University students' transformation of meanings within an ESP digital context

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ABSTRACT

Visual manifestations of meanings can provide an important means of creativity in educational contexts. In fact, the unprecedented technological advancements and their multimodal affordances have enriched the visual communicational landscape, initiating more interactive literacy practices for students to enter a transformative process of meaning-making, design multimodal texts, and remake new representations of the world. This qualitative study explores the concepts of *transmediation*, *transformation*, and *design* as seen in university students' meaning-making and representation of course content projected through digital semiotics in a technology-enhanced language course. Specifically, it interprets the semiotic modes from the students' visual/multimodal designed texts and analyses transmediation from visual to verbal modes to see the multiplication of meaning in the move across signs. Data were collected through multimodal analysis and semi-structured interviews with six Fine Arts students in an English-for-Specific-Purposes (ESP) course conducted exclusively online due to the pandemic. Thematic analysis pertains to the interview as an ongoing, dynamic performance of the sign-makers' strong sense of subjectivity and world representation. An important revelation is the prevalence of the written mode in the digital context, which points to the discourses that permeate digital production within academic contexts and which are part of the available designs that speak of established social rationalities and familiar representations.

1 Introduction

Literacy pedagogies in the 90s embraced the cultural and linguistic diversity that emerged worldwide, responding to the fast-changing social and economic conditions that prevailed due to global capitalism (New London Group, 1996). Since then, the affluent multimedia technologies and the accelerated speed of these technological innovations have permeated not only people's private and work lives but also educational contexts. Consequently, the hybridity of digital electronic texts created meaning-making opportunities from various modes such as videos, texts, movie clips, images, and the like (Luke, 2000). The concept of multiliteracies, first coined by the pioneering proposal of the New London Group (New London Group, 1996), involved the reshaping of pedagogical boundaries of the literacy curriculum to respond to the socioeconomic, political, and professional demands worldwide. The complexity caused by the cultural and linguistic diversity, as well as the multimodality in various forms of meaning representation and communication called for the redesigning of

the curriculum agenda (Jewitt, 2008a). The pedagogy of multiliteracies highlights the need for a more productive, active, and transformative meaning-making process for students, which opens new horizons for them to design their learning experience. In fact, the *what* of the multiliteracies framework focuses on the centralisation of the students' agency in designing their own learning, and what Kress (2000) proposed as socially, culturally, and historically formed individuals who will become the remakers, the transformers, and the re-shapers of their learning process. This is the shift from the *Available designs* – the findable resources individuals use to create meaning in a specific culture, context, and conventions of meaning-making, to the *Designing* – the transformative act of work produced with *Available designs* in representing the world to oneself or others' representations of it. Finally, the new texts of *Designing, The Redesigned*, will reproduce novel ways of meaning and exert a dynamic play of subjectivity (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). The concept of *design* is fundamental for this study since students draw upon a variety of digital semiotic modes, and they design their own representations of meanings in an ESP (i.e., English for Fine Arts) course in the following four thematic units: (a) *Fine Arts*, (b) *Art Movements*, (c) *Virtual Reality and Art,* and (d) *Video games and Art*, as portrayed on their project websites.

ESP, or Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), was developed in the 1970s with the emergence of communicative language teaching. ESP aimed to address the language needs of people preparing to enter specialised or academic professional fields. The focus was to deviate from more traditional approaches to language learning, which adhered to the memorisation of grammatical rules and vocabulary, and to focus on more functional uses of language as a tool for communication (Nunan, 2004). Teaching literacy as communication was built on Halliday's (1978) notion of language as *social semiotic*, according to which language learning is learning how to mean, a process that takes into account other semiotic systems, apart from language, in a sociocultural context. As outlined at the beginning of this section, the pioneering proposal from the New London Group (1996) asked for a pedagogy shift to respond to the socioeconomic, political, and professional demands worldwide, also as a result of the new technologies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). In general, Web 2.0 technologies have enabled the user-generated publication of multimodal artifacts as well as the transition from constructivist-based creations of meanings to a more fertile social constructivist-based context. The latter situates knowledge socially and does not only provide meaning-making interpretations of content by the audience, but it also places learners within an interactive community (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). Research has shown that technology-enhanced environments have fostered more learner-centred opportunities, allowing students more control over what they learn and enhancing individual learning experiences (Kessler, 2018). Shaped and outlined by the affordances of new, innovative technologies, new forms of a wide range of literacy practices emerge, allowing for the creation of new texts with various semiotic modes such as video, audio, and the like, and the generation of new discourse structures (Ware, 2017). It is a fact that new technologies have enabled the supremacy of visual representation, with some concepts becoming more easily *accessible* on the screen (Jewitt, 2005), while the visual representation of learning content produced by digital technologies has been proven to communicate subject matter better and improve students' understanding (Papageorgiou & Lameras, 2017). Based on the affordances of the technologies mentioned above and the current growing high-tech and divergent workplace environments, it is deemed necessary for educators to offer ESP students the opportunity to practise not only their linguistic repertoire but also their cultural repertoire and harness new ways of meaning-making that would help them enter more transformative learning experiences.

The current study analyses transmediation from the digital multimodal texts (websites) that students represent to the verbal modes they communicate to explain their choices through their interview with the author. Transmediation is the translation of semiotic content from one mode to another and, as a process of transformation, is conducive to knowledge generation and learning (K. A. Mills, 2011). It is important to analyse how the students' representation of meanings of course content in their work is qualitatively different in the interview and how that emerges through the movement across the two semiotic systems (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Unsworth, 2007). It is pertinent to examine the act of transformation and the re-making of course content through students' representations *(the redesigned)* and how that leads to new meaning reconstruction and transformed subjectivity. This study aims to explore further the issue of multimodality and the territory of social semiotic orientation to meanings in its intersection with the teaching and learning of foreign language (FL) in tertiary education and in an ESP context in particular.

2   Literature review

The multimodal representation and communication of meanings is not new since modes such as gesture, speech, and images have always been used in meaning-making. However, digital technologies have enabled the configuration of new forms of meanings and extended the multimodality of texts. We are witnessing the predominance of a visual and multimodal culture within a multimedia landscape through which people navigate and construct multiple meanings. From an educational perspective, heavy reliance on writing is estimated as problematic and contentious since students can now design their own texts, which contributes to how they construct knowledge and fundamentally changes how they acquire new knowledge (Jewitt, 2005). As for ESP, it has been proven that students can become more engaged in the learning process through technology since the latter is integral in the social, economic, and political transition (Kakoulli Constantinou & Papadima-Sophocleous, 2020) occurring in this domain now.

2.1 Digital tools used in the domain of FL teaching and learning

The unprecedented technological advancements have made digital tools increasingly available for FL teaching and learning. In their review of Web 2.0 technologies in second/ foreign language learning, Wang and Vásquez (2012) noted how the pedagogical implementation of these tools poses a positive environment for students to progress in a foreign language, but admitted that more research was needed on how the tools produce specific language learning outcomes. In their review on the effectiveness of technologies for FL, Golonka et al. (2014) highlighted the need for more empirical research on the key factors that enhance the effectiveness of technology in FL learning, and not so much on the description of the digital tools. Parmaxi and Zaphiris (2016) developed a Web 2.0 corpus within five years (2009-2013), delineating the use of Web 2.0 tools in second/foreign language classrooms. Their corpus consisted of blogs, wikis, social networking sites (SNSs), digital artifacts-sharing platforms, and a combination of the above. As for skills, their work highlighted multiple skills such as speaking and writing, as well as promoting group interaction, intercultural awareness, and autonomous learning, and the like. Concerning Facebook, and blogs (Dizon & Thanyawatpokin, 2018), research has shown that students' writing fluency was ameliorated despite Facebook being used primarily for recreational purposes. N. Mills (2011) also revealed the multiple affordances of SNSs since students can acquire knowledge, collaborate, produce, and share content, while the combination of some technologies, such as wiki drafts and chats, can initiate meaningful interactions among learners for language development (Elola & Oskoz, 2010). Currently, the cutting-edge of

digital tools in FL teaching and learning is Virtual Reality (VR), which includes any simulated, artificial, or synthetic environment that can represent a real context (Kessler, 2018). Its multimodal features can offer opportunities for embodied learning, for example, through tangible and spatial interactions (Jewitt, 2013), to produce multiple meanings. As for the field of ESP, the community-building opportunities of some SNSs, such as *Deviant Art* for art students, can be an incentive to use English for collaborative activities (Christoforou, 2020). These spaces could also be described as *affinity spaces* (Gee, 2005) where people with common interests congregate virtually and affiliate around their common interests, instantiating a more social character of learning. Finally, the Google Workspace for Education, formerly known as the G Suite for Education, the cloud computing service with Google Drive and Google Classroom as digital artifact-sharing platforms, can allow for collaboration and communication among students (Kakoulli Constantinou, 2018).

2.2 *The grammar of visual design and multimodality*

Even though the first half of the 20th century was visually represented through art and history, the latter half of the century saw an overarching interest in the representational function of everyday images in several areas such as film, photography, advertising, learning, and education (Jewitt, 2008b). The provoking work of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, places visual representation (colour, perspective, framing, and composition) within the theoretical framework of *social semiotics* and culture-specific boundaries, and presents visual text-objects (from works of art to maps, graphics in textbooks, advertisements, websites, and the like) from the Western culture since it is the most dominant one globally. The authors draw on the Hallidayan model of social semiotic approach (Halliday, 1978) to language and its three metafunctions (ideational, interpersonal, and textual) in an attempt to approach visual communication from a social perspective. They support that not all communicative meanings can be realised through linguistic modes. Instead, language and visual communication can express the same fundamental meanings that reflect cultural norms; however, each meaning is realised differently. They also stress the necessity of implementing the visual representation and production of meanings in Western institutional education settings to promote children's visual and critical literacy, coinciding with the world's current sociopolitical and cultural conditions.

Departing from the long-standing difference between verbal and nonverbal forms of communication, multimodality looks beyond language to find other modes of creating meaning and interacting, such as gesture, gaze, facial expression, and the like (Jewitt, 2013). As stated, images are a dynamic resource for meaning-making. Like multiliteracies, multimodality has become more noticeable only after the emergence of digital technologies to respond to the rapidly changing socioeconomic conditions that have reshaped the semiotic landscape, that is, the way meaning is created and communicated in a new context. The three key fundamental principles of multimodality are: (1) each meaning is produced with different semiotic resources, each offering distinct potentialities and limitations; (2) the process of meaning involves the production of multimodal wholes; and (3) studying meaning entails attending to all semiotic resources that make a whole (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2018). According to Lackovic (2016), however, there is a dearth of literature related to the pedagogy of multimodality in higher education, especially when it comes to students creating resources rather than using given ones outside the field of so-called 'creative' subjects such as arts and media (p. 150). Lackovic (2016) focused on pictorial images as learning modes and on image-based communication in higher education teaching and learning, highlighting the need for students to acquire a metalanguage to reflect on their work and choices.

Addressing the issue of how a multimodal semiotic approach can affect ESP, Plastina (2013) acknowledged that research on multimodality has remained peripheral in the ESP territory, and emphasised the importance of providing ESP learners with new opportunities for engaging and creating content, complemented by their English language skills. Reinforcing the aforementioned under-researched relationship between multimodality and ESP in tertiary education, Laadem and Mallahi (2019) also supported that focusing solely on vocabulary and grammar creates passive ESP learners and deprives them of active learning opportunities and communicative engagement. Finally, they stress that by adopting a multimodal approach to ESP meaning-making practices, teachers can prepare students for their future academic and professional life.

2.3 Transmediation

In the current study, *transmediation* is applied to students' translation of meanings from digital (websites) to verbal semiotics (interviews). Envisioned more broadly, transmediation is a term coined by Suhor (1984), referring to it as 'the student's translation of content from one sign system into another' (p. 250). Even though *translation* is the general semiotic term, Kress (2003) uses the term *transduction* to refer to the move of semiotic material from one mode to another. However, according to Bezemer and Kress (2008), modes or sign systems do not carry the same materiality because they are shaped from different cultural works, so 'there can never be a perfect translation from one mode to another' (p. 175). Therefore, when studying the shifting of meanings across modes, it is important to understand the context where meaning shifts (K. A. Mills, 2010). Semali (2002) also considers the relationship between signs important because the signs students manipulate, especially in the multimedia classrooms of today, represent the embedded cultural meanings students possess, their values, and systems of knowledge (i.e., discourses). The discourses shaped by culture and the signs used are part of the available representational resources of users, which evoke a sense of agency when they are transformed since users *design* new meanings in different contexts (Newfield, 2014).

It should be noted that transmediation is directly related to the concept of mediation, as mentioned in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Companion Volume (Council of Europe, 2020). Mediation is described as a social and cultural process through which ideal conditions are created to shape and communicate meanings from students. The context for that could often involve a class activity through which students can work to communicate their meanings, despite their individual, sociocultural, and sociolinguistic differences. In mediation, 'the user/learner acts as a social agent who creates bridges and helps to construct or convey meaning, sometimes within the same language, sometimes across modalities, and sometimes from one language to another' (Council of Europe, p. 90).

In the present study, students first represent their visual/multimodal meanings through their digital construction (websites), and later, they translate their meanings through verbal interviews during recontextualisation. The students use the modes as signs of interest, which are situated in a social and cultural framework and are, probably, socially influenced by digitalisation (Magnusson & Godhe, 2019).

2.4 Purpose of the study

Addressing the research gaps stated in section 2.2, the present study aims to interpret the shifting of the semiotic modes from the university students' visual/multimodal designed texts to the verbal modes they express in their interview with the author. Transmediation is analysed from how the students represented the meaning of ESP course content through digital semiotics in their websites to how they verbally expressed those meanings in the interview. The study was undertaken to explore how the concept of design was realised in the visual/multimodal designed texts of students of an artistic background, studying a language course in a tertiary education context. The study also aimed to enrich the under-researched literature on the pedagogy of multimodality in the ESP field.

3 Method

3.1 Context

The study took place in the ESP course *English for Fine Arts* in a tertiary education institution in Cyprus. Prior to COVID-19 pandemic, the course was delivered in a computer lab, but due to the conditions of emergency distance teaching in an online environment caused by the pandemic (Christoforou, 2021), the specific course was carried exclusively online.

The course is separated into thematic units that students can access through the Moodle platform, the institution's Learning Management System (LMS). Moodle allows the user to post a wide variety of multimodal texts through various semiotic modes (e.g., online articles, TED Talks, YouTube videos). The first unit is *Fine Arts*, which exposes students to various mediums of producing art, including different forms of art and authentic talks about 2D creations. This unit also introduces students to art-related terminology. The second unit is *Art Movements*, which provides information on many influential art movements such as Surrealism, Neoclassicism, and the like, influential painters and paintings, but it also initiates authentic negotiations of meanings in authentic conditions (Sari et al., 2021) such as a roleplay interview in a gallery.

The following two thematic units are more technology-oriented. The third is *Virtual Reality and Fine Arts*. During pre-pandemic times, students personally tested various VR applications in the lab, but due to the pandemic, they learnt about the affordances of VR in Fine Arts through digital material. The fourth thematic unit is *Video games and Art*, which analyses the contribution of artists in creating video games through YouTube videos, interactive talks, and class conversations. There are also presentations on the different genres of video games and their development through the years. The rest of the thematic units (not involved in the research process) centre on writing genres the students need for their studies, respectively titled *Process* and *Comparison and Contrast*.

The Multimodality project in the current study asked students to represent their understanding of the course content of the four above-mentioned thematic units. They were free to choose between the modes they preferred for representation to ensure their choices derived from their conscious decisions. Moreover, there were no constraints regarding the number of semiotic modes they could use. A pertinent research question to this paper is: Which are the dominant semiotic modes in the students' visual/multimodal designs to explore the concept of design in a tertiary education ESP course?

3.2 Participants

Six participants in the age range of 18 to 42 took part in the study: five female and one male, and they were all first-year students studying in the Department of Fine Arts. They engaged in the project in the course English for Fine Arts, a compulsory language course taken in the second semester of their studies. All the participants were of Greek-Cypriot origin and had studied English as FL at school. The students were familiar with SNSs and kept personal profiles on several SNSs on the Internet. It is important to mention that the six participants had limited to no experience with technologies such as the Moodle platform, Google Drive, or customised templates for building free websites prior to the course.

3.3 Why a website?

Students had to present their final project in the form of a website. Due to the pandemic, they worked exclusively online and interacted with their instructor through the Zoom platform. The project they were assigned to do and all course tasks in the semester were digitally submitted; therefore, a digital medium was considered more pertinent for the purpose of the project. The website was an ideal medium because it entails more multimodal opportunities for activating students' creativity and imagination (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000), and it gives important insights into the producer's culture, opinions, and expectations (Pauwels, 2005). Finally, students are becoming socialised into digital forms of communication and interactive websites from a very young age (N. Mills, 2011), so their representation of meanings in this type of software was expected to transform their social experience with multimedia texts. All students used the free version of their preferred website template and were allowed to choose the template of their preference.

3.4 Data collection and analysis

The qualitative data used in the study was the students' visual/multimodal digital websites and the semi-structured interviews after the project submission. Qualitative data analysis for understanding the process of transmediation and transformation of meanings required analysing and comparing (a) the multiple modes within the students' visual/multimodal digital websites and (b) transcribing data from the interviews. Table 1 shows the methods of data analysis: multimodal discourse analysis (MMDA), which recognises that language cannot provide a full account of meaning, but only partial (Kress, 2012); and thematic analysis for the interviews (Saldana, 2021).

Data-collection Sources	Data Collected	Analysis Methods
Interviews	The transcribed content of six interviews	Thematic analysis
Students' websites	The content of six websites	Multimodal discourse analysis

Table 1: Data-collection and analysis methods

The semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded through Zoom. The interviews took place after the project submission and were conducted in the Cypriot-Greek dialect (the students' native language) to elicit potentially more sophisticated answers. It is worth mentioning that the interviews were not part of the students' language-learning experience nor were the students assessed on their answers. After the interviews were translated into

English, the author manually coded the transcribed data. The questions used in the semi-structured interviews were:

1. What influenced your choice of semiotic modes in the design of your website?
2. Which semiotic mode(s) is/are the most important for you to represent course content?
3. What are your general comments about your website?

4 Findings

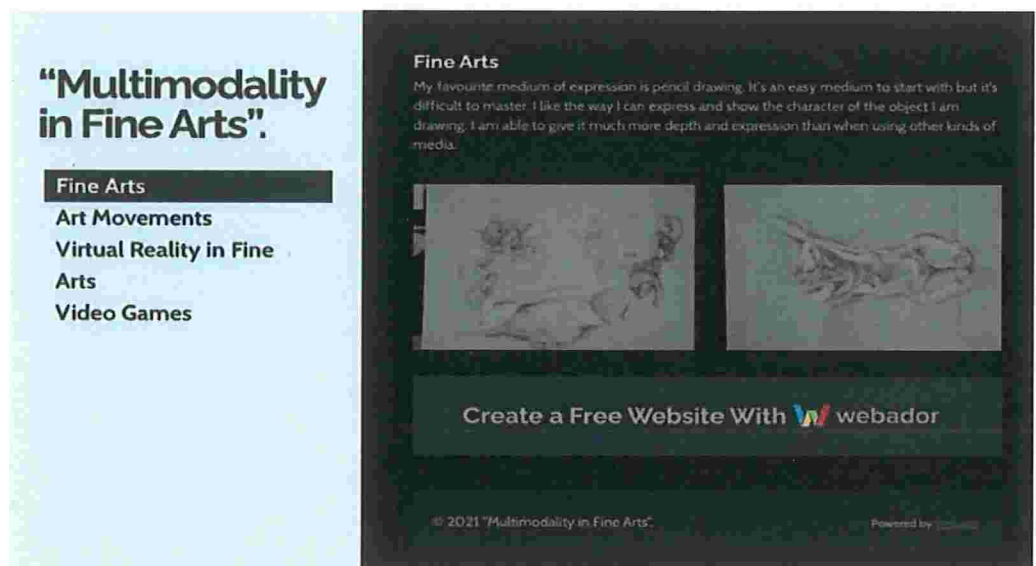Here is a synopsis of each student's website with the relevant images.

Website 1

Figure 1: Website of Student 1

Student 1 designed a free version of the *Webador* template. There was no cover, personal introduction, or profile picture. There were also no separate pages for each thematic unit.

Website 2

Figure 2: Website cover (Student 2)   **Figure 3:** Student 2 working with acrylics

Student 2 designed a *Google Site* and created a cover for the website (Figure 2) with a profile photo and a welcoming written note for the audience. Each thematic unit was presented in a different link. A personal photo again showed more processes in the 1st thematic unit *(Fine Arts)*.

Website 3

WELCOME TO MY PAGE

My name is [REDACTED] I am a Fine Arts student at Cyprus University of Technology.

I have created this page to discuss subjects related to art. There are four thematic units:

- Fine arts
- Art Movements
- Virtual Reality
- Video Games

Hope you enjoy my page.

Figure 4: Website cover (Student 3)

Student 3 also designed a *Google Site* with a cover (Figure 4) and a written note to welcome the audience. Each thematic unit was presented on a different page.
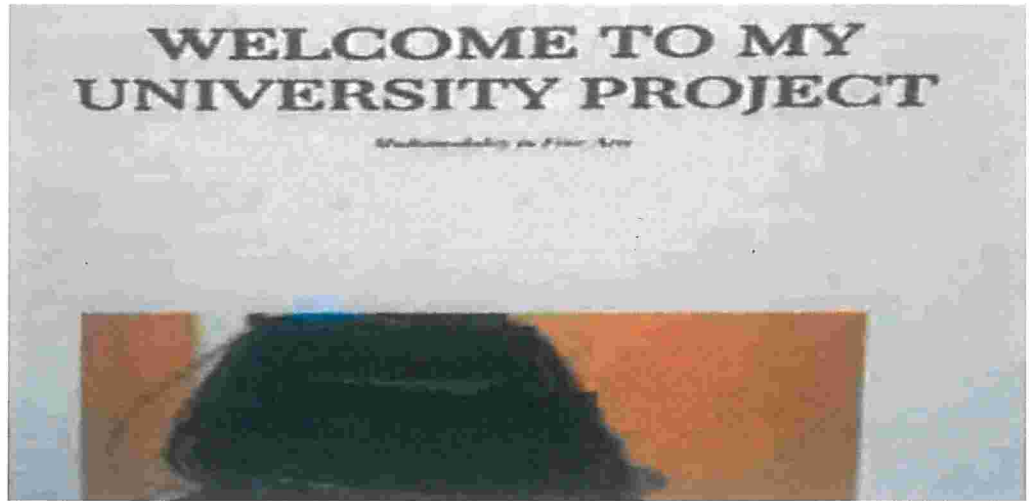
Website 4

Figure 5: Website of Student 4

Student 4 designed a website (Figure 5) with the free version of the *Wix* template. The website did not contain any pages; scrolling down the site, one could find all thematic units with an accompanying image and a short, written paragraph.

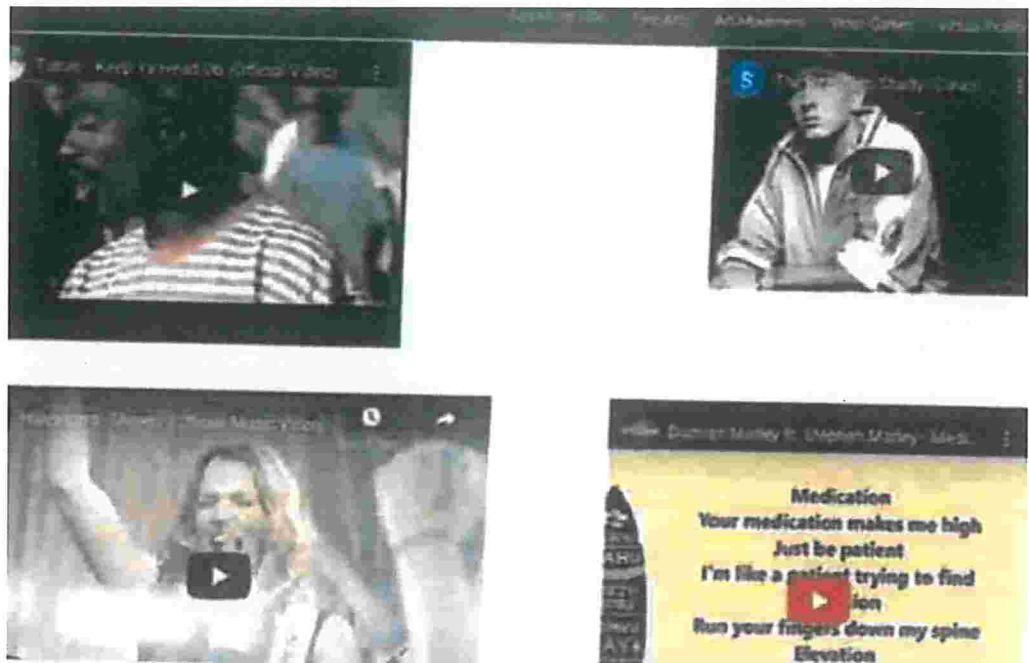*Website 5*

Figure 6: Website cover (Student 5)

Figure 7: Music videos on the website

Student 5 designed a *Google Site* (Figure 6) using an art-related and personal photo to welcome the audience. Scrolling down the cover page, one could find some music video clips from the student's favourite artists (Figure 7).
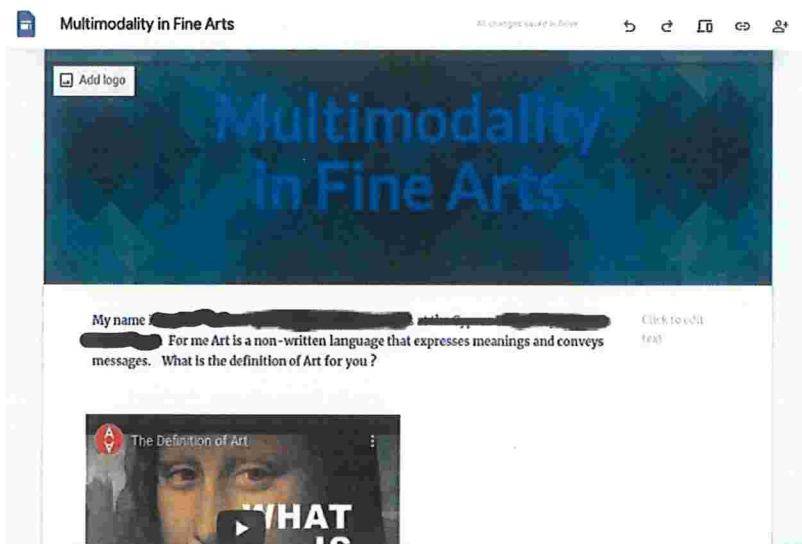
Website 6

Figure 8: Website cover (Student 6)

Student 6 also resorted to designing a *Google Site* (Figure 8). There was no profile photo on the introductory page, but there was a short, written paragraph that welcomed the audience and a YouTube video called What is art?. Each thematic unit was represented on a different page.

4.1 MMDA of the websites

MMDA (and social semiotic theory) is an approach that recognises the partiality of language in the process of meaning-making, in the sense that it cannot provide a full account of meaning since other modes must be given recognition, e.g., gestures, images, music, and the like (Kress, 2012). Applying MMDA on the students' websites, one can discern a verbocentric tendency of meaning representation. Despite the students' artistic background and exposure to multimedia technologies and rich technological, representational resources in the ESP course, as designers, they tend to rely more on stable systems.

Student 1 – Website 1

As shown in Figure 1, Student 1 designed a website, which relies heavily on written language as the most preferred mode of communication. One would expect more depictions of visual representations, static images, or videos, but instead, representation is mostly achieved through writing. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), weighing the visual clues of composition, such as salience, colour contrasts, balance, and the like, is a subjective process that could justify the fact that the website seems to be unfinished. As a semiotic mode on its own, colour can fulfil all three metafunctions simultaneously (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) since, as discussed earlier, ideally, it clearly states the strict mood of the designer, and interpersonally, it creates a distance between the designer and the viewer because the contrasting colours (light green and black) intensify the gap between these two individuals. Moreover, the absence of framing accentuates the sense of separation and individuality the designer (student) wishes to display. It is also evident that in Website 1, *Fine Arts* and *Art Movements* are placed within the artistic, cultural community Student 1 belongs to. For *Fine Arts*, there is information on the student's "favourite medium of expression", which is a form of personal investment. However, the student also relied on written language as a semiotic mode to represent content for *Virtual Reality and Art* and *Video Games and Art*. The conditions caused by the pandemic and the lack of personal testing with the VR equipment could have influenced the semiotic choices of Student 1 on those thematic units. Despite the multiplicity of available semiotic resources, there is a dearth of modes on the website concerning the two technological innovations and their relation to art. Meaning-making occurs mostly through writing. Specifically, in *Video Games and Art*, the student enhances the written piece with another written quote from the TIME website; according to which, video games are indeed a collision of art and science.

Student 2 – Website 2

Student 2 was the sole student whose website revealed a strong sense of agency as a designer. There is an intense portrayal of herself through action (Figures 2, 3, and 9). Various interconnected modes representing her meanings are used, such as personal photos and drawings. Despite occasional short written sentences, the visual semiotic modes realise what the student does not say in words.
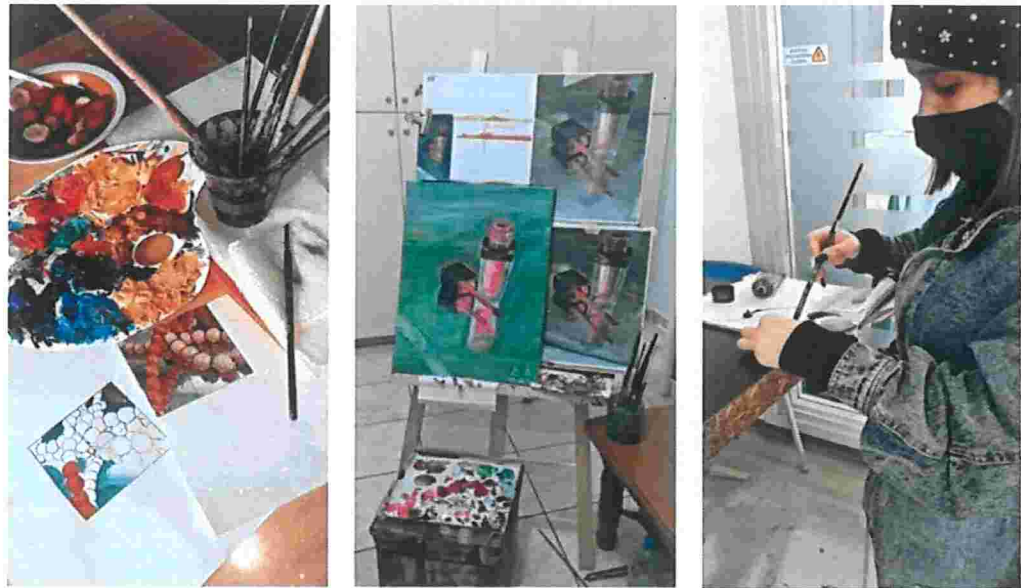
Figure 9: Student 2 working under COVID-19 conditions

In Figure 9, she portrays herself as the actor involved in a narrative process (a non-transactional reaction). Instead of writing about the act of drawing using *action verbs*, their pictorial equivalent, the vector, links the student with the phenomenon (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Ideationally, Student 2 represents what 'what goes in the world' (Jewitt, 2005, p. 18) through the visual representation of herself wearing a mask due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Watch on ▶ YouTube

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9-PMm6YdUU

After I have watched this video, I kept in mind two important things:

- First: "Our role as artists, is try to put people away from their daily reality. "
- and second: "Virtual reality totally change the grammar of the previous art forms so we need to discover a new grammar"

Figure 10: The representation of the thematic unit 'Virtual Reality and Art' by Student 2

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All the elements of a video game can be an art form. As the script, music, images, character development and much more.

- My favorite video game is called " Property Brothers " and it has to do with home decoration.
- You earn money and you make your own room decorations

Figure 11: 'Video Games and Art' by Student 2

- My favorite video game is called " Property Brothers " and it has to do with home decoration.
- You earn money and you make your own room decorations

How I play this video game

Figure 12: Representation of the game 'Property Brothers'

During the *designing phase* of *Virtual Reality and Art*, the student as a meaning-maker draws upon a very interesting cultural convention, that of the responsibility of artists to 'put people away from their daily reality', which is an element she seems to have inherited from the artistic culture she belongs to (Kalantzis et al., 2016, p. 222). As for the final unit *Video Games and Art*, there are only minor instances of written sentences. By opposition, she is actively involved in the semiotics of the video game (Gee, 2003) and enters a more visual procedural representation of how it is played.

Students 3, 5, and 6 – Websites 3, 5, and 6

Even though Students 3, 5, and 6 attempted to integrate multiple modes to represent their meanings, there is a common verbocentric tendency protruding from their designs.

A few of the oldest and known games are Super Mario and Pac-Man!

Are Video games considered art?

Up until 2011 they were not. That changed when the United States made a law that stated they are, saying games like any other art form is a representation of imagination and expression of one's ideas.

In my opinion, that isn't the only reason it should be considered art. A video game before it reaches its final form, requires lots of research, thoughts, imagination, and yes.....artistic skills just like any other art form!!! First thing, before sketching the characters, the core team brainstorms how the game will operate and look, and color-codes the components on·a bulletin board. After that, they sketch the character in a scene by scene storyboard. The rest of the work is done on a computer.

To bring the game elements to life, they add colours, textures, shading and movement using the latest computer animation technology. It's the animators job to create every movement the character makes in the

Figure 13: Verbocentrism in 'Video Games and Art' (Student 3)'

My Favorite art movement

My favourite movement is surrealism. Surrealism is a movement that started in the early 20ᵗʰ Century between the first and the s
World War. Surrealism is a movement that explore and activate the unconscious mind through the imagery .
In this movement we mostly see illogical scenes, pictures that cannot exist, pictures that we only can dream or imagine. That is t
reason that surrealism is one of my favourite movements. Its allows you to explore yourself your unconscious ,create anything y
without restrictions or specific rules.
The interesting with surrealism is that the scene you created might not make sense, or exist, but at the same time, the objects in
Like that Surrealism changed the world. Not only in Art but in literature, culture even in politics. Back in the 20ᵗʰ Century the artist:
a lot of humoristic and cautious paintings about the social and political period that they were going through. And because this
movement was very new and extremist for the people the paintings were even more intense from before. Some of the best surr
artists are Rene Magritte,Max Ernst, Salvador Dali and Casey Weldon.Loribelle Spirovski and Mark Bryan are some of my
favorites.They are modern surrealist especially Mark Bryan, his work is more Pop Surrealism the kind I prefer. He combines art v
humour and politics with that way that creates a political awareness and affect the world with his paintings.

Figure 14: The prevalent mode of writing in 'Art Movements' (Student 5)'

What is your favorite medium of expression and why ?

In this painting I used different media such as acrylic, collage
and ink. I chose to use black acrylic and I painted with impulsive
strokes. My intention was to create a rough texture and a
dynamic appearance. Then I put pieces of collage and used red
and brown liquid ink in some parts of the painting. I consider
collage an innovative and modern material that gives the artist
the opportunity to create without restrictions. Collage can be
used with other materials and give a completely unique result. I
used ink to give liveliness and translucency to some parts of
the painting.

What is your favorite medium of expression and why ?

Personally I don' t have a favorite medium of expression. I
believe that each medium has it' s own potential. Further more
each medium has different use, texture and color. I prefer to
choose a medium to work with, that work best for a particular
piece of art work. Some of the media that I have worked with is
oil, ink, acrylic, clay, collage, wood and linocut. I would like ver
much to work with marble, metal and stone. So what is your
favorite medium of expression ?

Click to edit text

Figure 15: Reliance on written language in 'Art Movements' (Student 6)

The students' design decisions reveal that the pictures mean more when they are set beside a written text rather than the text meaning more when juxtaposed with the picture (Lemke, 1998). Ideationally, this presents the verbocentric nature of the students' cultural community (Siegel, 1995), and interpersonally, it reveals the students' position and preference for writing as a semiotic mode. Even though Student 6 used her own painting as a new element that would *depict* her desired meanings (Kress, 2009), she also enhanced it with long, written paragraphs. Similarly, in Figure 14, Student 5 presents the written text as the most salient part at the top section of the page with a very strict representation of meanings. In reality, the depiction of meanings seems rather perfunctory in the sense that it is formally conservative and pertains to the *established* values (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) the students have of academic contexts.
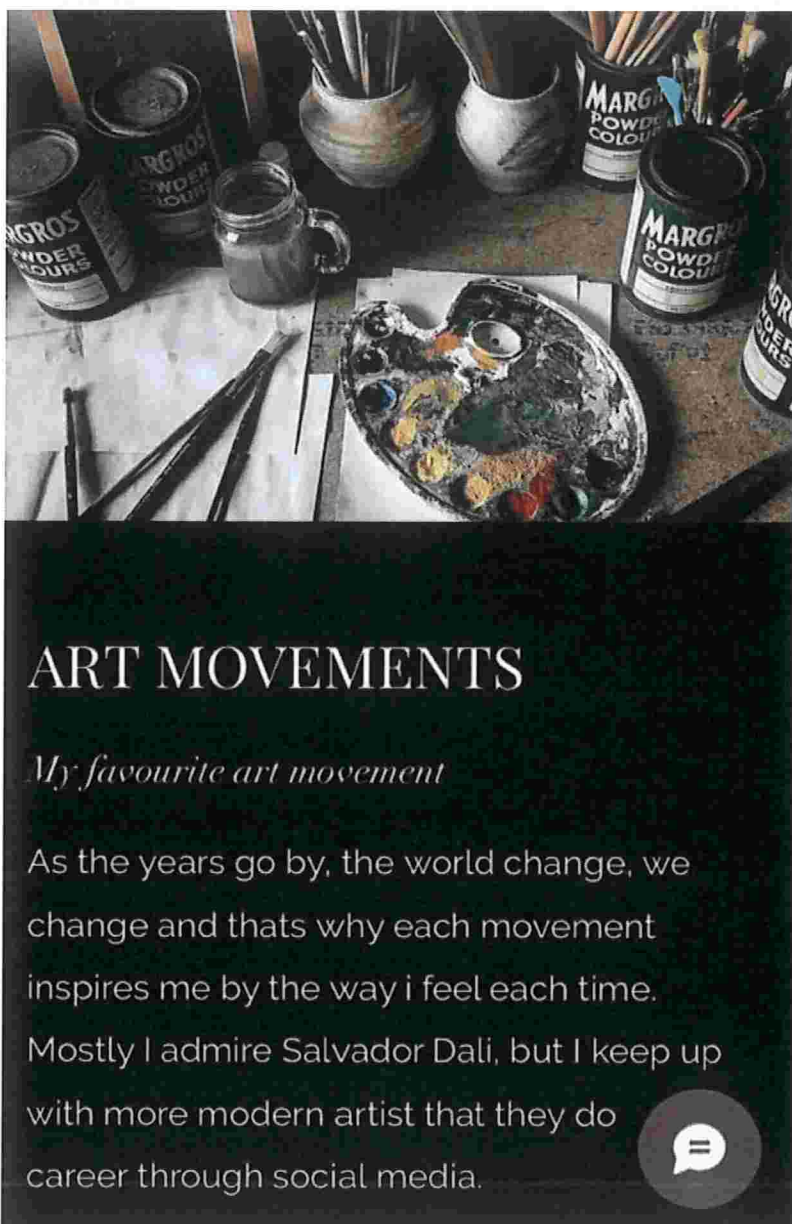
Student 4 – Website 4

Figure 16: Semiotic deviation between the visual and written mode (Student 4)

Student 4 uses a unique pattern for representing meaning, which is more of a blog or a diary entry with the same consistent pattern. Specifically, her interest is condensed into a combination of an image depicting painting materials at the top, with a brief, written text at the bottom. Looking at the semiotic relation between image and writing in Figure 16, there is a semiotic deviation. Ideationally, the image does not represent the *surrealistic world* of Dali, and surprisingly, she has not engaged with her own painting in Art. Textually, the visual mode does not indicate surrealism or correspond to her written message. The interpersonal metafunction finds the viewer in a distant position from the portrayed meanings because of the problematic semiotic relation between the two modes. Even though the written text is given lesser priority in favour of images in online contexts (Kress, 2009), in this case, writing is necessary for the realisation and understanding of meanings.

4.2 Thematic analysis of the interviews

Thematic analysis of the transcribed data showed an inconsistency between the translation from the representation of meanings through the website and the communication of meanings from the interviews, portraying a strong sense of agency on behalf of the students when using the verbal modes.

Table 2 shows the most common themes that emerged from the transcribed data.

Codes	Category
• Students portrayed themselves and their paintings intensely in the representative articulation of meanings. • Students aimed to problematise viewers with their work. • Students liked the designing opportunity.	Agency

Table 2: The most common themes emerging from thematic analysis

The interviews revealed the students' strong sense of agency. Particularly, Student 1 says:

> I have always used art to express certain things. Ever since I was young, I had a speaking difficulty, I was dyslexic, so the first thing I learnt to do was draw rather than speak. Even today, I might be out with friends for coffee, and not be able to express something verbally. (Excerpt 1)

Student 1 has a strong visual background whose website, however, relies heavily on written language as the most preferred mode of representation. For *Fine Arts*, the student uses his own painting and writes about his "favourite medium of expression": 'I like using still-life elements in my paintings so the pencil can help me with that. There's a dark shade and a

light shade' (Excerpt 2). The "dark" and "light" shades the student mentions are in accordance with the textual elements (dark and light colours) that were used for the design of the website. What is interesting to see, though, are the discourses on what constitutes an artistic creation:

> I don't have a favourite Art Movement because I never thought of studying about the history of art, the movements, and all that. Leonardo da Vinci used a term, 'minimum forte' if I'm not mistaken, to do minimalistic things and very fast sketches. I may have been influenced by that because as you see, my work seems unfinished but to me it is finished. (Excerpt 3).

When asked why there are no visual representations for *Virtual Reality and Fine Arts* and *Video Games and Art*, the student explained: 'I didn't think it was necessary to use any pictures or videos, or maybe it just didn't occur to me' (Excerpt 4).

Student 2 reveals a strong sense of agency as a designer/sign maker, which is evident in her work, showing encoded meanings of independence and creativity through her personal pictures and drawings (see Figures 9-12). When asked about her personal visual involvement in the project, she acknowledges: 'Well, art is "my art". We need to use our own pictures to show to the world that we made these and, in some cases, it's good to show the process of creation' (Excerpt 5). Student 2 also refers to the importance of visual representation:

> When I draw, I always want to problematise with my designs. I want people to understand my designs, and if they don't, I want them to interpret them in their own way. (Excerpt 6)

Student 6 also reinforces this:

> My purpose was to communicate with the viewers of my website; to pose questions, to make them think about art, about what constitutes art. I don't mind if people give their own interpretations of my art because we are all different, we think differently, we have a different aesthetic taste. (Excerpt 7)

Verbally, the students show a more dynamic performance of meaning representation not seen on their websites. Despite the multimodal semiotic toolkit they seem to possess for creating their designs, some still need to realise the extent to which their designs are influenced by already-familiar written representations. Student 5 acknowledges: 'Isn't that what we've been taught to do? I'm used to it now. I usually write longer paragraphs' (Excerpt 8), a statement that adheres to a more conventional literacy model. She also acknowledges the saturated nature of being taught mainly through written modes since a young age and demonstrates a more critical stance towards literacy education today, questioning its status:

> It is sad to teach children through one mode, it's just not right. This goes against all beliefs and against everything education should stand for. It's not democratic. Students should be able to choose between modes and find the one they feel more comfortable with. (Excerpt 9)

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The meaningful representation of *Art Movements* for Student 6 relies on writing, as seen in Figure 15. However, when she verbally refers to her favourite medium of expression and to her sculpture made of clay (Figure 17), she says: 'If I were to write a caption for it, it would have been "Missing the good old days"' (Excerpt 10), referring to the sculpture that wears a mask because of the COVID-19 pandemic. What is paradoxical is how she refrained from inserting a written caption under her sculpture but enriched her representation of the thematic unit with written paragraphs.
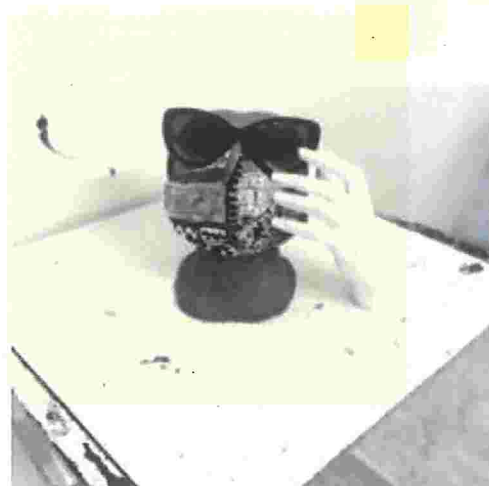

Figure 17: A sculpture made of clay representing 'Art Movements'

Finally, concerning the digital production of websites, students reveal great contentment having gained a new skill. Student 6 says:

> It is the first time I create a website on multimodality in arts. For me, it was interesting because I learnt how to create a website which is very important in our days, and also, I searched online, on YouTube, I found many videos…it was difficult and stressful at the beginning but it ended up being very pleasant afterwards. (Excerpt 12)

Student 4 admits: 'I was very happy I was given the chance to design a website because I had no idea it would be so easy' (Excerpt 13). Student 3 affirms:

> Generally, it was a nice experience because I've never worked with a website…it was a good chance for me to experiment! I did this to create something beautiful and, generally, I experimented with several modes. (Excerpt 14)

5 Discussion

This study has examined the transmediated content of students' meaningful representations of course content from visual/multimodal to verbal semiotics, pertaining to the interview as a dynamic performance of the sign-makers' sense of agency while, simultaneously, projecting the prevalence of the written mode in their designs. The latter links to the discourses that permeate digital production within academic contexts, a fact which has broader implications on what constitutes academic literacies within the FL environment, and which foregrounds their solidified character (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Specifically for ESP, the study has also verified the need for more empirical research in terms of multimodality pedagogy and ESP (Laadem & Malahi, 2019), while also calling for a reconceptualisation of meaning-making practices in the ESP classroom. Reconceptualisation will not abandon the linguistic realisations of meanings, but it will also embrace more visual/multimodal realisations of meanings (Plastina, 2013), which could bring more awareness to the concept of design. The students' *available designs* carry social conventions that could reveal how they can sometimes be systematised and how students are less transformative in the learning process (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000). Kress (2003) talked of the need to treat students as more agentive and challenged the dominance of writing as the most highly valued mode in schools, which relates to what the students admitted, as 'this is what we were taught to do'. The prevalence of the written mode has been very powerfully established and solidified within the FL context, which has proven to impede students from making greater use of other modes, despite their artistic background and freedom to design without limitations. The students' adherence to written modes of representation speaks of the discourses that are established as social rationalities in *available designs* (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) within the linguistic context in tertiary education, revealing a standard form of written language as a mode which has been naturalised, despite the multimodal affordances of available digital tools. The findings also address the need for students to make meaningful use of digital tools in FL teaching and learning and engage them as designers within the learning process. In the ESP context, using technologies is a tool that can positively transform the students' familiarisation with the language and professionally prepare them for their role as global citizens (Kakoulli Constantinou & Papadima-Sophocleous, 2020). Apart from that, the students' interviews also revealed their satisfaction with learning a new tool, that of website creation, which relates to their professional status as future graduates within the field of Fine Arts.

The current study reveals how the institutional framework of digital production in tertiary education language courses should be destabilised, which could extend to what qualifies as academic literacies and accentuate the need to display attention from the written mode and focus on other modes for meaning representation. The world of communication in the new media is constituted in such a way today that makes the concept of *design* imperative (Kress, 2003) so that students can access new modes of knowledge construction and new ways of understanding the world around them.

6   Conclusion

The creative, agentive action of sign-making on behalf of the students in representing their interests could create opportunities for the combination or the juxtapositioning of various semiotic modes that could help with the displacement of crystallised academic discourses. Transmediation can destabilise the grid of established academic practices and focus on the various sign-making systems students can work with. Images and other digital multimodal artefacts (Lackovic, 2016) should be legitimised and acknowledged as pedagogical examples within the technology-mediated language environments in tertiary education. It is time to redesign academic literacy in digital contexts and recognise the importance of other modes in the process of meaning representation. A possible limitation of the present study is the small sample size as well as the homogeneity of the participants. Moreover, new opportunities for transformation could arise from studying transmediation through more than two sign-making systems since the FL course combines various modes for meaning representation. Finally, the pedagogical implications of this shift will actively enhance the role of agency and the role of students who will enter a more dynamic transformative process as designers of lesson content.

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