

Introduction to Thematic Section: Evaluation, Argumentation and Narrative(s) in Conflicting Contexts

This thematic section represents a step forward in the field of language and linguistics, building upon and extending established research. The contributions presented emerge from an event, entitled "Evaluation, Argumentation and Narrative(s) in Conflicting Contexts"¹, and collectively exemplify a convergence of analytical methodologies, including Systemic Functional Linguistics, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, Discourse Analysis, and Multimodal Corpus Studies. As the title chosen for the Symposium makes clear, the participants were asked to deal with a range of questions involving evaluative language, argumentation and conflict resolution across a broad variety of communicative settings and national contexts. The result is a collection of six papers that explore the main themes using the aforementioned analytical tools.

The first two papers (Goźdź-Roszkowski and Shvanyukova) closely investigate conflicts and argumentation in the legal context, analysing the use of evaluative language in American and Polish constitutional court decisions dealing with morally-sensitive issues (freedom of religion, animal welfare, as well as abortion). The third paper by Sabao also focuses on the legal angle involving another controversial matter (homosexuality in Namibia), however, shifting attention to newspaper discourse. Sabao also tackles the political framing of homophobia in two major English-language Namibian daily newspapers. Vasta's paper deals with political language in a corpus-assisted and CDA-informed analysis of the discursive strategies of otherisation, legitimation, and normalisation in US Presidents' official statements that deal with actual or potential armed conflicts. The contributions by Swain and Komninos embrace a multimodal analytical approach. Swain's investigation into the boundary between satire and hate speech through visual analysis resonates with prior examinations of multimodal meaning-making. Komninos' study, which analyses the discourse around the Djokovic controversy at the 2022 Australian Tennis Open, applies appraisal analysis within a multimodal framework to investigate the role evaluative language plays in fostering community-building.

The paper by Goźdź-Roszkowski considers the use of evaluative, value-laden language in two court decisions dealing with freedom of religion and animal welfare. The decisions were issued by the Polish constitutional court (Constitutional Tribunal, decision K52/13 [2014]) and the U.S. Supreme Court (*Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 [1993]). He examines the way in which the rationale was constructed differently, although both decisions gave the precedence to the freedom of worship over animal welfare. The starting point for Goźdź-Roszkowski's comparative investigation is his interest in the linguistic dimension of the justification

¹ These papers were originally presented at the International Symposium "Evaluation, argumentation and narrative(s) in conflicting contexts" held at the Gorizia Polyfunctional Centre of the University of Udine on 14th October 2022 with the exception of Nickolas Komninos' paper that was commissioned specifically for the publication. The generous support of both *The Consortium for the Development of the University Center of Gorizia* (Il Consorzio per lo Sviluppo del Polo Universitario di Gorizia, <http://www.consunigo.it/en/about-us>) and *The Foundation of the Gorizia Savings Bank* (La Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Gorizia, <https://www.fondazioneclarigo.it/>) made this event possible.

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process that is explored by focusing on value-laden lexis in order to account for the strategies adopted by constitutional court judges to gain acceptance for their decision.

The methodology employed is that of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (Partington et al. 2013, Goźdz-Roszkowski 2021). The analysis starts with the extraction of keywords potentially used in the justification to reference values which are then analysed using a discourse approach surrounding the target item to identify its function (cf. Perelman 1976). The analysis shows striking differences in terms of the general strategies employed in the two decisions. On the one hand, the US Supreme Court's pragmatic reasoning remains focused on the ordinances and the scope of their applicability, neglecting to address extra-legal values or issues such as those related to public morals. On the other hand, the Polish opinion reveals strong axiological concerns by referring to high values and theories.

Shvanyukova's paper deals with American legal discourse. She analyses the majority opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, 597 U.S. (2022), a ruling that eliminated the constitutional right to abortion as established and re-affirmed by the two previous Supreme Court decisions, *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973) and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992). Shvanyukova employs Martin & White's (2005) Appraisal Theory to analyse the use of evaluative language in the section of the majority opinion that deals with the history of abortion jurisprudence in English common law and in American legal traditions. Her proposal is to employ an expanded version of the analytical framework of Appraisal Theory as presented and used in research that has analysed evaluative meanings in historical discourse (Myskow, 2018; Oteiza & Pinuer, 2013).

Shvanyukova introduces Myskow's Levels of Evaluation framework to account for the ways in which historical facts and historical actors' voices are introduced and orchestrated to reconstruct a particular version of the pre-*Roe* tradition of abortion jurisprudence. The analytical procedure adopted here involves a manual coding of the extract for Attitude (Affect, Judgment and Appreciation categories) and engagement (Levels of Evaluation framework) resources. Shvanyukova's goal is to identify a set of strategies that the majority justices employ to express evaluative meanings in the purportedly objective process of judicial decision-making. The investigation shows that invoked and inscribed evaluative meanings permeate the text of the majority opinion consistently, despite the supposedly unbiased activity of reconstructing a disinterested narrative of the past events.

Sabao's paper deals with news reports on the LGBTQI community in Namibia in the two largest English-language daily newspapers, *The Namibian* and *New Era*. This is done through the lens of two theoretical frameworks, Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; 2007) and Appraisal Theory (Martin & Rose, 2003; White, 1998). Firstly, he investigates how legal framing in news discourse is used to spread homophobia in Namibia by identifying the evaluative linguistic resources employed. In a national context where law is instrumentalised to criminalise and ostracise homosexuals, this is a timely investigation. Sabao's second focus is on homosexuality/homophobia in news reports that are politically framed to undermine or occasionally support the LGBTQI population.

The comparative analysis of the news reports in the two newspapers makes it clear that there exists an established form of legally sanctioned homophobia in the Namibian context, as well as a high level of politically engrained homophobia as demonstrated through the ideological positions assumed by prominent and high-ranking Namibian politicians. Sabao points out that the dominant homophobic perceptions have infiltrated mainstream Namibian media, informing the ideological positioning from which the homosexual population is framed in news reports. Sabao concludes his paper by commenting on the challenges involved in an attempt to analyse the reportage on the LGBTQI population in this national context. In the reports analysed, homosexuals are framed as a vulnerable group, however, their voice is largely absent from the discussion.

Vasta's paper analyses the discursive strategies of otherisation, legitimation, and normalisation in US Presidents' official statements that deal with actual or potential armed conflicts, from the start of the First Gulf War (1990-91) until the publication of the National Security Strategy (2015). The paper

focuses on the diachronic evolution of a restricted inventory of political myths and cultural constructs, employed by the US Administration to sustain a set of master narratives understood as strategically manufactured representations of 'reality' and manipulated to consolidate asymmetrical power relationships, monitor dissent and win domestic consent on the use of force.

Vasta conducts a qualitative, corpus-assisted and CDA-informed analysis. The key theoretical constructs guiding her analysis are: legitimisation (Cap 2008); van Dijk's concept of the ideological square (2008); and Lemke's Intertextual Thematic Formations (ITFs, Lemke 1988). Vasta shows that othering, imbued with Orientalism, is a key process that sustains the functioning of polarised, deeply culturally embedded narratives of 'us' and 'them'. The same process can be leveraged to nourish in-group cohesion and the 'clash-of-civilisations' master narrative. She exemplifies the mechanism in the construction of the Other's identity as that of the dangerous, threatening out-grouper characterised by an uncivilised, irrational and immoral nature. When it comes to master narratives about US, it is instead the exceptionally successful archetype of the super-empowered, fearless President that feeds the 'America-as-Civiliser' master narrative. This is reinforced by the personal anecdote of 'the good American' that can be linked to the master narrative of the mythical identity of American troops. Vasta concludes that ultimately, military intervention is conceptually grounded in the morality of helping others and discursively constructed as a civilising battle to bring the enemy to justice and spread freedom and democracy.

Swain's paper discusses the analysis of controversial cartoons appearing in news and social media that are sometimes accused of hate speech. The paper addresses the challenge in distinguishing between legitimate satire and hate speech in cartoons depicting real events involving public figures from historically discriminated groups. Swain employs visual analogues of the verbal Appraisal framework to analyse evaluations. The use of visual analogues of the Graduation category of Appraisal and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual composition and interaction modelling is suggested for studying the salience of evaluative meanings and viewer positioning.

The author proposes that understanding the conceptual and narrative representations, as well as the participant role assigned to the public figure (being, doing, or undergoing), is crucial for evaluation. Swain also shows how the roles of active and passive participants influence the types of visual attitudes expressed. Passive roles promote appearance-based appraisal, while active roles prompt behaviour-based judgments. The ambiguity in such cartoons is discussed, particularly whether the negative appraisal pertains to membership in the vulnerable group or something else. The study also mentions investigating unambiguous visual arguments in egregious types of cartoons to expose flawed reasoning behind hate speech, as well as researching the use of humour in spreading hate speech in online platforms. The paper emphasises the need for deeper analysis and understanding of the boundary between satire and hate speech in contemporary cartoons, suggesting methods for distinguishing between the two and proposing areas for future research.

Komninos investigates the interplay of language, paralinguage, and visual communication during a sporting event. The study investigates the intricate discourse dynamics of the 2022 Australian Open, highlighting the role of evaluative communication in shaping the narrative and public sentiment. The study employs a Multimodal Appraisal framework to analyse textual and visual resources surrounding Novak Djokovic's vaccination status. Using quantitative and qualitative content analysis, the research examines media reports, official statements, and public reactions to understand the underlying values, beliefs, and evaluations shaping stakeholders' responses. The author emphasises how evaluative language fosters community-building, aligning readers through shared values and attitudes.

The exploration of multimodal communication underscores the distribution and impact of semiotic resources in different text types. Institutional sources employ monogloss strategies, reinforcing their authority, while news articles display varying degrees of heterogloss, allowing diverse voices. The role of paralinguage in communication is also analysed, focusing on Facial

Affect, Voice Quality, and body movement. The analysis demonstrates how different channels influence emotions and perceptions, revealing the complex relationship between spoken and non-verbal cues. The study's examination of engagement and heterogloss reveals symmetries and asymmetries, shedding light on power dynamics and negotiation. The analysis also provides insights into communication strategies, societal divisions, and ideological polarisation. The clash between collective responsibility and individual rights reflects debates about public safety and personal freedoms. The media's role in shaping public opinion underscores the importance of responsible journalism. The study reinforces the understanding of the complex layers shaping public perception and identity. The Appraisal framework and Multimodal Discourse Analysis methods offer a valuable lens for researchers uncovering entangled discourses in contexts of conflicts.

This thematic section bridges the gap between established research and contemporary inquiries, intertwining a diversified range of methodologies with novel analytical perspectives. By forging connections with recognised scholarship, these contributions advance our understanding of the role evaluation plays in constructing narratives, ideologies, and perceptions within contexts of conflict, both verbally and non-verbally.

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