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Article / Artigo

# Comparing English and French for Business Coursebooks: a Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis

*Comparação entre livros didáticos de inglês e francês para negócios: uma análise discursivo-cultural*

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## Abstract

The focus of this article is to present the discipline Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis and show how this approach was used in the analysis of business language coursebooks published in France and the United Kingdom. After presenting the foundations of this discipline, two areas of comparison will be explored. The first area concerns the representation of professional activity and examines how the work of women and men is represented differently in the coursebooks of both languages. The second area explores how the age of the characters contributes to the representation of a specific type of woman in the French coursebooks, while in the English coursebooks age serves to represent an opposition between youth and old age. These results are indicative of how a contrastive approach reveals certain aspects in the coursebooks of both languages that would otherwise go unnoticed in an analysis of a single set of coursebooks.

**Keywords:** Contrastive discourse analysis • Discursive genre • Discursive culture • Ideational metafunction • Business language coursebook

## Resumo

O foco deste artigo é apresentar a disciplina Análise Discursivo-Cultural e mostrar como esta abordagem foi utilizada na análise dos manuais de cursos de idiomas para negócios publicados na França e no Reino Unido. Após apresentar os fundamentos da disciplina, duas áreas de comparação serão exploradas. A primeira área diz respeito à representação da atividade profissional e examina

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como o trabalho das mulheres e dos homens é representado de forma diferente nos manuais de ambas as línguas. A segunda área explora como a idade das personagens contribui para a representação de um tipo específico de mulher nos manuais franceses, enquanto nos manuais ingleses a idade serve para representar uma oposição entre a juventude e a velhice. Esses resultados evidenciam como uma abordagem contrastiva revela certos aspectos dos manuais de ambas as línguas que passariam despercebidos numa análise de um único conjunto de manuais.

**Palavras-chave:** Análise comparativa do discurso • Gênero discursivo • Cultura discursiva • Metafunção ideacional • Manuais de linguagem empresarial

## Introduction

In any comparative study, the first crucial step is determining what can be compared. In a discourse-centered approach, this might include questions about the form, function and meaning of texts, documents or any other type of data that will be analyzed and then compared. Establishing other selection criteria will also limit the scope of the research project and focus the analysis on a specific issue. This article will address some of these points through the presentation of Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis, a contrastive framework that was applied to the study of a specific genre, notably the foreign language coursebook. The examples highlighted in this article are taken from a research study (ANDERSON, 2019) conducted on a selection of English and French for business coursebooks published in France and in the United Kingdom between the years 2001 and 2016.<sup>1</sup> The objective of this study was to identify how women in the workplace are represented in discourse through an analysis of the texts that constitute the coursebooks. The main theoretical foundations and methodological points in the contrastive framework will be presented to show its application in the analysis of the coursebooks. The presentation of the results that will follow will focus first on one area where the coursebooks of both languages converge regarding the representation of women's professional activity. This first section will be followed by a second section that will illustrate how profiles of specific types of women and men emerge from the coursebooks of each language.

## 1 Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis and the notion of *discursive genre*

Cross-Cultural Discourse Analysis (CCDA) (VON MÜNCHOW, 2021, 2018, 2004<sup>2</sup>) is a discipline developed at the crossroads of text linguistics and discourse analysis in the French

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<sup>1</sup> The titles and other bibliographic information of the coursebooks analyzed are provided at the end of the reference section.

<sup>2</sup> See von Münchow (2004) for an earlier version of the theoretical and methodological framework of this discipline.

tradition. Text linguistics and discourse analysis are both focused on the description of the internal structure of texts and the organization of sentences into larger units in communication. Text linguistics sees discursive activity through the lens of the production of a text, defined as “a network of sentence-to-sentence relationships” (MAINGUENEAU, 2014, p. 33), and seeks to describe the patterns and regularities that order and provide an internal structure to the text. Text linguistics is, therefore, “a subdomain of the larger field of the analysis of discursive practices” (ADAM, 2011, p. 31). Discourse analysis in the French tradition sees the text and its corresponding structure as being inextricably linked to the underlying social and political dynamics that influence its creation. As a result, it is not only the structure and the function of the texts and the underlying dynamics (ideological, political, historical, institutional, *etc.*), but rather the convergence of all these factors together that inform the creation of the text (MAINGUENEAU, 2014, p. 43-44). The analysis that follows would then seek to analyze the organization of the text, to untangle the influencing factors and reveal the underlying messages hidden within the linguistic content.

Both disciplines were influenced by the “discursive turn”<sup>3</sup> at the end of the 1980s, which marked a shift in focus from lexical unit-level analyses to wider phrase and clause-level analyses (VON MÜNCHOW, 2004, p. 49). The types of analysis carried out in both disciplines moved from the description of the internal structure of texts, to considering the communicative functions of texts as well as considering a broader variety of corpora that could be studied (*ibid.*). With the movement towards considering the role of the communicative context and its impact on discursive activity, the notion of *genre* emerges as an important principle. If *genre* is defined as “a class of communicative events with some shared set of communicative purposes” (PALTRIDGE, 2013, p. 213), taking into account the communicative function of texts and the description of their organization makes it possible to observe that the form and structure of the final product, whether delivered in writing or orally, are governed by many constraints. When constraints help to shape or model discursive activity, it is not history or ideology that directly influence the structure of the text but rather constraints of a communicational, situational or contextual nature.

The development of CCDA can be situated at this juncture point where a *genre* becomes the main entry point into the analysis. The notion of *discursive genre* has a central place in the contrastive approach of CCDA because it serves as a shared framework for the categorization of discursive material. As shared frameworks, speakers “use discursive genres and are able to

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<sup>3</sup> Moirand and Tréguer-Felten (2007) use the term “discursive turn” to describe a change in perspective throughout the 1980s that brought to the forefront the pragmatic and communicational needs of the foreign language learner. In foreign language teaching, there existed at the time the belief that the understanding and production of the target language occurred via the acquisition of vocabulary and isolated syntactic structures. This focus, however, did not lead to the development of transferable communicative abilities in language learners since the vocabulary and phrases learned were often restricted to specific and limited contexts. The discursive turn marked, therefore, a shift in perspective that began to consider the overarching importance of the context, the situation or setting in communication and the development of communicative competence as the main goal in language learning and teaching.

identify them” (BEACCO, 2004, p. 111). Maingueneau (2016, p. 55) further defines discursive genres as “communication devices that exist if certain socio-historical conditions are met.” Given their role in communication and their socio-historical roots, discursive genres are specific to a community of speakers and constitute what Beacco (1992, p. 12) calls “an active cultural typology” in that they allow for the identification of members of a discourse community based on this shared framework. Kramsch (1998, p. 62-63) also sets forth the link between *genre* and culture in a similar way:

What turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some conventionalized set of communicative purposes [...] It is easy to see why genre plays such a central role in the definition of culture. One can learn a lot about a discourse community’s culture by looking at the names it gives to genres, for genre is society’s way of defining and controlling meaning.

In CCDA, the discursive genre forms the basis of the comparison. The starting off point for any research project in CCDA is the identification of documents, texts or other semiotic content of the same discursive genre that are produced in different national or linguistic communities. As its name implies, this discipline takes a specific position relative to the relationship between discourse and culture, a relationship which is explored through the comparisons of discursive genres (VON MÜNCHOW, 2010). Culture cannot reside in an abstract way in the linguistic systems that constitute human languages (i.e. English, French, *etc.*), because meaning is created over time, and evolves as language is used in specific contexts. It is through communication and exchange, through discourse, then, that any underlying cultural dimension can be seen to exist in language. It is only when language is used by real speakers that language becomes infused with meaning, with all the possible references or connotations, cultural or otherwise, that allow for communication. In CCDA, the basis of the comparison is not the linguistic system but rather the *discursive culture* (VON MÜNCHOW, 2012) which, as a notion, refers to the ideas, concepts or images, circulating through discourse within a community, as well as encapsulating what can be said, or not, about these objects. The objective of an analysis in CCDA is not to reach conclusions about culture in a broad sense in order to make generalizations concerning a whole community of speakers, but to observe the regularities (or disparities) in the actualization of a genre, and identify the ideas, themes or other objects of discourse circulating within the same discursive genre (*ibid.*).

The objective of CCDA is to carry out descriptive and interpretive comparisons of discursive genres from different national or linguistic communities (VON MÜNCHOW, 2004, 2011, 2019). An initial descriptive phase leads to the identification of linguistic, textual or pragmatic features in the texts which allows the analyst to observe how objects, social actors, themes or other phenomena are represented, rendered visible or evaluated. Some objects or social actors can also be relegated to the background or erased entirely from discourse, which provides a view of what is acceptable or unacceptable in the discursive culture in question

(VON MÜNCHOW, 2016, 2019).<sup>4</sup> Through a second “interpretive phase” (VON MÜNCHOW, 2004, p. 59), comparisons can then be made between the texts themselves or between texts originating from different linguistic communities to observe how the textual genre is realized, as well as to observe how different images or representations emerge and can be connected to larger social, historical or cultural contexts.

Examples of discursive genres that have been studied according to the CCDA framework include evening news programs (VON MÜNCHOW, 2004), books for new parents (VON MÜNCHOW, 2011), junior high and high school history textbooks (see especially VON MÜNCHOW, 2019) and high school philosophy textbooks (NIENKÖTTER SARDÁ, 2015). The national linguistic contexts contrasted in Von Münchow’s studies are France and Germany, while Nienkötter Sardá focuses on France and Brazil. Through the analysis of these wide-ranging discursive genres, these authors have sought to understand how specific objects of discourse such as motherhood, the World Wars or philosophical concepts are represented in discourse and examine how these representations differ according to the linguistic context. The study presented in this article was carried out in the continuation of these previous studies and marks a turning point, given its focus on the question of how women specifically are represented in business language coursebooks.

## 2 Method

The coursebooks selected for this study were published between 2001 and 2016 and were widely sold in France and the United Kingdom at the time of the constitution of the corpus. As general business coursebooks, they are not sector-specific but address the overarching themes and subjects of the business world for adult language learners. They incorporate information about concepts in business but are focused primarily on strengthening the productive and receptive competencies of the learner. As such, the business language coursebook, the discursive genre at the heart of this article, is a relatively stable genre since its form and function do not vary according to the language taught and the national community where it was published. The texts that constitute the coursebooks, however, fall under various sub-genres, and as a result, the variability between the texts had to be considered in the initial stages of the study.

To take into consideration the relative complexity and difficulty of the texts, the coursebooks selected were created for language learners at the intermediate level. Being situated at the same level, the coursebooks also all address similar themes, such as recruitment, effective communication and working conditions. This convergence around specific themes

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<sup>4</sup> Von Münchow (2016, 2019) examines silences and absences in discourse within the context of the World Wars in a corpus of current French and German history textbooks. Her analyses reveal what information can be stated directly and taken as obvious knowledge, but also highlight what remains implied or unsaid and the role played by implicit information in the representation of historical events in history textbooks.

allowed for the constitution of a corpus of texts (dialogues, first-person accounts, grammar and vocabulary exercises, letters, résumés, job postings) centered on these themes with various examples from the coursebooks of both languages. These texts were primarily non-authentic texts which were created by the authors to address specific learning objectives and reproduce as closely as possible authentic situations or interactions. Non-authentic texts also often present imagined characters who are given specific roles and identities and carry forward the narrative in the coursebooks.

The analysis that followed focused on the description of recurring linguistic markers (pronouns, possessive determiners), grammatical structures (transitivity, clause structure and verb patterns) and lexical items (relational terms) within the texts, which were organized into thematic categories such as the job interview and describing one's job. A second interpretive phase led to the comparison of these texts and the identification of recurrent images of the roles and responsibilities of the characters, as well the identification of significant differences in the ways certain characters were included or omitted and certain subjects avoided. In the following section, two areas of the analysis will be presented, focusing initially on the way that professional activity is represented, while the second subsection will examine how information regarding the age of the characters contributes to the representation of different profiles of women and men.

## 3 Analysis

### 3.1 Representing professional activity

In both the English and French for business coursebooks, a significant difference was observed in how the professional activity of female and male characters is represented. An important point of entry into the analysis of the texts was the verb and the resulting syntactic structure of the sentence. This method of analysis was based on Halliday's model of the semantic system and its organization into three functional parts (textual, interpersonal and ideational metafunctions) (HALLIDAY, 1973; HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004). The ideational metafunction, which allows for the representation of human experience in the clause, can be further understood as the representation of a process encoded in the clause through the verb. There are six process types (material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural and existential) through which language represents the wide range of human experience.<sup>5</sup> For example, when speaking about previous work experience, it is possible to do so by describing the concrete actions that formed the basis of the job, using verbs that encode a material process. It is also possible to present one's work experience through the feelings or thoughts associated

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<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this article, the first three types of processes (material, mental and relational) will be presented. For detailed presentations of Halliday's model of the semantic system, see Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) and Banks (2005, 2017).

with the job, or by mentioning what was learned by doing the job. A mental process is thus observed when the event denoted by the verb takes place at the emotional or cognitive level. One can also present their role in a company by stating their job, by giving the name of their profession, or highlighting their responsibilities. A relational process is observed in sentences where the verb *to be* ascribes qualities in sentences such as “I am an accountant” or “I am responsible for the department”. These three types of processes and their linguistic realization in the clause form the basis for analyzing how action is represented in the texts.

The following example is indicative of the way that material and mental processes represent the professional experience of female and male characters in both sets of coursebooks. In this example, four characters talk about their experiences working in information technology. After reading these short texts, the learner responds to true and false questions about the experience of each character.

(1)<sup>6</sup>

Naïla N., 31 ans, Bordeaux J'adore l'informatique mais j'ai besoin de bouger ! J'ai toujours aimé le contact avec les clients. Au magasin, j'aide les clients à acheter leur ordinateur. Mes qualités ? Écouter, négocier, convaincre !	Naïla N., 31 years old, Bordeaux I love information technology but I need a change! I've always loved the contact with the clients. At the store, I help clients buy their computer. My qualities? Listening, negotiating, convincing!
Damien G., 24 ans, Paris Ce métier me plaît beaucoup. Je travaille seul chez moi, ou en équipe. J'invente, j'imagine, je trouve des solutions aux problèmes des clients. Mes qualités sont la réactivité, la rigueur bien sûr, la logique et aussi l'esprit de synthèse.	Damien G., 24 years old, Paris This job pleases me a lot. I work alone at home, or on a team. I invent, I imagine, I find solutions to the problems of the clients. My qualities are my reactivity, rigour of course, logic and also my analytical mind.
Anne V., 29 ans, Vélizy J'ai toujours aimé dessiner et jouer ! Alors, je travaille sur les logiciels de jeux. C'est un métier exigeant. Il évolue rapidement et la concurrence est grande. Mes qualités sont plutôt la rigueur, la patience et la créativité.	Anne V., 29 years old, Vélizy I've always loved drawing and playing! As a result, I work on gaming software. It's a demanding job. It evolves quickly and the competition is great. My qualities are my rigour, patience and creativity.
Frank B., 35 ans, Grenoble Après mes études en électronique, j'ai travaillé sur les bases de données. Je crée et je contrôle les bases de données. C'est un métier très sérieux. Quelles sont les qualités nécessaires ? Comprendre les besoins des entreprises, s'adapter aux demandes des utilisateurs.	Frank B., 35 years old, Grenoble After my studies in electronics, I worked on databases. I create and monitor databases. It is a very serious job. What are the necessary qualities? Understanding the needs of the companies, adapting oneself to the requests of the users.

(ROSILLO; MACCOTTA; DEMARET, 2013, p. 20)

In the statements attributed to female characters, the verbs “adorer” and “aimer” are used to introduce their professional activities and serve to represent their professional

<sup>6</sup> The original text is in French. The English translation is provided for the purposes of this article and was conducted to reflect the meaning of the original text in French. Any issues in idiomaticity in English are due to the literal translation of the original text.



experience through the emotions associated with their jobs. The verbs “travailler”, “inventer”, “imaginer”, “trouver des solutions”, “créer” and “contrôler” used in the statements attributed to the male characters encode material processes. The description of one’s work via the concrete actions undertaken contributes to the representation of the grammatical subject as an actor in a tangible process. Describing one’s work according to the emotions felt, however, presents the grammatical subject as a reflective and introspective being who instead of acting on the world is reacting cognitively or emotionally to it. This way of representing the female characters’ emotional reactions relative to their professional activity also denotes a certain level of passivity. This opposition between action and reflection or emotion additionally recalls the stereotype that women are emotional and introspective beings while men, on the contrary, are active.

Example (2) provides an additional illustration of this point. The objective of the exercise is to have the learner practice the use of the present simple and present progressive tenses.<sup>7</sup> The distinction between these tenses lies in the meaning of the verb since verbs denoting a state are to be used in the present simple form while verbs denoting an action can be used in both progressive and simple forms. In this exercise, a female character is ascribed the role of the one who “loves” her job, who “knows” and “believes”.

(2)

Sarika Gupta is a technology programmer, and she loves what she does. She works for Datascope, an exciting IT company based in Bangalore, the ‘Silicon Valley of India’, and she is also a shareholder in the company [...] That is why this week Sarika and Vijay, her Head of Department, are not working at Datascope. They are attending a series of meetings with representatives from global IT companies. Sarika knows that some of these companies want to outsource part of their operations to India, so she believes something good for Datascope will come out of these meetings.

(COTTON; FALVEY; KENT, 2010, p. 32)

Relational processes, which are encoded in the clause with verbs such as *to be* or *to have*, also contribute to the representation of professional activity in the coursebooks. Relational processes enable the affirmation of professional identities or the declaration of one’s responsibilities. In example (3), several characters present themselves and their jobs. The learner must use this information to identify the job title of each character and then place them in the organizational structure of the company. The male characters are all represented as active subjects engaged in concrete actions while the female characters are represented as having responsibilities.

<sup>7</sup> The verbs underlined in example (2) are the verbs that the learner must write in the correct form.

(3)

[...]  
My name's Caroline. My area of responsibility is finding and testing new products.  
I'm John Paul. I lead the team who make our products and I'm responsible for their safety at work.  
I'm Gamal. I do the bookkeeping and the payroll.  
I'm Alex. I deal with our suppliers and make sure we buy equipment and materials at the best prices.  
I'm Rosie. I'm responsible for recruitment and issues to do with staff welfare [...]

(WHITBY, 2013, p. 10)

Another way the characters are represented differently in the texts of both coursebooks concerns the affirmation of professional identities through what Hyland and Tse (2012) qualify as an identity claim in sentences constructed on the model "I am a/an X", where X denotes an occupation or job title which confers upon its holder a corresponding identity and status. In example (4), two characters share the same job as assistant managers of a bank. It is only the male character, however, who is presented in the role of assistant manager, while the female character is presented in the text through her connection to her children and her desire to spend time with them.

(4)

Jim Sutherland is an assistant manager at a multinational American bank. He works in a small community branch but only works 60% time. The rest of his time, he prepares for his other job. Jim is a stand-up comedian in local clubs and restaurants. He uses his bank job as a source for many of his jokes. Who does Jim's job the 40% of the time he isn't there? His colleague, Susan Acker. She has two kids at home, and she likes spending time with them. She works Monday and Friday and Jim works Tuesday to Thursday. This gives Jim time to go away on weekends for his comedy act.

(GRANT; MCLARTY, 2006, p. 118)

A job title confers upon its holder a specific role as well status within the hierarchies that characterize the business world. As an assistant manager, Jim Sutherland has a specific role and status as an assistant manager, but also as a stand-up comedian ("Jim is a stand-up comedian"). His colleague, on the other hand, is not represented by her professional role, but rather by the fact that she is a mother.

Another structure frequently used in the texts to present one's job is *to work as/travailler comme*, which, contrary to an identity claim, presents a temporary connection between the person and their job. Example (5) is an extract of a longer recording where several speakers present themselves and their occupations.

(5)

[...]  
MICHAEL: Bonjour. Je m'appelle Michael Rose et je suis allemand. J'habite à Nidda, une petite ville à côté de Francfort. Je suis propriétaire d'une petite entreprise. Euh... Nous travaillons beaucoup avec l'Afrique.

[...]  
MICHAEL: Hello. My name is Michael Rose and I'm German. I live in Nidda, a small town beside Frankfort. I am the owner of a small business. Um... We work a lot with Africa.

MICHIKO: Je m'appelle Michiko Maida et je suis japonaise. Je suis célibataire. Je travaille à Tokyo, avec mes parents. Nous avons une librairie dans un quartier étudiant. Je travaille comme vendeuse, je conseille les clients. [...]	MICHIKO: My name is Michiko Maida and I am Japanese. I am single. I work in Tokyo with my parents. We have a library in a student neighbourhood. I work as a sales assistant, I advise clients. [...]
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(PENFORNIS, 2011, p. 10, 161)

In this extract, the female character “works as a sales assistant” while the male character is “the owner of a small business.” In the coursebooks of both languages, the structure *to work as* is most often used to present jobs that do not require many qualifications and are often done temporarily and early in one’s career before other opportunities. Consequently, it is most often female characters that will use this structure to describe their work and establish a temporary connection to their job. Given the temporary nature of this job, the holder of this position does not benefit from a specific status as a member of a group of professionals. For the male character in this extract, being the owner of a company is a more or less permanent occupation that also confers upon him a specific status as a business owner. In the coursebooks of both languages, female characters are often presented working in temporary positions while their male counterparts are represented as members of a professional group.

Material, mental, and relational processes enable the representation of a wide variety of human experiences through language (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004). One can just as effectively describe their work through the concrete actions they carried out, through what they learned or felt, or additionally by stating their responsibilities or job title. In the coursebooks, just as in discourse, a similar message can be expressed in multiple ways, and the texts certainly strive to model the different linguistic structures that can be used to describe one’s job. What is interesting to note, however, is that a speaker always has a choice to make about how they will describe their job, and this choice will represent them in different ways, either as an actor and agent, as an introspective being reflecting on events, or as having responsibilities or a specific role. The same can be said for the characters in the coursebooks. Whether characters are represented as agents, as introspective beings, or as having responsibilities is not remarkable in and of itself. What is remarkable, however, is that the distinction between these different types of processes in the texts align with the identity of the characters and contribute to representing the professional activity of female and male characters differently in both the English and French coursebooks.

### 3.2 Representing age

While the coursebooks of both languages present the professional activity of women in similar ways, the coursebooks diverge in terms of the types of women that are represented. The texts that constitute a language coursebook serve to create a reality in which the learner will have to imagine themselves interacting and communicating with others. Given their objective to encourage the development of a communicative competence, the texts serve to model and

reproduce as closely as possible potential communicative situations and interactions within the context of the workplace. In these imagined interactions, characters are given identities and play specific roles. The characters might have a first name and maybe a last name. As explored in the previous section, some characters might have a specific socio-professional status, according to their professional roles and responsibilities. In their analysis of mathematics textbooks, Bruegilles and Cromer (2005, p. 87) observe that the characters rarely go unnamed. The name, in their estimation, reinforces the opposition between male and female and helps to create the referential illusion of the existence of a specific reality (*ibid.*). Along with the name, providing the age of the character also contributes to the creation of this specific reality. According to van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic inventory of how social actors are represented in discourse, age can be used as a form of identification and classification. He further defines *classification* as the "major categories by which a given society or institution differentiates between classes of people" (2008, p. 42), which in western societies includes categories such as gender and age.

Providing the name and age of the character contributes to the creation of this reality that is filled with imaginary women and men at specific points in their professional and personal lives. The way that the age of the characters is used, however, in English and French coursebooks, differs significantly. In the French coursebooks, the age of the characters is used as an identifying characteristic which serves to situate the character at a specific point in their career. This information is regularly presented in the *paratext* (GENETTE; MACLEAN, 1991), defined as the contextual or informational elements (title, subtitles, captions, *etc.*) that surround a text and "make it present" (p. 261). The following extracts provide examples of how the age of the characters often appears in the paratext of first-person accounts in the French coursebooks, when several characters are presented.

(6)

Anne, apprentie-cuisinière – 18 ans Bernard, restaurateur – 48 ans	Anne, culinary apprentice – 18 years old Bernard, restaurateur – 48 years old
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(PENFORNIS, 2011, p. 62)

(7)

Pierre, 43 ans, à Paris depuis 18 ans Allison, 25 ans, à Paris depuis 4 mois Christelle, 38 ans, mère de 2 enfants, à Paris depuis 6 ans Romain, 25 ans, à Paris depuis 3 ans	Pierre, 43 years old, living in Paris for 18 years Allison, 25 years old, living in Paris for 4 months Christelle, 38 years old, mother of 2 children, living in Paris for 6 years Romain, 25 years old, living in Paris for 3 years
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(ROSILLO; MACCOTTA; DEMARET, 2013, p. 36)

(8)

Michel Mérat, directeur export, 52 ans. Marié, un enfant. Mario Benotti, artisan maçon, 45 ans. Séparé, trois enfants. René Dauga, retraité mécanicien, 72 ans. Veuf, deux enfants, trois petits-enfants. Pilar Fernandez, employée de banque, 31 ans. Vie maritale, deux enfants.	Michel Mérat, export director, 52 years old. Married, one child. Mario Benotti, craftsman mason, 45 years old. Separated, three children. René Dauga, retired mechanic, 72 years old. Widower, two children, three grandchildren. Pilar Fernandez, bank employee, 31 years old. Married, two children.
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(BLOOMFIELD; TAUZIN, 2001, p. 73)

In these examples, the name and age of the characters, as well as other identifying characteristics, are provided. This information gives the reader additional clues about the characters, clues that may or may not be required to understand the information contained in their accounts and complete the associated comprehension activities. Providing the age of the characters also allows the reader to better distinguish them and their experiences. The age of the character also appears regularly in the actual text, as in the examples below.

(9)

Gabriela: Je m'appelle Gabriela Bravo et j'ai 24 ans. Je suis mexicaine mais je travaille en Espagne [...]	Gabriela: My name is Gabriela Bravo and I am 24 years old. I am from Mexico but I work in Spain [...]
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(PENFORNIS, 2011, p. 11, 161)

In the French coursebooks, when the age of the characters is provided, the type of woman that is most often presented is young and at the beginning of her career. Some of these women are also presented as having children, but ultimately the profile that emerges is that of a young woman. Beginning to work in your twenties and having children in your thirties is the model that is frequently visible throughout the French coursebooks, as seen in the examples above. It is rare to see women over forty represented by their age in the paratext. Instead, their age can be addressed in a vague way like in example (10) below, where the age of forty marks a turning point for the female speaker in the text.

(10)

[...] Et puis, j'ai eu quarante ans, mes enfants sont devenus plus grands et cela m'a donné une certaine liberté [...]	[...] And then, I turned forty, my children became bigger and that gave me a certain freedom [...]
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(CHERIFI; GIRARDEAU; MISTICHELLI, 2009, p. 109, 147)

Women over the age of forty are rarely represented according to their age in the French coursebooks, to the point where these women seem to be no longer present in the business world that is depicted in the coursebooks. Their absence could even be qualified as a form of "radical exclusion" (VAN LEEUWEN, 2008, p. 29) since both the social actors (women over forty) and their activities are not represented in the texts. Not mentioning the age of women over forty could also be indicative of the culturally-based notion that, after a certain age, it is no longer

appropriate to identify a woman by her age (IRIGARAY, 2007 [1990], p. 106). When women are identified by their age, it serves to bring to light mental images associated with youth, femininity and fertility, and their loss with age. The French coursebooks represent primarily young women at the beginning of their careers or working mothers. After these life stages, however, the progression of a woman's age appears to constitute an unmentionable fact, which is not the case for the male characters, who are represented at all ages and stages of their professional lives.

In the English coursebooks, the age of the characters is rarely provided in the paratext; as a result, the profile of a specific type of woman does not emerge, contrary to the French coursebooks. If the age of the character is mentioned in the text, it is often to highlight the exceptional nature of their professional success as a young person, as in examples (11) and (12) below.

(11)

**Brad Jefferson**

Yeah, I guess you could call me successful. I mean I drive a BMW 740 and my home is worth about \$4m. Not bad for a guy who's just 35 years old [...]

**Anne Lee Chang**

[...] I knew it would mean an average of 60 or so hours a week when I accepted the job – on a good week that is, but I'm young, I'm 32, so I can take it [...]

(TRAPPE; TULLIS, 2005, p. 34, 164)

(12)

Louis Barnett left school at the age of 11 after he was diagnosed with dyslexia [...] at the age of 14 he became the youngest ever supplier to Waitrose, a large UK retailer [...] At the age of 17 Louis was invited, as a celebrity chocolate maker, to attend the Chocolate Experience Show [...] Now at the age of 20 Louis is a well-known entrepreneur [...]

(WHITBY, 2013, p. 120)

Another way that age is used in the English coursebooks is to address the issue of seniors in the workplace, a theme which is completely absent from the French coursebooks studied. Often integrated within the wider subject of unemployment, the texts that address the issue of people working after retirement age emphasize the challenges and difficulties faced by these workers. These texts also attempt to normalize their presence in the workforce and highlight their contributions. Extracts (13) and (14), entitled, respectively, “older employees” and “age at work”, are indicative of how this subject is often addressed in the English coursebooks.

(13)

**Older employees**

The number of workers over the age of 50 or 60 is likely to increase in the future. We are all living longer and many businesses have decided to operate without a fixed retirement age in order to take advantage of the skills and experience that older workers can offer [...]

(WHITBY, 2013, p 115)

(14)

**Age at work**

They forget things. They don't work in teams. They can't adapt to the latest technology. These are often the reasons given for not employing older people. But new findings show that the worst workers are not necessarily the slowest and in fact slower workers often make the fewest errors [...]

(HUGHES; NAUNTON, 2014, p. 125)

In the English coursebooks, the people represented by their age are young and successful but also older and at the end of their professional life, and this applies equally to women and men. The age of the characters does not contribute to representing women and men differently, but rather to represent an opposition between youth and old age, which will, ultimately, affect both women and men. Contrary to the French coursebooks, age in the English coursebooks does not lead to the representation of a specific type of woman.

When this result of the analysis is compared to how young women are represented in the French coursebooks, it is possible to observe how the notion of *discursive culture* can provide an explanation. In the French discursive culture, after a certain age, a woman's age seems to constitute a taboo subject. This could also be the case in the English discursive culture, but the analysis did not show this, and it points instead toward the existence of a polarization between young and old, between success in one's youth and challenges faced in one's later professional life linked to age. In the English coursebooks, the subject of the older worker seems to be addressed to challenge preconceived ideas about the capabilities of seniors in the workplace and, ultimately, seeks to introduce a new model where people continue working after retirement age.

The way age is used in the coursebooks in relation to the characters constitutes a significant difference between the English and French coursebooks, which could be due to the different learner profiles that emerge from their pages. Much of the content in the French coursebooks is situated in France. This is visible through the names of places, addresses and companies that are mentioned. The names of the characters are typically French names. In the examples of résumés and cover letters, the characters depicted are often young and at the start of their careers. The profile of the learner of French for business that emerges is that of someone who is young, at the beginning of their career, and who will likely be speaking French with native speakers in France. In the English coursebooks, on the other hand, the action is not centered in one English-speaking country, but rather all over the world. People of all ages are represented, with different backgrounds and professional experiences. There is no underlying assumption that the learner will be using English with native speakers in an English-speaking country. The English coursebooks are designed to reach a worldwide audience and are, therefore, intended to serve a wide variety of learners. As a result, a specific profile of the learner of English for business does not emerge from the coursebooks.

## Conclusion

The main objective in the contrastive analysis of English and French coursebooks was to identify the similarities and differences in the way that women are represented through discourse. The comparison of discourses produced in similar situations but in different linguistic contexts or national communities can reveal certain observations which would have, otherwise, remained invisible, in an analysis restricted to a single context (MOIRAND; TRÉGUER-FELTEN, 2007, p. 17). It was through the comparison of the coursebooks that the analysis revealed a clear division along gender lines reflected in the discursive content of the texts, regarding the way that the professional activity of female and male characters is represented. The comparison also led to the observation that the profile of a specific type of woman emerges from the French coursebooks, while in the English coursebooks there is no single profile. The comparison goes one step further, however, given that it is not merely a question of how the compared coursebooks are different or similar, but how these diverging or converging points can be linked to underlying cultural or societal phenomena. In both English and French coursebooks, the stereotypes and mental models of what it means to be a woman or a man in the business world seem to be so deeply ingrained that they go unnoticed by the authors and become embedded in the linguistic and discursive content of the texts as a result.

The conclusions regarding the way that age is used in the coursebooks constitute a point that should be examined in a further study. As previously mentioned, age in the coursebooks is likely reflective of the profile of the learner and the wider audience that the coursebooks are seeking to implicitly target. Age is also reflective of the culturally held beliefs around femininity and fertility, about the stages in one's professional and personal life, about success and challenging commonly held ideas of what it means to still be working after retirement age. Based on these observations, a contrastive analysis of another discursive genre from these same national contexts could provide another look at the question of the invisibility of women of a certain age. Old age is a subject widely explored in feminist studies (HARTMAN, 1990), and a contrastive discourse analysis could help to better understand how the connection between women and old age is perceived in our societies.

In the end, this comparison and analysis of business language coursebooks provides a window into the ideas and beliefs that are implicitly communicated to those who want to learn English or French for business. While coursebooks have been the focus of the present contrastive study, other types of texts, media or semiotic content could be studied using the same approach and yield results that would provide a greater understanding of discursive cultures.

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