

Languages in Contact, Cultures in Contact: Verbal and Iconic Visual Signs in Mother Tongue and Culture as Mediators in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT

Interlingual translation, intersemiotic translation, and mediation seem to be the main means by which students who are learning English as a foreign language in Greece connect the learning of English as a foreign language and Greek as a mother tongue. This research probes into the teaching of English in Greek state schools and more specifically the teaching of English, as a foreign language, in the first year of junior high school. The research attempts to evaluate the authors' choices of visual iconic messages that promote the Greek culture and language, the students' mother tongue, as a means of mediation—mostly through interlingual translation—to familiarize them with the target language and culture, namely, the English language and culture. The fact that the visual iconic and verbal signs under scrutiny are all derived from a textbook published by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs gives more significance to the specific signs (thus legitimizing them).

The concept of “culture” is, even today, difficult to define, even by the most systematic scholars. In the field of semiotics the influence of the School of Semiotics of Culture, and more particularly of Juri Lotman,

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has been immense. Lotman (2009, 12) observes: “Culture, whilst it is a complex whole, is created from elements which develop at different rates, so that any one of its synchronic sections reveals the simultaneous presence of these different stages.” These elements seem to be the “carriers” of information. As he later stated, “culture is interpreted in a limited sense as systems for the preservation, transmission and creation of new varieties of information” (2013, 53). The question is how one can teach these systems that are carriers of information?

We notice that scholars who specialize in language teaching and those who specialize in learning view culture differently in the sense that there are those who generalize, but there are also those who are content specific. Thus, Brooks (1975, 20) views culture as “everything in human life and the best of everything in human life,” while Brown (2000, 177), on the other hand, views culture as “the ideas, customs, skills, arts and tools that characterize a given group of people in a given period of time.” At a more sociosemiotic level, Ritlyová mentions that culture “could be defined as various customs, values, typical behaviour, attitudes and the overall approach regarding the way of life reflected in movies, songs, fashion, literature and numerous products of art, but also in everyday use of the particular language, e.g., recognised proverbs, common idiomatic expressions or phrases which are characteristic for certain members of society and which significantly differentiate these people according to their age, level and specific area of education, as well as their position in the society, etc.” (2009, 93). Ritlyová’s stance shows how significant the language system is in understanding culture and the significant role it plays in teaching language.

The position of many linguists and semiologists advocating the primacy of the semiotic system of language is well known; this primacy had been pointed out by the father of European semiotics and linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (1979, 45), from as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. Saussure regards language as the most important semiotic system of all. Many leading semiologists, such as Jakobson (1970, 511), Greimas and Courtés (1993, 398), Eco (1976, 172–74), and Barthes (1964, 40), have come to agree with Saussure’s point of view.

The question thus arises, how is language teaching and, more particularly, foreign language teaching connected to culture? According to Sun (2013, 371), “language is one of the most important carriers of culture and reflects the latter. Without language, culture would not be possible. The basic goal of learning a foreign language is to acquire the communicative competence, while the development and improvement of such competence is to some extent dependent

of efficient and scientific teaching approach.” It thus becomes apparent that it is imperative to connect the teaching of language and, more specifically, the teaching of a foreign language with the culture of the specific language.

Scholars and teachers often ask why it is important to teach both a foreign language and the cultural system within which the foreign language is spoken. Why do we need culture when we teach a particular language? What does a cultural system add to the learning of a specific language? Very often foreign language learners do not understand why they use a particular expression in the foreign language or why they should use a specific expression in place of another. Bada (2000, 101) clarifies the aforementioned questions by saying that “the need for cultural literacy in ELT arises mainly from the fact that most language learners, not exposed to cultural elements of the society in question, seem to encounter significant hardship in communicating meaning to native speakers.” According to Genc and Bada the teaching and learning of language and culture has “a humanizing and a motivating effect on the language learner and the learning process. They help learners observe similarities and differences among various cultural groups. Today, most of the L2 students around the world live in a monolingual and monocultural environment. Consequently, they become culture-bound individuals who tend to make premature and inappropriate value judgments about their, as well as others’, cultural characteristics. This can lead them to consider others whose language they may be trying to learn as very peculiar and even ill-mannered, which, in turn, plays a demotivating role in their language learning process” (Genc and Bada 2005, 75).

We thus see that culture and language are tightly interwoven and cannot be separated when teaching and learning a foreign language. This stance was taken from as early as the 1950s by Lado (1957), who emphasized the need of foreign language learners to transfer the forms and meanings of their mother tongue and culture to the foreign language. This is also the stance taken by Liu (2014, 244), who states that “when teaching a foreign language, culture cannot be avoided . . . and language and culture should combine together in order to reach a good understanding of [the] target background.” This stance is further supported by Mitchell and Myles (2004, 235), who argue that “language and culture are not separate, but are acquired together, with each providing support for the development of the other.” We thus see that most scholars associate the concepts of “language” and “culture.” Tomalin, in a critical evaluation, connects the two concepts and attempts to draw our attention to this connection. More specifically, Tomalin sees the teaching of language through culture as a fifth skill. He writes in his concluding remarks that

up until recently, I assumed that if you learned the language, you learned the culture, but actually it isn't true. You can learn a lot of cultural features but it doesn't teach you sensitivity and awareness or even how to behave in certain situations. What the fifth language skill teaches you is the mindset and techniques to adapt your use of English to learn about, understand and appreciate the values, ways of doing things and unique qualities of other cultures. It involves understanding how to use language to accept difference, to be flexible and tolerant of ways of doing things that might be different to yours. It is an attitudinal change that is expressed through the use of language. (2008, 2)

This fifth skill that Tomalin talks about is in fact language with interculturality, and for this to evolve and develop, yet further, someone has to probe into sociocultural elements (such as values, tolerance, attitude, etc). Wang (2008, 4) takes it one step further and mentions that "foreign language teaching is foreign culture teaching, and foreign language teachers are foreign culture teachers." We would, thus, dare to say that, through the teaching of the English language and culture, Greek students come to learn more about their culture and thus acquire a better understanding of the target culture, which in our case is the English culture. It is in fact the result of the contact that is made between the two "semiospheres," the Greek and the English, a notion introduced by Lotman:

the semiosphere is that same semiotic space, outside of which semiosis itself cannot exist. . . . One of the fundamental concepts of semiotic delimitation lies in the notion of "boundary." . . . Just as in mathematics the border represents a multiplicity of points, belonging simultaneously to both the internal and external space, the semiotic border is represented by the sum of bilingual translatable "filters," passing through which the text is translated into another language (or languages),¹ situated outside the given semiosphere. . . . In order for these to be realised, they must be translated into one of the languages of its internal space, in other words, the facts must be semioticized. ([1984] 2005, 208–9)

In simple terms the semiosphere includes all these signs belonging to a cultural system that in our opinion are not only a first but also a second order (ideo-

1. Torop (2012, 548) mentions the definition of culture, as this is presented by the Tartu-Moscow School, as the study of the functional correlations of different sign systems, thus synthesizing the views of Jakobson, Eco, and Barthes, while, on the other hand, the *sign systems* and *language* become synonyms in this context "and the notion of language is metaphorized, especially, when the notion of modeling system is added."

logical) of signs. In other words, they are an inscription of cultural information. In this study we examine the way Greek utterances and iconic visual signs² from Greek culture (the Greek semiosphere) are used as mediators in the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language (EFL) and English culture (the English semiosphere) in Greek secondary education.

Semiotics in Foreign Language Teaching

Since the influx of foreigners from Eastern Europe, in Greece, at the beginning of the 1990s, much has changed in the domain of teaching and learning in Greece. The teaching of foreign languages followed suit. From a purely monolingual society Greece became a multilingual and multicultural society. These changes brought about radical changes in the educational system of Greece, one of which was the material teachers used in teaching a foreign language. With the introduction of new and more modern EFL textbooks, an attempt was made to free students from their cultural bounds and to aid them in accepting diversity and becoming cultural mediators (Southern Poverty Law Center 2011). The question arises, at this point, as to how culture is related to signs, semiotics, and teaching.

According to Eco (1976, 8), “semiotics studies all cultural processes as processes of communication.” For Salupere, Torop, and Kull (2013), culture is a form of human symbolic activity and with the creation of signs an attempt is made to give meaning to everything around us. On the other hand, language, both oral and written, is a form of communication, and culture is an integral part of it. Since culture is an integral part of a language system and since it influences the way we think, our ideas, our way of life, our patterns of interaction, and so on (Cushner, McClelland and Safford 2012), it is only natural that we will interpret (Gallagher 1992) the world around us in a very particular manner. And as Dormans (2004, 1) so aptly states, “one of the most outstanding characteristics of the 21st Century is that it is an age of sign.” To communicate meaning, humankind has introduced language (written, spoken), signs, music, the arts, and so on, in an attempt not only to be understood but also to understand the world (Deely 1994; Sebeok 2001). This is where semiotics, and more specifically educational semiotics, comes in.

Erton (2006, 75) stresses the need for educational semiotics, emphasizing that “semiotics is a very influential and essential field of study, because by mak-

2. Groupe μ . (1992) categorized iconic signs into two distinct categories, namely, iconic visual signs and plastic visual signs (color, form, and texture). In our research we probe into the first category, which Barthes (1964, 42) calls “non-codified” iconic messages.

ing use of signs the learners are able to achieve a lot of information on various fields such as, literature, art, architecture, psychology, anthropology, philosophy, etc.” What and how we teach and learn something is strongly connected to the culture and society within which we live. The way we decode a sign, and the meaning we derive from what we decode, has to do with the culture and the society we come from, as signs may have a different meaning in a different cultural setting. This is why it is very important that a foreign language teacher have a firm grasp of the sign system of both the mother tongue and the target language, which in this case is EFL in a Greek junior high school setting.

This stance, as well as many others, has led to the creation of a branch in the field of semiotics, called “edusemiotics.” Danesi (2010, vii) calls edusemiotics “the idea of amalgamating signs with learning theory and education.” For Danesi, “semiotics is the ideal tool for understating learning in its corporeal and experiential totality” (xiii). Nöth (2010) presents two main reasons why both semiotics and education are tightly interwoven:

Semiotics is relevant to education in two respects: On the one hand, teaching and learning have semiotic implications since they are both processes of semiosis; on the other, the study of processes of learning and teaching are part of, and contribute to, the study of the ontogeny of signs and communication, which is a branch of semiotics. The fields in which both disciplines overlap include the theoretical foundations of education, methodological and practical aspects of teaching and learning, as well as the questions of the ontogeny of signs and communicative competence. (1)

Nöth supports the aforementioned clearly stating that teaching and learning are both processes of semiosis, since learning a sign presupposes recognizing a sign and teaching a sign can be identical to communicating a sign, which are two core notions of semiotics. Nöth also states that “elements of semiotics have been introduced and applied in the lessons of teachers of many languages and communication related subjects” (6). As we will discuss below, in the field of edusemiotics, the written language, as well as other semiotic systems, plays an important role in acquiring a firm grasp of the cultural knowledge.

Mother Tongue as a Mediator in Foreign Language Teaching

Language is the most important cultural product that is directly connected to cultural identity and common knowledge. As Torop (2012, 555) mentions, “the process of learning and teaching culture as the environment of generation and

development of cultural identity and cultural memory can best be analyzed as mediation.” One’s mother tongue is also an important medium in the learning of another cultural system and its language. Together with the visual signs of a foreign cultural system, and mostly through translation, the mother tongue acts as a mediator in the learning of a foreign language. It is the first small step that learners must take before taking the giant step leading to new knowledge.

The Greek language is no exception to the aforementioned. The use of Greek as a mediator is an effective tool in the hands of a foreign language teacher, in this case EFL. It is widely accepted that mediation provides learners with more opportunities for them to practice English in communication and to render the learning of a foreign language more effective (Williams and Burden, 2000). The mother tongue as a mediator (see also Opoku 1994; Butzkamm, 2007) thus becomes the scaffolding upon which students will develop their understanding of the foreign language, in our case the English language, a stance taken by Vygotsky (1986) from as early as the beginning of the twentieth century (in Upton and Lee-Thompson, 2001, 491): “L1 would quite naturally serve as a tool to help students think about and make sense of (i.e., mediate their thinking about) the structures, content and meaning of the L2 texts they read.” English, of course, is also a *lingua franca* both in Greece and internationally; as Trudgill (2002) puts it,

there are many languages which have played important roles as institutionalized *lingua francas*: Latin was the *lingua franca* of the Roman Empire, and continued to play an important role in European learning until quite recently. But the extent to which English is employed like this is without parallel. Never before has a language been used as a *lingua franca* by so many people in so many parts of the world. English is also remarkable in having more non-native speakers than native speakers. (150)

Trudgill places the need to learn English, as a foreign language, in the forefront. Nevertheless, there are many differences between the two languages, and this includes not only the writing systems of both Greek and English, but also their grammar, syntax, and so on. So instead of trying to maintain “both languages separately, one can appropriate the second language, and absorb part of it into the vernacular,” as Canagarajah (1999, 1–2) neatly puts it. This gives the learner the ability not only to learn a new language but to acquire a new identity too (see Stojković and Živković 2013); this may, however, come at a cost: “The achievement of new identities and discourse, none the less, involves a painful process of conflicting ideologies and interests. If we are to appropriate the lan-

guage for our purposes, the oppressive history and hegemonic values associated with English have to be kept very much in mind, and engaged judiciously” (Canagarajah 1999, 1–2).

For students to be able to reach this standard of language proficiency (in other words, to understand a text or a conversation, to interpret new vocabulary in the foreign language, to understand and interpret the cultural elements of the foreign language, to communicate effectively, etc. [see also Dendrinos 2006]), it is imperative that teachers activate mother tongue support in the foreign language, a stance also taken by Auerbach (1993), who maintains that the linguistic resources of students’ can be beneficial for them, as, allowing the use of the L1 in early second language acquisition will facilitate their transition from mother tongue to English as a foreign language. This activation of the mother tongue is important because, according to Manara (2007, 145–46), “the mother tongue is learners’ linguistic schemata. The mother tongue is a resource for the learners to draw their existing knowledge from and perceive the new language. L2 learners refer to their knowledge of L1 in order to help them to learn the L2. Their L1 is the resource in understanding the target language” (see also Khan 2014).

Şenel classifies the aforementioned as follows: “*a.* current applications of grammar translation method in language teaching, *b.* practice through translation from and into L2, and *c.* comparison between L1/L2” and further stresses that “it may be quite beneficial to start with the principles and classroom applications of the grammar translation method (henceforth, GTM) because there can be no doubt that the first step of activating mother tongue in language classes is to consider the applications of the GTM” (2010, 111). (We will be probing into translation as a mediator in foreign language teaching in the next section.) Nevertheless, the use of the mother tongue as a mediator in the foreign language “is not only a means of communication but also a tool that can help students to understand and use the target language more clearly and accurately” (113). We will discuss how the use of the mother tongue, in translation, can aid in learning a foreign language.

Translation as a Mediator in Language Teaching

In the last few years we have seen a revival in the teaching of foreign languages through translation (Cook 2010). Teaching language through translation has come a long way since the end of the eighteenth century with the advent of the grammar-translation method and the teaching of a foreign language’s grammar

through the translation of individual sentences. Even though translation was considered a method of teaching and learning a foreign language from the beginning of the twentieth century, it nevertheless provoked controversy among scholars, especially in the 1980s and 90s. More specifically, House (2009, 59) observes that “while translation as the cross-linguistic technique par excellence has a long tradition as an exercise and a test of student’s knowledge of the foreign language, it has also been in the center of an ongoing controversy about the role of grammar and the mother tongue in language learning and teaching.”

Lefevere, who was among the first to argue that translation isn’t just a branch of comparative literature or linguistics but an independent discipline, and Bassnett (2004), who followed suit, first presented the concept of “translation studies.” Bassnett (2004) presents translation as an independent discipline with a vivid cultural background; this was, in fact, the start of translation studies, heavily tinged with cultural elements—a “cultural turn” in translation (Bassnett and Lefevere, 2001, xi). Bassnett (2004) attempted to present translation in the form of a study that focuses on cultural and historical texts and to understand the complexity of these texts and how they influence, for example, translation strategies.

We thus see that translation is culturally bound in that it is “a relatively high-effort high-cost mode of mediated cross-cultural communication, normally suited to short term communication acts” (Pym 2004, 7). Translation may, on the one hand, be a transcultural means of interpretation between languages and cultures and may also introduce a foreign language learner to a different culture with different values, viewpoints, and ideologies (Lefevere 2004a, 2004b; Bassnett 2004); but, on the other hand, it may also lead a foreign language learner to confusion (see Tang, 2007) because of the misunderstandings that may arise when teachers attempt to infuse their teaching practices with culture and cultural awareness, and a student is called on to interpret or “translate” the aforementioned in an attempt to communicate orally or in writing. Gregory (1996, 9) calls this “losing their strangeness”: “students need to ‘lose their strangeness,’ not only to the new language, but to a strange culture through experiencing everyday new routines and ways of life.”

This does not occur automatically with every student in a classroom. What may be understood and interpreted by one student may not be understood and interpreted by another; this is where the role of social context in literacy (see Gregory 1996) comes in. Gregory specifies that, depending on the cultural assumptions of a text, students may or may not identify and understand what

is being said or written. The aforementioned is in line with the stance taken by Scribner and Cole (1981), who insist that literacy, language, and discourse are all influenced and also derive from the social and cultural practices of a particular society. This is also part of this study.

In previous research that examined the teaching of the Greek language through a Greek-language textbook (Kourdis and Zafiri 2010), it was found that translation was a very important teaching tool even in the case of teaching Greek as a mother tongue. More specifically, it was ascertained that “inter-semiotic translation becomes a ‘didactic tool’ in teaching, even in teaching the mother tongue, and together with the two other types of translation, intra-lingual and inter-lingual, it can contribute to the amelioration of the teaching process especially at a time when multi-semiotic texts, used in the teaching of language are considered the norm” (Kourdis and Zafiri 2010, 129). To be more specific, intersemiotic translation was further researched by Zafiri and Kourdis (2011), and these two researchers undoubtedly believe in the importance of the mother tongue and mother culture in the learning of foreign languages and cultures, a significant point that we will try to highlight below.

Cultural Elements in Textbooks for Beginners

The selected textbook is *Think Teen: 1st Grade of Junior High School*,³ written in 2008 by Evangelia Karayianni, Vasiliki Koue, and Ekaterini Nikolakaki and published by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. We chose to probe into the signs (exercises and activities) that focus upon the cultural characteristics of the two languages and cultures, Greek and English. Thus, in the first case (fig. 1) we see a reading exercise and a writing exercise that rely upon translation from the mother tongue into the target language, which in this case is English. More specifically, we notice that there are bilingual messages, and in this case the mother tongue, which is Greek, functions as the language that should be translated into the English language (μπλουζέες ‘t-shirt’, καρτοτηλέφωνο ‘card phone’, κλειστό ‘closed’). There are also bilingual messages, for example, words borrowed from English that are used together with Greek words and expressions (stock επώνυμα γυναικεία υπόγειο, parking 90 θέσεων).⁴ This choice of presenting a bilingual message is an ef-

3. We would like to thank the Greek Pedagogical Institute for its permission to study the iconic messages of the textbook under scrutiny; available at <http://ebooks.edu.gr/modules/ebook/show.php/DSGYM-A111/525/3466,14029/>.

4. The loanword *stock* is classified by Anastasiadi-Simeonidi (1994, 134), as one of the vocabulary words that has been borrowed from the commercial, touristic, and banking sectors, whereas the word *parking* covers an existing gap in Modern Greek, in which the word *parking* has no equivalent (Anastasiadi-Simeonidi 1994, 134).



Figure 1. Reading exercise, page 3

fort to connotatively present the semiotic landscape of the English language and its translation in Greece. According to House (2009, 68), “the common educational tenet of linking new knowledge with that learners already know can be interpreted in the context of foreign language learning as involving a bilingualization process in which the L1 and translation play an active part.”

This choice, especially, aims to curb the linguistic insecurities of all beginners and to promote a positive stance in learning EFL. In other words, the aim of the authors of this specific textbook was to show students that English is not a “foreign language after all.” In the same vein, and along similar lines, is the exercise called “Culture Corner” (figs. 2 and 3). It is true that in Greece, students are not accustomed to “reading titles” that clearly state what cultural elements are about to follow. In this particular activity we notice that there are

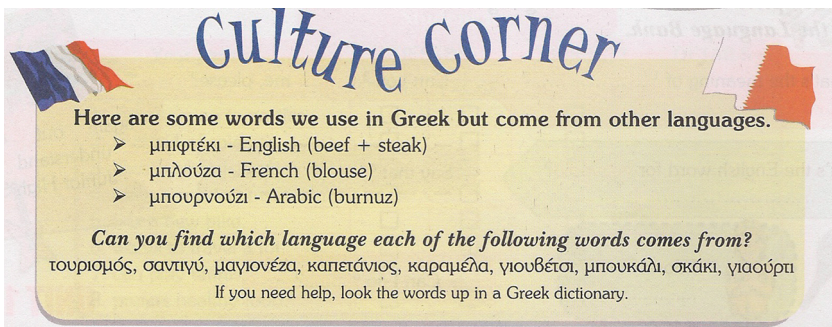


Figure 2. Culture corner, page 6

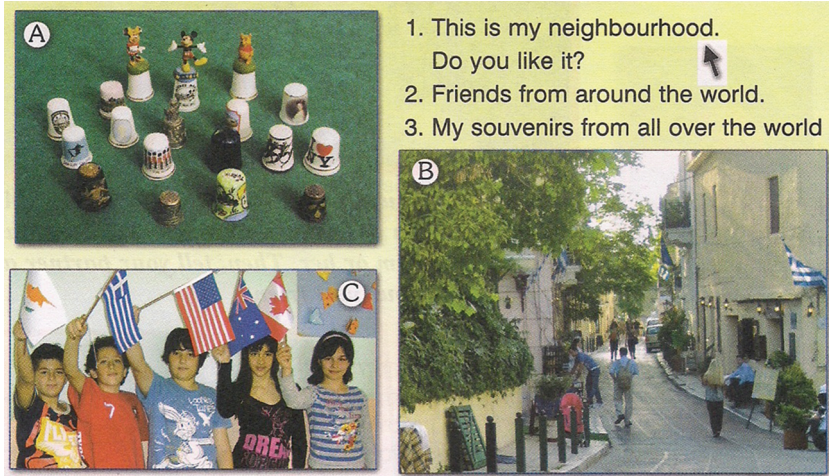


Figure 3. Exercise, page 7

interlingual translations of words, which are in fact borrowed words in Modern Greek (μπιφτέκι ‘bifteck’, meaning “hamburger”), from French (μπλούζα ‘blouse’), and from Arabic (μπουρνούζι ‘burnuz’, meaning “bathrobe”). The Greek language had borrowed extensively from French in the past and continued to do so until the mid-twentieth century (Anastasiadi-Simeonidi 1994, 109–15), when this role was taken over by the English language both nationally and internationally.

The choice of the Arabic language comes as a surprise, but we strongly believe that it was a quite deliberate decision made by the authors, who wanted to indicate to all readers what the natural consequence of a language is (or becomes), when it interacts (or “osculates”) with another language and, most importantly, when it “borrows” from this particular language. At the same time, the authors of this textbook attempt to get a (very specific) message across to their readers, namely, that students will be able to learn their mother tongue a lot better through a foreign hegemonic language such as the English language.

It is also interesting to see that the activity has a series of Greek words—which the authors note are loanwords—for which a dictionary is necessary. Through a playful manner of discovery, students are encouraged to find the origins of the words that they encounter and to use the dictionary—the basic tool for interlingual translation—effectively, not only at this language level but also at the next.

In the next activity, a connection is made between the national—the Greek region—and the international through a presentation of national flags, such as the Greek, the Cypriot (Cyprus was a former colony of the United Kingdom), and those from countries that have English as a common code of communication (United States, Australia, and Canada). It is interesting to see, though, that the UK flag is missing. The iconic messages are presented in English, which is an international language, and in this way the authors show that, through interpreting the iconic message from Greek to English, students exceed the national boundaries of their neighborhood or their country. The appearance of the Greek and the Cypriot flags denote the reality of today, which is that Greece and Cyprus are two countries in which English is the first language to be taught as a foreign language.

The rhetoric that “English is an international language and culture” and that “Greek is a local language and culture” is iconically presented in the activity that follows (fig. 4). We have, on the one hand, a picture of American actor Leonardo Di Caprio and, on the other, one of well-known Greek actress Vicky Stavropoulou. Hollywood is one of the most important cultural industries in the United States, and in our opinion one of the most important means through which the hegemonic language and culture, of the United States, is transmitted. The choice of the particular actor is not random, as the choice of a British actor may not have had the same impact on the Greek students who are using the particular textbook and who are learning EFL. At this point it is very important to mention that Greece belongs to those countries that encourage viewers to watch foreign series or movies, most of which are from the United States and most of which are subtitled. Greek students are thus trained, from a very early age, to

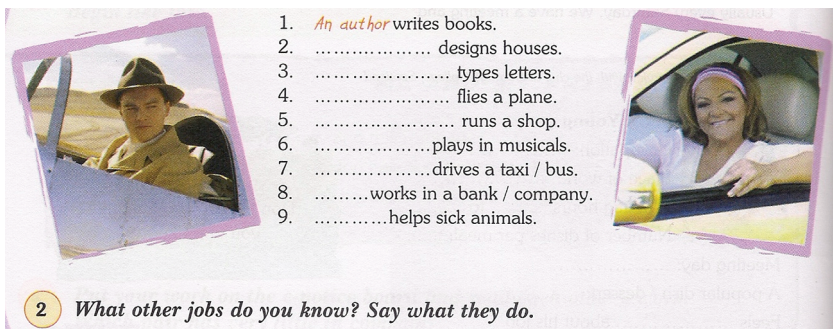


Figure 4. Exercise, page 36

listen to, and to a large extent understand, the English/American English language and to interpret Hollywood's modern mythology.⁵

The authors of the textbook seem to consciously maintain the balance between the two languages and cultures (Greek and English). In the next activity (fig. 5), even though the question concerning the well-known virtuoso (Dionisis Grammenos) is given in English, the iconic message and the caption that follows it is in Greek. This choice is not accidental, for it lays the foundations for the understanding and development of the activity, as students will attempt to answer using the means and the knowledge they have from their mother tongue with the aid of the caption. Also, the coexistence of the icon (the photograph) and the linguistic sign (the caption) functions as an intersemiotic translation.⁶

The next sign presented (fig. 6) encourages students to use the internet, which is primarily a polysemiotic/multimodal tool used by students for research, so as to come into contact with the European Language Portfolio (found on the bilingual website of the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs) and to read it and answer the questions that follow. This choice shows the importance the Greek state places on learning EFL.

The authors make good use of the sign of celebrities. Students are invited (see fig. 7) to say what they know about the people who are featured in the book. Although the people, who are featured, are of different nationalities, the majority are Anglo-Saxon. We see the Greek actress Alikì Vouyiouklaki⁷; Maria Salomea Skłodowska-Curie, who is a Polish scientist who taught in France; the English writer Agatha Christie; the musician and singer John Lennon; the Swiss scientist Albert Einstein, who became an American in 1940; and, last but not least, the American Wright brothers, who are well-known inventors and aviation pioneers. The choice of the aforementioned people, who represent the arts and sciences, helps students to describe and to express themselves, using the foreign language and the knowledge they already possess about these people, but at the same time it clearly presents the hidden need these students have to rub shoulders with people who have social recognition, through the use of EFL.

The next beginner's textbook message that we choose to present (fig. 8) is an activity that encourages students to converse among themselves, in other words, to engage in an exchange of thoughts and feelings by means of speech, and to

5. It is no coincidence that Hollywood drew the attention of Barthes (1957) very early in his life, as Hollywood's ideological stance is very easily diffused, at a global scale, through its film industry.

6. Jakobson ([1959] 2004, 139) described intersemiotic translation or transmutation as an "interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems."

7. In 1962 Alikì Vouyiouklaki attempted to become an international movie star, and chose to act in a Greek-British coproduction by Finos Film. The film's title was English, *Alikì My Love*.



Figure 5. Exercise, page 60

find out which painting (*Christmas Carols, Child with a Dove, The Dance Class, The Bedroom*) belongs to which painter (Nikiforos Lytras, Pablo Picasso, Vincent van Gogh, Edgar Degas). The fact that the painting of Nikiforos Lytras is presented in Greek helps students to answer promptly and correctly, but at the same time it triggers conversation in English, thus confirming that the first step students take in learning a foreign language depends on previous knowledge from their mother tongue and culture.

At this point, we should mention that the last two signs (figs. 7 and 8) present intersemiotic translations, as the iconic messages (photographs and paintings) carry linguistic captions with them. We observe continuity in the use of inter-

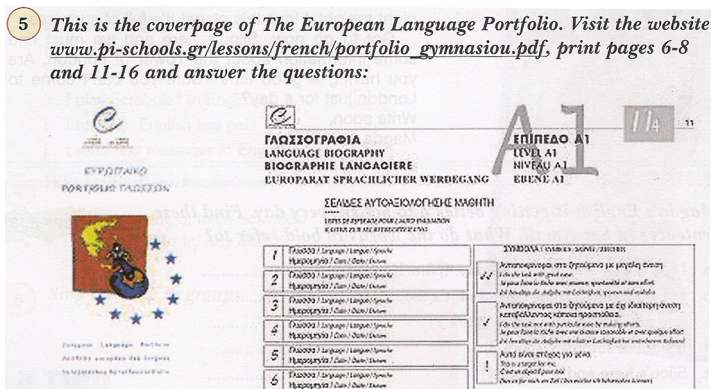


Figure 6. Exercise, page 68

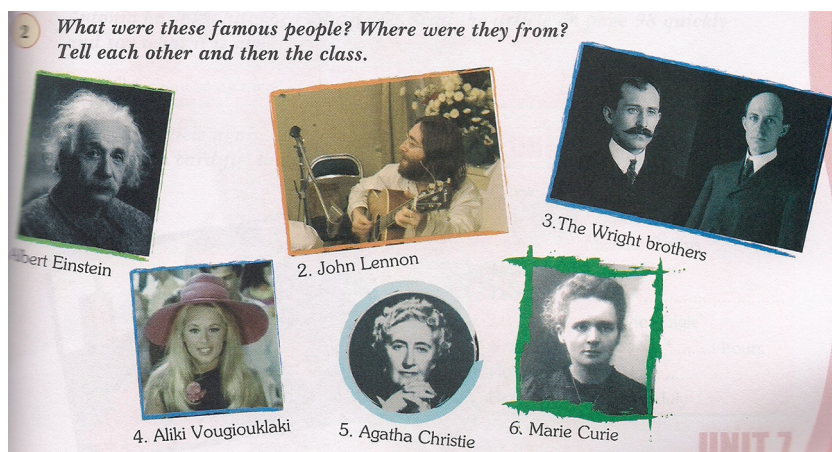


Figure 7. Exercise, page 95

semiotic translations for beginners, especially in activities that promote speaking and oral comprehension. Branco (2014, 311) also observes that speaking and listening comprehension activities based on intersemiosis were more successful with beginners, providing more participation and involvement. Furthermore, the fact that the linguistic and iconic signs do not limit themselves to the Greek or the English cultural system confirms Bochner's (1981, 12) stance "that knowing more than one culture is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for cultural mediation, which is the next stage."

The last message chosen (fig. 9) is a mediation task. Students are asked to read their star signs in Greek and to transmit the information that they have read, in English this time, to an Australian friend who is on holiday in Greece (a sign denoting tourism). It is the first time that a text of this length (six lines) is presented in the mother tongue of the students. As the learning of the foreign language evolves, the authors seem to place more emphasis on interlingual mediation. As Stathopoulou (2015, 3) mentions, "interlingual mediation . . . involves the interpretation of meanings in a text articulated in one language and the making of a new meaning, on the basis of the 'old,' appropriate for the situational context but in another language."

To round off, in this textbook we noticed that the regular use of the mother tongue appears both within the framework of an interlingual and an intersemiotic translation. We also noticed that the overuse of iconic visual signs—which is quite normal for students of this age group and language level who come into contact for the first time with a foreign language in secondary edu-

THE CAMP
GREEK WEATHER / PEOPLE / FOOD / CUSTOMS
TRAVELLING IN EUROPE

Project
 My favourite painting

1 Here are four postcards of paintings Nadia got from her e-friends when they met. Do you know any of them? What do they show? Which painting do you prefer? Discuss in class.



..... - Child with a dove



..... - Τα κάλαντα

2 **GUESS THE ARTIST!** In pairs, discuss and write the name of the artist under each painting. Choose from the following and explain your choice.

Νικηφόρος Λύτρας - **Pablo Picasso**
 Vincent Van Gogh - Edgar Degas



..... - The Dance Class

3 Which is your favourite painting or painter? Find some information about them.



..... - The Bedroom

4 Present your favourite painting to the class. Explain what you like about it.

UNIT 9

Figure 8. Reading exercise, page 128

ation—derives not only from the target culture (the English culture) but also from the source culture (the Greek culture).

Cultural Elements in the Textbook for the Advanced Students

The next textbook that we studied was *Think Teen: Advanced Level*,⁸ which was written by the same authors and published by the state; it is geared to students at an advanced language level and with advanced linguistic knowledge. It is interesting to see that the Culture Corner activity, which in the beginners text-

8. See <http://ebooks.edu.gr/modules/ebook/show.php/DSGYM-A114/417/2806,10749/>.

Unit 8 / Lesson 3 / Speaking**Mediation Task****Student A**

Your Australian friend is in Greece. You are looking at Greek magazines together and your friend wants to know what his/her horoscope says. Read the horoscope and tell him/her.

Student A:

- What do you want to say to your friend?
- Think about the language you need.
- Don't try to translate everything.
- Use your own words.

....
Αυτό τον μήνα, θα λύσεις ένα πρόβλημα που έχεις. Οι φίλοι σου θα σου δείξουν την αγάπη τους και θα σε βοηθήσουν.
Θα πάρεις πρόσκληση και θα πας σε ένα καταπληκτικό πάρτυ. Οι γονείς σου όμως θα σου πουν να γυρίσεις νωρίς και έτσι προμηνύεται σύγκρουση. Στο τέλος του μήνα θα γράψετε διαγώνισμα στο μάθημα που σκαίνεσαι. Προετοιμάσου! Δε θα είναι και τόσο εύκολο.

Now, Student A:

You are from Australia and you're spending your holidays in Greece at your Greek friend's house. You are looking at some Greek magazines together and you want to know what your horoscope says. Your friend will tell you. Is it good news?

Student A:

- Listen to your partner.
- Ask any questions you like.
- Say if you agree with what your horoscope says.
Are you happy with it?

Adapted from the teenage magazine: Young No 8 Ιούλιος 2006 (Greek edition - pages 206-207)

Figure 9. Mediation task, page 138

book refers to words that are borrowed by the Greek language from other languages, does not have the same contents in the textbook used by the advanced students (fig. 10). In the textbook used by the advanced students, reference is made to a “purely cultural” matter, such as the conditions within an Indian classroom and its differences with the Greek classroom. The iconic message

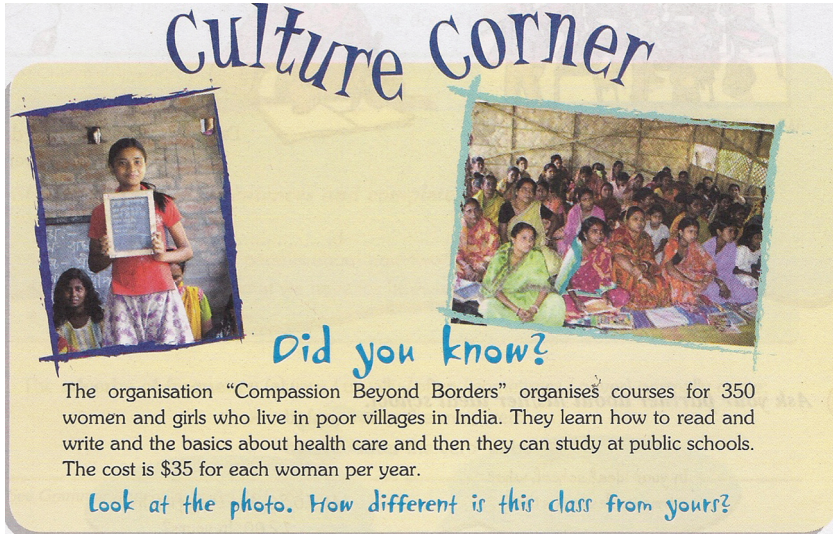


Figure 10. Culture corner, page 14

is an important sign stimulus, as it is clear that differences among cultural systems draw students’ attention and feed their imagination and thus their need to communicate verbally using the foreign language. The choice of India is not at random, as it gives the English language teacher the opportunity to tell her students that the Indian culture is highly influenced by the English culture as it is a former British colony. This shows, yet again, that English is an international language and a carrier of culture.⁹

The next sign we chose to present abounds in cultural elements, as it deals with the people’s eating habits (fig. 11). It is interesting to see that the *choriatiki salata* (χωριάτικη σαλάτα), also known to foreigners as Greek salad, which is the same in French (*salade grecque*), is not translated but rather is given in the form of transliteration, for instance, *pita-souvlaki*. Stano (2015, 113) observes that “transliteration plays a crucial role, as it mediates between two very different writing/reading systems not simply by transposing the first one into the second one, but first of all by making its signs recognizable.” Thus, even though it may be difficult to interpret—because of transliteration—the term *pita*, we see that the same does not apply to the term *souvlaki*, which has become a synonym with *Greek cuisine*. It is also interesting to see the connection between the different dishes corresponding to the different religious and national festivals and

9. Tomlinson (2016, 51) mentions that “English has a long history and plays an important role in education and commerce and often also in public administration. India, Pakistan and Zambia are three examples.”

Project


Eating Habits

1 Choose one of the following dishes or one of your choice.
Fish soup *Pita -Souvlaki* *Greek Salad* *Spring rolls*
 Look at the food pyramid on page 31 and find out what there is from each food group. Decide if it's healthy or not and why. Present it to the class.

OR

2 Choose one of the following topics, find information (on the Internet, in your school books, from your teachers) and present it to the class.

Food and Religion **Food and Celebrations** **Food and Climate**



Thanksgiving dinner Ramadan Snack tray for Chinese New Year Greek Easter

PROJECT STRATEGIES see page 42

Figure 11. Project: eating habits, page 32

their correlation to the language and culture of both the mother tongue and the target language. More specifically, the presentation begins with a country that is English speaking (Thanksgiving dinner, from the United States), and then continues with a religious festival from the Muslim world (Ramadan), and from Asian culture (a snack tray for Chinese New Year), only to round off with a traditionally Greek dish also known as *ovelia* (οβελία), which is the skewering of a lamb or goat at Easter.

The activity draws from memories of the past, from an event that happened on September 7, 1999. On that day there was a very destructive earthquake in Athens with numerous dead and injured people (fig. 12). Students are invited to speak about an event that is real and about which they may know nothing as they may not even have been born at the time. This activity is of interest, as, first, it prompts students to probe into an event of historical interest for Greece and also informs them about an event about which they may not have been informed thus prompting them to find out more information, in their mother tongue, from their parents and older friends or even from the internet. Should they decide to use the internet, they will be surprised to find information, in English, from foreign correspondents who wrote newspaper articles that were published around the globe. A piece of knowledge presented within an English language classroom could spark a flame that could lead students to dig deeper into



Project - Disasters

Notes on earthquake

Date: 7/9/1999

Time: 14.57

Location: Athens - Greece

Magnitude: 5.9

Number of victims:

- 143 people were killed
- 700 people were injured

Witnesses: Heleni Denou, 13

Lives in Nea Smyrni - Athens

Was at home

Her description:

- Kids / set the table
- Mum / serve lunch
- Dad / talk on the phone
- House / start shaking
- Plates / books / fall off
- Under the kitchen table
- She: terrified / Sister: crying
- Telephones / go dead
- After the earthquake / go downstairs / lots of people in shock
- Next day: watch the news / see the victims / cry.

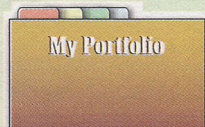


Figure 12. Project: disasters, page 59

the events of the time, perhaps in the form of a project that could be done at home, both in the mother tongue and in English as a foreign language.

The second reason is that it is a very unpleasant event and we, as researchers, are not used to presenting and perhaps even teaching language through unpleasant linguistic and visual iconic messages, as these are presented in foreign language textbooks. Authors usually choose pleasant thematic units that reflect positive signs for students. Perhaps the fact that the students are of an advanced linguistic level justifies the choice made, by the authors, to present a real, but very unpleasant, event. As Danesi (2000, 167) mentions “the basic goal of Semiotics in language education is to put the teacher and the learner in a position to see that different languages encode reality in ways that are in times identical, at others similar or complementary, and at others still, quite different.” On the other hand, the next sign we chose to study comes from the advanced English language textbook, once more, and encourages students to consult their history book, which is written in Greek, before they discuss, in English, events and matters that concern Greek history (fig. 13). The playful manner (in the form of a quiz) with which students are asked use the English language is very usual in foreign language textbooks. Once more students are invited to use their mother tongue to intermediate in the foreign language. This is done through the use of a sign that carries with it positive connotations for Greek students. This is the ancient history of the Greeks.

Project

History

A. An Ancient History Quiz
Work in groups of three.

- Look at your history textbook.
- Find information about other people, things or places of importance in ancient history.
- Choose 6 to 8 pieces of information.
- Write an ancient history quiz.
- Prepare the key to your quiz.
- Give it to other groups to find the answers.

OR

B. A Local History Poster
Work in groups of three.

- Find out about the history of your area. Your history teacher can help you.
- Choose an important person or event.
- Collect information.
- Write a short text and add pictures.
- Prepare a Local History Poster and present it to your class.

ANCIENT HISTORY QUIZ - THE ANCIENT GREEKS

a. Achilles was the warrior who fought in Salamina. T / F
b. Leonidas died in Thermopyles. T / F
c.

UNIT 5 69

Figure 13. Project: history, page 69

From the Greek culture comes the next sign too (fig. 14). More particularly, students who are of an advanced language level are invited to use the English language after they have read a text written in English on the Nikos Kazantzakis Museum, which is situated in Crete. Kazantzakis was chosen, for this specific English textbook, not only because he is a very well-known and popular Greek author but also because his work has been translated into many other foreign languages (including English) and also because numerous articles and books have been written in English about his work. The positive sign, which in this case is Kazantzakis, is now connected to the English language and the international character that the English language carries with it.

The next activity (speaking) also relates to the Greek culture. Through the use of the Culture Corner, students are asked to identify two very well-known politicians. These politicians are presented at Madame Tussauds in London, and they are Eleftherios Venizelos and Konstantinos Karamanlis (fig. 15). Again the choice of these two figures, of Modern Greek politics, is not at random. Eleftherios Venizelos supported the Entente in the First World War against the Germans, and Konstantinos Karamanlis was responsible for Greece's admission to the European Union. The fact that this particular activity focuses solely upon these two political leaders may be considered as an attempt, made by the authors of the book, to avoid presenting the subject of the ancient Greek artifacts, which were stolen by Lord Thomas Bruce Elgin, and presented in the Museum of London today. Such a conversation, among the students, would provoke negative feelings toward English culture, which is not the initial purpose and the aim of this lesson.

The activity that follows (a listening activity) includes iconic and linguistic signs that function as intersemiotic translations of the iconic ones that support the concept of interculturalism and the international community that it supports through the use of the English language (fig. 16). So, if Pedro speaks Spanish, Hans speaks German, Jean speaks French, Silou speaks Chinese, Maria speaks either Greek or Spanish, and Christos is certainly a speaker of the Greek language, then it is difficult to talk about the nation-states to which these young people belong. They are all different teenagers, from different cultural systems, who appear to have a common code of communication, which is the English language. We will nevertheless focus on the case of Maria. Since the utterance "Maria" is a name of Greek, Hispanic, Portuguese, or Italian origin and culture, it may lead students to a second "cultural reading" of the iconic message in an attempt to find codified visual signs, plastic visual signs, so as to be able

Lesson 3



Reading & Writing

Grammar Link

- 1 Read this extract from an article about the Kazantzakis museum. In small groups, discuss what you could look for in this museum if you played Treasure Hunt.
- 2 Prepare a short Treasure Hunt Task Sheet for the rest of the class. You can ask for information or ask students to find something if they visit the museum.
e.g.
 - Find one of the writer's photographs with someone else. Who is he with and where?
 - Find two of his personal belongings a visitor can find in the museum.



The Kazantzakis Museum is in Varvaroi, a place about 20 kilometres to the south of Herakleion. In the museum, there are some of the Cretan writer's personal things, documents, letters, the first Greek editions of his books, translations in 49 languages, photographs, theatrical works and costumes. There is also a collection of press reviews which refer to Kazantzakis and have appeared in Greek and foreign newspapers. Visitors can enjoy learning details about the famous writer's life and career during an audiovisual presentation in five languages: Greek, French, English, German and Dutch.

adapted from www.culture.gr



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Figure 14. Reading and writing, page 96

Lesson 1



Speaking

1 Where are the students in the photos? Discuss in pairs.



2 Look at the pictures and the tickets. Can you imagine the students' daily programme?

102

Culture Corner

- > What exhibits are there at Madame Tussaud's?
- > Are there any Greek personalities at Madame Tussaud's?
- > Is there a similar museum in Greece?

Figure 15. Speaking, page 102

Listening

1 Robert, the presenter of a radio programme for teenagers, invited the listeners to express their good intentions for this month. Listen to 6 of them and write the name of the teenager next to each intention (a-g). There is an extra intention.

This teenager is going to ...	NAME
a. be more careful in the streets
b. feel positive about themselves
c. take advice from somebody older
d. behave better towards others
e. watch less TV
f. eat less junk food
g. be careful when visiting websites.

Figure 16. Listening, page 106

to recognize the nationality of the girl (from the color of her skin, her clothes, accessories, the expression on her face, etc.).

The next activity (writing) also uses a Greek sign as a starting point (figs. 17 and 18). It is the well-known Greek pop star Sakis Rouvas, who became even

Writing


1 Which famous person do you like? Which one do you hate? Write a horoscope for each one of them. You can have categories like: Personal Life, Career, Family and Friends, Money etc.

2 When you finish, prepare a page for an English class magazine:

- Work in small pairs,
- type your drafts,
- add photos and
- make a collage.


Sign: Capricorn
 Personal life: Sakis will
 Career: This week, Sakis

Figure 17. Writing, page 114



Speaking

Student A
Read the blurb of this book and tell your English-speaking friend about it. The words in the box may help you. Don't try to translate the text. Use your own words.



get married to move to

record moments

new member

Λότη Πέτροβιτς - Ανδρουτσοπούλου

σπίτι για πέντε

Ο Φίλιππος 12 ετών, έχει καινούργια οικογένεια. Η μητέρα του παντρεύεται τον Ορέστη, πατέρα του εννιάχρονου και πολύ ζωηρού Άρη. Μετακομίζουν σε καινούργιο σπίτι. Ο Φίλιππος έχει ένα μικρό κασετοφωνάκι και καταγράφει την καθημερινή ζωή της οικογένειας. Το ίδιο κάνει και ο Άρης. Η μητέρα γράφει τα νέα στην αδερφή της στην Κρήτη και ο Ορέστης τηλεφωνεί συχνά στον καλύτερο του φίλο. Έχουν καλές στιγμές, κωμικές στιγμές αλλά και τραγικές στιγμές μέχρι που έρχεται ένα νέο μέλος στην οικογένεια και το σπίτι γίνεται σπίτι για πέντε.

Για παιδιά από 9 ετών και εφήβους
 Εκδόσεις Πατάκη
 Συλλογή Χελιδόνια


adapted from: Σπίτι για πέντε - Λότη Πέτροβιτς - Ανδρουτσοπούλου / Εκδόσεις Πατάκη (Συλλογή Χελιδόνια)

Figure 18. Speaking, page 142

more popular in Greece and the rest of the world when he came third in the Eurovision song contest in 2004. His song “Shake It,” which won third place in the Eurovision song contest in 2004, was performed in English. The English language seems to be the first choice for all those countries whose languages are only spoken by a few million people, and the language they are using is considered to be one of the lesser-used languages, thus rendering it necessary, for them, to find a common code of communication. It is thus, not unusual for most of the


countries in the Eurovision song contest to sing only in English and not in their mother tongue, rendering, to a large extent, Eurovision an English song context.

The next three activities (speaking activities) are based on the intermediation of the Greek language and the production (summary) in English of a specific text (figs. 19 and 20). Stathopoulou (2015, 63) explains that “summarising tasks are those requiring the production of a summary in the target language, representing a condensing of information which reflects the gist (central ideas)



Speaking

Student B
Read the blurb of this book and tell your English-speaking friend about it. The words in the box may help you. Don't try to translate the text. Use your own words.



help each other team

get a tan feel good

lie under the sun

Βησσαρία Ζορμπά - Ραμμοπούλου

Η Σαββίνα, η Μοένια και τα χρώματα

Η Σαββίνα μένει στην Αθήνα και είναι μοναχοπαιδί. Μια μέρα φτιάχνει μια ομάδα αλληλοβοήθειας. Η ομάδα τρέχει να βοηθήσει κάθε παιδί της τάξης που αντιμετωπίζει κάποιο πρόβλημα. Όπως την Μοένια που είναι από την Αφρική και θέλει να γίνει... λευκή. Η Σαββίνα πείθει τα παιδιά της τάξης να μαυρίσουν για να αισθάνεται η Μοένια καλά. Και κάθονται στον ήλιο με τις ώρες! Μα η ιδέα της δεν είναι και τόσο καλή. Όλοι είναι θυμωμένοι. Οι γονείς, οι δάσκαλοι... και η Μοένια δεν είναι ευτυχισμένη.

Εκδόσεις ΑΚΡΙΤΑΣ.

adapted from: Η Σαββίνα, η Μοένια και τα χρώματα
 Βησσαρία Ζορμπά-Ραμμοπούλου - Εκδόσεις ΑΚΡΙΤΑΣ

Figure 19. Speaking, page 144

Mediation

Student A

Your American friend is in Greece. You are looking at Greek magazines together and your friend wants to know what his/her horoscope says. Tell him/her.

Student A:

- Read the horoscope before you start.
- What do you want to say to your friend?
- Think about the language you need. Don't try to translate everything.

Use your own words.

....

Αυτό το μήνα, θα καταφέρεις επιτέλους να λύσεις ένα πρόβλημα που σε απασχολεί πολύ αυτόν τον καιρό. Οι φίλοι σου θα σου δείξουν την αγάπη τους και θα σε βοηθήσουν.

Θα πάρεις πρόσκληση και θα πας σε ένα καταπληκτικό πάρτυ. Οι γονείς σου όμως θα σου πουν να γυρίσεις νωρίς και έτσι προμηνύεται σύγκρουση.

Στο τέλος του μήνα θα γράψετε διαγώνισμα στο μάθημα που σιχαίνεσαι. Προετοιμάσου! Τα θέματα δεν είναι και τόσο εύκολα.

Μην σπαταλήσεις όλο το χαρτζιλίκι σου διότι θα χρειαστείς χρήματα για κάτι σημαντικό. Μπορεί να είναι για μια συναυλία που θα θέλεις να πας ή για την αγορά ενός δώρου. Οι γονείς σου δεν θα σου δώσουν επιπλέον χρήματα.

Now, **Student A**

You are from Australia and you're spending your holidays in Greece at your Greek friend's house. You are looking at some Greek magazines together and you want to know what your horoscope says. Your friend will tell you. Is it good news?

Student A:

- Listen to your partner.
- Ask any questions you like.
- Say if you agree with what your horoscope says. Are you happy with it?

adapted from the teenage magazine: Young No 8 Ιούλιος 2006 (Greek edition - pages 206-207)

Figure 20. Speaking, page 150

of the source text.” This is the reason why the authors of the textbook encourage their students not to translate the text given to them, in the English language, perhaps to avoid a literary translation that often hinders the interpretation and production of cultural elements. Intermediation is a form translation anyway. Mediation as a kind of language activity is very important for interaction between people. In the *Common European Framework of References for Languages*

(Council of Europe 2001, 87) it is mentioned that “mediating activities include spoken interpretation and written translation as well as summarizing and paraphrasing texts in the same language, when the language of the original text is not understandable to the intended recipient.”

Summarizing the main points of the study of this textbook, we find that the aforementioned points are culturally charged, both negatively and positively, creating a “semiotic balance” in relation to their cultural load, which is deemed as positive on the part of the authors. Interestingly, these points are not limited to the Greek and the English culture but extend to other cultural systems, many of which have no direct relation to either the Greek or the English culture. This option is a clear connotation on the saying “bridge between cultures” that is a characteristic given to the English language, the lingua franca of today’s globalized era.

Conclusion

Interlingual translation, intersemiotic translation, and mediation are the main means by which students who are beginners connect the learning of EFL and Greek as a mother tongue.¹⁰ It is interesting to see that the use of mother tongue in learning the foreign language is becoming very popular in recent years. House (2009, 63) observes that “if the foreign language is viewed as co-existing bilingually with the [mother tongue] in the minds of language learners, then language learning becomes a *bilingualization process*, i.e., a process promoting bilingualism.” We believe that this bilingualization process facilitates the need for mediation, which is a concept claimed by both teaching as a discipline and translation as a science. Cultural mediation does not limit itself to a linguistic system, per se. To this venture both verbal and visual iconic signs, mainly icons (as defined by Peirce), play an important role.

The specific textbook, which is published by the Greek state, abounds in iconic signs¹¹ that depict Greek culture, whether this is within an intersemiotic translation or within the framework of a micro skill, which aids learning. As Jaillet (2005, 92–93) rightly claims, linguistic signifiers play a very important role in course books; nevertheless, there are other signifiers that also play an important role, such as the visual ones that accompany language.

10. Kourdis (2014, 263) also concludes that intersemiotic and interlingual translations coexist in English and French textbooks written by Greek teachers.

11. Kourdis (2014, 263) notes those English textbooks published in Greece are made of an extensive use of iconic visual signs.

In this research we attempted to evaluate the authors' choices of visual iconic messages that promote the Greek culture and language, the mother tongue of the students, as a means of mediation—mostly through interlingual translation—to familiarize them with the target language and culture, which is the English language and culture. The fact that the visual iconic and verbal signs under scrutiny are all derived from a textbook published by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs gives more significance to the specific signs (thus legitimizing them).

It is true that these signs act as intermediaries for Greek students so that they (the students) can acquire a linguistic and cultural knowledge even when they are not fully aware of the contents of the information (e.g., the earthquake in Athens in 1999, or to which country the girl in the picture, Maria, belongs to). Signs are not one-dimensional, and what we mean by this is that even when the information load is ambiguous these signs still convey positive intermediation values (local history and literature, art, etc). It is very usual and quite rational to teach students who are learning a foreign culture and language about the positively charged signs of the specific culture through the textbook they are using. It is also true that the signs, both the linguistic and the iconic signs, are very carefully chosen by the authors. We nevertheless believe that there should have been a balance, a semiotic balance; in other words, the authors should have used signs of a negative or ambiguous nature in an attempt to stress the real profile of another cultural system.

It is not worth overestimating a cultural system when in a short period of time students will learn the truth through their own experience or through the internet. The deconstruction of an image may become an inhibiting factor for some students who may decide to discontinue their studies in the foreign language. Through the teaching of the English language and culture, the English semiosphere, Greek students come to learn more about their culture and thus acquire a better understanding of the target culture that in our case is the English culture.

An education process oriented to signs could be an advantage for language teaching/learning because signs are cultural constructions so they are meaningful. Our main aim, as foreign language teachers, is to lay the foundations upon which students will build their linguistic and cultural competence. And upon this concept, edusemiotics has much to offer, not as a philosophical theory but primarily as an applied practice, embodying Barthes's stance that semiotics serves other disciplines well.

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