

# **Semiotic Modes in Local Gastronomic Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of Culinary Shop Signs in Greece and Cyprus**

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## ***Abstract***

The paper aims to provide insights into the use of semiotic modes used in the shop signs of culinary businesses in Greece and Cyprus. In this context, we examine, comparatively, culinary shop signs collected from the commercial centre of Thessaloniki and Limassol, two European, Mediterranean cities with a significant gastronomic tradition and a lively city centre. These semiotic modes are represented in a sample composed of shop signs whose verbal message constitutes verbo-cultural palimpsest or is written in a local dialect, as well as of shop signs that focus on their iconic visual message using intersemiotic translation or visual rhetoric to make their message appealing to consumers. The main conclusion is that the shop signs under scrutiny seem to be addressed mainly to the native people of the two countries who are considered in the common cultural practice much better consumers than tourists as concerns their culinary habits. The study also provides evidence of creative use of culinary shop signs in both cities. Intracultural interpretation, as well as the design of the verbal element, seem to make shop signs more appealing for the consumers.

***Keywords: shop signs, culinary business, semiotic modes, creativity, graphic communication, typography***

## 1. The Culinary Landscape

The aim of our study is to examine the semiotic modes used in the shop signs of culinary businesses (restaurants, tavernas, rotisseries, snack bars) in Greece and Cyprus. In this context, we examine, comparatively, shop signs collected from the commercial centre of Thessaloniki and Limassol, two European, Mediterranean seaside cities with a significant culinary tradition and a lively city centre. These semiotic modes are represented in a sample composed of creative shop signs that seem appealing to consumers. The focus on creativity and playfulness adds a further dimension to the study, since, as Moriarty and Järlehed (2018) argue, the creative practices involved have implications for both the material and social outcomes.

Shop signs are considered as open or public advertisement. We thus approach them as multisemiotic signs where semiotic systems coexist or are in synergy not only to produce meaning but also to “anchor” consumers. *Anchorage function* is described by Barthes (1977) as selective elucidation, where the text directs the reader through the signifieds of the image, causing them to avoid some and receive others. The shop signs under scrutiny concern culinary establishments that promote the local cuisine in Greece and Cyprus. Thus, shop signs of multinational culinary businesses are not included in the present study.

The gastronomic discourse is articulated in three axes: the communicative (informational), the economic (commercial) and the cultural (identity). It is generally agreed that the third axis, the cultural element, is the most difficult to transmit and/or transmute, not only inter-culturally but also intra-culturally. Therefore, we have decided to also examine the design of culinary shop signs in the landscape of the commercial city centre.

As Metro-Roland and Soica (2018) mention regarding shop signs: “in both a literal and in a semiotic sense, they do more than simply denote” (p. 361). In order to make shop signs appealing, they must be culturally oriented not only to the locals but also to non-native citizens of the area who want to share in the culinary culture. However, the informational character of shop signs for a specific place in which one lives, or which one visits seems not to be the advertisers’ or designers’ primary concern. For some researchers, such as Koff (2013, p. 818), eating habits can mould landscapes, and food can be semiotically linked to a language—we use it to communicate information, our concerns and attitudes, our intentions, and so forth.

Besides this communicative function, shop signs are also *visual signscapes*, “forms of visual capital, which can be exchanged for a particular economic capital if they are able to attract the right clientele into these shops” (Hall & Datta, 2010, p. 71). Finally, Bender (1993) observes that the landscape is “part of the way in which identities are created and disputed” (p. 3).

From an anthropological point of view, food consumption is undeniably related to memory and nostalgia, as food and smells have strong connections to images and memories. Eco (1992, p. 69) aptly observes that any mnemonic device is indisputably a phenomenon of semiotic relevance. This does not escape the advertiser’s attention. In the advertising arena, gastronomic discourse struggles to promote itself both commercially and socially, even though food is an individual choice. As Danesi claims:

Using both verbal and nonverbal techniques to make its messages as persuasive as possible, advertising has become an integral category of modern-day culture designed to influence attitudes and lifestyle behaviors by covertly suggesting how we can best satisfy our innermost urges and the aspirations through consumption. (Danesi, 2004, p. 256)

Integrated into the wider arena of the semiotics of culture and of the landscape, this study focuses on the ways local culture is being advertised in the privileged space of gastronomy through private shop signs in the commercial centre of the two cities. We must mention that the two countries have the same official language, Modern Greek, but the Greek-Cypriot Dialect, which is Greek-Cypriots’ mother tongue, is extensively used in non-formal occasions, especially in everyday oral communication.

## **2. A Visual Semiotic Widening of the Linguistic Landscape**

There is a wide interest for *private signs* in the study of linguistic landscapes. Shop signs are included in this category since it is the owner of the shop that offers to the designer or advertiser the frame of production. Landry and Bourhis (1997) consider private signs to include “commercial signs on storefronts and business institutions (e.g., retail stores and banks), commercial advertising on billboards, and advertising signs displayed in public transport and on private vehicles” (p. 26). In fact, private signs

allow greater freedom in cultural expression, making them more eye-catching than other types of signs, such as official signposts, road signs, etc. Their aim is to attract consumers and not to provide services to citizens, which usually requires homogeneity and puts a stricter framework on everyday communication.

Shop signs are integrated into the landscape and can in fact be considered the most important signs in the study of landscape in the commercial city centre. Landscape Studies, proposed as a research field by architects and other specialists of space, have made more use of semiotics with the study of the linguistic landscape. The visual conception of shop signs has made them an integral part of the visual communication of visual semiotics too. Kress and Van Leeuwen mention that:

The place of visual communication in a given society can only be understood in the context of, on the one hand, the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society and, on the other hand, their uses and valuations. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 35)

Kress and Van Leeuwen refer to this phenomenon as the *semiotic landscape*. This is the reason why *linguistic landscape*, which is a sociolinguistic branch, seems to have already realised the importance of nonverbal signs in everyday communication and in the landscape, and attracted several researchers towards semiotic theory. Thus, Scollon and Scollon (2003) proposed the notion of *geosemiotics*, that is, “the study of the social meaning of the material placement of signs in the world. By ‘signs’ we mean to include any semiotic system including language and discourse” (p. 110). But semioticians have also started sharing this perspective. For instance, Leone (2010) proposes the neologism *semio-geography*, defined as “a sub-discipline that studies patterns and processes that shape human interaction with various environments, within the theoretical framework of semiotics, the discipline that focuses on signification and communication” (p. 217).

Sometimes, the opening up of linguists to the semiotic approach seems verbo-centric. Lindström, Kull and Palang (2014) remark that Adam and Jaworski (2010) entitle the collective volume they edited as *Semiotic Landscape* which “refers solely to linguistic landscapes and the role of texts (in a narrower sense of written linguistic representations) in landscapes and their creation” (p. 116). For Lindström, Kull and Palang (2014), “semiotics can provide adequate tools for analyzing



processes of landscape formation, because they are always a result of multi-party communication and depend on the sign categorization of the participants” (p. 126). It is interesting that the notions of the *semiosphere* and *cultural translation*, as well as other semiotic notions proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin and Juri Lotman, are also proposed by Lindström, Kull and Palang for the semiotic study of landscape.

The study of the culinary/gastronomic landscape through shop signs is a multilayered cultural process that is not limited to verbal signs. As Greimas (1984) argues, “the problems posed by the analysis of ‘visual texts’ are comparable with those of ‘verbal texts’, literary or not” (p. 11, our translation from French). Blommaert & Huang argue that:

Signs in social space tell us a lot about users of the space, how users interact with signs, how users influence and are influenced by them; they so start telling stories about the cultural, historical, political, and social backgrounds of a certain space. (Blommaert & Huang, 2010, p. 5)

And these stories are transmitted through polysemiotic signs such as shop signs. This is why nowadays we speak of the *semiotic landscape*. Córdova, López-Gopar and Sughrua state that:

the semiotic landscape allows written language (discourse) to interact with other discourses (visual images, spatial practices, and cultural dimensions), thereby aiding the emergence of indigenous self-representation and cultural values and hence working toward language revitalization. (Córdova, López-Gopar & Sughrua, 2017, p. 7)

The employment of semiotic tools in the study of the linguistic landscape is also proposed by Greek linguists. Canakis (2008) enhances the study of linguistic landscape “at the intersection of sociolinguistics, ethnography, and semiotics, which has gained ground as the platform of choice in ‘second wave’ linguistic landscape (LL) research” (p. 229). We argue that the semiotic approach to landscape offers profound insight due to the special attention on the study of nonverbal signs by semiotics.

### 3. Gastronomic Discourse in the Public Space

In the semiotic landscape of a city centre, gastronomic discourse is a special genre of advertising discourse. Oswald (2015) discusses how “[a]dvertising is by nature a public discourse that draws upon the shared cultural codes of the target market, including the formal and cultural codes structuring the meaning and representation of goods in a given context” (p. 40). Since messages related to gastronomic discourse are culturally charged, the study of shop signs could include the extent to which structure and choice of verbal messages allow them to be easily interpreted by natives and tourists alike. Stoianova argues that:

Gastronomic discourse [...] is a system that reflects the peculiarities of the national culture, has social and gender characteristics and represents a special type of communication, which uses some professionally oriented signs, terminology, set expressions and special morphosyntactic structures. (Stoianova, 2013, p. 109)

Panaretou (2002), who examines the lexical features of a new discourse norm used in Greek print newspaper texts about gastronomy, reports that modern gastronomic discourse is of particular linguistic significance due to certain characteristic features, which include: (a) foreign words, (b) neologisms, (c) unpredictable lexical conjunctions and (d) metaphors. In Greece, gastronomic discourse around *haute cuisine* is dominated by French loanwords and neologisms, and lexical conjunctions that are often unpredictable. Since it is the hegemonic language of our time, English is also regularly used on multilingual shop signs.

It is worth mentioning that Greek law requires the translation into Greek of shop signs written in a foreign language, without of course enforcing a particular translation technique. Much like every other cultural item, gastronomic discourse resists translation. As Grammenidis (2009) concludes, translation strategies change according to the importance of the text genre and index inside the text, which we want to translate. He also adds that the translation of gastronomic discourse is not only a language activity, but also a cultural one, and thus a social and commercial activity too.

#### 4. Graphic Communication Theory in Context

A shop sign functions as an outdoor advertisement for the effective promotion of a business in a consumerist cultural environment. Specific markers related to branding (Landa, 2010) elevate the commercial construct from a purely informative/functional level to supporting the image, values, promises and consequently the identity and the authority of a brand. In a culture of “visual dominance”, we relate advertising with images, whereas “language [as in typographic signs] evokes the visual” (Johnson, 2008, p. 3). In such cases, typography should represent a mental image, creating connotations and meaning that enable visual communication.

As Bringhurst (1997) mentions, typography “can be used to manipulate behavior and emotions” (p. 19) since it visually represents language. Typeface plays a pivotal role in the representation of language as it creates meaning through form, aesthetics, arrangement, and synthesis. Apart from its aesthetic qualities, a letterform carries historical and symbolic load that shapes meaning and enhances the symbolic designation attributed to the design. Subjectivity may affect choice (White, 2005, p. 103); however, the evolution and symbolic dimension of specific types of design (Lupton, 2004, pp. 42-43; White, 2005, pp. 101-105) are the leading factors examined in the choice of a typeface that can “give words a second extra meaning” (Jardí, 2007, p. 74).

For outdoor displays, aspects such as the size of the sign and the materials used, lighting (natural and/or artificial), height, distance, and legibility, as well as the style and the overall aesthetics of the building on which the sign is displayed, the surrounding environment and the visual competition of neighbouring signs, also need to be considered. But most of all, “communication goals, content, context, and audience” (Landa, 2016, p. 62) must be taken into account, since “[c]reating or selecting a typeface for its aesthetic value and the impact it will have [...] is as important as creating or selecting an image. Every characteristic of a typeface contributes to communication” (Landa, 2016, p. 54).

#### 5. The Concept of the *City Centre*

The corpus of the study consists of commercial signs located in the city centres of Thessaloniki and Limassol; in both countries, the city centre is the commercial centre as well. There are several methods of designating the city centre. We adopt

Parthenopoulos and Parthenopoulou's stance to describe the notion of *city centre*:

[l]ocating and legislating the city center is a matter of functional, formative, emotional and semantic designation. The city center is characterized as the heart of the city (8th CIAM, 1959), the old town etc. The conceptual city center often falls within the geometrical center of the city's plan, but this is not always true. In this part of the city the whole concept of the "city" expresses itself and here civilization functions with all its components. It concentrates all functions and activities according to the cultural character of the city. (Parthenopoulos & Parthenopoulou, 2010, p. 160)

In the aforementioned definition, it seems that the cultural and emotional elements are the most important for constructing the mental map of the city centre. There are several methods to define the city centre, and one of these methods is based on financial criteria. For Parthenopoulos and Parthenopoulou (2010, p. 160), "as criteria for specifying city centers serve here the buildings' height, density of the area, the price of land, the variety of activities, etc."

The Cypriot state shares this definition. The Town Planning and Housing Department of the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Cyprus has adopted Martijn's Kanters definition, which translated into English for the purposes of this study outlines:

[c]ity centre retail core: the retail infrastructure (collection of shops) in the downtown area of a city, usually small-scale retail shops in so-called high streets. The strength of the so called "prime pitch" of the high street is crucial as this usually sits at the top of the "retail hierarchy", where the international brands are concentrated and the highest rents are achieved. The strength of the prime "pitch" bears an important influence on the retail hierarchy and retail policy.<sup>1</sup>

Taking into consideration all the above positions, and for the purposes of our study, we define Thessaloniki's commercial centre as the region bound by the following streets: Agelaki, Egnatia, Nikis and Dodekanissou. Limassol's city centre is enclosed by the following streets: Gildiz, Tzelal Bajar and Kioproulouzate in the east, Navarino and Glastonos in the north, and the 28th of October and Lord Byron in the west.

It is worth noting that Thessaloniki and Limassol are not characterised by similar population density. Thessaloniki is the second largest city in Greece and has a population of 325,000,<sup>2</sup> with over a million inhabitants in its metropolitan area. Limassol has a population of 101,000, with a metro area population of 185,000.<sup>3</sup> However, both cities have a significant number of culinary establishments (cafes, restaurants, etc.). Culinary services are an integral part of the city centre in both cities and their contribution to the status of the city is at the same time commercial/financial and cultural. There are also broad employment opportunities in culinary industries in both cities, a fact that promotes their status. Businesses that capitalise on this economic growth include graphic designers and advertising agencies (see also section 8).

## 6. Data Collection and Levels of Analysis

The corpus material of this study consists of 123 commercial signs, 63 from Thessaloniki and 60 from Limassol, which were randomly collected from the respective city centres. The collection of the primary research material (photoshoots of the culinary shop signs) took place between 14 and 17 November 2016 in Thessaloniki and between 23 and 28 November 2016 in Limassol. As we see below (Table 1), the majority of culinary shop signs have a *referential function*<sup>4</sup> and their use is to denote the place. Our study will not focus on this sample. We will instead focus on the creative use of modes to draw the attention of the consumers. Sometimes, these modes are also characterised by the *poetic function* which, according to Jakobson (1960), places emphasis on the message. In this study, we have adopted *creativity* as “the playful reworking of semiotic resources in order to transcend existing social and material constraints with the intention of reconfiguring social meanings, relations and structures which in turn reveals certain tensions and ideological positioning” (Moriarty & Järlehed, 2018, p. 3).

In particular, the study of the commercial signs<sup>5</sup> takes place at three levels, the *linguistic* (verbo-cultural palimpsests and local dialects), the *translational* (interlingual and intersemiotic translation), and the *visual rhetoric* (visual metonymy). Kress (2009) defines a *mode* as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning” (p. 55). As the language on the commercial signs is written, the visual element runs through all three levels of analysis, but we will approach it based on the general function of shop signs as mixed communication codes.

Table 1. Repartition of the collected data

City	Referential function	Verbo- cultural palimpsest	Intersemiotic translation	Visual rhetoric	Dialect	In total
Thessaloniki	35	9	8	10	1	63
Limassol	42	4	5	6	3	60
In total	77	13	13	16	4	123

We argue that the use of these creative modes starts to gradually change the character of commercial communication. Dyer (2009) aptly observes that “[a]ds, as a means of representation and meaning, construct ideology within themselves through the intervention of external codes which are located within society. The ad will use images, notions, concepts, myths, etc. already available in the culture” (p. 102). The use of signs available in a cultural system does not guarantee their immediate or successful interpretation, since all signs don’t have the same semantic weight. In fact, as Kasanga (2015) argues “although they are supposed to be interpreted usefully by all who pay attention, certain signs speak particularly louder to segments of the public, whether the latter are the target or unintended audience, and ignore or marginalize others” (p. 124). This is certainly the case of shop signs that are *verbo-cultural palimpsests*, that is, established cultural expressions or words rewritten for the purposes of making an impression.<sup>6</sup> This is a choice based on cultural memory and often appears in the printed press; in recent years, it has been increasingly used on Greek shop signs. In fact, “[m]aking things strange draws attention which can be capitalised on in terms of making your product, shop or yourself stand out of the norm” (Moriarty & Järlehed, 2018, p. 3).

The use of verbal messages based on memory and/or nostalgia, such as *dialect systems* with specific connotations, on the one hand, and the playful dimension of the verbo-cultural palimpsests, on the other, attract the attention of the consumer. As Androutsopoulos (2010) argues, local codes may be selected for shop signs to fulfil the informational function of the linguistic landscape, or a symbolic function. Androutsopoulos also adds that:

[t]hese purposes may coexist with the wider commercial function of language display [...] i.e., to authenticate services by indexing a relation of the service to the places where that

language is actually spoken. In that sense, any language may be used to index the place of origin of a product or service, as the domain of gastronomy makes clear (Androutsopoulos, 2010, p. 740).

This is one of the main characteristics of advertising communication which has been characterised by Barthes (1977) as an *anchorage function*, since “[t]he 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” (p. 156). To this anchorage function the phenomenon of *intersemiotic translation*, which is defined by Jakobson (2004 [1959]) as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (p. 139), contributes significantly. Hodorogea (2015) states that, “[a]s a method, the intersemiotic translation is used effectively in advertising especially when the brand and its message have to be ‘transported’ into a new culture, along with the values it stands for” (p. 45). We share this view, although we believe that it is not necessary to have only an intercultural transposition. This transposition could also be intracultural, since consumers have different intracultural identities in the same cultural system. Kourdis believes that intersemiotic translation is a powerful semiotic tool in the globalised era and argues that:

[i]n the age of globalisation, shop owners seem to exploit verbal and visual signs to increase profit, and to achieve this, intersemiotic translation can be used. The selection of these visual signs, which are substantially cultural, is based on cultural knowledge, and this is why owners seem to prefer culturally recognised indices or symbols for their shop signs. In particular, visual signs are used in intersemiotic translation because they are easily construable, repeat the verbal sign, and are easier to accept or adopt in local societies and cultures. (Kourdis, 2013, p. 113)

Written language and intersemiosis are not the only forms of commercial communication for cultural argumentation. Very often, culinary shop owners choose to present their information through visual rhetoric forms. Mcquarrie and Mick (1999) argue that “pictorial elements comprised a variety of rhetorical forms (rhyme, antithesis, metaphor, and pun) and different types of signs (iconic, indexical, and symbolic) so as to evoke a diverse set of meanings about the brand and/or user (e.g.,

sophistication, beauty, safety, fun)” (p. 51). The two researchers continue that “[t]he main boundary condition we uncovered is that the consumer must be sufficiently acculturated to the rhetorical and semiotic systems within which the advertising text is situated; that is, s/he must be a culturally competent processor of the advertising message” (p. 51). As we will see later, this goal is achieved in the case of shop signs of culinary business since the iconic visual messages are easily identified.

## 7. Thessaloniki’s Culinary Shop Signs

### 7.1 The linguistic dimension: Verbo-cultural palimpsests and Modern Greek dialects

From a linguistic perspective, we found that verbo-cultural palimpsests appear in culinary shop signs in two forms: as the principal verbal message that is the name of the shop sign, and as a secondary verbal message that accompanies the name of the shop sign. The majority of shop signs in Thessaloniki and Limassol that use verbo-cultural palimpsests belong to the first category. Below, representative examples are given from each category.

In the first category, we find the commercial sign of the store “Το μετέωρο βήμα της γαρίδας” [Το meteorο vima tis γaridas] (“The suspended step of the shrimp”) (Figure 1) located in the commercial centre of Thessaloniki (33 Vassileos Irakliou street). The name of the shop is the title of a drama by Greek filmmaker Theo Angelopoulos (1991), “The Suspended Step of the Stork”, starring Marcello Mastroianni and Jeanne Moreau, where the “stork” has been replaced by the “shrimp”. This link between food and the cinema is also confirmed by online city guides.<sup>7</sup> The modification works at a connotative level too, as it implies that the establishment specialises in seafood, which is also confirmed by gourmet guides to the city. Finally, the owner of the fish tavern shares a surname with the director of the film, so the wording also works intertextually.

A similar case is the shop sign for “Αριστο...Τελικά...” [Aristo...Telika...] (Figure 2), where the adjective “Αριστοτελικός” (Aristotelian) becomes a verbo-cultural palimpsest with the addition of the three dots in the middle and at the end of the word. The two parts of the new message underline a new dimension of the food served: “άριστο” [aristo] means “perfect” in Greek and “τελικά” [telika] means “final”, “last”. Thus, the connotative meaning is the indisputable quality of the food at this



taverna. Furthermore, since the establishment is situated in the very centre of the city (10 Aristotelous Square), the first part of the palimpsest also brings to mind Aristotle, a highly regarded Greek philosopher. As regards these multiple interpretations, Hammer (2018, p. 265) argues that a “shop sign’s advertising success is based on the multiplicity of the interpretations produced in order to establish the coherence of the vague message” (our translation from French).

Figure 1



Figure 2



It is not only the insertion of dots that can create different words and produce additional meanings. Sometimes this insertion goes hand in hand with the substitution of a part of the initial verbal message, as in the case of the shop sign “Αρωμα ... Πόλης” [Aroma ... Polis] which means, in Greek, “Scent of a ... City” (Figure 3). This shop sign evokes the famous film “Scent of a Woman”, a 1992 American drama produced and directed by Martin Brest, starring Al Pacino and Christopher O’Donnell. The insertion of the dots that connotes an implicit meaning and the substitution of word “woman” with “city” creates a verbo-cultural palimpsest that is derived not only from the substitution of verbal signs (city) but also from the addition of nonverbal signs (dots).

Sometimes, the verbo-cultural palimpsest may not be the main linguistic message on the shop sign, but rather the supplementary message that accompanies the name of the establishment. In the case of the “Δια ταύτα” [Dia tafta] (Figure 4), which is advertised as a Greek restaurant in the centre of Thessaloniki (6-8 Vatikiotou street, Platia Athonos),<sup>8</sup> there is a supplementary verbal message “με ... ΝΟΥ & οινό ... ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑ” (with MIND & Alcohol). In the Greek language, “νους” (mind) and “πνεύμα” (spirit) are written in capital, emphatic, letters and they form the new

words “menu” and “alcohol”. And in this case, the playful use and the fact that the choice of this taverna is made in a “intelligent” way, highlights the place as a special gastronomy centre that differs from the rest.

Figure 3



Figure 4



Taking into consideration the common culinary culture between Greek and Turkish cuisine due to the coexistence of the two people during the Ottoman period, it is not strange to see Turkish words or loanwords on Greek shop signs, especially when the business includes dishes considered to have come from the East. This is the case of the shop sign “ντερλικατέσεν” [derlikatesen] (Figure 5), situated on 7 Kouskoura street,<sup>9</sup> transliterated in Greek and derived from the Turkish word “dirlik”, meaning “prosperity” with the addition of the Greek ending for verbs “-ώνω” [-ono]. In Greek, this verb means “I eat a lot”. In this way, the new Turkish-Greek construction becomes the verbo-cultural palimpsest “ντερλικατέσεν” [derlikatesen] based on the German word “delicatessen” which means “goodies”. The idea is that, in this store, a consumer can eat a lot, and, of course, a lot of good quality food.

Verbo-cultural palimpsests are not the only category of shop signs that benefit from the playful and connotative dimension of the verbal element. A new trend on culinary shop signs in Thessaloniki, and in Greece in general, is the use of Modern Greek dialects. Previously, we observed an intercultural influence in shop signs’ verbal messages. This influence can also become intracultural when Greek dialect systems are used in the linguistic landscape. Below, we see the shop sign “Αθιβολή” [Athivoli] (Figure 6), situated on 15 Katouni street, in Ladadika,<sup>10</sup> which in the Cretan Dialect means “thought” and “discussion”. In order to reinforce the Cretan dimension of the verbal message, the owner added to the shop sign an iconic visual,<sup>11</sup> a map of

Crete, and the verbal message: “Κρητική παραδοσιακή κουζίνα” [Kritiki paradosiaki kouzina] which can be translated from Greek as “Traditional Cretan cuisine”. The owner wants to take advantage of the fact that Cretan cuisine is considered very healthy, and one of the best diets in the Mediterranean.

Figure 5



Figure 6



From the examples above, we see that, for the food establishment owners in Thessaloniki, the iconic visual message appears to have a decorative role, and the focus is on the linguistic message and its playful use. Highlighting local identity on shop signs is a recent trend in Europe. Raffaelli (1983) and Tufi and Blackwood (2015, p. 3) claim that only in more recent times and with newly gained linguistic confidence have Italian shopkeepers started using local and regional terms on their shop signs, often with the intention to exploit the perception of authenticity that only local languages can convey. This position is reflected especially in culinary shop signs.

## 7.2 The translation dimension: Interlingual and intersemiotic translation

The translational dimension of the commercial signs is not a choice of the owners, but derives from the combination of semiotic, verbal and iconic visual signs. It is worth noting that according to Greek law, when a commercial sign is in a foreign language, it must also be translated into Greek. However, as the choice of language also implies the quality of the service provided, we must not be surprised that most commercial signs are in Greek, a carrier of the high values and tradition of the Greek people. As Greek cuisine—especially traditional Greek cuisine—is considered to be of particularly good quality, the choice of Greek language on commercial signs tends

to dominate, followed usually by French, due to the international prestige of French cuisine.<sup>12</sup>

The commercial signs in Thessaloniki that have a translational dimension can be divided into two categories. The first category includes verbal messages that are transliterations in the Greek language and then translated intersemiotically. This is the case of “Αγιολί” [Ajoli] (Figure 7), situated on 15 Leoforos Nikis street, which is a transliteration in Greek of the French word “ajolie” (garlic paste), and which is intersemiotically translated with the iconic visual sign of a garlic. It is worth noting that the designer associates the verbal with the iconic message, assuming that consumers will not recognise a word of French origin.<sup>13</sup> Transliteration of French words into Greek is an intentional choice in translation that allows shop owners to maintain associations of French food quality in Greek culture and thus upgrading the advertising product which is their cuisine.

Similarly, on the “τσέρκι” [tserki] shop sign (Figure 8), we come across another transliteration in Greek, in this case the Italian word “cerchi”. As a kitchen utensil, it was initially used by chefs in the French cuisine—today, its use is widespread among chefs—and was later borrowed by the Greek language. The interesting fact is that “τσέρκι” is not a common word in everyday communication: it is familiar only to those who are aware of culinary terminology, or those who can identify the old-fashioned hoop-rolling game.

Figure 7



Figure 8



The second category concerns commercial signs on which the verbal message is translated intersemiotically into an iconic visual message. Thus, on the shop sign of “Ιπποπόταμος” [Ippopotamos] (Figure 9), meaning in Greek “hippopotamus”, the



verbal message is translated intersemiotically with the iconic visual sign of a hippo. In order to direct the consumer's gaze, the verbal message and the iconic visual message are in the same colour, which is white. The choice of this particular verbal and iconic visual sign seems peculiar and can only be justified if Greek consumers recall Greek sayings, such as “s/he eats like a wolf”, which means “s/he eats large quantities”. As this sign looks like a hippo, it's reminiscent of the saying, “s/he is as fat as a hippo”. Similarly, on the “Ρόδι & Μέλι” [Rodi & Meli] shop sign (Figure 10), meaning in Greek “pomegranate and honey”, under the verbal message there is an intersemiotic translation, which is a pomegranate, half of which is in yellow, accompanied by a honey dipper.

Figure 9



Figure 10



The different options on the commercial signs with a translational dimension indicate the importance of open advertising communication for the commercial world of the city centre of Thessaloniki. The positive connotations of verbal and iconic visual choices are a tool for the owners of these businesses. Tufi and Blackwood (2015) observe that “French might have been used to add a flavor of sophistication and elite cosmopolitanism when displayed in shop signs” (p. 63), but since in Greece the perception of authenticity can be conveyed only through the Greek language, the choice of French words transliterated into Greek seems to be a reasonable linguistic compromise for shop signs. It is worth noting that in this type of commercial communication only nouns are used. Cultural expressions and/or verbs are missing.

### 7.3 The visual rhetoric dimension

As far as the dimension of visual rhetoric is concerned, Thessaloniki's shop signs favour visual metonymy in advertising. In the first case of the “Βασιλικός” [Vasilikos]

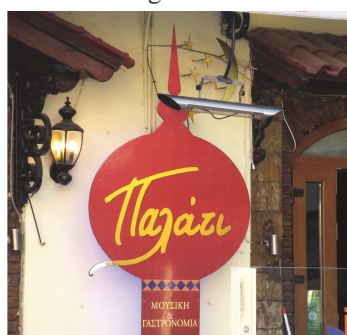
taverna (Figure 11)—situated in the Ladadika region (3 Egyptou street)—which means “royal” in Greek, we can see that the initial letter of the word is designed to bring to mind a frog. This choice also works intertextually, since it evokes the tale of “The Princess and the Frog”, but also the basil plant which is widely used as an ingredient in gastronomy. Thus, the crown which appears above the letter “B” could be considered a visual metonymy of the notion of a “king” or a “royal”. Indeed, the crown is only one of the semantic units that belong to the semantic isotopy<sup>14</sup> “royal”. This observation allows us to consider that an intersemiotic translation is produced between the verbal message “royal” in Greek and the iconic visual sign of the crown.

In a similar way, the shop sign of the “Παλάτι” [Palati] taverna (Figure 12) is also constructed. It means “palace” in Greek and is situated in the same region (3 Morihovou Square). A cupola with a sharp ending that recalls Persian or Arabic palaces is used as a visual metonymy of the word “Παλάτι” (palace), as this kind of cupola is not the only representative element of the semantic isotopy “palace”. The specific cupola is related to the history of the region, as the restaurant is located in the old Egyptian market in Thessaloniki, known today as the “Ladadika”.<sup>15</sup> As in the previous case, we argue that an intersemiotic translation is produced between the verbal message “palace” in Greek and the iconic visual sign of the cupola.

Figure 11



Figure 12



We can see that iconic visual sign in the case of visual metonymy functions as an *index*, which is described by Peirce (1931-1966) as “an existential contextual connection or spatiotemporal (physical) contiguity between sign and object”. It is worth mentioning that visual metonymy is also related to intersemiotic translation, since the iconic visual sign, this indexical sign, of the shop sign could be translated with the verbal message. Kourdis (2013, p. 101) claims that intersemiotic translation

on Greek shop signs is based on the extensive use of indexes and symbols, but in the cases under scrutiny, we observe a preference only for index signs. This remark reflects the influence of indexical signs in visual communication.

## 8. Limassol's Culinary Shop Signs

### 8.1 The linguistic dimension: Verbo-cultural palimpsests and the Greek-Cypriot Dialect

Verbo-cultural palimpsests are also present in Limassol. For example, we can see below the shop sign of the Cypriot taverna “Μεζεδοπαγίδα” [Mezedopajida] (Figure 13), which is situated on 11 Irinis street. The verbal message comprises a composite word that does not exist in Greek. It derives from the fusion of the word “μεζές” [mezes] the Greek word for “snack”, and “παγίδα” [pajida], which means “trap” in Greek. This new composite word evokes the word “ονειροπαγίδα” [orinopajida] which means “dreamcatcher” likely suggesting that the food in this taverna is so tasty that it is used as a trap, and it seduces the consumer like a dream.

The next shop sign reminds us of a similar case in Thessaloniki. It is the shop sign for “Αριστο ... Τέλειον” [Aristo ... Telion] (Figure 14), which is situated on Dimitri Mitropoulou Street, in the medieval Limassol Castle area. This message is composed of two synonymous words: “άριστο”, which means “excellent”, and “τέλειον”, which means “perfect”. It is also acoustically reminiscent of the Greek adjective “αριστοτέλειο” [aristotelio] which means “of Aristotle”. Thus, the food is so good in this place that it is almost perfect. It is worth noting that the verbo-cultural palimpsest that emerges from the addition of three dots and the capitalization of the letter “τ” (“τ” in Greek), is also characterised by the rhetorical phenomenon of exaggeration or hyperbole,<sup>16</sup> which is also a frequent characteristic of advertising.

Figure 13



Figure 14



Continuing our research in Limassol, we see that verbal messages in a Modern Greek dialect appear in this city too. This is the case of the “το Μελούι” [to Meloui] shop sign (Figure 15), which means “the honey” in the Greek-Cypriot Dialect, a rather peculiar verbal message for a restaurant. This choice is not explained on the shop’s website. Another verbal message in the Cypriot Dialect is also the shop sign of the “Στου Σιαντρή” [Stu Siantri] restaurant (Figure 16), which is situated on Glastonos street. This denominative message means “at Siandri’s” in Greek and connotes a well-known place that local people frequently visit. It is interesting that, as in the case of Thessaloniki, on the shop signs written in Modern Greek dialects in Limassol, only nouns are used. These parts of the speech are considered to be strong utterances and usually they have an emphatic use. Winter-Froemel and Zirker (2015, p. 5) argue that modern shop signs, in particular those referring to fashion, luxury services and culinary businesses, try to innovate through unexpected denominative choices that are both original and memorable.

Figure 15



Figure 16



If we take into consideration that Greek-Cypriots are a small language community, the use of the Greek-Cypriot Dialect seems to function as a code of solidarity. As Hammer (2018, p. 260) argues, “the sporadic loans from local dialects aim to create or to enforce the relation of proximity” (our translation from French). Especially on culinary shop signs, as Androutsopoulos (2010) argues, “any language may be used to index the place of origin of a product or service, as the domain of gastronomy makes clear” (p. 745).

## 8.2 The translation dimension: Interlingual and intersemiotic translation

As far as the dimension of translation is concerned, we present below the shop sign of the taverna “Η φωλιά του κούκου” [I folia tu kuku] (Figure 17), which is situated



on 228 Agiou Andrea street. This shop sign evokes the famous American film “The Cuckoo’s Nest”, directed by Milos Forman (1975), with Jack Nicholson and Louise Fletcher, and presents a peculiarity: it belongs to the infrequent cases in Cyprus in which the verbal message of a culinary shop sign is translated interlinguistically from English into Greek.

The next shop sign, “Βαρέλα” [Varela] (Figure 18), constitutes an intersemiotic translation between the two verbal messages, in English and in Greek, and the iconic visual sign of a barrel. Furthermore, the English verbal message gives the consumer the additional information that the barrel is old. In this case, we have an interlingual translation from English into Greek, before proceeding to the intersemiotic translation with the iconic visual sign.

Figure 17



Figure 18



Interlingual translation on Cypriot culinary shop signs seems to be the exception rather than the rule. If we accept that the English language is used for the tourists, the Greek language seems to be used as a *solidarity language code*. As such, we expected to find a bigger number of shop signs in Limassol using intersemiotic techniques, a more frequent choice in Thessaloniki. This observation seems to connote a rather traditional way of advertising in commercial culinary communication in Cyprus.

### 8.3 The visual rhetoric: Visual metonymy and graphic design

On the historic street of Agiou Andrea (street number 239), we can see a crown above the verbal message of one shop sign. The crown could be considered as a visual metonymy of the notion of “king”, as in the case of the Greek shop sign from Thessaloniki (Figure 11). In fact, the crown is just one of the semantic units that belong to the semantic isotopy “royal”. It is worth noting that the white and

blue colours of the shop sign connote the concept of the sea, particularly, of the Mediterranean Sea, and are not related to the notion of royalty. On the contrary, the verbal message calls upon the courtyard of the restaurant and implies that in this restaurant, which offers the typical meze dishes reminiscent of Greece and the islands, one can eat like a king.

A more inspiring visual metonymy is the case of the shop sign of the “Ραστώνη” [rastoni] (“Indolence”) taverna, located on Athinon street. The verbal message, the name of the shop sign, is placed atop a hammock secured by tree trunks. The sign is a three-dimensional metallic construction. Undeniably, a hammock can be considered as one of the numerous signs related to indolence.

Figure 19



Figure 20



As we have previously argued for the culinary shop signs of Thessaloniki using visual metonymy, index continues to be an important sign in rhetoric-commercial communication in Cyprus.

## 9. The Typographic Communication

Among the twenty signs examined in this study, only four are exclusively typographic (Figures 3, 13, 15, 16), while the rest are combined designs that use typography and iconic or decorative elements. Dressed in imagery or not, typographic characters are expected to satisfy the communicative function and produce effective meaning, as explained above. Do they succeed in this complex task in our study cases?

The “Αγιολί” [ajoli] restaurant sign (Figure 7) is a nice example of targeted design that promotes gastronomic discourse both commercially and socially—as discussed in the first section of this study—therefore satisfying the communication goals of

the business. Delicate calligraphic typography that resembles handwriting acts like a signature that reinforces a sense of authenticity. The iconic element, incorporated as a graphic extension of the design, noticeably interacts with type, interpreting the meaning of the word “Αγιολί” [ajoli]. Letterforms, subtly shaded in an elusive, pale blue on the intentionally tarnished background of the sign, hearken back to an older era, evoking nostalgia.

Nostalgia is similarly challenged through the iconic element of the “τσέρκι” [tserki] shop sign (Figure 8), depicting a young girl playing hoop rolling.<sup>17</sup> The “τσέρκι” game was favoured among children in days gone by. Her mid-20th century outfit as she plays the outdated outdoor game brings forth memories and old narratives.<sup>18</sup> Plain, thin, sans serif lowercase letterforms with wide counters are in accordance with the form of the metal hoop so as to promote visual harmony between the typographic and the iconic elements of the sign.

The logo on the shop sign of the “Αριστο...Τελικά...” [Aristo...Telika...] restaurant (Figure 2) is based on rounded and curvy forms that appear playful and friendly. The typeface, a heavy script with rounded swashes and freely drawn letters, interacts with the iconic element—a tornado-like doner kebab—which follows the script design and visually promotes the specialty of the restaurant. The “Αρώμα ... πόλης” [Aroma ... polis] (Figure 3) restaurant shares a similar typeface on its shop sign, with minor design variations. Meanwhile, “ντερλικατέσεν” [derlikatesen] (Figure 5) and “Αθιβολή” [Athivoli] (Figure 6) share a typeface, a brush script font of Greek origin.<sup>19</sup> Script, swash, lowercase typefaces seem to be favoured on culinary shop signs: apart from the cases already mentioned, “Δια ταύτα” [Dia tafta] (Figure 4), “Παλάτι” [Palati] (Figure 12), “Μεζεδοπαγίδα” [Mezedopajida] (Figure 13), and “Αριστο ... Τέλειον” [Aristo ... Telion] (Figure 14) also accommodate script type on their shop signs. In addition to appearing distinguishing, or friendly and inviting if rounded and curvy, a script typeface can also replicate the style of a signature, thus promoting and ensuring the distinctiveness and the personal touch in the products and services offered by the restaurant.

Ornamental decoration also appears to be a common design approach on culinary shop signs. Ornaments that date back to the medieval era and were used to “illuminate” manuscripts (Pohlen, 2011, p. 78), animate typography and connote elegance, therefore, they can draw positive attention if used sensibly and within a targeted

design concept. Their embellishing features provide a flair to plain typographic arrangements, as on the “Αριστο ... Τέλειον” [Aristo ... Telion] (Figure 14) and “Αυλή του Βασιλέα” [Avli tu Vasilea] (Figure 19) shop signs; whereas on other signs, such as “Δια ταύτα” [Dia tafta] (Figure 4), “ντερλικατέσεν” [derlikatesen] (Figure 5) and “Αθιβολή” [Athivoli] (Figure 6), ornamental decorations apply to the overall aesthetics of the sign itself, rather than interacting directly with type.

In contrast, we encounter a case of decorated capitals used on the “Η φωλιά του κούκου” [I folia tu kuku] (Figure 17) shop sign, which is set in a Victorian type design of the Romantic era (Jasper & Jasper, 2008). Type design is exclusively based on letters of the Latin alphabet, which are sloppily altered in order to resemble Greek characters: the letter <Φ> [fi] is made of an “I” and an “O”, the letter <Ω> [omega] is replaced by a “W”, thus resembling a lowercase <ω> /omega/, and the letter <Λ> [lamda] is facilitated by an inverted “V”. The choice of such a type design seems odd and misguided for the occasion, due to: (a) the significant historic load it carries; (b) the complete lack of relevance to both the linguistic and iconic elements of the sign; (c) the design style of the shop sign; and (d) the nature of the restaurant.

“Το μετέωρο βήμα της γαρίδας” [To meteoro vima tis garidas] (Figure 1) and “Βασιλικός” [Vasilikos] (Figure 11) are the only samples among the shop signs of this study that could claim genuine authorship, since they are both hand-painted, evoking the signage craftsmanship of an older era. The shared relationship between the designer and the client in order “to convey specific information or emotions” defies the idea of ‘graphic authorship’ and—occasionally—hardly allows the designer to have critical control over the design task” (Rock, 2009, p. 110). Likewise, in the absence of a graphic design tradition—as in the case of Cypriot graphic design that only started to establish itself in education and professional practice at the dusk of the 20th century<sup>20</sup>—the task is often directly assigned to the craftsman, the sign manufacturer, thus fully bypassing the graphic designer. The visual outcome is of dubious quality, as in the cases of the culinary shop sign designs examined here, which: (a) function in a basic, informative way (Figures 13, 18); (b) provide no further denotation (Figures. 3, 15, 16); or (c) deliver confusing meanings (Figure 17), therefore failing to promote the image and nature of the particular business.

## 10. Concluding Remarks

The study of the shop signs of culinary businesses in the commercial centre of Thessaloniki and Limassol confirms the remark of Lindström, Kull and Palang (2014) that “landscapes can be analysed with the same methodological devices as language, discourse or text” (p. 114). Gastronomic discourse on the shop signs of the two countries are characterised by creativity and playfulness, and the use of different cultural devices or modes such as verbo-cultural palimpsests, dialectical elements, translation practices and visual rhetoric. These observations confirm Bonhomme’s (2013) argument that modern advertising is characterised by a deep transformation “systematizing the implicit playful register of traditional ads” (our translation from French). It is worth noting that all these semiotic modes are not primarily aimed at tourists, as we would expect, but at locals. For this reason, however, these are advertising options that are not easily translated and interpreted by non-Greek speaking tourists who are interested in trying the local cuisine in the places they visit.

Very often, we observe a combination of modes such as verbo-cultural palimpsests and intersemiotic translation, or interlingual and intersemiotic translation, and, much less often, language metonymy and intesemiotic translation. It is also very interesting that the same signified can be depicted by different signifiers (see the Greek shop sign “Aristo...Telika...” and the Greek-Cypriot shop sign “Aristo...Telion”).

The study reveals that iconic visual signs are not used extensively on culinary shop signs as one would expect. Most shop signs, especially in Cyprus, only carry verbal messages. Zantides, Kourdis and Yoka (2016) claim that “[t]he linguistic message is of primary importance in the most recent shop signs of Limassol” (p. 20). The importance that is attributed to the verbal message is evident from the variety of modes in which language is always present. The use of fixed Greek cultural expressions or titles of well-known (mainly American) films as verbal messages in Greek and Cypriot culinary shop signs show that common cultural knowledge and memory continues to provide all the necessary communicational modes to address consumers. This group of consumers seems to mainly consist of the native people of the two countries who are considered in the common cultural practice much better clients/consumers than tourists or foreigners as concerns their culinary habits. Therefore, we haven’t found culinary shop signs only in foreign languages, or any

shop signs without verbal messages.

The abundant variety of typefaces in an ever-growing typographic design market and the ease of their dissemination in the digital era can offer choices and enhance creativity, but also perplex graphic communication. Design tradition and fair professional practices can benefit culinary shop signs in terms of artistry, intention and meaning; conversely, the absence of the former can be to the detriment of the latter. The culinary landscape is an ongoing challenge for graphic communication in forming the aesthetics and promoting the culture of a city.

The creativity of the culinary shop signs proves that gastronomic discourse has started to gradually bear fruit through the poetic function in the case of the shop signs studied. The fact that two cities in different countries share the same patterns in non-referential commercial communication/advertising shows that globalisation could impose common devices, though the consumer has to deal with a particular cultural discourse, as the gastronomic discourse is not only addressed to foreigners such as tourists, and immigrants, in intercultural communication, but also to the natives living in the particular cities, in intracultural communication.

## Notes

- 1 See, “EUKN Policy Lab Retail Policy and the Functional Urban Area facilitating optimal distribution and preventing urban sprawl”, 15 December 2017, Town Planning and Housing Department, Ministry of Interior, Republic of Cyprus, [https://www.eukn.eu/fileadmin/Files/Policy\\_Labs/2017\\_December\\_15/Background\\_Paper.pdf](https://www.eukn.eu/fileadmin/Files/Policy_Labs/2017_December_15/Background_Paper.pdf) (accessed on 29.12.2020).
- 2 See, <https://bit.ly/3tjvi9t> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 3 See, <https://bit.ly/3Mw2jX2> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 4 Jakobson’s referential (also denotative or cognitive) function is focused on the referent or context referred to by the text (Jakobson, 1960, p. 353).
- 5 The copyright to all figures belongs to the Language and Graphic Communication Research Lab (LGCR), Department of Multimedia and Graphic Arts, Cyprus University of Technology.
- 6 For a detailed presentation of the concept of verbo-cultural palimpsest, see Galisson (1991).
- 7 See, <https://bit.ly/3Q14QLJ> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 8 See, <https://bit.ly/38UeJdt> (accessed on 16.6.2022).

- 9 See, <https://bit.ly/3MmqslZ> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 10 See, <https://bit.ly/3mlO2kY> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 11 We adopt Groupe's  $\mu$  (1992) classification of signs to verbal signs, iconic visual signs and plastic visual signs (colour, form and texture).
- 12 This phenomenon occurs not only in Greece. Curtin (2009) documented the fact that "vogue" or "display" French shop names are favoured by high-end restaurants and beauty salons in Taipei. Keng Wee Ong, Chesquière and Serwe (2013) also highlight "the chic prestige of French, which is tied to food, beauty and fashion business" (p. 19).
- 13 Moriarty and Järlehed (2018) argue that "[t]he standardisation of creativity is also reflected in the choice of language: it is generally the English and the European high-status languages such as French that are used in the analysed displays, either solely or in combination with local languages" (p. 4).
- 14 For Greimas (1966), isotopy ensures the semantic coherence of a text through the repetition of similar elements, to establish semantic features.
- 15 See, <https://bit.ly/3zmlBuS> (accessed on 16.6.2022).
- 16 Englis (1994, 73) observes that "[l]anguage is hyperbolic when frequent underlining or italicizing of words and expressions occurs, when unremarkable comments end with exclamation points (marks), and when emphatic words are sprinkled throughout".
- 17 "Τσέρκι" [tserki] in Greek means metal hoop-rolling game.
- 18 Zantides, Kourdis and Yoka (2016) claim that "[n]ew shop signs can look old, but that is more the effect of integration into the visual culture of existing shop signs, rather than a statement of a fashion for 're-discovering traditional aesthetics'" (p. 19).
- 19 CF Painter font, used in both "ντερλικατέσεν" [derlikatesen] (Figure 5) and "Αθιβολή" [Athivoli] (Figure 6) shop signs in Thessaloniki, was designed in the mid-90s by Vlassis Fotinos.
- 20 Zantides, Kourdis, and Yoka (2016) argue that "[w]hat makes the case of Limassol, as a town of the global capitalist periphery, unique, is the fact that design practices on shop signs seem to operate on principles of spontaneity and even lack of interest in graphic design standards of aesthetic and signficatory consistence" (p. 19).

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