

SEMIOTICS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING. BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS AS INTERSEMIOTIC TRANSLATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE COURSE BOOKS

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Abstract

This article discusses a specific aspect of English language teaching as a foreign language in Greece. This subject is further aided by Semiotics and Translation through the synergy of semiotic systems incorporating the views of Charles S. Peirce. More specifically, after a brief survey of what existed in the past, concerning the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek primary schools, readers will be introduced to the English language teaching curriculum for sixth grade primary school students which mentions non-verbal forms of communication, as well as to the role of course book illustrations. Both approaches focus upon the intersemiotic value of illustrations in connection with the texts that accompany them. This study proves that the sixth grade English course book includes a broad variety of visual systems which constitute the symbols and icons of the book according to Charles S. Peirce's categorization.

Key words

foreign language teaching, intersemiotic translation, book illustrations, primary schools

1 Prologue

Primary school teachers need to understand how children make sense of the world and how they learn; therefore they need skills of analyzing learning tasks and of using language to teach new ideas to groups of children in class. Teaching languages to children needs all the skills of the good primary teacher in managing children and keeping them on task, plus a profound knowledge of the language, of language teaching, and of language learning (Cameron 2001: xii). Before proceeding with our study it would be interesting to see how and when the English language was introduced into the Greek primary school system.

English as a foreign language was taught in Greek junior and senior high schools long before it was introduced to primary schools across the country. Changes in Europe, especially changes brought about by the expansion of the European Union, had made it necessary for English to be taught in primary schools too. In 1987 English was first introduced, experimentally, in approximately 120 Greek primary schools. Today the teaching of English in Greek primary schools starts from the third grade and finishes in the last year of senior high school. By the

time of the initial introduction of English in primary school in 1987, English was taught three hours per week (in some cases, four hours per week if the teacher had some extra workload to fill). It was also taught in the subsequent two years as well. In total, English was taught for 270 hours in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades in primary school (Sougari 2000: 56).

The purpose of teaching English as a foreign language in Greek primary schools was to help the learners communicate not only with the native speakers of the language (Presidential Decree No. 15, 1996), but also with people of other nationalities who use English as a common code of communication. Thus Greek learners were expected to learn to use English as a *lingua franca*. It was advisable not to place emphasis on the cultural elements of the country or countries in which English is the national language but it was considered more appropriate to promote the international elements of the English language. The aim of teaching English as a foreign language in Greek primary schools was for learners to achieve both short and long-term effects. In other words students had to satisfy their immediate needs to convey simple messages in the classroom context and/or in social interactions while, at the same time, they had to be in a position to pursue educational, social and professional goals (Sougari 2000: 58).

For the purpose of fulfilling the aforementioned goals a course book consisting of three different levels (fourth, fifth and sixth grade) was constructed and was entitled “Fun Way English”¹. Nevertheless, after over twenty years of use, the course book became obsolete and was replaced by newer and more modern course books entitled English 4th Grade Pupil’s Book, English 5th Grade Pupil’s Book and English 6th Grade Pupil’s Book. These course books were accompanied by the Pupil’s Workbook for all three levels, the Teacher’s Book and the cassettes for the course book. The aforementioned books were introduced to all Greek primary schools in the school year 2009-2010 and are in standard use today.

2 Introduction

According to the National Curriculum for foreign language teaching in Greece, the purpose of teaching a foreign language is to develop the linguistic abilities of students, thus allowing them to communicate in different linguistic and cultural environments. By learning a foreign language the concepts of literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism are promoted. Foreign languages aid in the development of skills in students, which will help them cope with real communication circumstances, both expected and unexpected. This is done by using linguistic, paralinguistic or even non-linguistic forms of communication. The use of illustrations aid towards this direction as they facilitate the decodification of

linguistic and cultural elements which are very often translated intersemiotically. By being taught a foreign language, students realize that a foreign language is not only used between people who have a different way of thinking and speaking but also for the acquisition and administration of information which is derived from different cognitive fields.

The inch pin of the curriculum's cognitive content is threefold: literacy, multilingualism and multiculturalism. More specifically, for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek primary schools, the special purposes of the course are to guide students in gradually developing their ability to participate in a communicative interaction by using the English language as a common code of communication. At a medium-term students will be made able to cater for their basic needs, and last but not least their social needs. In the long term students will be able to fulfill their basic needs, such as their work field needs or their educational and social needs, and most importantly to become sensitive to and interested in lifelong learning.

The teaching and learning of English as a foreign language aims at achieving the following:

- Extending students' "communicative horizons" beyond the borders of their language community.
- The use of a second language will aid students in their search, discovery and understanding of information which is relevant to their needs.
- It will also help students discover a new way of organizing their thoughts, a new way of expressing their experiences, etc.
- Learning English as a foreign language will aid students in developing one of their basic skills which is "learning how to learn" empirically.
- It will also aid students in developing their level of "linguistic awareness"² and to function as mediators between monolingual individuals and other language groups.
- The broadening of the range of roles students could play in different circumstances, while using the English language.
- The learning, as well as the indirect experience students will acquire from different cultural institutions, rules, values and attitudes, etc.

The use of both languages should come naturally, as their main aim is to facilitate communication. It should also inform (speaker and listener), aid listener in the evaluation of the information received, to record and to present data which is derived from different cognitive fields and from different people who may come from the same or different countries. Thus, within this framework, students of Greek primary schools should be able to – gradually – develop and refine

the following skills: a) perceptive and productive language skills such as the understanding and production of cohesive oral and written language; b) the understanding and use of linguistic and mental concepts; c) the production of linguistic speech acts; d) strategies of learning and communication. Successful language learners are considered to use the following strategies: metacognitive strategies, cognitive techniques, memory strategies, social strategies, affective strategies for managing emotions, attitudes, and motivation (Oxford et al. 1990: 198); e) the skill to use the mother tongue and the foreign language simultaneously; f) the skill and ability to develop a multicultural awareness.

The teaching of English in Greek primary schools aims at developing the students' ability to understand and produce oral and written language. More specifically, students must understand and learn the phonemic and graphemic system of the language, understand the oral, written and intellectual concepts of the language. Students should also be able to use the aforementioned information to produce appropriate speech acts, to work upon their learning and communicative strategies to develop their skills in using both mother tongue and second language simultaneously and last but not least to develop a multicultural awareness. This is the reason why the language exercises and thematic units of the course book, as we will see in the analysis which follows, were very carefully chosen.

3 Teaching methodologies

In this section we will be looking at the basic teaching techniques of teaching English as a foreign language, the activities which aid the learning of the language, the way project work is approached, as well as an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching.

3.1 The basic teaching techniques

To design the teaching process which is to be followed one has to bear in mind the level of English language knowledge the students have, including their interests. The application of different methodologies and teaching strategies will motivate students in participating actively in school activities. This is why teachers may use different techniques which can be either guided (memorization, note-taking, revision, transcribing, reading aloud, mother tongue use, comparing the foreign language to the mother tongue or to other languages), or free and creative (games, free expression, dramatization).

The systematic use of dialogues in the teaching of English as a foreign language is the essence of active learning, while conversation is the core of an interdisciplinary approach to language teaching. The learning of the English language will generally give learners the opportunity to become eloquent speakers through the use of appropriate questions, through experimental approaches to different subjects, and through the examination of the purposes and aims of teaching and learning English as a foreign language so as to choose the most appropriate approach or methodology. Encouraging students to participate in small or large groups within which they will be able to exercise the oral use of the language in the form of a dialogue will help them develop both their oral and their communicative skills.

3.2 Language-learning activities

Aiming at a student-centered approach to English language teaching and learning, the authors of the course book should bear in mind that the language activities should promote knowledge through experience. These activities should fulfill some or all of the following criteria: a) students should be motivated to participate in the language activity. Activities should aim at developing different learning skills in students' studies so that by the end of their studies they will have a clear picture of the English language; b) activities should be formulated in such a way that they will promote both individual and group work (in pairs or in a group of more than two people) as in this way students' social and organizational skills are also developed; c) activities should trigger students' different learning strategies; d) activities should promote students' intellectual development, as well as the organization of their thoughts; e) activities should – in some cases – permit solutions (given by students) which are a result of the specific strategy used by the student, himself, or which may be a combination of both his personal skills and his strategies; f) activities may also be self-initiated by students; g) activities should determine the parameters which are characteristic of the communicative event in which the students participate.

3.3 Approaching project work

One of the most creative ways of teaching and learning a foreign language is through project work. Through the enforcement of project work students do not only learn a foreign language, but also become aware of the social and cultural dimensions of the language that make communication in the foreign language effective.

For project work to become effective teachers should: a) choose the subject carefully; b) choose a subject which is of common interest to the group; c) encourage brain storming; d) encourage active learning through group work; and e) last, but not least, the English language as a “carrier” of culture and information will aid effectively towards an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, while at the same time it will become the means with which knowledge will be transferred to learners.

Project work is highly valued in Greece today, even though this method of teaching and learning has been in world-wide use since the sixties. According to Taratore-Tsalkatidou (2002: 73-83), some reasons why this is so follow:

- it contributes to the development of interpersonal relationships between students, as well as between students and teachers, thus building on their communicative skills;
- it introduces students to basic democratic principles such as the acceptance of the “other”, communication, the programming or planning of future activities, self-discipline, etc;
- it allows the teacher to adapt his teaching methods without any limitations;
- it allows students to develop their creativity and critical thinking;
- it broadens students’ perceptions as they (the students) are obliged to search for and use material which is appropriate for the needs of their project;
- students are guided towards a “self-initiated” form of action which will teach them how to attain knowledge through personal participation and effort;
- students do not just “accept” the information they receive from their teachers but take initiative by collecting the necessary information and material for the project;
- students are positively strengthened by the success of their project thus gaining the courage to continue their good work;
- it “ ‘liberates’ students thoughts and their ‘right’ of expression”;
- it helps students develop their personalities, etc.

3.4 An interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of the English language

Language, as well as its teaching and learning, evolves in time and space as it is both a code of communication and a semiotic system which displays similarities and differences to other linguistic and non-verbal systems with which it interacts. The Council of Europe (2001: 9) stresses the importance of

the contribution of non-verbal communication (practical actions, paralinguistic and paratextual features) in the learning of languages. More specifically, as concerning the relation between a text and an image, Bezemer and Kress (2009: 252) remark that “the relations between image and writing have remained constant over time in English: throughout the 20th century, most of the images have been ‘subordinate’ to writing, some have been on an equal footing with writing, and none have been super ordinate to writing”.

Languages of other disciplines are also connected to fundamental concepts. Today the teaching of English demands for an interdisciplinary approach. In other words, its teaching should be connected to other school subjects such as literature, history, mathematics, geography, etc. Through the topics of these disciplines students will familiarize themselves with both the language and the science under scrutiny.

4 Supplementary teaching material

Besides the course book, students are obliged to carry a portfolio with them in which, during the course of the school year, they will store polysemiotic material such as newspaper clippings/articles, pictures³, other written and visual material, etc. Through the use of this material students will be able to: a) understand the cultural diversity of the English speaking world, b) understand the multi-dimensional character of the English speaking world, and, c) by using the English language effectively Greek speakers will be able to communicate or to transmit to the “outside world” cultural elements of their country.

To complete the project work effectively, students should have their desks appropriately placed within the classroom (spatial semiotics). The blackboard/whiteboard, as well as the notice board and the color (which is also a semiotic non-verbal system) of the walls also play an important part in the effective and successful completion of the project work. A well-equipped library and the subscription to English language magazines, journals, periodicals (depending on the age and interests of students) are also considered very important, and so is the use of the internet.

5 Semiotics, translation and language teaching

Illustrations in textbooks, especially for the teaching of the mother tongue⁴, as well as for the teaching of a foreign language, have prompted language teachers towards the teaching of language through the use of polysemiotic texts⁵ and through linking semiotics with the communicative approach to language

teaching and learning⁶. The coexistence of many semiotic systems, very often, leads to an intersemiotic translation, in other words to their transmutation – both terms are synonymous according to Jakobson⁷ (2004 [1959]) – as they function as intensifiers rapidly dispersing knowledge⁸. Semiotics and translation serve the field of teaching through research, the value of which has been enthusiastically perceived by scholars. Scholars, such as McCannell and McCannell (1982: 153) argue that “we could be on the verge of a new era of freedom in intersemiotic studies, the opening of the direct analytic relation between semiotic systems”.

More importantly for the teaching of a foreign language Nöth (1995: 222) specifies that “there are three main areas of contact between semiotics and the theory of foreign language teaching: non-verbal and visual communication, cultural semiotics, and the methodology of vocabulary teaching”. Further on we will see that intersemiotic translation “slips into” all three fields because of its collaboration with all three of the aforementioned fields with the different semiotic systems.

6 Intersemiosis and symbolicity

The illustrations which are under scrutiny in this study are approached through Charles S. Peirce’s (CP 2.247-2.249, c 1903) stance who categorizes signs as icons, indexes or indices, and symbols. He further states that “a sign can refer to an Object by virtue of an inherent similarity (“likeness”) between them (icon), by virtue of an existential contextual connection or spatiotemporal (physical) contiguity between sign and object (index), or by virtue of a general law or cultural convention that permits sign and object to be interpreted as connected (symbol)”.

Peirce proposed a complex classification of signs precisely in terms of the different relationship which each manifested between *signans* and *signatum*, or *signifier* and *signified*. In doing so, he argued that he was confronting nothing less than the foundations of logic itself (Hawkes 1992: 126). According to Hawkes (1992), for Peirce, logic exists independently of both reasoning and fact. Its fundamental principles are not axioms but definitions and divisions and these derive ultimately from the nature and functions of signs. As a result, logic can be seen as the science of the general necessary laws of signs. Logic, that is, the science of signs, translation, illustrations, and symbols will be further studied bearing in mind that “intersemiotic translation is iconic symbolicity, or symbolicity degenerate in the second degree” (Gorlée 1994: 163). This type of translation will be studied here for the teaching of language with the use of the new sixth grade primary school book. The course book was prepared and written

by Greek teachers and published by the National Publishing Company of Greek Course books.

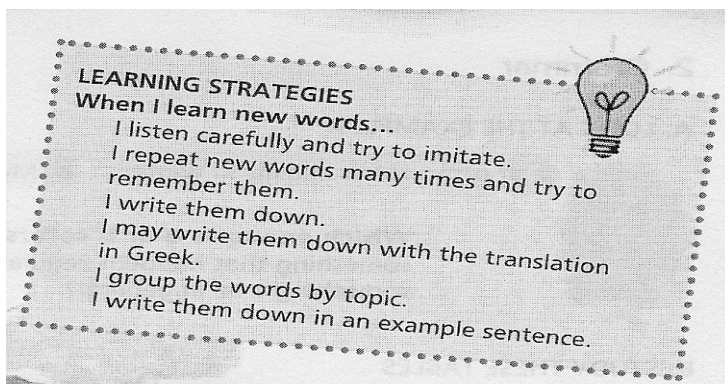
6.1 Intersemiotic translation of symbols: A restricted convention

A common concept in many course books is intersemiotic translation by specialized convention. In this case small iconic messages⁹ or systems are placed close to verbal systems and are used emphatically and repeatedly in an attempt to codify and facilitate communication between writers of the course book and the student him/herself, thus prompting a conventional relationship with its referent. We thus ascertain the appearance – as a visual system – of a “light bulb” which radiates light (iconic message 1) when we talk about “learning strategies” which are the verbal system and which the writers of the course book are trying to translate iconically. We should stress here that the “light bulb”, as well as many other iconic messages which follow, further on, consist of drawings. The drawing and the photograph are enlisted, by the Council of Europe (2001: 90), as paratextual features and express devices. These devices have a similarly “paralinguistic” role played in relation to written texts. It is important to stress that in the Anglo-Saxon culture, even in non-instructive (teaching) environments such as the moving pictures of Walt Disney, we find the “light bulb” which “gives out light” to stress the conception of a new idea. Ideas are the ultimate quarry of structuralist thinking into which rational human beings give in. As Jameson (1972: 109) mentions: “[they are] an explicit search for the permanent structures of the mind itself, the organizational categories and forms through which the mind is able to experience the world, or to organize a meaning in what is essentially in itself meaningless”.

Jameson’s stance is interesting as it shows that, even though the writers of the course book are Greeks, the choice of iconic messages that appear intersemiotically in translation are determined – as expected – by cultural conventions. This choice abides to the conception that “a socio-semiotic approach to foreign language teaching requires a high level of cultural awareness from both teachers and students” (Pütz 1997: 91). This awareness comes from the *decryption* of the sign systems “one possibility to understand a culture is to learn the languages of the culture, the sign systems operating within the culture” (Torop 2002: 600).

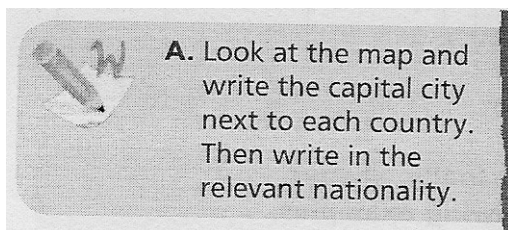
At this point, we should mention that, in parallel to the aforementioned, we use an intralingual translation as the verbal utterance “learning” is analyzed in connection to other verbal utterances such as “listen, repeat, write, may write down, group, write down”. Very rarely do we find, in foreign language teaching course books in Greece, instructions which state that translation is a skill from

the foreign language to the mother tongue, which in our case is the translation in Greek (interlingual translation). The value of translation and interpretation, as a language activity, is acknowledged by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. It states that “the language learner/user’s communicative language competence is activated in the performance of the various *language activities*, involving reception, production, interaction or mediation (in particular interpreting or translating). Each of these types of activity is possible in relation to texts in oral or written form, or both” (2001: 14).



(iconic message 1)

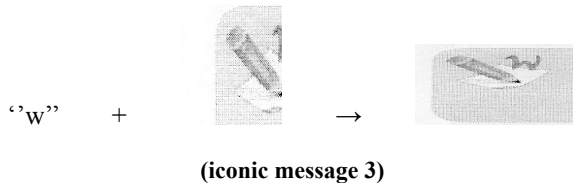
Another intersemiotic convention that the writers of the course book bring forth is the iconic message 2. It includes a pencil which is writing something on a piece of paper upon which rests the English letter “w” and which is intersemiotically translated into the English utterance “write” (verbal system). In this case we are talking about an iconic, not a visual message, as the whole message is structured upon both the verbal and the visual system.



(iconic message 2)

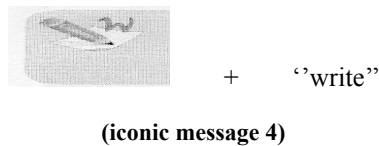
It is worth mentioning that an iconic message is structured upon an *intrasystemic intersemiotic translation* (iconic message 3) as a plain iconic message (visual system) which consists of a piece of paper and a pencil which is in the process of writing. This is initially translated intersemiotically with the English verbal message “w” = write. More specifically we have the following composition:

iconic message = verbal system + visual system → intrasystemic intersemiotic translation



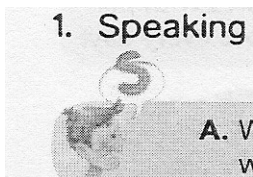
The iconic message is then translated into the verbal utterance “write” (iconic message 4). This continuous intersemiosis constitutes another positive element towards the learning of a foreign language as it is based upon the principle of repetition, rendering the “transmutation” of semiotic systems a central choice to language learning.

iconic system + verbal system → intersemiotic translation



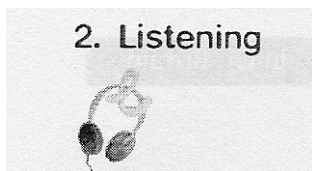
A similar case is the use of an iconic message for the skill of speaking (iconic message 5). In this case we have an intrasystemic intersemiotic translation which takes place within an iconic message which includes a visual system. This is the picture of a boy with a hat and from which springs a bubble with the verbal system “s”, this is the first letter of the word “speaking”. The fact that the boy is wearing a baseball cap seems to promote an Anglosaxon cultural element into the minds of Greek students. This iconic message is interpreted yet further intersemiotically with the English word “speaking”. The visual system is based upon the rhetorical schema of metonymy as the picture of the boy is used by

all possible speakers of a foreign language, the English language in this case. According to Tymoczko (1999: 54-55): “by definition, therefore, translation is metonymic: it is a form of representation in which parts or aspects of the source text come to stand for the whole”.



(iconic message 5)

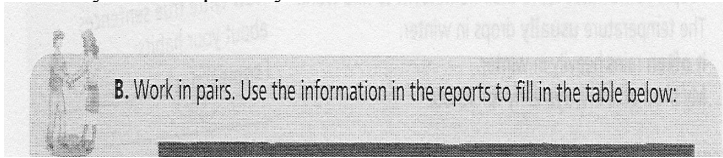
The last skill which is structured upon the same theme is that of listening (iconic message 6). The visual system which consists of a pair of acoustic devices (earpieces) is intersemiotically and intrasystemically interpreted with the verbal utterance “l”, thus composing an iconic message. This is further intesemiotically interpreted by the verbal utterance “listening”. In contrast to the previous speaking skill which uses an “animate object”, a boy, in this case – as is also the case of writing – the writers of the course book use an “inanimate object”, in other words the pair of acoustic devices (the earpieces).



(iconic message 6)

What follows is the use of a visual message (iconic message 7) in which the writers of the course book mention the collective work of the students in the foreign language. The message consists of two children, a boy and a girl, who are holding hands. This is an intersemiotic translation of the English utterance “work in pairs”. Even though the utterance is based upon the cooperation between the two sexes (boys and girls) we can assert that it functions through the rhetorical schema of a synecdoche. It promotes and presents the general – in other words the cooperation between the two sexes (a boy and a girl) – but it does not exclude the cooperation between school students of the same sex, something which is

considered very usual in primary school classes.








(iconic message 7)

6.2 Intersemiotic translation of symbols: An established convention

A different type of conventional relationship exists between the visual systems and their referents which appear in the course book and which deal with the teaching of the verbs of senses (iconic message 9). These verbs appear under visual signs (proxemic system) which are broadly accepted as they are used in different environments and stand for symbols which are not only used for the teaching purposes of the particular course book. Joly (1993: 32) mentions that:

“We should not forget, in actual fact, that if each image is a representation, this will necessarily imply construction rules. If these representations became understood by others (besides those people who construct them) then this happens because there is a minimum of socio-cultural conventions which exist, in other words they owe a large part of their meaning to the character of the symbol, according to the definition given by Peirce” [our translation from French].

Indeed, the first three visual systems (look, sound and taste) are based upon the rhetorical schema of synecdoche as they only present a part of the body (for example, only an eye, only an ear, only a hand). Nevertheless, it is a fact that in order to be able to perceive something all senses and all parts of our body participate (both of our eyes, both of our ears, both of our hands). The last of the visual systems mentioned (which intersemiotically interprets the sense of taste) depicts a pair of woman’s lips which is based upon the rhetorical schema of metonymy, as the same visual system is used for both sexes.

Verbs of senses				
				
look	sound	feel	smell	taste

(iconic message 8)

In contrast to the previous example in which school students simply ascertain the intersemiotic translation and learn through transmutation of the semiotic systems, in this case (iconic message 9) students are asked to proceed to an intersemiotic translation from a visual system to a verbal system. An example of this is the concept of “history” as depicted in the English utterance “*I like history because I like learning about past events*”. Here the intersemiotic translation is conducted through a visual system. It presents urns which are Greek in shape, and also through the process of “*reductio ad absurdum*” (in other words, *the process of elimination*), i.e. removing all visual systems which are not related to the concept under scrutiny and its linguistic representation. This is accomplished through correlating the concept to the symbol: the visual system of the globe with the concept of geography, the guitar with music, the microscope with microbiology, etc.

For Eisele (1983: 91) “pure mathematics in itself, in modern dress, is one of the purest forms of semiotics with its working tools all set up in symbolic or iconic form”. At this point we must mention that arithmetic is imbued with iconicity but it is not an iconic message or an iconic system and neither is it a verbal system as it belongs to the semiotic system of mathematics. This example is also followed by the use of illustrations (designs), as a visual system is considered “codified icons” according to Barthes (1964: 42).



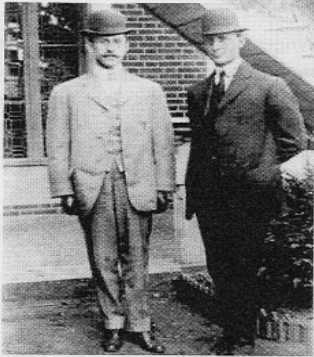
(iconic message 9)

6.3 Intersemiotic translation of icons

Another very interesting category of signs presented in the new course book and interpreted intersemiotically, are according to Peirce the *icons*. In the iconic message number 10, we notice that the verbal system “The Wright Brothers” is interpreted intersemiotically with the visual system which is the photograph of the Wright Brothers. This is followed by an intralingual translation in English which is in fact a summary of the history of the two brothers. It is interesting to see that this photograph is placed next to the verbal utterance “the Wright Brothers” thus involving another semiotic system, that of proxemics¹⁰, in its intersemiotic translation. Joly (1993: 31) theoretically classifies the photograph, together with the film and the video, under the heading of pure icons and characterizes them first and foremost as *index/indices* and secondly as *icons*. We could also assert that photographs are evoked to verify real facts, thus they are often used in order to depict a verbal sign. Bezemer and Kress (2009: 254) consider that “most photos show snapshots of ‘real’ people and ‘real’ objects, in black and white [...] the photos are ‘confronting’ [...] the photos are used to raise ‘critical awareness’”.

The Wright Brothers

Wilbur and Orville Wright invented the first aeroplane in the United States of America in 1903. The Wright brothers thought of the flight when one day their father returned from a trip and surprised the boys with a small toy. (1) The boys admired the toy very much and they said that they wanted to fly. While the boys were growing up, they were always repairing and fixing things. (2) and sold them to classmates. Later, (3) and repaired bicycles. They used the money from the bicycle shop for their first flight experiments. The historic flight lasted for just 12 seconds and covered about 120 feet. This changed the world forever.



(iconic message 10)

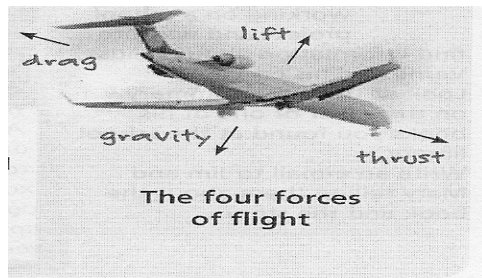
In the example which follows (iconic message 11) we notice the intersemiotic translation of the verbal utterance “parts of the aeroplane”. In this case the visual system which is chosen is once more the photograph – but this time it is of an inanimate object. This iconic message includes three semiotic systems: the visual system (aeroplane), the verbal system (*aileron, rudder, fin, fuselage, nose wheel, landing gear*) and the graphics system (the arrows). This last system does not appear solely as an autonomous semiotic system (the arrows), but it coexists, or is included, within the verbal system, as this appears in the handwritten manuscript. This is in contrast to the rest of the verbal utterances of the course book which ascribe to a printed font, as is the utterance “*Can you label the missing parts of the aeroplane?*” This means that the foreign language student must look for and fill in, using his/her own letters, the corresponding part of the aeroplane, upon the arrows on which there is no verbal utterance.



(iconic message 11)

The same semiotic systems (verbal, visual and graphic) participate in the intrasemiotic translation of the verbal system “the four forces of flight” (iconic message 12). In this case, even if the same visual system is used (aeroplane) and the same graphic system (arrows), there is a change in both the verbal system which is intersemiotically translated as “the four forces of flight” and its intralingual translation (*drag, lift, thrust, gravity*). The student is not encouraged to fill in information concerning the four forces of flight. Nevertheless, the authors of the course book continue to use the handwritten manuscript to read out the instructions which accompany the arrows, but this time the direction of the arrows has changed.

In the previous case the arrows were placed in a direction towards the aeroplane. In this case the arrows commence from the aeroplane itself, in this way, translating intersemiotically an additional piece of information of the verbal message which they accompany. This piece of information is that of the direction of the force of which the aeroplane consisted of. To be more precise, it concerns the intersemiotic translation of each and every one of the four sub-verbal systems. These are followed by the corresponding arrows which accompany them (graphic systems), steering towards an intrasystemic intersemiotic translation, as it takes place internally, in other words, within the iconic message itself.



(iconic message 12)

7 Concluding remarks

With the English language being introduced into the Greek primary school educational system, as early as 1987, one would expect that changes would be made which would facilitate the students learning process. Nevertheless, even today, the Greek Ministry of Education still insists on promoting one course book only starting from the third grade of primary school (from the school year 2010-2011 English will be piloted in some Greek primary schools from the first grade of primary school). Lack of choice has many drawbacks as it does not promote diversity. The initial purpose of teaching English, as a foreign language, in the 1980's and the beginning of the 1990's, was to help students who use English as a common code of communication to communicate with speakers of other languages.

Today, pupils' needs are more diverse and complex. The influx of new technologies, new information and the rapid advances made by the sciences (in general) have made it mandatory to approach the teaching of a foreign language through a different angle or a different perspective. In our case it is the teaching of English as a foreign language through the use of symbols and icons.

The sixth grade English course book includes a broad variety of visual systems which constitute the symbols and icons of the book according to Peirce's categorization. On the other hand, we have located no intersemiotic translation of visual systems which constitute index signs, perhaps because they are identifiable and able to be decoded (especially the symbols) by Greek students. Jakobson (2004 [1959]: 139) connects intersemiotic translation with symbols, especially because prior to the definition of intersemiotic translation which is given, he mentions that by "interpreting a verbal sign: it may be translated into [...] a non-verbal system of *symbols* [our italics]". Later Jakobson (1985 [1977]: 253)

comments on the fact that “the predominant task of symbols in our verbal (and not only verbal) creativity could be considered the mainspring of Peirce [...]”.

In both an interlingual and in an intersemiotic translation the cultural elements of the target language affect the translation process, especially when the target language is a wide spread or a hegemonic language. The fact that English language signs are translated into non-verbal signs (iconic, graphemic, colour) within the framework of an English lesson, sometimes results in the choice of an intrasemiotic translation with non-verbal systems. These are directly or indirectly connected to the Anglo-Saxon culture, and represent the target language but they are also familiar to the Greek culture and more specifically to the Greek students. This has been aided by what is regularly shown on television and the cinema (films, documentaries, advertisements, etc.) promoting the Anglo-Saxon culture and life-style in Greece. This is why it is very easy for verbal signs to be understood and decoded by sixth grade primary school students.

The purpose of the authors of the course book was to use intrasemiotic translation as a strengthening force in the teaching and learning process of the English language, mostly between the verbal and visual systems. Nevertheless, we notice that in many cases there have been findings of intrasystemic intersemiotic translation within the iconic system. In more than one cases we notice the participation of other semiotic systems. These systems are quite typical of, for example, colour (since the course book is addressed to children), graphics (which is supplementary and which strengthens the influence of the visual signs) and its proxemics (as the visual systems are placed physically next to the verbal system and at the same time are also translated intersemiotically).

The intrasemiotic translation or the transformation of semiotic systems, within the foreign language course books, seem to be an important choice for all those people who are specializing in the science of teaching and are directly connected to the use of polysemiotic texts. Torop (2003: 273) observes that “the understanding of intersemiotic translation starts from the realization of text ‘processuality’, on the one hand, and the coexistence of diverse sign systems, i.e. semiotic heterogeneity, on the other hand”. The codification, or the presentation of iconic messages which consist of more than one semiotic systems bends a student’s language insecurity which often derives from his contact with monosemiotic texts in the foreign language. It also gives students a sense of security towards the learning of the foreign language and its culture, thus confirming that semiotics can offer much to the teaching of the foreign language.

Endnotes

- ¹ The adjective/noun “*fun*” connotes the amusing and entertaining side of the teaching and learning of English as a foreign language, upon which the advocates and supporters of the introduction of the English language in Greek primary schools relied. It is interesting to see, at this point, that the English language teaching curriculum proposes, from as early as primary school, the use of non-verbal semiotic systems in the educational processes.
- ² According to Fairclough (1992: 1), “the term ‘language awareness’ has been used since the early 1980’s to refer specifically to the advocacy of a group of language teachers, educationalists and applied linguists of a new language awareness element in the school curriculum, at the top end of primary school or in the early years of secondary school [...]”.
- ³ Students will thus be made able to translate pictures into words by: a) literally reproducing the textual elements in pictures, b) emphasizing specific narrative elements, and c) adapting the picture(s) to a specific ideology or artistic trend (Pereira 2008: 109, 111, 114).
- ⁴ For a more analytical presentation of how semiotics and translation aid in the teaching of the mother tongue, see Kourdis and Zafiri (2010).
- ⁵ According to White Brown (1991: 45) in polysemiotic texts “several codes operate simultaneously to convey the message(s) [...]”.
- ⁶ The categorization of semiotics within the disciplines of communication supported the stance taken by supporters of the communicative approach to the teaching of languages with the use of semiotics. Ransdell (1986: 236) links semiotics to the understanding of communication by stating that “semiotics is a movement towards a comprehensive theory of communication, constructed in terms of interpretational responses to meaning-properties”.
- ⁷ According to Jakobson (2004 [1959]: 139) “intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems”. Other researchers use the term *transmediation* to describe the same phenomenon. Shipe (1998: 107) concludes that “transmediation also makes it clear that visual texts are on an equal footing with verbal texts. It seems necessary, in the logocentric society that we live in today, to make this point and emphasize the significance of picture books in children’s learning”.
- ⁸ Goriée (1994: 168) has a different opinion and states that “information lost must be highest in intersemiotic translation, in which the semiosis shows maximum degeneracy”.
- ⁹ We speak about an iconic system because this system is composed of the verbal, the visual, the colour and the graphics systems, and much – much more. We must mention that the verbal systems also have iconicity in their written discourse. Petrilli (2003: 58-59) states that “if verbal language may be described as a predominantly conventional or symbolic sign system, its method is mainly iconic”, and Peirce (CP 4.544) observes that “the arrangement of the words in the sentence, for instance, must serve as *icons*, in order that the sentence may be understood”.
- ¹⁰ According to Hall (1968: 83): “[proxemics] deals primarily with an out-of-awareness distance-setting.” The Council of Europe (2001: 89) includes proxemics among the paralinguistic actions which aid in the understanding of cultural characteristics of different European cultures.

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Course book under scrutiny

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