

Chapter 7. The World of Work: Constructing an Entrepreneurial Identity

ABSTRACT: This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the textbook content related to work. The findings suggest that Catalan textbooks tend to promote and prioritize the neoliberal revival of *homo economicus*, constructing an entrepreneurial identity among learners. In the world of work, values and practices related to the entrepreneurial self (the ideal neoliberal citizen) usually appear in a positive, desirable and normalized way. The characters tend to show satisfaction with their work or are excited at the prospect of finding a new one. In addition, the tasks in the textbooks demand students to implement an entrepreneurial spirit by having them imagine starting their own business or learning and developing techniques to find or maintain a job in a highly competitive, flexible and insecure labor market.

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative analysis of the textbook content related to work. In the framework proposed by the communicative approach to language education in which the emphasis is on practical goals and everyday life, the world of work has become one of the key topics in textbooks for learning languages. Indeed, in the first efforts by the Council of Europe to develop a communicative method for language learning in the 1970s, one of the main objectives was to help immigrant and guest workers incorporate themselves into the new labor market of the European countries they were coming to, as explained in Chapter 2. Four decades later, language education continues to be oriented towards the training of workers in order to develop

more competitive economies. In current language textbooks, the world of work tends to have a central place (Gray 2010a).

The application of the neoliberal capitalist labor model in Western countries since the 1980s has led to major insecurity and precariousness in the world of work. In Spain, for example, the seven labor reforms that have been implemented over the last few decades (1984, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2010 and 2012) represented the renunciation of the earlier objectives of full employment and permanent contracts¹. They all debilitated the working class and gave more and more power to the employers (Ruiz 2006; Otxoa 2007). These reforms have promoted temporary and part-time jobs, internship contracts and offers by private agencies of temporary work. They also broadened the grounds for dismissals and reduced the duration and amount of unemployment aid. Neoliberal labor reforms have been approved by Social Democratic and Conservative governments with the (eventual) support of the two main Spanish trade unions. The latter organized massive strikes against labor reforms in the 1980s and the early 1990s. However, in recent years, they have accepted neoliberal labor policies, giving their support to the

¹ The Francoist dictatorship encouraged full and permanent employment. The fascist regime intended to compensate for the lack of trade unions and political freedom with employment stability. The Spanish government stated that the situation in the labor market was very near to full employment, but this did not mean quality and well-paid jobs (Vilar 2012). The apparently low unemployment rate during the Franco era, especially from the time of the Spanish economic boom in the 1960s, can be explained by the fact that most women in that period were excluded from the regular job market and by the emigration abroad of around two million Spanish workers (Vilar 2012).

1997 and 2006 labor reforms (Otxoa 2007). In other words, the two biggest Spanish unions have accepted measures that prioritize and promote a flexible job market.

The latest labor reform was passed by the conservative government in 2012 without any negotiation with the unions. It was approved at a time when the economic downturn initiated in 2007/2008 reached its peak. The law was adopted under the pressure from international institutions and organizations such as the European Central Bank, the European Commission and the International Monetary Fund, the so-called 'Troika'. The reform made dismissals easier and cheaper, weakened sector-wide collective agreements, and gave companies more flexibility to reduce salaries or increase working hours if their competitiveness and productivity depended upon it. The spirit of the latest labor reforms in Spain is based on the concept of 'flexicurity' promoted by neoliberal theorists and political leaders to deal with the greater precariousness in the job market. This new paradigm is explained by Francesco Di Bernardo (2016: 12) in the following words:

Flexicurity is based on the idea of providing workers a moderate degree of social security, particularly in assisting workers moving from one job to another and supporting them financially in this phase, while preserving the 'flexibility' of the job market.

Although it is presented as helping workers in response to declining job security, flexicurity represents the promotion of employers' interests, the elimination of state employment protection and the legitimization of casual labor contracts (Di Bernardo 2016).

Neoliberal labor reforms in Western countries have led to the creation of ‘a reserve army’ of labor (Marx 1976 [1867]: 781--94) consisting of millions of unemployed and millions of people working under different kinds of precarious conditions, especially young people and immigrants. After the start of the 2007-2008 crisis, Spanish unemployment grew rapidly surpassing 26 per cent in 2013 according to governmental data (INE 2016a), which meant that more than 5 million people were officially without a job. In recent years, Spanish unemployment has reduced slightly, but temporary work has also increased. In 2016, for example, only one of every 20 new contracts was for a full-time job (Garrido 2016).

A recent report by the Catholic charity Caritas (Fundación Foessa 2016) states that 15 per cent of Spanish workers live in conditions of poverty, which means that one out of six workers in Spain is poor. The situation is even worse among the unemployed: the poverty rate of those without a job stands at 44.8 per cent (Fundación Foessa 2016). These high rates of poverty mean that a lot of people in Spain don’t have sufficient income for making a living, either because they don’t work or they have a poorly paid job. The precariousness of the Spanish labor market is the result of a neoliberal political economy that during recent decades has done very little to fight unemployment and to create better working and living conditions for the working classes. With this in mind, this chapter will now go on to identify and comment on the representation in Catalan textbooks of neoliberal values and practices in the world of work.

Flexibility

The theme of labor flexibility, one of the main characteristics of the neoliberal world of work, was recorded in all collections of textbooks. Robert Sennet (1998: 57--58)

suggested that flexibility in the workplace was fuelled in the mid-twentieth century by the rise of “more middle-class women” into the workforce, who joined poor and working-class women “who were already employed in lower-level service and manufacturing jobs”. These working women needed more flexible timetables to combine part-time work and full-time parental obligations (Sennet 1998: 58). However, with the advent of the neoliberal economy, ‘flexible labor’ quickly spread throughout the entire world of work and in recent decades flexibility has become a characteristic associated with both female and male employment.

In one of the most frequent textual genres related to work in Catalan textbooks – the job interview – flexibility usually appears as a precondition for getting a job, whether it is time-table flexibility (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 14) or the willingness to work extra hours (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 18). As we see in the following example from one of the books of the Barcelona Center for Linguistic Normalization, the interviewer demands work-time flexibility as a non-negotiable condition from the candidate in order to get a job:

—*Bona tarda, he llegit el seu anunci i m’agradaria treballar aquí.*

—*Ha treballat alguna vegada en una botiga?*

—*Sí, com a dependenta a la botiga de comestibles de la meva família, a Roses.*

—*I en algun bar o restaurant?*

—*També, els estius faig de cambrera.*

—*Busquem una persona que tingui flexibilitat horària, perquè nos sempre hi ha feina. A vegades hi ha molta gent i, a vegades, gens.*

—*A mi ja em va bé. Puc treballar en règim de torns, a temps parcial o només el cap de setmana, com prefereixin.*

—*I quan pot començar?*

—*Puc venir demà mateix.*

[—Good afternoon, I have read your announcement and I would like to work here.

—Have you ever worked in a store?

—Yes, as a shop assistant in my family's food store in Roses.

—And how about bars or restaurants?

—Yes, I also work as a waitress during the summer season.

—We are looking for someone to be flexible with working hours because there isn't work all the time. Sometimes there are more people, sometimes less.

— I'm fine with that. I can work in shifts, part-time or even only on weekends, whichever you prefer.

—And when can you start?

—Tomorrow.]

(CNLB 2008a: 157)

In the example above, work-time flexibility is presented as a positive thing not only for the interviewer but for the job applicant as well, who demonstrates the willingness to work at times convenient to the employer without showing any concern. I have also identified the ability/willingness to be flexible as a habitual practice in dialogues between friends. For example, Joan, one of the characters in *Fil per randa*, explains to a friend that he works long hours and weekends (Vilà and Homs 2013a: 48). He himself admits that this practice is tiresome but he is not complaining about it because of the money he earns: 2,500 euros net per month. Therefore, the ability to be flexible confers advantages on the employee.

One of the few negative representations of labor flexibility was identified in the dialogue between two friends in *Fil per randa*:

—*Ei, Pau, què fem?*

—*Bé, però estic fart de les pràctiques! Treballo el dissabte i el diumenge de vuit a dues i de tres a vuit i em paguen una misèria!*

—*Uf..., són moltes hores en dos dies. A més, treballar el cap de setmana... Tan poc et paguen?*

—*Quatre-cents euros al mes! I durant la setmana vaig de cul amb la uni! Ja no tinc vida social!*

[—Hey, Pau, how are you doing?

—Fine, but I am fed up with this internship! I work on Saturday and on Sunday, from eight to two and from three to eight, and they pay me a tiny wage!

—That's awful..., that's a lot of hours in two days. And what's more, you work on weekends... They really pay you so little?

—Four hundred euros a month! And during the week I'm up to my eyeballs in work at the university! I don't have a social life anymore!]

(Vilà and Homs 2013a: 48)

Pau, the student from the above dialogue, in contrast to the characters from previous examples, is complaining about his work, his timetable and his low salary. So, in this dialogue flexibility as a neoliberal practice does not appear in a positive light. Indeed, it is worth mentioning this example because it presents flexibility from a negative

perspective, a fact that is highly unusual in the textbooks analyzed since they almost always follow the storyline of neoliberal rhetoric that associates flexibility with ever-greater personal freedom, self-fulfillment and better social and economic expectations. Despite all its promises, the emphasis on flexibility in the new work order, together with short-term contracts and labor instability has, in reality, created a growing disorientation and anxiety among many workers (Sennet 1998).

Labor flexibility and adaptability also appear when various characters from textbooks explain how they adapted themselves to work in a line of business unrelated to their university qualifications. Thus, we meet a journalist who works as a secretary (Mas and Vilagrassa 2005: 25), a psychologist who works as a supermarket stocker (Guerrero *et al.* 2010a: 58), another psychologist who works as a saleswoman, a musician who works as a truck driver (Roig *et al.* 2011: 91), and an architect who works as a shop assistant, first in a clothing store and then selling furniture (DGPL 2008: Bàsic 2, Unit 3, 1.10). Highly educated men and women take low paying jobs in which they cannot use their university qualifications. These so-called ‘skills mismatches’ are also one of the consequences of the neoliberal work order. However, not one of these ‘mismatched’ workers in the textbooks expresses any concerns about this situation. For example, the visual images of the ‘overqualified’ workers from the supermarket in *Nou Nivell Bàsic* often portray them as smiling and happy. When an individual doing an MA in journalism is asked if he still works as a cashier at the supermarket, he responds: “Yes, I still work there, and to tell you the truth I really like it” (Guerrero *et al.* 2010a: 81).

Not being able to find work related to one’s university degree or other qualifications is not seen as an anomaly in the world of work. It is presented as a natural phenomena, to which the textbook characters do not express surprise or outrage. In this sense, these

materials at least acknowledge this reality in contemporary capitalist societies.

However, they do not make any reference to the consequences that the practice of job mismatching has on workers such as stress, constant job switching, or disaffection (Kalleberg 2007). There are no references to be found about the economic system which has provoked and is using this practice in order to build up and sustain its own competitiveness.

Indeed, one of the few times we see workers complaining is when they talk about their low salaries. For example, one shop assistant complains of earning 500 euro per month (DGPL 2008: Bàsic 2, Unit 3, 1.17). However, the characters never explain how they came to be in these situations or comment on the political and economic circumstances that caused them. Some teachers may argue that it might be difficult to discuss political or economic issues with students who are at beginner levels. However, we should also take into account that, although their language knowledge is limited, students have the capacity to think deeply, and even with little language knowledge they may be able to express their opinions and feelings about this issue. Surely, they have their points of view about working conditions, enriched by their background and lived experiences. In short, I am of the view that the limited language proficiency of learners should not be an excuse to avoid 'problematic' issues in language classrooms and to underestimate students' intellectual capacities.

Mobility

Another type of flexibility that appears in textbooks as an indispensable prerequisite for a job is mobility, meaning among other things location flexibility, which presumes the

willingness to relocate for a job, as illustrated in the following job interview from *Fil per randa*:

—*Té experiència com a banquer en empreses estrangeres?*

—*Sí, fa molts anys que m'hi dedico i he treballat a Londres, a Zuric i a Nova York. Els detalls apareixen al currículum que els he deixat.*

—*Ho dic perquè a la plaça a la qual vol accedir és molt important ser flexible i estar disposat a canviar de ciutat sovint.*

—*Miri, de fet, és precisament per la falta de mobilitat en altres bancs que he decidit buscar feina a la seva entitat. Com deu haver vist, tinc molt bones referències ja que sempre estava ben considerat quan he deixat una feina per assolir un nou repte professional.*

[—Do you have experience working as a banker in foreign companies?

—Yes, I have been working as a banker for many years and I worked in London, Zurich and New York. The details appear in my CV, which I've given you.

—I ask you this because in the job position for which you applied it is very important to be flexible and well-disposed to moving from one city to another often.

—You see, it's precisely because of the lack of mobility in other banks that I've decided to look for a job in your firm. As you can see I have very good references and have always been considered a good employee when leaving job positions to cope with new professional challenges.

(Vilà and Homs 2013b: 18)

In this example, mobility is presented as a desirable labor practice, not only on the part of the company, but also on the part of the future employee who demonstrates his desire to frequently move to other countries. Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that this worker positions himself as an ideal neoliberal worker, which includes his willingness to constantly change jobs and 'to cope with new professional challenges'. With the emergence of the 'risk society' (Beck 1992), workers are increasingly encouraged by employers to be risk-takers who eschew stability and long-term commitment but pursue self-investment and innovation.

Another example of mobility is found in the words of a Catalan scientist from *Veus 3* who worked in a medical laboratory in her home country, but now has to go to work in Switzerland because the funding for scientific research in Catalonia is insufficient (Mas and Vilagrassa 2008: 125). She is an example of the many workers with advanced degrees in the era of neoliberalism who are forced to relocate because there are no job prospects where they live. Although the character expresses sorrow for having to leave her home country, the job change seems a natural process to her. There is no mention of the reasons why Catalonia cannot support scientists and give them a chance to work in their own country, unlike in other countries such as Switzerland (or the UK or the USA).

Parla.cat dedicates an entire unit to workplace mobility, with the objective of teaching students how to prepare for a business trip. The main character in the unit is Ralko, a salesman from Holland who travels to Majorca on business. Apart from Ralko, we also get to know other characters (a singer and a university professor) who also travel for work. In a dialogue where these three meet, Ralko sums up his job using these words: "I think that the best things about my job are the journeys and contacts with the clients."

The hardest part is working the whole day, from breakfast to dinner” (DGPL 2008: Elemental 1, Unit 2, 2.10). The entire unit is full of examples of the importance of mobility, together with a work ethic that sees long working hours as unproblematic. For example, in a test under the title “Are you a professional traveler?” there are options such as “I take a plane three or four times a week”, or “I almost never watch the movies on the plane. I prefer working on my laptop” (DGPL 2008: Elemental 1, Unit 2, 2.12).

The only negative perspective about labor mobility is identified in the commentary of a man who has been working for five years and has lived in ten different places. He compares his situation with those of his parents and grandparents who always lived and worked in the same place and defines his labor mobility as “chaos!” (Mas and Vilagrassa 2008: 125). This character, unlike the others in these textbooks, does not consider location flexibility as something desirable and natural.

Zero drag

In the neoliberal era, employers are increasingly looking for employees with zero drag, meaning workers who are infinitely flexible, adaptable and disposable. This type of worker appears, for example, in a listening exercise where different characters are responding to job advertisements (Anguera *et al.* 2010a: 25). In one of the dialogues, a woman who wants a job as a teacher does not feel that relocating or working late at night is an inconvenience. In another dialogue, the candidate looking for a job as a truck driver is more than happy to spend a couple of nights away from home, and travel to Paris or London. Moreover, for the job of truck driver, the employer also demands a good command of foreign languages, another characteristic of work in neoliberal times.

Because of the high levels of unemployment, companies can ask for better training and university degrees from people applying for manual jobs.

Characters in textbooks also do not find any inconvenience when it comes to changing jobs, as can be seen in a personal account from a character that has changed jobs, extracted from one of the textbooks from the Barcelona Center for Linguistic

Normalization:

He fet d'infermera durant dos anys. El que més m'agrada era el tracte amb els pacients i el que menys, els canvis de torn. Ara faig de tècnica de laboratori i estic molt contenta amb l'horari. A més, guanyo el doble.

[I worked as a nurse for two years. What I liked best was working with patients and what I liked least was working different shifts. I now work as a technician in a lab, and I'm very happy with my schedule. What's more, I earn double.]

(CNLB 2008b: 66)

In the previous extract, we can identify two neoliberal practices: timetable flexibility and flexibility in changing jobs. The first is presented as negative: “what I liked least was working different shifts”. And the second practice is seen as positive, reinforced with a photo of the main character smiling. In a listening exercise in the same textbook series, we again see job mobility and flexibility as a usual practice (CNLB 2011: 71). The first character is a Catalan woman working for a Japanese multinational corporation who decides to go and spend three years in the company's center in Tokyo. The second character is an operator in a factory who has been forced to take early retirement. The

third is a self-employed woman who works in advertising and wants to take a year off. In all three cases, they are very positive about their situation. For example, although he was taken aback initially, the worker forced to retire early explains that “the truth is that I needed some free time and I am happy not to go to work and get my retirement paycheck at the end of the month”. This positive representation of the change in someone’s job situation and the risk involved is addressed in the following exercise in which different celebrities explain how the change was good for their lives and how it helped them become even more successful (CNLB 2011: 71). For example, we learn that the Catalan scientist Eduard Punset studied law Harvard University, worked as an economist at the IMF and as an advisor to the Catalan Ministry of Finances. The change that is highlighted is that he left politics for scientific research, and later it is said that in 2011 he won the *Creu de Sant Jordi* (the Cross of Saint George), a prestigious award for life achievements, sponsored by the Catalan government. This disposition for change and the risk that it brings is a characteristic encouraged by neoliberalism and also appears in English textbooks (Gray 2010b), especially if the change serves to find a job which brings personal fulfillment.

In the collection *Fil per randa*, which proportionally has more work-related content than the other books in my dataset, job loss is repeatedly seen as an opportunity and not as a problem, as is illustrated in the following dialogue, in which one of the interlocutors is happy to be out of work:

—*Hola, com estàs?*

—*Bé, força bé. Vinc d’una entrevista de feina i m’ha anat molt bé.*

—*Però, tu no treballaves en una companyia telefònica?*

—*Sí, de moment sí, però d’aquí a poc se m’acaba el contracte.*

—*Ostres, quina mala sort.*

—*No! I ara! Prefereixo canviar de feina, la veritat.*

[—Hi, how are you?

—Well, very well. I've just come from a job interview and it went really well.

—But I thought you were working for a telephone company...

—Yes, for the moment, but my contract will expire soon.

—Bummer, that's bad luck.

—Oh, no! On the contrary! I would like to find a different job, really.]

(Vilà and Homs 2013b: 15)

The reaction to losing a job in the example above is in line with the neoliberal economic utopia where job insecurity and uncertainty are “celebrated as ‘liberating’ transformations” (Zimmerman 2008: 233). In a similar fashion, in the following dialogue in this same textbook, losing a job is not seen as a real problem, but more as a fortunate event. When one of the people in the dialogue discovers that one of his old colleagues has lost his job he says: “I’m sure you’ll find a new one quickly. It might even be a better one!” (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 15). There is yet another similar dialogue following this one. A worker accepts his layoff as something natural and which was foreseen, without expressing any kind of worry, anger or doubt. His words in the text are: “Don’t worry, I’ve been expecting it” (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 18). The only negative representation of losing a job I found is a drawing of a man who has just lost his job with his head down and his hands on his head (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 16). If we bear in mind the massive layoffs and the difficulties that people were having finding a job in Catalonia at the time this collection was published, it seems that *Fil per randa*,

like other textbooks, opted not to present a realistic portrait of Catalan society. Obviously, unemployment and precarious working conditions are nothing new in capitalist countries, but the labor situation has further worsened since the 2007-2008 crisis, also impacting wider sectors of the middle class:

In large parts of the labor market, employment has become less secure and the low-wage sector has expanded in many countries. Together with high levels of unemployment, this has resulted in an increase in precarious living conditions. While precarity has always existed on the margins of society, it is now more widespread, expanding the zones of vulnerability and insecurity.

(Flecker *et al.* 2017: 8)

One of the best known neoliberal practices to combat unemployment is to demand that workers constantly re-train themselves in order to adapt to market necessities. This practice is known as lifelong learning or ‘self-programmable labor’ (Castells 2000). Lifelong learning has been in vogue in all important EU official documents concerning education since the late 1990s (Mitchell 2006). The goal behind this practice is to prepare individuals for the changing labor market. In textbooks, this practice is also frequently presented, as we shall see in the next section.

Lifelong learning

In Catalan textbooks, lifelong learning is usually presented as a solution for the unemployed. For example, Koldo, one of the characters of *Curs de català bàsic B2* from the Barcelona Center for Linguistic Normalization, explains to his friend Joana that

when he lost his job he immediately started a course in occupational training (CNLB 2008b: 69). Even though Koldo still does not work, this situation is not presented as problematic because Joana assures him that he will surely find a job. Meanwhile, Joana recounts to Koldo her labor experience in recent months. She decided to leave her old job in a supermarket six months earlier and is now working for an advertising agency. In Joana's story, we can see an individual willing to risk changing jobs in order to find one that will be personally fulfilling, something that neoliberal ethics encourages. The result, in this case, is positive because Joana has found a better job in an advertising agency. Furthermore, the experience of Joana gives us the impression that to change a job is a very easy choice: She left the old one because she was tired of it and found a new position relatively quickly, which is a very idealized vision of job switching if we bear in mind that the long-term unemployment rate in Spain has affected more than 10% of the working-age population since 2012 (INE 2016b).

Similarly, in the following dialogue between two friends from another textbook of the Barcelona Center for Linguistic Normalization retraining is explained as an opportunity for the unemployed to open their own business:

Mirta: Ah, doncs, jo ara que sóc a l'atur vull aprofitar per estudiar i posar-me al dia.

Nora: Molt bé! Jo, quan vaig estar aturada, vaig fer un curs de dones emprenedores de 300 hores i em va anar genial. Mira, sis mesos després vaig obrir l'empresa que tinc ara.

[Mirta: Oh, well, since I am unemployed now I want to use the time to study and get myself up to date.

Nora: Great! When I was unemployed I took a course for women entrepreneurs that lasted 300 hours and it was great. Look, six months later I opened my own firm.]

(CNLB 2011: 105)

The perspective towards lifelong learning in the example above is clearly positive. We notice it from the cheerful tone of the conversation coming from both interlocutors (although Mirta is unemployed) and from Nora's professional success. It is also interesting that we get no information about the process and the steps between point (a) taking a course, and point (b) opening one's own firm. Again, textbooks tend to present job switching as a very easy process.

In a unit in *Passos* dedicated to lifelong learning (Roig *et al.* 2011: 187-93), learners are given a menu of vocational courses which they can take in order to find a better job. In a conversation between Raquel and Gloria, we hear that Raquel, who worked as a part-time babysitter, is now taking an occupational course to become a geriatric assistant. The course is offered by a civic center, and she says it will give her the opportunity to have a job which includes pension and sickness benefits. In the examples of this textbook, lifelong learning refers to permanent adult education and the courses presented are conducted with the help of the state or non-governmental organizations. This textbook appears to promote the view that lifelong learning should be backed by the state through voluntarily accessible education for adults, as was the case formerly when free educational courses were regularly offered by the state (Tuschling and Engemann 2006). Today's concept of lifelong learning in which the individual learner creates spaces for learning aligns to some extent with older iterations of education. Both

concepts stress the need for a self-reflective, self-responsible individual who accesses education as a vehicle for liberation. What has changed, however, is the role of the state, which once had the obligation to provide funding for learning which was seen as a personal right, while now it forces its citizens to learn in order for their countries to keep up with the global economy (Biesta 2006).

Lifelong learning is not only presented as a solution for the unemployed. It is also seen as an opportunity for students to gain specialized training and is often offered by their companies. One of the textbooks explains that universities offer their students training in companies, which is seen by the students as a very positive practice because they can demonstrate their “value to the company” or because it gives “added value” to their curriculum (CNLB 2011: 70).

Self-branding

Apart from constant training and flexibility, another pre-requisite for fitting into the new work order in neoliberal times that I found in textbooks is self-branding. For example, in *Català Elemental* there are four short fragments from answers to job interview questions from which students are to construct appropriate questions. In the responses offered, we can identify the candidates’ spirit of self-branding in sentences such as the following: “I am a resolute, decisive person with initiative, things that I find important when it comes to being an accountant. And I have an MBA from the University of Manchester” (188). Lifelong learning and personal commitment to the future company also appear in these answers. One of the candidates says: “I would like to take an MA in Business Management; in that way my education would be more complete, and I could be more engaged in the management tasks of the firm” (188).

The journalist in the following excerpt from *Veus 3* is also an example of a self-branded worker, as she shows passion for work, flexibility and the willingness to innovate:

Sóc periodista i he treballat a diversos diaris i revistes. Cada un tenia avantatges que l'altre no tenia. Però a tots havia de fer un horari molt estricte i força absurd. Al final, m'he decidit! M'he fet autònom. Treballo des de casa i envio els articles per internet. És fantàstic!

[I'm a journalist and I have worked for various magazines and daily newspapers. Each of them offered advantages that others didn't have. But at all of them I had a strict and really absurd schedule. Finally, I decided! I became self-employed. I work from home and upload my articles on the internet. It's great!]

(Mas and Vilagrassa 2008: 125)

This text promotes the idea of labor flexibility as the journalist criticizes her “strict and really absurd” timetable. This example also shows self-branding values in the willingness to change personal affiliations and adopt an entrepreneurial spirit, as the character decides to leave a job and become self-employed. In an enthusiastic tone and with the final exclamation (“It's great!”) this text demonstrates a celebration of these neoliberal practices and values. The extract above is also an example of labor mobility through distance working, a practice growing in popularity due to the recent accelerated developments of information technology and the outsourcing and decentralization of production in the global economy. In the neoliberal era, both public and private

enterprises are generally interested in having an increasing number of remote workers because this offers them more advantages than drawbacks:

Such arrangements save money on offices, give a company access to a broader pool of talent (and retain women after childbearing), allow it to operate extended days, reduce office politics and colleague interruptions, and are more environmentally friendly. Drawbacks include lack of informal information sharing and less *esprit de corps*.

(Standing 2011: 38)

Of course, ‘telework’ can also have many benefits for the workers, since it may offer a more comfortable way of working, particularly for those with family commitments or who live very far from their workplace. However, it should also be noted that working at a distance implies the complete individualization of the workers since, as Guy Standing (2011: 53) noted in *The Precariat*, this isolates employees and limits “their space and opportunity for collective action”. Furthermore, remote jobs have also blurred former boundaries “between work and private life” (Flecker *et al.* 2017: 2) because the traditional physical spaces of the world of work such as the factory or the office no longer exist. Although these workers can organize their time as they see fit, working at a distance often implies that employees work longer and longer hours to earn better incomes and to show commitment to the company. All this may prepare “the ground for devotion and the self-exploitation of workers” and, ultimately, for the construction of the entrepreneurial identity required by the employers (Flecker *et al.* 2017: 15).

So far, we have seen that Catalan materials present very similar kinds of characters as those who appear in textbooks for learning English (Gray 2010b; Copley 2017) and French (Block and Gray 2018) (see Chapter 3). The typical character in contemporary language textbooks greatly resembles one who Michel Foucault (2008) would consider the ideal neoliberal subject and also called by Block (2018a) the ‘neoliberal citizen’. In the work-related content in textbooks, this is the kind of individual who does not maintain long-term commitments, who is willing to take risks and engage in constant training, and who demonstrates entrepreneurship, self-branding and self-responsibility, as I will discuss with further examples in the next section.

Entrepreneurship and self-responsibility

In *Nou Nivell Bàsic*, a supermarket stocker plans to become a small business owner by opening her own jewelry shop (Guerrero *et al.* 2010c: 34), whereas a man who works as a courier at the same supermarket looks for a job in the IT sector (Guerrero *et al.* 2010c: 70) after having completed a course in IT. They both seem happy with their low paid jobs in the supermarket, but at the same time they aspire to better ones. The textbook appears to celebrate and encourage this attitude as witnessed by the general support that the two individuals receive from all their colleagues who encourage them to take the risk, leave their current job and look for a new one. Inside of this idealized work setting, it seems that finding another job or opening a business is the easiest task in the world. For example, when the supermarket supervisor discovers that his courier wants to quit his job and find a new one, he says: “Oh, very good! I’m sure you’ll find another one immediately!” (Guerrero *et al.* 2010c: 70).

Català Elemental dedicates a whole unit to developing the entrepreneurial spirit among learners using the unit title “Help us! Let’s start a business” (Campoy *et al.* 2011: 207--16). The first question this unit poses is: “Are you entrepreneurial?” (208). The question is followed by a questionnaire in which students see whether they have an entrepreneurial spirit or not. This is revealed after they comment on a series of twelve statements such as the following: “An entrepreneur [...] cannot stand to waste her/his time with unimportant things” (208). Later, there is a listening activity about a business center created to help young entrepreneurs with their ideas in order to promote private initiative (209). The unit continues by making students imagine starting their own business. Once they have chosen an idea, they should explain “the viability of the idea and the resources needed to start the business” (210). After deciding on the business idea they want to develop, the next step in this unit is to elaborate a business plan following an example of a business plan given by the textbook. Later, learners are asked to explain their ideas in front of the class with other students suggesting ways to improve their business projects (211). Finally, there is a model of a business proposal from which students can improve their business plans and ideas (213).

Entrepreneurship and market competitiveness are as important to the neoliberal order as is individual responsibility. Dardot and Laval (2013: 290) explain this as follows:

[N]eoliberal rationality produces a subject it requires by developing the means of governing him so that he really does conduct himself as an entity in a competition, who must maximize his results by exposing himself to risks and taking full responsibility for possible failures.

Textbooks also highlight the relevance of workers' individual responsibility in the new economic order, as for example in a dialogue between a head of a company and his employee who has recently been late for work because he has three little children and his mother-in-law in the hospital. Although his personal situation is complicated, his superior focuses on his lack of punctuality, and the employee completely agrees that it is definitely his own fault: "You are right. This has happened because of my lack of planning. The situation with my mother-in-law has taken us by surprise. I am asking you to forgive me" (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 153). The answer of this character is a model of the ideal attitude that a submissive employee should have towards the neoliberal work order: he recognizes his individual responsibility and apologizes for something that obviously is not his fault. Another example of self-responsibility featured in textbooks is related to the issue of workplace safety, as we shall see in the next section.

Risk management

The notion of risk has changed in the current neoliberal phase of capitalism because the state is increasingly tightly linked to the market, which directs the behavior of the state, society and individuals. In the workplace, as Garry Gray (2009: 326) explains, states (and firms) are less and less responsible for workplace safety, and they have transferred this responsibility onto individuals:

Workplace safety is undergoing a process of 'responsibilization'. While employers have traditionally been the target of health and safety law, workers are increasingly assigned greater responsibility for their own safety at work and are held accountable, judged, and sanctioned through this lens.

Related to risk management lies another important practice and that is self-regulation, which includes "strict abstention from dangerous practices, constant self-control, and a regulation of one's own behaviour that blends asceticism and flexibility" (Dardot and Laval 2013: 186). The evolution of responsibility and risk-management in the workplace goes hand in hand with the neoliberal attributes of "autonomous, self-determined, and self-sustaining subjects" (Shamir 2008: 380) who should be responsible for all spheres of their lives, from education and work to their retirement. In the words of Michael Peters (2001:61): "The duty to the self—its simultaneous responsabilisation as a moral agent and its construction as a calculative rational choice actor— becomes the basis for a series of investment decisions concerning one's health, education, security, employability, and retirement".

Treatment of risk-management is evident in several textbooks. *Passos* dedicates an entire unit to occupational risks (Roig and Daranas 2011: 58--67). It starts with a text from the Spanish Construction Association about occupational risks and hazards in which students are given the definitions of occupational risks, accidents and illnesses and what is to be done to prevent them. The text states that "prevention means acting responsibly by the company and the worker respectively in order to avoid accidents. Prevention means being informed" (60). This definition situates workers and employers with shared responsibility towards work safety. However, as pointed out by Garry Gray (2009: 326) despite the apparent equality in what he calls "the neo-liberal discourse of 'equal partnership'" between workers and employers, the responsibility falls more heavily on the workers because of their "direct exposure" to the unsafe working conditions. Later, the unit gives advice on how to promote individual responsibility in order to minimize labor-related risks. There are recommendations on how to lift a heavy

object safely in nine steps with pictures (62), and what to do in order to avoid accidents at a construction site, accompanied by a picture of a bricklayer (63).

Much like an imitation safety-at-work manual, the textbook continues with instructions for waiters and cooks on how to prevent work-related risks. There is an exercise with a table called “risks in the kitchen” that students are to fill in, with columns related to explaining and defining the risk, naming the type of injury and finally how to prevent it (65). Later, there is a text taken from a daily newspaper which explains an accident that happened to workers in a medical center in Tarragona. The case involved a nurse named Carmentxu Atin and 22 of her colleagues, who had to give up their jobs due to severe health problems arising from having been poisoned by the inhalation of chemicals following a “fumigation conducted by the company” (66). The text explains the state Carmentxu is in and what kind of life she has lead since the accident. However, the nurses’ employer was not to blame, according to the text. In the activity which follows, students complete a table in which once again they themselves have to explain the risks described in the text and the possible prevention. In the final task of the unit, students are asked to think of all the means of prevention for various types of occupations and write them down (67).

Nou Nivell Elemental also dedicates space to occupational risks with examples of professions and the risks they entail, followed by a newspaper article on farmers not being responsible enough when it comes to preventing risks and two short personal accounts about accidents that have happened or can happen (Anguera *et al.* 2010a: 27--9). In all texts dedicated to risk, there is an emphasis above all on personal responsibility and company-worker collaboration when it comes to finding solutions. The state, local government and unions are mentioned only as intermediaries between

workers and employers, whose job is to draw up regulations to ensure that individual responsibility is exercised.

The examples cited here suggest that these textbooks are in line with the neoliberal policies of the individualization of responsibility and promote the self-regulation practices related to safety at work. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work Report (2013) features a slogan that seems to fit perfectly with the textbooks' treatment of this topic: "Safety and health at work is everyone's concern. It's good for you. It's good for business." (EU-OSHA 2013: 1). Responsibility for one's personal safety without a doubt has its benefits. However, the apparent equality which is stressed here between the worker and the employer in the matter of safety at work can also mean that the state no longer has any responsibility for the well-being of the workers. It is now a matter of 'self-responsibilisation', whereby the state gives way to the corporate backed economy, such that individuals are no longer protected by the state. In the case of these units, safety and avoiding danger are notions that have more to do with the individual workers than with the state and the social system establishing mechanisms for their protection.

Other textbooks do not treat the topic of occupational risks this extensively. However, they all have units related to health and well-being, which are mostly dedicated to personal 'responsibilisation' for being healthy and accident free. Furthermore, as I have already explained in this chapter, these textbooks also emphasize lifelong learning and entrepreneurship as practices in which self-responsibility is a key to managing the uncertainty and risks related to the new work order.

An important role in the process of configuring a neoliberal identity for the working world is played by managerial discourse and texts such as those in self-help guides for success, written by the so-called ‘experts in subjectivity’ (Fogde 2007). The ‘expertise in subjectivity’ is a concept developed by Nikolas Rose (1990) who argues that these new professionals base their social authority upon “their capacity to understand the psychological aspects of the person and to act upon them, or to advise others what to do” (3). In the work order, the experts in subjectivity include career counselors, job consultants, occupational psychologists and personnel managers. As we shall see in the next section, the experts in subjectivity are also featured in the work-related content in textbooks.

Expert knowledge

In neoliberal times, states (and companies) have shifted the responsibility of finding a job to individuals, who are now responsible for becoming entrepreneurial, flexible and self-branded workers in order to retain their job or get a new one. Textbooks include several texts by experts, such as job consultants and career coaches, with advice on achieving success in increasingly competitive, changing and insecure work settings. In *Nou Nivell Bàsic 3*, there is a text from a website addressed to workers, employers and future professionals where learners can read expert advice related to work, such as for example how to ask for an increase in salary or how to create their own business (Guerrero *et al.* 2010c: 74). This text is accompanied by a picture with three elegantly dressed business men and women smiling in front of a laptop, which presents the idealization of the new work order.

In a similar vein, in *Fil per randa*, a psychologist gives advice to the unemployed suggesting how to manage future job opportunities:

Tu, com tothom, al llarg de la vida has conegut moltes persones. Fes això: apunta'n unes quantes, les més importants, en llistes per temes, llocs... Quines són les persones que es repeteixen més? Identifica'n deu o dotze. Ara no tens feina, fa temps que en busques, però aquestes persones es poden convertir en els teus contactes. Ho pots comprovar avui mateix.

[Like the rest of us, you have met a lot of different people during your life. Try to do this: make a list of some of them, the most important ones, by topics, places...Which people appear most? Identify ten or twelve of them. You don't have a job now, you have been looking for one for a long time, but these people can become your contacts. You can try that out today.]

(Vilà and Homs 2013b: 88)

Once again, in the previous example, the textbook highlights the simplicity of the process of finding a job. It seems that if one follows this exercise, she/he will become employed as if by magic! Moreover, this text suggests that the responsibility to look for a job depends solely on individuals and should be considered part of the self-managing entrepreneurial process. It is also interesting to note that sometimes the textbooks' authors take on the role of experts in the new work order. For example, they give advice to learners on how to get ready for a job interview, such as to prepare a script beforehand with all the possible questions and to make sure to answer all of the questions (Campoy *et al.* 2011: 189), not to swear (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 89), to look

the interviewer in the eye (DGPL 2008: Bàsic 3, Unit 6, 2.7), or “to be on time, wear proper clothes and explain with certainty what you want” (CNLB 2008b: 68). Similarly, in a final task of writing a job announcement for the student’s imagined company, textbooks authors also give advice to students on how to make their advertising campaign more successful: “The advertisements serve to convince. So, you have to present the company as important, one that can help both workers and other companies!” (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 19).

Contemporary techniques to find a job

The neoliberal work order also encourages the manufacturing of a self-employable worker through training techniques such as how to write a CV or how to prepare for a job interview (Fogde 2007). These practices are found in all textbooks and are usually preceded by activities such as reading and commenting on job ads, writing letters of application or reading and listening to recommendations from advisers on how to get a proper job. Like the managerial texts, these kinds of activities seek to enhance to students’ employability in neoliberal times.

A typical unit introducing these practices can be found in *Català Elemental* under the title “Interview for a new job” (Campoy *et al.* 2011: 179--92). The unit starts with a one-page photo of an unemployment office and a line of people (179). In one of the first activities there are a number of job ads (for an administrative worker, hairdresser, salesman, secretary, cashier, and air hostess) that students are invited to analyze according to certain criteria and skills, such as knowing languages or having a drivers’ license or owning a vehicle, and whether these are important for obtaining the jobs published in the ads (182). The job ads give brief descriptions of the person who would

fit the position advertised. After this activity, learners are asked to prepare a job ad. Later, there is a model of a CV listing personal information, education, and work experience (183). Students are then asked to write their own CV (184). The unit continues with a model and instructions to write a letter of application (185), also one of the typical steps in the process of finding a job in contemporary working life. Next, students are asked to comment on their experience of job interviews and how they should prepare themselves for an interview (186). This exercise continues with an activity in which students fill in their suggestions on how to perform well at a job interview. After that, they compare their own suggestions with those given by an expert that they listen to in another activity. The text below presents the expert's advice on what needs to be done to be successful in a job interview:

En la salutació i la presentació, cal donar la mà d'una manera decidida i cordial.

Convé mostrar amabilitat i somriure. Procura evitar ser el primer de parlar.

Convé esperar que l'entrevistador prengui la iniciativa.

[When introducing and presenting yourself you need to shake hands in a decisive and cordial manner. It is advisable to show friendliness and to smile. Try to avoid being the first one to talk. It is best to wait for the interviewer to take the initiative.]

(Campoy *et al.* 2011: 186)

Finally, after reading answers to job interview questions and a list of instructions about how to get ready for a job interview, students do a simulation of a real job interview with one group of learners posing as interviewers and another as job applicants (190).

The textbooks from the Barcelona Center for Linguistic Normalization include two work-related units with similar approaches. In one of them, there are four job ads, two pages of preparation for a job interview and an activity in which one student acts as an interviewer and the other as a job candidate (CNLB 2008a: 157--8). The other unit is dedicated to showing learners how to write a CV, a job application and what to do in a job interview (CNLB 2008b: 65--77). In *Fil per randa* there are also two units in which students use a similar set of exercises, from reading and writing CV's, motivational letters and job ads to a simulation of a job interview. The first unit is called "On work" (Vilà and Homs 2013a: 44--55) and the other one is "I have a job interview" (Vilà and Homs 2013b: 8--19).

As a whole, these units not only aim to teach the language and to show students how the new work order functions, but also seek to instruct students about how to become self-responsible individuals suitable to work in very flexible and competitive work settings. Language lessons, in this way, serve as one more link in the chain of neoliberal working practices, encouraging language students to conform to the pragmatics of job seeking in neoliberal times.

In that regard, the techniques for finding a job taught in Catalan textbooks resemble those proposed in job-guidance centers for immigrants, as in a center in Italy studied by Del Percio (2017). Professional counselors in this center teach newly arrived immigrants ways to become self-entrepreneurs to fit into a neoliberal work order characterized by labor flexibility and employment insecurity. The Italian center places an emphasis on teaching linguistic abilities to immigrants, such as how to read job announcements, how to write a CV or how to behave and communicate in a job

interview. Del Percio (2017) suggests that these counseling practices do not help immigrants find a job, and actually contribute to maintaining the neoliberal rationality which dominates the current economic system.

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that Catalan textbooks tend to promote the neoliberal revival of *homo economicus* (Peters 2001, 2016), constructing an entrepreneurial identity among learners. In the world of work, practices related to the entrepreneurial self (the ideal neoliberal citizen) usually appear in a positive, desirable and normalized way. The typical worker in Catalan language materials, similarly to their equivalent in global ELT textbooks (Gray 2010b), is one who has no commitments or attachments, is easily adaptable and adjustable to any kind of job condition, for whom insecurity is a form of a personal and professional challenge, while stability and life-long security are outdated. The characters tend to show satisfaction with their work or are excited at the prospect of finding a new job. Labor conflicts or problems very rarely feature. Visual content reinforces the idealization of the neoliberal work order with several images of people smiling while working. In addition, the tasks in the textbooks require students to exercise their entrepreneurial spirit by having them imagine starting their own business or learning and developing techniques to find or maintain a job in a highly competitive, flexible and insecure labor market. The precarious working conditions and the high unemployment that affect many people in Catalonia, including immigrants (the main actual and potential group of learners), are very scarcely addressed in textbooks.

In concluding this chapter, it is worthwhile to highlight that the promotion of an entrepreneurial identity in textbooks is in line with the dominant discourse in Western

societies in the era of neoliberalism. To demonstrate this point, I will focus on a report published by the European Commission (2012), called *Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*. It gives advice to European Union Members on what should be done to improve education in future years. According to this communication, entrepreneurship in education is crucial to increase productivity and assure future prosperity. Therefore, the European Commission calls for the incorporation of entrepreneurial skills into the curriculum at all levels:

Member States should foster entrepreneurial skills through new and creative ways of teaching and learning from primary school onwards, alongside a focus from secondary to higher education on the opportunity of business creation as a career destination. Real world experience, through problem-based learning and enterprise links, should be embedded across all disciplines and tailored to all levels of education.

(European Commission 2012: 4)

The proposal presents this educational reform as the solution to the major problem of unemployment in Europe. It states that all young people should have “at least one practical entrepreneurial experience before leaving compulsory education” (European Commission 2012: 4) and cites as an example of good educational practice the participation of entrepreneurs from private businesses in classrooms (European Commission 2012: 11). Together with entrepreneurship, the European Commission (2012) calls for the mobility of students, the adjustment of educational outcomes to the new requirements of the economy and to increase the partnerships between private and public institutions in education, which is in line with the neoliberal reorientation of

schooling in recent decades (see Chapter 2). The promotion of entrepreneurship illustrated in this communication of the European Commission also appears in other documents of the same institution or of several EU member states, as Block (2018a) shows in the cases of the call for research projects of the *Horizon 2020* program by the European Commission and the 2013 Spanish law on support for entrepreneurs. It is worth noting that this law, passed by the conservative government, states that the educational system should develop an entrepreneurial culture to teach students the abilities needed to become entrepreneurs (Block 2018a), which is fully in accordance with the educational proposals stated above from the European Commission (2012) for its state members. Furthermore, Block (2018a) illustrates the dominance of the entrepreneurial and self-branding discourse in the neoliberal era using the figure of Josef Ajram, a paradigmatic example of a self-branded personality. Ajram is a Spanish businessman, broker and athlete who has become a celebrity with his books, conferences and interventions in traditional and new media about how to become economically successful in times of economic crisis. Block (2018a) points out two factors that contribute to his enormous popularity:

First, there is his physical appearance: he has an athletic body covered in tattoos and at times adorned with piercings. He usually dresses very informally, jeans, a tee-shirt and trainers being a typical combination, and on the whole, he projects an image that we might call ‘youth cool’. The second factor which has contributed to his success is his exceptional stage presence, and indeed, charisma as a speaker.

As the previous examples and the ones belonging to the Catalan textbooks have shown, it seems that becoming a successful entrepreneur can be a reality for everyone, which of course is not the case, particularly for those belonging to the lower classes of society

(Block 2018). Indeed, the effects of the 2007-2008 crisis have clearly shown that the neoliberal fantasy that everybody should be transformed “into little one-person corporations” (Fleming 2015: 39) has resulted in a deterioration of the living conditions of many working-class people who believed that by becoming self-employed they could succeed economically and climb up the social ladder. However, Catalan textbooks seem not to take this state of affairs into account. Seemingly a part of the capitalist utopia that the textbooks represent is a reality that rewards people who demonstrate entrepreneurship and self-branding. In the final chapter of this book, I will return to the dominant neoliberal discourse in our capitalist societies to address the question of why textbooks are presented as they are.

In the next chapter, the critical analysis of Catalan language textbooks will continue examining how neoliberal practices and values find expression in the content of textbooks and how they are presented as a matter of common sense. The focus will be on housing, another important social concern, which in recent years has become a matter for national debate in Catalonia and across Spain, because of the forced evictions of working-class people who could no longer pay the mortgage on their homes, and also because of the protests against evictions by the *Plataforma d'Afectats per la Hipoteca* (Platform for those Affected by Mortgage).