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The Press Briefing as an ESP Educational Microworld. An Example of Social Semiotics and Multimodal Analysis

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**The Press Briefing as an ESP
Educational Microworld.
An Example of Social Semiotics and
Multimodal Analysis¹**

Abstract

This paper explores the concept of the educational microworld as an interactive learning environment. Using as a case study a computer-based language activity, titled *Operational Update*, in the area of teaching English for Specific Purposes, we demonstrate how an intersemiotic PowerPoint slide show could become an educational microworld in a specific professional context, the military. This language activity was based on a series of NATO press briefings held during the Kosovo conflict in 1999. In order to investigate this microworld as a literacy event, we use a framework that combines social semiotics and multimodality. By analyzing each semiotic element as an independent meaning-making resource and examining how all modes are jointly used, we investigate the ways the stakeholders of this microworld use social resources for communicating meanings. We conclude by proposing an extension of this microworld in the areas of teaching English as a foreign language and intercultural communication.

¹ An earlier version of this paper titled Social Semiotics and Multimodality: A Synaesthetic Analysis of a PC-based Educational Microworld of a Press Briefing was presented at the International Summer School for Semiotic and Structural Studies Summer Schools and Festival: 25 Years Semiotics in Imatra, Finland, June 11-15, 2010.

1. Introduction

In our study, we examine a computer-based activity called ›Operational Update‹, which is included in the DVD accompanying the book *Joint Military English: A Specialized English Language Coursebook* (DAMASKINIDIS 2008). This language activity is based on a series of NATO Press Briefings (1999) that were held during the Kosovo Conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). FRY consisted of Serbia and Montenegro and was established in 1992 following the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1991. The author of the coursebook claims that the language activity is actually a microworld of the briefings. We have used this activity as a case study, to examine the extent to which such a microworld could facilitate the building of a constructive learning environment for students who learn English for specific purposes.

We call this language activity an *educational microworld* on the basis that it re-creates the environment of a media event by containing only its most basic and appropriate elements (cf. RIEBER 1992). In the next section, the concept *educational microworld* is outlined as a multimodal literacy event that combines verbal and visual elements into an integrated electronic multimodal text.

Our aim is (a) to analyze the verbal and visual modes of communication of a media event (in the form of a screen-based text) and the way these modes interact with each other in the meaning-making process and (b) to compare and contrast the participants in the actual press briefing (the speaker/officer and the audience/journalists) and the users of the *educational microworld* (the teacher and the students in the classroom or the individual user in self-training). Therefore, we intend to use this *microworld* as empirical data to analyze a literacy event.

We draw on the work of van Leeuwen (2005) and Kress (2010) on multimodality and social semiotics (see section multimodal and social semiotics approaches) through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (cf. CHOULIARAKI/FAIRCLOUGH 1999) and ethnography and visual data (cf. HAMILTON 2000) (see section a multimodal framework). In our discussion of the meaning-making resources of our *educational microworld* we will adopt Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) work on representational, interactional and compositional metafunctions to images, which is further informed by Unsworth's (2006) work in image/text relations and their implications for approaches to multimodal literacy education. A multi-staged multimodal analytical framework consisting of several layers will be presented in the sections following.

Overall, the article is structured as follows. First, we examine the idea of the ›educational microworld‹ as a learning environment and we expand this notion by proposing the Powerpoint presentation as a new form of educational microworld. Second, we provide the theoretical framework of our study, social semiotics and multimodality. Third, we present the structure and

background details of the press briefing (in the form of a PowerPoint presentation) as an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) activity. Fourth, we describe a multimodal framework for investigating microworlds as educational tools, and apply it to selected examples of our case study (the *Operational Update*). Fifth, we propose a cultural microworld to illustrate the applicability of the *educational microworld* to other areas.

2. The Educational Microworld

In this section, we approach the concept of the microworld as a learning environment, and we move on to suggest that the operational update could become an educational microworld.

2.1 The Microworld as a Learning Environment

A microworld, according to Hogle, is an »interactive learning environment [...] a conceptual model of some aspect of the real world« (HOGLE 1995: 4). This microworld may take the form of »an idealized and simplified environment« (HOGLE 1995: 4) based on electronic means (e.g. personal computers (PCs), the internet) or a tangible medium (e.g. Cuisenaire rods), in which the learner/user »explore[s] or manipulate[s] the logic, rules, or relationships of the modeled concept, as determined by the designer« (HOGLE 1995: 4). The power of this microworld as an educational tool is based on constructivism, a faction within cognitive psychology associated with Piagetian learning theory, which is characterized by discovery and experiential learning (cf. RIEBER 1994).

Taking into account this concept of the microworld, in the next section we describe the way in which the PowerPoint presentation creates a learning environment and, potentially, the formation of a microworld.

2.2 The Operational Update as an Educational Microworld

As it has been mentioned before, the *Operational Update*—in fact a slide show—integrates visual and verbal elements where the slides change automatically at predetermined intervals. The *Operational Updates* that are included in Damaskinidis' coursebook comprise selected sections of the actual NATO press briefings, and in particular the parts presenting the military operations that had taken place the day(s) before. Due to limitations of space, we will analyze only a section of one these microworlds, recreated in the Appendix.

According to the instructions given in the coursebook, the *Operational Update* as an ESP activity has four educational goals: first, to enable military

personnel to practice knowledge of specialized language gained in previous units of the coursebook; second, to familiarize them with authentic NATO briefings; third to increase their ability to understand multinational speakers who are native or non-native speakers of English; and fourth, to become a confidence-boosting experience that will encourage their active participation in similar international environments. Prior to entering this activity, students will have already completed modular activities that are based on written text in the coursebook, and on combinations of written text and pictures, and audio files that are stored on the accompanying DVD.

This language activity seems to offer a new perspective on the microworld concept since it does not require the use of specialized computer software and programming. It was created by means of a PC and popular software (MS Office Powerpoint) for a very specific educational purpose. Yet, it requires that a number of contextual factors be taken into account, such as the teaching venue, the professional identity of the students, and the socio-political conditions at the time of teaching, as it will be shown later.

3. Multimodal and Social Semiotics Approaches to Analyzing Literacy Events

Halliday (1978) introduced social semiotics to study the way people use social resources for communicating meanings. One of the most influential contributions of Halliday in social semiotics theory has been the three metafunctions—ideational (the representation of the world), textual (the ways in which texts are made coherent and related to their context) and interpersonal (social and identity relations enacted and played out in texts). Social semiotics focuses on the study of social meaning-making practices of all modes. Moreover, these practices are not examined in isolation or in a vacuum but in certain contextualized situations where all semiotic modes derive and construct their meaning in a given (sub)community.

In this case, the community is the class of military personnel learning English as a foreign language through the computer-mediated multimodal text called *Operational Update*. Analyzing screen-based texts from a multimodal perspective would entail studying both the visual and the verbal as a full system of communication, where all meaning-making modes would be equally treated when assessing their contribution to the multimodal text. By the phrase ›equally treated‹, we mean that while only certain meaning-making modes may play a central role in the effect of the multimodal text, we can afford a look at each mode that exists, no matter its degree of contribution to the overall meaning.

The reading of electronic multimodal texts bears little resemblance to the reading of the ›print-based and logocentric‹ ›western text‹ (cf. SNYDER

2001). That is, while we use our ears to listen to a speaker and our eyes to read a written statement, in the electronic world we should combine all our senses for an ›electronic reading‹. For instance, the modern textbook, according to Kress, Ogborn and Martins (1998), has led to the simplification of the language used to describe visuals. This change is a sign that the visual has a more specialized function to play representing meaning that is not conveyed by the written text. These developments have led educational researchers to talk about ›multi-literacies‹ (cf. STREET 1997) with some arguing for several distinct literacies (e.g. visual, computer, digital) while others for a mixture of literacies.

According to Bolter (1998: 8) »we are living in a visual culture« where the visual is »a different form of literacy« (BOLTER 1998: 9). The value of working with images is also highlighted by Beavis, who argues that »it is through texts and images that much of the politics of representation and identity are being transacted« (BEAVIS 1998: 244). Recent changes in the curriculum worldwide »emphasize[s] the need for young people to be able to interpret text and images« (FACER 2002: 1). Yet, in adult education, it is not easy to increase adults' ability to read images because they lack a solid foundation in visual literacy skills.

Additionally, the ambiguities created by the interaction of the verbal and visual, and the way this interaction is recognized and interpreted, could become problematic. Nowadays scientific community shows an awareness of the way and the requirements the scientific knowledge is presented to the general public (cf. KRESS/OGBORN/MARTINS 1998). For example, Kreuter (2009) describes the way the interpretation of a series of aerial photos led to the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 and to the US build-up to war with Iraq in 2003. Of particular interest is the discussion on the dangers of ascribing scientific objectivity to remotely sensed images of the earth obtained from aeroplanes or satellites. Such images, according to Kreuter, are »easily staged or divorced from their larger context« (KREUTER 2009: 210). These photos were considered as information weapons because neither the media nor the public had the means to evaluate the photos independently.

From a similar perspective, NATO, as a scientific community, manipulated a media event—the press briefing, and in particular the *Operational Update* section—to present scientific knowledge and social events to the general public. In the next section, we describe how we investigated the *Operational Update*, bearing in mind that it took the form of an educational microworld for ESP purposes.

4. Investigating Educational Microworlds

In this section, we provide some guidelines on the investigation of an educational microworld. Although we are focusing on the *Operational Update*, these guidelines could become a template for the exploration of other similar educational microworlds.

First, it is important to contextualize the analysis. In our case, this includes a CDA to investigate the three-dimensional power relations inherent in the literacy event: a military institution (NATO) informs the press which in turn will inform the public. Since the microworld under investigation consists heavily of visual elements, complemented with verbal elements, we identified some basic elements of literacy events and practices in photographs: the participants, the setting, the artefacts and the activities.

The analysis of the microworld consists of two stages. The first stage involved an exploration of the way each separate multimodal element—each semiotic mode—functions in the slide show. This enabled us to see how meanings are realized by these modes. The second stage involved an exploration of the way all these modes are jointly used; the way one mode influences the other. At the same time, we employed four dimensions of intersemiotic layering (cf. ECKKRAMMER 2004), as illustrated in figure 1: *transposition*, where an image (the whole or part of it) is turned into verbal text or vice versa, *juxtaposition*, where visual and verbal text coexist without blending, *combination*, where visual and verbal elements are combined, and *fusion*, where images and verbal text merge into a new textual form.

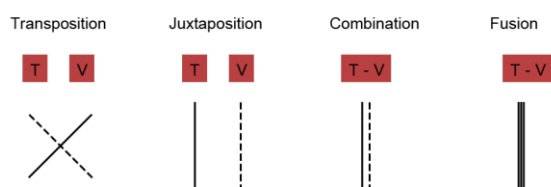


Fig. 1
The four dimensions of Intersemiotic Layering.

Since the *Operational Update* aspires to recreate the environment of a military literacy event for ESP learners, we thought it appropriate to compare the identity of the participants in the actual press briefing event with the participants' identity in the »simulated environment«. This view of analyzing literacy corresponds to the ideological model of literacy, where language is »actively constructed in context« (STREET 1997: 83) by both the speaker/writer and hearer/reader.

As a computer-delivered activity the *Operational Update* can be used for self-paced study by military personnel. This kind of study »promotes life-long learning«, which is considered so important »in the lives of many workers« (MIKULECK/KIRKLEY 1998: 316). A related question that is raised is whether the computer or the content presented »produces the most educational learning effects« (KAMIL/LANE 1998: 331). This question is important because while the individuals are to use the PC privately, the teacher in the classroom is supposed to use (for maximum teaching effect) an overhead projector. Thus, the analysis of the *Operational Update* should also include the computer as a material, as a medium for teaching. Lillis and McKinney (2003: 113) argue that »the materiality of texts carries meaning in itself and contributes [...] to the meanings of the texts as a whole«. The *Operational Update*, as a multimodal text, is inherently transformed by the physical characteristics of the medium presenting it, namely the PC monitor or the image projected by the overhead projector.

Modern technology, either in the form of a PC or an overhead projector, creates a learning environment that may be experienced differently by each member of the class. In the case of the *Operational Update*, the way military trainees »interact with each other in the presence of new technologies may have a profound effect on literacy« (KAMIL/LANE 1998: 328). In the context of this study, the PC, in self-paced training undertaken by military personnel at home, may provide »a privacy factor reducing embarrassment« (ASKOV/BIXLER 1998: 169). In the case of having a group of trainees, the overhead projector may also »encourage discussion, group problem solving and communication skills« (ASKOV/BIXLER 1998: 169) in learners who work in groups of two or more.

No matter what type of technology is used as an instructional tool, the *Operational Update* is a multimodal text that creates a literacy event. In the next section, we will demonstrate how multimodality can be employed in the analysis of a social event that has been recreated in the form of an electronic text. Due to the limited space available here and the inherent constraints in analyzing multimodal texts, and in particular electronic ones, only selected examples of our complete analysis will be given here.

5. A Multimodal Framework for Analyzing the Operational Update

In this section we analyze the *Operational Update* so as to illustrate its complexity and the various conflicting factors instructors should take into account prior to setting up a lesson. After that, we will attempt an evaluation of this microworld as an ESP literacy event. We conclude the section by suggesting ways to »enliven« the ESP microworld, particularly for military personnel.

5.1 A Multi-Faceted Analysis of the *Operational Update*

5.1.1 Critical Discourse Analysis of the *Operational Update*

Although the overarching discourse is that of the military, the mixture of discourses is evident throughout. Military discourse is mostly found in the technical terminology. Although military discourse may alienate the lay reader, the journalistic audience (probably war correspondents) in the actual press briefing must have been more acquainted with the military register. Humanitarian discourse is related to human suffering, and it is mainly found in the first slide; e.g. government/human relief organisations, human misery, deportees, tented villages, refugees, aid. Although the terms *petroleum production* and *storage facilities, airfields, and bridges* have been classified by NATO as ›military categories‹ (Appendix, Slide 2), someone (e.g. a journalist or the public) may consider them as important non-military resources for a society to provide humane living conditions to its citizens. This difference of perspectives as to what can be qualified as ›war-like‹ blurs the division between military and non-military. Political discourse could be found in the names of the countries, political institutions and figures; e.g. Albania, FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) (Government), President Milosevic, Kosovo, FRY and Security Institute. Finally, although no explicit reference is made (in the particular extract of Appendix) to media discourse, it is most apparently evident in the title itself ›Operational Update‹, by analogy to ›news update‹.

All these discourses create a hybridity of discourses in the current late modern society (cf. CHOULIARAKI/FAIRCLOUGH 1999). The word ›slides‹—where the setting and the participants of the battlefield are used to demonstrate military effectiveness—is a sign of the ›commodification of language‹ (CHOULIARAKI/FAIRCLOUGH 1999) that consciously aims to maximize the aesthetic appeal with the ultimate goal of selling the product of war. The reflexivity of discourse appears in phrases such as ›As you can see [...] on this map‹, where the war itself is brought into the press room. A major way in which the press room was transformed into a, so to speak, ›war-room‹, was with a series of photographs illustrating aspects of military actions.

5.1.2 The Photograph as an Instance of Literacy Event and Practice

According to Hamilton (2000), photographs could be analyzed as records of literacy events and practices in order to explore ways of thinking about literacy in society. He begins his photographic research by identifying four basic elements of a literacy event: participants (the people who can be seen to be

interacting), settings (the immediate physical circumstances in which the interaction takes place), artefacts (the material tools and accessories that are involved in the interaction) and activities (the actions performed by participants). These elements are listed in Table 1 for the photographs of the *Operational Update*.

Elements visible	Photo A		Photo B		Photo F		Photos G & H	
	naked eye	speech	naked eye	speech	naked eye	speech	naked eye	speech
Participants	-	civilians, security force, [soldiers mounted on armour (inferred)]	women, children, female elders	deportees, refugees	-	-	-	personnel manning the SAM* vehicles [inferred]
Setting	village, countryside	village	countryside	Albania, FYROM, [countryside]	semi-urban terrain	Belgrade	countryside	-
Artefacts	vehicles, buildings	armour, village, vehicles, buildings	hand luggage	tented villages	buildings	Security Institute	-	military vehicles
Activities	-	military movements, awaiting transportation	walking	human misery, military operations, humanitarian activity	-	-	-	military vehicles deployed

*SAM (Surface-to-Air Missile system)—a surface-launched guided missile for use against air targets.

Tab. 1
Identifying basic elements of literacy events and practices in photographs A, B, F, G & H of the Operational Update.

The reading of Table 1 presents several difficulties. A great deal of the information about each photograph is given (or even inferred) by the speaker rather than seen with the naked eye. In addition, there are cases where the photograph and the speech convey completely different types of information. Therefore, the audience of this briefing might have a problem assessing the validity of the speaker's claim, based on the photograph/speech bond. Select-

ed cases illustrating these problems will be shown in the next sections. An interesting point is the fact that almost all the photos in all the press briefings were aerial, the extensive use of aerial means hinting at the aggressors' air superiority, and, *possibly*, their unwillingness to deploy ground forces. Also, notice that photograph B does not have a caption, leaving room for a number of possible interpretations, as we will see next.

5.1.3 The Intersemiotic Layering of the Press Briefing

To explore the semiotic modes and their meaning we tried to answer three questions (cf. SNYDER 2001: 267). The first question is »Are graphics as informative as, or even more informative, than verbal texts?«. For instance, photograph F illustrates the intersemiotic layering of juxtaposition and transposition. This photograph is as informative as the verbal text, in that while we hear (and read the picture's caption »pre-strike«) that it was taken »before« the target was destroyed, this is also verifiable by the fact that we can see that the building is generally intact and has thus not yet been bombed. This is an example of juxtaposition. At the same time, the photograph is more informative than the verbal text, in that the picture depicts three red (in the original photograph) lines of equal length drawn over the three intact wings. This is an example of transposition, where the red lines translate *visually* the verbal »pre-strike«.

The second question that we try to answer is »Is it possible to determine whether the image, the sound, or the word is the principal carrier of the meaning of the text?«. For example, photographs G and H illustrate the intersemiotic layering of fusion. In these two photographs, the speaker acknowledged that only after *careful scrutiny* did the military locate the ground targets and identify their military significance. This excludes the lay reader *and* the professional who is not equipped with electro-optical equipment for analyzing the photos or does not have access to other sources of information (e.g. ground inspection) that could validate the claim about the military significance of the targets. For that reason, there are vectors pointing to the targets that are obscure to the naked eye, captions describing, and ellipses and circles to help focus. Thus, the principal carrier of the meaning (mainly for any third party) is the verbal text. Also, the verbal and visual elements that were added on the photo are an example of fusion, a completely new textual form.

Our third question is »How do the words, pictures and sound interact to make meaning?«. In this case, photograph B illustrates the intersemiotic layering of combination and fusion. This photograph is a rare example of an unannotated visual element in all the actual briefings. All we see is a group of children and women walking and carrying hand-luggage and babies. The

clothing of the elderly women (kerchiefs and ankle-length dresses) indicates that they must be villagers,² but no *human suffering*³ is manifest in this photograph and these people can also not be justified as *deportees*. For example, they might well be going to a festival or may even be tourists! Therefore, viewers had to rely on speaker's words (rather than the visual elements) to learn that these people *are suffering* and are about to enter a centre with tented villages. This is an example where the visual is combined with a verbal element (the speech) to produce a fusion, a new multimodal textual form.

In order to fully appreciate the analysis of photograph B, we need to see its wider context. The speaker in the actual press briefing is indirectly validated by the fact that the photo (judging by the angle) was taken by someone on the ground. NATO officers, in all the Operational Updates, frequently invoked ›ground inspection‹ to verify the assertion that critical incidents such as ›successful military strikes‹ and ›ethnic cleansing events‹ did take place, or even to apologize for, or deny, NATO's involvement in ›collateral damage‹ situations. Therefore, in the case of photograph B, the speaker implies that the characterization of these women and children as deportees is a valid claim because it came from a human intelligence source, a photographer on the ground.

These three questions lead the discussion to the second stage of our multimodal analysis, the orchestration of modes, where we explore the way the various semiotic modes are combined into a meaningful whole. Very briefly, we have just seen a photograph that is ambiguous to us as an audience. We know that the women and children (deportees and refugees according to the speaker) were victims of war because the speaker told us so. An ideological assumption lies in the lack of a caption. In light of the (undeclared) *war against terrorism*, all the anonymous people of the world are prospective *victims*. It is an example where meaning is produced *not* at the moment of *taking* the photo but at the moment of *viewing* the photo.

The representational world of the military briefing, as a social phenomenon, is presented in a way which is highly influenced by modern technology. It constructs an identity not only for those being viewed but also for those viewing it. Also, it offers a classical example of dramatization of TV news, where an event is accompanied by footage from a completely different event.

As we have seen in these examples, intersemiotic layering can be quite penetrable, while our interpretations are quite subjective and definitely

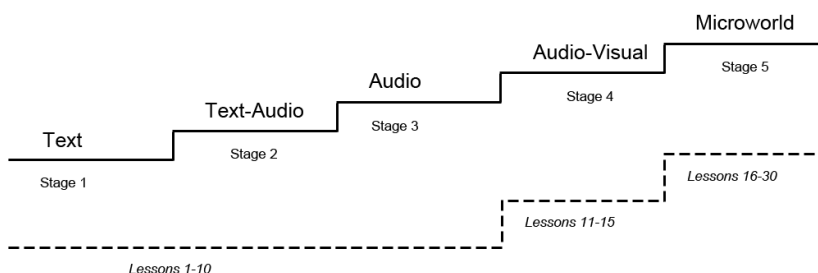
² This is a personal, Greek/Western culture-specific assumption. In other cultures, city people may also wear similar clothes.

³ This is a gender-loaded statement, since the sight of women, exposed in the countryside, carrying their wayworn babes, may have an emotional impact on female viewers and mothers, for whom these babes may certainly appear to be suffering.

subject to criticism. These interpretations have guided our evaluation of the *Operational Update* as an ESP literacy event.

5.2 Evaluation of the ESP Literacy Event

Our brief evaluation of this educational microworld as a literacy event will be made by looking at the effects of multimodality. As we have shown already, it was sometimes difficult to tell, whether it was the *verbal* or the *visual* elements that told the story. Also, the decision to choose only one of these two, or both of them, was based on ideological assumptions. While the ability to interpret the visual elements went beyond traditional *reading* skills, figure 2 illustrates the importance of being trained, in a scaffolding mode, to interpret each separate semiotic mode on its own, as well as combinations of modes, prior to entering the microworld. In other words, this microworld is (and in fact should be) only the culmination of a series of minor, but equally important, stages.



Tab. 2
Graphical representation of the various scaffolding stages prior to attempting the Educational Microworld activity.

As we can see in figure 2, the users of the coursebook *Joint Military English* have to go through fifteen lessons that consist of four different types of activities (based again on *Operational Updates*) before they enter the educational microworlds. First, they complete verbal-only activities in the book. Second, the activities combine verbal elements in the book and listening to audio files on the accompanying DVD. Third, the activities are based only on listening to audio files on the DVD. Fourth, the activities combine visuals in the book and audio files. Yet, this scaffolding procedure is not unproblematic. As we have seen in the discussion of table 1, information conveyed by verbal, audio and visual elements is mostly mismatched, if not conflicting. Therefore, by having access only to some of these elements, the user of the coursebook experiences a subset of the educational microworld and not the whole of it. From a pedagogical point of view, the compartmentalization of the educational

microworld may have serious teaching and learning implications, as it will be shown next.

According to the instructions given in the coursebook, there are two potential users: the individual user, and the group of trainees. The individual users, in a self-learning mode, enjoy privacy at home or at the office, using a PC and (re)playing the educational microworld as many times as they wish. This is a more or less passive experience, with the user in full control of the (re)playing of the microworld. On the other hand, when the microworld involves a group of trainees, it is the trainer that dominates the educational microworld, with the trainees simply watching. In a classroom, the teaching medium, probably an overhead projector, transforms the trainees into a sort of cinematic audience. Also, the trainer or a trainee may use a pointer to point to the screen. In that case, the more or less interactive experience enables the trainer and the trainees to be engaged in a sort of discussion.

Although this type of engagement simulates the actual press briefing—the ultimate goal of the educational microworld activity—there are certain differences. For example, in the actual press briefing there was a speaker delivering a speech on the podium. The audience consisted of journalists and other officers who had eye contact, in a room specifically arranged for this purpose. The briefing was audio recorded, and possibly video recorded, and it was experienced only once, in contrast to the educational microworld which can be experienced several times. The ability to re-experience the educational microworld gives the teacher several opportunities to use a variety of teaching techniques so as to focus on specific learning goals. In the next section, we examine how the trainers could go beyond the computer-based educational microworld by drawing on a variety of real-life resources to meet the specific needs of their military trainees.

5.3 Enlivening the ESP Microworld for Military Personnel

In order to enliven this ESP microworld for military personnel, we could choose a suitable classroom, for example a room with military maps hanging on the wall, or even a military tent⁴ to simulate a field exercise. A sense of realism could be added by using technical equipment such as microphones for the student-speaker, and cameras for recording the lesson to simulate the presence of journalists. The classroom could be empty of desks, with the seats arranged in rows to resemble how the audience would be seated for a

⁴ The decision to use a tent as a teaching area would constitute a major deviation from the actual press briefing because the latter took place in a building at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) near the town Mons in Belgium. On the other hand, it realizes the coursebook's aspiration to assist the training of officers in other similar situations. For example, in peace-keeping operations, press briefings usually take place in tented camps.

speech. The arrangement of the seats in a classroom, Dimitriadou and Eustathiou (2008) argue, signals the aims of the activity (here, for those seated, the role of the audience), and the teachers' attitude towards innovative teaching techniques. A student-pointer on a podium could play the role of the actual speaker of the briefing. At a more advanced level, the loudspeakers could be mute and a student could deliver the speech as the slides change—either the same speech or the student's version, which could have been prepared as homework. The rest of the trainees might assume the role of the journalists that were originally present in the actual briefing. This could be done by dressing them accordingly (not in military uniform), and asking them to take notes, ask questions to the student-speaker, have hand-held audio recorders (pointed to the student-speaker) or even to take photographs.

There are many more things that could enhance the realism of this microworld for military personnel. For example, the trainer could have pre-arranged, with a couple of students, a number of dead calls on their mobile phones. This technique might be a very effective way to help student-speakers focus on their speech despite unexpected distractions. In addition, some students may be instructed to talk to each other as if they were making comments on the speech. We may also think of several other minute details. For instance, military equipment such as field telephones and national flags, the presence of high ranking officers, or even armed personnel assuming the role of security forces, could bring this microworld a little bit closer to the actual press briefing. All these teaching techniques aim to prepare students to deal with similar situations in the future.

Although the above suggestions may create innovative teaching environments, they should be adopted with extreme caution. Some of the modifications suggested refer to a physical environment completely different to that in the actual press briefing. Having a student substitute for the actual speaker has two main pedagogical implications. First, trainees are denied the chance to practice their listening skills (by not listening to the audio recording of a native speaker). Yet, the inability to meet one teaching goal, that is to practice one of the four language skills, is counterbalanced by the fact that students experience the physical presence of an actual speaker, albeit whose native language may not be English. In addition, an interactive communicative event is (potentially) created among the members of the class. Second, for the students who deliver the speech, being on the podium is a confidence-boosting experience, although outside the original educational microworld. The trainer should be aware of these implications prior to setting up such an alternative (at least to the original educational microworld) teaching environment. There are also some interesting implications from the point of view of the trainees/audience. For instance, the trainees that are asked to dress in civilian clothes to resemble a journalistic audience, or to speak to each other as if they were commenting on the speech, may miss the opportunity to pay attention to the speech and the visual material projected on the screen. Moreover,

in the military context, changing the roles of the members of a class may have serious professional implications.

The proposed modifications for the ESP educational microworld should not be adopted lightheartedly. Each teaching technique has a direct effect on the relationship between the trainer and the trainees, and between the trainees themselves, and in some cases it introduces features novel to the educational microworld. For example, having some of the officers/students dressed in civilian clothes in a military class may make them think that (temporarily) they are no longer officers but civilian students. This could create an imbalance in the chain of command, especially when the class consists of officers with different ranks. Bearing in mind the discussion thus far, in the next section we propose another educational microworld for a completely different audience and for different training purposes.

6. A Proposed Cultural Microworld

Using the educational microworld of the *Operational Update* as a ›template‹, in this section, we propose an educational microworld in the area of teaching English as a foreign language.

Let us suppose that Greek high school students have been invited by the International School of Semiotics in Imatra to visit its centre in semiotic studies. A Finnish undergraduate student from an English language and literature department has been appointed, in short notice, as a tour guide. Since English will be the language of communication, the centre has considered it appropriate for this student to practice his or her English specifically for the purposes of this visit. The social program of this visit includes a sightseeing tour of Helsinki and a visit to a museum. Since the student does not have enough time available for a proper preparation, creating an educational microworld could be a last minute solution.

The educational microworld would have been designed so as to help this Finnish student to hone his or her language and communication skills. A video of the centre of Helsinki could be used, based on which the Finnish student would describe to other Finnish students (playing the role of Greek students) what is being shown, as if all were on the same bus. The video would not be paused, so as to simulate the limited amount of time available for this ›tour guide‹ to describe the various locations while on the moving bus. Similarly, for the museum tour, pictures from the museum's exhibits would change automatically in a slide show at a pre-set time. In both cases, the ›tour guide‹ in this microworld would point to the screen while talking. In addition, the Finnish students playing the role of the Greek students could ask questions (in English) about Helsinki or the museum's exhibits.

The tools that could be used in this microworld are, practically speaking, only limited by its producer's creativity. For instance, an overhead projector is almost imperative to allow for the widest projected area possible. If there is sufficient time available, and in order to make this microworld an interdisciplinary project, the video could be made in close cooperation with another student from a film and cinema department, who would actually be responsible for producing the film. As far as the slide show is concerned, it would be easier to find relevant pictures of the museum.

Such a cultural microworld could be set up easily, in short notice, by an individual, or it could take the form of a larger project involving several students from a variety of departments. In both cases, it would be a great pedagogic experience for all those involved, that is, teachers and students. At the same time, it is a good opportunity to establish close relationships with non-institute participants, such as the curator of a museum.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, we have put forward the concept of the educational microworld as a methodological tool. In the case of the *Operational Update*, the tool is related to a variety of preparatory stages of teaching and learning that adult students have to go through, culminating in the microworld itself. This procedure provides the opportunity to practice a variety of communicative skills for students in a learning environment, where the teacher is mostly a facilitator rather than the dominating figure. However, the very fact that the producers and the users of a microworld are called upon to assume various roles and work at several levels calls for a heightened degree of reflexivity (cf. SHACKLOCK/SMYTH 1998).

If the educational microworld that we examined in this study were to be presented to a military class in an international military school—the class consisting of officers from the parties involved in the Kosovo conflict (e.g. Serbia, Kosovo, Albania, FYROM, NATO forces) and other European countries—it could create conflicting roles for the students. That is, it would be awkward for Serbian officers to assume the role of the NATO speaker who describes the way their own country has been bombed. Therefore, all stakeholders in the educational microworld should reflect upon and be conscious of the role that their beliefs and values play in the selection of the design and tools for the production of the microworld.

The microworld we proposed here is also ideal for adult training, for instance, in the form of a crash course, as in the example we offered about the Finnish student who was in need of rapid and intensive language and cultural training, undertaken in short notice. It could also be tailored to specific professional groups, like the military we have just seen, or other social

groups, like immigrants or illiterate people, in the form of informal life-long learning. Recently, there have been numerous attempts to transform the Greek school into a truly intercultural learning environment so as to accommodate the large number of immigrant children (cf. KESSIDOU 2007).

An effective way to allow the smooth integration of immigrants into school could be a cultural microworld (similar to the one we described above), where the role of the speaker would be assumed by native Greek students and immigrants, by turns presenting the culture of their own country to the rest of the students. Moreover, Greek students could be asked to present the culture of the immigrants' countries or the other way around. The role of the teacher is crucial here in making sure that this presentation is an accurate and balanced account of the relevant culture.

All things considered, the educational goals need to be highly specific because the educational microworld that we examined in this study refers to a specific type and amount of knowledge that cannot be modified after the microworld has been produced. Finally, we have demonstrated that a simple language activity, in the form of a multimodal intersemiotic slide show, has the potential to become an important learning opportunity for teachers and their students. To paraphrase the lyrics from the soundtrack⁵ of a James Bond movie,⁶ although the [micro]world is not enough [...] it is such a perfect place to start.

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⁵ Garbage (Performer), Arnold, David; Don Black (Composers) (1999) *The World Is Not Enough*. Universal City: Radioactive/MCA.

⁶ Apted, Michael (Director) (1999) *The World is Not Enough*. [DVD movie]. Los Angeles: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

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Appendix

A: A print Version of the *Operational Update*

The text after each slide is the audio transcript of the speaker's presentation and the bracketed block capital letters roughly indicate the point at which each picture must have appeared on the screen at the actual press briefing. In this activity, the student is asked to find in which order the pictures on each slide are described by the speaker.

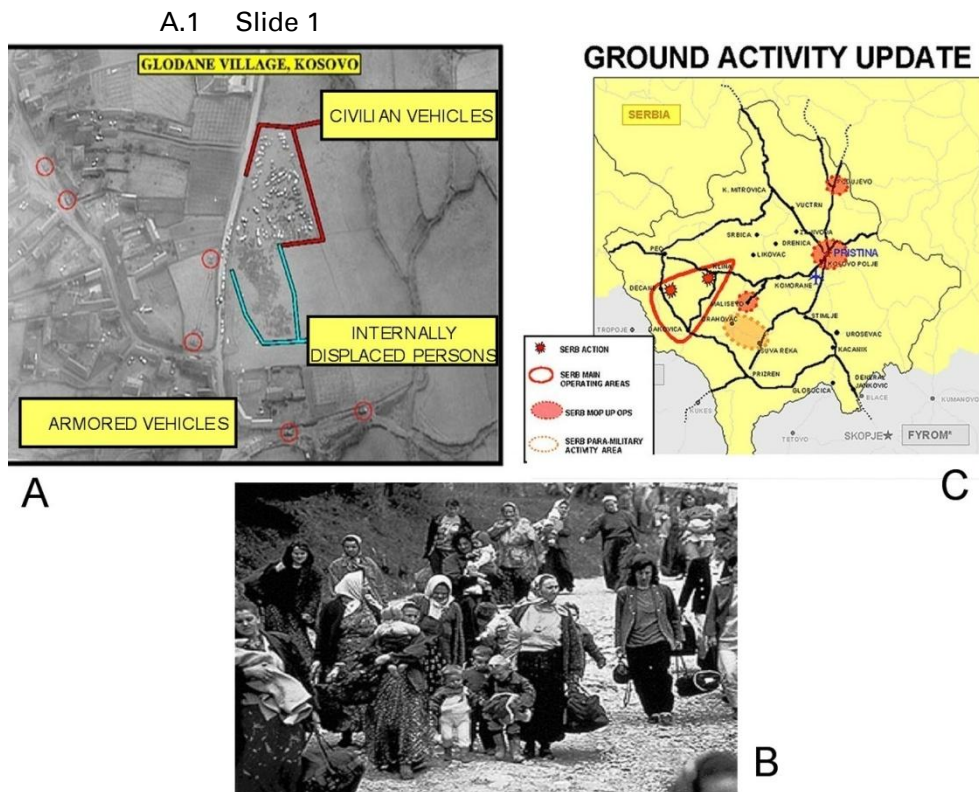


Fig. A, B, C

NATO also increased efforts to assist in addressing the disaster and human misery created by President Milosevic in Kosovo and exported to the neighbouring countries. NATO military forces on the ground in Albania and FYROM are conducting operations in direct support of the governments' and human relief organisations' activities; we are doing this to alleviate the human suffering and to ensure the safety and well being of the deportees until they are allowed to return to their homes [B]. We have established a number of centres with »tented villages« and these are now beginning to fill. Procedures with the FYROM Government to ease the plight of the refugees are being evolved but food has become an urgent requirement. The humanitarian relief operations in Albania are also reaching critical proportions. NATO heli-

copters have already started relief operations. Aid continues to flow in from around the world and some 31 flights are scheduled for today. In regard to ground activity in Kosovo, the UCK [Kosovo Liberation Army, as known by its Albanian initials] resistance is, in the main, limited to Western Kosovo [C]. The remaining pockets are under heavy pressure from elements of the 125th Motorized Brigade, the 252nd Armoured Brigade and the MUP [Serb police. Ministarstvo Unutrasnjih Poslova (Ministry of Interior Affairs)]. The paramilitary activity that I reported yesterday is still going on in the area shown. The forced expulsion of ethnic Albanians from their homes and their subsequent deportation has not stopped; the FRY military and Special Police continue their ethnic cleansing with their customary brutality. Yesterday, we were able to produce a sequence of three images of the Kosovar village of Glodane which gave us damning confirmation of this activity. The first image, [A] which I am able to release to you, showed us Serbian armour that was working in and around the village—this is identified by the circles on the left side, and bottom, of the screen. On the right of the screen you can see the consequences of the security force action with civilians and vehicles assembled in a holding area,—presumably awaiting transportation to the border. Our second shot showed that the civilians had disappeared and, later, a final image clearly showed that the village had been set on fire. This was harrowing evidence of how these Serbian military units are being employed to force villagers from their homes.

A.2 Slide 2

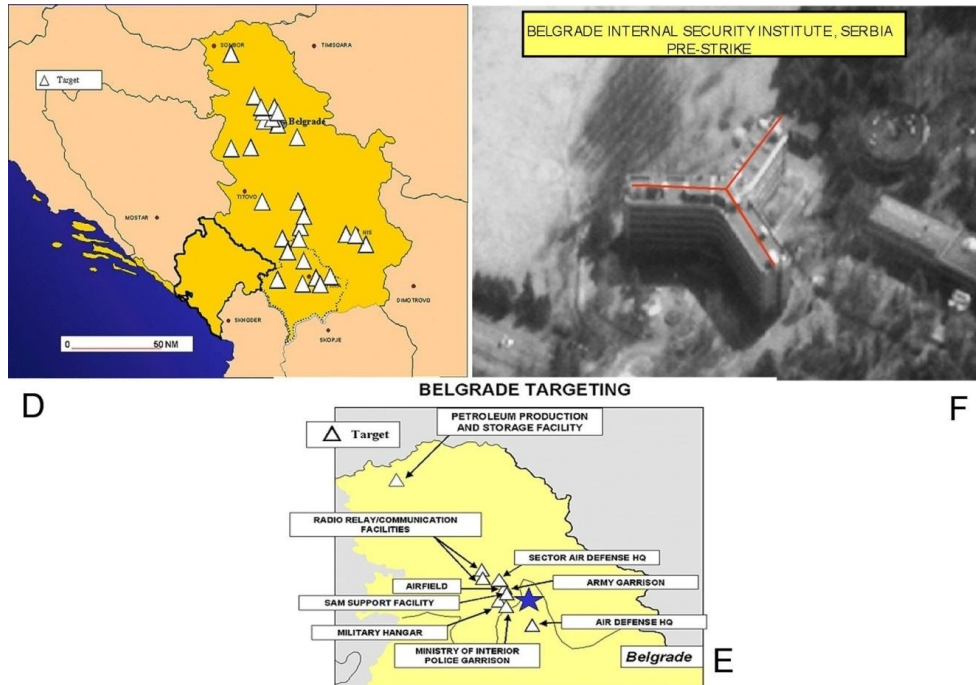


Fig. D, E, F

Turning to our air operations, an improvement in the weather enabled us to make full use of all our assets. As you can see from the graphic, we hit a comprehensive number of targets throughout the full range of military categories [D]. These included petroleum production and storage, airfields, air defences, ammunition storage and bridges. I would like to reiterate, every one of our targets is carefully chosen and vetted to ensure its military significance, and each attack is planned with meticulous scrutiny to keep collateral damage to civilian property and loss of life to the absolute minimum. In Belgrade, we also hit an important HQ of the FRY air defence forces [E]. I told you yesterday of the destruction of the Security Institute and, today, I can show you before and after reconnaissance pictures of that target [F]. As you can see, it was very heavily damaged.

A.3 Slide 3

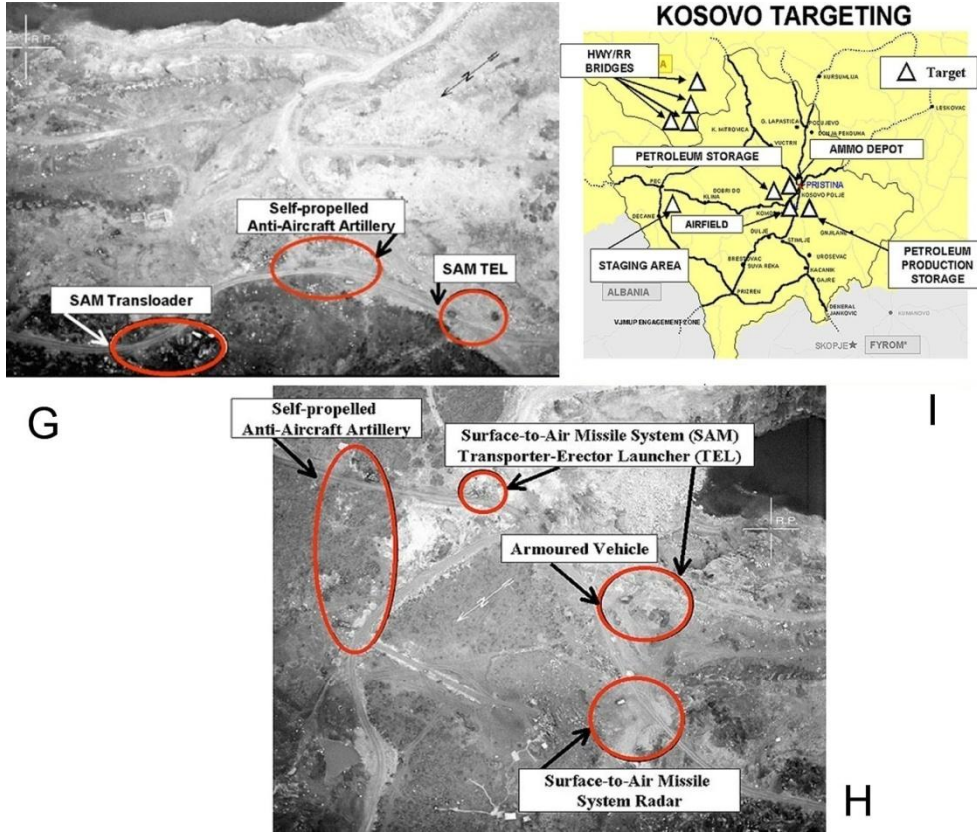


Fig. G, I, H

We also targeted Serbian forces in the field [I]. These next two slides in Kosovo give you an indication of the forces we are trying to interdict. Careful scrutiny showed us a field-deployed surface to air missile system and its support vehicles together with numerous armoured fighting vehicles [H]. The second image pointed us to more deployed equipment—both target sets which we were subsequently able to attack [G].