

Multimodality in L1 Curriculum: The case of Greek compulsory education

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This paper presents a study of the current First Language (L1) Curriculum in Compulsory Education (Preschool, Primary School and Junior High School) in Greece. Specifically, we examine the extent of the Curriculum's modernisation, in the framework of new language-teaching orientations as defined by multiliteracy pedagogy and multimodality theory. First, we will argue for the close connection between the socio-cultural conception of language and communication and multimodality theory and multiliteracy pedagogy. Then we will try to answer the question: Is language and literacy redefined in the latest Greek Curriculum (2003) away from earlier conceptions suggesting a narrow construal of literacy as a set of skills to more dynamic ones suggesting a view of language and literacy as social practices? This paper discusses language teaching and literacy teaching, considering that since literacy conveys a broader scope than the terms "reading" and "writing", it permits a more unified discussion of relationships between readers, writers, texts, culture and language learning. The focus on literacy, by studying reading and writing in their social contexts of use, frames reading and writing as complementary dimensions of written communication, rather than as utterly distinct linguistic and cognitive processes (Kern, 2000).

There are four parts to this paper. The first part focuses on multimodality in the context of multiliteracy theory and on the necessity for its utilisation in the classroom, hence for integration into the Curriculum. The second part presents our qualitative content analysis approach to research material and data collection. The third part presents our findings from the critical appraisal of the Preschool, Primary and Junior High School curricula, based on categories that arose from studying the research material from the given theoretical perspective. In the closing fourth part, analysis findings are correlated and an interpretation is attempted, taking into account Greece's contemporary educational context.

Theoretical Background: Multimodality and Multiliteracies

Multimodality (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996) is a recent term in the literature. It highlights the complex combinations between media (e.g. a book, a screen), modes (e.g. speech, writing, image, music) and semiotic resources (e.g. fonts, intonation, colours) to make meanings in communication and considers their specific way of configuring the world (Kress, 2003b). Certainly, such media, modes and resources constantly change depending on cultural context and are invariably socially and culturally defined. Rapidly increasing diversity in technology over the last two to three decades has paved the way for the design and production of cultural products (such as games, texts, films, websites) that contain and combine numerous and varied semiotic modes, i.e. modes of representation. Such multimodal cultural products obviously make for novel communication conditions and offer novel ways for making meaning (Kress, 2000b, pp. 182-187). Furthermore, contemporary society's multicultural nature, in conjunction with globalisation, give rise to marked linguistic, as well as cultural, variations. We now communicate in multiple languages (various dialects, numerous

genres, multiple discourses) using communication structures that often transcend our cultural and national borders. Meaning is now made in novel, varied ways intertwined to form multimodal combinations. So, to perceive and make such meaning, we require a new "multimodal literacy" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, pp. 5-6) that will allow us to understand the many and complex modes and the various settings in which communication is effected and meaning is synthesised.

Essentially, the multimodality theory grew in the multiliteracy framework. Like multiliteracies, multimodality has emerged in response to the changing social and semiotic landscape (Jewitt, 2008, pp. 245-246). *Multimodality* appears in The New London Group's (1996) manifesto of multiliteracies which highlights the need to renegotiate the concept and pedagogy of literacy, steering it towards multiliteracies. The manifesto asserts that this new orientation is necessitated by the modern world's multiplicity of communication avenues and linguistic diversity. Thus, as a result of novel communication technologies and the supranational multicultural communication landscape, language is not the only way to express meaning and text is defined as "any instance of communication in any mode or in any combination of modes" (Kress, 2003a, p. 48). The key to multimodal perspectives in literacy is the basic assumption that meanings are made (distributed, interpreted and remade) through many representational and communicational resources, of which language is but one (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Multimodality and multiliteracies interrelate to propose an expanded notion of text and indeed of the way by which the processes of reading, writing, speaking and listening are conceptualized; these are revisited as social practices.

In this context, therefore, not only are monomodal communication approaches revisited, but written language's dominance is challenged too. This refers mainly to the representation that was the most powerful socially, with its homogeneity, rigidity, autonomy and subordination to fixed grammatical rules (Kress, 2000a, p. 159). According to Halliday (1978) and his socio-cultural approach to language, the person who makes meaning makes choices about representing social relations and the way she/he sees the world and about the means which would make her/his message a text. Utilising Halliday's views on grammar's choice alternatives for the user, not rules for the ideal speaker, and on the three fundamental functions of a sentence (interpersonal, ideational and textual), multiliteracy and multimodality theory no longer views speakers as consumers of an immutable system (Kress, 2000a, p. 160; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996). On the contrary, given that meanings develop during communication, meaning is a process, not fixed or static. Speakers and writers are conceived as subjects who act by transforming semiotic modes dynamically. That is, meaning is made gradually through utilising available resources, as the individual, in his/her social, cultural and historical setting, negotiates communication's constantly shifting occasions and needs (Fairclough, 2000, p. 162). Each time in this process, the individual employs some of the many and varied modes available in order to put across specific aspects of his/her message, formulating the best-fitting message representation for his/her purpose.

In the multiliteracies and multimodality context, language is conceived differently. Now, the significance of variety, diversity, change and creativity is recognised. Emphasis shifts to the variety of language forms which co-exist, but are socially diverse. Even text is no longer considered a single-faceted and autonomous product, with given and non-negotiable meanings. It is viewed as a clearly bounded, internally cohesive unit of language, consisting of a combination of various semiotic resources and modes. There may be a dominant mode therein, however the other modes influence meaning making. Thus, text's meaning is not a mere sum total, but an outcome of the producer's choices and the reader's/listener's reception and signification (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 187), while it is also linked to situations and communication conditions beyond

language. From this perspective, text encompasses a dynamism as regards the meanings it expresses. In this context, communication as transmission and transformation of meaning becomes a lot broader (Kress, 2000b, pp. 189-190), while also characterised by great polysemy, with a multitude of connotations. This polysemy is maximised through the use of complex modes of representation.

The multiliteracies and multimodality theories have important implications for education for two reasons: firstly, because the teaching and learning processes essentially rely on communication. As the communication landscape shifts, so must every process utilising it. Secondly, because communication is taught at school mainly through language courses. Thus, any change in communication also calls for language teaching redefinition. Especially in literacy teaching, we ought to rethink and renegotiate its general objectives. A school that prepares its students for the contemporary dynamic communication landscape by using it, turns students into active producers and readers/listeners of multimodal texts in a manner that will allow them to become critically literate through: (a) understanding that a text is not a transparent window on reality, but is constructed; (b) developing and demonstrating rhetorical awareness; and (c) developing agency as a communicator, rather than opting for media-promoted passivity (Duffelmeyer & Ellertson, 2005).

Teaching literacy in the context of multiliteracies and multimodality means developing critical literacy at schools, if it implies teaching and learning through revealing the structures of power in language and other modes (Luke & Carpenter, 2003, p. 20). Despite the recommendations of the pedagogy of multiliteracies (The New London Group, 2000, pp. 30-37) on *Critical Framing*, its relationship with critical literacy should not be taken for granted. It presupposes that multimodal texts are used in the classroom as a basis for critical engagement and redesign. Only if students study multimodal texts focusing on how power works in representation, if they become actively involved in text production by choosing from the modes available and bringing their lived experience, multimodal by nature, to school, will critical literacy be served/nurtured (Jewitt, 2008, p. 262). Such lived experience creates various perspectives, since it relates to different sociocultural settings, and in turn highlights various realities. Literacy, thus, is more than just a choosing from existing resources. It is actively making signs (Hodge & Kress, 1988). The sign and the meanings that a sign-maker makes are an expression of his/her disposition, habitus, identity and interests. In a context of debate, dialogue or even synthesis, new meanings can be reviled in the classroom. The view of language and other modes of representation as a form of critical thinking and social action, can refresh literacy teaching significantly.

Examining L1 Curriculum in Greek Compulsory Education

L1 Curriculum and Multiliteracies

The aim of our research project is to study how Greek formal education perceives literacy and literacy teaching and to what extent it incorporates elements of multimodality and multiliteracies theories presented above. We chose to study the official texts, namely the three L1 curricula in compulsory education, because we wanted to understand deeply the official literacy teaching policy, its real intentions versus its rhetoric ones. Curriculum, as a political text (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995), demarcates in-school activity, so it should be interpreted as an ideologically laden mechanism that permits us to understand the practices by which this theory is to be enacted in classrooms (Kostouli, 2002, pp. 5-6), and, in the long term, it may act as a check on the students' future civic activity in broader society. Moreover, as an ideological text it has been ideologically constructed by political forces

within a particular historical and political context (Codd, 1988, p. 244). But policy can be treated both as a text and as discourse, because they are implicit in each other (Ball, 1994), so the curriculum text develops and contributes to a particular set of discourses (Maw, 1993).

The adoption of the pedagogy of multiliteracies and the theory of multimodality by any L1 curriculum is certainly a political choice. It is a choice to incorporate social changes (i.e. globalization and diversity, see: The New London Group, 2000, pp. 9-17; Kalantzis, Cope & Harvey, 2003) and communication developments (brought on by the progress of digital technologies and the reconfiguration of the representational and communicational resources of image, sound, discourse, etc. in new multimodal ensembles) in education. It is actually a political choice to renegotiate the meaning of a literate person in the contemporary society, that is gradually abandoning written speech and books in favor of image and the screen (Kress, 2003a, p.1). In other words, it signifies a change of policy for education, from the traditional and dominant view of literacy as a universal, autonomous and monolithic entity to a view of literacies as locally, historically, socially and culturally situated (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000). We argue that the curriculum that adopts a multiliteracies orientation is a socially and culturally responsive curriculum. It challenges the dominant models of literacy that continue to focus on restrictive print- and language-based notions of literacy, making a point of meeting the communication requirements of contemporary digitalized society (Jewitt, 2008, pp. 245-248). It is the political choice to liberate education from a monomodal and monocultural view of literacy, turning it towards new forms of representation that affect not only the construction of knowledge but also the construction of identities and roles in the classroom (Jewitt, 2006).

In this framework, we could approach L1 curriculum by means of education policy analysis. Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) described three contexts within which education policy is formulated and enacted – the context of influence, the context of policy text production and the context of implementation. Our study did not include the context of implementation, where we could investigate the teachers' acceptance of or resistance to policy mandates.

By viewing L1 curriculum as an expression of specific information, ideas and intentions, we attempt an analysis of the content of this policy document taking into account the context in which it was produced. Focusing our analysis on explicating the ideas and intended meanings of the curriculum under study, we investigate whether the state opts for a real multimodal orientation for language teaching or places multimodality within a more managerial approach.

The Greek Compulsory Education System

As curriculum is a social product and is interrelated to other educational components, we consider it necessary to present the key features of the Greek compulsory education system. They form the context of the curricula under study that can illuminate our findings and enrich the discussion about their implications.

Compulsory education in Greece consists of elementary school and Junior High school, 1st to the 9th grade (students' age: 6 to 15 years old). Since September 2007, under the provisions of article 73 of Law 3518/2006, the second year of the childhood (pre-school) education is also compulsory for young children (aged 5-6). Since senior high school does not form part of compulsory education, we did not study the L1 Curriculum of this rung. Moreover, the curriculum of senior high school has emerged

from a previous educational reform, not the reform that shaped the current curriculum for compulsory education.

The Greek educational system is highly centralised and is characterised by bureaucratic administration. So all the curricula, the L1 curricula included, are extremely detailed, designed centrally and published in a top-down way. That is, they are expected to be applied across the entire country in the same way and to be implemented through a series of L1 textbooks, the same for all the Greek students, that are also written under the supervision of the same central administrative organism, the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute, an advisory body to the Greek Ministry of Education. So the curricula form an integrated and homogenised whole, common to all schools in Greece, reaching them in a ready-to-apply form.

The L1 curricula implemented since 2006 were designed by consultants at the Hellenic Pedagogical Institute with no contribution from classroom teachers. They were published in 2003 (Official Government Gazette 303, 2003). The Ministry advertised them as an innovation based on the cross-thematic principle which they claimed to implement, instead of the traditional field-centered curricula and teacher-centered teaching strategies (Matsaggouras, 2002). The main aim was to develop a common and unified curriculum which could upgrade general education as a system that can shape social reality providing answers to social problems (Alahiotis & Karatzia-Stavlioti, 2006).

We could expect current curricula to display multiliteracies elements, since their creation aimed at modernising education and promoted the concept of interdisciplinarity, a concept that closely relates to multimodality (Jewitt, 2008, pp. 255-256; Katsarou, 2009, p. 57). One of the characteristics of the contemporary multimodal communicational landscape is a shifting and remaking of disciplinary boundaries. We would therefore expect a contemporary and interdisciplinary Curriculum to build connections across discourses of specialized knowledge and everyday knowledge, an emphasis on context-based learning and the introduction of new cross-curricular projects, through designing and redesigning curriculum knowledge across modes.

Our study

Qualitative content analysis is the research method we selected (Mayring, 2000; 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994), specifically the research steps proposed by Mayring (2003). Initially, we specified what texts would be analysed, namely the three curricula (for Preschool, Primary School, and Junior High School, respectively) for L1 teaching, three distinct prongs of a common Cross Thematic Curriculum Framework (henceforth CTCF). Each curriculum comprises two parts. The first part presents the course's general principles and goals. The second more specific and practical part details for each unit what should be taught, its objectives and teaching methods. We chose this particular course's curricula because, like other courses, it is affected by the contemporary communication landscape but, unlike other courses, communication is its focus and it aims to create competent, literate students and citizens. Additionally, we chose to study all three curricula (for Preschool, Primary and low Secondary Education) that together make up compulsory education. Of particular interest to us is the extent to which these three curricula demonstrate a common perspective on language, communication and the literate citizen, and adopt the same principles both in framework and in the teaching directions they offer. Thus we investigate the dominant discourse of curriculum reform processes in L1 Curriculum, which could influence the teachers' practices, shaping their view on what constitutes a legitimate curriculum (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997).

Looking at our material from the selected theoretical perspective, we defined presence/absence of multimodality and endorsement/rejection of multiliteracy prospective as the key research parameters. This led to the following research questions:

- To what extent do the three L1 curricula incorporate elements of multimodality theory?
- How consistent with the multiliteracy theoretical framework's sociocultural perspective on language and communication is their approach to literacy teaching?

Next, the paragraph was set as the unit of analysis. Each objective, each recommended teaching activity and so on was considered a single paragraph. After carefully studying the curricula in a deductive/inductive fashion (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993), that is based not only on the documents under study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, pp. 101-161), but also on the multiliteracies literature mentioned above, we compiled the taxonomy on which the analysis of curricula were based.

Categories of analysis

Finally we arrived at the following taxonomy:

1. The use of multimodality in teaching; multimodality as a teaching tool and as a taught subject:

- 1.1 References to multimodality: explicit or implicit (e.g. mentions the employment of multiple codes when communicating).
- 1.2. Ways multimodality is used in educational practice: a) use of multimodal educational materials, b) comprehension and production of multimodal texts by students.
- 1.3. The curriculum suggests processes for multimodal text signification through activities that combine the language course with other courses working with different semiotic codes (e.g. art education, mathematics).

2. Manifestation of a sociocultural view of language and communication:

- 2.1. Language is seen as one of many modes of communication.
- 2.2. Explicit references to semiotic modes for meaning making other than language: the ways by which such modes make meaning, either autonomously or jointly.
- 2.3. Texts are studied in their sociocultural context. Situated text comprehension and production is attempted, that is, once texts have been situated in specific social practices.
- 2.4. Text is viewed more broadly, it does not merely reflect social reality but is also constructed by it while constructing it.
- 2.5. Texts composed by different modes and representing various genres are studied and produced.
- 2.6. Promotion of a grammar of choice alternatives, not of a normative grammar.

The material was then coded and typical examples were picked for each category. After that, the data was subjected to 'structuring', specifically content structuring and prototype structuring (Mayring, 1993, in Bonidis 2004, pp. 129-134). With content structuring, we attempted to identify in the curricula under study specific themes and

content, essentially viewpoints from the multiliteracies and multimodality theoretical framework, as well as summarise them. With prototype structuring, we attempted to identify within the curricula the most significant references. Indeed, we studied carefully each category's and subcategory's cards and selected noteworthy references that could be singled out as "prototypical" ones.

Finally, post-processing involved the interpretation of findings against two fundamental criteria: (a) The degree of the text's inner cohesion, logical consistency and application of its theoretical principles in the classroom-practice parts. Any internal conceptual conflicts identified were commented on and interpreted; (b) The social and, in particular, educational context of data coded into specific categories and of our findings. That is, we correlated findings with the broader educational context, the official and unofficial educational theory that has formed the dominant education discourse in Greece in recent years.

Research findings

In relation to Category 1, it appears that the three curricula are not aligned as regards the utilisation of multimodality. There is a remarkable difference between the Preschool Curriculum, which heavily hinges on multimodality, and the other two curricula. More specifically, the multimodal orientation in the Preschool Curriculum is obvious not only in the unit titled *Child, Creativity and Expression*, where teachers are called on to create the conditions for children to express themselves in various ways, not just through language, but also in the various explicit or implicit references to multimodality. So, on the one hand the children are expected to have the opportunities "to develop and express ideas and feelings in many ways, such as play, dramatisation, writing, sketching..." (p. 587) or "for experimentation with materials and techniques [in] activities [that] combine and complement each other, blazing new creative trails" (p. 589). On the other hand, the students should receive "information from various sources such as posters, films, shapes, works of art, in which images and written language co-exist". These references are complemented systematically and extensively by the endorsement of the use of multimodal educational materials in teaching and in producing multimodal texts, as the children are expected "to write under their drawings as far as they can, supplementing and interpreting the image's meaning, and to express themselves by creating greetings cards or invitations..." (p. 597); "to tell stories, add illustrations and dramatise them collaboratively" (p. 609). Generally, the Preschool curriculum suggests processes through which children get acquainted with their literate environment: they describe how they put together a collage, distinguish Greek from Latin characters by observing the packaging of everyday items, dictate letters, invitations, lists, recipes etc. to the teacher.

The picture is noticeably different in the Primary and Junior High School Curricula. There are no explicit references to multimodality, and only limited implicit ones can be found, relative to paralingual and non-verbal elements of oral speech in particular (pp. 3752, 3779, 3782) or to written communication signs and codes (pp. 3769, 3779). Moreover, even if in both Primary and Junior High School Curricula teachers are encouraged to use multimodal material when teaching, as they are called to utilise non-verbal information resources ("small ad, telegram, simple map, [...] advertising poster..." p. 3770; "Internet searches" p. 3771) or to ask students to read "a conversation, a website, weather forecast, music show, advertisement etc. (Physics, Music, Literature) (p. 3781)", this implicitly multimodal perspective of these curricula is hampered by the absence of provision of open instruction on the ways different modes are combined to meaning making and by the absence of multimodal text production activities by the students.

There could be a cross-thematic contribution to the multimodal orientation. That is, as students, in all the grades, are called upon to approach themes from multiple viewpoints. They could become familiar with the various alternative versions of reality, as well as the complementarity of the various modes through which these themes are approached and signified. This correlation of cross-thematic and multimodal is evident, yet implied, in all the recommended cross-thematic projects for both Primary (publication of newspaper, author a tourist guide...p. 3771), and Junior High Schools (examine the event's description using press clippings, sound archives, music, songs and literature). Yet there arises an obvious question, already highlighted in relevant papers (Noutsos, 2003, pp. 24-29; Grollios, 2003, pp. 30-37), namely to what extent the curriculum's structure allows for cross-thematic linking and goes beyond empty rhetoric when proclaiming a multimodal orientation, along with a multi-perspective approach. The limited teaching time, along with the large volume of content to be taught in Primary and Junior High School, effectively undermine any multimodal activity planning and have a negative, if not destructive, effect on the success in organizing and completing the cross thematic projects (Aggelakos, 2007, p. 463). Also crippling is the traditional objective-centred structure of the curriculum (Passias & Flouris, 2001) with its multiple objectives and contents.

Thus, we conclude that, contrary to Preschool, multimodality is at the core of neither the Primary nor the Junior High School Curriculum. Implicit references to multimodality and a sprinkling of related activities cannot make these curricula multimodal. Indeed, we could argue that each curriculum's monomodal orientation and pigeonholing approach leaves little room for any complementary, peripheral multiliteracy strategies to grow. But, as curriculum reforms are influenced by power relations, competing agendas and discourses, these determine how the curriculum would be viewed in practice (Taylor et al., 1997). We could conclude in a question that would be the starting point for another research project: Does the promotion of the ever-dominant, syllabus-centred, monomodal educational discourse lock the teacher yet again in a struggle to cover the syllabus and transmit given knowledge, rather than consider the students' lived experiences in terms of the new multimodal and multicultural social and cultural practices?

In relation to Category 2, data and findings point to more complex conclusions. As early as the General section of the Cross-Thematic Curriculum Framework (CTCF), where essentially the general orientation of each curriculum is outlined and specified at least in principle, there is heavy emphasis on the need to cultivate "the skills of communication, collaboration and all-round participation in the contemporary social developments" (p. 3736). We establish, therefore, that the main CTCF aspiration is to form a collaborative and interactive framework, considered essential in preparing students for their multicultural environment, based on an expanded form of communication (Koutselini, 1997).

In all three curricula, too, communication is heavily emphasised, language being the key communication instrument. Specifically at Preschool, communication defined as the "interaction and presentation of data in multiple ways, such as constructions, dramatisation, sketching, tables, diagrams" (p. 590), is considered the pivot around which Language and all other courses revolve, given the explicit proclamation that it is through communication that "knowledge and language gradually develop" (p. 587). Moreover, in both Primary and Junior High School Curricula, language remains "a system of communication based on articulated words" (CTCF, p. 3745), or "a fundamental instrument of communication", i.e. as a tool. That is, at school we develop

the language that can help the student cope with his everyday life responsibilities, communication being the single most important one.

This communicative dimension of language is supported by the particular concern shown by compulsory education curricula to develop spoken language skills. The Preschool Curriculum dedicates a chapter to Oral Communication, stating clearly which competencies, relevant content and recommended activities form part of the curriculum's objectives. Here is a telling goal: "At Preschool, a variety of communication situations should be devised, in order to encourage children right from the start to speak and narrate, describe, explain and interpret, use elementary arguments ..." (p. 593). The other two curricula also dedicate a section to spoken language, including goals, thematic units and sample teaching activities for all grades, which in fact link spoken language with the need to communicate. That is, both curricula build upon the widely acknowledged premise that language teaching should be concerned with the communicative underpinnings of language choice (Papoulia-Tzelepi, 2001). So the students are expected to "comprehend the speaker's (author's) rationale for his/her language choices, as defined by communication circumstances" (Primary Curriculum, pp. 3750-3751) or to relate grammar and syntactic phenomena to the speaker's intentions, which in turn depend on communication circumstances ("[Students ought] to recognise the morphosyntactic and vocabulary choices made by their discussion partners, depending on communication circumstance" (Junior High School, pp. 3778-3779).

Written language, too, is explicitly related to communication. Already at Preschool, according to the curriculum, the aim is that children "understand the importance of writing as a means of communicating, developing ideas, passing information" (p. 596). According to the Primary School Curriculum, too, the student ought to "be conscious of writing in a style suitable for the target and receiver of his/her written work" (pp. 3757). Finally, at Junior High School, a key objective (p. 3779) is that students "compose texts of different genres depending on the receiver, objective and circumstances of communication". So, according to the curricula, communication circumstances prescribe both spoken and written language. The basic aim is for the students to acquire communicative competence (Hymes, 1974).

Language, whether spoken or written, is explicitly associated with communication in a one-to-one relationship. However, with language considered as the dominant mode of communication, not much room is left for looking into other semiotic modes of communication or for developing the multimodal skills required. Practically, only at Preschool do references to non-verbal modes of meaning making highlight them as a pivotal point for the curriculum alongside verbal ones, even though they are not the subject of systematic study.

For the other two stages of compulsory education, language as the dominant communication mode naturally becomes the main, if not only, object of study in the Language course. Tellingly, forty-six pages of Primary School Curriculum contain a mere three points suggesting that alternative meaning making modes be studied - and even they are in the *Sample Activities* column ("Comparing product presentation and advertising", p. 19; "Locating messages in art", p. 3750; "Advertising mechanisms and strategies", p. 3751). At Junior High School, too, references to non-lingual semiotic modes for meaning making are very few (e.g. the goal that "[students] easily recognise messages from written codes and communication signs", p. 3779). Moreover, language's contribution to "the intellectual and emotional development of students" is stressed, yet no reference is made to other semiotic modes' respective contributions. Thus, references to non-lingual modes for making meaning reduce to a peripheral, ancillary role.

Linking language and communication does not imply that language's sociocultural dimension has been considered. On the contrary, it only focuses on providing students with functional skills to apply in a predetermined social context. Language's restriction to its communication dimension could impart a utilitarian and functional character to its study (Hasan, 1996). Language is the means of communication that, when moulded to suit a given situation, allows effective communication. So, language becomes a means of adjustment to social reality, which essentially overlooks its power and contribution to the prospect of (re)forming social life (Hyslop-Margison & Pinto, 2007, pp. 196-198; Shor, 1992, pp. 126; Lankshear, 1993, pp. 90-91; Luke, 1996). But focus on language's sociocultural dimension presupposes interest for the development of critical literacy, variously conceived as applications of critical thinking to texts and to associated social practices, in order to actively produce and transform them (the texts and the practices associated with them) (Lankshear & Knobel, 1998). Moreover "language is not only an instrument of communication or even of knowledge. It is also an instrument of power. One seeks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (Bourdieu, 1977, cited in Codd, 1988, p. 242).

A first analysis of the curricula under study points to a certain degree of linking language and society. Such an orientation is evident in highlighting written language's social dimension: "Preschool written language projects should offer children opportunities for becoming aware of issues related to why and what we write, that is with written language's social dimension" (p. 596). Additionally, the Primary School curriculum includes references to language's power in (re)forming social life: "It is intended that [the student] becomes aware (a) that he/she possesses the capacity to describe, and alter external reality, as well as create a reality through language, insofar as he/she employs appropriate linguistic means, and (b) that this capacity comes from knowledge and conscious use of the language system" (p. 3748).

Nevertheless, this aspiration is not really supported by the curricula as would be fit for an innovative approach (for Greece) in guidance and sample practices offered later. At Junior High School, for instance, on one hand there is guidance for "teaching activities through which students try various forms of spoken and written communication and produce effective language of various types and genres" (p. 3792). Yet, on the other hand, there is not even a cursory mention of instruction methods that would allow students to become aware of this social dimension and power of language, tapping into it in a realistic or simulated setting in their various activities, at least in the language course. But in real teaching situations, it is difficult to translate into teaching practice what is theoretically suggested by the curriculum. It is really difficult for the teacher to help students become critical readers and writers, especially if he/she gets no explicit guidance from the curriculum. So students seem to have few opportunities, if any, to learn how to detect the way people construct and reproduce power via specific social practices (Fairclough, 1992). As the curricula focus on the close relation between language and communication, students become consumers of language as a product and passive recipients of communicative skills. They do not learn to analyse the socially constructed strategies employed by people in specific, culturally defined communicative contexts in the process of creating and/or negotiating social action.

The compulsory education curricula do not appear to adopt a common view of 'text'. At the same time, the curricula contain explicit or implicit inconsistencies. For instance, the Preschool Curriculum contains points where text is limited to its written form ("what gets read is text, not the image", p. 594), yet elsewhere 'image' is "a medium for expressing and transmitting a message" (p. 596), i.e. it is presented as a visual text. In the Primary School Curriculum, too, while 'text' implicitly means the same as 'written language' and, indeed, is contrasted to 'image' which isn't text, (for instance "transform

comics into text", p. 3755), elsewhere it is implied that there are visual or even multimodal texts where images and written language merge to jointly make the text's meaning (e.g. "correlates the text's linguistic elements with its accompanying visual material"). The same curriculum makes numerous references to spoken and written text genres, further broadening 'text' as a concept: "The student works gradually to become capable of [...] gaining familiarity with genre (e.g. narrative/expressive writing) and type of text (eg. fable narration), [...] employs various genres and composes different types of text for different purposes and receivers" (p. 3758).

The Junior High School Curriculum appears to have adopted a consistently broader view of 'text'. Language production is defined as "any text, spoken or written, produced by students in a specific communication setting, with a specific objective" (p. 3792). 'Text' is not limited to written language, hence the stated need for embedding it in communication. Indeed, expanding 'text' further, it emphasises the need for students to gain familiarity with a large variety of texts from multiple sources ("...be able to read and write texts and communicate using a computer, transmitting or receiving", p. 3780; "to realise the wealth of genre forms in conjunction with the communication goals they serve", p. 3781; "the student listens to or reads a variety of texts from all courses and other sources ...", p. 3780; "...watches / reads a conversation, a website, a weather forecast, a music show, an advertisement etc.", p. 3781).

Certainly, in all three curricula students are required by various statements to study and produce texts usable in various communication settings (oral invitations, instructions, announcements, interviews, advertisements). All three curricula also share some common views on 'text', namely the reference to genres and their linking to communication circumstances. These are important steps towards a critical literacy approach, as students can begin to decode texts of any genre, relate them to individual and collective needs and, at the same time, realise the power and intervention potential of texts, provided that this communicative dimension is not restricted to the level of functional communication but is used in social practices that raise disputes, dilemmas, conflicts of interest and so on. However, the specific curricula do not appear to adopt this orientation.

The same timidity is evident in the version of grammar adopted by the curricula. A first-pass read of the curricula general principles seems to opt for the grammar of choice alternatives, establishing the conditions for students to develop means and ways of perceiving and producing various socially situated texts. So the students are expected to "recognise the structural and grammatical elements of their first language at clause and text level, in order to identify and explain any departures or contraventions thereof" (Junior High School, p. 3745). And, although we would expect such departures or contraventions to be related to the wider social context, we find out that the alternatives offered by the curricula to their users are only correlated with communication circumstances: "the student will make conscious use of phrasal alternatives required by the communication setting" (Primary, p. 3745), "students practise the use of language in producing and understanding spoken and written language, in their communicative capacity to modify their language to suit the communication circumstances..." (Junior High School, p. 3792).

Also, in the *Teaching Methodology* section of the Primary School Curriculum, attention is paid to three distinct levels: grammar of the word, of the sentence, of the text and communication (p. 3774). We see, therefore, references to learning how linguistic elements work and to acquiring skills regarding the use of language in the social context (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). Yet, the curriculum's whole structure impedes, if not undermines, this prospect. Initially, this distinction is not supported methodologically with concrete examples by the curriculum. What is stated, simply and vaguely, is only

what should be avoided ("Hence teaching [language] system grammar must not exceed what is "reasonable") and how traditional, mainly first-level grammar teaching ought to be limited ("the objective is [for the student] to sort subcases into a declension model fixed in advance, since this is his/her mother language and its grammatical types are already known [to the student]") (p. 3774). Besides, this distinction is not obvious elsewhere in the curriculum and is potentially confusing to the teacher. For instance, at various points in the sample activities section, there is a multitude of grammatical phenomena to be taught by the teacher without any text and communication context (recognition of parts of speech, conjugation of verbs, declension of declinables..., p. 3769). So, the teacher who is familiar with teaching language norms may well stick to using the first two levels of "grammar", so that that the various grammatical forms be presented and taught separately from spoken and written discourse (Kostouli, 2002, p.11).

Despite its support for studying communication in a sociocultural context, the Junior High School Curriculum also displays many choices straight from traditional grammar, which focus on morphology and syntax: "A verb's [1st/2nd] conjugation, voice, diathesis, tense, person" (p. 3781); "Declining nouns and adjectives" (p. 3781). There are also several choice alternatives regarding vocabulary, although decontextualised in most cases. Special attention is given to composing words: "The types of compounds (co-ordinative, subordinative, possessive etc.)" (p. 3784); "adjective derivatives" (p. 3782). There are a lot fewer choices regarding genre grammar: "The macro-structure of text" (p. 3785); "Paragraph and narrative structure and cohesion" (p. 3785). Finally, there are next to no choice alternatives regarding the significance and function of lexical and grammatical forms in language: "Nouns and adjectives in descriptions" (p. 3781); "Narrating with verbs" (p. 3781); "Literal and metaphorical language" (p. 3788).

The curriculum's linear juxtapositioning of phenomena to be taught and, mainly, the insignificant references to language at the semantic level lead to traditional-style teaching of the language system, with a sprinkling of genre grammar. However, the communicative and text-centred approach to language which the curriculum emphatically and explicitly claims to serve (see pp. 3791-3792) can only be applied in the classroom, not remain fragmented and vague, on the basis of a grammar that is oriented towards semantics and the functions of language elements. A grammar, that is, that will interpret language as a system of meanings embodied in forms.

Conclusions

As we can conclude from the above, the new compulsory education L1 curricula do not seem to correspond to the needs emerging in the contemporary multicultural and multilingual social context which demands multiliteracy skills or competencies from citizens. Critical analysis, when used to deconstruct the curriculum text, can reveal certain contradictions and inconsistencies of the ideology latent in it (Codd, 1988, p. 245).

More specifically, the curricula are in fact closed and rigid, with very clear, stated or implied, preplanned directions, which makes them technocratic both in planning and classroom implementation. So, a closed, homogenised and rigid curriculum is de facto unable to serve a multiliteracy perspective (The New London Group, 2000, p. 18). Hence, it is only natural that the curricula display only one language (the standard linguistic form, independent of its various development and evolution factors) and offer a single meaning, representing a single social reality. Different versions of reality, associated with ever-changing sociocultural conditions, cannot find their place in such a framework.

In the context of only one language that must be taught, one meaning that must be made or received, as defined by the curriculum, genuine variety or variations may prove risky. Thus, any variety is artificial. That is, the varieties projected in the curricula relate either to different communication conditions or to different genres and texts. So, the different versions of language and, via these, of social reality are merely correlated with communication circumstances to which the student ought to adapt, acquiring specific communication skills. The various genres are seen as static, abstract entities with specific features, ideal for classroom processing, yet unrelated to social situations and with no relation to social action. It may be a strategy by which policy agents try to mask the monocultural monomodal orientation of the curriculum.

Language, therefore, is not defined in terms of social action. It just becomes the dominant communication mode, an immutable system governed by fixed rules, yet with little relation to the social context. It is worth noting that the "simulated" discourse produced in the classroom and bounded by the predefined frameworks and the textbook's practice questions, having but the slightest relationship with discourse produced under real communication conditions, effectively reinforces the view that communication skills constitute a package of taught content and do not evolve through use. Text ultimately turns into a static product, standalone, with one meaning, monolingual and monomodal. It is not presented as a socially situated process reflecting the producer's choices and receiver's signification, nor as a dynamic process of actively transforming the resources available for meaning making.

In this educational context, the multicultural reality is naturally ignored and multimodality is seen at best as a teaching instrument. Thus, the world carried by students is made use of insofar as it does not endanger adjustment to accepted language forms. After all, meaning and reality are fixed, as far as the school is concerned. They are not constructed by text production and reception whereby literate students could examine their own perspectives.

Therefore, the communicative and genre approaches, while promoted as innovations in the curricula, essentially serve the dominant educational discourse through their recontextualisation by them. Communication circumstances specify objectively measurable norms outside any sociocultural setting, to which students ought to conform. Genres, too, as abstract entities decoupled from social action, become taught material. So, both communication skills and genres are broken down into fragments of knowledge that students ought to conquer, not so much in order to be effective speakers, but to satisfy curricula's assessment criteria. Perfectly aligned with this version is the educational discourse comprising the single textbook, detailed syllabus, conventional grammatical view of language, testing and quantitative assessment processes, etc. (Cook-Gumperz, 2006).

However, as already indicated, compulsory education curricula exhibit variations, some of which seem important and challenging to interpret. First, the Preschool Curriculum, in contrast to the others, has multimodality as a key axis. This is, however, easy to interpret. Any message is more accessible to children who have not conquered reading and writing yet, when transmitted in different ways and non-exclusively language texts are employed. Besides, a practice that, for instance, exploits visual texts does not contradict the dominant educational discourse with respect to Preschool Education. The study and critical treatment of other modes, the comparison with written and spoken language communication, in the context of emerging literacy, could be viewed as innovative. However, such an orientation is absent.

A more important variation seems to be the Primary School Curriculum's stance on utilising student 'voices' i.e. different ways of perceiving and interpreting the world. With the creative use of Literature, the power of language as a sociocultural phenomenon in constructing reality versions is brought to the fore with specific teaching practices. For instance, the inclusion of some transformation tasks ("processing a literary/narrative text and transforming it into a play and dialogue, and its dramatisation", p. 3754), or even of a change in plot or filling in an unfinished story, offer hints of how language can construct reality. In fact, if the teacher invites students to study the choice alternatives they produced through transformations, then language's social significance starts to emerge in teaching practice and to relate to the sociocultural context of its production. Such a sociocultural orientation could also be served by studying text as a synthesis of resources that together constitute a complete, socially situated meaning. In that way, school would aspire to create literate students who can investigate and decode messages, attempt novel significations and proactively mediate in society.

In such a pluralistic context, communication approach could also diverge, since communication may not necessarily equate to norms for students to conquer, but to a process for signifying the surrounding world and forming positions and views. This is a process that grows in school, as well, not merely to get through lessons, but primarily for students to use language in order to pose issues and problems, and gradually conquer modes that will lead them to personal interpretations of their, or others', experiences.

This holds as long as the other parts of the curriculum do not undermine this multiliteracy orientation. The three curricula do not seem to ensure this. Quite the opposite. The whole structure of these curricula, with their disjointed, decontextualised grammatical and syntactic material, allows the teacher to limit language teaching to conquering norms. So students approach language as a static product, forced to accept the specific sociocultural hierarchies reflected in the standard language. They conquer and acquire the traditional grammatical competence, which, as it is not accompanied by a real communicative competence, restore the language teaching in a traditional way.

Of course, at Junior High School, as the educational context becomes more restrictive primarily via standardised testing, pluralistic practices have no place not even as intentions. In this exam-centred climate, students can only be consumers, without individuality or diverse experiences. For a student to succeed and advance personally, he/she must learn to use language effectively in communication circumstances. However, by reproducing socially acceptable (i.e. dominant) discourse patterns, the student effectively reproduces world views reflected and social relationships embodied therein.

The study of these specific curricula leads to the conclusion that they are texts of an official educational policy that does not dare to adopt changes that have already taken place in society. Literacy is approached statically, as knowledge shaped in the past, not dynamically, as knowledge that is being shaped by the complexity of our constantly changing, socially and culturally diverse, globalised and technological world. We should bear in mind that these curricula were shaped in the context of a centralized educational system, that promotes homogenization over diversity, opting for inflexible curricula that ignore local circumstances.

Before closing, what we could certainly claim is that Greek education does not lack good intentions, at least in L1 curricula. However, these remain good intentions merely looking the part of modernisation proclamations in the curricula. In this way, modernisation is just rhetoric, essentially a smokescreen for dangerous inaction. Even

where good intentions lead to curriculum reformations, the respective practices nullify any innovative outlook. Many questions emerge, requiring further study:

Could this be due to timidity? Could it be an inability to transform theory into teaching practice, even at the planning stage? Or is the dominant educational discourse rooted so deeply, that it cancels out all attempts and takes us "back to basics"?

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