

IDENTIFYING ELEMENTS OF INTERCULTURALISM AND LANGUAGE MEDIATION IN THE “MODERN GREEK PAIDEIA” PROGRAM

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Article info	Abstract
<p>Received: 24 August 2023 Accepted: 31 March 2024 Published: 29 April 2024</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Intercultural elements; language mediation; teaching Greek as a second/foreign language; heritage language; Modern Greek Paideia</p>	<p>This study delves into the intricate tapestry of interculturalism and language mediation within the textbooks of the 8th grade of the program “Modern Greek Paideia”, which is being used for the teaching of Greek as heritage language in “Aristotle” school, the only primary school in Toronto that the Hellenic Republic recognizes. More precisely, using discourse analysis as a method, the reconstitution of the whole cultural relationship between the dominant culture and the target culture is done through the cultural elements that exist in the textbook’s activities and images. This aims to show that foreign-language teaching textbooks play an important role in configuring multicultural societies with intercultural competence and acquiring a second language in diasporic environments. The present study is structured into the following two parts. First, a literature review of second/foreign language acquisition theories, intercultural education and teaching Greek as diasporas was conducted. Second, the textbook was analysed before the results were presented, and a discussion about teaching Greek as a heritage language was held. This research contributes to the burgeoning discourse on intercultural education and language pedagogy by offering empirical evidence and practical insights into fostering intercultural competence and linguistic mediation skills among young learners. Ultimately, the findings aim to inform curriculum design and pedagogical approaches that promote inclusive and culturally responsive education within the “Modern Greek Paideia” program and beyond.</p>

INTRODUCTION

This study holds significant importance as it delves into the nuanced exploration of interculturalism and language mediation, specifically within the 8th-grade curriculum of

the “Modern Greek Paideia” program, which focuses on teaching Greek as a heritage language. Despite the growing interest in heritage language education, there is a lack of specific research examining the intercultural aspects and language mediation strategies in teaching Greek as a heritage language. Moreover, understanding how students navigate their heritage language and culture within the broader socio-cultural landscape is crucial for promoting cultural integration and identity formation. By identifying elements of interculturalism, this study sheds light on how students negotiate their Greek heritage identity alongside their participation in multicultural societies.

Recent research on teaching Greek as a heritage language, particularly focusing on interculturalism and language mediation, is relatively scarce and offers insights into the context, the challenges, the educational implications (Charalambous, 2019; Panagiotopoulou et al., 2019; Alakaki, 2021; Gavriliidou et al., 2021; Voskou, 2021; Becker, 2022; Gavriliidou et al., 2023; Gogonas, 2023), while others refer to the implementation of language mediation strategies in heritage language education (Stathopoulou, 2015). While these recent studies provide valuable contributions to the broader field of heritage language education and Greek language teaching, there remains a need for more focused research specifically examining the elements of interculturalism and language mediation in teaching Greek as a heritage language, as the teaching of Greek as a second/foreign language is its teaching in the diaspora is an important part of the teaching of Greek as a second/foreign language. This happens because the Greek language and the Greek cultural elements, together with the elements of the culture of the environment, contribute to the formation of the identity of the members of the diaspora communities, to the two-way communication between the centre and the diaspora, but also to the equal intercultural exchange (Fuchs, 2001; Potowski, 2018; Alvanoudi, 2019).

The interest in learning the Greek language by expatriates in Canada led to the writing of multimodal teaching materials, such as the teaching manuals of the “Modern Greek Paideia” program, which were designed based on the principles of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001), but also the Ontario guidelines for teaching languages (Ontario Curriculum, 2006) for all classes of the “Aristotle” school in Toronto (from the 1st to the 3rd grade), a sample of which is studied in the present work.

More specifically, the present work is based on the detection of cultural elements in the activities and the visual illustrations of the lessons of all the sections of the 8th-grade textbook of the “Modern Greek Paideia” program (2nd High School Grade). It also identifies intralingual and interlingual mediation, integral to intercultural education. This contributes to fostering intercultural awareness, establishing a cultural bridge for Greece globally, correlating the heritage language’s culture with the local culture, and ultimately constructing a symbolic Greek identity for the students (Tsolidis, 2014; Griva et al., 2018).

Language and Culture

Language serves as the primary tool for socialization, inclusion, and integration among students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Additionally, it plays a vital role in shaping ethnic identity and acts as a unifying force within ethnic groups, facilitating the transmission of cultural heritage across generations (Byram, 2003). Consequently, language teaching manuals and educational materials, in general, are required to adapt to these conditions, which lead to the formation of multicultural societies.

Learning a second or foreign language entails grasping the language itself and understanding its associated culture. Language and culture share an intricate relationship, where learning one involves gaining insights into the other. This process involves cultivating cultural awareness, which encompasses understanding both one's own cultural behaviours and those of others. It also involves the ability to articulate cultural nuances and comprehend the dynamic interactions between different cultures and languages. Ultimately, developing cultural respect is integral to this process (Griva & Zorbas, 2018; CEFR, 2001).

Indeed, the connection between language and culture is deeply intertwined with fostering a critical awareness of how identities are culturally constructed. This relationship plays a crucial role in cultivating intercultural awareness, wherein culture is viewed as a collection of ideological constructs, achievements, and values inherent within a specific group. These cultural attributes manifest through symbolic systems, underscoring the importance of understanding the intricate interplay between language, culture, and the symbolic representations that shape them. (Nünning & Nünning, 2003; Beaudrie, 2023).

Identification of cultural elements

The literature review yields several frameworks for the analysis of cultural elements within educational materials. Firstly, Williams (1980) delineates three types of culture: the archaic, the residual and the emergent. In addition, Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) introduce four dimensions of culture: the aesthetic, the sociological, the sociolinguistic and the semantic. While Risager (1991) advocates for a dual-level approach to cultural analysis, encompassing both micro and macro levels of cultural analysis. Moreover, Byram's (1993) analysis proposal was captured, which provides an analytical framework comprising eight cultural categories and underscores the differentiation between culture denoted with capital "C" and culture with lowercase "c". Brooks (1997), presents a comprehensive taxonomy consisting of ten categories for cultural examination. Lastly, Lafayette (1988) proposes an analytical framework focusing on historical, political, societal, occupational, and relational dimensions within educational materials.

Linguistic Mediation

Linguistic mediation serves as a relational and interpretative endeavour aimed at fostering mutual understanding among cultures and their participants, albeit not devoid of contradictions and conflicts (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Language mediation activities play an important role in societies' normal linguistic functioning, while they also serve as pivotal elements for nurturing intercultural awareness and sensitivity (CEFR, 2001; Griva & Kofou, 2019). This communication process can take the form of interlinguistic activities, involving the interactive transfer of meanings between languages (Viaggio, 2006) or intralingual activities, inherent in the daily social interactions of individuals (North & Piccardo, 2016), while it may encompass both written and oral forms (CEFR, 2001; CEFR, 2018). Notably, mediation includes both pre-mediation activities, such as bilingual dictionaries and specialized vocabulary, and post-mediation activities (CEFR, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The present research focuses on identifying cultural elements and assessing interlingual communication within the context of teaching and learning a second/foreign language. The method used to record the data is qualitative content analysis, which entails a comprehensive understanding of the researched material and applying systematic processes, often involving reality reconstruction (DeWitt et al., 2013). Based on the approach mentioned above, all the lessons within the sections of the school textbook were analyzed, and tables were created to document the results of the qualitative analysis of the identified (inter)cultural elements. However, only a representative section of the overall material is cited for this work.

The research material

The textbook for the 8th grade of the Greek language program "Modern Greek Paideia" was utilized, which was developed to meet the educational needs of the "Aristotles" school in Toronto, Canada, and features multimodal educational materials designed for all levels of education levels, from elementary to high school.

The selected school textbook under examination constitutes an integral component of a comprehensive program aimed at teaching Greek as a second/foreign language. This educational approach strategically intertwines language instruction with elements of Greek culture, structured around thematic axes (Griva et al., 2018). The rationale behind selecting this particular textbook for the research lies in its potential to mould students' opinions and perceptions regarding the socio-cultural landscape. Furthermore, it is

anticipated to play a significant role in shaping their identities within the context of a multicultural society.

The textbook is structured into four sub-thematic sections, each comprising five sub-chapters/lessons centred around the section's topic. At the outset of each lesson, bilingual learning objectives are delineated, followed by a literary or scientific text. This text is supplemented by a bilingual glossary and visual illustrations aimed at enhancing comprehension. After the text, various reading and listening activities are provided, facilitating comprehension of the target language's grammatical and syntactic rules. Furthermore, the textbook incorporates activities promoting written and spoken language production alongside exercises fostering student cooperation and creativity.

At each lesson's conclusion, students use a structured form to self-evaluate. This form assesses their performance based on predetermined success criteria, employing a graded score rubric ranging from "very" to "little" success. Following self-evaluation, students receive feedback from the teacher utilizing descriptive assessment techniques. Additionally, the teacher comments to both the student and the parent, fostering communication channels to address potential learning challenges. This feedback loop facilitates collaboration between teachers and parents in addressing any issues that may arise during the learning process.

The material is organized into five modules, each containing five lessons. Specifically, the first section, entitled "Literature", encompasses lessons on "The Peace", "The Cracked Pot", "The Selfish Giant", "The Dude" and "The Kid with the Matches". The second section, under the title "Sports", includes subjects such as "The Football World Cup", "The Ancient Olympics", "The Modern Olympics", "Interview with an Olympian" and "My favourite sport". The third section, "Fine Arts", covers topics like "Sculpture", "Comics: The Ninth Art", "Classical Music", "Dominikos Theotokopoulos" and "The Painter Pablo Picasso". The fourth section, entitled "Heroes of Mythology", delves into "Heracles", "Theseus", "Jason", "Achilles" and "Odysseus". Finally, the Fifth section, "Personalities", comprises lessons on "The Seven Sages", "Socrates", "Pericles", "Leonidas" and "Alexander the Great".

Data analysis

A combination of approaches from various proposals for analyzing cultural elements in school textbooks was employed to analyze and document the cultural elements present in the textbook material since this methodology allows for a deeper understanding of the text's underlying meanings, value judgments and inherent power (Perri, 1999). Specifically, for the analysis of cultural elements, Risager's framework (1991) was utilized. The analysis encompasses three levels: the micro level of cultural analysis, focusing on social and cultural anthropology phenomena; the macro level, addressing contemporary and timeless social, political, and historical issues; and international and intercultural issues, examining comparisons between the target culture and the dominant

culture in terms of common representations, images, stereotypes, relationships, cultural dynamics and interactions.

In addition, the distinction between lowercase “c” culture and big “C” Culture will be used. The first encompasses morals, customs, diet, clothing, social identity, beliefs and behavioural patterns, linguistic and non-linguistic symbols of communication, and everyday life. The second pertains to the more visible facet of cultural heritage, like arts, literature, music, and architecture, but also history (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993; Kramersch, 2013).

At the same time, while analyzing cultural elements in the 8th-grade textbook of the “Modern Greek Paideia” program, the distinction of Adaskou, Britten and Fahsi (1990) regarding the four senses of culture is considered. According to this framework, culture encompasses an aesthetic sense, associated with big “C” culture, including Mass Media, cinema, music, literature, etc. Additionally, it embodies a sociological sense, linked to lowercase “c” culture, involving family organization, daily life, interpersonal relationships, work, leisure time, customs and behavioural patterns within communities. Thirdly, culture also has a semantic sense, revealing the mental-conceptual system of language, including perception, thoughts, and temporal and spatial relationships of emotional moods and colours. Finally, culture also involves a sociolinguistic sense, incorporating background knowledge of culture, social and paralinguistic skills, combined with proficiency in language use to facilitate effective communication. This includes employing a variety of communication functions, adhering to rules of politeness and avoidance of prejudice, awareness of the conventions governing interpersonal relationships, and being familiar with the rhetorical conventions across different textual genres (e.g. letters, informational texts, articles, advertisements, forms or applications).

In addition to the cultural elements found in the various textual genres that make up the textbook, attention is also given to cultural aspects depicted in the images. This is because the image complements and enhances the linguistic content, fostering observation, sensitivity, imagination and aesthetics. Furthermore, they aid in perceiving and interpreting reality, assessing the world, and enhancing communication (Byram, 1989). A tripartite distinction was employed for the cultural analysis of the visual representations: Greek cultural heritage, cultural heritage of “others” and world cultural heritage.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Unit cultural analysis

The fourth lesson of the last section of the school textbook, “Personalities,” deals with another important political and military figure of ancient Greece, the king of Sparta Leonidas, renowned for his important role in the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC against the Persians. This historical narrative fosters empathy by delving into the perspectives of individuals from the past and cultivates a sense of symbolic Greek identity.

Understanding the motivations behind historical actions requires considering their objectives, beliefs, attitudes, knowledge, and the cultural and historical contexts shaping their decisions (Barton & Levstik, 2008).

Table 1

Inter-cultural Elements in the Fourth Lesson

	Reading Comprehension	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Communicate and Create
Aesthetic sense- Culture with “C”	✓	✓		✓	✓
Sociological sense – culture with “c”			✓		✓
Semantic sense			✓	✓	✓
Sociolinguistic sense			✓	✓	
Interculturalism	✓			✓	✓

The comprehension activity text discusses the personality of Leonidas, the Spartan king, who fought in Thermopylae against the Persians and was a symbol of bravery and heroism, both in his time and throughout history. In fact, the way in which he was honoured is also identified, after he sacrificed himself for the defence of his homeland. Thus, this engagement exposes students to the aesthetic sense of culture, but also to culture with a “C”, as history and historical points with symbolic value belong to official culture, just like the monument erected to honour Leonidas. Furthermore, the activity underscores the cultural significance and dynamics surrounding Leonidas and Greek cultural elements. Finally, in understanding the rules of the language, the students engage with the sociolinguistic sense of the culture, learning grammatical and syntactical language conventions.

In the listening activity, an audio excerpt is heard detailing the hero monument in Thermopylae honoring Leonidas, the 300 Spartans and the 700 Thespians who perished in battle, symbolising patriotic sacrifice. Therefore, this activity familiarizes the students with the aesthetic sense of the culture and Greek national geography. Then, in the writing activity, students analyze the decision of Leonidas and his warriors to remain at Thermopylae despite certain deaths. Therefore, the plenary discussion includes the semantic sense of the culture, as the reception of the sociological sense of the culture of the era is distinguished. Specifically, the ethos and behavioural norms of Leonidas and his comrades are explored, as well as how they are perceived within the students’ cultural context, thus involving interculturality.

In the writing activity, the students engage with the rhetorical conventions of poetry and the sociolinguistic significance of culture, by summarizing K.P. Cavafy's poem "Thermopyles" translated into English. This allegorical and symbolic poem reflects on the battle of Thermopylae and the attitude of its protagonists. Additionally, the aesthetic sense of the culture is distinguished, as poetry belongs to the culture with "C" and represents the official culture, while its semantic sense emerges as students interpret and summarize the poem based on their personal perceptions. Finally, the cultural dynamics of the poet, reflected in the widespread translation of his works, also underscore interculturality within the activity.

In the first part of the communication and creation activity, students engage in a role-play of Leonidas' encounter with Xerxes, featuring his iconic phrase "Μολών Λαβέ" ("Come and take them"). This theatrical portrayal cultivates empathy and provides insights into historical events from both perspectives, highlighting the aesthetic sense of culture and fostering intercultural understanding. At the same time, in the second part of the activity, students explore the sociological aspect of culture by connecting the reference to Ephialtes, who betrayed the Greeks and the Persians, to its contemporary cultural significance. This activity delves into the semantic meaning of culture, as students examine the reception of the word "εφιάλης" ("nightmare") in a different cultural context, further emphasizing interculturality.

The cultural elements in the visual representations of the lesson

Table 2

The cultural and intercultural elements in the unit of the textbook

		Reading	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Communicate and Create
Greek	cultural elements	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Cultural elements of the "others"	✓				
World	cultural heritage	✓	✓		✓	✓

The reading comprehension activity includes two visual illustrations: a photographic impression of a statue of Leonidas, representing Greek cultural elements, and an illustration of Jacques-Louis David's painting "Leonidas at Thermopylae", which draws inspiration from Greek cultural heritage, but has been crafted in a different cultural context. Both depictions also contribute to the world cultural heritage, reflecting the cultural dynamics of their subject of inspiration.

In the listening activity, a photograph of the statue of Leonidas, situated in Thermopylae, is presented. This statue holds significance as part of both Greek and world cultural heritage, reflecting its cultural dynamics.

In the writing activity, students encounter a portrait of K.P. Cavafy, whose poem “Thermopylae” serves as the inspiration. This photograph represents a Greek cultural element while also contributing to the world cultural heritage, reflecting the cultural dynamics of the poet. Finally, in the communication and creation activity, two visual representations are included: a sketch of a headdress, representing Greek cultural heritage, and a visual depiction of the phrase “Μολών Λαβέ” on a piece of vase, which also belongs to Greek cultural elements. Both images reflect interculturality, stemming from the cultural dynamics of their origins.

Linguistic mediation in the school textbook

Similarly to other lessons in the school textbook, the fourth module of the module initiates with mediation by providing lesson organizers and bilingual success criteria. Additionally, activity titles are presented to guide the students. Moreover, language mediation, particularly pre-mediation activities, involves the utilization of a bilingual glossary. This glossary aids in comprehending the text about Leonidas and assists in decoding the necessary information to answer subsequent comprehension questions.

In the writing activity, written interlingual mediation is encountered, as students are asked to understand the translated into English K.P. Cavafy’s poem “Thermopyles” and they are then tasked with succinctly conveying its meaning in Greek, which aligns with the objective of the language course, focusing on the heritage language of the students. Finally, the course concludes with post-mediation activities, which include both the student’s self-evaluation form and the teacher’s descriptive evaluation. These components serve to assess the mediation solutions provided by students in the mediation activities.

Discussion

Greek heritage language education has increasingly become decentralised, fragmented, and polycentric (Lytra, 2014). This paper contributes to research on heritage language education and pedagogy, as it provides insight into how their communities shape the motivations and expectations of heritage languages. Specifically, some factors that affect heritage language teaching include socio-cultural dimensions, such as cultural identity and attitudes towards their heritage language group, intercultural elements through a translanguaging and transcultural lens and language mediation, and their learning situations, such as evaluative reactions towards the language course, and the materials used in class.

The paper also illustrated the importance of the textbook’s heavy pedagogies for formal and instructional aspects of Greek language and literacy learning. These function as an established authority centre that shapes teachers’ pedagogic choices and practices

(Koutsogiannis & Hatzikiriakou, 2018). The school textbook analysis reveals a design tailored to student's diverse needs and interests, emphasizing language proficiency acquisition (Norford & Marzano, 2016). It emphasizes in cultivating skills in understanding and producing written and spoken language across different contexts (Harwood, 2010), using various textual genres with cultural elements from everyday life. This approach resonates with students' experiences (geographic, social, etc.), activating both intellect and emotion, fostering critical thinking, and facilitating the integration of new technologies (Tomlinson, 2012).

An essential characteristic of the school textbook under study is the mediating use of language and intralingual and interlingual codes to enhance the communication of ideas and meanings across cultural contexts (Rudvin & Spinzi, 2014). The acquisition, in fact, of this skill is a crucial element for the development of intercultural awareness, as well as for intercultural communicative competence, particularly in the multicultural settings prevalent in modern societies and school classrooms.

In addition, the analysis of the content of the 8th grade school textbook of the "Modern Greek Paideia" program, reveals a focus on enhancing students' creativity and cooperation through communication and interaction activities embedded within each lesson (Bourke, 1992). This approach aims to cultivate individuals capable of navigating cultural diversity, fostering their personal identity alongside a symbolic Greek identity, and fostering the development of intercultural citizenship.

These findings support current research and instructional proposals in the field of heritage language, as it reveals the importance of culturally responsive teaching for supporting heritage language learners' cultural and linguistic identity (Paspali & Alexiadou, 2023). Research has also shown that supporting heritage language cultural and linguistic identity is instrumental in order to maintain a linguistic link to that culture (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2019; Hudgens Henderson et al., 2020; Shen & Jiang, 2021; Aravossitas, 2023; Ashtari, 2023).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the analysis of the content of the school textbook reveal a rich presence of cultural elements across all its units since the activities encompass a wide spectrum of culture, including both official culture (Culture with a "C") and its everyday manifestations (culture with a "c"). More specifically, within the textbook incorporate cultural elements spanning art (literature, music, sculpture, sports) and behavioral culture (beliefs, morals, customs, leisure activities, and behavior patterns). These elements originate from both Greek cultural heritage and diverse cultural contexts, enabling students to engage with local and temporal differences while absorbing cultural elements from various environments. In addition to cultural elements within the texts and activity instructions, visual depictions in the lessons also contain cultural elements. Images are regarded as cultural markers, shaping social meanings and serving as vehicles for personal understanding, interpretation, and evaluation of the world.

Hence, it is evident that the cultural elements embedded in the school textbook are approached through the principles of intercultural education. Greek cultural elements are intricately woven into language instruction, serving the dual purpose of language proficiency acquisition and student identity formation. It is important to note that the findings of this analysis are not exhaustive or universally applicable to all textbooks within the “Modern Greek Paideia” program. A comprehensive assessment of cultural elements and linguistic mediation would require an analysis of textbooks across all classes in the program.

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