Traditional Textbooks and Their Multimodal Nature: From Misconceptions to Pedagogical Suggestions

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Abstract

In this paper, the author intends to contribute to the field of pedagogical knowledge by answering the question students frequently ask, at some point, once their original uninformed definition of multimodality is challenged: Are traditional paper-based textbooks also multimodal?

To answer this research question, adopting purposeful sampling (Teddlie, Yu 2007) the author has analysed the *Ġabra ta' Ward* book series published in 1933 in Malta and which were used in primary schools to teach Maltese. The original social-semiotic MIRROR framework (Cremona 2017) was used as the main analytical framework through which the author could interpret the content of the book series.

The findings of the paper suggest that these books, while including very few images, still include layout, size, colour, and spacing which frequently are the modes also used in modern pedagogic texts. A second finding indicates that while several social ideas have changed over time, these can serve to initiate various discussions through which students can gradually develop their critical skills. Therefore, the paper concludes that a 1933 textbook is multimodal and when used creatively and critically can still serve, together with modern digital texts, as effective pedagogical tools in contemporary classrooms.

Keywords: *Traditional Textbooks, Multimodality, Pedagogic Resources, Ġabra ta' Ward.*

Introduction: Defining Multimodality

A frequent challenge I encounter almost daily while conducting my work as a senior lecturer at the University of Malta is having to explain the meaning of the at first incomprehensible term 'multimodality'. Year after year, I encounter situations where students read the term on study unit course descriptions and end up questioning what this term means.

Over time, I have managed to explain the term by breaking it down into two main words. I start by explaining what mode is, namely defining it as a culturally-shaped semiotic resource having specific potentials through which it can produce certain

communicative effects and not others (Stein 2008). I define mode as a cultural channel through which a message is transmitted (Kress 2012). Adopting Norris's (2004) perspective, I suggest that these channels can be split up into two broad categories. Embodied modes include the message transmitted through channels like gesture, gaze or posture which are manifested by the human body. With these, other modes that are not directly produced by the human body, thus called disembodied modes. These include 'among others music, print, layout, colour, clothes and any other mode deriving from the setting or material world where the interaction is happening' (Norris 2004, p. x).

After this definition of the term 'mode', I move on to focus on the prefix (i.e. multi-) forming the term multimodality. I refer to words such as 'multitasker', 'multibillionaire' and 'multilingual' and lead those asking me to explain what the term means to themselves conclude that multimodality refers to 'the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event' (Kress, van Leeuwen 2001, p. 20). Therefore, as Jewitt (2009) elaborates, 'multimodality describes approaches that understand communication and representation to be more than about language, and which attend to the full range of communicational forms people use – image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on – and the relationship between them (p. 14).

From Limited to a Broader Understanding of the Definitions

Experience suggests that, once this definition of the term 'multimodality' is explained, most of those at the receiving end immediately start linking the term only to contemporary digital texts (Beach, O'Brien 2008) which 'increasingly likely express ideas using different semiotic modes, including print, visual, and audio modes, and create hybrid texts that defy typical associations between modes and what they traditionally represent (Wood, Blanton 2009, p. 476). This is understood since "the new realities of the semiotic landscape are primarily brought about by social and cultural factors which include the intensification of linguistic and cultural diversity within the boundaries of the nation-state, the weakening of these boundaries due to multiculturalism, electronic media of communication, technologies of transport and global economic developments. (Kress, van Leeuwen 1996, p. 34).

Because of this, those at the receiving end of the definition frequently limit the term multimodality to include only the modern, very frequently digital texts, which are available both in class and out of class. The general assumption of many is that traditional textbooks which have been used for years within learning contexts are not multimodal, because, in their view, these textbooks only include chunks of text as their predominant modality. These texts are sometimes also accompanied by several images.

Research questions

In light of this, to contribute to the field of research, the two main research questions this study intends to ask are:

1. Are traditional textbooks also multimodal in nature?
2. Based on the outcomes of the first research question, can these traditional textbooks still be valid pedagogic resources in contemporary educational contexts?

Methodology

To answer the two research questions, since the exercise required an analysis of as many characteristics as possible of these traditional textbooks, the paper adopts a qualitative purposeful approach (Creswell 2013). While modern textbooks are so much more appealing to the contemporary pupil, based on the nature of the research question, of all the textbooks which have been used to teach in Malta, the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series (Vella 1933a, Vella 1933b, published by Oxford University Press in 1933) was selected. I did my choice adopting purposeful sampling (Creswell 2013) since this was the only series written at that time designed specifically with children (i.e. students) as their target audience (Żahra 2002).

The series includes six volumes, two for children and four aimed for adolescents (Grech 2010). Since multimodal research exercises look for depth rather than width, I opted to focus on the first two volumes only. While one volume only would already provide ample space for interpretations, including insights from the second volume would help the reader to obtain more complete and informed interpretations (Norris 2004). Book one includes 39 chapters and book two includes 30 chapters.

Each chapter of the two volumes was analysed using the original socio-semiotic text analysis Mirror framework (Cremona 2017). This text analysis tool includes the following steps:

The Mirror Framework – An Overview

Monitoring of available texts (in this case in the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series) and choosing the actual texts (the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series and chapters) to be included as part of the text analysis exercise;

- Which are the sources available at hand?
- Which are the most quoted (the most popular) texts at hand?
- How are they similar?
- In what way do they differ?
- Do any of the available texts possess a particular/special feature that deserves particular attention? Why?

Initial descriptive interpretation (for each chapter in *Ġabra ta' Ward*);

- Which topic(s) are being presented and/or discussed?
- Who is the ideal reader of the text? For whom was it originally designed? Which genres are used? What are the expectations linked to these particular genres and how do these expectations contribute to set/ affect the students within the particular classroom?
- Which representations do the selected texts appear to imply after a first reading (i.e. the preferred reading)?

Representational multimodal semiotic interpretation (for each chapter in *Ġabra ta' Ward*);

- Which particular sections of the selected texts appear sequential (i.e. not as separate entities)?
- Identify all the modes – embodied and disembodied (see Introduction) - building up the text.
- What representations does the reader perceive through the embodied modes included in the particular text?
- What representations does the reader perceive through the disembodied modes included in the particular text?

Represented social interpretation (for each chapter in *Ġabra ta' Ward*);

- Are particular social features and practices preferred/disfavoured by the representation in this particular text?
- Are particular discourses preferred/disfavoured by the representation in this particular text?

Table 1: The Social Features included in the fourth level of the MIRROR Framework

Are particular social features preferred/disfavored by this particular text?
Answers the question in terms of the following social features and practices: • Social Identity and Social Groups • Social Interaction • Belief and Behaviour • Social and Political institutions • Socialisation and the life-cycle • National history • National geography Adopted from Byram (1993, pp. 36-37)
The attempt to answer the above question also aims to highlight possible discourse types, which may include discourses linked to:

- Class
- Race
- Gender
- Media language, advertisements and promotional culture
- Institutional Discourse: in institutional practices and communications
- Education: an area for reproduction of social relations, representation and identity-formation.

Adopted from Blommaert (2005, pp. 26-27)

Overview of the representations observed: This involves presenting a detailed write up of the representations obtained per individual text. Later, where possible, this level compares individual trends with common trends derived from the texts as a whole.

Reorganising the representations derived from the MIRROR Framework: This step includes the reorganising of ideas (i.e. those presented in the above-mentioned steps) in the best way to serve the particular learning/teaching context they are going to be applied to.

Results and findings

In this section, I will now present the outcomes (i.e. the most salient features) derived from my socio-semiotic interpretation of *Ġabra ta' Ward* based on the questions of the MIRROR text analysis framework[1]. As in the case of similar socio-semiotic interpretations, it must be noted that these results and findings are being presented so that other readers of this paper are prompted to make their own interpretations.

The first finding derived from this socio-semiotic interpretation suggests that the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series are multimodal because the two volumes predominantly amalgamate written text mode and image mode. Written text tends to be the main superordinate mode used in the textbook. The superordinate mode is accompanied by a font that helps to guide the reader while reading through the included material. These include less evident features such as the font type, font colour and font size. Punctuation also serves as a mode through which the reader can be helped and assisted while reading the printed graphics. Through punctuation, the reader is directed and guided about pauses, intonation and volume. Furthermore, another mode that the superordinate written text mode is genre. There are three predominant literary genres included in the book. These are short stories using paragraphs as their main layout, poems using stanzas as their main layout and short jokes using sentences and interjections.

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[1] A detailed definition and explanation of each italicized multimodality-related word can be found in the glossary of multimodal terms on mode.ioe.ac.uk

Both volumes (i.e. volumes 1 and 2) also include a collection of images accompanying the content presented through the abovementioned written graphics. These images tend to choose one particularly salient point from the chapter. This means that each image frames one of the moments explained through written graphics in the chapter and presents an image of this particular moment. There are two different types of images: the first type of images includes reproductions of photos or paintings of inanimate participants (which include places or objects) or animate participants (which include people or animals) mentioned through words in the particular chapter. More frequent in the volume are drawings depicted using black and white colour. Furthermore, in the first volume, there are only two drawings that include colour. The first of these include black, white, green, brown, orange and yellow hues. The second drawing includes a set of shapes filled with different colours. These refer to written graphics and invite the reader to see what is being explained through words i.e. which colours form when several colours are mixed.

A second finding indicates that the abovementioned modes (i.e. written graphics and images) frequently lead to several inconsistencies and contradictions. These happen particularly when one compares the contents of different chapters. On the one hand, the written graphics of several stories and poems included in the series highlight environmental care and protection. This features in volume 1 chapters '*Is-Sebħ*', '*Il-Lejl*', '*Il-ħdura tal-art*', '*Ħamiema bajda*', '*Roy*' the dog and volume 2 chapters '*Kewkba*', '*Il-Ġnien t'Edgar*' and '*Lis-sħab*'. On the other hand, almost in a simultaneous parallel manner, through written text, the reader finds many examples of careless people who harm and disrespect the environment, who are depicted as normal, according to the mentality prevalent at the time of publication. In volume 1, these include the bird hunter in the story '*Iċ-ċajtier*', the bird shooter in '*Nixtieq*', the boy who hit the dog in '*La taħqarx il-bhejjem*', the fisherman who catches a lot of fish in '*Sajjied ta' xewqtu*', the father who keeps a bird in a bag and buys a cage as a present for his son in '*Ġiġi u l-ġojjin*'. In volume 2 these careless or unthoughtful people feature again in the way Ġaħan burns the chickens alive and how Ġaħan kills the pig and cuts it in pieces.

Moreover, similar contrasting ideas which seemingly feature in the way written graphics are placed, also seem particularly evident when one compares images of the same character. While through written graphics the character has the same characteristics in different chapters, the same animated participant looks different in the accompanying images featuring in different chapters. Two examples of this include the features of Ġaħan in the image of volume 1 '*Ġaħan u l-bieb*' and the features of the same character of the two images in '*Ġaħan u l-flieles*' and '*Ġaħan u l-Ħanżir*' included in volume 2.

These identified contradictions are viewed by Kress (2010) as an essential and natural feature of Multimodal texts since:

> Signs and ensembles of signs are read conjointly so that the contradictions which inevitably exist in such ensembles provide

readers with the means of making sense of any one sign and of the sign-complex overall. […] This complex relation of signs (and ensembles of signs of often quite different kind) is encapsulated in the notion of the logonomic system (Hodge Kress 1988), itself a complex of signs that give readers means of reading, 'navigating', of 'placing' the interrelations and valuations of signs in sign complexities: means for reading contradiction, tension, opposition and apparent or real incoherence as well as irony, humour, degrees and kinds of realism, fictionality and facticity, and so on. In that context, the contradiction of one sign with others in a sign-complex is in no way dysfunctional but supplies essential information for an accurate reading of the social/communicative environment, which includes the maker of the sign (Kress 2010, p. 74).

Furthermore, with these first two findings, a third finding derived from my socio-semiotic interpretation suggests that while written graphics and images seemingly are the most predominant and obvious modes included in the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series, there are other (at times less evident modes) included in the two volumes which seemingly serve to ratify *(*i.e. sustain and mention again) the ideas expressed by the two most predominant modes.

These subordinate modes include:
- non-verbals such as facial expressions, gaze, gestures and posture of the animate participants which feature in each image included in the two volumes;
- clothes which these animate participants are wearing;
- proxemics of the animate and inanimate participants included in the images;
- Intentionally chosen written graphics that serve to transduce (i.e. moving meaning across modes) to sounds that are usually associated with participants (especially animals) featuring in images. Some examples of this include: '*Żirr, żirr, żirr, żirr,*' to refer to the sound of the cricket in the poem Il-Lejl volume 1 and all the onomatopoeia included in Fl-Arka also in volume 1.

A fourth last finding which this socio-semiotic interpretation tends to point to is that both the superordinate predominant modes and the other subordinate modes when seen together as a multimodal ensemble, to some extent, indicate that the *Ġabra ta' Ward* includes each one of the seven biases which Sadker, Sadker (2010 cited in Banks) identify as characteristics of textbooks used in classrooms. These include:
1. Invisibility or Group exclusion where not all racial, ethnic, gender, religious groups are equally represented.
2. Stereotyping where all members of a group are presented as all the same and uniform.

3. Imbalance where only one interpretation of an issue, situation or group of people is mentioned.

4. Unreality through the glossing of unpleasant historical events and facts often ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict.

5. Fragmentation where a group is physically or visually isolated and frequently ends up usually represented as non-dominant and as peripheral.

6. Linguistic bias where the language used – visibly or subtly – treats different races/ethnicities, genders, accents, ages, (dis)abilities and sexual orientations equally.

7. Cosmetic bias where through its presentation (i.e. such as its covers, colour, posters etc.) the text gives a modern bias-free impression and an "illusion of equity".

Seen in this light, the detailed and extensive socio-semiotic interpretation of the two volumes of *Ġabra ta' Ward* indicates that the society presented in all the chapters is one that is predominantly Catholic. This idea is sustained both by reference to stories from the Old Testament (such as Moses, volume 1 and Solomon in volume 2) and from the New Testament (such as the Nativity Story and Jesus calming the tempest, volume 1; Jesus healing the paralysed man and St. Paul's shipwreck in Malta in volume 2). With these, there are other subtler references such as the school day starting with the sign of the cross ('*L-iskola*' volume 1), the fact that a beautiful garden reminds the author of how beautiful God is ('Il-Ġnien' volume 1), Ġaħan's mother going to church for mass ('*Ġaħan u l-bieb*', volume 1) and the prayer asking God to save the Queen ('*Ħares Mulej lir-Reġina*', volume 1). Volume two opens with images of the Catholic Cathedral in Malta and the Catholic Cathedral in Gozo. The two churches are both fortified and remind the Maltese nation of the Great Siege (mentioned in '*Żball u Mhux*' in volume 2) where Knights and the catholic Maltese people fought and won against Muslim Turks.

Apart from presenting a predominantly Catholic society, the contents of the first two volumes of *Ġabra ta' Ward* tend to sustain the idea of a society led predominantly by males where the role of females is to learn at school and to serve at home. This is clear from the suggestion of a mother who tells her daughter:

> '*Binti, jaqbillek tisma' mill-ktieb u mill-fardal; il-għaliex mill-istudju titgħallem ħafna ħwejjeġ meħtieġa, u mix-xogħol tal-idejn tidra tkun mara tinqala' u li taf iddur bid-dar.* (Excerpt from '*Il-ktieb u l-fardal*', volume 2, page 26).[2]

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[2] Translated: My daughter, you should follow the advice of the book and the apron; if you learn and study you learn a lot of needed things, and doing manual work you learn how to be an efficient woman, able to take care of the house.

Females are presented as well behaved (such as Maria in '*Iż-żatat*' and Rożina in '*Rożina u Kelinu*' and '*Wara d-daħk jiġi l-biki*' in volume 1) and emotional (such as the grandma of Toninu and the kissing mother of Pisani's poem in volume 1). These characteristics seemingly are expected of them even when females are in pain. In such moments males tell them to downplay their emotions, to keep in mind that nothing happened and to be more careful so that next time they will avoid getting hurt ('*Nuqqas ta' Ħsieb*' in volume 1). Because of this, females end up assuming the role of silent passive followers of their male counterparts, at times even accepting unjust punishments to cover up for the mistakes of their male siblings (such as in '*Qlub t'aħwa*' in volume 1).

Also related to this is the seemingly very common idea presented in the *Ġabra ta' Ward* volumes where older people are presented as wiser, while the younger generation is expected to listen and learn from the advice of those who experienced life before them. One of the stories even suggests that older people should be worshipped by the younger generation (as in '*Qima lix-xjuħ*' in volume 2). This is particularly seen each time there are interactions between adults and younger people. The latter include interactions between parents, grandparents or adult relatives and children (such as Ġaħan following his mother's words literally in volume one and two, '*L-iskola*', '*Il-bewsa tan-nanna*', '*Il-ktieb u l-fardal*', '*Il-Ħlas tal-ħsara*', '*Ġiġi u l-ġojjin*', '*L-Indafa*' in volume 1 and '*L-indafa wara t-tjieba*', '*Il-Ġnien ta' Edgar*', '*Nies bla ras*' in volume 2), teachers and their students (such as in '*Żball u mhux*' in volume 1) and adults who guide children they do not know and tell them what they are expected to do (such as in '*La taħqarx il-bhejjem*' in volume 1). All these outnumber the only three sparse occasions where children's suggestions are well received by their parents or by the adult generation. These include the boy of '*Sajjied ta' Xewqtu*' in volume one who goes fishing and gives the fish to his mum to fry them for lunch. The other two children whose voices influence the adults around them are the only two non-Maltese children mentioned in the volumes. These non-Maltese children are Gustavu Vaża who is Swedish (in '*Tifel Svidiż*' in volume 2) and partially follows what his father tells him and kills the very harmful serpents on his initiative and British Horatio Nelson who as a child used to tell his mother:

> "*X'jiġifieri tibża' mamà?*" wieġeb it-tifel. Ma nafx x'inhu l-biża'"[3].
> ('*Ma nafx x'inhu biża'*, volume 2, pp. 50-52)

Maltese people are represented as white Caucasians. There is one time where dark skin features are mentioned throughout the two volumes. This happens in the Aesop fable '*Il-Qattus u l-Ġrieden*' (volume 2) where the evil cat who made all the mice afraid is called Nigru and is described as '*qattus iswed bellusi*' (cat with a black velvet skin).

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[3]   Translated: 'What does being afraid mean mum? the boy answered. 'I do not know what fear is'.

Furthermore, there are a selected number of Aesop fables translated to Maltese which all tend to hint at what the younger generation should learn to become as strong and mature as the older generation. The stronger lion teaches the younger more agile mouse how to face life (in '*Il-Ġurdien u l-iljun*' in volume 1), the more agile rabbit loses against the less energetic tortoise (in '*Il-Fenek u l-Fekruna*', volume 2) and of all the mice trying to solve the problem of the watching cat, the old mouse comes out with the best suggestion ('*Il-Qattus u l-Ġurdien*' in volume 2). The two big frogs tend to end up lost at the end of the story because they have no guidance from a more mature and older frog (in '*Iż-Żewġ żrinġijiet*' in volume 2).

Throughout the two *Ġabra ta' Ward* volumes, ociety tends to be predominantly presented as consisting of people who can afford to pay for things they like such as toys ('*Il-Pupa tiegħi*' in volume 2), pets ('*Ġiġi u l-Ġojjin*', '*Roy*' in volume 1 and '*Praspar ta' Xadin*' in volume 2) work of arts ('*Moqli f'żejtu*' in volume 1), birthday parties ('*Għeluq Snini*' in volume 1), gifts for their relatives ('*Rożina u Kelinu*', volume 1) and things which need to be replaced ('*Qlub t'Aħwa*' in volume 1). These very frequent references, together with the way participants are seen wearing smart or formal clothes, outnumber the less frequent cases where poverty-stricken people are mentioned (such as the stories of Ġaħan in volume 1 and 2, '*Sajjied ta' xewqtu*', '*Il-Ħlas tal-Ħsara*' and '*L-Indafa*' in volume 1). Furthermore, through the modes used in '*Il-gawwija, il-kokka u l-gallozz*' (volume 2) the reader is directed to the message that those whose businesses fail should find ways how to do their best to recover from the losses so that they can recuperate from financial turmoil.

Discussion

The findings of this qualitative multimodal text analysis exercise serve as an answer to the first research question. These suggest that the Ġabra ta' Ward volumes (1 and 2) are multimodal pedagogic texts even if at first glance they are just seen as very traditional textbooks published way back in 1933. This, in itself, is a contribution to the field suggesting that while many scholars and students attribute the term multimodality to technological and modern pedagogic tools only, the abovementioned findings indicate that even traditional pedagogic tools are multimodal (sustains ideas of Anstey, Bull 2009, Callow 2013) and their multimodal nature is as valid as the multimodal nature of the more recently produced resources. Therefore, these traditional texts are multimodal. Aiming to offer a further contribution to the field, the next focus of this discussion should ask whether these traditional 1933 multimodal textbooks can still serve as valid pedagogic resources in contemporary educational contexts such as classrooms and schools.

Before further discussion, I wish to point out that the fair answer to the second research question should acknowledge that these shared insights should be seen together with the pedagogical benefit of many modern textbooks. Furthermore,

one should also highlight that any content presented in class from *Ġabra ta' Ward* should be included only if students are encouraged to look at it through a critical eye in that it reflects the realities of the 1930s society.

Furthermore, since *Ġabra ta' Ward* was designed to teach Maltese as a native language (L1), to answer this second question, each of the four findings mentioned in the previous section (i.e. Results and Findings) will be put in light of the contemporary methodologies being used in today's language classrooms. These include two predominantly used contemporary L1 methodologies:

- the communicative approach (Portelli, Camilleri Grima 2002) where language is put in a context and students learn languages through texts presenting language as used in daily situations;
- task-based learning approach (Kramsch 2003 cited in Lange, Paige 2003) where students are the main protagonists of the lesson and the teacher involves the students in hands-on activities through which they use the language so that through this active participation they can learn the target language.

On the one hand, while one needs to acknowledge that the mentality at the time of the *Ġabra ta' Ward* (volume 1 and 2) publication was different, the contents included in the book, to some extent, acknowledge similar lines of the trends used in today's L1 classroom. A case in point that goes close to the nature of the currently applied communicative approach is how modes are placed together and through this multimodal ensemble, the written Maltese language is presented in contexts with which the target audience is familiar. Similarly, also intending to put students at the centre of the lesson (i.e. similar to the contemporary task-based learning approach), throughout both volumes, there are '*Kieku x'kont tagħmel?'* (translated to What would you have done?) presenting a common daily situation and asking students to take a stand about the situation. An example is reproduced below:

> *Pinu kien ġej lura mill-iskola. Ra xi flus jaqgħu lil raġel li kien miexi quddiem, u li baqa' sejjer bla ma kien jaf x'ġara. Kieku int kont flok Pinu, x'kont tagħmel? (Ġabra ta' Ward,* volume 1, page 76)[4]

Moreover, in this section, I will share further insights which could serve as a proactive reaction to the findings derived from the socio-semiotic interpretation. I will provide these insights and conjectures based on the experiences I have obtained since I started teaching Maltese (as L1) in both secondary and primary learning contexts in 2004. Although the *Ġabra ta' Ward* series was designed as a reading textbook, I will give suggestions that could be used when teaching each of the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking.

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[4] Translated: Pinu was returning home from school. He saw a man who while walking, without realising, lost some money which fell on the ground. What would you do if you found yourself in Pinu's position?

Table 2: A summary of the findings and suggestions about how *Ġabra ta' Ward* can serve as an effective pedagogic tool for the contemporary Maltese (L1) classroom.

Summary of finding	Suggestion for contemporary L1 learning context
Finding 1: The two predominant (superordinate) modes are written graphics and images.	• Written words should be revised according to the new grammar spelling rules (Kunsill Nazzjonali tal-Ilsien Malti 2008). • Images can be more varied ranging from static and moving images also including online or self-made videos (similar to Cornett 2003). • Colour can be also added to the images either by the teacher or by the students as a reaction to what they are reading. • Students can also be asked to supply images or videos they feel adequate according to the content of the particular story or chapter (similar to Potter 2010). • The teacher can arrange several games where part of the picture leads to an activity where students guess how the story will continue or end.
Finding 2: There are contradictions and inconsistencies across chapters.	These contradictions can serve to initiate a discussion with students suggesting what they think about the contradictions and how they would react to these. The students' reactions can be presented either through words or using other modes which they feel comfortable working with (Bezemer, Kress 2016).
Finding 3: Several subordinate modes ratify the message transmitted by the superordinate modes.	These subordinate modes can be also used to serve as tools through which students either react or present the content being read. Instead of 'just' reading the text, teachers and students can use their body language to mime, act, dramatize, sing, draw and animate the text being presented (Rowsell 2013). This gives the 'modern' dress to a 'traditional' text and puts the student at the centre of the lesson.

Finding 4: This multimodal ensemble presents a homogeneous Catholic white Caucasian male dominant society where old people are respected and guide the younger generation about what they are expected to do.	Students should be encouraged to first read the content and later observe these trends which present a limited perspective of society. These readings and lessons, apart from helping students to learn the L1, should also encourage them gradually to look at these limited perspectives adopting critical cultural awareness where the multiplicity of social realities is understood, embraced, promoted, expected and tolerated (Guilherme 2002). Many modern newspaper articles, texts from social media and other recent mundane printed or audio-visual texts (Rao 2019) can be brought regularly in class and their content is compared and contrasted with that presented in *Ġabra ta' Ward*. While some of these social ideas are contested today, at times they still feature around us and thus through the *Ġabra ta' Ward* text, students can get both a historical perspective of things as well as an understanding of contemporary views and perspectives.

Conclusion

A valid conclusion summing up the insights obtained from this *Ġabra ta' Ward* volume 1 and volume 2 socio-semiotic interpretation would be, as the saying goes, never to judge a book by its cover.

What appears to be a 1933 traditional old-fashioned outdated textbook still offers a rich multimodal ensemble through which pedagogical benefits may be reaped.

Furthermore, one can also conclude that such multimodal texts can only be effective if educators treat these not as neutral ready-to-use resources but as resources that require interpretation through a critical reflective eye. This applies both to the traditional 1933-published *Ġabra ta' Ward* series, as well as to the modern recently published textbooks. The latter appear to have more value and to have an invaluable pedagogic effect on today's contemporary classroom.

These conclusions should serve not just as eye-openers but also as an encouraging invitation to us all involved in language teaching through which we can aim to be more effective when using both traditional as well as modern texts in class.

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