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FRAMING ALBANIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE THROUGH COMMUNIST LENSES

(An analysis of a textbook of Albanian as a Foreign Language)

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Abstract

In terms of cultural diplomacy, countries have been using various mechanisms, some aiming at getting their language taught around the world. Teaching materials and books are specifically designed to best convey the image of the country to language-learning foreign students. Textbooks for foreign languages are part of larger discursive and pedagogical practices, thus being historically embedded in the political, cultural, and social context. The present paper examines the most common frames used to project the image of Albania, its political regime, and its culture in the textbook ‘Gjuha Shqipe 3’ (1981), (Albanian language 3). This textbook for advanced learners of the Albanian language was published under communist rule. Following a framing analysis method, we determine which cultural/political/historical aspects of Albania are made more salient in the textbook for the sake of perpetuating and imposing the ideology of the communist regime. In the textbook, there are multiple forms used to display a glorious communist image of Albania: the reading materials, the illustrations, as well as the grammar sections are all devices displaying the omnipresent communist ideology. This approach is important to understand how textbooks for foreign language learners shape the image of a country by complying with the dominant ideology and the language policy of that specific country.

Keywords: *foreign language; textbook; communist ideology; Albania; framing.*

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1. Introduction

This paper is an examination of the way in which the textbook ‘*Gjuha shqipe 3*’ (Albanian Language 3), aimed at foreign learners of the Albanian language, frames Albania and its culture. Published in 1981, a time when the country was suffering one of the harshest communist regimes (Goldstone, 2015, 5), the 368 pages textbook does not determine explicitly the level of learners it is aimed at.

For a long time, countries have made various efforts to spread their own languages throughout the world and to increase the number of speakers as a way to increase their cultural and political influence. Ager (2010) argues that countries tend to project their images to the outside world by relying on cultural diplomacy tools, among which spreading the knowledge of their respective languages. Image projection is closely related to the projection of the (national) identity of a country. “The aim of cultural diplomacy, of which this type of language policy is often a part, is that of image projection and management: trying to ensure that a favourable view is taken by other countries of one’s own history, traditions, cultural

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production, religion and manner of being” (Ager 2001, 56). Learning a foreign language and getting fluent in that language is related to the knowledge of cultural schemata and discursive patterns (Bialystok 2001), which comprise the public discourse of that language. Discourses are flow of language and they are shaped accordingly to the dominant ideology (Jager 2001). In terms of discourse studies, through discourse power is exerted and specific ways of thinking and behaving are imposed on people, because of the social component of discourse (*i.e.* it is socially constructed and constructing) (Hodge & Kress, 1993; Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, De Cillia 2006; Van Dijk, 1993).

There are numerous examples in literature about how authoritarian regimes seek to manipulate through education, specifically through textbooks. Pine (1996) brings in the example of the fascist regime of Mussolini, the cleric-fascist regime in Austria, Nazi regime in Germany, which utilized school textbooks as propaganda tools. The author closely examines the case of the Nazi regime and illustrates how the textbooks blatantly represented Nazi ideals. Most of the features of the textbooks described by Pine (1996) match those of the Albanian school textbooks and specifically the features of the textbook we analyze in this paper. Cary (1976), following a computer content analysis, investigates Marxist-Leninist ideology in soviet school textbooks and reveals how textbooks are used ideologically to build communism and to contribute to the acquisition of the Marxist-Leninist belief system.

Zebroski (1999) argues that textbooks, being products of the academic discourse of communist and disciplinary research scholarship are a reflection of more than themselves. They represent several aspects such as epistemologies, curricular and teaching practices, and social relations. In a similar vein, You (2005) examines a contemporary EFL composition textbook in China and she analyses how ideology has shaped the content of the textbook. The author concludes that educators “will abide by the dominant ideology, either “socialist ideology”, "socialist ideology with Chinese characteristics," or "bureaucratic capitalist ideology” and set as their main task to produce workers to serve and maintain current economic relations” (You, 2005, 605).

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on Albanian school textbooks of the communist regime, although those textbooks have shaped directly and indirectly the way of thinking of several generations for almost five decades. Voka (2019), Lichnofsky, Pandelejmoni, Stojanov (2017) argue that there is a significant gap in the research conducted about the textbooks, both in less-known former socialist countries and in South-Eastern Europe. Voka (2019) manages to somehow fill the void with his monograph on history textbooks, published in Albania in the years (1978-1984). Others, such as Lichnofsky, Pandelejmoni, Stojanov (2017), Pandelejmoni (2017), Kera (2017), also focus on history textbooks. Thus, the most research subject on communist-related textbooks remains history, whereas textbooks of other subjects remain understudied.

1.1 The structure of ‘Gjuha shqipe 3’ textbook

The textbook is structured in two parts. The first part consists of 49 units and the second one includes 39 units. At the end of the book, there are a grammar vocabulary (grammar terms translated into English and French), a section of grammar tables (the conjugation of specific verbs in all modes and tenses of standard Albanian language), and an Albanian-French- English lexicon. Each unit starts with a reading section. Texts included in the reading section are mainly fragments of literary works, mainly prose and a few of poetry. Fragments fulfill the artistic and thematic criteria of socialist realism in literature (Elsie, 1993, Prifti, 2008). Following the reading section, there are two consecutive vocabulary sections named: ‘*Fjalë dhe shprehje*’ (Words and expressions) and ‘*familje fjalësh*’ (word family). The last section of the unit is the grammar section. In some units, there is an extra section of music sheets and lyrics. The textbook does not include listening section or writing tasks, which makes it unconventional for a foreign language book. The second part of the book has no grammar section at all. Its units consist of literary texts and the corresponding vocabulary section.

The textbook is mainly black and white, although there are stripes of color on grammar section headlines and the textbook overall has 30 images. These images are either basic sketches related to the content of the reading section or photos or reproduced paintings. All the illustrations included in this textbook

comply with the principles of communist soc-realist aesthetics (Isto 2020, Efimova 1997, Dickermn 2000, Mata 2011).

2. Analyzing frames present in the textbook

Framing is a broad concept in social sciences (Skënderi Rakiplari 2020) and a crossover perspective that has involved many researchers (Reese, Gandy, Grant 2001). According to Gamson and Modigliani (1989), frame is a “central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events, suggesting what is at issue”, whereas Entman (1993) states that framing is related to selection and salience of some aspects of perceived reality. Reese (2001, 14) argues that frames are principles of organizing information, some sort of tool or “schemata” that structures meaning reinforcing Goffman’s idea of “schemata of interpretation” that “enable individuals ‘to locate, perceive, identify, and label’ occurrences within their life space” (Goffman 1974, 21).

There are several methodological approaches toward eliciting frames, but most researchers working on framing analysis rely on the linguistic approach (*see* Matthes and Kohring 2008, Olausson 2009, Dahl 2015). The text-linguistic approach has proven successful in detecting the employed frames. Here we refer to Entman (1993), who points out that frames are manifested by “the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (52). According to him, frames are found in the communicators, in the text, in the receiver, and the culture. Here we are more interested in the frames manifested in the communicator and in the text.

This paper sees communicators are the authors of the textbook, who are consciously framing knowledge by relying on existing belief systems related to and imposed by the communist rule. Thus, communicators shape both the metalinguistic and the textual content of the book. In shaping the metalinguistic content, the authors are relying on the language and educational policy of communism. Metalinguistic frames used by the communicator are to be found in the idea that schools under the communist rule reinforced the standard language ideology and the communist party ideology (Kostallari 1984, Gosturani, 1988, Voka 2019). The first ideology became an absolute requirement after the Orthographic Congress (November 1972) (*see* Skënderi 2022), whereas the communist ideology was a prerequisite in the school systems (Voka 2019, 24-29). As Thomas (2006, 111) puts it, “all schools became Party schools; all education, Party education. Schools were to be ideologically pure; communist education in the schools was to be, as always, «correct and scientific ».” Thus, any Albanian as Foreign Language (henceforth AFL) textbook related to the communist Party schools and Party education would carry the same metalinguistic and textual and visual content as other school textbooks of that time.

The textual content is framed through the selection of reading materials, visuals, song lyrics, and so on. To elicit the frames manifested in the text, we examine the textual information of each unit by focusing on the reading sections, grammar sections, and song lyric sections. Finally, we will examine the illustrations of the textbook in terms of the frames they encompass separately. This framing analysis indicates which cultural and political aspects of Albania are made more salient in the textbook, following the ideology of the communist regime.

In Table no. 1 there are presented the frames of the first twenty units, the frames manifested by illustrations (photographs or reproduced paintings that occupy a single page on the textbook), and the song lyrics given in between lesson units. Below we will also examine the type of illustrations that the book contains. The images used in the textbook are also an indication of framing. Choosing a certain photograph or painting instead of another is all about selection and salience. The first image, a reproduced painting of the dictator Enver Hoxha opens the book, being a clear sign of all the framing that has been going on when compiling this textbook.

A piece of overall information where all frames are presented is to be found in the results and conclusion section of this paper.

Table 1. Mapping frames of the first twenty units of the textbook

Unit no.	Title of the unit ²	The frame (s)	Keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images,
1	Dritero Agolli <i>From the novel 'Commissar Memo'</i>	National Liberation war	Partisan, enemy, fight, the occupier, traitor
2	Fatmir Gjata <i>The boy</i>	National Liberation war	Young partisan, enemy, bloodshed, guns, death
Song	The Partisan march	National liberation war	Partisan march, enemy, battle, melee, partisan star
3	From the novel "Flower of memory"/ Freedom fighters	Turkish occupation; Nationalism	Scanderbeg (National hero 15 th century), patriots, flag, warriors
Photo	A monument about Çerçiz Topulli, a fighter with the Turkish invaders	Turkish occupation; Nationalism	Heroic fight, Turkish hordes, Çerçiz Topulli (a national hero), fighters, comrade-in-arms
4	Andon Zako Çajupi/ Where are we born? (Poetry)	Nationalism	Fatherland, life in your own country
5	Nonda Bulka/ Mother and son	The former regime of King Zogu (negatively framed)	Hatred regime of King Zogu, poverty, fear, misery, death.
6	Dhimitër Xhuvani From the novel "On foot again"	Socialist lifestyle	New man, socialism
7	Shefqet Musaraj From the novel "Light"	Socialist lifestyle	Electrification, Party- Enver ³ , enthusiasm, working class, May 1, advancement (positively framed)
Photo	From the amateur artistic ensemble of the artistic enterprise 'migjeni', Tiranë	Albanian Culture (Folklore dance)	Artistic values, national folk costumes, young women engaged in artistic activities, happiness.
8	Ismail Kadare From the novel "The Castle"	Turkish occupation; Nationalism	Scanderbeg (<i>Our Gjergj</i>), Sultan, Albanian bravery, Albanian people, castle, war, battle, grave, bombarding
9	Nonda Bulka From "Eagles' song"	Nationalism	Eagles ⁴ , War, Bravery, Arbëria ⁵ Land, resistance
10	Dhimitër S. Shuteriqi The mother	National Liberation war	Partisan, war, Antifascism, prisoner, liberate, German concentration camp
11	Fan Noli From "The history of Scanderbeg" The return of Gjergj Kastrioti to Kruja	Turkish occupation; Nationalism	Noble Kastrioti family, Scanderbeg, Fatherland, the Albanian flag, Gjergj Kastrioti, fighter portrait, Albania,
12	Sterjo Spase 'At the Beli hill'	National Liberation war; The former regime of King Zogu (negatively framed)	Poor peasants, the feudal class, armed conflict, police, class struggle
13	Fatmir Gjata From the short novel 'Tana'	Socialist lifestyle	Prosperity, Fieldwork, overproduction, countryside workers.
Song	Celebration in the highlands	Socialist lifestyle	Highland, The party, happiness, education

² Titles are translated into English, by the author of this paper.

³ The typical call said during gatherings.

⁴ National Symbol of Albania.

⁵ Albania in Middle Ages.

14	Gjikë Kuçali The blood	National Liberation war	Battle, partisan, wound,
15	Dritëro Agolli From the novel <i>Commissar Memo</i>	National Liberation war	Remembrance, ballistë (ti-Anti-communist resistance movement), the Germans
Painting	The partisan eagles (Kel Kodheli)	National Liberation war	Fighting position, partisan army uniforms, guns, brave men, red scarves (neck scarves symbol of youngsters during communism)
16	Fatmir Gjata Albanian Heart	National Liberation war	Partisans, blood, fire, gun, Germans, death.
Song	In one hand the pickaxe, in the other the gun	Socialist lifestyle	Party –our mother, factory, construction site, fatherland, enemies, eagle, winners, enemy, party- people unity
17	Ali Abdihoxha From the novel “The great duel”	Socialist lifestyle	Workers, miners, drivers, engineers, technicians, petit bourgeois, New man, industrial development (positively framed)
Painting	The workers discuss Painter: Skënder Milori	Socialist lifestyle	Men and women in a meeting. The meeting is held near a construction site.
18	Shevqet Musaraj The young eagle	National Liberation war	Partisan, war, National liberation army, regiment, brave soldier, bravery, enemy
Painting	The end of fascism Painter: Andon Lakuriqi	National Liberation war	A soldier of the communist army standing and two German soldiers, wounded, sitting on the ground as losers.
Song	The revolution marches	National liberation war Socialist lifestyle	Fatherland, revolution, people, party, marching
19	Fan S. Noli 1 January 1907	Nationalism	Warrior, new year (new life), Bravery, enemies, brave soldier
20	Asdreni True dream	Nationalism	Migration, fatherland love, freedom aspiration, Albanian nature, and beauty.

Source: the authors' own analysis

3. Results and Conclusions

The frames used in the textbook of AFL are similar to other school textbooks published during communism in Albania, as Gitlin (1980, 7) emphasizes frames are part of societal ideology, used by “symbol-handlers to organize discourse, whether verbal or visual”.

Table no. 2 shows the most common frames found in the textbook ‘Gjuha shqipe 3’, in descending order. As it was noted in table no. 1 above, one unit has more than one frame, and these frames often are correlated. For example, the *National Liberation war* frame is often intertwined with the *nationalism* frame. As Voka (2019), Lichnofsky, Pandelejmoni, Stajanov (2017), Schwandner-Sievers, Fischer (2002) etc. have claimed, the combination of themes such as the National Liberation War, the glory of the Party, and nationalism made communist propaganda more legitimate and valid. However, the nationalism frame is often manifested alongside the Ottoman/Turkish occupation of Albania and it mostly employs the image of Skanderbeg, the Albanian national hero.

Among the most common frames manifested in the textbook, one can also notice the frequent *Communist Party* frame. Yet, we decided not to consider it as a frame on its own, as it is manifested as part of other frames, such as the Socialist lifestyle and the National Liberation War. The last frame,

which we have named the *Culture, nature, and moral* frame, is the least ideologically marked frame. There are few to no communist ideological traces in two or three units/illustrations of the textbook. Elsewhere, even when the reading material was not explicitly written considering communist aesthetic principles, or when it was written long before the communist rule in Albania, the authors of the textbook use a short note giving preliminary information about how the following text must be read and interpreted. Let’s see three examples of the note from the textbook:

I. “Imagine a dark and cold room, where, on a winter night lies sick a little boy. By his side, stays his mother, who is not able to light the fire, give him food, or call a doctor. She is not able to do so, because she is poor, and has no money. Imagine what kind of pain this mother feels when seeing how life is fading away from her son’s eyes and lips, who dies by pronouncing the words: ... Mother! ... Bread!... I’m freezing! .. This is just one aspect of the miserable life, where the hatred regime of Zogu, had immersed our people!” (Radovicka, Karapici, Toma 1981, 21).

II. “The novel ‘The castle’ by the writer Ismail Kadare shows events of the 15th century, the unconquerable 25-year war of the Albanian people, under the rule of Scanderbeg against the Ottoman invaders. This work is permeated by the idea of the historical truth that the Albanian people has always been and is invincible. It shows the moral force of a small people. The novel presents the roots of the Albanian resistance and bravery, by affirming that Albania is a granite castle and that every enemy will fail shamefully if he will dare to touch “the walls of our castle”. (Radovicka, Karapici, Toma 1981, 21).

III. In the novel “The big duel” by the author Ali Abdihoxa (published in 1975) it is reflected the great work for the construction of socialism in Albania and of the people that socialism gave birth to and brought up; warriors of the new: workers, chauffeurs, engineers, and technicians. During this work are shaped and reinforced the best features of a person; he gets free of all the remains of petty-bourgeois selfishness, and he creates his own social personality.

Fragments I, II, and III clearly indicate how every piece of information related to Albanian history and culture and more broadly the content of this book must be read using the official point of view on the events and on the reality. Notes are just one of the tools used by the authors to reinforce the omnipresent communist ideology in the textbook.

Table 2. The most common frames in the textbook ‘Gjuha shqipe 3’

Frame	Keywords, stock phrases, and stereotyped images related to the frame	Frequency
National Liberation War	Partisans, blood, fire, gun, Germans, death, sacrifice, fascism, bravery, enemies.	28
Socialist lifestyle	Industrial progress, New man, prosperity, working-class devotion to work, Women and girl education/ emancipation	25
Nationalism	Patriotism, yearning feeling for the fatherland, migration, Albanian flag, national symbols, national heroes.	21
Former regime of King Zogu (Negatively framed)	Misery, social injustice, insecurity, fear, death, class struggle, poverty.	9
Turkish occupation	Glorious past, Scanderbeg, Fatherland, the Albanian flag, warriors, brave soldiers	6
Culture, nature, moral	Folklore, cultural traditions (wedding traditions, hospitality), moral (in terms of what is good and what is not), beauty in nature	4

Source: the authors’ own analysis

As table no. 2 indicates, the textbook is blatantly ideological. From a westerner’s perspective, this textbook might feel to its users more like a war history textbook than a foreign language textbook. It is obvious that the authors of the textbook are very much concerned about representing the best ideological image of the country, in the way they shape the historical past of Albania and its socialist lifestyle.

The socialist lifestyle frame is omnipresent while being intertwined with the communist cultural and political norms, such as the work culture and ethics, industrial advancement and prosperity, New Men's cultural ideal, and women's emancipation through education.

Foreign learners of Albanian who use the textbook ‘Gjuha shqipe 3’believe he is learning the language of the most prosperous country in the world, where workaholic people work passionately, driven by their communist ideals and under the protection of the Party.

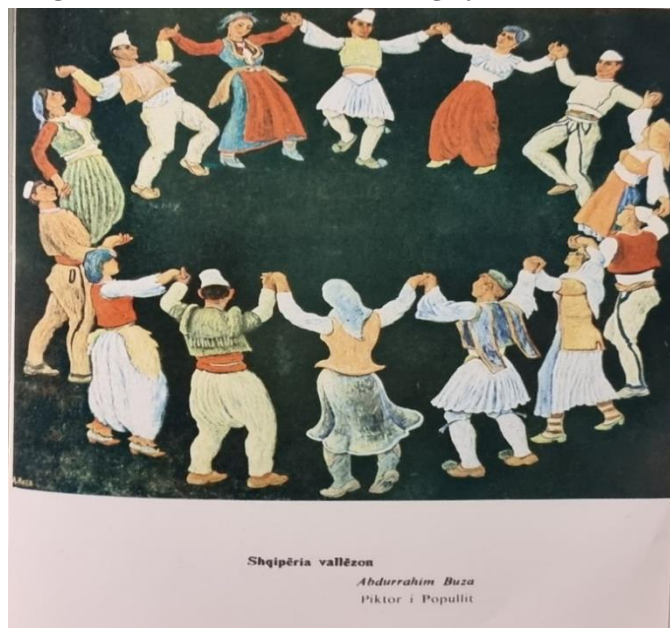
To strengthen the Party ideology, this frame is supported by images paintings or illustrations included in the textbook. Figure 1 and 2 frame the Socialist lifestyle: in the first image there is an engagement of workers and engineers who are having a meeting in a construction site (probably a factory that is being build); figure no.2 contains a combination of nationalism and socialist lifestyle frames, signalled by the verb to *dance* (used in present tense). The dancing characters metaphorically represent Albania’s joy and unity. People wearing traditional folk costumes bearing symbols of all provinces, are dancing hand in hand, a feature of the traditional Albanian dance.

Figure 1 "The workers discuss"- Painting by Skender Milori.



Source: Radovicka, Karapici, Toma (1981, 96).

Figure 2 "Albania dances" Painting by Aburrahim Buza



Source: Radovicka, Karapici, Toma (1981, 301).

An analysis of all illustrations in the textbook indicates that just 3 out of 30 are ideologically unmarked. The other images frame either a socialist lifestyle, the glorious partisans of the National liberation war, or the historical past related to Scanderbeg. The National liberation war paintings and sketches frame heroic battles and romanticize war. In a sketch there is a newly wedded couple, getting ready for war, sitting close to each other, with the groom holding some bullets in his hand (Radovicka, Karapici, Toma 1981, 181). In another photograph, there is the dictator, Enver Hoxha sitting with some peasants, laughing with them, while they are seen to be completely delighted by this occasion as their faces express pure awe and adoration.

The textbook lacks any painting or illustration dedicated to the depiction of Albanian nature or its beauties. Apparently, the authors of the textbook had to use the technical graphic capacities and resources more conveniently in terms of framing the ideological image of communist Albania. When visually framing the Albanian culture, authors focus more on folklore, folkloric traditional dance and costumes, songs, and popular folk texts. This follows the given guidelines to gather and revitalize the folk traditions and oral texts that were considered to foster the historical and cultural vitality of the country (Musaraj 1952, 60, Sako 1952, 65, Lafa 1985).

The ideology present in this textbook is part of the public discourse of Albania during its communist period. The marks of ideology frame not only the textual and visual content of the book but also its metalinguistic sections. Half of the grammar sections include ideologized illustrating sentences, either taken from the reading material or constructed by the authors for the sake of providing an example.

In this paper we examined the way in which Albania is framed culturally and politically in a textbook of Albanian as a foreign language. We noticed that the most common frames were those of the National Liberation War, the Socialist lifestyle under the communist regime, and the difficult yet glorious historical past, which were all framed positively. Among aspects framed negative one can find the former regime of King Zogu, enemies of the country (such as the Ottomans, the Nazi Germans), and enemies of the party (traitors of the partisan war, the petty bourgeois, etc.). The textbook ‘Gjuha shqipe 3’ is just an example of how textbooks might be used as ideological tools to convey the image of a country and its political regime. Much remains to be researched about the ideology in school textbooks of language and literature during communism. Specifically, research from a diachronic perspective could help improve the content of present-day school textbooks and AFL textbooks.

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