

## CHAPTER 4

# Context of Teaching and Research

### Introduction

In this chapter I set out both the methodological concerns of this study, as well as its context; a space where the tensions between expectations, mine and students', and the normative processes of traditional liberal humanist educational perspectives and instrumental ones were constantly felt.

The aim of this classroom study was to find out how students engaged with my pedagogy of intercultural language education which I had been developing over the previous years: a *cultuurtekst* approach. The process of this study was not a neat and linear one. As I let the data 'rest' for a few years after I initially collected these, the underpinning ideas to this pedagogy kept evolving. This was as a result of reflection on the analysis on my data, the everyday experience of teaching this particular language course and a range of other courses, and through further theoretical reflection. The first three theoretical chapters of this book, then, do not just set out the theory underpinning the data chapters, conversely the data chapters also underpin the theoretical chapters, as my notion of the *cultuurtekst* approach, and its accompanying idea of becoming a 'text ethnographer', and how this contributes to learners' cultural and intercultural awareness became more refined.

### Background to the Study

When I started this study in the late 1990s, the theoretical field of intercultural communication as part of language teaching had only just started to develop. The idea that the notion of the Intercultural Speaker should replace

that of the 'native speaker' as the aim of language learning was only posed in 1997 by Byram and Zarate. At the university where I worked, language teaching was at many language departments still largely grammar and translation based with an assumption that students should achieve the level of 'near-native speaker' competence upon graduation. The underlying educational principles in language departments were rooted in the liberal Arts and Humanities with their emphasis on critical and rigorous thinking, objectivity and the notion of 'high' culture. The texts which were used for reading and translation in language teaching were challenging in their intellectual content, but the actual pedagogy did not emphasise communication in the foreign language in real life situations.

As I set out in chapter 1, outside the institutions adhering to liberal education, the grammar-translation approach was, justifiably in my opinion, recognised as outdated. A contrasting approach, that of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), was favoured at universities with less traditional language departments or at Language Centres attached to universities. The content of these latter courses was originally developed with exchanges in typical tourist situations in mind, but this was soon incorporated into the new educational paradigm of instrumentalism which was gaining significance in HE.

Contemporary published language teaching materials for Dutch, such as *Code Nederlands* (1992, 1996) strictly followed the principles of the functional-notional syllabus with its bite-size approach to memorising phrases to perform language functions such as asking for directions, or ordering in a restaurant. Unlike the grammar translation approach, the pedagogy of CLT was informed by general theories of language acquisition and learning. The strength of this approach was clearly that students learned to communicate in every day situations and were familiar with appropriate phrases in a range of contexts. Students would be more likely to use 'authentic' language expressions within these set contexts. However, as a language teacher, I felt equally dissatisfied with this approach because of its lack of structure and linguistic underpinning on the one hand, and the reductive content focusing on pragmatic language exchanges only, on the other.

It would seem an obvious solution to integrate the positive aspects of each of these approaches into one syllabus, i.e. integrating the learning of grammatical structures in relation to communicative language functions, and, in addition, adding more interesting 'cultural' content. Indeed before embarking on the study for this book, in the mid to late 1990s, I had developed the second and fourth year language courses at the department where I taught. My brief had been to 'improve the language skills' of students. The principles that influenced my courses at that time were informed by, amongst others, Wilkins' notion of the semantico-grammatical category<sup>1</sup> (1976), Hawkin's (1984) notion of language awareness as a meta-linguistic construct, and views of language as 'discourse' in the sense of the units of language which contribute to coherent texts, i.e. the 'traditional' applied linguistics view of discourse. I wanted students to

develop their language competence and skills both at the level of social interpersonal communication as well as at the level of academic and cognitive language use; the areas that Cummins (1979) refers to as BICS (basic interpersonal communicative skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency).

In practice this meant that in my courses I focused on the integration of form, function, text structure, text coherence and cohesion. But in addition, I also introduced an element of critical thinking in the courses, particularly in the fourth year language course. At that time I had not conceptualised criticality either as ideology critique, or as 'discursive mapping' (see chapter 3), but instead conceptualised critical thinking to mean scrutinising argumentation for its logical interplay of ideas in texts and being able to write logical and cogent arguments. In the initial syllabus for the fourth year language course then, I included a range of language activities focusing on 'heavyweight' topics such as the political and ethical principles of the various Dutch media or the political ideals and historical influences which were embedded in the current arts policy of the Dutch government.

The initial results of this course (developed in the mid-1990s) suggested that students' language and writing skills improved in the sense that they showed a greater competence in writing cohesive and coherent texts than was previously the case. They also showed an awareness of the reader (albeit a universal one) in writing reader-friendly prose<sup>2</sup>. Yet, I was still not satisfied with the course and its learning outcomes; the students' writing lacked authenticity and engagement. I realised that this was due to the fact that they were not able to understand, and certainly not produce, the subtle and connotative cultural meanings in language use. Students were quite capable of comprehending the surface meaning of texts and recognising stylistic points such as the degree of formality or informality of a text, but they tended not to respond to more subtle or specific cultural meanings. Nor were they able to produce language themselves incorporating these subtle or cultural meanings. Moreover, the texts that I exposed students to covered - due to the nature of the topics, mainly one register: that of the 'quality newspaper' or popular academic article. I realised that in my desire to provide a high standard university course encompassing critical thinking, I had unwittingly interpreted the notion of content and culture as couched in the liberal humanist ideology: culture as the 'better' products of intellectual thinking. And in having done so, students received a one-sided and value-based view of language and text as needing to adhere to certain standards.

### Research Challenge

The challenge for me became to develop principles for language teaching and learning for a general language course in the context of a language degree, which would conceptualise communication as not only taking place in a *context of situation*, but also in a *context of culture*. I followed Kramsch in using these two parameters. The course would need to develop students' general

communicative and critical language skills and relate these to the immediate context (which I had focused on in my original course), as well as relate it to the wider cultural context of ‘ideas and values’. As I came to understand later, the notion of ‘cultural values’ carries with it the assumption of stability and clearly delineated ‘cultures’ which are distinct from others. As I started to conceptualise the idea of cultuurtekst, I soon came to use the notion of ‘discourses’ and ‘discursive formations’ (see chapter 2) in my own conceptualisation, although I used these terms only occasionally to students themselves, since they showed a resistance to these concepts. As a result of this study my own conceptualisation of criticality also changed. My intention was initially to develop students’ critical language skills in both the ‘critical thinking’ paradigm I set out above and in addition in terms of CLA, which I saw as a way of alerting students to the fact that texts invite us to take up certain reading positions, particularly in relation to dominance of particular ideologies. Later in the study, I came to think of this as ‘discursive mapping’ as that afforded texts to be looked at in relation to complexities, contradictions and tensions in real life as well as the ‘text producing environment’.

My intention was to develop these principles through re-designing my fourth year language course, and to reflect on my pedagogy and the students’ responses to see how the course ‘worked’ in practice. This course is taken by students when they return from their Residency Abroad - a period of a year or half a year, spent at a university in the Netherlands or Flanders.

My initial intention with this study was to develop principles for good practice in language and culture teaching. As my study progressed along dialogic lines, i.e. a continuous reflection on practice in relation to theory, new concepts started to emerge. The research focus changed as part of this reflective process. Early on in the study, I articulated the initial aim further as ‘developing principles for a pedagogy that would enable students to see text as cultuurtekst within a general language course’. Later on my research focus shifted from *developing* principles of good pedagogy, to *understanding* what happens in the classroom, and how students engaged with the concept of cultuurtekst, which had become the focus of my pedagogy.

It was the juggling and problematising of the initial and emerging concepts which posed the challenge of this study. In the process I followed various angles and themes, later abandoned them, resurrected some, picked up new ones, only to abandon some again. I will describe below which concepts in the end informed the thesis and how they changed over time. However, first I will set out the nature of the enquiry and the particular methodological features of this study.

### Methodology and Messiness

The data for this study consist of two recorded and fully transcribed lessons out of the fourth year language course and two sets of fully transcribed student interviews. In collecting and analysing these data I engaged in a few different

research orientations. As my study was aimed in part at improving my own pedagogy, it can be said to be a form of action research. However, this study aims to be more than a 'procedure designed to deal with a concrete problem' (Cohen and Manion, 1985: 223), as it seeks to understand how students responded to my approach and to see what would emerge from my classes in terms of student learning and engagement. In that sense my methodology is ethnographic in nature in trying to understand the 'richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions' (Cohen et. al., 2007: 167) of the classroom environment. I used the 'traditional' ethnographic methods of participant observation, although there was a tension between my dual roles of teacher and researcher. I also carried out in-depth ethnographic style interviews. My study reflected to some extent the tension which exists in ethnography between traditional naturalistic perspectives which sees the ethnographic product of field notes as a closed, completed and final text, and a postmodern orientation influenced by the linguistic, or interpretative *turn*. The latter orientation looks upon the discipline as characterised by difference and diversity and a series of tensions ethnographers and the people they study both engage in.

As I indicated earlier, my data seemed messy and contradictory. The realities of the classroom and the students' experiences seemed at times ambiguous, elusive and slippery. However, it is in reflection that I can conclude that this indistinctiveness is an inherent part of research which seeks not to reduce or simplify the complexity of social reality. As Blommaert (2010: 11) states, social activities are 'not linear and coherent, but multiple, layered, chequered and unstable.' By refusing to impose ordered methods to complicated and kaleidoscopic realities, ethnography becomes critique, Blommaert suggests (*ibid*).

It can be said that in my own study I used the standard social science approaches of observations and interviewing. Similarly, in the initial stages of the data analysis I followed the 'mechanical' approach which is inherent in that standard methodology. Nevertheless, my intellectual engagement with the data, as well as with the 'project' as a whole, has embraced ways of thinking about method which sees messiness not as an unavoidable disadvantage, but as a 'way of working' and a 'way of being' (Law, 2004: 10).

In my reflection on the data, this study also borrows from grounded theory (cf. Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Rather than having a clear hypothesis at the start of the study to explain certain phenomena, research using a grounded theory approach aims to understand these phenomena through the data. Concepts and categories of explanation are 'discovered' through careful analysis of the data, as well as through reference to and reflection on theoretical literature. The tentative categories and concepts which emerge can be tested over and over again, against new data in a continuous cycle. In relating the data to concepts and to make links with existing theories and categories, I developed and rearticulated the concepts which I discussed in the previous chapters. This process of developing categories and concepts took place through 'coding': reading

and re-reading the data and going through these to see what categories emerge, whilst acknowledging the multiple voices and what Denzin and Lincoln call the ‘breaks, ruptures, crises of legitimation and representation [and] self-critique’ (quoted in Atkinson et. l. 2007 (2001): 3).

### The Concepts which Informed the Study

In developing my approach to language and culture teaching, I conceived of context of situation and context of culture as consisting at two levels: context of situation as the basic level that students would need to understand, and the context of culture as the level which would allow students to become intercultural – to understand where the text or the speakers were ‘coming from’ at an ideological level. Both levels are necessary to discuss and understand text, and indeed to become a competent language user and intercultural speaker. The second level, the context of culture, addressed the relationship between language and culture at the *generic* level; how values and ways of thinking are articulated and refracted in language through discourses. Following a range of other concepts, such as a Foucauldian notion of discourse, Bakhtin’s notion of multivoicedness and dialogue, Kress’s notion of conflicting discourses and Maaïke Meijer’s idea of cultuurtekst, I applied these ideas to my language teaching courses, in what I came to call the cultuurtekst principle of language teaching. As I set out in previous chapters, this principle holds that seeing text as cultuurtekst helps students to become aware of the discourses and values which underpin our everyday communications and which are often taken for granted. I wanted to make students aware of this through reading texts, and also to apply, or at least be aware of it in their own communications.

The notion of cultuurtekst also helped me to address the tension that exists in the relationship between language and culture at the *differential* level, i.e. ‘a’ language related to ‘a’ specific culture. As I set out in chapter 3, we cannot hold to a view of a direct relationship between a language and ‘the’ culture with which it is associated. Yet, at the same time we cannot ignore that there are cultural patterns which relate to or, at least, are experienced by people as a national or localised entity (cf. Holliday, 2011). Many of the discourses that learners come across, however, are global and cross many different national borders, e.g. the discourses of ‘terrorism’ or ‘environmentalism’, but these ‘global’ discourses can be articulated differently in different contexts, including national ones. I have called this in relation to the text we discussed in class a ‘Dutch articulation’.

In the process of conducting my study and analysing data, making tentative inferences and recognising categories, new concepts emerged. Whereas earlier on in the study I had worked with the notions of context of situation, context of culture, and different views of criticality, which then led me to the idea of cultuur

tekst, the analysis of the data brought new categories to the fore. One of these new categories was particularly the importance of students' previous personal experiences, their emotions, their lifeworld knowledge as ways of making sense of the world in interpreting texts. Also, I realised that the view that students had of 'text' became an important part of their response to the text. The 'partial' or 'half' understandings (as I saw them), I recognised later to be an important part of the 'struggle to mean' and to gain a deeper understanding of these complex issues. As I realised, the 'rich' learning moments in the lessons had been where students engaged with and related the text to their own experiences.

Students did not just approach the text in an intellectual way, but also in an experiential way. That is to say, they read text in relation to their own experiences. I came to think of this way of intellectually and experientially engaging with text as 'seeing text as a text ethnographer', which I describe in chapter 3.

It was only retrospectively, after the process of analysing, further reflection and further theorising on the course that I came to see how reading text as an ethnographer is a way of engaging with the other, and being intercultural through texts, so it was not part of my pedagogy at the time of data collection.

This study analyses two lessons in the fourth year language course. In order for the reader to understand where these lessons fitted in, I will give a short overview of the course, its aims and the distinctiveness of my approach.

### Distinctiveness of the Course

The course which I am using as the basis for this study, is a fourth year Dutch language class. The reason for focusing on this year group was partly pragmatic, in that this was the only language year group I was teaching at that point. However, more importantly, I felt that for researching the understanding of the cultural locatedness of texts, the fourth year class would be the best starting point as the students had just returned from the Netherlands or Flanders on their Year Abroad, and would therefore have already experienced various cultural practices; in other words they have already participated and have been socialised in the 'shared cultural knowledge' that the Dutch readership for the texts we are using would have. The fourth year students would therefore be more likely to recognise the discourses in the texts in relation to the context of production, and be able to discuss texts at a critical level because their language competence would be that much greater than in the first or second years.

Whilst the course takes a cultuurtekst approach, which borrows concepts from cultural studies, it is important to emphasise that this study took place as part of a general language class and not a cultural studies class per se. This means that students were not just engaged in reading, discussion and interpretation, but also in other practical language tasks which included all the four traditional language skills. However, as the students on this course have just

spent a substantial time in a Dutch-speaking environment, they are confident communicators at the interpersonal social skills level (cf. Cummins), and are confident intercultural speakers. For that reason, the course focuses more on cognitive language skills. It is largely centred around texts (including oral and visual ones, although the latter were only touched upon), discussed in class and with a range of follow up writing activities.

At the time of data collection I had articulated the overall aim of the course at a practical level as enabling students to function and communicate at a professional, social and academic level in a Dutch-speaking environment within a wide range of social and cultural contexts. Apart from advancing students' actual language skills, this functioning particularly requires the students to develop an awareness of how language, communication and culture relate to one another. As I mentioned earlier the students need to be able to engage with communicative instances at the level of context of situation as well as context of culture. Both levels would demand a particular level of criticality. Looking at texts in relation to the context of situation requires students to engage with texts as products and encourages them to think critically about the text in terms of its interplay of ideas, its coherence and clarity. Looking at the context of culture requires students to engage with text as a process and encourage criticality in terms of 'discursive mapping': looking at texts for the way they draw on discourses and produce 'truth claims' and maintain assumptions about the world and power differentials. Students need to be 'critical intercultural language users', not only in their ability to read and talk about texts, but also in being able to write and address readers themselves, taking into account the communicative demands set by both levels of contexts.

As set out in previous chapters, the course differed from other Dutch language courses in its focus on awareness raising of 'culture in language'. In my previous chapters I criticised the instrumental approaches to language learning which are informed by the guidelines of the Council of Europe. Particularly in the Netherlands there is a strong instrumental focus in language teaching. My criticism of instrumentalism is directed at its limited and reductive approach to the social and cultural world. Frequently in instrumentally oriented textbooks, examples of 'language in use' are presented as if the language users all share the same context and speak with the same voice; as if there is a universal (native) speaker.

That does not mean that I believe preparing students for the world of work is irrelevant, but I believe that the 'world of work' is part of the complex wider cultural context. We cannot predict what particular linguistic and cultural contexts our graduates will encounter. What we can predict, however, is that these situations will be complex and differ each time, will be challenging, consist of many indeterminacies and will be intercultural.

As well as linguistic skills, students should develop intellectual skills which go over and beyond the cognitive academic language proficiency of writing cogent arguments in order to understand and become aware of language and its

uses in the cultural world. These are not just skills for functional and pragmatic purposes, but also for ideological purposes: recognising on the one hand how ideas and values are reflected and constructed in texts, how power relations are reproduced and how the reader is positioned in certain texts.

With these factors in mind, I designed the course so that students were gradually made aware of the wider cultural context of the text and how this is reflected and constructed in the language used. I had 'packaged' this approach to students in the more pragmatically formulated notion of 'style'. After all students' expectations and their own objectives for this course would have been primarily to improve their language skills, not to learn how to analyse texts. The importance of looking at cultural values in texts, I explained, was partly to recognise as a reader where a text is 'coming from', but also, it would help them in their practical writing skills by being able to write stylistically appropriately for different aims and purposes.

### Overview of the syllabus

The course of 20 weeks is split into two parts. In practice the material that I wanted to cover in the first part took approximately 12 weeks, with 8 weeks left for the remaining part of the course. The table below shows a schematic overview of the course. However, the course did not progress as neatly as the overview suggests. As well as discussing texts and doing writing activities, we also did grammatical exercises where appropriate. In addition a number of lessons were spent on translating texts as this offers a way to discuss cultural aspects of a text.

The first 12 weeks of the course consisted of two blocks. The first block, introduces the notion of 'style' in relation to the aim and audience of a text before looking at how language in its stylistic choice of structures and lexis can reflect particular ideological positions in texts. In order to help students to query the seemingly natural positions in texts, I introduced most texts in 'pairings' so that students could see how else the topic could be talked about. I also structured the ideas in a gradual way, moving from ideas of situational context to context of culture. Paired texts covered the same topic, but were either written for different purposes, for different audiences, or consisted of different genres or draw on different discourses.

The second block of this first part of the course applied these conceptual ideas to a more 'traditional' area of advanced language teaching; that of argumentation and text structure. In looking at structure and argumentation we initially focused on the 'textual' and 'product' level of the text, I introduced students first to the academic, rhetorical and linguistic aspects of these areas, e.g. how arguments and texts are constructed, and cohesion and coherence in texts. Then we looked at these texts in their situational and cultural contexts. It is in this block that I introduce the notion of cultuurtekst using the *Men's*

*Health* text which is the focus of this study. I will discuss these lessons in more detail below.

The second part of the course aimed to put the framework and the new understandings of cultuurtekst into practice in more practically and professionally oriented situations and contexts, such as report and letter writing and giving oral presentations. I ask students to look at addressivity and at positioning of the texts, as well as to write for different contexts, and drawing on different discourses. My main aim in this second part of the course with moving from cultuurtekst to instrumental and goal oriented areas of language teaching was to encourage students to apply their critical awareness of discourses to communicative events which may seem even more natural than those of popular media texts, but are equally filled with different voices, discourses and ideologies. In their writing I want students to be responsible towards their readers and audience – to take account of ‘addressivity’.

### Course overview

<p><b>TERM 1 Language and Culture</b></p> <p><b>Block 1</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> to introduce the concepts in progressive fashion</p>
<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Representations of Dutch (and English) culture and society in the Dutch media</li> <li>• Comparing discourses</li> <li>• The multi-cultural society</li> <li>• A current debate, e.g. euthanasia</li> <li>• Gender roles and representations</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Texts used include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two newspaper reports from different newspapers reporting on an attempted prisoner break-out. Newspapers: <i>Telegraaf</i> and <i>Volkskrant</i>.</li> <li>• Two interviews conducted by a female journalist in a series of interviews with ‘experts’ about their views on Dutch identity. One was an ex-diplomat, the other a young female parliamentarian of Turkish descent. Newspaper: <i>Volkskrant</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texts from same genre, but different audiences and orientations are compared for different representation of the same event in terms of information focused on or left out; grammar, lexis and their effect.</li> <li>• Texts from same genre are looked at critically and used for discussion of content and are compared for different positioning from journalist and interviewee and the other way round, through language used.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two informative texts about Dutch identity: 1) textbook for social studies at secondary school; 2) the first two pages of an article from a popular academic monograph <i>Het nut van Nederland</i>.</li> <li>• Three texts representing regional identities: 1) article from Dutch newspaper, <i>Volkskrant</i>, about the Cotswolds; 2) column in newspaper, <i>Trouw</i>, by Dutch novelist about his experiences of and views on London. 3) a texts from popular media, <i>One</i>, a magazine aimed at young women, 'exoticification' and essentialising particular travel destinations.</li> <li>• A set of texts to make the differences clear between aim, audience, style and genre of text. Topic: self development courses. Texts: 1) PR material from personal development/vocational training company; 2) a section from a popular weekly publication for young women (<i>Viva</i>) giving 'vignettes' of people talking about courses they have taken and how this helped them to develop personal skills; 3) course description from the website of a publication aimed at professional staff, <i>Intermedi-air Loopbaantrainingen</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text from text book is looked at critically for essentialist representation of an aspect of Dutch culture, and scrutinised for how the language used and its 'breezy style' help to 'convince'. Text from academic monograph is used to compare its style: its structure and stylistic strategies (e.g. repetition and contrast) also help to 'convince'.</li> <li>• The travel texts are used to further talk about representation of identity, and how the language and style used aids respectively 1) its nostalgic impression of the Cotswolds through romantic literary language, 2) discussing students' personal responses to the novelist's views, and 3) its exoticising and directing at audience by fitting in with expectations of genre, using techniques of rhyming and repetition and focusing on senses.</li> <li>• We analysed the texts for genre, purpose, audience and style. This led to talking about different values about work and personal development which were reflected in some of the texts.</li> </ul> <p><b>Tasks and assessment:</b></p> <p>Activities included discussion about and analysis of the texts. Writing tasks are in preparation for the assessment task which is to write two contrasting pieces: a fairly essentialised description of a country or region or town in a 'closed' style as well as a more nuanced version about the same place in a popular academic style.</p>
<p><b>Block 2 Argumentation</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> to apply the concepts to a larger range of genres relating to arguments, debates and discussions. Introduce the concept of cultuurtekst more explicitly.</p>

<p><b>Texts and materials used include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Text book for native speakers about argumentation structures</li> <li>• <i>Ons drugsbeleid mag er zijn.</i> Rationale for drug policy written by Dutch Health Secretary (published in <i>NRC</i> newspaper.)</li> <li>• Three texts about a new euthanasia law in the Netherlands: 1 and 2) two newspaper editorials from <i>Trouw</i> and <i>Volkscrant</i> respectively. 3) An emotive interview with a mother whose child died through euthanasia.</li> <li>• Three texts: 1) <i>Het multiculturele debat</i>, Paul Scheffer, <i>NRC</i>. This text later became a key text in the discussion surrounding multiculturalism in the Netherlands. 2) A criticism on this article and 3) Scheffer's response to that.</li> <li>• Three texts about gender roles and representation: 1) a polemical text: 'De man als dinosaurus', Liesbeth Wytzes, <i>Volkscrant</i>. 2) An argued response to this text; 3) <i>Men's Health text</i>: 'Pas op. Er word op je gejaagd'.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Focus:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Text in context of situation:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Text purpose</li> <li>- Audience</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Text as product:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Argumentation structures</li> <li>- Argumentation types/genres</li> <li>- Cohesion and coherence</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Text as context of culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Genre</li> <li>- Intertexts</li> <li>- Implicit argumentation/discourses</li> <li>- Cultuurtekst</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>NB The discussion of this particular text forms the focus of and is the entry point of my study.</b></p>	
	<p><b>Tasks and assessment:</b></p> <p>Activities included discussion about and analysis of the texts. Writing tasks were in preparation for the Assessment task which was to write an argument about the same topic and more or less the same viewpoint, but for different audiences and purposes and hence drawing on different discourses.</p>
<p><b>TERM 2 Practical skills</b></p>	<p><b>Aim:</b> Apply the concepts introduced in the first half to communicative situations often encountered in work-related contexts</p>

<p><b>Oral presentations</b></p> <p>Materials used:</p> <p>Textbook on communication Presentations from a symposium about the topic whether Dutch language is in danger of disappearing</p>	<p><b>Authentic contexts</b></p> <p>We look critically at text book examples. It is useful to gain new language expressions, but we critique its lack of authenticity. We talk about different styles and audience needs and contexts. Addressivity and audience.</p> <p>We listen to two presentations held at a symposium in the Netherlands to see how they are structured and what techniques the speakers use, such as repetition.</p> <p><b>Tasks and assessment</b></p> <p>Students work on sample presentations for different contexts. These are recorded on film and discussed individually with students for pointers on style and manner etc.</p> <p>Oral presentation: students use the same topic as their year abroad research project and choose an appropriate and authentic context, and determine what role they themselves and the audience need to play. Students are assessed on relevance and appropriacy of content and style within the chosen context.</p>
<p><b>Report writing</b></p> <p>Materials used:</p> <p>Authentic reports of institutions and companies</p>	<p><b>Identity</b></p> <p>We look at these reports partly in terms of product, the kind of conventions within report writing and expressions and representations of statistical information, but we particularly look at these in terms of context of culture: what corporate or public identity the institution/company is representing through language and the information focused on (i.e. traditional and trustworthy, or dynamic, market leader, environmentally aware, successful, etc.).</p> <p><b>Tasks and assessment:</b></p> <p>Activities include discussion about and analysis of the texts. Writing tasks are in preparation for the Assessment task</p>

	<p>which was to conduct a simple study, i.e. in local swimming club or amongst students regarding eating habits, and to write two reports using more or less the same information but for different audiences and purposes.</p>
<p><b>Letter writing</b></p> <p>Text book on communication for a few examples.</p> <p>Many authentic letters: e.g. asking for donations, newsletter, letters from school to parents, invitation to a leaving party of a colleague at work, invitation to project meeting and so on.</p>	<p><b>Addressivity</b></p> <p>We look at text book examples critically. It is useful for some language expressions, but we critique its lack of authenticity. Talk about different styles and audience needs and contexts. Addressivity and audience.</p> <p>We used a framework I made for analysing letters and focus on interpersonal relations and positioning and power relations and how these are embedded in language.</p> <p><b>Tasks and assessments:</b></p> <p>Tasks included writing a range of letters for different purposes and audiences and ‘relationships’ including power roles</p> <p>This task is assessed during the exam where students have to write two letters about the same topic using different roles and purposes and positioning, e.g. provost sending letter to students advising not to go on strike, union sending letter to students urging them to go on strike.</p>
<p><b>Summary</b></p>	<p><b>Context</b></p> <p>In the last couple of lessons we focus on the importance of context in writing a summary. Depending on why you want to write a summary and for whom, you will focus on different aspects and formulate it differently.</p>

### The Lessons

The two lessons I focus on in this study represent the point in the course where I introduce the notion of cultuurtekst explicitly to the students. Even though we have looked at discourses in texts at earlier points in the course, I had masked that as looking at ‘style’.

These two particular lessons fitted into a series of lessons within the block on argumentation, which had as its starting point gender roles and representations. Prior to discussing the *Men's Health* text, the class discussed a feminist polemical article, '*De man als dinosaurus*', ('The male as dinosaur'), by a female journalist, and a critical response to that. The students looked at this text particularly to see how the linguistic representation through grammar and style enhances the impression of the strong successful female and the weak disempowered male. I then introduced the text which forms the focus of this study, the text from *Men's Health* (see appendix).

The reason for discussing the *Men's Health* text was that it provided a range of different and contrasting discourses with the previous texts. Whereas the first two texts, respectively the feminist text and a critical response to it, came from a 'quality' newspaper (*de Volkskrant*), the *Men's Health* text is a different genre text from a popular lifestyle 'glossy' for men.

The rationale for using a text from the popular media is that discourses tend to be more exaggerated and easily recognisable. Moreover, as Wallace citing Luke et. al. (2001: 113) states, these texts may seem innocuous, neutral and requiring just a simple response, 'cumulatively they document and shape social and cultural life' (Wallace, (2003: 1). This particular *Men's Health* text, I felt, would easily yield a discussion around discourses and values in texts. The topic crossed national boundaries and the article drew on various conflicting discourses familiar in the western world. Moreover, I thought there was a Dutch articulation in the text, as I will explain below.

### Framework and How it Relates to the Two Classes

The framework I have developed (see below) borrows to some degree from Wallace (2003: 39), in the sense that her concern with critical language awareness (CLA) is both with critiquing the logic, arguments and sentiments expressed in texts, as well as the ideological assumptions underpinning these (ibid: 42). As the basis of my framework I adapted Wallace's orienting questions which she based on Kress (1989): 1) why has the text been written?; 2) To whom is the text addressed?; 3) What is the topic?; 4) How is the topic being written about?; 5) What other ways of writing about the topic are there? However, I am not following Wallace's Hallidayan methodology, based on Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (1994), partly because of its high level of abstraction which would demand much more specialist in-depth analysis and the use of meta-language. My theoretical concerns are less with in-depth analysis according to clearly delineated linguistic categories. Instead, I saw my framework partly as a tool for looking at texts, at both levels of 'text as product', and 'text as cultuurtekst', each encompassing a particular perspective on criticality. As I set out before, one of my concerns with reading texts in class is also with the cultural. I saw cultuurtekst not only as a tool for analysis, but also as a guideline to facili-

tate the dialogue in class, to provide the ‘fuel’ in the process of collaborating in making sense of the text. Moreover, cultuurtekst also embodies the cultural aspect of language learning, as by looking at discourses in texts, students can access social, historical and political meanings.

I intended for the discussion around texts to move from a focus on text at a textual level, to text at a cultuurtekst level, which I saw in relation to respectively the context of situation and the context of culture. I based the level of context of situation on Hymes’ model of communication, even though strictly speaking this model also encompasses cultural and social contexts as part of some of the speech categories such as norm and genre, but, these, I would say, are distinct from the context of culture, as they do not explicitly consider values embedded in language use. For my framework then I conceptualised the context of situation in a slightly more ‘pared’ down manner than Hymes’ model, focusing particularly on the where, to whom, when, why and how. Or as I have phrased it in my framework, the text audience, the text function, the text structure.

### English translation of framework

#### Framework for analysing and understanding texts

##### 1 – Content: what (or who) is the text about?

- what is the main point?
- maybe also: what are the subsidiary points?
- what is exactly said about those points?
- **Relating to your own expectations and knowledge**
- to what extent do you recognise the theme of the text?
- in what kind of situations have you come across this before (having read or heard about it)?
- and in what way?

##### 2 – Immediate context:

- **aim/function**
- what does the text ‘do’? (what does the text want to achieve?) examples of functions are: *to inform, to analyse a problem, to suggest a solution for a problem, to amuse, to give an opinion, to convince the reader of a particular argument, to explain something, to try and convince the reader to change his/her behaviour, etc.*
- Describe the function in relation to the content of the text. For example: *this text provides an overview of the different saving accounts available at this bank. Or: this text tries to convince the readers that the product of this company is the best on the market.*
- Which (strategic) means are used to achieve that aim?  
For example: *Engage the reader by appealing to making the theme recognisable, or engage the reader through grammatical structures, e.g. use of imperfect tense. Or: Convince the reader by referring to sources of authority, or by making comparisons, or by referring to a generally accepted ‘rule’ or convention, etc.*
- **target audience: who is the text aimed at?**

- is the text written for a certain situation or a certain publication?
- and what do you know about that situation?
- if you don't know that situation or publication, are there clues in the text which could help you to find out what kind of audience the text is aimed at? (for example: *is the reader expected to have certain prior knowledge, the way the reader is addressed (or not), the kind of arguments which are used, kind of sources which are used, complexity, liveliness, formality, and use of grammar: use of passives, complex sentence structures, use of verbs, nouns, adjectives etc.*)

### 3 – genre

- What kind of text is it? (for example: *a business letter, a personal letter, an invitation for a party, a news report, an opinion article in a newspaper, an essay, a report, an academic article, a conversation, a joke, an informative article in a women's glossy, dietary advice etc.*)

### 4 – text as text

- **structure**
- How is the text structured?
- What is the effect?
- **cohesion**
- How are the sentences and sentence parts connected? (for example: *formal markers, use of ellipsis, repetitions, through word order, synonyms, bridging sentences which indicate links explicitly etc.*)
- What is the effect?

### 5 – text as cultuurtekst

- How does the text talk about the topic and the 'participants'? Show this by referring to specific words and expressions. (For example: *written from perspective of the 'participants'; distant; critical; ambiguous; knowledgeable; angry; sympathetically; with empathy; with disdain; from a power position; as truth; cautiously etc.*)
- How is the reader addressed? (*as equal, patronisingly; as a 'student', from the assumption reader shares the same ideas and values; with (dis)respect; etc.*)
- Which values do you recognise in the text? (for example: *feministic; new age; religious; social-democratic; humanistic; conservative; capitalistic; individualistic; collaboratively; environmentally aware; nationalistic; etc.*)
- Which different 'discourses' and 'intertexts' do you recognise in the text? (*see above, and discourses reminiscent of law, text books, advertising, financial world etc.*)
- Are these values conflicting in anyway?

### 6 – evaluation

- Why is this text written?
- If you would write it for a different target group what and how would you adapt it?
- What other ways could you write about this topic (think about aim, audience, values and intertexts)?
- Is it an acceptable text if you look at it from a liberal view of text structure (in terms of argument, structure, clarity and 'honesty')?
- How do you respond yourself to the text now? Compare with your own expectations you had written down at point 1.

I introduced this framework at the point of the lessons where we looked at the *Men's Health* text. The questions in the framework were not specifically geared to this particular text. So, even though one aspect of the second lesson related to Dutch articulation, the framework itself does not cover this aspect. The notion of Dutch articulation was not a general point to be discussed for each text we read, but seemed pertinent to this *Men's Health* text. There are six points in the framework, which relate to various stages in the interpretation process, as I had conceptualised this. These stages move gradually from content and description gradually to interpreting and problematising the text. The earlier points in the framework relate to looking at the text from an 'outside' perspective, whereas looking at the complexity of the text as cultuurtekst introduces discursive mapping which involves students looking at texts also from an 'inside' perspective.

In designing my framework I did not take account of the framework which O'Regan (2006) designed for his approach which he calls the TACO approach: Text as a Critical Object, as his study was not available then. My framework does indeed differ from O'Regan's in that his framework is designed to be interpretive, as well as analytical. My approach as I explained before was less explicitly analytical and partly formed the basis for discussion of text and content. Although O'Regan's TACO approach is more complex and more fully underpinned by philosophical perspectives, there are some similarities with my approach as a staged process of analysis and an aim to engage in 'discursive mapping' (Pennycook, 2006), so I will refer to his work in the discussion of my framework below.

The first point in the framework serves to invoke students' previous experience and expectations of the text in order to make them aware of the possible preconceptions they may have. This is not a pre-reading activity per se, because normally the students would already have read the text as homework in preparation for the class. However, the first reading of text as homework is primarily meant for students to read at a content level, in order to look up any vocabulary they do not understand. Point 1 in the framework then, is to ensure there were no misunderstandings which arose from unfamiliarity with the vocabulary or with certain (cultural) references to the text. Under the heading of what the text was about, I also included the recognising of main and subsidiary points in the text. This was because the aim of my lessons was partly to develop cognitive language skills.

The second point was designed to make students think more carefully about the immediate context of the text; the context of situation. This involved moving from the surface content of the text (which is discussed under point 1) to recognising what the text 'does'; what its aim or function is, and the way of bringing that about, such as the use of various argumentation schemas. Another aspect of this part of the framework refers to the target group: who is the text aimed at and how can you tell? Whereas the first point of the framework is intended to be purely at a description level, this second point in the framework moves the attention of learners on to the level of interpretation. This point in the frame-

work constitutes the 'preferred reading,' which O'Regan (2006: 113) describes as 'the *apparent* argument, perspective, or purview of the text as it appears to the reader and is therefore *preferred* in the sense that the text itself seems to indicate this preference.'

Point 3 of the framework, the notion of genre, bridges the notion of context of situation, i.e. social setting, and context of culture. I have given this a separate heading as it needs some special consideration, both in terms of reading as well as writing of text. In developing writing skills, it is crucial for the students to consider conventions of certain social contexts (Bakhtin, 1986; Fairclough, 1992). As far as reading a text is concerned, the issue of genre helps students to recognise the conventions associated with specific types of text and to consider why a text may deviate from these conventions and expectations.

The fourth point of this framework, text as text (i.e. text as a product), is designed to alert students to the textual aspect of text, which I see here as a more traditional, structuralist approach to text in language teaching. In this framework I am contrasting the notion of text with the notion of *cultuurtekst*. Under this heading students look at text in terms of cohesion and argumentation. The rationale for this was not only to develop cognitive language skills, but also to guide students towards the interpretation of text as *cultuurtekst*. I felt that, together with point 3 of genre, looking at the *effect* of the overall structure and cohesion of a text, would alert the reader to style as social language use, which would pave the way for seeing text as *cultuurtekst*. This point in the framework, as well as the previous two points, require critical work by the students which are on a par with the 'critical thinking' level defined by Pennycook (2001) as being an aspect of the liberal humanist paradigm. It is a level of critique which requires students to take up an 'outside' position towards the text they are reading.

The most important point for my purposes is point 5, that of *cultuurtekst*. In this section I want students to look at that aspect of *cultuurtekst* which recognises and maps the discourses and the voices in the text, and to see if the discourses are consistent with one another, or conflicting. The conflicting discourses are the most significant ones. For this aspect I borrowed from Wallace's framework (Wallace, 2003: 39) which focuses on how the topic and participants in the text are represented. I am encouraging students to recognise discourses by engaging their knowledge of previous texts, of intertexts, by asking: where have you come across this kind of 'talk' before? This discursive mapping, 'problematising practice' (Pennycook, 2001), applies to all texts, and not just to ones which show clear ideological positions, in terms of power domination. As O'Regan states (2006: 118) 'all texts are inserted into a matrix of social, political and economic meaning relations.'

The final point in the framework is an overall 'evaluation'. I use evaluation here, partly in line with Halliday (cf 1985) in attributing meaning to the text. However, it also has a more pedagogical rationale in the sense that it functions to summarise the points mentioned under 5, *cultuurtekst*, which can then be

compared with the questions and answers which were given in the earlier parts of the framework. I followed Wallace's aforementioned Hallidayan framework with questions such as 'Why has this text been written?' which serves to make students aware that as well as text function, as part of immediate context discussed under point 2, there are ideological underpinnings to a text. Finally, I ask the students to look at the text from the liberal humanist perspective of text: Is it a clear, well argued piece of text?, before asking them to give their own response to the text. By comparing their answers under point 6 with earlier answers, I hope to alert students to the value or importance of analysing a text from different perspectives.

Important to mention is that my framework was not purely meant to help students interpret texts, but also intended to function as an 'awareness raiser' for students in producing text themselves.

### The Text and my Analysis

The English translation of the text is in the appendix. I will offer a summary here.

The title of the text is: '*Huwbare mannen gevraagd*' ('Marriageable men wanted') with the subtitle: '*Pas op. Er wordt op je gejaagd.*' ('Look out. They are after you.'). The text comes from a monthly publication called *Men's Health*. The publication is an international one, and the Dutch version carries the same English name. As far as I can tell, the texts are not translated from English, but written by Dutch authors for a Dutch audience. The particular issue (1999) which carried the text I was using for these classes, used the following editorial categories within the table of contents: 'Fitness and sport'; 'Relationships' (the category in which the article under discussion appeared); 'Psychology' (an article about stress); 'Nutrition'; 'Sex' ('How to keep going for longer'); 'Health'; 'Career'; 'Adventure'; and 'Fashion'. In addition there are a number of columns which all reflect the topics in the sections just mentioned. The categories and topics would suggest that the target group of *Men's Health* are ambitious, health and body conscious, fairly youngish men. The notion of 'success' is emphasised in many of the articles and columns.

#### *Content and context*

As described in the introductory paragraph of the text, the article is about single career women between 35 and 54 whose 'biological clock is ticking'. As the title states: 'Marriageable men wanted'. The women are represented on the one hand as aggressive young women who go out in the evenings to engage in '*man-nen vernielen*' ('male-bashing'), and on the other hand as women who have a problem and need help, as they are incapable of maintaining a healthy relationship with a man, and are thus risking missing out on having a baby.

The 'preferred reading' of the text could be construed as advice or as a warning to men. In the last line of the introductory paragraph this is made explicit as the (male) reader is directly addressed in this warning:

*Kijk uit, er wordt op je gejaagd.*

Look out, they're after you. (literally: Look out, you're being hunted).

Equally, there is a whole paragraph with the heading: 'The career woman: instructions for use', in which advice is given. It starts with the following sentence:

*Wat doe je wanneer je verstrikt raakt in een relatie met een vrouw die gehard is in de top van het bedrijfsleven?*

What do you do when you get trapped in a relationship with a career woman who has been hardened in a top position in the business world?

There are some linguistic, as well as visual features of the text which suggest a half-serious as well as a half amusing undertone in discussing the particular 'social phenomenon' of the single career woman. Particularly the descriptions in the first few paragraphs, which describe some of the women in their 'male-bashing' exploits seem geared to getting some laughs:

*Allen zijn ze op hun eigen manier even succesvol én .... even single. Nou ja, de meiden komen wel aan hun trekken hoor, dat is het niet. Dorien – 34, topbaan bij een bank – heeft al een paar jaar een relatie met een getrouwde vent. José – 36, manager bij een hotel in Utrecht – heeft een onmogelijke verhouding met een vage schilder met een alcoholprobleem.*

All are in their own way equally successful and ..... equally single. Well, the girls don't go without, you know. Dorien – 34, top job at a bank – has had a relationship with a married bloke for a few years. José – 36, hotel manager in Utrecht – has an impossible relationship with some vague artist with an alcohol problem.

Similarly, the inset box with a quiz about 'how to recognise a desperada' clearly is not meant to be taken seriously, e.g.:

- *Ze heeft geen kinderen maar soms al wel de kinderopvang geregeld - 25 pt.*
- *Ze citeert moeiteloos enkele strofen uit 'Het dagboek van Bridget Jones, 59 kilo' -10 pt.*
- *Zeven van de tien zinnen die ze uitspreekt, begint met één van de drie volgende woorden: onafhankelijkheid, ruimte of respect - 20 pt.*

- She doesn't have any children, but has sometimes already arranged child care 25 points.
- She quotes with ease whole paragraphs from 'The diary of Bridget Jones, 59 kilos' – 10 points.
- Seven out of her 10 sentences start with one of the three following words: independence, space or respect – 20 points.)

On the other hand the thrust of the rest of the article seems fairly serious and informative. There certainly is a semblance of seriousness in its references to other sources. The dominant information source is that of the female psychologist, Labrijn, who has carried out 'exhaustive research' (*uitputtend onderzoek*) into this phenomenon. She has written a book on the subject and gives therapy to women with 'this problem.' Furthermore a documentary film by a Dutch female film maker set in New York is cited as proof that this problem is universal.

### *Representations and discourses*

When deconstructing the text, the first paragraph sets the scene and gives the impression that 'the issue' of single career women is wide spread. They are characterised as a homogeneous group:

*Ze verdienen geld als water en hebben alles wat hun hart begeert, behalve een man. Steeds meer hoogopgeleide carrière-vrouwen tussen de 35 en 54 raken in paniek omdat zich maar geen potentiële vader voor hun kind aandient. Ze zijn soms cynisch, vaak hard en altijd veeleisend...*

They earn money like water and have everything to their heart's desire, except a man. More and more well-educated women between 35 and 54 are starting to panic because a potential father for their child has not yet turned up. They are sometimes cynical, often hard nosed, and always demanding...

The group characteristics are defined as:

*Leuke, goed geklede, vlot gebekte meiden zijn het en ze hebben het helemaal voor elkaar.*

Great, well-dressed girls they are, with the gift of the gab and they've really made it.

What it means to have 'really made it' is further defined in terms of possessions and appearances:

*Designkleren, dakterras of balkon, vlot karretje onder de cellulitis-vrij getrainde billen, make-up van Clarins en Roc, koelkast met zalm en champagne en natuurlijk die job met uitdagende perspectieven.*

Designer clothes, roof garden, nice trendy car under their cellulite-free trained buttocks, make-up from Clarins en Roc, fridge with salmon and champagne and of course that job with challenging prospects.

Moreover this group of women is represented as sexually aggressive:

*Als de meiden uitgaan is zij [Suzanne] het die roept ‘Kom vanavond gaan we mannen vernielen!’; een kreet die een gevleugeld begrip is geworden in het groepje. Sarren, flirten, beetje zoenen, en net als hij denkt dat-ie jou heeft, toch weer afwijzen – aan veel meer komen ze niet toe.*

When the girls go out, [Suzanne] is the one who shouts ‘Come on, tonight we’re going to destroy men!’, which has become a battle cry in their little group. Provoking, flirting, bit of snogging and just when he thinks he has got it in the bag, drop him. Much more than that they don’t get around to.

Initiating sexual advances seems to be the male prerogative.

*Welke man heeft er geen avonden gependeed aan vrouwen waarin je een vermogen aan aandacht, humor en dineetjes investeert met nul komma nul aan (seksueel) rendement?*

What man has not spent evenings with women, investing a fortune in attentiveness, humour and dinners with zero point zero (sexual) gain [profit]?

The expected conventions of behaviour, it is clear, is for the man to take the woman out to dinner and bestow his attention and charm on her, with a clear expectation that this favour will be returned in sexual kind. The discourses on which the text draws are very similar to the ones which the *Men’s Health* publication displays; discourses of success and status defined through possessions, job, a toned body and money. The latter is important; the quote above is located within a capitalist discourse, e.g. ‘investing’, ‘fortune’ and ‘profit’.

These discourses of success take on a natural common sense assumption when applied to men. However, when applied to women, these discourses take on a negative connotation; it seems subversive and abnormal for women to have ‘a top position in the business world’. Indeed the rest of the article makes clear that success is not a natural state of affairs, but it is a ‘problem’ for women. The first example of this is in the form of a woman in a documentary film, Laura Slutsky (!), who as a single career woman has ‘developed strategies for being successful’, which have led her to be ‘confrontational and critical’ in her

relationships. Laura was told by her psychiatrist that ‘her game was power’. She might win the battle with this, but she would lose the war.’ Again, power and success are highlighted as problems. By describing Laura in relation to her psychiatrist, her desire to be powerful and successful is constructed in terms of an ‘illness’ or ‘madness’ (cf. Foucault, 1965). Moreover, the unnatural and aggressive aspect of this is emphasised by locating power in yet a different strand of meaning: that of fighting and war.

Another shift in tone then takes place. A discourse of psychological analysis is constructed as the female psychologist, Labrijn, is quoted, explaining that women’s desire for success is occasioned through their ‘*jeugdervaringen*’ (childhood experiences). Frequently, the father is absent, and because of this fatherly neglect women overcompensate by building ‘a strong male ego’ for themselves in terms of ‘wanting to achieve a successful position in society’. But building up this strong outer protective layer

*snijdt haar ook af van haar zachte kant. Haar creativiteit, haar vermogen evenwichtige relaties met mannen aan te gaan.*

has cut her off from her soft side, her creativity, her ability to have stable relationships with men.

Labrijn continues:

*Afhankelijk kunnen zijn is het taboe van de succesvolle vrouw.*

Being able to be dependent is the taboo of the successful career woman.

Softness, creativity, being dependent are then constructed as ‘natural’ characteristics of women.

Another shift of personal self-development takes place as the psychologist describes therapy sessions in which women are trained in ‘alternative behaviour’. Together with her clients she explores the behaviour that women themselves want to change. Moreover, Labrijn gives some practical tips to men who are in a relationship with a career woman. These reflect the discourse of self-development; on the one hand the shared responsibility is emphasised, and on the other, the importance of the man to protect himself and his own individuality:

*Zoek en vecht samen uit wat wel en niet goed voelt in de relatie, ook als je voor jezelf geen pasklare antwoorden hebt. En blijf bij jezelf.*

Work out together what does and doesn’t feel good in the relationship, even if you have no ready made answers. And stick to your own convictions.

The final paragraph represents yet a different strand of discourse, which seems to be almost diametrically opposite to the discourses of the independent suc-

successful career woman. Instead, an intensely traditional image is presented; evidence of the successful results of the therapy sessions is given in the form of the marriage and birth announcements Labrijn receives from her ex-clients. Moreover, she herself points to how happy she is now since she has been in a 'really good relationship' for the past 5 years. Moreover, she also had her first child, she says 'beaming'. The last few sentences set the article within a wider context. Labrijn explains women of her age have been part of the generation which was conscious of feminism, and even though, she said, this was a phase that was necessary, it had led to a particular attitude towards men:

*In die tweede feministische golf werden mannen individueel verantwoordelijk gemaakt voor allerlei maatschappelijke misstanden, voor de ongelijkheid. Dat heeft de attitude van je afzetten tegen mannen bevorderd en onze generatie heeft daar last van. Ik denk dat er nu wel ruimte is voor een andere houding.*

During the second feminist wave men were held individually responsible for all kinds of social injustice, for inequalities. That encouraged the attitude of contempt for men, and our generation suffers from that. I think now the time is right for a different attitude.

Feminism is represented here for its contempt against men. It would seem then, that the final discourse which emerges is that of anti-feminism. This final discourse, allows us, I would suggest, to read the whole article in the light of an anti-feminist perspective, or at least a perspective of fear of successful women, as success seems to be a male attribute.

The women in the text are represented in many different and conflicting ways. Through the range of representations and different discourses a picture is created where the discourses of power, success and sexual aggression are 'natural' for men, but unnatural for women, to the point that they are seen as 'ill' or at least as 'unhappy' when they display these male characteristics. What is natural for women is to be soft, creative and dependent, and to find happiness in a stable relationship and motherhood.

A discourse of self-development, both in terms of changing one's behaviour and gaining insight into oneself is also reflected in the text. Part of this discourse is the discourse of shared responsibility, ('work out together what does and doesn't work') and a discourse of individuality, at least when it applies to the male: 'stick with your own convictions'.

### Dutch Articulation

Looking at the text as cultuurtekst as I did in the previous paragraph, means looking at culture and language at a 'generic' level. But I also felt that this text displays culture at a 'differential' level (cf. Risager, 2007), which I referred to

in chapter 2 as ‘Dutch articulation’. The topic of the text is clearly a global, or at least a western one; indeed students made intertextual connections, as chapter 5 will show, with American and English soaps and films. Yet my own interpretation of this text is that particularly the gender based discourse of women only finding fulfilment in motherhood was more likely to have occurred in the Netherlands. Whilst I realise I am treading on dangerous ground here, keen as I am to underline the pluriformity and multicultural aspects of society and avoid an essentialist interpretation, there are nevertheless cultural and social specificities in society as a result of, at least in part, historical development. Certainly, in her history on Dutch women’s writings between 1919 and 1970, Fenoulhet (2007: 1) highlights the ‘extreme emphasis on the nuclear family’.

Another Dutch discourse, as I saw it, was that of the semi-therapeutic one, which was quite prevalent in lifestyle publications in the Netherlands at the time (1999). On the other hand we could surmise that ‘therapy talk’, and the discourse of ‘personal development’ is part of many lifestyle magazines in the west. It has become so ingrained that we cannot even step outside it easily; it has become taken for granted to such an extent, that, even in a men’s magazine, it does not seem out of place (at least not to me). However, I felt that a discourse which sometimes is referred to as ‘touchy-feely’, - the word already indicates a critical attitude - would be out of place in an English men’s magazine. I also interpreted this particular discourse as an indication that strongly negative stereotyping of women and brazen sexism, as expressed in the first part of the article, was not acceptable, even in a glossy male magazine (which quite likely is also read by women), and needed to be toned down and wrapped up in a semi-serious therapeutic tone. Of course, the underlying sexism is still there, even, or maybe especially in the ‘therapy-part’ of the article. But the therapy discourse seems to make the sexism in the article more acceptable because of the tone of concern and caring it adopts, even using a literal female voice.

### Using the Framework in the Classroom

In the first lesson students had not received the framework for analysis which I discussed above. I felt that it might make the class too formal and I wanted them to ‘engage’ with the text. For most of the other texts we had discussed in the course up to that point, I had given them questions specifically geared towards that particular text. In quite a few instances I found that following the questions one by one formed a hindrance to the flow of the discussion in class. In this particular lesson, then, the framework was intended to be more a guide for myself.

However, as I will show in chapter 5, in reality, it was very difficult to follow the framework. Whilst it had been designed to take student through the text progressively, the students themselves did not make that strict separation.

Frequently, in answering one of my questions, they would bring in issues that related to one of the other points in the framework. Initially, I did say on a couple of occasions; ‘this will come later in the lesson’, but as that frequently had the effect of stopping the flow of communication, I tried to steer students back to the point under discussion – and not always with success. Cooke and Wallace call this students ‘not staying on task’ (2004: 109). This happened even more frequently in the second lesson, as the students rather than pre-empting the next questions, used the text for their own purposes to ‘talk *around* the text’ (ibid), as I will show in the next chapter. As a result the framework was followed only in a very loose sense during both classes.

To prepare students for the second lesson, the cultuurtekst part of the framework, I gave students a copy of the framework and asked them to answer the questions related to point 5 as a homework task.

### The Students

There are six students on this course, two male, four female. Five of the students have followed the whole programme in the department which included a language course in the first and second year and a year or a half year (varying between 3 to 8 months) spent in the Netherlands as part of the Year Abroad. The sixth student was a mature student, Chris, who was in his sixties and who followed an MA course at the department. All students have had experience of foreign language learning at an advanced level (i.e. at A-level or comparable) before they started this degree course. All students except one (Emma) started the degree course without any prior knowledge of Dutch. Students followed a variety of degree options which were either BA Dutch or a combination of Dutch with another modern foreign language.

All students are white, three are mature students (Chris, Emma and Eve), the other three either started their degree straight from school or after a gap year. All students were British, but students had a variety of background experiences. In addition there were two exchange students from the Netherlands, Marijke and Yasmin, who I had invited to take part in one of the classes which I use for data collection. I will describe the individual students below.

#### *Emma*

Emma was a mature student in her late twenties. She had lived and worked for a number of years in the Netherlands before she came to study at our department. She was the only student in the group who when she started her degree already had a high competence in Dutch. She was taking the BA Dutch programme.

*Claire*

Claire had studied in France for a couple of years doing a Baccalaureate, but had lived in Britain prior to that. She did not speak any Dutch when she started her study. She was taking the BA Dutch and French programme.

*Andy*

Andy had taken A-levels at a British school. He did not speak any Dutch before starting his study. Like Claire, he was taking the BA Dutch and French programme.

*Sarah*

Sarah had taken A-levels at a British school. She also started Dutch completely from scratch. She was studying BA Dutch and German.

*Eve*

Eve was in her mid-twenties which classified her as a mature student. She had lived for a brief period in Amsterdam working in a bar. She had a smattering of Dutch when she started her BA Dutch programme.

*Chris*

Chris was a mature student in his sixties. He had worked his whole life. He was taking an MA course at the Dutch department. He had learned Dutch many years ago and wanted to catch up on his language skills. His Dutch competence was particularly grammar-based and his writing style tended to be very formal.

*Marijke*

Marijke was an exchange student from the Netherlands. She was studying literature at the University of Groningen. She also undertook some work practice while she was at the department. In this capacity she did vocabulary work with students in a literature class.

*Yasmin*

Yasmin was an exchange student from the Netherlands. She was studying at the University of Amsterdam and was of Turkish descent.

In chapter 5, I use classroom data mainly, but not exclusively, relating to Claire, Emma, Sarah and Marijke, because their responses tended to provide

the richest segments of data. In chapter 6 in providing a general overview of my findings, I also discuss some interview data relating to Claire and Sarah. I decided to focus on these two students because of their contrasting approaches to the cultuurtekst pedagogy. One of the students, Claire, could be said to be a 'model student', as she engaged well with this pedagogy. Claire has also, together with Emma and Marijke, contributed more than the other students to the classroom discussions. I selected Sarah for this study, because the data relating to her are significant: she resisted my pedagogy throughout the course and she was very open and frank about this.

### Conclusion

This chapter described the context in which my study took place and I set out the conceptual framework which I developed to look at texts as part of what I call the cultuurtekst approach. I draw attention to the tensions, 'ruptures' and frustrations which were part of this study in terms of a number of areas, which included 1) the conflicting pulls of language teaching discourses in the context of my work; 2) the organic nature of the study, with paradoxical and 'messy' data and a constant interplay between data, theory and reflection; 3) and in the classroom itself, when students did not always 'play ball' or even resisted my pedagogy.

In the next chapter I look at the classroom data of this study in which these tensions emerge clearly.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The semantico-grammatical category is one of the four principles underpinning the functional-notional syllabus. The category holds that particular meanings are embedded in grammar.
- <sup>2</sup> Student feedback was generally positive about the improvement of their language competence. The most pleasing comment (for me) on one student questionnaire was that the course had been 'very thought provoking'. On the other hand it needs to be said that my impression was that only the more academically motivated students engaged enthusiastically with the texts, whereas others treated the texts and activities as just another language exercise.