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Polysemiotic Signs in Foreign Language Course Books

Language, Iconicity, and Translation in Complementary Function

Abstract: Recently, in most foreign language course books, rubrics of units, activities, and exercises are codified resulting in a peculiar coexistence of semiotic systems to produce or to accentuate meaning, creating thus polysemiotic signs. In this paper, I study the polysemiotic signs of English and French in foreign language course books published in Greece which are composed of verbal and visual signs within the context of Groupe M. Such a relation of semiotic systems also includes intersemiotic and interlingual translation. My main result is that course books are characterized by an increasing visuality that permits reference to a common cultural framework or semiosphere that enables the polysemiotic signs used in course books to be understood by students learning a foreign language.

Keywords: intersemiotic and interlingual translation; language teaching; polysemiotic signs

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1 Introduction: Language and Iconicity

The relationship between language and image has been studied from many aspects, however they usually begin with the premise that they are two distinct – and even contrasting – semiotic systems. Of course, there are researchers that emphasise upon a deeper relationship between the two. Langacker (1987) has argued that iconicity is not just a characteristic of world creation, claiming that even the parts of speech have an iconic referential function built into them. Petrilli (2007: 324), too, has claimed, "if verbal language itself is a conventional system, its method is mainly iconic". Therefore, while there are researchers who even talk about iconicity in language, most studies focus on the different nature of the two semiotic systems and, more specifically, on the function an image

serves when it accompanies a text. These studies essentially constitute an acceptance of the view that the verbal semiotic system has primacy over non-verbal semiotic systems. Researchers used this view as a springboard from which to develop their thesis on the rhetoric of the image, on the use of the image as an intersemiotic translation, on the use of polysemiotic texts in education, and particularly on (native and foreign) language learning.

This paper deals with this thesis, in which the relation between language and iconicity in the *polysemiotic signs* or *systems* of foreign language course books in Greece are studied.[1] More precisely, it examines the polysemiotic signs that are composed of *verbal signs* (utterances) introducing activities or exercises in the foreign language course books, and *iconic visual signs* (images, drawings), and/or *plastic visual signs* (colour, graphics, proxemics), within the context of Groupe M (1992).

The analysis of the present paper consists of three stages. The first stage deals with the two foreign languages namely English and French, in order to examine if culture is a factor that affects the synthesis of the polysemiotic sign and, in particular, that of the visual sign. Secondly, I compare and contrast the polysemiotic signs in the English and French course books written and published by the Greek state for the needs of Greek learners. Furthermore, the selection of these course books was based on the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR), which focus on sociolinguistic competence and the socio-cultural elements in foreign language teaching and where translation is recognised as a necessary macro skill in foreign language teaching.

2 Foreign Language Teaching and Semiotics

For Danesi (2000:167), 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 still at other times, quite different. This is why CEFR promotes the development of the sociolinguistic competence, which is indeed socio-cultural competence. According to CEFR (2001:118), "sociolinguistic competence is concerned with the knowledge and skills required to deal with the social dimension of language use. As was mentioned with regard to

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1 Torop (2004: 59) says, "[A] more novel step was connecting the notion of text with polylinguism or polysystematism".

sociocultural competence, since language is a sociocultural phenomenon, much of what is contained in the Framework, particularly in respect of the sociocultural, is of relevance to sociolinguistic competence". The question naturally arises whether this sociocultural element can be taught to learners through a semiotic approach that does not confine itself to the verbal system, but instead also encompasses non-verbal semiotic systems.

This question is answered by Nöth (1990: 223), who remarks that proposals for adopting cultural semiotics as a foundation in the domain of culture and area studies in foreign language learning have been made by many scholars. This view is also supported by De Carlo (1998: 48), who includes semiotics in those disciplines that have enriched teaching though a cultural approach. An important contribution in this direction was made by the branch of semiotics known as cultural semiotics, whose main proponent was Juri Lotman. Lotman et al. (1975: 57) approached culture as a "functional correlation of different sign systems".

However, for this purpose to be achieved, learners must understand the function of signs in every culture.[2] They are aided in this endeavour by two factors: their teachers and their course books. As regards the former, Morris (1955: 245) stated that "teachers of the native language can play a central role in such education. To show what signs appear in an utterance, how they serve various ends, how they are inadequate or adequate in actual communication". Where course books are concerned, their compilation was based on the view that the signs that appear in an utterance may also be non-verbal. We therefore very rarely encounter monosemiotic, foreign language course books today.[3]

In fact, visual messages are an integral part of foreign language learning. We must of course ask ourselves to what extent this coexistence of verbal and visual signs is governed by specific cultural aspects. In response to the question of whether verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems could coexist Lawendowski (1978: 274) argues that "by recording a string of abbreviations, acronyms, and ideographic signs the interpreter helps his memory to recreate the message in the target language keeping the same 'line of thought', so to speak". Thus, this coexistence helps in the interpretation of the message, much more when intersemiotic translation takes place, since "the codification, or the presentation of iconic messages which consist of more than one semiotic

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2 According to Torop (2004: 65), "the ontology of signs of different cultural texts is based on the nature of intersemiosis".

3 From the 70's Zaliznjak, Ivanov and Toporov (1977: 49) poinponted that ''although some texts are homogeneous in substance, all texts are heterogeneous in that elements of two different sign systems can appear in them''.

systems bends a student's language insecurity which often derives from his contact with monosemiotic texts in the foreign language" (Zafiri and Kourdis 2011: 81).

3 From Roland Barthes to the Groupe M Approach to Visual Semiotics

Eco (1978: 81) says, "[...] if one does not want to consider semiotics as a discipline per se, one should at least consider it as a methodological approach serving many disciplines". In fact, semiotics has greatly boosted the teaching of living languages, especially through the ever broader scope of illustrations included in course books. The scope is indeed so broad that in some cases some semiotic systems or texts (for instance, iconic signs) outweigh some other semiotic systems (for instance, verbal signs) in certain parts of course books. These iconic signs are, however, rather complex in function. As Zaliznjak, Ivanov, and Toporov (1977: 52) remark, "the complexity of a text can be judged by the number of systems of various levels used in constructing it".

The iconic sign, as Barthes demonstrated, contains a plethora of other signs and even complete elements that are interdependent and interactive. While studying a printed advertisement of his time, Barthes (1964: 42) identified three messages: the *linguistic message*, which is usually found in all advertisements, the *coded iconic* or *cultural message* and the *non-coded iconic* or *literal message*. Barthes (43) observes that the cultural message, e.g. colour, is contained in the literal message, e.g. a photo, concluding that when a system is assigned with the signs of another system so as to create its signifiers, then this system is a system of connotation.

Groupe M (1992) elaborated on Barthes' classification and categorised the visual sign into the *iconic visual sign* (Barthes' non-coded message) and the *plastic visual sign* (Barthes' coded message). There is thus a theoretical distinction between *iconic visual*, and *plastic visual signs* that dates back to the early 1980s, when Groupe M (1992), in particular, showed that the plastic elements of images (colours, shapes, composition, text structure) are complete and distinct elements rather than merely an expression of iconic signs. In fact, Groupe M (1992: 123) clarifies that plastic visual signs signify in the manner of

an index or symbol and that iconic visual signs have a signifier whose spatial characteristics are comparable with those of the referent.[4]

Jean Marie Klinkenberg (1996: 288–289), a Groupe M member, mentions that the iconic visual sign is comparable with and imitates a real object, while the plastic visual sign mobilises codes that are based on lines, colours, and texture and that are unrelated to any imitative allusion. According to Groupe M (1992: 35), a visual sign's function is based on a combination of information, and this combination is achieved through contiguous and even similar information.

Both Barthes and Groupe M agree that the visual sign is a polysemiotic sign. However, where a number of semiotic systems coexist, an interaction takes place that frequently fosters rhetoric and intersemiosis. This view is also held by Klinkenberg (1996: 291), who claims that some plastic signs are important because they exploit a plastic rhetoric. We should not be surprised by the use of rhetorical schemes in polysemiotic systems. Barthes (1994: 13) mentions that the art of rhetoric was introduced into institutions of learning and that in schools it was transformed into material for examination (exercises, lessons, tests). This, together with the fact that rhetoric is also a ludic practice, as it creates the conditions needed for the development of rhetorical schemes to generate meaning – mainly synecdoche and metonymy – as we shall later see.[5] Moreover, we should not forget Barthes' saying (1994: 158–159) that "a meaning can never be analysed in an isolated fashion" because "the signs are constituted by differences".

4   Textual and Paratextual Features in Course Books

According to Sipe (1998: 98), "in a picture book, both the text and the illustration sequence would be incomplete without the other. They have a synergistic relationship in which the total effect depends not only on the union of the text and illustrations but also on the perceived interactions or

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4 Barthes (1964: 43) has already characterized non-codified message (plastic sign) as symbolic connotative image. According to Peirce (1995: 114), "sign is applicable to whatever may be found to realize the idea connected with the word; it does not, in itself, identify those things".

5 Combley (2001: 251) remarks, "[R]hetoric is sometimes regarded as the imaginative or poetic use of language, that aspect of language that refuses to be limited to the rigorous demands of logic or rational discourse".

transactions between these two parts". This synergistic relationship is also highlighted by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001: 2) who discuss the concept of *framing* as specific to visual communication and which also includes "the ways in which elements of a composition may be connecting to each other, through the absence of disconnection devices, through vectors and through continuities and similarities of colour, visual shape and so on". Nodelman (1988: viii) also spoke of two parts related in a special manner, noting, "the words and the pictures in picture books both define and amplify each other, neither is as open-ended as either would be on its own". However, can this interaction rely on the same signified?

The answer is 'yes', since intersemiotic translation enables the linguistic message to be visualised, in other words codified, in the effort to anchor the learner's attention. Thinking along these lines, the Council of Europe (2001: 99) has remarked, "the user/learner receives a text from a speaker or writer, who is not present, in one language or code and produces a parallel text in a different language or code to be received by another person as listener or reader at a distance".

This is also why polysemiotic signs are used, since polysemiotic systems are characterised by rhetoric features and functions, such as *anchorage* or *redundancy*, in accordance with Barthes' work (1964: 44). I also demonstrate that redundancy is not only a verbal phenomenon, but also a non-verbal one, by drawing on what Jakobson (2004 [1959]: 139) calls intersemiotic translation, "the interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of non-verbal sign systems".

For Danesi (2000: 23), "… nonverbal dimensions of communication constitute a *cultural grammar* which should be taught in class as explicitly as are the rules of linguistic grammar and rehearsed as regularly as grammar". The Council of Europe (2001: 90) has highlighted the contribution that non-verbal communication (practical actions, paralinguistics, and paratextual features) has made to language learning. According to the Council of Europe (2001: 90), drawings and photographs are paratextual features, and are devices in which a similarly "paralinguistic" role is played in relation to written texts.

5 The Pedagogical Role of Translation in Foreign Language Teaching

In a globalized world translation plays a very important role aiming at overcoming language and cultural barriers, contributing, thus, to the

educational, professional, and cultural mobility in the European Union. So it should not come as a surprise that the use of translation, interlingual and intersemiotic, exist in the study of the polysemiotic systems of the book, since according to many researchers (Cook 2001: 119; House 2009: 59; Leonardi 2010: 17; etc.), translation has been proposed as a means for learning and teaching a foreign language. Petrilli (2010: 271) adds that "translation is functional to the claim that a *mathesis universalis* tends to absorb the unique act of saying, listening, interpreting".[6] For this reason, the Council of Europe (2001: 15) states, "a learner at school who has to translate a text from a foreign language (task) may look 'to see' if a translation already exists". As we will see later, intersemiotic or/and interlingual translation are used as a means for learning and teaching a foreign language for Greek students.

6 An Assessment of Course Books

The English and French language course books selected were published in 2007 and 2008 and should in theory comply with the criteria of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages mentioned in the teaching of the cultural element through verbal and non-verbal signs. With this in mind, we examine the relationship between verbal and (iconic and plastic) visual signs in A2–B1 level course books published in Greece, France, and the UK. Polysemiotic signs are dealt with by dividing the messages into verbal, iconic visual, and plastic visual signs, in the manner adopted by Groupe M (1992).

6.1 Course Books of the English Language

Before we present the visual messages of the English language course book, we must point out that the iconic sign is never a photograph, but rather a drawing. In fact, Bezemer and Kress (2009: 253–254) note, "in textbooks of English, drawings are usually commissioned artwork, produced by [...]". The researchers go on to affirm, "most drawings show an 'imagined' world, with imagined people, animals, objects, in full colour [...] are usually 'friendly' and 'funny' [...] appear to be entertaining". In our case, most of the drawings depict people and

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6 For Lawendowski (1978: 274), "since spoken messages are wrapped in a bundle of accompanying non-verbal messages, the interpreter has a difficult decision to make each time he does his job: how much of the non-verbal messages should he convey".

objects in full colour, are truly learner-friendly, and sometimes even playful. The polysemiotic signs that follow were taken from the *Think Teen! 1ˢᵗ Grade of Junior High School* English course book. The student's book was edited in Greece. It is a beginner's book written by Greek teachers of English and is given to lower secondary school pupils who have been taught English in the last four years of primary school.

In the first polysemiotic system (Figure 1), we note the coexistence of the verbal, iconic visual, and plastic visual signs. More specifically, the polysemiotic sign is structured around the verbal sign 'Reading, Speaking and Writing'. We also see that there are three iconic visual signs – two on opposite ends and one in the middle – depicting an open book, a boy with a speech bubble coming out of his mouth, and a pencil that is writing.[7] We note that the iconic visual sign of the boy is located directly above the verbal utterance 'speaking', while the book and pencil are further away from the utterances 'reading' and 'writing'. The position of the iconic visual signs may lead to the view that the writers of the book have used the proxemic code as a means of emphasising the skill of speaking, given how close the linguistic and iconic messages are to each other.

While iconic visual signs are an intersemiotic translation of verbal utterances, in rhetoric they function as a metonymy.[8] The utterance 'reading' is not semantically exhausted with a book, since other signs, such as newspapers, magazines, and so on, can also be read. Similarly, the act of 'speaking' can also be performed by a woman, girl, man, or even a baby, and the act of 'writing' can also be achieved using a ball-point pen, fountain pen, or another medium. Of course, each of the three linguistic actions cannot be visualised through an iconic visual sign that expresses all of the dimensions mentioned above. Thus, the writer's choice of metonymy is supported by the symbolic hypostasis of the iconic sign chosen. The first conclusion drawn is thus that, in this particular polysemiotic sign, the intersemiotic translation is based on the metonymic use of symbols.

Interestingly, the plastic visual signs used do not seem to participate in the intersemiosis that evolves. The colours used are, of course, yellow, blue, green, and red – colours which, according to Eco (2003: 427), are part of an

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7 According to Eco (1993: 146), "[I]f a speech bubble ends with a tail pointing toward the speaker's face, it is an expression of spoken discourse".
8 For Danesi (2000: 150–151), metonymy can be treated pedagogically and the main point to be made is that knowing how this constitutes conceptual fluency will put second language learning into a better position by incorporating the aforementioned elements into instructional practices and into the development of appropriate pedagogical materials.

international language that guarantees the translatability of the iconic message. In addition, the typography of the verbal signs does not appear to carry any meaning. It is, however, interesting to see that the utterances begin with a capital letter, a feature common to the Anglo-Saxon cultural system. Moreover, the course book's editors chose to use a non-verbal sign (&) to render the utterance 'and', which is not appropriate for low-level language learners. In our opinion, a verbal sign that would be more easily understood by the learner should have been used.

Figure 1: Polysemiotic sign 1

The polysemiotic sign in Figure 2 follows the same pattern as in Figure 1. In this example, there are two utterances/skills, 'Reading' and 'Listening'. Here, a set of headphones is used to portray the second skill. This iconic visual sign is once again, metonymically speaking, an intersemiotic translation of the verbal utterance. Unfortunately, in Greek classrooms pupils do not use headphones during listening exercises! Their symbolic use is nevertheless a given in course books. In addition, as regards the plastic visual signs, proxemics seems to have been used once again to foster intersemiosis, since the iconic visual signs are positioned next to the utterances, and the colours appear to enhance the contrast between the two iconic visual signs, with a light colour chosen for the book and a dark colour for the headphones.

Figure 2: Polysemiotic sign 2

The polysemiotic signs that follow (Figures 3 and 4) present a different situation, their composition expressing a sexist view. More specifically, the polysemiotic sign with the verbal utterance 'Grammar Link' has been intersemiotically translated using the drawing of a girl wearing glasses reading a book. It may not be accidental that a girl was chosen, since society considers boys to be weaker students when it comes to language and literature and better than girls at computers.

We should note at this point that it is the utterance 'grammar' that identifies the book the girl is holding as a grammar book. Without this utterance we could not have determined what type of book it is. Similarly, in polysemiotic sign 4, the utterance 'Project' is rendered intersemiotically using the drawing of a boy (we have drawn this conclusion based on the fact that baseball caps are widely used by boys in the Anglo-Saxon world). In this case, as in the case of the girl before, society considers boys to be more familiar with computers. Here, too, the verbal sign contributes decisively to the generation of meaning, since it directs the learner to the activity aimed at by the polysemiotic sign.
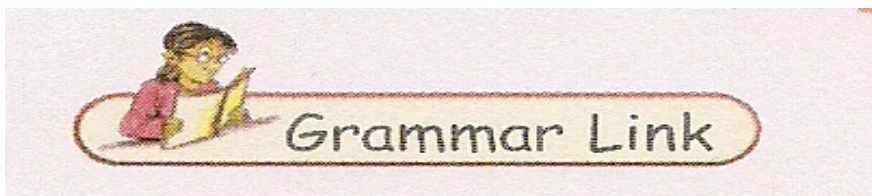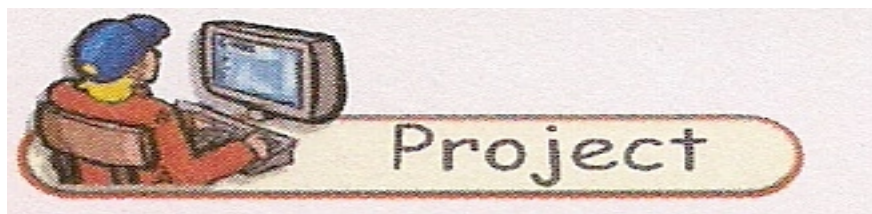
Figure 3: Polysemiotic sign 3

Figure 4: Polysemiotic sign 4

In the polysemiotic sign which follows (Figure 5) it appears that the verbal sign 'Vocabulary Link' is accompanied by a drawing depicting a child wearing roller skates, its arms wide open, and holding a toy. The playful aspect is evident, and

the course book's editors probably chose this particular system in order to associate vocabulary learning with the happiness that toys bring.
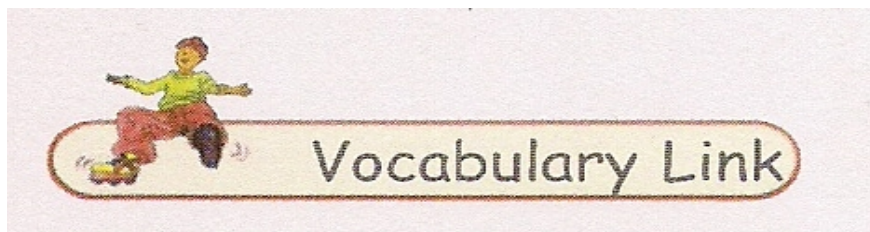

Figure 5: Polysemiotic sign 5

Figure 6 is a different type of polysemiotic sign, in which the utterance 'Pronunciation Link' is accompanied by two phonemes, /s/ and /ʃ/, from the International Phonetic Alphabet. The two phonemes can be seen as the intersemiotic translation of the English verbal system, since they metonymically represent the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is a metalanguage of linguistics. We can therefore say that the verbal sign is translated by means of a metalanguage sign.[9] However, it is believed that if the learner is unfamiliar with phonetic symbols – symbols which he/she encounters in dictionaries – he/she will find it difficult to decode the specific sign. As for the plastic visual signs, we note that besides the proxemic sign that is expressed by means of the phoneme /ʃ/ jutting into the frame that encloses the utterance 'Pronunciation Link', we also have an enhanced colour sign through the emphatic use of red for this phoneme.
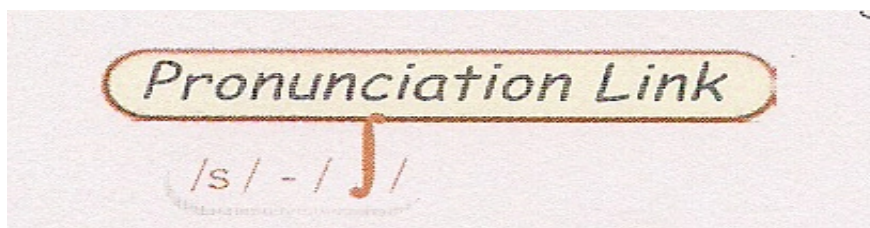

Figure 6: Polysemiotic sign 6

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9 Petrilli (2010: 266) asserts that, "the verbal, with respect to itself, is endowed with a distinctive feature that differentiates it from nonverbal special languages: the metalinguistic capacity". The metalinguistic capacity uses signs to refer modally to themselves.

We have generally observed that the polysemiotic signs chosen by the editors of the English course books written for Greek learners and published by the Greek state follow a specific pattern: an iconic visual sign that accompanies and intersemiotically translates a verbal sign through the use of a rhetoric scheme. The last polysemiotic sign is an exception, although we can claim that the metalinguistic sign is dominated by iconicity, since it also includes non-verbal signs – a dash and forward slash marks. It should be noted at this point that no matter if a sign is verbal or metalinguistic, based on the above views, it is always governed by iconicity.

Moving on to the polysemiotic signs found in the English language course book *More! 2. Student's Book*, published by an English publisher, we observe that the only iconic visual sign used depicts a DVD. It is not clear what the iconic visual sign represents, that is, whether it is a CD or DVD, but we have reached this conclusion based on the fact that the same symbol is used for different activities, such as 'read' and 'listen'. Moreover, we note that the iconic visual sign only translates the skill (reading, listening), while the polysemiotic sign other utterances which remain intersemiotically untranslated.

6.2 Course Books of the French Language

In the French course book *Action.fr-gr 1. Student's book. 1st Grade of Junior High School*, published by the Greek state, the editors make reference to the book's 'symbols'.[10] All these polysemiotic signs are placed in rectangular boxes, which, as Charaudeau (1991: 57) observes, are more aggressive. In addition to the iconic visual sign, there are two verbal signs, which are worth studying to determine whether the second is a translation of the first.

More specifically, in the first polysemiotic sign (Figure 7) we see an iconic visual sign depicting two pages, one on top of the other, and an arrow pointing to the verbal sign 'Scène'. The verbal sign is the intersemiotic translation of the iconic visual sign, which is based on the rhetoric scheme of synecdoche, since the two pages could be interpreted in a number of ways. Note that intersemiotic translation is very rarely enhanced through the use of a second iconic visual sign (the arrow), as is the case here, since synecdoche does not appear to easily connect the two signs, namely the iconic visual and the verbal.

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10 According to Morris (1955: 25), "a symbol is a sign produced by its interpreter which acts as a substitute for some other sign with which it is synonymous".

Another rather uncommon characteristic in the case of these polysemiotic signs is that intersemiotic translation is succeeded by interlingual translation. As House (2009: 63) remarks, "[...] foreign language learning and teaching is no longer a monolingual undertaking related solely to the foreign language to be acquired, but a bilingual one". Cook (2001: 119) also notes, "grammar-translation holds no monopoly, and translation may be used both more imaginatively, and as a complement to direct method teaching rather than an exclusive alternative to it". Thus, the verbal sign 'Scène' is translated and explained interlingually through the verbal sign 'διαβάζω τη σκηνή του έργου' (meaning 'I read the play's scene'), an utterance that ends in an exclamation mark, which is absent in the French (source) text.[11] The Greek utterance contains more lexical items than the corresponding French utterance and we can speak of *expansion* in the translation. Newmark (2001: 61) considers that occasionally, translation from Language 2 (in our case, French) to Language 1 (in our case, Greek) is useful for the expansion of source language vocabulary, particularly for items within the semantic field or topic. In fact, this becomes an exercise in synonymy. Moreover, graphic and colour signs play an important role in these polysemiotic signs. We thus see that the iconic visual sign is positioned on the far left hand side of the system, inside a circle, while the other signs, namely the arrow (as an iconic visual sign) and the French and Greek verbal signs are placed inside a rectangle (at the top and in the middle). The arrow and the French utterance are emphasised in bold letters, while the outline of the polysemiotic sign and some parts of the iconic visual sign are in colour.

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11 For Liungman (1995: 82), "where in texts the exclamation mark's straight vertical line for one-ness and truth indicates that the preceding words are to be taken seriously indeed". Kress (2009: 150) states, "all punctuation marks frame and in doing so contribute meaning. Some punctuation marks/frames also convey social/attitudinal/affective meanings, such as the question mark '?' and the exclamation mark '!' as questioning, seeking confirmation, ordering, commanding".
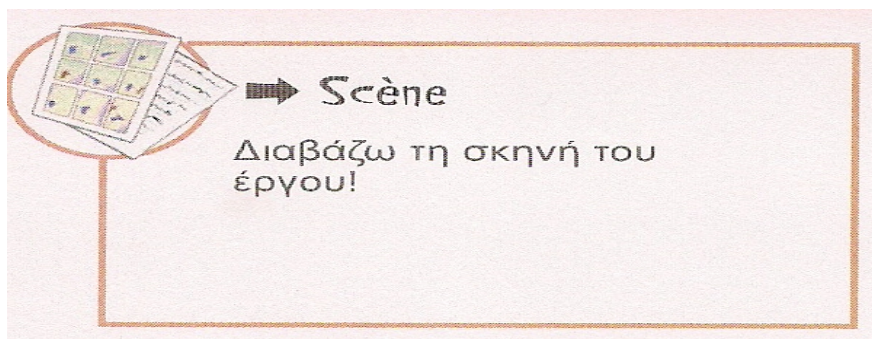
Figure 7: Polysemiotic sign 7

The second polysemiotic sign (Figure 8) consists of an open book, with a magnifying glass focusing on a section of the text in which we can distinguish the letter 'A'. As in the previous case, this polysemiotic sign, too, has an arrow intersemiotically connecting the iconic visual sign with the French utterance 'Zoom sur le lexique' (meaning 'zoom on the glossary'). This utterance is translated intersemiotically with the Greek utterance 'μαθαίνω τις καινούργιες λέξεις' (meaning 'I learn new words'). The French utterance seems to be intersemiotically closer to the iconic sign, since the Greek utterance is more general: the verb 'zoom', which is of English origin, has been translated into Greek as 'μαθαίνω' (meaning 'learn'), which is a more general concept. Furthermore, since the Greek utterance contains more lexical items than the corresponding French utterance, we can speak of an *addition* to the translation. Note, also, that the magnifying glass focuses on a letter rather than a word, which could have intersemiotically enhanced the concept of vocabulary.
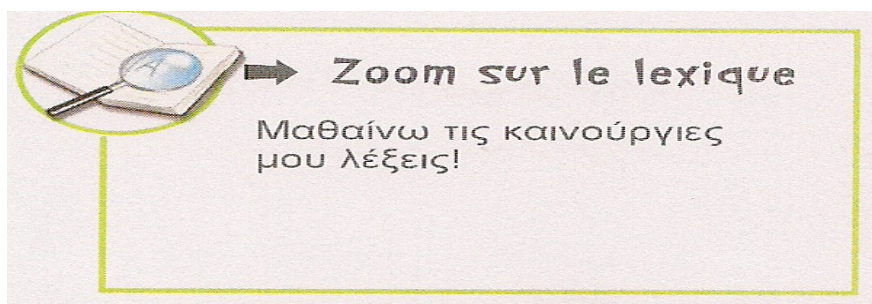

Figure 8: Polysemiotic sign 8

While studying the polysemiotic sign shown in Figure 9, we noted that it consists of an iconic visual sign depicting a roll of film that is becoming unwound. An arrow directs us intersemiotically to the translation of the iconic message, whose decodification is equivocal. The reason for this is that the same symbol could also be used for a cinematographic film, for the job of a TV technician, or for a film set, to name a few examples. However, the verbal sign informs us that it is a recorded rather than a visual sign. Here the verbal sign performs the function of anchorage. Barthes (1972: 40) defines anchorage as when "the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing him to avoid some and receive others; by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance". Note, however, that the verbal sign 'bande-son' (meaning 'sound filmstrip') has been interlingually translated using the Greek utterance 'μαθαίνω τους καινούργιους μου γαλλικούς ήχους' (meaning 'I learn my new French sounds'). The Greek linguistic message contains much more information than the corresponding French message, perhaps because both the iconic visual sign and the French verbal sign are rather difficult for learners to decode. Being more than a paraphrase and more than an explication, the Greek verbal sign can thus be said to be a kind of *adaptation*.[12]
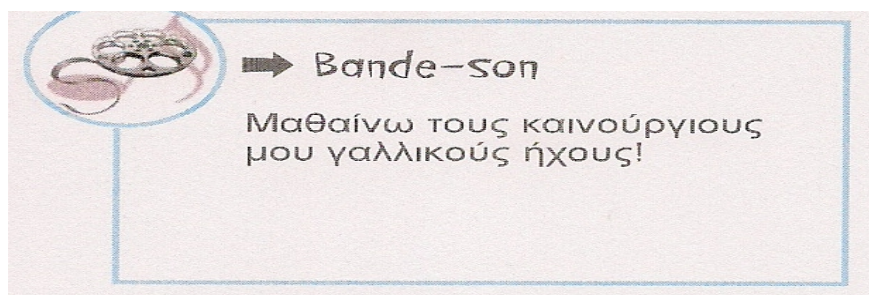

Figure 9: Polysemiotic sign 9

In the next polysemiotic sign (10), besides the iconic visual sign and the verbal sign, we also have the evident use of a plastic visual sign. The iconic visual sign represents a boy and a girl in conversation, with speech bubbles coming out of

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12 According to Bastin (2001: 5), "adaptation may be understood as a set of translative operations which result in a text that is not accepted as a translation but is nevertheless recognized as representing a source text of about the same length. As such the term may embrace numerous vague notions such as imitation, rewriting, and so on".

their mouths. The arrow is once again used to intersemiotically translate the iconic visual sign through the verbal sign 'jeu de rôles' (role-play). We note also that the interlingual rendering of the French utterance in Greek resulted in the noun being converted into a verb. We are therefore dealing with *transposition* into the first person. Transposition is the first of the nonliteral translation devices and the most used device in translation (Jones 1997: 77). We tend to resort to it when an obstacle in the process of translation occurs due to different grammatical structures in the source language and target language. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995: 94) consider transposition as "probably the most common structural change undertaken by translators" and shows "a very good command of the target language" (246). Moreover, an exclamation mark was added to the Greek utterance, perhaps in an effort to make this activity more learner-friendly, since various studies have demonstrated a sense of insecurity on the part of learners where speaking is concerned.
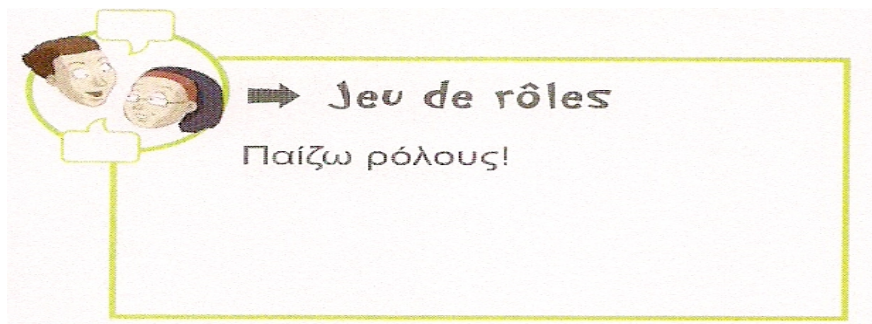

Figure 10: Polysemiotic sign 10

The use of the particular pattern of a polysemiotic sign that combines intersemiotic and interlingual translation is a reflection of the editors of the course book who seem to be anxious to effectively communicate the polysemiotic sign, since if it were to be successfully decoded, it would foster better learning for the foreign language. Moreover, we have noted that even though the semiotic system of colour has been used, this plastic visual sign does not contribute intersemiotically to the decodification of the system, but instead helps to make the polysemiotic sign more learner-friendly.

Moving on to the case of the course book *Le Mag. Méthode de français* (2007), published by a French publisher and written by French experts, we note that, just as in the corresponding English course book, iconicity is restricted to the use of an iconic visual sign, namely a DVD. This iconic visual sign is used

intersemiotically to emphasise the skill of listening. The other utterances of the verbal sign are not intersemiotically translated. As regards the plastic visual signs, the colour sign appears to affect neither the verbal sign, nor the iconic visual sign. In contrast, the proxemic sign does affect the intersemiotic translation, given that the iconic visual sign and the verbal sign (écoute) are positioned very close together.

7 In Lieu of a Conclusion

Bezemer and Kress (2009: 260) remark, "… English textbooks have indeed become increasingly visual". This is a valid observation given the increase in visual signs at the expense of verbal signs in course books overall. However, this does not seem to be the case for the polysemiotic signs we have studied in the English language course book published in the UK, even though the use of illustrations is also recommended by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. This is in contrast to the English course book published in Greece, in which extensive use is made of iconic visual signs. It is especially interesting that the same difference can be found between the French course books published in France and those published in Greece. This does not serve semiotic goals as aesthetics – as Zaliznjak, Ivanov, and Toporov (1977: 52) consider – but it also reflects the targeted efforts of Greek course book writers to maximise foreign language acquisition.

Furthermore, given that the metonymic use of iconic visual signs is dominant in the polysemiotic signs we focused on, and since different course books use the same or similar polysemiotic signs, we tend to speak of a common cultural framework or semiosphere that enables these polysemiotic signs to be understood by Greek, English, and French students alike. It is, however, strange that colour, as a plastic visual sign, is not utilised to the extent that it is in other situations to decode the polysemiotic sign, even though it is a common cultural semiotic system in European culture. In contrast, other plastic visual signs, such as proxemics, appear to be the other pillar – together with iconic visual signs – on which the decodification of the polysemiotic sign rests.

The fact that intersemiotic translation is used in both course books of English and French, written by Greek teachers – and in fact in the French course book intersemiotic translation coexists with intelinguistic translation (Greek-French) – confirms that "if the foreign language is viewed as co-existing bilingually with the [mother tongue language] in the minds of language learners, then language learning becomes a 'bilingualization process', i.e. a process

promoting bilingualism" (House 2009: 63). This finding makes any form of translation an option that contributes positively to foreign language teaching/learning. That is why we believe it was taken into account by the writers of the coursebooks adopted for Greek learners by the Greek Pedagogical Institute.

Notes

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