Preface

What images of culture, society and the world do we find in language teaching and learning? This question has guided me in all my academic work, including the monographs Language and Culture: Global Flows and Local Complexities (Risager, 2006) and Language and Culture Pedagogy: From a National to a Transnational Paradigm (Risager, 2007). In the present book, I want to deal with this question in a concrete manner as I focus on the analysis of a number of language textbooks with special reference to their cultural representations: their images of culture, society and the world, including language as an integral part of culture and society.

My central point is that an analysis of culture in textbooks has to be specific about what theoretical approaches are drawn upon, and therefore I distinguish between a number of different approaches: national studies, citizenship education studies, Cultural studies, postcolonial studies and transnational studies. For each of the five approaches, I list a number of analytical questions that may guide the analysis of any language textbook. The methodology is useful for the analysis of other language learning materials as well, and also, in my view, for the analysis of other subjects and areas of education. In a sense, it is a way of analysing and reflecting on what directions intercultural competence takes or could take.

The textbooks selected are drawn from six different languages: English, German, French, Spanish, Danish and Esperanto. It is an important point to try to include many languages as they exemplify different traditions and perspectives. It is also a way of unfolding my own interest in multilingualism.

When I went to school in Denmark in the 1960s, I had the wonderful opportunity of making the acquaintance of a number of different languages: English, German, French and Latin, and I studied Dutch on my own. Norwegian and Swedish were very easy to learn as these languages are closely related to Danish. In the years around 1970, I studied General Linguistics and French at the University of Copenhagen, and during those years I acquired some (restricted) knowledge of a number of other languages: Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, Vedic, Russian, Classical Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs), Quechua and Basque. Later on, I studied Esperanto and Spanish, and a little bit of Portuguese and Italian.
I experienced how being able to read texts in a language may give access to discourses of the world that are influenced by the position of that particular language – and its users – in world history.

My interest in language teaching, and also in theories of culture and in studies of the world order, stems from my work at Roskilde University. All of my professional life I have been attached to Roskilde University, one of the reform universities created in the 1970s, characterised to a large extent by interdisciplinarity, problem orientation and study work in groups with supervisors. I first had a post in Language pedagogy with special regard to French, and I started my research projects on the cultural, social and political dimensions of language teaching. Later on, I was attached to International Development Studies and gained further insight into theories of development and globalisation. In 2000, I was (co-)founder of Cultural Encounters, which focuses on critical intercultural studies with a team of teachers/researchers from postcolonial/decolonial studies, cultural sociology, Cultural studies, anthropology, the sociology of religion, language and culture studies, and gender and sexuality studies. Hence my interdisciplinary orientation.

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