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Multimodal argumentation in news magazine covers: A case study of front covers putting Greece on the spot of the European economic crisis

Assimakis Tseronis

Abstract

In this paper, front covers of news magazines are studied as a distinct multimodal genre that invites readers to buy the magazine not only by attracting their attention but also by assuming a position with respect to the particular cover story. In order to account for the argument that a front cover may convey in support of that position, an argumentative reconstruction is required that also needs to take seriously into account the way in which the verbal and the visual modes interact to create meaning. The study proposes a multimodal argumentation perspective on the systematic reconstruction of the arguments that front covers of news magazines put forward. As a case in point, six covers by two German weekly news magazines are analysed, featuring the role of Greece in the eurozone crisis in the period 2010-2012.

Keywords

front covers, multimodal argumentation, news magazines, strategic manoeuvring, eurozone crisis, Greece

1. Introduction

While lifestyle magazines have received extensive attention within discourse and multimodal analysis (Bell, 2001; Machin, 2007; Martínez Lirola, 2006; McLoughlin, 2000), news magazines have been less studied as such. Moreover, studies in media and news discourse have mainly paid attention to the interaction between the verbal and the visual modes on the

(front) pages of newspapers (Bednarek and Caple, 2012; Economou, 2006; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998), without addressing the specificities of the cover of news magazines.

Finally, although the studies of the verbal-visual interaction in magazines and newspapers have addressed questions of representation and ideology, not enough attention has been paid to the way in which the design of the front cover and the combination of modes can be used as clues for recovering the argument put forward with respect to the cover story.

In this study, I analyse news magazine covers from an argumentation studies perspective as a multimodal text designed to convince the reader to buy the magazine by way of advancing a standpoint with respect to the story on the cover. Assuming that communication is multimodal rather than monomodal (Kress, 2010), those communicative practices that seek to convince an audience by means of advancing argumentation can thereby be studied as multimodal argumentation. A number of argumentation scholars have argued in the last years for the possibility and actuality of visual or multimodal arguments (Groarke, 1996; Kjeldsen, 2007; Roque, 2012; van den Hoven and Yang, 2013). More case studies are still needed focusing on particular contexts of use, in which the properties of a specific genre and the constraints of a given communicative activity are taken into account for the identification of the argumentative relevance of the interaction of the verbal and the non-verbal modes.

To this direction, I focus on one concrete story that has received wide media coverage in the last five years, namely the ongoing eurozone crisis (Tzogopoulos, 2013; Wodak and Angouri, 2014). More specifically, I study the choices made regarding the way in which two German magazines, *Focus* and *Der Spiegel*, have featured the role of Greece in the period 2010-2012. The question that I seek to answer is: how can the meaning of the choices concerning the verbal and the visual mode on front covers be interpreted as an instance of argumentation? A magazine's front cover can be analysed as advancing a standpoint and arguments that support it that would not only be in line with the magazine's

own editorial stance but also seek to accommodate the expectations of their readership as well as make a rational contribution to the ongoing discussion. In order to analyse front covers as arguments, I take a specific approach to the study of argumentative discourse, namely the pragma-dialectical approach (van Eemeren, 2010). Moreover, I pay attention to the images chosen and their composition in order to extract information that is relevant for the argumentative reconstruction. choices made regarding the visual composition and the images. To this direction, I also draw some insights from authors working within a multimodal perspective to the analysis of discourse (Bateman, 2014; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996; Machin, 2007). My goal is to illustrate the benefits of analysing a multimodal text such as front covers from an argumentation studies perspective, as well as to exploit the insights of multimodal analysis in order to extend the object of analysis within rhetoric and argumentation studies.

2. Towards an argumentative analysis of multimodal discourse

In the last two decades, scholars from discourse analysis as well as from rhetoric and argumentation studies have shown increasing interest in the role that visual images and other non-verbal modes play in the communicative process. As the following overview illustrates, the quests of the various scholarly communities have run in parallel without entering into a dialogue that could benefit both the extension of the object of analysis within argumentation studies and the methods for multimodal analysis. On the one hand, studies on multimodal analysis (Bateman, 2014; Jewitt, 2009) have elaborated on the meaning-making potential of a great variety of non-verbal modes but lack the concepts and tools needed for accounting for the argumentative functions of these modes. On the other hand, a growing number of argumentation scholars have begun studying discourses where the verbal mode interacts with other modes, mostly visual, but overlook or simply ignore the bulk of work carried out within multimodal analysis (see Tseronis, to appear).

The work carried out by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) has opened up the road for exploring the mechanisms of meaning-making in advertisements, newspapers and magazines, websites and blogs, films and painting, among other objects of (media) culture. Starting from the view of language as social semiotic, advocated by Michael Halliday (1978), these scholars have sought to provide a systematic overview of the choices at the image maker's disposal regarding colour, perspective, composition, and typography, and to account for these as being motivated by the social, cultural and historical context. Despite the criticisms concerning the possibility of a comprehensive theory of multimodal meaning (see the discussion in Forceville, 1999 and Machin, 2009), Kress and van Leeuwen's work has provided a wide range of concepts and tools for the systematic analysis of multimodal discourse. In his own work on multimodality, Bateman (2008) argues that attention also needs to be paid to the constraints that distinct genres of communication place in the production and interpretation of multimodal discourses. Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to the role that the various modes, and the interaction thereof, may play in communicative situations where parties seek to resolve a difference of opinion by means of arguing.

Within communication studies and rhetoric, there has been a call for the study of visuals on an equal footing with verbal texts, since the 1970s, as Foss (2004) explains. Inspired by Kenneth Burke's (1966) conception of language as action that involves the use of symbols with the aim of getting the addressee to do something, rhetoricians and communication theorists have studied images used in advertising, politics, and media, but also art and science, in an attempt to describe their nature and function, and to evaluate their role in communication (see collection of papers in Hill and Helmers, 2004). Having recourse to the concepts of ethos, pathos and logos, as well as to the five canons of classical rhetoric and the taxonomies of figures of speech, modern rhetoricians have sought to describe the meaning of various artifacts in terms of their function for a given audience, in

a given situation, at a given time (see Kenney and Scott, 2003). While the attention paid to the non-verbal by scholars of visual rhetoric has produced a wide range of studies, a clear interest in theory-building and theory-testing is found lacking (Foss, 2004: 145). Moreover, it is not clear what the standards are for the purpose of evaluation proposed within rhetorical criticism (ethical, cultural, epistemic, rational, or other).

Also acknowledging the pervasiveness of visual images in contemporary culture, but running parallel to the work that had been carried out by multimodal analysis and visual rhetoric until then, Birdsell and Groarke (1996) launched a call for broadening the object of argumentation studies. Unlike communication scholars and rhetoricians, these scholars assume a view of argument as a product that consists of premises seeking to enhance the acceptability of a standpoint. Groarke (2007: 135) defines visual argument as: "an argument conveyed or communicated in images – drawings, diagrams, photographs, paintings, actions, film and so on. In many cases, such arguments incorporate visual and verbal cues, combining images and words". Despite his rather formal approach, Groarke acknowledges the role of context by identifying three layers that need to be considered when analysing and evaluating visual arguments: the immediate visual context, the immediate verbal context, and the visual culture. In search of a theoretical framework within argumentation studies that can prove friendly to the project of visual argument, Groarke (2002) has considered the pragma-dialectical approach to the study of argumentation, developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004).

The pragma-dialectical approach studies argumentative discourse (be it written or spoken) as a "dialectical procedure for solving problems regarding the acceptability of standpoints by means of a methodical discussion aimed at testing the tenability of these standpoints" (Van Eemeren, 2010: 31). It postulates that argumentative discourse is the result of a discussion between two parties, the protagonist of a standpoint and the antagonist, who take turns in contributing moves to the critical testing of the standpoint. In

this view, the analysis of argumentative discourse amounts to the study of all the moves that are relevant in this procedure, beyond those of putting forward a standpoint and of adducing arguments in support of it; namely, moves such as expressing doubt, establishing starting points, giving clarifications, asking critical questions, and responding to or anticipating counter-arguments, among others. Moreover, attention is paid to the effectiveness of these moves, and to the possibilities that the various contexts and genres of communication allow to the two parties for balancing their quest for effectiveness with the requirement for reasonableness. In this broader view of argumentation as a social and rational activity, the meaning conveyed by the visual and other non-verbal modes in combination with the verbal mode can be studied as contributing to the design of the moves carried out in the dialectical procedure of resolving a difference of opinion.

The added value of adopting an argumentation studies perspective on the analysis of multimodal discourse is that it provides a frame (and related concepts), within which the verbal and visual relations can be interpreted, at least in those contexts in which it can be plausibly assumed that there is an attempt at convincing a reasonable critic by means of adducing arguments. The meaning conveyed by the various elements of the modes in use can therefore be structured as arguments (connected in some way) in support of a standpoint. At the same time, the integration of insights from multimodal analysis into argumentation studies can help the latter to analyse and evaluate discourse produced in communicative activities involving more than just the use of the verbal mode. In the following section, I describe front covers of magazines as a distinct multimodal genre that has a certain argumentative goal, and present the generic argument structure that can be reconstructed from them.

3. The front cover as a complex argument

The front page of a newspaper and the cover of a magazine are generally considered as the show window that attracts the readers' attention and informs them about the stories featured in the inside pages. While both newspaper and magazine covers make an expedient use of images and text in order to attract attention and to inform, the relation between the verbal and the visual mode as well as the overall layout differ in these two media genres.¹ In this section, I focus on the front cover of magazines and consider it as a distinct genre that seeks to promote the magazine to its readership. In doing this, I argue for the interest that front covers present for argumentation studies and propose a structure for the generic argument that they convey.

Held (2005) has studied a corpus of covers of news magazines from Austria, Germany, France and Italy, focusing on the structural, textual, stylistic and rhetorical characteristics thereof. She defines front covers as a multimodal media genre "which announces, indicates and appraises subsequent texts inside the magazine" (2005: 173). According to her, this genre deploys three codes, namely, pictures, typography and language, the interaction of which results in a unique meaning. Her study seeks to reveal some of the macro- and micro-structural characteristics of news magazine covers, focusing largely on their textual and, to a lesser degree, their visual features. By visual, the author refers mainly to the layout. She thus discusses the use of the logo of the magazine and its position on the page, the framing used around text and image, the use of layout to distinguish the main topic from the rest, as well as the choice among different picture types, ranging from realistic photography to illustrations, to picture montage, to caricatures.²

Moreover, Held (2005: 176) notes that covers behave like actual advertisements, a promotional genre *par excellence* that seek to capture the public's attention, and to turn this

¹ Bednarek and Caple (2012: 128-129) remark that headlines and images in news texts rarely share close relationships of overlap, with the exception of the stand-alone stories which is a genre that can be related to magazine front covers (see also Economou, 2006, 2008).

² See also Economou (2006, 2008) who studies the framing role of naturalistic photos in news-review articles in newspapers.

into an interest in buying the magazine. McLoughlin (2000: 5), too, emphasizes the promotional function of the front cover by quoting the editor of British glossy magazine *Tatler* who remarks: "A magazine's front-cover image and coverlines are persuasive selling tools... [that] motivate readers [...] to buy our magazine rather than another". Bateman et al. (2007: 149) remark that front pages of newspapers strive both to be innovative and to act as a "point of reliable identification for its [the newspaper's] regular clientele". Front pages or covers have to strike a balance between addressing their regular readership and appealing to new readers, as well as between remaining recognizable and being creative (see also van den Broek et al. (2012), chapter 15).

Aspects of the content and style of the front cover are thus exploited in order to attract the reader's attention without compromising the magazine's recognisability. The logo with the magazine's name, for example, or the use of a certain colour palette and a specific layout may remain constant from one issue to another, enhancing thus the magazine's recognisability, or may be modified, attracting the attention of new readers or appealing to the changing preferences of the regular ones. The content of the language used on the cover plays an important role in providing the readers with an appealing and familiar register but also in raising their curiosity to explore further what lies behind the cover. The choice of font size, colour, letter type and the arrangement of the text in relation to the rest of the elements on the cover also relate to its visual style. Next to choices made regarding the above aspects of a front cover, the content and style of the image(s) put on the cover plays a crucial role, too, both in attracting attention and in accommodating the regular reader's expectations. It is the relation between not only the content of the text and of the visual image but also between the form of the text and the style of the image that need to be considered when one seeks to account for the rhetorical effect of magazine covers.

While the promotional function of the front cover is taken for granted in the studies reviewed above, it is not specifically explained how rhetoric may help achieve this goal. In

terms of classical rhetoric, it can be said that a cover seeks to build the ethos of the magazine itself and to address the pathos of its regular and occasional readers, by advancing an argument (logos) that can convince them to buy it. According to Aristotle, three means of persuasion are distinguished: logos refers to the content of a speaker's argument, ethos concerns the credibility of the speaker, and pathos refers to the audience's frame of mind which can influence their judgment (see Braet, 1992). The choices made regarding the content and layout of the front cover (see Bateman, 2008; Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998) can then be understood as relating to the above rhetorical means. But besides the layout and the visual and verbal style of the cover, the cover story itself and the accompanying image(s) can also be said to play an important role in promoting the magazine as a whole, and in promoting the particular issue, more specifically. It is therefore the story and the way it is treated both verbally and visually on the front cover that also need to be considered as contributing to the cover's effectiveness.

A series of interrelated arguments can thus be reconstructed when considering the role that the front cover plays for the whole magazine but also when looking closer into what the front cover depicts and how. The main argument of the cover can be understood as supporting an inciting standpoint such as 'Buy the magazine'. One of the main arguments in support of such an inciting standpoint is to be reconstructed from the main story as depicted on the cover, both verbally and visually. Aspects of the story itself (its newsworthiness, relevance for the readership, actuality, uniqueness, urgency, etc.) as well as aspects about the way the magazine treats the story (professionalism, investigative journalism, exclusiveness, etc.) may count as further arguments in support of this inciting standpoint. Next to the argument *of* the cover, inciting the public to buy the magazine, one can also reconstruct the argument *in* the cover, the specific position the magazine assumes over the cover story. In what follows, I illustrate what an analysis of news magazine covers from an argumentation studies perspective amounts to, by taking the story of Greece in the ongoing

eurocrisis as a case in point. In the analysis, I thereby focus on the argument *in* the cover and suggest how it contributes an argument for the overarching standpoint "Buy the magazine".

4. A proposal for an analysis of front covers as multimodal arguments

In the previous section, I have established that front covers present an interest for argumentation studies and that it is possible to propose a generic argumentation structure that is justified by the promotional character of this genre. In this complex argument, the implicit standpoint inciting the public to buy the magazine is supported by arguments having to do with the cover story and the way this is presented. The question that arises now is how to interpret the choices made within the various semiotic systems used in the cover (verbal, visual, layout, etc.) as contributing meaning that has an argumentative relevance; that is, as playing a role in the argumentative discussion, by conveying the standpoint or some argument in support of it, for example, or defining the disagreement space and establishing starting points. To this direction, it is necessary to have recourse to insights from multimodal analysis. Scholars within multimodal studies have mainly studied image-text relations with an interest in the social context in which such artifacts are produced and/or consumed, or an interest in explaining how communication works and/or can be designed more effectively. From an argumentation studies perspective, however, the question is how can such multimodal instances of communication be analysed and evaluated in terms of the contribution they make to resolving a difference of opinion over the advanced standpoint.

Argumentation scholars who have studied instances of visual communication agree that attention needs to be paid both to the visual and the verbal elements as well as to the broader context of use. Birdsell and Groarke (1996: 6), for example, write: "Any account of visual argument must specify how we can: a) identify the internal elements of a visual image, b) understand the contexts in which images are interpreted, c) establish the consistency of

an interpretation of the visual, and d) chart changes in visual perspective over time". More recently, van den Hoven and Yang (2013) have proposed a method for the reconstruction of multimodal argumentative discourse, which contains the following components: a) a concrete perspective on argumentation (where they assume the pragma-dialectical model); b) two discourse principles, according to which the analyst assumes that the arguer presents the audience with a coherent and relevant discourse; c) an analysis of the rhetorical situation; and d) mode-specific theories that bring insights about the specific modalities in use as well as knowledge about the (sub)genre of communication.

Within multimodal analysis, Bateman et al. (2007) identify five features that define the appearance of a multimodal text: linguistic structure, content structure, rhetorical structure, layout structure and navigation structure. From a social semiotic perspective to multimodal analysis, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) have drawn upon Halliday's (1978) three basic requirements for any semiotic mode to convey meaning, namely the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual meaning. Particular qualities of the visuals or arrangements thereof can thereby be systematically studied as conveying meaning regarding the representation of the world, meaning regarding the relation between the producer and the receiver of the message, and meaning regarding the way the message coheres as a whole. As Machin (2007) shows, the meaning potential of a certain affordance of a given mode, the use of a specific colour, for example, can be further specified with respect to each of these three metafunctions, depending on the way this is combined with other features and the way it is used in a specific context.

The analysis of multimodal discourse from an argumentation studies perspective can benefit from two insights to be gained from multimodal analysis. The first has to do with the attention paid to both the content and the form of each mode used. The second concerns the assumption that each mode, be it verbal or other, contributes equally to the meaning process. As a result of this, it is important not only to study each mode used separately but

the way modes combine, and to pay equal attention to both the content and the form. The intricate ways in which verbal and visual elements may interact can convey a number of argumentative functions, other than simply advancing a standpoint or an argument for that standpoint. Next to the evidentiary function that rests on the depictive content of visual images, other properties of visuals such as colour, lines, perspective, framing and composition may provide clues for the inference relationship between the premises (rendered partly or wholly visually) of an argument or for the argumentative force of the verbal elements (to counter, refute, defend, attack, doubt, etc.). In addition, visual elements may convey information as to how the audience is addressed or how the difference of opinion is framed (see Economou, 2006, 2008). Besides paying serious attention to the affordances of the various modes and to their interrelationships, a multimodal argumentative analysis needs to consider systematically the situational and institutional context within which the argumentative activity takes place, and the constraints of the communicative genre.

As I have mentioned in the previous section, a magazine cover seeks to compete for the reader's attention at the news stand and thereby seeks to invite the reader to buy it. At the same time, a front cover reflects not only the editorial stance of the magazine and its identity but also (seeks to accommodate to) the profile of the targeted audience. Last but not least, the magazine cover does not only inform the potential reader about the stories featured in the inside pages but promotes one story in particular by placing it on the cover. When choosing the story and the accompanying visual images for the cover, the magazine editors take all the above factors into account. They do not only seek a balance between creativity and recognisability but also between accommodating the expectations of their readership and putting forward their standpoint with respect to the cover story. The concept of strategic manoeuvring, developed within the pragma-dialectical approach to the study of

argumentation, can help the analyst to account for the argumentative means by which this balance is achieved.

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999, 2007) have argued that an integration of rhetorical insights in the pragma-dialectical framework can benefit the analysis by accounting for the intended effectiveness of argumentative discourse. In order to describe in a systematic way the choices the arguers make in their attempt to observe the dialectical standards for reasonableness while they also make the best of what is allowed at the various stages of an argumentative discussion, Pragma-dialectics has introduced the term 'strategic manoeuvring' (van Eemeren, 2010). In this view, each party is expected to design their moves (including the moves of advancing a standpoint and forwarding arguments in support of it, but not limited to these) in such a way that they strike a balance between reasonableness and effectiveness. To achieve this balance each party makes expedient choices from three inseparable aspects of strategic manoeuvring, namely: topical potential, adaptation to audience and presentational devices. The aspect of the topical potential refers to the viewpoint, angle or perspective from which an arguer selects in order to make a move in a given context. The aspect of adaptation to audience refers to the ways in which the arguer may choose to accommodate the preferences, expectations and perspective of the audience that is being addressed. The aspect of presentational devices refers to the choices that the arguer can make in order to present a move in verbal or any other semiotic means in the most appropriate way in the given context.

The assumption about the workings of the strategic manoeuvring can guide the analyst into assessing the argumentative relevance of the choices made from the affordances of the various modes and their combinations. Having the generic structure of the argument of a front cover in mind (see previous section), the analyst can then search for the arguments that can be recovered from the verbal/ visual content of the cover as well as from its verbal / visual form. Knowledge of the broader context in which the specific story falls

(see the eurozone crisis, for example) as well as information on the editorial stance of the magazine will help the analyst to further reconstruct the standpoint and the arguments advanced in support of it. In the analysis proposed in the following section, I consider the visual elements and their combination with the verbal ones, together with the broader context of the genre of front covers and the socio-economic situation, as clues for justifying the proposed reconstruction of the argument in the cover.

5. Greece on the cover of European news magazines

In this part, I analyse six covers that two German news magazines, *Der Spiegel* and *Focus*, published between 2010 and 2012 featuring the role of Greece in the ongoing European debt crisis.³ The focus on the particular story allows me to take into account the topical constraints (the story about the Greek crisis in particular) and the broader context of communication (the editorial profile of the magazines but also the socioeconomic context of the euro crisis) when analysing the arguments on these front covers. In 5.1, I briefly present the socioeconomic context of the Greek-Euro crisis before discussing the covers of each of the three magazines in 5.2. Knowledge of this context is necessary for understanding the references made in the covers and for justifying the proposed reconstruction.

5.1 The socioeconomic context of the Greek-Euro crisis

The attention of the international media on Greece, as Tzogopoulos (2013) explains, was never so extensive as in the last quarter of 2009. At the end of this year, the country's debt was announced to have reached its highest rate in modern history. Rating agencies started

³ The British weekly news magazine *The Economist* has devoted an even greater number of front covers on the 'Greek case'. Nevertheless, for reasons of space I here concentrate on the two German magazines and reserve the argumentative analysis of these other covers for a future study.

to downgrade Greek bank and government debt. From then on, a chain of events has put Greece on the spot.

In 2010, the reports about severe irregularities in the Greek accounting procedures for the statistics provided to Brussels led the media to question the country's credibility and credit-rating agencies to doubt the viability of its debt. Under fear of a collapse of the national economy and of a spread of the crisis to the rest of the member states, Greece was the first country of the eurozone to ask for the activation of a bailout mechanism from the newly set up European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in May 2010. The austerity measures that the Greek government had to take in order to meet the demands of the lending countries and the reforms undertaken in the financial and political sectors were met by unprecedented protests and riots, as well as a feeling of indignation and despair by large parts of the Greek society. In summer 2011, while talks abound that Greece will be forced to become the first country to leave the eurozone, the EU decided on a second rescue package. In November 2011, almost two years after his victory in the general elections, George Papandreou resigned and Loukas Papademos, a former ECB vice president, led a government of national unity. In a fragile political climate, new elections were held in May 2012 but no majority government was formed. The second elections round held in June brought a coalition government in power, under the leadership of conservative party leader Antonis Samaras.

It has been suggested (see Tzogopoulos, 2013) that the extensive media coverage on the so-called 'Greek crisis' has contributed, to a certain extent, to the establishment and diffusion of a negative image of the country. In the analysis that follows, I do not seek to explain how each magazine, given their distinctive editorial stance, may have sought to influence the public opinion on the matter and to construct a certain representation of Greece. Instead, I refer to information regarding the magazine's editorial profile and to information regarding the socio-economic situation as presented above, in order to justify the

proposed argumentative reconstruction. This said, it may well be possible for some future study to refer to the analyses provided here in order to make claims about the ideology and politics of these magazines and the construction of 'crisis discourse', but this is not the goal of the present study.⁴

5.2 Strategic manoeuvring in the front covers of *Focus* and *Der Spiegel*

In the following sub-sections, I seek to reconstruct the argument that the covers of the two magazines under study convey with respect to the cover story. I will mainly focus on the standpoint and eventual arguments in support of it, that can be reconstructed on the basis of what is depicted on the cover and how. To do this, I look at choices made regarding both the verbal and the visual mode, as well as their combination (relation of the heading with the image, for example). The proposed argument structure is an attempt to capture the main elements of an argument, namely the standpoint, the argument in support of it and the so-called linking premise, that is the premise that connects the argument with the standpoint. Both magazines under study are critical of the role of Greece and sceptical, to say the least, about its position in the eurozone. At the same time, as the analysis of the covers in question shows, there are differences in the ways they treat the cover story, which to a large extent have to do with their differing editorial stance and with the audience each of the two magazines addresses. Each has therefore focused on slightly different aspects of the crisis and presented their covers accordingly (in line also with their general distinctive visual profile). The most striking difference in the covers of the two magazines is that *Focus* visualises the agent to blame for the crisis and the possible problems caused for the German people, namely Greece symbolized by the photoshopped statue of Venus of Milo. On the other hand, the covers of *Der Spiegel* present Greece as the location where the crisis is manifest but not necessarily and explicitly blaming the country for it.

⁴ See, for example, the studies in a recent special issue of the journal *Discourse and Society* (Wodak and Angouri, 2014).

5.2.1 Focus

Focus is a German weekly news magazine, first published in 1993 to counterbalance *Der Spiegel's* success. It is considered conservative and leaning towards economic liberalism. Its target audience is the 'information elite', a term coined by Helmut Markwort, the magazine's founder. The magazine features many colour images and makes heavy use of information graphics. It is known for offering advice and consumer tips relevant to family, health, finances and career issues.⁵ *Focus* was the first to devote its front cover to the Greek parameter of the euro crisis. It published three covers in total, two in 2010, and one in 2011 (see figures 1 to 3 below).⁶ They all exploited the theme of the Venus of Milo that attracted a lot of international attention and critical reactions from the Greek media, too.



⁵ Information collected from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_%28German_magazine%29 and the *International Directory of Company Histories*, Vol. 23. St. James Press, 1998.

⁶ These are versions of the original covers sketched and translated by the author. The original covers can be found in the following webpages: http://www.focus.de/magazin/archiv/jahrgang_2010/ausgabe_8/; http://www.focus.de/magazin/archiv/jahrgang_2010/ausgabe_18/; http://www.focus.de/magazin/archiv/jahrgang_2011/ausgabe_38/.

Focus assumes a pretty straightforward position regarding the questions 'who is to blame' and 'who is affected from the Greek crisis'. It thus thematises on Greece's 'unreliable' and 'irresponsible' attitude on the one hand, and on German people as the 'victims' who will pay the bill, on the other. In all three covers, the visual, depicting the statue of Venus of Milo draped in the Greek flag, is contrasted with the verbal that refers to the German people. The magazine appeals to its readership by presenting itself as an authoritative source of advice on how to secure one's finances at a moment of crisis, and as a critic who judges those who have presumably caused the crisis. The generic argument in support of the standpoint "Buy this magazine" could be formulated as "because it informs you on how to prepare yourself for the coming crisis and the consequences this has for you as a German consumer".

The first cover featured a manipulated image of the statue of Venus of Milo against a blue sky background making an obscene gesture to the reader.⁷ On the left side, in big letter type appears the text: "Cheater in the euro family", followed by the question in smaller size: "Is Greece robbing us of our money - and what is going on with Spain, Portugal and Italy?". In the second cover, the statue of the Venus of Milo is making an open-handed begging gesture.⁸ The blue daylight sky background of the previous cover has now changed into a dark sky suggesting an approaching storm. On the left side, one reads in big letter type: "Greece and our money!", followed below by the text: "What you should expect", in smaller size. The third cover, unlike the other two, is divided in top and bottom, along a vertical axis or, in Kress and van Leeuwen's (1998) terminology, in ideal and real.⁹ In the top part, in big letter type one reads: "Is our money lost?". Above and below this text, in smaller fonts appear the sentences: "The Greek-Euro crisis" and "Billions for nothing, Merkel in need -

⁷ The original text in German reads: "Betrüger in der Euro-Familie. Bringt uns GRIECHENLAND um unser Geld -- und was ist mit Spanien, Portugal, Italien?".

⁸ The original text in German reads: "Griechenland und unser Geld! Womit Sie rechnen müssen".

⁹ The original text in German reads: "Die Griechenland-Euro Krise. Ist unser Geld verloren? Milliarden für nichts, Merkel in Not -- was isch als Sparer jetzt wissen muss".

what should you know now as a saver", respectively. The image in the bottom part depicts only the head of what is presumably the statue of Venus with a two-hundred euro note stuck on it; the rest of the body is under water as well as half of the Parthenon temple in the background.

Taken together the three covers construct a certain narrative about Greece, as a country asking for money when it is perfectly clear that it is in no position to give the money back. The three covers were designed as three scenes of an illustrated story about Greece's drama and the German people's fears and sought to attract attention by the creative manipulation of an iconic statue of Greek antiquity - particularly by the obscene gesture it makes in the first cover. Throughout the three covers, a story unfolds that only gets worse: from the blue sky background in the first cover, to the tempest background of the second, to the third cover depicting the disastrous results after the tempest has struck. The magazine editors have thus exploited the metaphor of the crisis as tempest and flood to the full (see Bickes et al., 2014; Bounegru and Forceville, 2011). It is worth noting, however, that the two last covers suggest that the natural disaster hits Greece locally, since the tempest is shown approaching the Venus of Milo and it is the Venus of Milo and the Parthenon that are flooded, no other symbols referring to Germany or Europe (compare with the destruction metaphors in *Der Spiegel*).

The verbal mode emphasises the contrast between 'Greece' and 'Germany': pronouns and phrases such as 'us' and 'our money' are juxtaposed to 'Greece' in the titles of all three covers. In the first cover, Greece is described as a 'cheater' while Germany is associated with the 'Euro family'. Pronouns are used to address the readers directly while polar and indirect wh-questions enhance an interactive format that reflects the magazine's profile of providing solutions to problems its readers may have. The interactive format is further supported by the visual mode, especially in the first two covers, where Venus'

obscene gesture and begging are a direct address to the readers, ending up not only catching their attention but also their emotions (either by irritating or moving them, or both).

The verbal and the visual modes in the three covers of *Focus* complement each other producing a new meaning that in turn contributes to the argument which can be reconstructed about the magazine's position over the issue of the Greek crisis. In the first cover, the image does not only identify the nationality of the 'cheater' - after all, 'Greece' in capital letters appears also in the sub-coverline - but mainly qualifies that 'cheater' as someone who is disrespectful of the rules that bind the European family (a reference to Greece's 'creative statistics' methods that were being widely commented on by the media at the time, see 5.1). By turning the rhetorical question into an assertion, the argument would run as follows:

Greece will rob us of our money

BECAUSE they have cheated the euro family

AND they are disrespectful of the European regulations [recovered from the obscene gesture that Venus of Milo makes]

In the second cover, the image of the statue of Venus begging for money against a looming tempest combined with the text depicts the cause of one's worry about one's money, namely the worsening of the situation. The contrast between Venus depicted begging in this cover and Venus making an obscene gesture in the previous one can justify the addition of an extra argument for expecting only the worst to come can be added, namely that "Greeks are untrustworthy and disrespectful". The argument would thus run as follows:

You should expect the worst to come

BECAUSE we are about to lend money to Greece¹⁰

AND the country is untrustworthy and disrespectful [recovered from the sequencing of the two covers]

The third cover builds on the ground established by the two previous ones regarding the untrustworthiness of Greece and the worsening financial situation of the country, in order to provide a definitive negative answer to the question posed in the main title. The image of a drowned Venus stands not only for a country in trouble (the news about strikes and riots in Athens and other Greek cities had made it to the top stories around the world) but also as a visual depiction of the expression 'throw money into the sea', suggesting that the money that Germany and other European countries have lent to the Greek state will never be recovered.¹¹ The argument of the third cover would thus run as follows:

Our money is lost

BECAUSE we have given our money to a country that is in trouble

AND the financial situation of this country and of Europe is only worsening [recovered from the depiction of drowning Venus and from the sequencing of the two previous covers]

The three covers of *Focus* build clear arguments on the questions who is to blame and who is to lose from the crisis, based on the opposition between 'Greece' and 'us'. The standpoint of the argument in the cover is to be reconstructed from the rhetorical questions in the headline or subline and it addresses the financial worries of the magazine's readership. The

¹⁰ The cover appeared one day after the eurozone members and the IMF had agreed on the first bailout package for Greece.

¹¹ A second bailout for Greece had been agreed upon during the summer before this third cover of *Focus* appeared.

arguments advanced in support of the standpoint have to do with the negative representation of Greece and are to be reconstructed from the combination of the verbal and the visual mode taking into consideration the current socio-economic background. It is the text in the verbal mode that can be said to cause alert in the audience, while the photoshopped image of Venus of Milo catches the eye with its unusual gestures without however depicting a very dramatic situation (with the exception of the last cover, to be compared with the covers of *Der Spiegel*). In line with its general editorial stance, the magazine invites the readers to buy it in order to find solutions to the problems announced on its covers.

5.2.2 *Der Spiegel*

Der Spiegel is a German weekly news magazine founded in 1947, and one of Europe's largest publications of its kind. The magazine is known for its investigative journalism and extensive articles that focus on complex political, economic and social issues. While originally leaning towards the left, *Der Spiegel* is currently adopting a rather populist stance.¹² The magazine had published early on articles and editorials concerning the Greek crisis but it is in May 2010 when it devoted its cover to it for the first time. Overall, it published three covers in the period under study (see figures 4 to 6 below).¹³ While critical about the current financial situation, the magazine's position comes out as less provocative than that of *Focus*. The ambiguity concerning the actions depicted in the covers and their agents conveys the doubts that the magazine editors may have about which solution is the most favourable, and for whom, given the circumstances.

¹² Information collected from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Der_Spiegel and the *International Directory of Company Histories*, Vol.67. St. James Press, 2005.

¹³ These are versions of the original covers sketched and translated by the author. The original covers can be found in the following webpages: <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/index-2010-19.html>; <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/index-2011-25.html>; <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/index-2012-20.html>.

10 May 2010

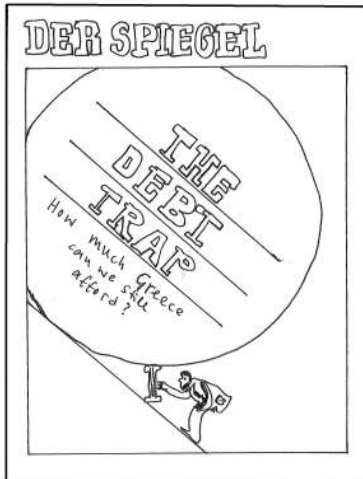


Figure 4.

20 June 2011

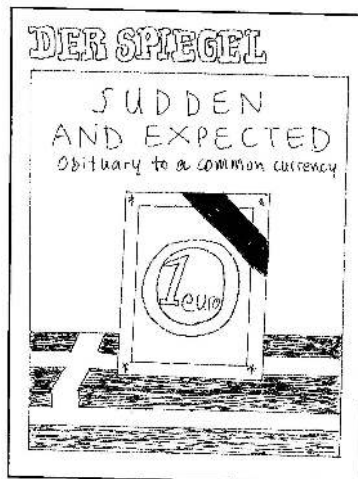


Figure 5.

14 May 2012

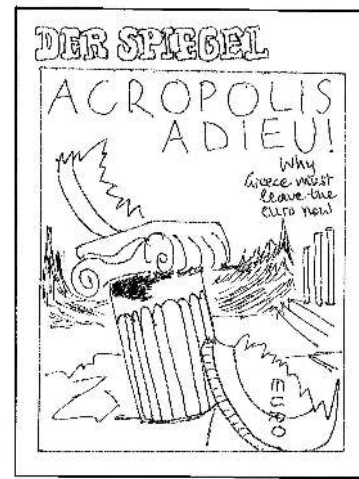


Figure 6.

Der Spiegel's first cover appeared with the headline "The debt trap" in capitals followed by the question: "How much Greece can we still afford?" in smaller size letters.¹⁴ The text appears diagonally inside an incommensurably huge black ball that is stopped from running down a steep slope by what looks like a small ancient pillar. A man in black suit, symbolically standing for a politician or businessman, appears kneeling right in front of the ball and stretching his hand towards the pillar. It is ambiguous whether he is trying to remove the pillar or to block the ball's path with it. The huge ball is not centred but rather appears falling from the top left, suggesting a momentum that cannot be possibly stopped by the small pillar. The contrast between the size of the ball and the fragility of the pillar as well as the unbalanced composition provide the visual cues for reformulating the question raised in the sub-title of the cover in the negative.

We cannot afford keeping Greece in the eurozone much longer

BECAUSE the accumulated debt is going out of proportion [recovered from the visual contrast between the ball and the pillar]

¹⁴ The original text in German reads: "DIE SCHULDEN FALLE. Wie viel Griechenland können wir uns noch leisten?".

AND Greece's economy constitutes only a small percentage of the eurozone economy [recovered from the size and fragility of the pillar]

Nevertheless, far from claiming directly that one should let Greece default instead of rescuing it, the image conveys visually the interconnectedness of the European member states and explains the 'debt trap' in which they are all found, as stated in the headline. The man in black suit will be the first one to be affected by the rolling of the huge ball in case the fragile pillar breaks or is removed. At the same time, letting the pillar stand as it is may work temporarily but, as the composition of the cover shows, this is not the most secure option either.

In the second cover, the scene of a funeral is evoked both verbally (by the use of the word 'obituary') and visually, by the coffin covered with the Greek flag, and the photo of the euro coin with a black ribbon, suggesting that the European common currency is dead.¹⁵ The title reads: "Sudden and expected. Obituary to a common currency". At first sight, it seems that the cover is only making a statement, namely that the euro currency is dead, in support of which there is no explicit argument that can be reconstructed verbally or visually. When considering the socio-economic context (see section 5.1) as well as the broader verbal context of the magazine, a certain argumentative reconstruction can be proposed. The main story inside this issue focuses on the reactions of the citizens in various European countries and their resistance to austerity measures, that is, on the consequences of the current economic crisis, in order to conclude that the common currency was a mistake. By foreshadowing the death of euro on its cover, *Der Spiegel* may be seeking to address the concerns of the euro sceptics among its readers. In this sense, what the cover depicts could be understood conveying the following argument:

¹⁵ The original text in German reads: "PLÖTZLICH UND ERWARTET. Nachruf auf eine gemeinsame Währung".

The euro will die in Greece [recovered from the depiction of the coffin covered by the Greek flag]

BECAUSE the situation in Greece is destabilising the common currency [recovered from knowledge of the current socio-economic context]

AND the common currency was problematic from its inception [recovered from the verbal contrast between the words 'sudden' and 'expected']

Once more, it is worth noting that it remains ambiguous whether the magazine maintains that it is Greece to be blamed entirely for the death of the euro. The title after all, suggests that such a death was expected, presumably because of the inherent weaknesses of the eurozone system.

The title of the third cover reads: "Adieu Acropolis! Why Greece must leave the euro now".¹⁶ The cover depicts the ruins of an ancient temple in the background with the half of a euro coin fallen from a pillar on the foreground. The scene suggests these to be the result of an earthquake or some other natural disaster. The diagonal lines created both by the pillar on the foreground and the pillars in the background contribute to an unbalanced composition that underscores the tension of the situation and contrast with the serenity evoked by the horizontal and vertical lines created in the composition of the previous cover (see Dondis, 1974: 46, for the meaning of diagonal direction). The natural disaster scenario that is evoked on this cover leaves it once more ambiguous as to what has caused the crisis: was the euro currency too strong for Greece to handle or is the Greek case proving hazardous for the euro? In addition, there is a certain ambiguity regarding the time of day depicted: is that the dawn light or the twilight? Would then the withdrawal of Greece from the euro bring a new era for Europe or for Greece, or would it be the twilight for Greece or Europe? While the main title, "Adieu Acropolis", suggests that it is the Germans or other European member

¹⁶ The original text in German reads: "AKROPOLIS ADIEU! Warum Griechenland jetzt den Euro verlassen muss".

states who lead Greece outside the euro, the title of the cover story inside the magazine is "Farewell to euro" suggesting that it is Greece that decides to leave. Moreover, it is telling that the editors have chosen to formulate the subtitle as an indirect question foregrounding the 'why' instead of using the imperative form ("Greece must leave the euro"). In this way, they put emphasis on the reasons there exist for Greece's leaving the eurozone. The arguments in support of the standpoint reconstructed from this indirect question would then run as follows:

There are good reasons for Greece's leaving the eurozone

BECAUSE the euro has been a currency that was too strong for Greece (and maybe for the rest of Europe) [recovered from the image of the split euro coin falling from an ancient pillar]

AND Greece's case poses a risk for the rest of the eurozone countries [recovered from the unbalanced composition that suggests that Greek ground is trembling]

The main story inside the magazine reports on the results of the elections earlier that month where a great number of Greeks had voted for parties that reject the country's bailout agreement with the EU and the IMF. While the article elaborates on the idea that Greece's leaving the eurozone will help the country's economy to restart it also discusses the complexity of the consequences for both Greece and the rest of Europe.

Der Spiegel's covers, contrary to those of *Focus*, do not depict Greece as an agent of a condemnable or pitiful activity. The symbols for Greece and the Greek people are used circumstantially to locate the crisis. All three covers make use of metaphors of destruction as discussed in Bickes et al. (2014), representing the crisis as a downward movement, as death or as earthquake, and thereby backgrounding the responsibility of Greece but also of other agents, like banks and politicians (with the exception of the first cover where a man in black

suit appears). Unlike the natural disaster metaphors in the covers of *Focus*, the ones depicted in the covers of *Der Spiegel* appear to affect Europe as a whole not just Greece. The 'we' vs. 'Greece' distinction is present only in the first cover, where the 'we' in the verbal text combined with the colours black, red and yellow of the background and of the fonts inside the falling ball clearly identify Germany. Moreover, *Der Spiegel* does not appear putting a judgment on Greece as being the direct cause of the crisis or the only threat for the euro. At the same time, the editors seem to suggest that no direct solution to the crisis exists which can be entirely beneficial for the one or the other party. The generic argument advanced by the covers in support of the inciting standpoint to buy the magazine could thus be formulated as "because you will be informed about the various scenarios regarding the future of the common currency and what these mean for the role of Germany in Europe".

The arguments that can be reconstructed in each cover address more complex aspects of the crisis concerning its consequences at a European level as well as questions over possible solutions. The verbal text and the image invite interpretations that are less clear-cut, when compared to those in the covers of *Focus*, something which goes in line with the magazine's editorial stance for exposing the complexities of the cover story. The text used is generally shorter and it does not address the reader directly (except in the first cover). On the other hand, the visual images are more complex and more dramatic than those in *Focus*, inviting the viewer to think about what is depicted and how it connects with the text.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have proposed an analysis of front covers as a multimodal genre that seeks to promote the magazine by advancing arguments that support the standpoint that the magazine takes over the cover story. To this direction, I have taken an argumentation studies perspective, assuming the pragma-dialectical approach in particular, and made use

of insights and concepts from multimodal analysis. From this perspective, the choices made from the affordances of the verbal and the visual modes were analysed not only as contributing to a generic argument that invites the reader to buy the magazine (the argument *of* the cover) but also as clues for reconstructing the magazine's argument over the cover story (the argument *in* the cover). Attention was paid to both the content and the form of both the verbal and the visual mode. The proposed generic argumentation structure of front covers of news magazines and knowledge of the broader social and economic context of the specific story were used in order to guide the argumentative interpretation of the verbal and visual cues.

The arguments of the covers of the two magazines were analysed in line with the notion strategic manoeuvring as seeking to strike a balance between appealing to the magazine's readership and putting forward a standpoint with respect to the cover story. *Focus* addressed its readers directly, both verbally and visually, and assumed a straightforward position depicting Greece as the untrustworthy partner that the German citizens are asked to support, risking their own finances. *Der Spiegel* raised the readers' interest by conveying nuanced arguments that emphasize the complexity of the situation, since it leaves it unclear whether definitive solutions on the issue of the Greek-euro crisis exist that will not affect negatively both sides.

Within argumentation studies, there is an ongoing discussion regarding the propositionality of the non-verbal elements that play a role in an argument and their subsequent verbalization and presentation in an argumentation structure (see, for example Groarke, 2007; Kjeldsen, 2012; van den Hoven and Yang, 2013). The argumentation structures for the covers I have proposed are neither definitive nor as elaborate as the rich information conveyed by the interaction of the verbal and the visual mode would require. I have here chosen to keep them simple and formulate them in a way that plausibly reflects the proposed interpretation in an attempt to illustrate the general directions one could follow

when seeking to reconstruct multimodal discourse from an argumentation studies perspective. Further studies are required to show the merits of specific frameworks currently on offer within multimodal analysis (see Bateman, 2014) for a systematic and detailed argumentative analysis of multimodal discourse.

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