

The use of American textbooks depends on the population of students

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Before giving an answer to the general question posed by Brysbaert and Dumoulin (2007): 'Do we all have to study American textbooks', it seems worthwhile to draw a couple of additional distinctions. For who are 'we all'? The first distinction relates to the type of student: (1) students who follow an academic psychology programme; (2) students following a course of study other than psychology, such as law or medicine at the academic level or a course at higher professional education level. The second distinction relates to the question of what other areas of study are meant here in addition to the general introductions to psychology: introductions to the fundamental disciplines of psychology (e.g. personality psychology) or introductions to fields of applied psychology, such as clinical psychology, to ancillary subjects such as history of psychology, or practical subjects such as interviewing skills and psychological assessment. In elaborating my answer it will be clear that I subscribe heartily to Brysbaert and Dumoulin's general argument for the development of more high-quality Dutch language textbooks.

As for the academic psychology programmes in psychology, I regard the use of American textbooks in the Bachelor's phase worthwhile, insofar as it concerns introductions to the fundamentals of psychology; use of these textbooks in the Master's phase is even more self-evident. Introductions to applied disciplines such as Abnormal Psychology (e.g.: Seligman, 2000) can also be offered in American textbooks during the Bachelor's phase, but the lack of references to specific Dutch or Flemish contexts in mental health care is indeed a disadvantage. In the psychology programme at Erasmus University Rotterdam we have solved this problem by sometimes providing students with both American and Dutch introductions. It should be noted that in Rotterdam (as in Maastricht) we use the method of problem-based learning (PBL) (Schmidt & Moust, 2000). Within PBL students formulate learning objectives based on the problems they discuss in small teaching groups. In order to achieve these learning objectives they must study parts of the various books available from

the library independently. They are required to report on what they have studied in their own language, during a subsequent meeting. It is our impression that because of this latter procedure, the problems that used to occur with storage of knowledge and insights into memory due to lack of L2 proficiency have been reduced. Understanding of English language concepts and theories is made easier because the literature is also studied in the native language.

When it comes to ancillary subjects such as history of psychology or subjects intended to increase the practical skills of students, I am also in favour of the combination of American and Dutch literature, particularly because of the cultural differences referred to by Brysbaert and Dumoulin. Little will be found in any American psychology manual about the history of psychology in the Netherlands and Flanders. Anyone who has ever seen a broadcast by Dr Phil and noted with how much authority and aplomb he introduces his experts in the field of psychiatric diagnostics and intervention to his clients will hopefully understand what I mean when it comes to skills training. In the context of the Dutch culture, Dr Phil's manner would often cause irritation. This kind of exaggerated respect for authority and the broadly normative prescriptions given for the conduct of the psychologist in daily life are also encountered in American skills manuals on counselling, such as *The skilled helper* by Egan (2002). This book paints a 'portrait of a helper' that contains an accumulated list of the characteristics of the good helper ('He shows respect for his body through proper exercise and diet'), without any relativisation (see Lang & Van der Molen, 2003).

Finally, in the case of students following a course of study other than psychology, either at the academic level or at the higher professional education level, I agree with Brysbaert and Dumoulin in that I regard Dutch textbooks as more worthwhile than their American counterparts. One could think of books with titles such as *Psychology for physicians* or *Psychology for lawyers (written in Dutch)*.

The question that remains is who should take the lead in the further development of Dutch textbooks. Brysbaert and Dumoulin rightly point out that the Open University of the Neth-

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erlands (OUNL) has played an important role in this regard in the past. I am of the opinion that the OUNL ought to continue to fulfil that role,

of course in dialogue with publishers and Dutch and Flemish experts in psychology.

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Academic students of psychology should read textbooks written in English

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Do we all have to study American textbooks? No! Do we all have to study textbooks written in English? Yes! Why? I see at least two reasons for this. First, English has become the professional language in which the science of psychology progresses. Therefore, already at the start of their education, academic students should learn to accommodate the language and the specific terminology in which the communication with their future peers will be performed. Second, the first year of a higher education course in the Netherlands serves not only the purpose of introducing students to the field but also the purpose of student selection. Therefore, academic students should find out early whether a study involving lots of reading in English is suited to them.

Although Brysbart and Dumoulin (2007) acknowledge the important role of English in the science of psychology, they nevertheless present a number of arguments against using textbooks written in English. Below I will briefly address these issues in turn.

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First, Brysbart and Dumoulin argue that students' proficiency in English, as they start, might be too low. Although I do not disagree, in my view this need not be very problematic. If, for example, students adopt the habit of looking up every word they do not know during their reading, they will soon find out that they will have to consult the dictionary less and less. Teachers can help students on this trajectory in various ways. For example, they could stress the importance of study habits like the one sketched above. In addition, teachers can easily boost students' L2 proficiency by providing a list of the names of important English psychological concepts, their L1 translation equivalents and a brief description of the concept in L1. If students are still unable to acquire the necessary English proficiency, this might contribute to the selection purposes of the first year of the course.

Second, Brysbart and Dumoulin (2007) discuss the detrimental role of language switching costs when students study in English and are lectured and tested in L1, and I agree that those costs exist. However, again, teachers can try to minimise those costs by providing the already mentioned list of translation equivalents and descriptions and, at the time of test, the English terms in parentheses whenever the L1 translation of English words might not be completely obvious.