

## **The Intercultural Approach and the Diachronic Evolution of Auto- and Hetero-stereotypes in Two Series of Finnish Textbooks (1965-2009)**

### **Approche interculturelle et évolution diachronique des auto- et hétéro-stéréotypes dans deux séries de manuels finlandais (1965-2009)**

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#### **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to present the evolution of auto- and hetero-stereotypes and the cultural representations conveyed by two series of textbooks used currently and in the past to teach French as a Foreign Language in Finland (*Bonjour Monsieur Dupont ; Voilà*). The textbooks concerned were published in 1965 and 2009: in each there is a meeting between a source culture and a target culture that appears to be totally different according to the time of publication. Consequently, the emergence of interculturality takes on different meanings depending on the decade. Stereotypes of the self and the other have evolved and even become reversed during these last forty years. This study also shows the emergence of peripheral alterities, of representations of the self and the other and of their relationships in a pedagogical tool essential for the transmission of culture and language in Finland.

Keywords: representations, interculturality, stereotypes, textbooks, Finland.

#### **Résumé**

L'objectif de cet article est de présenter l'évolution des auto- et hétéro-stéréotypes ainsi que les représentations culturelles véhiculées par deux séries de manuels de Français Langue Etrangère utilisées ou ayant été utilisées en Finlande (*Bonjour Monsieur Dupont ; Voilà*). Ces manuels respectivement publiés en 1965 et 2009 mettent en évidence une rencontre entre culture-source et culture-cible et une émergence de la notion d'interculturalité tout à fait différentes selon l'époque. Les stéréotypes sur le même et sur l'autre ont évolué au point de s'inverser en une quarantaine d'années. Cette analyse nous permet aussi d'entrevoir l'apparition d'altérités périphériques, les représentations du même et de l'autre ainsi que leurs relations dans un outil pédagogique essentiel à la transmission de la langue-culture en Finlande.

Mots-clés : représentations, interculturalité, stéréotypes, manuels, Finlande.

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## 1. Introduction

It was some thirty years ago that the topic of interculturality entered the field of language learning and teaching. Ever since then, it has become increasingly influential in didactics. In a globalised world where interactions between people appear to be more and more intercultural, it has become self-evidently necessary to take into consideration cultural parameters when developing pedagogical material for use in the classroom. However, we may notice that these “cultural parameters” evolve with time. Indeed, some representations of the source culture and target culture have changed to the point of being completely reversed a few decades later.

The aim here is to analyse qualitatively endogenous and exogenous representations and stereotypes conveyed by language textbooks and to observe the construction of identity presented in these pedagogical tools through the notions of alterity and peripheral alterities. This topic is a part of a wider research project dealing more generally with cultural dimensions in teaching French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in a heteroglot framework. The focus in my doctoral thesis is on the case of Finnish learners. The diachronic evolution of the cultural content of textbooks (five series, each one illustrating a decade) is one of the themes selected for investigation.

## 2. Corpus and authors

In this paper, the corpus is restricted to two series of FFL textbooks published in Finland in 1965: *Bonjour Monsieur Dupont* (*BMD*) and 2009: *Voilà* (*V*) in order to show this evolution clearly with the help of multiple examples. For this purpose, a framework of analysis has been developed focusing on cultural and sociocultural contents in these textbooks, adapted from existing frameworks such as that of Bertoletti & Dahlet, and examples cited have been qualitatively analysed.

The only author of *BMD* is a Finn. This fact leads us to suspect that this material may contain autochthonous representations of the Finnish author’s collective identity. On the other hand, the authors of *V* are predominantly Finnish but some French people contributed to the publication (8 Finnish, 3 French). A binational team of authors may have made the representation of the self and the other more complex in this edition. The target learners are Finnish pupils of secondary school or high school (13 to 19 years old), depending on when they want to start FFL as a B2 language. B2 does not correspond at all to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages but to the ranking of languages in the school curriculum: a B2 language is an optional language selected after two compulsory foreign languages (A1, B1: generally English and Swedish) and possibly one first optional language (A2). A1 and A2 languages are learnt from primary school; the teaching of B languages starts at secondary school.

FFL textbooks in Finland are few in number so the ones selected here are the one widely used in schools in the seventies and the one widely used today. The meeting of the self and the other in these instructional media requires us to study the evolution of the intercultural approach and current educational policies in the two periods illustrated by our corpus.

## 3. The wish to integrate culture into curricula

Lately, the Council of Europe has strongly encouraged teachers to include intercultural issues in their language teaching. In didactics, we have witnessed in the past few years the development of the “task-based approach”, but this new way of developing courses does not seem to have been so widely adopted in Finland, even in recent pedagogical material. Nevertheless, we can see that some efforts have been made so that the methodology in textbooks has changed from *Le Français Fondamental* (lists of frequent words to learn) to the beginnings of a task-based approach (the learner seen as a social actor).

To explain this evolution, it is necessary to state the educational context in which these books were published. In 1970, various changes took place in education in Finland. A new type of school was developed and called *peruskoulu* (*école de base* / ‘basic school’, usually translated as comprehensive school). A new national curriculum was established determining the pedagogical orientation to be followed: POPS (*Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet, Curricula in basic education*). Several POPS revisions followed over the years. In 1994, for the first time, POPS recommended the inclusion in all fields of education new topics such as “education for internationality”. Ten years later, this vague recommendation became explicit and topics like cultural identity and knowledge of other cultures became part of language textbooks and courses. That is one of the reasons why we notice a big change concerning the content of textbooks published before and after the nineties. In Finland, pupils in secondary education have to plan their courses themselves and choose their subjects (*jakso*). Language teachers have a short time to teach a certain number of grammatical or lexical points in each *jakso*. In consequence, they mainly base their teaching on some chapters of language textbooks and do not often use other pedagogical resources. The textbook remains the main tool for transmission of French language and culture. That is why representations conveyed in FFL textbooks are so important in Finland: Finnish learners have access to French language and culture mainly through what is shown and said in these books. To give a few examples of diachronic evolution, we will compare the representation of “the other” (the French) and the representation of “the self” (the Finns) in *BMD* and *V* and the meeting of cultures - when there is one - in coursebooks published in 1965 and 2009. The concept of alterity is understood here as the otherness in contrast to whatever learner identity is built into those books. Even though the term ‘interculturality’ covers several meanings, what is meant here is specifically encounters between two worlds and interactions generated between the self and the other.

#### 4. Analysis

##### 4.1 Representation of “the other” in *BMD*

This old textbook introduces a “typical French family”, the Dupont family: the father works as an engineer for Renault, he lives in Paris with his wife (a housewife) and their three children. This one family is supposed to represent French people. The main toponymic reference is Paris. Even if iconography was very poor in the seventies, the cover shows a caricature of “a typical French man”: big nose, moustache, beret, in front of the Eiffel Tower. No peripheral alterities such as minorities are presented in this book. The Dupont family are depicted as patriots. A surprising reference is found to

the Algerian war of independence where Algerians are depicted as enemies: “Je me suis battu pour défendre la France contre ses ennemis” (“I fought to defend France against its enemies”, *BMD*; p.71). The characters want to show a positive picture of their country. A number of superlatives are found, such as: “[Le France] le paquebot transatlantique le plus moderne du monde” (“[Le France], the most modern transatlantic ship in the world”, *BMD* ; p.86-87) In this book, then, the other is constantly valorized, or appreciated, by the author.

#### **4.2 Representation of the self in BMD**

Finland is hardly mentioned in this textbook designed for Finnish learners. Only one chapter deals with the preparation of the trip of a Finnish man to France. That event does not lead to any interaction between French and Finnish people but is a new opportunity for the author to promote French patrimony and what has to be shown to foreigners. The few references we can pick out relating to Finland or Finnish people are demeaning (a small country, nobody speaks Finnish, etc).

#### **4.3 Interculturality in BMD**

The meeting between the self and the other remains at the level of comparison. The characters see what surrounds them through their own “cultural glasses” and norms in an ethnocentred way of thinking. We notice this especially in the use of numerous deictics such as “nous” (“we”) to refer to the self community and establish a gap between the self and the other: “Nous buvons du lait en Finlande. Les Français boivent du vin. Cet allemand boit de la bière” (“We drink milk in Finland. French people drink wine. This German drinks beer”, *BMD* ; p.68). It is apparent that through this deictic, the author includes herself in the linguistic community of the self with which she shares habits, values, ideas, that will be different for the other, the French.

#### **4.4 Representation of the other in V**

The other series, *Voilà*, is composed of 6 volumes in which the iconography is rich and colorful. All sorts of “French people” are represented: ethnic diversity is omnipresent. There is no longer a typical physical appearance or typical job. The family representing the country through its patriotism disappears, as does the solid culture represented previously by the nation. The authors present particular situations and personal experiences, which makes it possible to avoid a generalization to a whole community. They show a multicultural country where peripheral alterities are emphasized. For instance, in the first volume, the main characters come from different French-speaking countries: Rachida Choukroune (Morocco), Mylène Lemaire (Canada)... It is interesting to notice that even if the cliché of the typical French person has disappeared, we do not escape new stereotypes, now transferred onto other targets such as Muslims, who define their identity in those books first through religion and food taboos: for instance in *V1* p.54-55 : « *Jean-Pierre* : Bonjour. Je te présente Malik, il est algérien[...]. *Malik* : Je suis musulman. Je ne mange pas de porc » (*Jean-Pierre* : Hello. Let me introduce you to Malik, he is Algerian [...]. *Malik* : I am a Muslim. I don't eat pork). It is even more interesting to notice that the character Malik himself summarizes his own identity through such

words while ‘the French’ continues to introduce him by mentioning his nationality first. So we are dealing here with a “folklorized identity” described by Abdallah-Preteille as a “pédagogie couscous”, in other words a pedagogy contributing to stereotypes and marginalization by focusing mainly on differences in cultural practices rather than on the encounter itself.

#### 4.5 Representation of the self in V

Finland and its inhabitants are seen as highly qualified in technology and education. Appreciative terms abound. Ignorance of Finnish customs by French people is particularly underlined. At first glance, this could be considered as a criticism of the other but beneath the surface, it can even be more demeaning for the self (Finnish people) since their customs are so unknown that the other discovers everything about them and finds their habits weird: “Tu crois vraiment que les Finlandais se baignent après le sauna?” (“Do you really think that Finnish people have a swim after the sauna?”, *V*; chap.1).

#### 4.6 Interculturality in V

As we have seen, most references concerning Finland in textbooks nowadays present Finland in a very positive light as a clean, rich and organized country. In this context, France is always a loser in the comparison between the two countries. Once again, deictic personal pronouns are used to emphasize cultural differences and separate the characters into two distinct communities: *chez nous* vs. *chez vous*. The only demeaning terms about Finland once again concern the size of the country in this recent series.

### 5. Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that the main difference between the two series is that in the last decade, we have seen the appearance of peripheral alterities that did not exist in textbooks in the seventies: French-speaking immigrants are now depicted. The solid identity defined mainly by nationality and national borders has, over a period of forty years, become a liquid identity, fuzzier and harder to delimit. Dervin (2008, p.59), quoting Bauman, explains: “L’individu contemporain éprouve une multiplication d’identités qui se *liquéfient* selon les contextes de communication qu’il traverse et l’altérité avec laquelle il agit au quotidien”. In other words, we can no longer define one identity that will never change and will be easy to describe, as was the case before. How can we capture what we cannot define and reproduce it in a textbook? In *BMD*, France and its patrimonial culture were overexposed and glorified; a glowing picture of the country was presented. Finnish people were presented as belonging to a different community, another world that it was not even necessary to explore. They were not mentioned much but when this happened, they were categorized and demeaned in their identity by the author herself, who transmitted a negative picture of her own collective identity (a small country that should discover the splendors of France). Thanks to the POPS curriculum reforms in 1994-2004, authors tried to insert more intercultural elements in pedagogical material. In doing so, they wanted the learners to discover and interact with the other. Of

course, some of the stereotyped representations remain or are transferred to other targets, but an intercultural approach has emerged and led to an appreciation of interaction with alterity along with the beginnings of a task-based approach. The evolution of didactic tools, conceptions and research on this topic contributes to making the learners become intercultural beings. Of course, progress still have to be made but at least some efforts have already been made to accentuate the fact that there is not one French culture and family type but individual situations and contexts. French culture is no longer Parisian and patrimonial, but popular and multicultural. The other's identity has changed in the self's eyes. The dialectic relation between the self and the other in the seventies finally produced a face-to-face meeting stressing similarities and divergences between them that ultimately unified them by producing an intercultural identity under construction.

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