



Legitimation strategies in the Greek paradigm: A comparative analysis of *Syriza* and *New Democracy*

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the legitimising discourse of two political parties, New Democracy and Syriza, in their political advertisements filmed for the Greek legislative election in September 2015. It also aspires to suggest a way for multimodal research to stave off the criticism about impressionistic analyses it faces via implementing triangulation. The findings suggest that Syriza exploited the modes of gaze and voice, deployed an emotional discourse and linked the election with the antecedent election and referendum that occurred earlier in 2015. As for ND, its legitimation depended on instrumental rationalisation and nationhood signs to a considerable extent. Finally, triangulation offered converging and complementary findings supporting previous studies that advocate its potential for the provision of valid and reliable findings.

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1. Introduction

The correlation between discourse and legitimation has often been the focus of critical discourse analysis research, which in the past has attempted to analyse and disclose how legitimation is rendered, declared or performed by discursive means (e.g. Chouliaraki, 2005; Van Dijk, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2007a; Mackay, 2015).² Ever since the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008, the Greek socio-political landscape has served as a resource for the exploration of legitimating discourses (e.g. Boukala and Dimitrakopoulou, 2016). Many different data types have been investigated, with the discourses by politicians, or more broadly speaking power elites—international and domestic alike—having occupied a central place in the linguistic research conducted so far. In spite of this proliferation of studies, the genre of electoral advertisements has been insufficiently explored and this article endeavours to contribute towards filling this gap.³

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² Legitimation answers the question ‘Why should we do this?’ and ‘Why should we do this in this way?’ (Van Leeuwen, 2007a, p.93). It constitutes “the process by which the exertion of power by one person, group or political body over another is made to be—and maintained as being—acceptable to those over whom power is wielded” (Mackay, 2015, p.325).

³ Recent studies by Chaidas (2018) and Kissas (2017) look at the genre of political advertisements. However, more research is needed in the case of the Greek politics.

Considering that this study falls within the area of multimodality,⁴ it also aspires to suggest a way for multimodal research to stave off the criticism about impressionistic analyses it receives by implementing triangulation and combining qualitative and quantitative analyses. My aim is to show the benefits of this amalgamation by deploying two methods: Mackay's (2015) framework for qualitative multimodal analyses and Corpus Linguistics. This article examines the legitimating discourse adopted by the two major Greek political parties, *New Democracy* (henceforth, ND) and *Syriza*, in their electoral advertisements for the September 2015 parliamentary election in Greece. The following research questions are investigated:

- (1) By what multimodal means did Syriza and ND attempt to legitimate the candidacy of their president?
- (2) Were there any similarities and dissimilarities in their legitimization strategies? If so, what were they?
- (3) Were there any benefits in the implementation of triangulation? What kind of findings did it offer?

The findings suggest that the multimodal discourse of both parties depended greatly on spoken language for information-conveyance and emotions triggering. Other modes like music, colour and image appeared to be important for the emotional effects of the advertisements, but rather supportive. Syriza's exploitation of gaze and voice emerged as prominent. Syriza's discourse was predominantly emotional and oriented at the projection of Tsipras' moral superiority. Considering Syriza's effort to link September's election with January and July 2015's policy of hope, I argue that it is perhaps this successful connection that secured Tsipras' third win. As for ND, it exploited instrumental rationalisation and nationhood signs widely as part of its legitimization strategies.⁵ Lastly, the implementation of triangulation offered converging and complementary findings supporting this article's main argument that the validity and generalisability of the findings of multimodal qualitative research can be further enhanced by using quantitative analyses.

With regards to the remainder of the article, a recap of the main socio-political events during the 'Greek crisis' precedes the literature review section. Then, the deployed methodology is discussed and the data analysis follows. Finally, a discussion of the findings and some concluding remarks complete this article. An [appendix](#) including a keywords list is also provided.

2. The chronicle of the 'Greek crisis' and linguistic research

The year 2015 was critical for Greece and the European Union (henceforth, EU) since two national elections and one bailout referendum defined the country's future within the Union. In January 2015, the current political party in power, Syriza, was elected to govern inducing many political and economic repercussions in that way. Its election marked the transition from the forty-year predominance of a two-party system and Greece's governance by the social-democratic PASOK⁶ and the liberal-conservative ND to the rule of the radical-left Syriza. The latter was achieved with the adoption of a non-elitist populist rhetoric and the challenge of the implemented policy of the former Prime Minister and ND's president, Antonis Samaras, which was consistent with the adoption of austerity policies across the EU as a response to the financial crisis.⁷ After Tsipras' win in January 2015, he started negotiating with the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission that had been providing Greece with loans since 2010 in exchange of structural and economic reforms.⁸ Unfruitful negotiations led to the imposition of capital controls in June 2015 and the conduction of a bailout referendum on 5 July 2015. Amid prevailing 'Grexit' scenarios, Tsipras finally reached a provisional agreement on a third bailout programme with the creditors on 13 July 2015 followed by his resignation (20th August) and his call for a snap election on 20 September 2015 (Malteizou and Kambas, 2015). In this election, Syriza and ND were again the two frontrunners, just like in January 2015. Tsipras outcompeted ND's president, Vangelis Meimarakis, and was re-elected as Prime Minister.

The question that arises is what kind of discursive strategies were employed by ND and mainly Syriza, which secured another win despite the fact that it was first elected in January with promises to end bailout programmes as well as their corollaries for the Greek society, such as the drastic increases in taxation, the massive decreases in wages and pensions and the rise of unemployment (Vasilopoulou et al., 2014).

⁴ Multimodality examines all the semiotic modes that people use in communication and representation as well as the relationships between these modes. Thus, multimodal research focuses not only language, but also on other communicational forms, such as gesture and gaze. For more details, see Section 3.

⁵ Instrumental rationalisation is a type of legitimization. According to Van Leeuwen (2007a, p.101), it "legitimizes practices by reference to their goals, uses and effects".

⁶ Panhellenic Socialist Movement.

⁷ Although providing many details about the literature on populism is beyond the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that the ascension of Syriza to the governance of Greece has been extensively studied in the context of a pan-European dissemination of left-wing and right-wing populism (e.g. Aslanidis and Kaltwasser, 2016; Caiani and Kröll, 2017; Moffitt, 2017).

⁸ Three Economic Adjustment Programmes, usually referred as bailout packages, have been signed by Greece and its creditors, namely the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. These were signed by the Greek governments under George Papandreou in 2010, under Lucas Papademos in 2012 and under Alexis Tsipras in 2015.

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