A reflection on the 'non-place' character of German foreign language (GFL) courses and coursebooks in South African higher education[1]

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the reductionist, and increasingly trivial, nature of foreign-language textbooks has an adverse impact on how German language, culture and society are represented and perceived by foreign-language learners in South Africa reframing German-speaking countries as 'non-places'. Reflecting on a coursebook prescribed at a South African university, this paper posits further that coursebook users, especially learners, are decontextualised and perceived to be homogenous by publishers who are guided by a construct of the average learner. This paper maintains that teaching coursebooks without adaptation to incorporate students' epistemologies and ontologies endorse a 'non-place' classroom. Such practice perpetuates alienating conditions lamented in discourses common to higher education (HE) institutions which are facing calls for transformation. The paper examines the non-place representation of German-speaking contexts in German Foreign Language (GFL) coursebooks and its creation of a non-place classroom. Following a consideration of the disciplinary aims of German courses in South African HE, the paper advocates a curriculum which fosters a critical engagement with coursebook content. Finally, it argues that by cultivating learner-responsiveness in language courses, and by localising content, one can withstand a foreign language classroom which is devoid of place and belonging.

Keywords: foreign language education, teaching German as a foreign language, critical reflection, teaching material practice

INTRODUCTION

This paper emanates from an ongoing PhD study which seeks to gain a deep understanding of the underlying principles which shape German Foreign Language (GFL) textbook practices in GFL courses at South African universities. The aim of the larger study, and this paper, is not based on an interventionist approach, nor is it to prescribe textbook teaching practice. Instead, it aims to understand the textbook as 'cultural artefact' (Gray, 2010: 1) and teaching resource in GFL curricula as it is situated within a South African HE context. Drawing on existing literature on Foreign Language Teaching Materials (FLTMS) and first-hand experience as lecturer (and former student) of German, this paper offers a reflection on the character and use of commercial foreign language textbooks in the context of teaching GFL in South African Higher Education (HE). The focus of the study is on beginner-level textbooks, used in first-year

1 Date of submission 19 July 2019
Date of review outcome 25 August 2019
Date of acceptance 21 May 2020

courses for students without prior knowledge of German, as this represents the largest group of students who register for German courses nationally (Annas, 2016).

Critically reflecting on what one teaches and the professional and pedagogical beliefs which guide one's teaching practice (including the choice and use of teaching materials) allows one to uncover taken-for-granted practices (Mezirow, 1990; Thompson & Pascal, 2012). Furthermore, being a critically reflective practitioner, i.e. questioning 'what one does and why', encourages the continual development of one's teaching practice (Thompson & Pascal, 2012: 319) and it is a crucial part of curriculum transformation (Weber, 2018). The intention of this paper is not to offer textbook teaching methods, to charge German lecturers with using textbooks in a certain (incorrect) way, or to suggest that the problematic aspects of foreign language (FL) textbooks discussed in the paper can be eliminated. The intention of this paper is to stimulate critical reflection on what lecturers teach in GFL courses in local HE – why they add, omit or create content (or not) – and how their teaching-material practices relate to their students' learning. The fact that there is no literature emanating from South African GFL scholarship, which specifically focuses on language teaching material (LTM) practices in university GFL courses, makes this discussion relevant.

It is common practice in German courses to prescribe coursebooks for every undergraduate level and the curriculum is variably structured around the progression and content of the book, depending on the institution.[2] However, FL textbook publishing today is such that one book must be applicable to a global learner group, which in its attempt to accommodate everyone, inevitably engages no-one. While the inability to cater to individual learners has been an ongoing feature of textbooks, globalisation only 'exacerb[ates the] social, cultural, and ideological diversity' (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015: 13) of learners and the contexts about which they are learning (Kurtz, 2011).

The development of FL textbooks is influenced by research and pedagogy in FL teaching and learning. The audiolingual method, popular in the 1960s, was underpinned by a behaviourist approach to teaching and learning (Simon-Pelanda, 2001). This method was characterised by the presentation of contrived sentences and texts in the foreign language, and learning happened by means of repetitive drill-exercises (Quetz, 2006). The focus in FL textbooks of this time was on grammar progression, and instances of communication tended to be based on '*verallgemeinerten ahistorischen Alltagssituationen*'[3] (Simon-Pelanda, 2001: 47; Quetz, 2006). Hence, socio-cultural content was not integrated in what were essentially grammar manuals.

By the 1970s, communicative competence, rather than grammatical correctness, became the predominant outcome of Foreign Language Learning (FLL) (Röttger, 2010; Dobstadt & Riedner, 2014). It was argued that the core outcome of FLL should be the ability to use the foreign language to negotiate intercultural situations (Maijala, 2008). The ability to communicate and 'use' the foreign language (Quetz, 2006) coincided with the argument that real communication takes place within a socio-cultural setting, for which one would need (inter)cultural competence (Maijala, 2008). Therefore, *Landeskunde* (cultural studies) became increasingly integrated in FL textbooks (Simon-Pelanda, 2001). Yet, as language acquisition was still the main preoccupation of the materials, themes and content were chosen to serve the communicative outcomes, which placed socio-cultural engagement on the periphery of the textbook's focus (Simon-Pelanda, 2001).

2 Nine universities in South Africa offer German (Annas, 2016), of which eight prescribe commercial coursebooks published in Germany in their language courses. At first-year level these textbooks include *Menschen, Studio D, Aspekte neu, Motive, Deutsch Na klar!,and Kipp und Klar*. One German section prepares its own material.

3 'generalised a-historical instances of everyday life'

Today, most textbooks claim to follow a *handlungsorientierten* approach which, similar to the communicative approach, places emphasis on the practical use (*das Handeln*) of the language in realistic situations (Hölscher, Piepho & Roche, 2006). However, Dobstadt & Riedner (2014) highlight the tension between action-oriented aims of cultivating authentic (and as such, dynamic) communicative scenarios in which learners can actively participate, and the focus in GFL teaching and learning on standardisation, efficiency and measurability of competencies underpinned by the CEFR.[4] Consequently, most current commercial GFL textbooks still contain exercises which stem from a behaviourist tradition (for example, tables and fill-in-the blank exercises), with sociocultural elements integrated into a primarily language-learning resource. Textbook-provided tests and exercises in *Menschen*, the textbook prescribed at my institution, reflect a prioritisation of grammatical knowledge.

While textbooks inadvertently promise to provide access to the foreign language and socio-cultural context, little space is in fact available for linguistic and cultural information which is not superficial or highly generalised. In *Menschen*, cultural information is usually placed in the 'additional' pages at the end of a chapter and in the glossary. Hence, textbook content reflects a mix of current and traditional trends of language pedagogy as well as of old and new perceptions of language learning and language-learner constructions (Kurtz, 2011). Often, the accepted structures in textbooks, like the PPP approach (presentation, practice, production), are not based on substantiated evidence that it contributes to language learning (Tomlinson, 2013).

Integrating familiar 'ways of doing things' with innovative content design is a way for publishers to cautiously ensure that their publications succeed (Bell & Gower, 1998). Therefore, textbooks today represent an accumulation of developments in FL teaching and learning. Furthermore, textbooks have become commodities in a neo-liberal education system (Apple, 1988). The result is that textbooks are often conceptualised on the basis of marketing strategies such as standardisation and ease-of-use rather than pedagogical principles of FL learning (Littlejohn, 2012). Functional aspects of language learning, promoted by the communicative approach and intensified by growing commodified views of education and language learning (Bori, 2018a), result in textbook content which allows one to approach communication strategically and to 'consume' culture with ease (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015).

The reductionist nature, or 'tourism discourse' (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015), of foreign Language Teaching Materials (LTMs) impacts on how language, culture and society are represented. Tourism discourse in FL textbooks implies a presentation of the foreign context which is predominantly positive and welcoming, while avoiding politically and historically contentious topics, much like one would find in a tourist brochure (Bori, 2018b). The book as a representative of the foreign-speaking contexts can thus be understood as a 'non-place' (Augé, 2008). Augé discusses places like airports and shopping malls as examples of non-places. Non-places are not naturally and socially occurring places, but have been constructed to serve a specific purpose (Augé, 2008), such as air-travel or consumption. These places have been created to be navigated and understood by any visitor, and they can be duplicated. What individuals in non-places have in common, Augé argues, is their reason for being in that space – they are travellers, passengers or

4 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is described by the framework document as follows: 'The Common European Framework provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe. It describes in a comprehensive way what language learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively. The description also covers the cultural context in which language is set. The Framework also defines levels of proficiency which allow learners' progress to be measured at each stage of learning and on a life-long basis' (Council of Europe, 2001: 1). The framework offers descriptions of language proficiency in six levels, from beginner to advanced, namely A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2. In South African university-level GFL courses, students generally have to be on A1 level at the end of their first year, A2 at the end of their second year, B1 in their third year and B2/ C1 in their honours year.

consumers. The FL classroom is also a 'non-place' in that it is not an anthropological place in itself (Augé, 2008) but is rather connected to the shared identity of those language learners who inhabit it. These learners meet in an imagined space, facilitated by the textbook, 'only remotely related to the reality we associate with the traditional place' (Lapidus, 2013) – in this case, German-speaking countries.

Non-places, according to Augé (2008), are 'spaces formed in relation to certain ends [such as language learning, engaging with another culture], and the relations that individuals have with these spaces'. Therefore, creating a simplified socio-linguistic reality of German-speaking contexts in FL textbooks is understandable, because it allows for manageable engagement with and insight into the complex and dynamic linguistic and cultural world of the Other. Although these resources attempt to accommodate the heterogeneity of learners who engage with this 'non-place', they are still limited by an idea of the average learner at the intersection of all the diverse identities of actual learners.

Although Augé (2008) claims that the definition of 'non-place' need not be negative, this paper argues that it contributes to the kind of alienation one finds in discourses on transformation in South African HE (Boughey & Mckenna, 2016). Following a discussion on the non-place representation of German-speaking contexts in coursebooks, the paper explores the decontextualisation of GFL learners and learning environments by LTMs. Particularly highlighted are the core disciplinary outcomes of critical engagement and intercultural competence in South African German academia, and how these outcomes align with the textbook as curricular tool of language teaching and learning. Lastly, the paper reflects on how lecturers could withstand a FL classroom which is devoid of place and belonging by adopting a critical attitude towards LTMs and cultivating learner-responsiveness in GFL courses.

TEXTBOOK CONSTRUCTIONS OF GERMAN-SPEAKING CONTEXTS AND GFL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

It is acknowledged in FL teaching and learning that globalisation has created tensions between real-life complexities of culture and language, and 19th century notions of a nation state (in the case of Germany) with homogenous native speakers, standard-language use and unilateral cultural practices (Kramsch, 2014). As the complexity of a globalised society is becoming more evident, the uncountable variables influencing foreign-language learning success within learners and their interaction with the environment is receiving more attention (Larsen-Freeman, 2018; King & Alison, 2016). Furthermore, changing views in language teaching and learning demonstrate a growing acknowledgement that there is no such thing as 'one nation, one language' (Larsen-Freeman, 2018). Nevertheless, textbooks continue to construct mother-tongue speakers, and the spaces they inhabit, in a manner which suggests that they all speak flawless, standard German and live in a DACH[5] country. Moreover, non-mother tongue characters in GFL textbooks generally come from other European countries and speak standard German with high levels of competence – unlike most beginner FL learners of German in the South African context. However, there are pedagogical, and at times, unavoidable reasons for creating characters who do not mirror real speakers and learners of German.

Literature dealing with the issue of representation in FL textbooks generally identifies three reasons why the complexity of language and culture in practice, societal representation, and context-related learner needs are ignored in textbooks: the vast learner group, the pedagogical purpose of the resource and the dominant worldview of the context where these books are created. Each of these points are discussed below.

5 Germany, Austria, Switzerland.

The vast learner group

In order for publishers to sell their books in any place in the world, they avoid any content which could be considered taboo, inappropriate or controversial (Bori, 2018b) (such as menstruation, alcohol-abuse and homosexuality), exemplifying the kind of 'tourism discourse' problematised by Kramsch and Vinall (2015). Textbooks are often used in contexts different from the ones in which (and for which) they were developed, and themes are often superficial and trivial in an attempt by publishers to maintain their suitability – especially on a global scale. As such, published materials will not be completely rejected or fail in any given context, but neither will they aim at succeeding fully in a particular context (Kramsch, 2014). Hence, materials manage to 'surf' (Kramsch, 2014: 302) communication and superficial aspects of culture, resulting in a 'shallow treatment of diversity' (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015: 25).

Pedagogical purpose

Presenting too much ambiguity, especially in the early stages of language learning, does not make sense from a pedagogical standpoint. It is nearly impossible to represent a whole, dynamic and complex socio-linguistic system, while enabling learning, all in the confined pages of a textbook. Gray (2010: 1) compares LTMs with the design of a map: 'the inclusion of too much detail defeats the map's purpose and results in the creation of something which is impractical'. A filtered presentation of reality in LTMs is inevitable, as materials designers have to 'choose among multiple norms and endless sources for reading' (Del Valle, 2014: 369-370) to fit within the physical constraints and learning outcomes of the LTMs.

Therefore, including inauthentic texts which correlate with learners' language competency level, and which do not include too much emotive, abstract language use, is common practice in LTMs. Yet, Andon and Wingate (2013) find a correlation between the authenticity of language exposure and the motivation of learners – the more authentic the exposure and opportunities to use the language, the higher the perceived relevance of what they are learning. Even so, when Bišofa (2012) asked Latvian students of German to comment on their preference of authentic or textbook materials, the majority felt that textbooks cannot be replaced by authentic materials completely. Her study revealed that students value clear structure, many explanations and examples as well as a revision section. This dichotomy of needs is well understood by Tomlinson (2003: 6):

> My own view is that meaningful engagement with authentic texts is a prerequisite for the development of communicative and strategic competence […] I also believe, though, that for particularly problematic features of language use it is sometimes useful to focus learners on characteristics of these features through special contrived examples.

A reduced representation of language and culture is practical, and attractive, if one's aim is efficient and speedy acquisition of communication abilities by means of a curriculum which is transferable to many contexts.

While enabling ease of engagement with the new language and culture requires a measure of normativity and essentialisation, the contents of textbooks nevertheless depict constructed ideas of what the essential information is that should be imparted by FL textbooks (Apple, 1988). The social and cultural reality depicted in LTMs is neither an accurate nor a neutral reflection of the real society and culture. Canale (2016: 226) describes FL textbooks as being 'legitimised versions' of the social world, reflecting hegemonic views of 'Germanness' validated by textbook writers, rather than being 'repositories of historical facts and objective truths' – which relates to the third reason why language teaching materials present a skewed view of the foreign language and culture.

Dominant worldview of textbook-designer context

Various scholars investigate the inaccurate representation of language and culture in LTMs in various contexts and scopes. Corti (2016) addresses the normative representation of language varieties and socio-cultural aspects in Spanish LTMs. He claims that these norms might not be decided upon consciously by the materials writers, but that it nonetheless presents particular language use as neutral. Similarly, Azimova and Johnston (2012: 338) explore the representation of diversity in Russian-language textbooks and find that because learners will have very little (or no) contact with native speakers of Russian (similar to South African learners of German), 'their understanding of who Russian speakers are [is based on the] totality of the […] speakers referred to or described in the pedagogical materials'. Thus, certain minorities are to an extent 'erased' (Azimova & Johnston, 2012: 338) from the perceived reality of the learner.

Gray (2013) too raises the issue of erasure in (English) LTMs, in this case regarding the absence of LGBTQ representation, arguing that 'heteronormativity is the default position when profits may be at stake'. Coffey (2013) ascribes selective representation to the communicative teaching methodology, in particular its practice of selecting instances of communication to depict in textbooks which 'package' (2013: 159) language in a certain way, and he puts forward implications it might have for learner constructions of these places – places that only consist of cafés, bakeries, parks, hospitals and apartments – while precluding places like prisons, refugee housing, landfills and politically-charged events. In commercial German LTMs, such as *Menschen A1* (Evans, Pude, & Specht, 2012), one finds an emphasis on communication in places related to fitness and well-being, on professional development, work ethic, consumerism, and productivity.

These representations play a larger role in shaping the socio-cultural epistemology of these places for students learning German outside of German-speaking contexts than to those learning whilst in Germany. Many students enrol in German courses at South African universities without any prior knowledge of the language or culture, apart from what they know from the media. Students are thus not afforded the opportunity to compare their experience of German-speaking contexts in the textbook with real contexts and thereupon re-evaluate their understanding of these places. Consequently, students' presuppositions relating to German-speaking societies are not called into question and these imagined (non-)places are further mediated by LTMs. In addition, the textbook does not teach them to critically reflect on their own essentialised representation of (German) society. In textbooks such as *Menschen A1*, certain groups and identities are excluded from the constructed German contexts, which preserves dominant views of what it means to be German (Çalişkan, 2014; Moffit, Juang, & Syed, 2018). The image is projected that German speakers are all white, middle-class, productive, punctual individuals who speak flawless standard German and never swear or code-switch. Therefore, if GFL-textbook content is taught unreflectively, it could be detrimental to students' understanding of the German language and its speakers. It is also harmful to those German speakers denied ownership of the language and culture (Canale, 2016), such as citizens with African and Turkish immigration backgrounds (Whose Heimat?, 2018).

Currently, the projected relevance of teaching materials used in South African GFL courses has been determined in Germany where the materials have been written and published for learners vaguely described as *young adults* or *adults* (Hueber, 2019a). The focus of the materials is most often on learning for prospective German immigrants or for people wanting to obtain a language certification, such as the Goethe Certificate.[6] The chosen communicative scenarios in a textbook are based on what materials

6 The beginner level Goethe Certificate is described by the Goethe-Institute on their website (https://www.goethe.de/en/spr/kup/prf/prf/sd1.html) as follows: 'The Goethe-Zertifikat A1: Start Deutsch 1 is a German exam for adults. It certifies that candidates have acquired very basic language skills and corresponds to the first level (A1) on the six-level scale of competence laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).'

designers perceive to be useful to learners with these aims in mind. *Menschen*, for example, states that its choice of themes and progression is based on the different language-proficiency levels of the CEFR and with current internationally standardised language exams in mind (Hueber, 2019b). These presented contexts, however, might not reflect the real-life experiences of the learners, creating a misalignment between the book's construction of the learner and the actual learner. If taught as is, learners become outsiders in textbooks, observers and imitators of insider-communication rather than participants and creators of meaning. Weber and Weiner (2016) analysed popular GFL textbooks, such as *Menschen A1*, *Studio D*, and *Schritte International*, and found that non-German characters in LTMs fulfil specific pedagogical functions, such as providing information about the foreign language and context,[7] rather than representing actual examples of German non-mother-tongue speakers. Their findings showed that these foreign language characters, contrary to actual foreign-language speakers, do not divulge much about their own culture, which makes it seem as if they do not have one. They are also integrated, active participants of the foreign culture (Weber & Weiner, 2016), projecting an image of easy assimilation into the foreign context, and demonstrating a value of cultural assimilation.

Such a representation of foreign-language learners is not aligned with the experience of many actual learners of German who struggle with grammar and pronunciation, have existing backgrounds and values, and have to 'renegotiate[e] [their] sense of self in relation to the [foreign-language context]' (Norton, 2010: 350). Admittedly, learners might implicitly understand that real foreign-language speakers residing in Germany are not really as fluent, integrated or confident as they are portrayed in the book, especially not in the early period of their move to Germany. Moreover, learners might not necessarily be passive in their engagement with a reduced view of language and culture. However, beyond simply not catering to diverse learner needs and identities, LTMs may in fact elicit certain identities from learners (Auerbach & Burgess, 1985; Kullman, 2013). Kullman (2013) argues that, if taught as is, LTMs shape learner identities by favouring certain discourses in which particular identities are validated above others. For example, Kullman (2013) found that in UK-published English textbooks there may be an emphasis on having students express themselves on topics such as lifestyle, but not on topics such as sexuality or religion. Furthermore, he claims that in these textbooks, learners play out scenarios in which they might never find themselves in the real world. Examples from *Menschen A1* include complaining at the hotel reception because the heater in their room does not work (this may be far removed from the reality of many students who come from an underprivileged background), or making plans with a friend based on a schedule (filled with appointments with 'friends' and activities such as soccer practice) provided by the book which does not resemble their life at all. Even in talking about validated themes such as family relationships, vocabulary is limited, for example omitting step-families or half-siblings. While one can never include every aspect of social reality, this example does demonstrate that there is a selection process which prioritises certain aspects of reality above others.

Not only do many LTMs neglect diversity and complexity, but they do not have the capacity to 'take into account […] realities [such as] large classes, unmotivated learners, lack of adequate time, lack of resources and the need for examination preparation' (Tomlinson, 2013: 2). Furthermore, in my experience, FL textbooks' lack of relevance to students' field of study, or their personal interests and lived reality, may negatively affect the textbook's perceived personal relevance to students. In a first-year course evaluation focusing on students' experience of *Menschen A1* which I conducted in 2018, some students commented on the topics in the textbook in addition to functional aspects. The comments reflect issues related to relevance and thematic presentation of language and culture:

7 In *Menschen A1*, for example, characters Carmelo and Benito from Italy talk about their experiences at the German music festival, Rock am Ring.

> Sometimes its use of specific themes for every chapter felt awkward.
>
> Some of the content is a bit silly and unrealistic.
>
> Some chapters seem a bit far-fetched[,] it [the content] is not that relatable.

Projecting a consumerist view of learning onto learners, presupposing that learners view 'language only as a job skill' (Bori, 2018a: 16), decontextualises learners and learning (Kramsch & Vinall, 2015). LTMs inadequately foster critical reflection and 'scrutiny of the social world' (Santos, 2013: 109) – which one could argue is a large part of what education in the humanities should do (Higgins, 2014). Lecturers are thus instrumental both in mediating coursebook content and the contextual reality of their students, and in encouraging critical reflection on German-speaking contexts, which is lacking in commercial coursebooks.

CRITICAL REFLECTION AS A DISCIPLINARY AIM OF GERMAN COURSES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

FL textbook content underpinned by pragmatic and standardised outcomes of language learning reflect the changing aims of education in general. Traditionally, universities were institutions with the objective of developing critical-thinking faculties and engaging with knowledge 'for its own sake' (Sin, Tavares, & Amaral, 2017: 2). Today, however, a discipline's value is increasingly measured by its ability to address the demands of its student clientele and the labour market, rather than maintaining its legitimacy purely through the pursuit of developing and sharing knowledge (Le Grange, 2009). Viewing HE as having a largely vocational purpose (Weelahan, 2014) has especially impacted the perceived value of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences (Higgins, 2014). Many disciplines have subsequently reformulated how they market themselves and have restructured their courses in order to demonstrate more explicitly how they are beneficial to graduates in terms of prospective careers, for example, the incorporation of language-acquisition modules in previously largely literature-based German courses at South African universities (Laurien, 2006; Weber, Domingo & Fourie, 2017). Tensions between education for economic growth and employability on the one hand, and education for the development of engaged citizens on the other, is explored by Nussbaum (2010). She regards the humanities as being crucial in fostering a 'humane, people-sensitive democracy', compassion, and interest in understanding people different from ourselves (Nussbaum, 2010: 14-15; see also McArthur, 2011). German as an academic discipline generally legitimises its place in HE in three ways: (i) its relevance to research and epistemology, (ii) its role in developing intercultural competencies, and (iii) its pragmatic contribution in the form of career-oriented language learning (Hamman, 2009). In terms of the increasing utilitarian purpose of HE, language learning makes up the most attractive component of the course to students – and most students register for one year of German (Annas, 2016), where emphasis is largely on language acquisition. The core outcomes of first-year foreign-language courses at the majority of HE institutions entail practical competencies, such as acquisition of vocabulary, grammar knowledge and communicative abilities. Hence, critical thinking is relegated to other, traditional aspects of the course, like literature and cultural studies, which are usually only introduced from second year.[8] However, one cannot assume that devolving the development of critical engagement to areas of literature and cultural studies automatically cultivates critical reflection on representations of language and culture in LTMs (Mühr, 2009). If the emphasis in German language courses is on beginner-level language acquisition, one might ask when in this phase of language learning the development of critical engagement with the complexities of language and culture takes place. This would align with the aspect of the discipline concerned with epistemology.

8 In beginner-level courses focussed on language acquisition.

In terms of the subject's pragmatic function, the reality is that German programmes today prosper where the curriculum offers students personal and professional relevance (Ammon, 2014). Roche (2009) argues that one can only come to understand the purpose and objective of GFL when one is able to understand what drives people around the world to learn about German language and culture. Making central to a course the lived realities and aspirations of the persons who find value in studying German is an imperative within current discourses on curriculum transformation in South African HE. Hence, one might pose a second question: How are we as GFL lecturers negotiating the decontextualised teaching resources and the very real contexts and identities of our students?

FOSTERING CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH COURSEBOOK CONTENT

It is impossible to achieve total coursebook-context compatibility because both German-speaking and local contexts are constantly in flux. However, the development of local materials, the adaptation of commercial materials to suit local needs or making the textbook the object of critical reflection have all been suggested as possible ways of addressing the shortcomings of LTMs discussed in the first section of the paper.

Some scholars suggest localisation of content as a way to achieve coursebook-context compatibility (Dat, 2003; Lin & Brown, 1994; Maijala & Tammenga-Helmantel, 2016). Locally published resources initially appear to address the problem. However, the cost of development, small scale distribution and questionable credibility of a language-teaching resource which does not originate from the same country as the language and its speakers might not make this a viable solution. Contributing yet another textbook to an already overcrowded market might not be plausible and the act of publication alone renders it unable to respond to changes. Lastly, it increases the effort of preparing materials and curricula. At the very least, commercial LTMs save teachers and course designers an immense amount of time in structuring course content and resources (Maijala, 2007). According to a survey completed by GFL lecturers in 2019, LTMs in South African GFL courses perform a central curricular function. Textbooks in our context are perceived by GFL lecturers to fulfil the role of providing progression through a systematic approach to grammar, preparing students for Goethe exams, providing exercises and online resources, developing students' listening, reading, writing and speaking competencies, and providing content which reflect up-to-date German language and culture organised into relevant topics. While some, such as Thornbury (2013), advocate foregoing coursebooks altogether, LTMs are so intertwined with FL curricula (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013) that it would be unreasonable to suggest that LTMs be removed from the curriculum because of their unavoidable shortcomings.

Thus, adaptation offers a more realistic solution and entails aligning the LTMs with the context, especially in matching materials with learners' potential, relevance, personality and preferences (Dat, 2003). Adapting materials stand to aid learners in expressing their identity by providing tools with which they can utilise their personal knowledge and which requires their 'affective involvement' (Dat, 2003: 2). Saraceni (2003) follows this orientation to materials adaption by drawing on research which emphasises the learner's contribution to course design and which values collaboration with learners in developing content. Saraceni (2003) offers a model which allows for learner-centred, relevant adaptation, with the features of such adaptation including flexibility in terms of student interest and needs, culturally provoking topics, and authentic texts depicting realistic situations. Her case study demonstrates how learners and teachers decide together on acceptable and relevant provocative topics, which is then presented through an authentic text. Saraceni (2003: 83) promotes the empowerment of learners by allowing them to 'express themselves instead of simply communicating'.

Saraceni (2003) specifically draws on the influential contribution of Clarke (1989: 134), who argues that the 'externally imposed' curriculum of teaching materials are bound to be influenced by the teaching and learning environment, and Clarke thus advocates a 'negotiated syllabus' which is internally generated

both by teachers and learners. In this way, the adaptation process becomes more meaningful and suited to the immediate context. Furthermore, by placing learners in the active role of collaborator in materials writing, their level of required commitment is not only increased, but it is naturally situated within relevant content which suits their 'cognitive, emotional, and pragmatic needs' (Clarke, 1989: 133). Learners' active involvement in creating materials might, additionally, raise their awareness that LTMs are only selected compilations of *aspects* of language and culture.

In *Menschen A2*, the textbook prescribed at second-year level at my institution, one chapter deals with the theme of festivals and events. In one exercise, students read a text in which various 'Germans' talk about their favourite festival or event, why they enjoy it so much, when it takes place, and what happens at this event. The book then asks the students to choose one of these events and play out a dialogue with a partner in which they plan to visit one of the events together. I ask students to write about a festival or event which they have attended or would like to attend, either locally or internationally, in order to, firstly, create a connection between the content and their lived reality, and, secondly, for them to talk about their immediate context. I compile all the writing pieces to create a similar text to the one found in the textbook. From this collaboratively created resource, students now choose an event and plan their trip with a partner, in addition to acting out dialogues suggested by the textbook.

In line with Paulo Freire's orientation to education, Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) propose positioning the materials as the object of critical focus. Freire (2003) argues that education plays a role in cultivating critical attitudes toward one's context and generally, naïvely accepted reality because only a critical awareness of one's context can allow a meaningful interaction with the way things are, or seem to be. Thus, Freire (2003) believes that by deepening one's understanding of the social world by questioning it, one gains the power to oppose shallow interpretations of society. Teaching students to challenge simplified versions of reality stand to empower students to engage independently with knowledge, emancipating them from subject matter which make claims about what is real and what is normal. Similarly, Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989: 174) consider it vital to obtain a 'holistic impression' of the materials by critically considering what learners learn beyond language – such as general knowledge about the speakers and their culture, which social values and attitudes enjoy preference (ontological aspects), what the learners' role in the learning context is, and what language learning involves (epistemological aspects). They argue that this implicit information communicated to learners (mostly unintentionally) should be made explicit and scrutinised by teachers and learners. On that account, explicit critical textbook-practice by lecturers stands to foster a similar engagement with LTMs and language learning from students.

The solution in both HE and in FL curricula structured on commercial textbooks lie in compromise, by marrying its pragmatic role with the underlying pedagogy of critical engagement with knowledge. Spivak (2016: 7) argues that this compromise involves

> [the] lesson of being folded together with your enemy, being complicit, […] not complicit in the sense of conspiratorial or involvement in something underhanded. Often we teach in a knowledge-managed way against our best convictions because we want to keep the job; we are folded together with what we want only to oppose. […] Not excusing but also not accusing the protocols of whatever it is that we are critiquing so that we can locate the point in the system that can turn it around, for use.

The aim of a recent cultural studies module, which I taught to second- and third-year undergraduate students, was to examine how German language, culture and society are portrayed in a simplified way in GFL teaching materials. The module explored why essentialisation in LTMs happens as well as why such practice may be both problematic and necessary for learning to take place, and for students to consider changes that could be made to better align their exposure to 'Germanness' with reality. Discussions and

assessments were built on previous engagement with notions of culture and cultural competence in the same module, and they were conducted in English so as to allow for robust engagement with the topic. In one instance, to demonstrate the underpinning claim of the module, students watched the film 'Deine Schönheit ist nichts wert'[9], directed by Hüseyin Tabak, which deals with a Kurdish-Turkish family seeking asylum in Vienna. Students compared the place, people, behaviours and language use in the film with that of their textbook. Moving beyond supplementing the textbook with other forms of representations of language and culture in the form of texts, films and literature, as is common practice among German lecturers in South Africa, the reasons for the supplementation was made overt to students. In this way, students were explicitly asked to call the textbook contents into question whilst simultaneously dissolving borders between critical and functional components of the course.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that there is value in fostering a critical awareness of normative practices in language textbooks, especially in a HE context where learning outcomes should transcend pragmatic communicative aims. The paper acknowledges the advantage of the structure, progression and resources which coursebooks offer, and that foregoing commercial textbooks altogether might not be feasible. However, it argues that lecturers should critically reflect on the reality presented by the chosen textbook (preferably in collaboration with students). Encouraging critical reflection of materials in language courses, particularly at first-year level, integrates the aspect of the discipline concerned with epistemology and intercultural competence with the pragmatic function, already inherent in GFL courses.

The three systems – commercial LTMs, HE, and German as a discipline – described in this paper share characteristics of commodification, standardisation, and an increased demand for responsiveness to learner diversity. The interaction between these contexts influence and shape one another. For an academic discipline such as German to ensure that it makes a meaningful contribution to a changing HE landscape, it does not have to blindly adopt external curricula by commercial textbooks which reflect the demands of a commodified education system, neither can it afford to ignore demands for responsiveness to students who enter these spaces. Place fosters belonging and deep engagement with the surroundings because it is in non-places 'in which the individual feels himself to be a spectator without paying much attention to the spectacle' (Augé, 2008: 70). A GFL classroom which is not devoid of place is one that is shaped by the relations, histories and identities (Augé, 2008) of those who navigate these spaces. Hence, incorporating student identities and lived-realities into a course which is steeped in the immediate context, makes it a place.

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