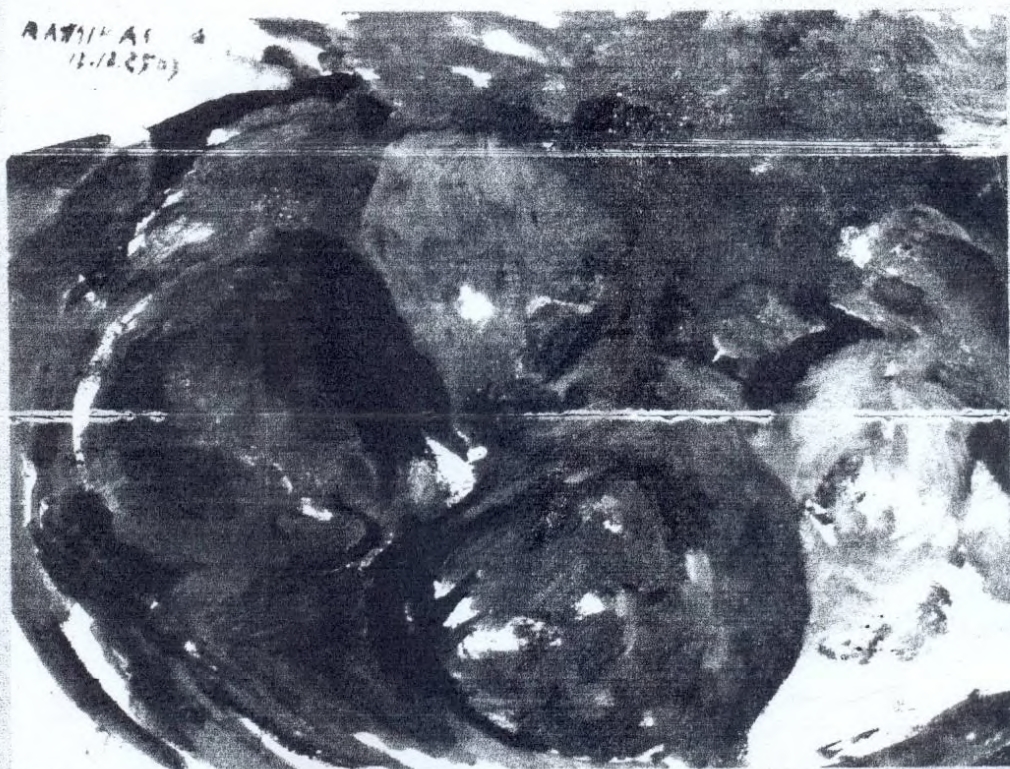


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**Interculturalism and elt in Greek primary schools:
the case of fun way I and II***

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ABSTRACT

This article analysis the content of the coursebooks Fun Way I and II for fourth and fifth grade primary school students in Greece. Fun Way (I and II) is an English language coursebook used in all Greek primary schools. This paper attempts a quantitative and qualitative examination of all intercultural accounts which appear in the coursebooks and rounds-off with the formulation of conclusions and remarks which –if suitably exploited- may be very useful to the English language primary school teacher.

INTRODUCTION

The School Curriculum Concerning The Teaching Of English To Greek Primary School Students (Presidential Decree No. 15 (1996))

The curriculum concerning the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek Primary Schools states that: English is taught as a foreign language –to primary school students- in a way which will enable them (the students) to communicate effectively not only with native English speakers but with speakers of other languages who use English as a common code of communication. In other words all Greek primary school students are encouraged to use English as a sort of lingua franca. This means that Fun Way does not focus upon the cultural elements which are characteristic of the countries where English is considered the national language and is spoken by the majority of its citizens, quite the contrary the coursebook highlights the international characteristics of English. An attempt is also made to teach the language and cultural background of other nations to Greek primary school students in English while at the same time it encourages interlocutors of a different linguistic and cultural background to learn Greek.

The General Aims are:

- To develop those skills which are necessary for a student to function constructively within a social and cultural environment.
- To help students develop an ability to understand themselves as well as the world around them.

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Within the framework of these excerpts concerning the School Curriculum it is inevitable that there exist at least some elements of interculturalism.

The role of the school coursebook

This article focus upon the content of the textbook *Fun Way* as it is the only coursebook used in all Greek primary schools today for the teaching of English as a foreign language. *Fun Way* thus becomes the main and most important source of information for young learners, successfully guiding them towards their cognitive objectives. *Fun Way* acts as an intermediary bringing young learners closer to their social and cultural environment while at the same time it meets the teaching and learning needs of both teachers and students (Zafiri 2006). The value system (Ahles 1996, Demace 1996, 2002) - as depicted in the coursebook *Fun Way* - exercises an indisputable influence upon the attitudes, dispositions, values, rules and regulations which young learners are asked to apply in the learning process. The contents of the textbook support the afore mentioned value system.

The definition of intercultural instruction

Multiculturalism has become the centre of attention today and has shaped the context upon which racial discriminations may arise or be averted. There are direct and indirect discriminations emanating from a student's family background or social environment and these discriminations concern students' negative attitudes towards people or groups of people who are ethnically, socially, nationally, culturally or linguistically different from the majority of the population.

Linguists and researchers –in Greece- maintain that there is a rigorous demand for language planning which must be implemented within an intercultural framework. This intercultural framework ought to have the following objectives: firstly, it ought to maintain the overall characteristics of the Greek language compared to the pressures exerted by the users of other languages. Secondly, the embodiment of all foreigners, living in Greece, into the Greek system and language, and thirdly, spreading the Greek culture and language to neighbouring countries (with or without a common frontier to Greece) (Paparizos 2004:233).

Much research has been conducted concerning the English language –as a foreign language- as well as its role in accepting the 'other' in this case the English language in relation to the national language of the country in which it is taught. For example, there is research concerning the influence of the British value system upon the Russian and the results this may have on the intercultural identity of the Russian students. What is very interesting about this research is the internal transformation of the students who participate in the learning process and –to some extent- the loss of their

cultural identity (Leontovith 2005). It is understood that both teachers and students bring into the classroom specific norms and expectations concerning their roles in the teaching and learning process. This has to do -mainly- with their upbringing, education and sociocultural background. It thus becomes imperative for a teacher who is teaching a foreign language, English in this case, to have some knowledge of the culture and civilization of the English and England (Dogancay - Aktuna 2005).

It has become a trend in Greece and worldwide to teach English to students at a very young age (6-7 years old), focusing on the learning needs and interests of that age group but most importantly on their multicultural social and school environment (Barnard 2004). The development of an intercultural identity in young students is considered very constructive in learning a foreign language. The Bennet model -used in the teaching of English to German students- seems to aid in this direction as it helps students develop an intercultural sensitivity which further promotes student's corresponding perceptions of the English language, culture and traditions (Göbel - Hesse 2004). This leads to the belief that English can be considered an intercultural language (Sifakis 2004). English is today an international language, a lingua franca, with an intercultural perception, and will remain so because of its direct access to the information world which helps shape cultural and intercultural relations (Fox 1994).

Research Methodology

The method used for this research is 'content analysis' as it deals primarily with the content of the coursebooks. It was chosen because it was considered the most appropriate method for the analysis of all text types as it poses questions which aim at a quantitative classification of the hypothesis which deals with a specific system of categories, which secure objectivity, systematisity, quantitivity and the generalization of the results (Ahles 1996, Demace 1996, Vamvoukas 1998, Demace 2002). The resulting figures of the analysis were utilized in a way which facilitated the interpretation and evaluation of their content.

Research Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this research can be determined as follows:

The textbooks used in the teaching of English as a foreign language in primary (and secondary) schools function both as tools which promote particular ideologies as well as determining factors in the formation of students' personalities. As 'carriers' of culture, through the use of language, they introduce the cultural elements of the country in which the language is spoken and written - in this case the English language - they also introduce elements of other cultures and languages.

The Findings

There are 56 accounts, and they are the following:

Fun Way I	24 accounts	41.1% of the total
Fun Way II	33 accounts	58.9% of the total

It follows that for every textbook, based on the content of the accounts given, there was a classification according to the thematic category. It must also be noted that all accounts are interculturally oriented.

Origin/ Descent- Nationality	11 accounts
Language	3
The 'other'- the ancient person	1
The 'entirely different'- the 'unfamiliar'	9

Origin/ Descent- Nationality

The accounts concern the origin/descent as well as the cultural background of the people who are Greek or English, there are also accounts of people who appear to have a different culture to the two afore mentioned. Charles, Monique, Roberto, and Greta (unit 10, p.104) introduce themselves and their interests which are influenced by the countries they come from. After the characters' self-introduction more information follows concerning information about their countries. For example, in England, we are told, students wear school uniforms, in France, we are told by Monique, that her father is an excellent cook, and last but not least we are told that in Italy macaroni and cheese is everyone's favourite dish.

Students' hobbies on the other hand seem to have many common characteristics and they also function as unification elements. Accounts of some cultures are familiar to Greek students and these accounts may indirectly trigger intercultural education. There are also direct accounts which intend to teach specific cultural features to students:

- 'I like traveling and I can speak English and French very well'.

The adventure of traveling seems to be connected with the person's ability (and not wish or expectation) to speak two foreign languages.

The expression:

- 'I have friends all over the world', confirms the communicative value of language learning.

Greta tells us that her mother is Greek and that she -Greta- can sing in German and Greek. This is a fine example of two cultures coexisting and interacting in one person. Further on in unit 10 (p.111) another example is given of different characters coming from different countries, with a different culture, to the one represented by the child

in the coursebook. In this case the child could either be English or Greek whereas the 'other' is from Italy or from a distant country such as Canada.

Example one:

- Where are you from Paolo?
- I come from Italy.
- And how's everything in Italy?
- Italian!!!

Example two:

- Are you new here?
- Yes, I am. My name's Jane.
- I'm Alex and this is Carla. Where are you from Jane?
- I'm from Quebec...
- How's everything in Canada?
- Great, just great!

A map of Europe, with the most important museums of each country, is found in the first unit. This makes students more sensitive to the culture of each country. Teaching children the culture of another country through its geography and its museums seems to contribute positively not only to the language teaching process but also to feelings of respect we should all show to other cultures and people.

The 'true-false' exercise which follows stimulates creative and critical thinking and supports the afore mentioned aims (unit 10, p.105) Greece also seems to appear in many of the exercises:

- Greece hasn't got mountains, only beaches.
- Italy and Greece are Mediterranean countries.
- People in Greece speak Greek.

It's very interesting to see that the textbook exploits the fauna found on different parts of the planet. This can be considered as positive propaganda for it helps students become more sensitive to ecological problems and aids the effort made by the authors of the coursebooks to teach students about different ecological systems. It must be stressed here that in unit 10 (p. 106) there is no direct connection between the country and the animal(s) that lives there. There is an attempt though to help students recall information stored in their memories about the animals mentioned in the texts or it can be considered as an attempt made by the authors of the textbooks to trigger students' interests in research.

- Tiger-Don't kill our children

- Hippopotamus-Freedom for all animals.

In unit 10 (p.107) there are direct accounts of the fauna found in particular countries, and more specifically animals acquire anthropomorphic characteristics and actions which link the ecological problem to the whole planet making it a global issue.

- "Hello, I'm an American crocodile. Don't make shoes with my skin".

- "Hi, I'm a European dolphin. There isn't enough food for me in the sea..."

The W.W.E application form the student is asked to fill in, so as to become a member, introduces the student to the communicative functions of the language, in this case the English language which is considered a foreign language for the Greek students.

Language

There are two direct accounts: The first one is about Roberto who speaks English and French and the second one is about Greta who sings in German and Greek. These seem to be the only references made to other languages besides the three prevalent foreign languages. The Italian language which is Roberto's mothertongue and the Greek language which is Greta's mothertongue make a tangible presence in the language field and become members of a broader group of languages in which English seems to prevail (Preunit, pgs.2-3 in which a world map shows all English speaking countries).

The 'other' - the ancient person

Mention is made of the 'other' - the ancient person within the context of the 'true or false' exercises Greek mythological creatures and their main characteristics are presented briefly. This seems to be the only direct reference to the ancient Greek civilization, leaving the teacher to exploit and develop, yet further, the limited information s/he has at hand:

1. Mermaids have got a fish tail
2. Centaurs have got four legs
3. Medusa has got long blond hair... (Unit 7, lesson 2, p.80).

The illustrations given below the sentences support the context of each sentence and give more information.

The 'entirely different' - the 'unfamiliar'.

In -Bong's story- the students are introduced -for the first time- to an alien who finds himself, by mistake, in their environment and invites them to have fun and

to learn through having fun. The flying saucer and the green alien (unit 1, p.22) are the prerequisites of an interesting story based on scenarios and existing perceptions of young learners. These pre-existing mental pictures and perceptions of another dimension make the understanding of the 'other' the 'alien' more familiar. The inside of the spaceship becomes the 'playground' in which friendships flourish and in which daily events take place, these events are familiar to children compared to the spaceship which is the unfamiliar object. Children are able to associate familiar elements or characters (the sister, the dog, etc.) with unfamiliar elements (the little green man and his green personal belongings) (unit 2, p.32). Friendship makes the unfamiliar less frightening and the curious characteristics of a person less difficult to understand: "he is big but very short which is normal as he has an inborn ability to augment or minimize his size", this is a direct account of social racism and the way the textbook deals with it (unit 3, p.42). A spacetrip triggered, by mistake, by the children minimizes the distance between planets as well as the conditions of life (unit 4, p.52).

The human characters of the story point out the differences which exist between them and their alien friends but they also show their friendship by giving their t-shirts to the aliens. This may be a simple scenario but it shows social discriminations which exist, under different circumstances in the 'real' world, and the transcendency of people when they are open-minded and want to approach the 'other' (unit 5, p.62). People who belong to a smaller and less 'usual' group of people never go unnoticed: Bong and his sister move around (the earth) very quickly, their eyes seem to adapt according to their needs and this happens because they function very much like binoculars (unit 6, p.73). The prize Bong and his sister win, at a masquerade party, helps to teach young children the virtues of equality among different people (unit 7, p.82). On their return home the aliens' narration about their adventures on earth confirms their positive attitude towards the 'other' (the earthlings), which was the initial intention of the authors (unit 9, p. 102).

Fun Way II

Origin / Descent – Nationality - Culture	22 accounts
Occupations	5 accounts
Festivals – Social manifestations	5 accounts
The Arts	3 accounts

Origin/Descent – Nationality – Culture

Accounts concerning a person's place of living, his nationality and culture are 22 in number. These accounts are divided into three sub-groups which are as follows: direct accounts, simple presentational accounts, and lastly more detailed "references"

to representatives of other nations: 'That's Fernando. He is from Spain...He lives in Madrid.' (Unit 2, part 1, lesson 1, page 24) and also:

Fernando – Spain/Madrid

Chang – China/Beijing

Hemalita – India/New Delhi... (Unit 2, part 1, lesson 1, page 25).

Six of the children represent -in a codified manner- countries which seem to verify the 'causes' of the existing diversities both physically (facial features, external appearance, etc) as well as culturally. The map which accompanies the countries and cities which are described attempts to make the afore mentioned accounts more tangible to the students and aids towards globalization. The epicenter of the text which follows is once again the geographical area described earlier – in the map. The object of the text is to broaden students' linguistic knowledge, as well as their understanding of the world.

- Pablo is from Brazil. He lives near a river, but he doesn't live near a forest... (Unit 2, part 1, lesson 1, page 27). Unfortunately no mention is made of Greece.

Flags, which are national symbols (unit 2, part 1, lesson 1, page 26), stress the differentiating functions-roles, played by different countries. It must be accentuated that in Fun Way I, Student's Book, mention was made only of Europe, whereas in Fun Way II, Student's Book, other countries around the world are also mentioned.

Values are clearly presented –and thus better exploited- in unit 2 (part 1, lesson 3, page 32) where the stories of Oscar from the Andes and Pauline from Malaysia prevail. These two children represent two different cultures and ways of life which are alien to Greek students. The countries Oscar and Pauline come from are -in the eyes of Greek learners- distant, exotic and perhaps even mythical. The description -which is presented here- of these foreign countries triggers the imagination of young learners most of whom hope to visit them so as to experience a different way of life. The difficulties Oscar and Pauline experience are also mentioned in the texts, child labour, lack of water and food, lack of sanitation and hygiene are only some problems young children around the world face which should activate the rest of the globe towards finding a solution. Betty - on the other hand - is from Australia, she plays with her friends and loves horse-riding. She lives far away from Greece and is very happy. Augustine lives in Brazil and is not considered a privileged person. She doesn't go to school, she helps her mother with the house chores, she has no toys but she has a large family so she plays with her sisters in the woods. Two different worlds, two different people (Betty and Augustine) living together on the same globe. This thematic section finishes with two postcards -showing winter in Moscow and fog in Bombay- and the texts which accompany them (unit 5, part 1, lesson 3, page 62) as well as a section on England, the English and their culture. Children who are not English introduce the English culture to us. They present information about England and the English which they have acquired -through correspondence with

an English penpal- such as tea at five o'clock, about her Scottish grandfather with his bagpipe and kilt, about London's zoo, about London's rainy weather, etc., (Unit 9, part 2, lesson 1, page 42). Five of the most important British sights and monuments are presented in unit 9, they are: the Tower of London, Big Ben, the Parliament, the British Museum and Buckingham Palace (Unit 9, part 2, lesson 1, page 43): It is famous for its great collection of treasures from all over the world. There are over 90 galleries with Egyptian, Greek, Roman and Asian collections. This is where you can find the Greek (Elgin) marbles. Lord Elgin took these marbles from the Acropolis in Athens and brought them to Britain in 1823.

Greek culture is presented from a British point of view. The Elgin marbles become the centre of all diplomatic discussions and national claims, followed by a brief history of the Greek marbles. The thematic section about the English culture finishes with Madam Tussaud's Wax Museum.

America is depicted as a continent that has accepted all religiously oppressed English Pilgrims (Unit 9, part 2, lesson 3, page 51). It introduces readers to the adventures of the English, their journey, their explorations, their acquaintance with native Indians and the 'new' land. The USA of today is presented through a tourist guide: New York's Manhattan, The American Indian, Brooklyn Children's Museum and the New York Aquarium (Unit 9, part 2, lesson 2, page 47-48). The thematic section finishes with the different types of masks used by different civilizations, including the ancient Greek civilization, this is done in an attempt to show the different types of art, history and popular-folk culture.

- This is a Chinese theatrical mask.
- This harlequin mask is very popular in Venice.
- This is an African mask of Medicine men.
- These are the ancient Greek masks of comedy and tragedy.

Occupations

There are accounts, in five different texts, which contribute positively to the teaching of social values. The introduction of different occupations may change or even adapt existing social beliefs about occupations. This change or adaptation will help the student form his or her own scale of values or sets of beliefs concerning the people who practice the particular job. Children play a protagonistic role (in the texts) in an attempt to promote and present the different occupations, to the best of their abilities:

- I'm the editor.
- We're reporters.
- I'm the photographer (Unit 3, part 1, page 33)

Occupations are grouped according to how difficult, dangerous or funny they are

(Unit 3, part 1, lesson 2, page 38), there is also an attempt to correlate a person's occupation with the area or place where he or she works, etc. (Unit 3, part 1, lesson 2, page 40) and last but not least there is a self-presentation of different professionals who introduce and promote the work they do:

1. Teacher: -I teach in a school. I love my students and they love me, too.
2. Greengrocer: -I sell fruit and vegetables. They're always fresh from the farm.
3. Baker: -I make bread. I'm also famous for my cakes.

This thematic section finishes with an invitation to the students, by the authors, to take on new activities in the field of aesthetics which will shape their personal and cultural values in the future.

Celebrations-Festivals-Social Festivities

This thematic section has references to masquerades. The picture on page 47 (Unit 4, part 1, lesson 2) shows children dressed up in costumes which are familiar to children all over the world regardless of where they come from, their nationality, their language, their social class or any other differences. The most popular carnivals around the world –like the carnivals of Wn 3, page 52). The texts which follow show the differences in culture, in music and the arts between the two cities (Venice and Rio).

In unit 4 it becomes clear that Halloween is celebrated in the USA and Great Britain. In Britain and America Halloween is a time for fun. Children dress up and go 'Trick or Treat'. They knock on people's doors, say 'Trick or Treat' and people treat them with goodies, if they don't then the children play funny tricks on them. There are also parties with traditional games like pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey or bobbing the apples.

The accounts given in Unit 4 attempt to bring young students of different nationalities, cultures and languages together in an attempt to teach them the customs and traditions of other countries and to help them understand the similarities and differences between their culture and cultures of other countries. The unit rounds off with the 'First of April-Fool's Day' which is by custom a day in which almost all Greeks lie to each other so as to 'fool' to 'trick' or to 'deceive' one another. Nevertheless, not many accounts are given in Fun Way II about the celebrations, festivals or social festivities which exist in Greece compared to the references made (in the textbook) about other countries.

The Arts

Pictures and paintings as well as excerpts from children's literature are included -in Fun Way II- in an attempt to educate young learners interculturally. Paintings of

very important painters depicting the four seasons of the year are given in unit 5 (part 1, page 53), followed by literature texts of well-known writers such as:

- Robinson Crusoe, by Daniel Defoe.
- Gulliver, by Jonathan Swift.
- Around the world in 80 days, by Jules Verne.

There is also a page with the comic character Asterix (Unit 5, part 1, page 61), in an attempt to show young learners that many values around the world have an international character.

Concluding Remarks

The English language coursebooks 'Fun Way I-Student's book' and 'Fun Way II-Student's book' which are used in all Greek primary schools include many accounts of the 'other', the 'different'. We find most of these accounts in 'Fun Way II-Student's book' and here we must stress that texts concerning the Greek culture are almost non-existent while modern Greece and the Greek way of life today is absent. The accounts given in the coursebooks are both direct and indirect and it depends on how the teacher will evaluate and use this information. This is why teachers should be trained not only to teach English as a foreign language but also to educate students interculturally.

To improve teachers' teaching techniques, especially the teaching of values, the following should be considered:

- The (teaching) material of the coursebooks should be revised and new and more modern material concerning both countries (Greece and the UK) should be introduced to improve their quality.
- New and more modern illustrations and pictures should be used to support teachers in their teaching efforts. These pictures should breed familiarity to young learners so that they are able to use or exploit them accordingly (picture discussion, picture description, etc.). More pictures or illustrations should be used to support texts, literature texts, poetry, etc.
- More references to the 'other', the 'different', should be made given the fact that young Greek learners come into contact with groups of people from neighbouring countries with a different cultural background, nationality, language, etc. Thus emphasis should be placed mostly upon characters from the Balkans, Italy, Russia etc., and perhaps less to countries Greek students feel they have no affiliation to.
- Greek civilization, both ancient and contemporary, should be presented in more detail in the textbooks.
- English language teachers should receive training concerning intercultural teaching at a pre-graduate and post-graduate level as well as at teacher training seminars.

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