

Multimodal interpretations of foreign language learning textbooks: two case studies from Maltese and Greek learning contexts

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Abstract

The paper opens with an outline of the role multimodality plays in the Maltese and Greek curricula. This is followed by a detailed presentation of an original multimodal text analysis framework proposed as a tool through which the representations of the 'foreign' country where the target language is spoken as L1 may be interpreted in a multimodal socio-cultural way. Using the MIRROR framework, the authors analyze various sections from the Foreign Language (FL) textbooks used within the two selected FL learning contexts. For the sake of comparison, sections related to one topic (i.e. food and drink) have been included in the discussion. Because of the application of a multimodal framework, this is an innovative way of approaching foreign language textbooks and their analysis.

In response to the outcomes of the interpretations of the sections analyzed from the selected textbooks, the authors propose video-making as a multimodal tool through which the representations of the FL contexts could benefit. They suggest, and it remains to be tested in the continuation of their research, that video-making should involve the FL students directly and actively. Through the authors' proposal, the rather limited representations of food and drink featuring in the textbooks in both contexts may possibly become more inclusive, less essentialist and less judgmental.

Keywords: multimodal approach, FL textbook analysis, German as a Foreign Language (GFL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), FL teaching

JEL classifications: Z00 Other Special Topics: General

Introduction

The concept of exchange in foreign language learning environments has been popular for many decades (Byram, 2009). It does not only refer to physical exchanges of individuals and classes but also to the exchange of ideas and practices among foreign language teachers and learners. Within this framework, and given that we are both foreign language (FL) teachers in two different countries, we thought it would be fruitful to embark on a common research project. Our intention was to exchange multimodal interpretations of various FL texts used in our classes.

Children in Malta start attending school when they are three. Compulsory schooling lasts till students turn sixteen. Formal

education includes six years of primary schooling. The secondary schooling phase lasts for five years. Before finishing their primary school experience, students in Malta participate in a weekly language awareness programme (ten lessons) designed to help them choose one European language among those offered to them once they start their secondary experience (i.e. at age 11). At secondary level, students then start learning the foreign language (FL) they select. They do so for five years. Maltese secondary school students also have the possibility to learn another foreign language when they start Form 3 (i.e. at age 13). Notwithstanding a recently observed decrease, Italian is still the foreign language selected by the highest percentage of Maltese students (29%). After Italian, the other three most popular FLs are French (23%), German (5%) and Spanish (4%) (Bartolo, 2011).

The official documents guiding and regulating foreign language teaching in Malta do not refer directly to *multimodality* or *multimodal texts*. However, the official textbook list and resource list proposed as pedagogic tools in Malta for the foreign language learning contexts indicate that teachers and their students continuously have at hand textbooks which do not only rely on traditional text and paper format. Resources which are used very frequently in Maltese Foreign Language classrooms include textbooks and materials produced by the teachers themselves based on online visuals, online videos, online audio clips and DVDs. Therefore, without being aware of the fact, teachers are continuously using their and their students' multimodal skills and level of analysis when producing and using these resources as pedagogic tools to teach/learn the particular foreign language. Reacting to all this, for the past seven years, the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta has been offering a number of study-units aimed to introduce multimodality to student-teachers attending Bachelors and Post-Graduate Education courses. These study-units not only introduce prospective teachers to the theoretical multimodal principles; they also offer students (i.e. prospective teachers) the opportunity to practically analyze existing FL texts multimodally as well as to design their own multimodal tools, which they start using critically as early as their Practicum (i.e. teaching practice) days. The detailed course descriptions of each of these courses can be found and accessed on www.um.edu.mt.

In Greece, schooling lasts from the age of 4 until the age of 15 for the completion of the compulsory education, or until the age of 18 for those who continue in a comprehensive or vocational high school. All students are taught Greek, the official language of the country, throughout their schooling. English, the first foreign language taught, is introduced in the first class of the primary school (i.e. at age 6) and it is instructed until the end of the secondary school. In the fifth class of the primary school (i.e. at age 11), students choose a second foreign language to be taught. They can choose among French, German, Italian and Spanish and they continue with it until the end of the secondary school, too. In the high school, students continue learning only one foreign language, so they have a selection among English, French, German, Italian or Spanish that they have been learning so far.

As for the use of multimodality in the Greek education system, there is no mention of it as a teaching parameter to focus on in any subject, including foreign languages. The national curriculum refers to the use of multimodal material as a way to illustrate and complete the written texts, but not as a main topic of analysis. It is

mentioned that both written and oral texts - monomodal and multimodal - should be exploited to teach the use of language as well as to teach intercultural awareness (I.E.P., 2013). Moreover, within the framework of cross-curricular education, students are expected to use English material, such as articles, to find information for other subjects (Pedagogical Institute, 2002a; Pedagogical Institute, 2002b). Nevertheless, the Ministry of Education has made various, but not systematic and long-lasting, attempts to introduce all sorts of multimodal texts in official education with the funding and realization of various projects. The most recent initiative in the direction of multimodality integration in education is the forming of a committee dealing with the introduction of audiovisual education at school, within the framework of the education system reform.

Keeping both contexts in mind, despite the fact that many acknowledge indirectly the benefits of the use of multimodality, its application is still very often treated as a complementary secondary educational tool. As a reaction to this, we decided to carry out a common research project, whose main intention is to:

- interpret multimodally possible textbooks' representations¹ and,
- based on the outcomes, suggest ways through which FL teachers and their students could be involved in a more motivating, creative and inclusive learning process.

Because of the application of a socio-semiotic multimodal framework, this is, therefore, an innovative way of approaching foreign language textbooks and their analysis. Additionally, another innovative contribution to the field offered by the content of this paper is the presentation of mundane texts' interpretations, which are so naturally presented in class and usually taken for granted.

Theoretical background: Presenting a socio-semiotic multimodal text analysis framework

In order to analyze the FL pedagogic texts at hand, the authors of this paper will be using the original multimodal socio-semiotic text analysis framework designed by Cremona (2015; 2017). In contrast to text analysis frameworks previously used and designed by others (Byram, 1993; Maijala, 2006; 2007; 2008), the text analysis framework used in this paper is original in the sense that it reaches deeper levels of analysis, particularly focusing on different modes and different social aspects. Therefore, rather than just interpreting the meanings behind words, the socio-semiotic multimodal MIRROR framework (Cremona, 2015; 2017) intertwines different levels of analysis and builds its interpretations upon them.

Cremona (2015; 2017) suggests that the acronym MIRROR serves the framework very well, since the framework's main purpose is to investigate whether the contents of texts used to teach FLs are serving as mirrors reflecting elements from the particular country of origin, which they are expected to faithfully represent (Zu and Kong, 2009), or whether they are only representing part(s) of the complex society, intentionally and/or unintentionally leaving out other relevant parts (Gray, cited in Block and Cameron, 2002).

The MIRROR framework is based on an adaptation of O'Regan's (2006) TACO (standing for Text as a Critical Object) model of text analysis. The selection of this particular model among all others is linked to the explicit pedagogic application the model presents as well as the

model's alignment with the multimodal and social perspective which the current study is interested in.

In brief, this framework proposes that pedagogic texts should be analyzed using the following steps:

Monitoring of available texts and choice of the actual texts for analysis;

- Which are the sources available at hand?
- Which are the most quoted (i.e. the most popular) texts at hand?
- How are they similar?
- In what way do they differ?
- Do any of the available texts possess a particular/special feature which deserves particular attention? Why?

Initial descriptive interpretation (per individual text);

- Which topic(s) are being presented and/or discussed?
- Who is the ideal reader of the text? For who was it originally designed?
- Which genres are being used to present the text? Which are the implications linked to these particular genres used and how do these implications contribute to set/affect representations of the country where the target language taught is used as L1?
- Which representations of the country (i.e. where the target language taught is used as L1) do the selected texts appear to imply after a first reading (i.e. the preferred reading)?

Representational multimodal semiotic interpretation (per individual text);

This second level entails a multimodal analysis of the selected texts. To start with, multimodality can be defined as:

the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.20).

This level aims to identify and highlight representations of the country where the FL is spoken as L1 perceived through the particular ways different semiotic modes are combined in the design of particular semiotic products (i.e. in this case, the interpreted textbook series from Malta and Greece) or events (i.e. in this case, the situations presented in the selected textbooks from the two different countries).

This second level starts by identifying all the different modes included in the particular text. Cremona follows Stein (2008) by defining a mode as a culturally-shaped semiotic resource having specific potentials through which it can produce certain communicative effects and not others. These potentials each mode has are called affordances (Gibson, 1979). The contemporary digital generation (Beach and O'Brien, 2008)

increasingly likely expresses ideas using different semiotic modes, including print, visual, and audio modes, and create[s] hybrid texts that defy typical associations between modes and what they traditionally represent (Wood and Blanton, 2009, p.479).

Keeping this in mind makes the interpreter depart from the traditional distinction between verbal and non-verbal modes, often treating language as a superior mode - when in fact it may not always be the case. Aware of such a situation, this study follows Norris' (2004) distinction between embodied and disembodied modes.

Embodied modes classify language with other modes like gesture, gaze, or posture which 'can play a superordinate or an equal role to the mode of language in interaction, and therefore, these modes are not merely embellishments to language' (Norris, 2004, p.x).

On the other hand, **disembodied modes** 'include among others music, print, layout, colour, clothes and any other mode deriving from the setting or material world where the interaction is happening. These too can take a superordinate role in interaction and at times even 'overrule' embodied modes' (Norris, 2004, p.x).

Therefore, at this level, the interpretation is based on the following questions:

- Which are the particular sections of the selected texts which appear sequential (i.e. not as separate entities)?
- Can the reader identify all the modes - embodied and disembodied - building up the text?
- What representations of the country (i.e. where the target language taught is used as L1) does the reader perceive through the embodied modes included in the particular text?
- What representations of the country (i.e. where the target language taught is used as L1) does the reader perceive through the disembodied modes included in the particular text?

Represented social interpretation (per individual text);

- Are particular social features and practices preferred/disfavored by this particular text?
- Are particular discourses preferred/disfavored by this particular text?

While attempting to answer the above questions, Cremona's (2015; 2017) framework suggests that the interpreter should aim to highlight possible discourse types, which may include discourses linked to

- Class
- Race
- Gender
- Media language, advertisements and promotional culture
- Institutional Discourse: in institutional practices and communications
- Education: an area for reproduction of social relations, representation and identity-formation. (Adopted from Blommaert (2005, pp.26-27))

Overview of the representations of the country where the target language taught is used as L1 observed: presenting a detailed write up of the representations of the country where the target language taught is used as L1 obtained per individual text. Later, comparing individual trends with common trends derived from texts as a whole (where possible);

- Amalgamating different parts of the particular text - therefore treating the particular text as a whole -, which representations of the country where the target language taught is used as L1 feature throughout the series?

- At any point, is/are there any contradicting representation/s featuring in this particular series?

Reorganizing the representations of the country (i.e. where the target language taught is used as L1) derived from the MIRROR Framework (i.e. those presented in the aforementioned steps) under the different categories proposed by the FL curriculum of the particular learning context where the text is being used.

Although each step in the MIRROR framework above seems chronological and its different levels might seem separate from each other, once this framework is applied in practice, each step intertwines with the others. The framework involves its user in a continuous process of relooping (Fairclough, 2010 [2008]), in which no boundaries between different levels limit the interpretation.

Another main characteristic of the MIRROR framework puts in practice one of the most fundamental basic theories of multimodality, i.e. communication is interpretation (Kress, 2010). This should remind any user of the MIRROR framework that any interpretation derived from this framework should be treated as just one interpretation of many other possible interpretations. In fact, users of the MIRROR framework are encouraged to keep in mind that their interpretation should serve as an invitation for others to initiate further interpretations.

Data Analysis of the German as a Foreign Language textbook used in Malta

This section will include the outcomes of the analysis of the main set textbook series used in the Maltese German as a Foreign Language (GFL) learning context based on the practical application of the aforementioned MIRROR framework. Due to the word limit, this section will only include the representations linked to the items people living in Germany eat and drink.

Multimodal analysis

The *layout*² of the *inanimate connected participants* in the *modal print-image ensemble* presented in the textbook used in the Maltese GFL learning context *conceptually* indicates that a typical German breakfast consists among others of various types of bread, eggs, jam, milk and marmalade. Similarly, the *layout* of the table seen in the book indicates that among other things Germans regularly enjoy eating eggs, bread, Nutella and pretzels.

Furthermore, both the *background* of the images in Chapter 3 showing fruit and vegetables at the vendor's shop and the *semiotic signifieds* mentioned in the same dialogue indicate that Germans preferably, regularly and fondly eat vegetables and fruits. This latter idea is represented again through the *arrangement* of the image at the end of Chapter 3, where the healthy 'Kartoffelsalat' (i.e. potato salad) and cucumbers are placed at the very center of the *site of appearance* (i.e. the *double page spread*). The chef's *posture* and *gestures* direct the *movement* of the learners' *gaze* and *attention* towards this centrally-placed typical German dish. Significantly, the other meat dishes are placed on the side, thus indirectly representing (or *positioning*) them as less popular.

Food available in Germany is always fresh and of best quality. This representation is visible through the selection of food at the

disposal of the chef in Chapter 3. Through the *modal affordances of colours* the learners using the book can feel the freshness *materialized* in the images presented. This is done by *contrasts in hues* of the colours used. The *hue* of the already cooked 'Frikadellen' (i.e. meat balls), 'Rippchen' (i.e. spareribs) and 'Würstchen' (i.e. sausages) is *low in contrast* to the *mid-grounding* purple colour seen in the image. On the other hand, the fresh tomatoes, potatoes and onions have a *bright hue*, which contrasts starkly with the *darker hue* of the mid-grounding purple. This facilitates a representation of freshness. The same technique is used in Photo Story 3 materializing the freshness of the apples the German vendor has on offer.

Germans dine and cook in two separate rooms. The *layout* of the flat (very visible throughout the book) indicates this through a white-painted vertical wall which *frames* the two rooms, distinguishing them from each other.

Represented social interpretation (per individual text)

Seen together with the former stage of interpretation analyzed above (i.e. the representational level), a social interpretation of the texts leads to a general, wider social representation of the German society as highly homogeneous.

Social identity and social groups

From what they eat, people in Germany (both native citizens and non-native German visitors) frequently appear as predominantly ethnically white middle-class Caucasians³. At times there is indeed an implication that they look for special offers. This happens particularly when they buy food. However, these examples are sparse (Zwischenspiel 6) compared to the continuous examples and illustrations which lead to the middle class 'genericisation'⁴ of the German society. The people presented throughout the volume either study at University or have a good job. Unemployment does not feature. Furthermore, they can afford to pay up to €1,500 to rent their accommodation (Photo Story 4), they buy expensive branded clothes (summing up to € 228.59 on one shopping outing as in Zwischenspiel 6, also in Photo Story 6) and they afford only fresh very healthy food.

Every individual featuring in the volume seems to belong to the mainstream. There is no mention of any major or minor German sub-culture. Followers of periphery cultures do not feature throughout the book.

Social interaction

At a first glance, women are perceived as equal to men. There appears to be no gender discrimination and both genders appear to be treated equally. For instance, the chef in Zwischenspiel 3 is a male. This could present the idea that males are good chefs and can prepare very tasty food.

However, at a second glance, gender stereotypes still somehow feature in the volume. In Photo Story 5 males appear to be incompetent when buying and/or cooking food. This is a reminder of the traditional conservative association linking cooking to female hands.

The same applies to shopping and its association with female figures. This is predominantly visible when one compares Anja's wittiness and Timo's naivety in Photo Story 6. Overall, German females are

represented as wiser than males. Females appear continuously in leading roles, helping males to solve all kinds of problems.

Beliefs and behaviour

Major and minor religions in Germany do not feature in the textbook. Food linked to Christian religions - predominantly followed by Germans - including food eaten at religious feasts and traditions, including Christmas and Easter, are not mentioned at all. Similarly, food and festivities of minority religions followed by people in Germany do not receive a mention throughout the volume. For example, the book neither mentions nor includes examples of food eaten by Muslims, nor details about the Islamic Ramadan and Eid periods.

All the food items presented in the textbook could give the impression that non-EU citizens from different ethnic backgrounds and nationalities may be friends with Germans but cannot start closer relationships, including family-building ones. The textbook volume seems to suggest that non-European migrants never share time (such as through dining together) with German native citizens. Such close relationships feature either between Germans or between Germans and other EU citizens only, thus excluding non-European citizens completely.

Social and political institutions

It seems that people in Germany live in a very harmonious society with minor social problems. Germans sometimes do disagree and argue but when this happens, they solve such conflicts peacefully and quickly. This representation easily comes out from the way people eating together feature in the selected texts. Whole families appear eating happily around tables. This tends to strengthen the idea that the German society consists of strong families, which face no serious relationship problems (Photo Story 2). Eating does not feature anywhere as an occasion to solve family or relationship issues. Arguments in families (which are rarely encountered) are solved very easily (Zwischenspiel 6). In the Photo Stories and in the Zwischenspiele there is not even one brief mention of divorced or separated couples⁵. Widows and single parents remain unmentioned throughout the volume.

Socialization and the life-cycle

The German society as presented in the textbook is predominantly determined by 20-30-year-old youths and their tastes. Children are simply expected to do what they are told.

People in Germany are very concerned about what they eat and about their health. The only people with disabilities featuring in the textbook volume are old people with hearing impairments. The series sustains the representation that people living in Germany are healthy, fit and good-looking. Only old German people appear weak and at times unable to communicate (Photo Story 2). When they try to involve themselves actively, they either appear nose-y (as Frau Wollenschak in Photo Story 4) or they create confusion and misunderstandings. For example, the old-looking neighbor in Photo Story 4 basically only contributes passively to the story and later ends up cheated by Timo, who considers her to be someone frightening. These and other similar instances add to the representation that old German people can only contribute minimally to social interactions and continuously require the aid of the younger generation.

National history

Throughout the volume the way food items are presented leads the reader to form a homogeneous positive feeling about German history. People in Germany boast about what they cook and what they eat. All these remind learners of glorious events in German history. However, there is no mention of other darker periods of German history including Nazism, the period of National Socialism and the climate brought about by the reunification of Germany.

National geography

People living in Germany appear eating the same food items everywhere around the country. This gives the general impression that today (after the German reunification) German citizens are united and lead a uniform kind of life, shared across the whole country. There is no distinction between those living in the West and those living in the East. The only clear difference highlighted in the textbook is linguistically oriented (Zwischenspiel 3), where language varieties and dialects separate the North and the South. Apart from this, there seems to be no other feature distinguishing between or separating people living in the contemporary Germany society.

Data Analysis of the English as a Foreign Language textbook used in Greece

In its turn, this section will include the outcomes of the analysis of the first book of the main set textbook series 'Think Teen!' (downloadable at <http://ebooks.edu.gr/new/classcoursespdf.php?classcode=DSGYM-A>) used in the Greek English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning context of the secondary school based on the practical application of the MIRROR framework. This section will also include only the representations linked to the food and drink items in the British society.

Multimodal analysis

The *layout* of the chapter dealing with food in the textbook used in the Greek EFL learning context *conceptually* indicates that British people do not have healthy eating habits through the presentation of open-air fast food stalls. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that the education system of Britain cultivates the concept of a healthy diet despite the dominant tendency. Linked to this is the title of the chapter, i.e. 'Are your eating habits healthy?' In this chapter, a British girl, Jennifer, sends an e-quiz about healthy eating habits to her e-friends. Here Jennifer appears as an informed and concerned about healthy diet teenager, thanks to the interpolation of the official British education. This comes in contrast with the dominant unhealthy eating habits of most British people. The whole chapter deals with this contrast between healthy food and what is presented as unhealthy junk food.

The image, i.e. the photograph of Jennifer, indicates that she is a thin girl with healthy eating habits. This comes out from her *body features* and *her body posture*. Furthermore, Jennifer's *direct gaze* ratifies this idea of a healthy lifestyle. By adopting a *direct gaze*, i.e. making direct eye contact with the readers, Jennifer confidently addresses them and in this way what she says about food becomes more credible and reaches the readers even more easily. Additionally, as a teenager, she is presented as a representative of the young generation, who is more informed and better educated about various issues, including healthy diet. Similarly, through the written graphics included in the e-quiz, this idea of healthy vs. junk food

is ratified once again. The way Jennifer formulates the *written graphics* in the e-quiz distinguishes between unhealthy food such as burgers and chips and other more healthy snacks like salads and juices.

This reference to snacks is the bridge to the following photograph of a fried seafood stall that lies on the same page. Two cooks, a woman and a man, are busy frying and bottles of ketchup, mayonnaise and lemon juice are placed in front of them. The *posture* and *gestures* of the cooks direct the movement of the learners' *gaze* and *attention* towards fish and chips that are being fried. This makes it appear as the centrally-placed typical English dish people in Britain buy and enjoy eating when they are in the street. Through this *page layout*, one gets the idea that the British tend to eat junk food when they are outside. This idea is also underpinned by the first page of the same chapter in the exercises book accompanying the main textbook. The chapter starts with the photograph of a cheap self-service steak restaurant that is spread on the *whole page*.

This contrast between healthy and junk food also comes out from the *whole-page* quiz, which is part of the main textbook chapter. On the one side of the quiz, there are *images*, in the form of drawings, of healthy food (fruits, an orange juice, a salad) while on the other side, there are images of junk food (burgers, refreshments, chips). The two food categories discussed in this chapter are put one opposite the other to stress their differences and imply that even though British people tend to prefer junk food, they still have to think about healthy food because of the British education system. Therefore, teenagers like Jennifer are being informed about that and are expected to spread the word. It is also worth mentioning that the fact that cartoons are used instead of real photographs may lead to a situation where healthy food appears less detailed (Van Leeuwen, 1992) and thus features as less important.

In the following page, learners are asked to categorize a list of foods into the healthy and unhealthy ones, just like Jennifer and her classmates do. The *semiotic signifieds* mentioned here indicate that the British education system informs and makes children work on the topic of healthy eating to make them aware of the importance of a proper diet in their life. Further down in a following page, the food pyramid is introduced by Jennifer and it is *centrally placed* on the page to direct the learners' *gaze* towards it and draw their *attention* to healthy food only and to the quantities of healthy food the new generation of British people are taught to eat.

The *modal affordances of colours* contribute to the *materialization* of the contrast between the two food categories. The *background* is white, therefore *neutral*, so that the colours of the foods and the boxes containing them make a *contrast* with it in order to draw the learners' attention to a topic much discussed, which they should be aware of. The initial question 'Are your eating habits healthy?' and the box with drawings of various healthy foods are *bright green*, as a representation of freshness, and healthiness. On the other hand, the photographs depicting the fried seafood stall and the steak restaurant are in a *pale orange* and light pink frame respectively to imply their more controversial nature; they constitute a temptation but people have to be aware of their low nutritional value. Similarly, the box with drawings of various unhealthy foods is orange.

Represented social interpretation (per individual text)

The above representational interpretation, along with the social interpretation of the texts used in EFL in Greece, leads to the social representation of the British society as multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. It is also worth mentioning that the emphasis is put on the use of English as a global language, therefore people from all over the world are shown as its users in this textbook series.

Social identity and social groups

From what they eat, people in Britain concerned about their diet appear as predominantly young, mainly teenagers. There is an implication that British people are prone to eating junk food when they are out of their houses. This kind of food is also connected to other working class ethnicities living in Britain, as quite a few colored people are standing outside the cheap steak restaurant depicted in the food chapter of the exercises book. This unhealthiness of the British diet also appears in a postcard written by a Greek teenager in London (Unit 5 Lesson 3), who talks about the food as 'tasty but not really healthy'. Just like in the Maltese GFL textbook though, the majority of the examples and illustrations lead to the middle class 'genericisation' of the British society. The teenagers that are the main characters presented throughout the volume (given that this textbook has been written to be used by teenagers) are aware of the contrast between healthy and junk food and of the benefits of a healthy diet (Unit 6 Lesson 1). Unemployment or working class social contexts do not openly feature. Every individual featuring in this volume seems to belong to the mainstream as in the Maltese GFL textbook. There is no clear mention of any major or minor British sub-culture nor any followers of periphery cultures feature throughout the book.

Social interaction

As in the Maltese GFL textbook, in the texts from the Greek context women are generally perceived as equal to men without any gender discrimination elements. Both male and female teenagers and adults equally feature in the textbook and there are no gender-related job discriminations either. For instance, the chef in Jennifer's school, Jerry Young, in Unit 3 Lesson 3, is a male.

Nevertheless, at a second glance, gender stereotypes somehow feature in this volume, too. In Unit 6 Lesson 1, Jennifer, a girl, appears to be concerned about healthy eating habits putting forward the stereotype that females are more concerned about their diet than males. Furthermore, the depiction of a male chef also implies that male chefs are good and efficient professionals, a stereotype that also features in the Maltese GFL textbook.

Beliefs and behaviour

As in the Maltese GFL textbook, there is no mention neither of the major and minor religions in Britain nor of the food linked to the religious celebrations. Christmas only features in a picture of the exercises book (Unit 4 Lesson 1), where Jenny and her mum want to go shopping to buy presents.

As for the habits of having lunch and dinner, the characters of the textbook seem to have them at school, at home, in a children's camp when on holiday and when they go out with friends, but the tone used is neutral. There is no specific mention of the coexistence of different ethnicities over meals.

Social and political institutions

It seems that people in Britain live harmoniously and no serious social problems feature in the volume. There is a concern about the environment, but people, and even teenagers, seem to be aware of the dangers it faces and take up action to protect it (Unit 4 Lesson 2). As for the interpersonal relationships, no arguments or disagreements appear in the textbook.

The British society seems to be well-organized, with enough jobs for everyone, satisfactory education and health systems, and harmonious families. In fact, no family problems feature in the textbook and there is only one brief mention of a French teenager, Jean Paul, who lives with his mother and his stepfather and stepbrother.

Socialization and the life-cycle

Since the main characters of the EFL textbook are teenagers, the British society is represented by this age group with a few other children and middle-aged people featuring in it. So, their lives, preferences and tastes are in the very center of the interest here. British people appear to respect and take into consideration teenagers' needs and desires and teenagers are presented as mature and thoughtful.

It is detected though that not all generations are represented in the textbook. Mainly teenagers and young people feature there, along with some children and middle-aged people. Older people are not mentioned at all. It appears that not only the British but also the international society represented in this textbook consists of young and healthy people, with the exception of the reference to the blind (Unit 7 Lesson 1).

National history

Unlike the Maltese GFL textbook, this volume does not relate the British people's diet with their history and no historical events are mentioned in it. Nevertheless, a lot of well-known English sights are featuring in the textbook, which imply the importance of the British history as they are all connected with glorious events or prominent personalities of Britain. We can mention the Tower of London, Big Ben, the city of London and the towns of Windsor and Cambridge (Unit 5 Lesson 3) and also Buckingham Palace and the Houses of Parliament (exercises book Unit 2 Lesson 3).

National geography

People living in Britain do not appear to have gastronomical differences and geography is not connected to the dishes people eat around the country. Throughout the textbook, the eating and drinking items are not connected to the inhabited geographical parts of Britain and there is no mention of any gastronomical differences among the local cuisines of the different British provinces.

The analysis of both FL textbooks, i.e. those used in Malta and Greece, tends to suggest that even though the teaching and learning contexts are different and the textbooks are published by different publishers - the one by a German publisher for the teaching of GFL and the other by a committee of the Greek Ministry of Education for the teaching of EFL in the Greek state schools -, they share some common characteristics. First, they tend to essentialize and frequently present limited idealized cultural representations of life in the communities where the foreign languages are spoken as FL. Second, the cultural representations are standard and stereotypical and there are not many references to other peripheral ethnicities,

unprivileged social groups and sub-cultural groups living in Germany and Britain. Last but not least, the use of multimodal prompts in both cases is complementary to and illustrative of the written texts; so teachers are not encouraged to focus on them much.

Video-making as a multimodal way of foreign language learning

Based on the FL textbooks' interpretation conducted above and the need for a more critical evaluation of the foreign cultures represented in class, we hereby propose the use of video-making as a productive application of multimodality in foreign language teaching and learning. This suggestion comes from our experience as practitioners and from the existing bibliography discussed below. Our suggestion still needs to be tested in the field, something we intend to do as a next step of our research project.

In this respect, we put forward Burn and Durran's (2007) argument that the interpretation and creation of meaningful media texts demand the use of semiotic tools. The semiotic approach that they propose as a good tool of interpreting media texts derives from social semiotics, according to which all texts accomplish three social functions: the *representational*, as they represent the world somehow, the *interactive*, as they interact and communicate with audiences, and the *organizational*, as they have to be organized according to a system and combine various modes in order to create understandable messages. These social functions take place in each semiotic process, one of which is video-making. Burn and Durran (2007) have also adopted a model of multimodal communication consisting of a four strata scheme proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001). It includes *discourse, design, production, distribution*, and Burn and Durran have also added *interpretation*. Discourse refers to the aspects of reality coded and represented in the media text. Design is the mode or modes used to convey meaning while production has to do with the medium chosen to create the text. Distribution refers to the means used to promote and distribute a media text to the audiences and the last stratum, *interpretation*, refers both to the way people understand media texts and also to the way they produce their own texts.

Since our textbooks' analysis focused on the representations of the eating and drinking habits of the people living in the countries where the languages are spoken as mother tongues, we suggest a video-making activity treating the same topic.

In the case of Maltese classrooms, students should be encouraged to widen the perspective adopted by the textbook and in their video include a greater variety of food eaten by different social and ethnic groups living in Germany. The research students will conduct should lead to videos including a wider variety of food and drink items. One should also encourage students to adopt non-judgmental attitudes when presenting these 'non-traditionally German' types of food and drink in their videos.

As far as the Greek EFL learning context is concerned, after the sessions based on the textbook, students should be asked to make in groups their own videos presenting in English the eating and drinking habits of the British people, as a result of their own research on the topic. Since English-speaking people live in a number of countries with a considerable differentiation in their diet due to the different geographical, climatic and socio-cultural factors, we can assign each group of students to work on the diet of a different

English-speaking country. In this way, students will realize that when we talk about English, we actually talk about Englishes, both linguistically and culturally.

Conclusions

As we have noticed, despite the differences observed in the textbooks used in Malta and Greece, in both countries the outcomes indicate a set of limited representations of the societies where the languages taught are spoken as mother tongues. Therefore, they do not reflect the multiple and complex realities that reside both on a local and on a national level in Germany and Britain. That is why we propose video-making for foreign language classes with similar limited stereotypical representations. Through this suggestion, limited representations could be widened and could become less judgmental and more inclusive. The use of multimodality for educational purposes, and more precisely for foreign language learning, can be creatively put in practice through the design, production and distribution of the students' videos. In this way, the knowledge acquired from the textbooks could be consolidated through its practical application and also expanded through the students' research in the field, an assumption that remains to be proven through further fieldwork in the near future.

Compared to other interpretations where various frameworks have been applied (Byram, 1993; Cremona, 2019; Maijala, 2006; 2007; 2008) and which typically focus on the foreign language textbooks used in one country only, the added value of this paper is its comparative nature, focusing on textbooks used in different and diverse national learning contexts. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that due to word count and space limit this attempt could focus only on one section of each textbook. This limited focus has given us the strength of deep analysis but at the same time, if we could work on more sections of the books or on the whole of them, we could have a more comprehensive interpretation of them. Furthermore, as an extension of that, it would be good to conduct an empirical study researching what students, teachers and even policy-makers think about and how they react to our interpretations of the textbooks. In this way, we would allow different interpretations to form, which is what multimodality is all about; to give space to different interpretations. Therefore, the ideas presented in this paper could serve as an initiation for further research since according to Derrida (1972), everything becomes complete when the missing parts are tackled.

Footnotes

1. No parts of the analyzed texts have been included or reproduced in this article due to copyright reasons.
2. The underlined terms are the multimodal terms included in the analysis.
3. Only three pictures throughout the volume (not part of the Photo Story or the Zwischenspiele) show people of a different ethnicity (Herr Kosha in Lektion 1 D4; Mertin and Elif in Lektion 2 C2c and Seri and Mori in Lektion 2 C3).
4. Genericisation: Where generalized essences and classes constitute the real (Van Leeuwen, cited in Coulthard & Caldas-Coulthard, 1996).
5. Throughout the volume the only brief mention of a divorced couple is found in Lektion 2 exercise D3.

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