



---

---

# **Emotive Language: Linguistic Depictions of the Three Year-Old Drowned Refugee Boy in the Greek Journalistic Discourse**

---

---

NIKOLETTA TSITSANOUDIS-MALLIDIS  
*University of Ioannina*

ELENI DERVENI  
*University of Ioannina*

## **Abstract**

The media and journalists play a central and powerful role in influencing both policy-making and societal opinion on migration and refugees. In recent years, there has been growing attention to media representations of refugees and migrants, with various studies examining news sources to identify dominant frames of refugee reporting. As hate speech and stereotypes targeting migrants and refugees proliferate across Europe, balanced and sensitive media reporting is needed more than ever. Integrating various theories within the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) this article distinctively attempts to analyze the linguistic presentation of the images of the drowned child refugee by the Greek media, whose body washed ashore in Turkey in 2015 and critically examines how emotive language is selected, systematized as well as framed in the form of both general beliefs and of ideological constructs. Based on a content analysis of twenty newspaper headlines and articles published online on September 2015 in Greece, this paper endeavours to show the relationship between emotion and language. The results of the study indicated that the media language prompted emotional responses during that period as well as a sympathetic and compassionate coverage.

**Keywords:** Emotive Language, Linguistic Depiction, Journalistic Discourse

© Nikoletta Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis & Eleni Derveni

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

<http://interface.ntu.edu.tw/>

---

---

# Emotive Language: Linguistic Depictions of the Three Year-Old Drowned Refugee Boy in the Greek Journalistic Discourse

---

---

During the past two years, Europe has experienced the greatest mass movement of people since the Second World War. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) more than one million people fleeing war, poverty, conflict, persecution and destruction in Syria and other troubled countries have traveled through Greece in search of safety and a better life in Europe.<sup>1</sup> The situation has been described as the “largest global humanitarian crisis” of our time (UNHCR 2014). The so-called “refugee crisis” or “migration crisis”, has intensified debates on immigration throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup>

The stream of refugees fleeing the war in Syria has been one of the last two years’ defining, and most complicated, news stories. It is understandable that controversial issues receive significant media attention. Importantly, media have played a crucial role in shaping attitudes, reflecting opinion and framing the public debate on the “refugee crisis”. The impact of the refugee crisis on debates on immigration is, however, not only seen in the language used by politicians, but also in how media portrayed *refugee* issues. In particular, in the case of the ongoing European refugee crisis, media had to cover fast-developing and complicated stories in the context of tragedy, loss of life and changing national and European policies. As it is widely acknowledged, it is impossible to ignore the role of the mass media in influencing public and elite political attitudes towards asylum and migration. As Cottle (2000, p. 2) argues: “The media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultur-

---

1 Frontex (2016) publishes risk analysis for 2016. Retrieved from: <http://frontex.europa.eu/news/frontex-publishes-risk-analysis-for-2016-NQuBFv>

2 Eurostat (2016, March 4) states that, in 2015, more than 1.2 million first-time asylum seekers were registered in the EU. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/7203832/3-04032016-AP-EN.pdf/790eba01-381c-4163-bcd2-a54959b99ed6>

al power. It is in and through representations, for example, that members of the media audience are variously invited to construct a sense of who “we” are in relation to who “we” are not”. While there are positive effects of media coverage of ethnic affairs, encouraging inclusion and raising awareness of diversity, research in many countries has found that refugees and migrants have tended to be framed negatively as a problem, rather than a benefit to host societies. Xenophobic and racist discourse has been normalized in many countries, with certain media outlets and politicians blaming refugees and migrants for economic and social problems. The representation of the “others”, the representation of cultural diversity and the reproduction of stereotypes, racism, hate speech and xenophobia through media have been key research topics. However, it also true that, on occasion, media can have positive impacts on public attitudes and policy. For years, the news media have published articles and photos of Syrian refugees. Thus, Alan Kurdi<sup>3</sup> was a three year-old Syrian boy whose lifeless body was photographed by Nilüfer Demir<sup>4</sup> after he drowned on 2 September 2015 in the Mediterranean Sea in a desperate attempt to find a better life.<sup>5</sup> Photographs<sup>6</sup> of Alan’s body pictured lifeless and face-down on the sand in Turkey, while fleeing Syria with his family, was seen as a turning point in the response to the crisis and dominated front pages of newspapers and top news headlines worldwide.<sup>7</sup>

Central to this, the role of the media emerged as crucial in providing a platform for this complex, controversial, newsworthy topic to be unpacked and presented to the public. In particular, the responsibility of

---

3 Alan Kurdi ([Kurdish](#): Alan Kurdi), initially reported as Aylan Kurdi across much mainstream and social media coverage. Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_of\\_Alán\\_Kurdi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Alán_Kurdi). The Kurdish spelling is in fact “Alan” as reported to the BBC by family members (see: BBC, Alan Kurdi death: A Syrian Kurdish family forced to flee. Retrieved from BBC News, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34141716>. This article reflects the correct Kurdish spelling of the name.

4 Speaking to Turkey’s Dogan News Agency (DHA), Demir said: “At that moment, when I saw the three-year-old Alan Kurdi, I was petrified. The only thing I could do was to make his outcry heard. At that moment, I believed I would be able to achieve this by clicking the shutter of my camera, and I took his picture”. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/dec/27/the-best-photographs-of-2015-in-picture>

5 Wikipedia. Death of Alan Kurdi. Available: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_of\\_Alán\\_Kurdi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_of_Alán_Kurdi)

6 These photographs selected for Time’s Top 10 photos of 2015 as the most influential images. Available: <http://time.com/4145154/top-10-photos-2015/>

7 The boy’s lifeless body was captured in a series of images released by a Turkish news agency. One of these showed a little boy wearing a bright red t-shirt and dark blue shorts lying face-down on a beach near the resort town of Bodrum. In another, a police officer carries the lifeless body of Alan Kurdi.

## I N T E R F A C E

the media to provide fair, compassionate and sensitive reporting was higher than ever. Overall, after photographs of the body of three – year old Alan Kurdi made headlines in the European press, media narratives changed significantly and contributed to the public perception of the “crisis”, shifting to an outpouring of solidarity and humanitarianism in September 2015. Alan’s images mobilized empathy and concern and powered emotional responses and attempts to act. More precisely, we address the following interrelated research questions: How are emotions referred to linguistically? How were these images presented by Greek media and how much did the language and frames adopted in the media promote understanding, responsibility or vulnerability towards this story? How do words allow us to understand these “obscure objects” that are our emotions?<sup>8</sup> What are the media narratives of the “Alan’s story”? By thinking about the emotional impact of text, affective responses and how they are articulated, these questions are pertinent in discussions of the media’s role in our lives today. The idea is to explore the ways in which discourse evokes, reveals and engages emotions.

Understanding how emotion is constructed and used in the media can help us to interpret journalists’ motivations and thoughts when presenting affecting stories or issues like Alan’s story, and to reveal the role of emotions in shaping our worldview. The article first provides interesting points and a discussion on emotive language and reviews a number of studies on critical discourse analysis. The analysis section will bring examples from the body of text analyses of this story, and finally some general conclusions and critical interpretations will be made in terms of the link between language use and the emotions in the Greek online newspapers.

An interesting point regarding this study is that “the power of visual imagery is well known, enshrined in such familiar sayings as “seeing is believing” and “a picture is worth a thousand words”. Iconic photos stir our emotions and transform our perspectives about life and the world in which we live”. (Slovic et al. 2017, p. 640). A photograph of a

---

<sup>8</sup> Blumenthal, P., Novakova, I., and Siemann, D. (eds) (2014). *Les émotions dans le discours/ Emotions in discourse*. Berlin: Peter Lang.

young Syrian child, Alan Kurdi, lying face-down on a Turkish beach, was viewed by more than 20 million people around the world within 12 hours on social media (Goriunova & Vis, 2015).<sup>9</sup> Added to this, Chouliaraki and Zaborowski (2017) find that, following Kurdi's death, there was an increase in humanitarian and more personalized reporting on refugees in newspapers.

What is also remarkable is that according to Google Trend data on the relative popularity of search terms "Syria," "refugees," and "Aylan," between August–September 2015 there was a dramatic increase in searches for the terms "Aylan," "refugees," and "Syria" on the days after publication of the photo (Slovic et al., 2017).

"These tragic photographs became what we call "iconic images" that represented the atrocity of the Syrian refugee crisis in a way that instantly and substantially affected individuals and society" (Goriunova & Vis, 2015, p.5). "An iconic photo of a single child had more impact than statistical of hundreds reports of thousands of deaths" (Slovic et al., 2017, p. 640).

## **1 Emotive Language**

Emotions exert an incredibly powerful force on human behavior. "The emotions are often defined, both in professional and in lay psychology, in contrast to cognition and rational thought. They are conceived to be natural bodily experiences and expressions, older than language, irrational and subjective, unconscious rather than deliberate, genuine rather than artificial, feelings rather than thoughts" (Edwards, 1999, p. 272-273). Emotive language is word choice that is used to evoke emotion and is intended to cause an effect (emotional response) on the audience. Different words can be used to cause different reactions in the audience. Loaded words are these highly emotional words, which elicit an emotional response (positive or negative) beyond their literal meaning and

---

<sup>9</sup> The emotional politics of this image were examined at length in a rapid response paper by the Visual Social Media Lab (2015).

## I N T E R F A C E

can significantly contribute to persuading the audience to adopt a specific point of view. “Words are often used to describe reality, to refer to objects and to communicate feelings, desires and emotions. Words can be powerful. They can move us, they can frighten us and they can lead us to action (Macagno & Walton, 2014, p. 1). ““War”, “peace”, “death”, “terrorist” and “security” are but a few of the innumerable terms that we read or hear every day and these words clearly lead us to draw a judgment, or feel uncomfortable with, or be attracted by a certain situation. When we encounter words of this kind, we do not simply acquire new information. We do not simply modify our systems of belief. We feel an emotion toward what the word is depicting. We fear a war. We are afraid of terrorists. We desire peace. We love children. These words are emotive because they trigger our emotions. They influence the way we regard the reality they represent. They affect our decisions concerning their referents. The emotive power of these words can make them extremely effective instruments to direct and encourage certain attitudes and choices. But at the same time, the very emotions that they evoke make them subtle tools to manipulate the others’ decisions and feelings” (Macagno & Walton, 2014, p. 5).

A key feature of emotion discourse is its deployment in *narrative* and *rhetoric*. Emotion terms occur not merely as one-off descriptions of specific acts or reactions, but as parts of interrelated sets of terms that implicate each other (syntagmatically) in narrative sequences, and also (paradigmatically) in rhetorically potent contrasts between alternative descriptions. Narrative sequence and rhetorical contrast are *ways of talking* about things, ways of constructing the sense of events, and orienting to normative and moral orders, to responsibility and blame, intentionality and social evaluation. Emotion categories are not graspable merely as individual feelings or expressions, and nor is their discursive deployment reducible to a kind of detached, cognitive sense-making. They are discursive phenomena and can be studied as such, as part of how talk performs social actions. Emotion discourse includes not only terms such as *anger*, *surprise*, *fear*, and so on, but also a rich set of metaphors. Emotion metaphors

can be considered *conceptual resources* that, where they occur in any language, whatever the metaphorical base, are available for discursive deployment.

(Edwards, 1999, p. 279-280)

Newspapers often choose emotive language (words) to get their readers to react emotionally to a story.<sup>10</sup> However, persuasive writing (such as emotive language) is often accompanied by visual material. The images that accompany the persuasive writing are often as powerful as the words themselves. Dramatic and real-world events have the power to impact on public opinion and to cause shifts in public attitudes (Sorrentino & Vidmar, 1974). News stories tend to be structured to resemble drama. Emotions are a principal ingredient in the photos and stories of newspapers and a major reason why people read them.

Bamberg argues (1997, p.309) that the relationship between language and emotions “can take place extralinguistically (e.g. by facial expressions, body postures, proximity, and the like), in terms of suprasegmentational and prosodic features, and in terms of linguistic (lexical and syntactic) forms”. Bamberg (1997, p. 309-310) starts from the assumption that “language in a way refers to, and therefore “reflects” objects in the world, among them the emotions: Languages have emotion terms, and people across the world engage in talk about the emotions... If language is conceived of as merely representing (in the sense of ‘mirroring’) the world of emotions and/or people’s conceptualizations and understandings of the emotions, language offers an immediate access. Language, in this view, is “transparent”. If language, however, is conceived of in one or another way as contributing to how emotions are understood, or even, to what emotions “are”, the relationship is not direct, but mediated”. According to Bamberg (1997, p.309) “language and

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Prof. and Head of the Department of Communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago Zizi Papacharissi “the balance between emotion and news is delicate. Journalists have always struggled with sentiment in reporting, trying to either manage their own emotions against the objectivity dogma of Western journalism or to find meaningful ways to integrate emotion into a story in general. The most masterful journalists, in their most memorable reporting, attain this perfect balance between emotion and information, color and news, the affective and the cognitive. By contrast, the form of news reporting least memorable is frequently characterized by excessive emotion, and the misinformation that excess produces. Available: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2012/12/the-return-of-sentiment/>

## I N T E R F A C E

emotion are two concurrent, parallel systems in use, and their relationship exists in that one system (emotions) impacts on the performance of the other (language). Both of them share their functionality in the communicative process between people". The media use of emotive language is the use of descriptive words to add colour or drama to the news report influencing public debate on the issue. A discourse that is highly loaded with emotions is more likely to reach citizen's hearts and minds and thus lead to actions, change of opinion.

### **2 Literature Review: Discourse Analysis as a method for understanding the emotive language and the emotional responses in journalistic discourse**

Reath (1998, p.54) asserted that language is one of the pivotal means in which "attitudes towards groups can be constructed, maintained or challenged". In the same way, Fowler (1991) argues that some texts have a direct role in shaping attitudes and ideas within a specific society. Our words are never neutral, they carry the power that reflects the interest of those who speak or write (Fiske, 1994). Language, as non-socially innocent, serves various purposes, expresses social stratification, values, preconceptions and infinite social determinants by providing and transferring numerous social and ideological information even though by using the simplest phrases (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis, 2017). Linguists' interest in discourse in recent times is gradually shifting from the traditional focus on the linguistic structure of text to how texts figure in the social process. Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 17) compare the relationship between discourse and language use to grammar and actual language use and argue that "in the same way as grammar characterizes the structure of sentences, discourse rules characterize utterances/texts that are acceptable within a certain practice". Van Dijk (1988a) provides a brief but useful review of the historical development of discourse analysis, linking its origins to classic rhetoricians such as Aristotle.

Khosravinik (2009, p. 478), drawing on Van Dijk, emphasizes that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) "by definition needs to account for



the links between its detailed textual linguistic analyses and various levels of socio-political contexts affecting the processes of production, distribution and interpretation of language". Critical Discourse Analysis, as an approach in discourse analysis, stems from a critical theory that perceives the use of language as a form of "social practice" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Fairclough, 2003). Fairclough's *Language and Power* (1989) is commonly considered to be the landmark publication for the start of CDA.<sup>11</sup> The purpose of Critical Discourse Analysis<sup>12</sup> is to analyze "opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language" (Wodak, 1995, p. 204). In agreement with the theory of the Critical Discourse Analysis, language is not powerful on its own, it gains power by the use powerful people make of it, specifically in new public spaces or new genres provided by globalized media (Fairclough, 2000a; Habermas, 2000; Hall, 2000a). According to van Leeuwen (1993, p. 193) Critical Discourse Analysis is concerned with both these aspects: "with discourse as the instrument of power and control as well as with discourse as the instrument of the social construction of reality". Fairclough's (1995) framework for Critical Discourse Analysis of communicative events involves the three overlapping dimensions of text, discourse practice and socio-cultural practice. "Choices and patterns in vocabulary (e.g. wording, metaphor), grammar (e.g. transitivity, modality), cohesion (e.g. conjunction, schemata), and text structure (e.g. episodic, turn-taking system) should be systematically analyzed" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). Analyzing texts involves areas such as structure, vocabulary or representation of actors through image, discourse or sound.

Any specialized form of discourse has its own unique language and media literacy is no exception. The basic issues of communications research were encapsulated by Harold Lasswell in 1948: "Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect".<sup>13</sup> Media language has al-

---

<sup>11</sup> Among the scholars who contributed to the development of CDA, Wodak, Fairclough and van Dijk are the most referenced and quoted in critical studies of media discourse.

<sup>12</sup> "CDA studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed." (Wodak, 1997, 173).

<sup>13</sup> In his article "The Structure and Function of Communication in Society", Lasswell (1948)

## I N T E R F A C E

ways attracted the attention of linguists, particularly applied linguists and sociolinguists. Garrett and Bell (1998, p. 6) point out that more than 40% of the papers published in the leading journal *Discourse & Society* are based on media texts.

Whether the media reflects or constructs reality or both is a question central to discourse analysis. “They are crucial presenters of culture, politics, and social life, shaping as well as reflecting how these are formed and expressed. Media ‘discourse’ is important both for what it reveals about a society and for what it contributes to the character of society” (Bell, 1995, p. 23). News offers an ideal source of data from which we can learn about social meanings and stereotypes through its mode of discourse and communication (Bell, 1995). More recently, Berry et al. (2015, p. 13) have also noted that media representations not only “reflect the events that are happening and views that are already ‘out there’ but actively contribute to the construction of the meaning of the events”.

The appearance of the new media and the development in the communication technology have brought huge transformations even in the conceptual term of public sphere and public discourse. The analysis of communication on social media is rapidly becoming a key-area in sociolinguistics and discourse studies. “Online communicative interactions constitute discursive practices that serve as a mechanism for publics to shape and construct their own opinions by sharing and discussing social media content and even by giving meaning to experiences that they directly or indirectly face” (Valentini et al., 2016, p. 4060). A variety of case-studies of social media afforded practices (e.g. sharing, tagging, Like & Follow) ranging from Youtube to Facebook and Twitter constitute the act of creating and sharing contents that carry specific language forms, meanings as well as illustrate the role of a range of language and multimodal resources in presenting ourselves and relating with others online. Couldry (2012) introduced the idea of ‘media practice’ to think about the way that media become incorporated into everyday lives in unremarkable and socially learned ways, such as ‘searching’, ‘sharing’, ‘showing’, ‘being shown’, ‘community’, the value of the ‘latest update’

---

developed the “5W” model of communication.

and the ‘new’. The wider field of discourse studies is still only beginning to turn its attention to social media despite a number of notable scholarly works (Bouvier, 2015). Social media offer new challenges and new possibilities, create new requirements for the study of multicultural discourses and “can be conceptualized as an emerging frontier where new forms of social relations causing power differences and other forms of unacceptable social practices develop at the intersection of human collective communicative acts and information technology” (Albert & Salam, 2013, p. 1).

Van Dijk’s (1991) theory of news discourse includes the relationship between news production and reception processes. Media discourse and public opinion are treated as two parallel systems of constructing meaning.<sup>14</sup>

According to van Dijk (1998), CDA is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive source of power, dominance, inequality and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political and historical contexts. Van Dijk (1995) perceives discourse analysis as ideology analysis<sup>15</sup> and this analysis is characterized by “a positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation”.<sup>16</sup> Major CDA studies on the Self and Other presentation within Wodak’s Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001) and Van Dijk’s Socio-Cognitive approaches have developed useful methodologies and proposed several analytical categories through which the representations of these groups in discourse are accounted for. The concept of ideology can be associated with language use. It means that ideologies are typically expressed and reproduced in and through language (Van Dijk, 1998).

---

14 According to W. A. Gamson & Andre Modigliani (1989) in their article “Media Discourse and Public Opinion on Nuclear Power: A Constructionist Approach”. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95 (1).

15 According to Van Dijk (1998) the basic sense of ideology is simply the system of ideas, beliefs, values, attitudes and categories by reference to a person, a group or a society perceives, comprehends and interprets the world. The sociocognitive model of Van Dijk is based on the assumption that cognition mediates between society and discourse.

16 Analyzing and making explicit this contrastive dimension of US versus THEM has been central to most of Van Dijk’s research and writings (1988a, 1991, 1995, 1998a).

## I N T E R F A C E

Most linguistic research on issues of asylum and immigration has taken a critical discourse analysis stance, which traditionally carries out a close analysis of a small sample of texts, focusing on aspects such as positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation and argumentative and linguistic strategies employed for predication, labeling, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation.

(Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008, p. 6)

Each of these strategies is manifested textually through a number of linguistic indicators, such as specific lexical items, along with adjectives, attributes, metaphors and the selection of verbs (Baker et al. 2008).

A critical analysis would not only be interested in accounting for what linguistic elements and processes exist in a text or set of texts, but would also need to explain why and under what circumstances and consequences the producers of the text have made specific linguistic choices among several other options that a given language may provide.

(Baker et al., 2008, p. 281)

Van Dijk (1991), for instance, examined the racist discourses which operated within the British press. Van Dijk's sociocognitive approach focuses on the schemata through which minorities are perceived and illustrated as well as on headlines in the press.<sup>17</sup>

Carefully sampled population of news headlines of stories about ethnic affairs, for example in *Racism in the Press*, yield evidence of the following statistical regularities in ethnic reporting: majority actors figure more prominently than minority...minorities more often get first position in headlines as agents of negative actions.

(Boyd-Barrett, 1994, p. 28)

---

<sup>17</sup> The headlines represent "Others" as penetrators and agents as anonymous and criminal, whereas the police and victims are passivized and presented as suffering. (Van Dijk, 1991).

The journalistic discourse helps to define, share, and maintain racial stereotypes, cultivates the racial prejudice and contributes to the reproduction of racism as a form of ethnic or “racial” domination. It does so typically by expressing, confirming or legitimating racist opinions, attitudes and ideologies of the dominant ethnic group (Chatzisavvidis, 1999). The journalistic language serves as a vehicle of evaluation judgments and dissemination/ maintenance of negative stereotypes (Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis, 2017).

As this humanitarian crisis, the so-called “refugee crisis”, continues to unfold before our eyes and to remain controversial newsworthy topic about which people have strong opinions, we need to be sensitive to language that may pollute rational discourse over what is undeniably an extremely complex issue. The importance of language when discussing the current situation should not be understated.

Language is being extensively used, many times with specific intent, to stigmatize those crossing borders and create a hostile environment for refugees. The choice of words (asylum seekers, refugees or migrants) has the potential power to influence public perception and opinion. The power of journalists lies in choosing the content of their writing, the words they use and the linguistic means they embed. Patterns of usage attribute semantic properties and prosodies to lexical choice. The word choice use can be judged on the intention of the person using it and the effect on the person about whom it is used. Inaccurate terminology and commentary has increased confusion, misinformation and that breeds prejudice (UNHCR, 2016). The specific linguistic choices under which the phenomenon is analyzed – humanitarian crisis, security threat, effects on economy and welfare- shapes the public debate. In addition to these commonly shared frameworks, news reporting about refugees often tends to be framed negatively, as a problem rather than a benefit to hosting societies (Berry et al., 2015, p.5). Various studies demonstrate collectivization – meaning that refugees and immigrants are often constructed as a unanimous group with shared characteristics and motivations- as a common strategy that is used for the negative or positive portrayal of refugees in news media (KhosraviNik, 2010, p. 17).

## I N T E R F A C E

However, this does not mean that there is a single mode of depiction in the representation of refugees, but there are “multiple viable narratives” that interweave with one another (Caviedes, 2015, p. 912).

This study seeks to better understand the role that the media plays in shaping and creating emotional responses. The words we use can be signs of our emotions. Media narratives can be powerful as well as images and photographs can also stimulate intense emotional engagement.<sup>18</sup> The heart-breaking reality of the Syrian refugee crisis failed to reach many people on an emotional level until the tragic death of the three-year old Alan Kurdi in 2015. By acknowledging the emotional impact of Alan Kurdi’s death and the power of the media language and the affective images, we will attempt to reconstruct the media’s role in portraying and shaping emotional styles in contemporary society. It is argued that such insights into the functioning of language help to reveal in which way the building of consensus (Chomsky, 1987) through the emotive aligning of the journalist with his or her audience is achieved as an essential feature of persuasive discourse.

### 3 Methodology

The present study was based on the linguistic representations of Alan Kurdi’s death in online news stories on September 2015 in Greece -in the days immediately after the publication of Alan Kurdi’s image (from 2/9/2015 until 15/9/2015)-during which the publication of the shocking photos was subject to heightened media interest. This research seeks to show how emotional responses are hidden underneath the surface structures of language choices in media texts looking into the texts through the traditionally qualitative approach of CDA. Obviously, the key word for this period of analysis is “refugee boy”. The selection of articles was based on the use of the key words ““Aylan Kurdi”, Alan Kurdi”, “three-year old Syrian boy”, “Syrian boy”, “drowned boy” “drowned child” along with visual representations and especially the predominant im-

---

<sup>18</sup> The image of Aylan Kurdi (Alan Kurdi), appeared to capture and provoke feelings of grief, shame and frustration, all expressed by individuals, reporters and politicians.

ages of drowned Alan into the newspaper website search tools. A total of twenty (20) Greek online news articles were selected randomly for analysis among well-known and the most-read exclusively online news website with no restriction on their type and ideological stand. Appendix lists the online Greek articles along with their publication dates and headlines. Discourse analysis is an active and dynamic discipline and it is to be applied in this research by selecting and collecting data and by analyzing the data in accordance with its principles. The Critical Discourse Analysis is a major tool for analyzing the news articles and reports and for understanding the emotional responses. The CDA component of our project was based on categories of analysis taken from the Discourse Historical Approach in CDA (DHA), created by Ruth Wodak and collaborators at the University of Vienna, which “made an important contribution in systematizing the methodologies for analyzing out-groups in discourse and developed an index of major argumentative and discursive dimensions of “anti-foreigner” discourses” (Khosravinik, 2010, p. 4). Based on the literature, the CDA approach we adopted focused on macro-structural approaches, such as the specific genre, and on text-inherent categories developed in the DHA approach of CDA. The five-level analytical method proposed by the Discourse Historical Approach (Wodak, 2001), consisting of looking at Referential strategies (naming), Predicational strategies (attribution), Argumentative strategies (*topoi*) and Perspectivization, Mitigation and Intensification strategies, is relevant to the aims and scope of this study. Van Dijk’s (1991) analytical categories such as Discourse topics: definition of macro-topics of the text under analysis and the definitions of sub-topics of the respective parts of passages of the data, as well as genre specific features of the data play an important role in this study. Some of Van Dijk’s (1991) proposed categories overlap with DHA’s methods, e.g. the macro-topics and the strategy of naming the participant.

## 4 Results and Discussion

Within the framework of this paper two representational key themes are identified in the analysis and are discussed in the following sections: the *humanitarian crisis theme* and the *power of personal stories and testimonies*. A number of sub-themes emerged in relation to the language and associations made in the media framings of Alan's story. On the topic analysis level, news articles' coverage is generally emotional and sympathetic towards the refugee boy and his family, both on the discourse topics and the micro-linguistic levels and structures. In particular, the articles draw on humanization and victimization in focusing on the plight of the refugees by putting the events in narrative form with ample extensivation, by providing detailed information on the names, places and conditions of the refugees. It also uses a significant number of direct quotations on the part of the victims with a frequent use of proper names. The articles humanize the people involved through individualization which characterizes the individuals involved in terms of who they are and what they do. "Predicational strategy represents the actors as being involved in ordinary and familiar actions and thus the readers can more easily identify with the people described and sympathize with them" (KhosraviNik, 2010, p. 20). More process of humanization and victimization through the referential strategy of describing the actor and surrounding information of the conditions.

This process is categorically the same discursive strategy used in media discourses in negative representations of refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers in other periods or events. However, these discursive characteristics function differently from those of other periods or events and they create a sense of humanisation and an appeal for support. Drawing on topoi of human rights, ethics and human values, all the analysed newspapers reflect a generally sympathetic macro-structure, position themselves in the macro argumentation of the "humanisation" and adopt the same discursive and linguistic strategies. In terms of the link between macro-structures- ideologies- and micro-linguistic structures, the articles of this study are more 'sensational' through employing more vivid descriptions, visual representations of the situation by



relying on emotion, human interest and first-hand experiences.

1. *Aylan's distraught father, Abdullah Kurdi, tried and failed to hold on to his wife and two sons after their boat to the Greek island of Kos capsized.*
2. *The family had been making the treacherous journey across Turkey to Europe in the hope of joining Abdullah's sister, Teema Kurdi, a hairdresser who has lived in Vancouver, Canada for more than 20 years.*
3. *A sense of weary resignation at the plight of the Syrians was briefly punctured by horrifying images of one of the young victims, a small boy whose body was discovered by a Turkish police officer.*
4. *Alan Kurdi was one of a million. The three-year-old Syrian boy and his family fled the war engulfing their country, hoping to join relatives in the safety of Canada. They were part of a historic flow of refugees from the Middle East to Europe this year, and they followed the dangerous route taken by so many others.*
5. *In the early hours of Sept. 2, the family crowded onto a small inflatable boat on the beach of Bodrum, Turkey. A few minutes into the journey to Greece, the dinghy capsized. Alan, his older brother Ghalib and his mother Rihanna all drowned, joining the more than 3,600 other refugees who died in the eastern Mediterranean this year.*
6. *The picture, taken on Wednesday morning, depicted the dark-haired toddler, wearing a bright-red T-shirt and shorts, washed up on a beach, lying face down in the surf not far from Turkey's fashionable resort town of Bodrum. A second image portrays a grim-faced policeman carrying the tiny body away.*
7. *Syria was already at war when Alan Kurdi was born. He died with his five-year-old brother, Galip, and mother, Rehan. Their father, Abdullah, survived.*

#### 4.1 Humanitarian crisis theme

Because of the photo showing a dead child, Demir's photo had been circulated in all major European newspapers within 24 hours and the picture became a symbol of the humanitarian crisis in Syria.<sup>19</sup> Responses were immediate and highly emotional provoking empathy, anger, shame, frustration. Alan's heartbreaking story opened people's eyes and souls to the plight of refugees around the world and united everyone in supporting them.

The photographs of Kurdi have been described as "iconic," comparable to photographs of children in times of humanitarian crises.

Humanitarian photos are composed, edited, narrated and circulated with an eye toward creating a specific effect: to stimulate emotion, such as empathy or outrage, in viewers, and cause them to act...Historically, images of suffering have been mobilized, including extreme suffering, to enhance sympathy, empathy and a sense of responsibility or guilt in its viewers. Triggering emotional response has been, and continues to be, one effective way to shape public understanding of both what is going on "out there" and what is "at stake".

(Fehrenbach & Rodogno, 2015, p. 1125-1126)

Thus, the photo of Alan Kurdi symbolizes the war in Syria and the crisis faced by the millions of people fleeing the war and hoping for a more promising future on the other side of the sea. The toddler has become a tragic human face of the humanitarian crisis, a symbol, an icon, an emblem and an emotional vehicle reminding us of the meaninglessness of war and depicting the reality of the desperate situation facing many refugees. Alan's body could also represent the hundreds lives lost during the European migrant crisis. In other words, Alan was seen as a

---

<sup>19</sup> "Because children are vulnerable and blameless – the purest victims – depictions of their suffering have an extraordinarily visceral impact," writes the American academic and essayist Susie Linfield in her book, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (2010). University of Chicago Press. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/sep/06/photograph-refugee-crisis-aylan-kurdi>

human being, a tiny, innocent child, who no one could argue deserved his death.<sup>20</sup>

Drawing on the work of Norman Fairclough (1995), this research employs Critical Discourse Analysis, as described before, and argues that the generic structure and use of particular metaphors form the basis of emerging ideological perspectives. The metaphors add understanding and vividness to writing can reinforce a point without mere repetition, create interest and powerful and lasting images and ideas, add colour and are often witty. “Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person’s conceptual system” (Lacoff & Johnson, 1980, p.6). The use of metaphors do not seem to be working towards a negative representation of the refugee boy in this event and in fact they seem to argue for more humanitarian help. For example, the “human face” incorporates the metaphor of humanitarian perspective that can be illustrated by shocking images of the three-year old drowned boy and dramatic headlines and narratives of the human suffering of the refugees. Furthermore, loaded language (also known as emotive language) attempts to influence an audience by using appeal to emotion. Loaded words and phrases have strong emotional implications characterized by emotional connotations or specific emotional reactions. Using specific words consciously and correctly can dramatically improve journalists’ persuasive power and their ability to engage their audience. Facts are replaced by the most flowery adjectives making the emotional connection the centerpiece of the story. Below emotional terms and phrases and metaphorically used expressions (*italic*) are used widely in articles’ headlines and the choice of these words can highlight the outpouring of emotion after the image emerged and can importantly influence how the story has been presented. The point of the following loaded language is not to make the readers think clearly and objectively about this tragic death emerged, but to transfer the negative emotions associated with the words to the situation being described.

---

20 Kirstine Sinclair, PhD, Associate Professor at the Centre for Contemporary Middle East Studies, SDU argues: “Children represent the future and are expected to outlive their parents and secure the survival of the human race. Therefore, the death of a child is perceived as unnatural. And the death of a child which could have been prevented or avoided is perceived as not only unnatural or unfair but morally indefensible”. A Dead Boy on a Beach (October, 2015). Retrieved from [https://www.sdu.dk//media/files/om\\_sdu/centre/c\\_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2015/october/sinclair+article+final.pdf](https://www.sdu.dk//media/files/om_sdu/centre/c_mellemoest/videncenter/artikler/2015/october/sinclair+article+final.pdf)

## I N T E R F A C E

8. Images of the drowned refugee boy have appeared on front pages and news sites worldwide and *put a grim face* on the migrant crisis.
9. The image of Abdullah Kurdi's infant son lying dead on a Turkish beach in September *forced the world to face up* to the refugee crisis.
10. More has emerged about the death of three-year-old Aylan, pictured here smiling with his brother, whose story *has given a face* to the refugee crisis.
11. The toddler's *lonely* death on September 2, 2015 moved millions and *caused an international outcry*.
12. *Shocking* images of drowned Syrian boy *show tragic plight* of refugees.
13. *Humanity washed ashore*.
14. *Heartbreaking* pictures of a dead refugee boy on a Turkish beach.
15. Image of 3-year-old who washed ashore *underscores Europe's refugee crisis*.
16. Aylan Kurdi's story: How a *small* Syrian child came to be washed up on a beach in Turkey.
17. Image of Drowned Syrian Boy *Echoes Around World*.
18. Charlie Hebdo cartoon depicting drowned child Alan Kurdi *sparks racism debate*.
19. In 2015, the photograph of Alan, lying dead on a Turkish beach, *became the defining symbol of the tragedy* of Syria's refugees.
20. Image of Drowned Syrian, Aylan Kurdi, 3, *Brings Migrant Crisis Into Focus*.
21. The picture that *moved a world*.

### 4.1.1 Artistic representations of the image

Furthermore, the image of Alan Kurdi's body, lying face down on a beach in Turkey and the emotions aroused became subject of many

artistic representations of the image. Alongside this, the way that his body was positioned looked like a sleeping child. The formulation of this image was iconic and led to multiple response images being made. The scene with the dead boy on the beach has been documented by various artists and activists aiming at raising awareness, expressing protest and maintaining public attention. Visual metaphors generated provide us with insight into the sentiments of “people like us” and create their own stories reflecting their feelings about refugee crisis. For example, a Moroccan NGO paid tribute to Alan Kurdi and recreated the discovery of three-year-old’s body and in Gaza, Palestinians paid tribute to Kurdi by building a giant sand sculpture of him in his characteristic blue and red clothes. In Frankfurt, German artists painted a mural of Alan Kurdi on a wall next to the European Central Bank headquarters.

22. Artists Around The World *Respond To Tragic Death Of 3-Year-Old Syrian Refugee*.
23. *Cartoonists respond* to image of Aylan Kurdi.
24. Unpacking artistic responses to the Alan Kurdi image.
25. A graffiti depicting the drowned Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi in Brazil.
26. *Tribute*: A giant sand sculpture of the little Aylan in Gaza.

#### **4.2 The Power of Actors’ Personal Stories**

The second representational theme emerged centres on the personal stories that are, at their core, human. “Their power may be related to people’s tendencies to match other people’s emotions” (Carstarphen, 2004, p.183). The most powerful way to reach an audience is through the actors’ emotions. Personal stories influence minds, motivate action, improve understanding, develop empathy with the “other” and help people feel bonded and connected to the “other” at an emotional level. They touch people because they express real and personal experiences, feelings and meanings. “Personal stories are windows through which we can see and feel the other side and their life experiences” (Carstarphen, 2004, p.184). This research sheds some light on that and suggests that sharing personal stories associated with the tragic death of the three

## I N T E R F A C E

year old boy may be a key process that encourages acknowledgement, awareness and attitude change. Personal stories break through the people's stereotypes and fears toward the other side -the refugees- by helping them. People begin to understand and recognize the other's perspectives, needs, values and core concerns and naturally connect with the emotions they are expressing. Through this process, they begin to empathize with the other and often recognize echoes of their emotions, their own values in the postings of others.

A dramatic family story and in-depth interviews with people whose life experiences and feelings touch readers and give the insights into their minds and hearts. The articles humanize the case in point by giving the full background story. For example, news articles analyzed place an emphasis on the personal stories and report Alan Kurdi's story, the testimony of the photographer behind image of dead Syrian boy, the story of Alan Kurdi's father, the statement of Police Officer who discovered Alan's body and the testimony of Alan's aunt Fatima Kurdi.

### **4.2.1 Alan Kurdi's Story**

A story evolved beyond the tragic fact of Alan's death associated with the widespread anguish and outrage it had provoked as illustrated in the following extracts of the news articles:

27. Alan Kurdi's Story: Behind The Most Heartbreaking Photo of 2015.
28. The story behind the images that shocked Europe.
29. That Little Syrian Boy: Here's Who He Was.
30. Aylan Kurdi, 3, was found on a Turkish beach in sneakers, blue shorts and a red shirt after the small rubber boat he and his family were in capsized in a desperate voyage from Turkey to Greece.
31. Aylan died along with 5-year-old brother Galip and his mother, Rehan, leaving their distraught father, Abdullah, to cope with his sudden, overwhelming loss. He said Thursday he wanted one thing and one thing only: to sit by

- the graves of his wife and children.
32. The drowned boy was 3-year-old Aylan Kurdi, from Syria, part of a group of 23 trying to reach the Greek island of Kos. They'd set out in two boats on the 13-mile Aegean journey, but the vessels capsized.
  33. Aylan Kurdi's 5-year-old brother, Galip, also drowned, as did the boys' mother, Rehan. Their father, Abdullah, survived. In all, five children from that journey are reported dead.

#### **4.2.2 Photographer behind image of dead Syrian boy**

On 2nd September 2015 it was Nilufer Demir, a photographer working for Turkey's Dogan News Agency, who came upon Alan's body while crossing the beach in Bodrum. She explained the reason for taking these memorable pictures and discussed in the following extracts of news articles:

34. Photographer behind image of dead Syrian boy: "I wanted to express his silent scream".
35. Photographer who took picture of drowned toddler Aylan Kurdi says she had to "make this tragedy heard".
36. Photographer describes 'scream' of migrant boy's 'silent body'.
37. The best thing to do was to make this tragedy heard. At that moment, when I saw the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, I was petrified. He was lying lifeless face down in the surf, in his red T-shirt and dark blue shorts folded to his waist. The only thing I could do was to make his outcry heard. When I realised there was nothing to do to bring that boy back to life I thought I had to take his picture ... to show the tragedy.
38. There was nothing left to do for him. There was nothing left to bring him back to life. I did the only thing I could: I raised her camera and began shooting.
39. There was nothing to do except take his photograph ...

## I N T E R F A C E

and that is exactly what I did. I thought, this is the only way I can express the scream of his silent body.

40. I was on duty and also photographed a group of Pakistani migrants in an attempt to cross into Greece. While witnessing the tragedy, suddenly we noticed the lying, lifeless bodies. We recognized the bodies belonged to toddlers. We were shocked, we felt sorrow for them .The best thing to do was to make this tragedy heard.
41. At that moment, when I saw the three-year-old Aylan Kurdi, I was petrified. He was lying lifeless face down in the surf, in his red T-shirt and dark blue shorts folded to his waist. The only thing I could do was to make his outcry heard.
42. He was laying on the beach the same way. He also had his shirt, his shorts and shoes on. They had nothing - no life vest, no arm floats, no life buoy to keep them floating on the water. This actually revealed how tragic that moment was. I thought the only thing for me to do was to take their photographs to make sure Turkey and the world sees this. I didn't think it would bring this much attention when I was taking the photograph. However, with the pain I felt when I saw Aylan, the only thing on my mind was to pass along this to the public. I didn't think anything else. I just wanted to show their tragedy.

### **4.2.3 Alan Kurdi's father on his family tragedy**

The father of the family, the only survivor, described the desperate ordeal to save his family and revealed the heartbreaking story of family's last moments:

43. I should have died with them.
44. My kids were the most beautiful children in the world. My kids were amazing. They woke me up every morning to play with them. They are all gone now.
45. I took over and started steering. The waves were so high



- and the boat flipped. I took my wife and my kids in my arms and I realized they were all dead.
46. All I want is to be with my children at the moment.
  47. The Turk [smuggler] jumped into the sea, then a wave came and flipped us over. I grabbed my sons and wife and we held onto the boat.
  48. We stayed like that for an hour, then the first [son] died and I left him so I can help the other, then the second died, so I left him as well to help his mom and I found her dead...I spent three hours waiting for the coast guard to come. The life jackets we were wearing were all fake.
  49. I was holding my wife's hand. But my children slipped through my hands. It was dark and everyone was screaming.
  50. I tried to catch my wife and children but there was no hope. One by one, they died.
  51. I will stay and fight for Kobani, fight for the family I have left and for my people. I feel like I have lost everything, that my life is over, but I must fight and struggle for what's left.

#### **4.2.4 Police officer's story**

Mehmet Ciplak, the Police Officer, who discovered Alan's body and carefully carried him out of the water, speaking about the tragedy describes the moment he realized the three-year-old was dead. He was pictured carrying the lifeless three-year-old from the beach in Bodrum in an image, which prompted international outrage over Europe's migration crisis.

52. I was just doing my job.
53. When I saw the baby on the beach, I approached the baby and said to myself: "Dear God, I hope he's alive".
54. When I found out he was dead, I was crushed deep down inside.
55. It was a terrible sight, it was a terrible loss.

## I N T E R F A C E

56. I am a father of a six-year-old boy. I thought of my own son, the moment I saw the boy.
57. I put him in my son's place. There was an indefinable pain.
58. I didn't see the photographer and didn't know the picture was being taken.

### 4.2.5 Alan's aunt Fatima Kurdi

Alan's aunt Fatima Kurdi, who lives in Canada shared her story and said in statements:

59. When the boat flipped upside down and the waves kept pushing down, those two boys were in his arms.
60. He tried with all his power to push them up above the water to breathe and they screamed: "Daddy, please don't die". Mr Abdullah realized Galip had died, so he let him go. He tried to save the second one, Aylan. He looked at him and there was blood coming from his eyes. So he closed his eyes and he let him go. He looked around for his wife. She was floating in the water.
61. The funeral was very hard for him, I wish I was there for him. He felt lonely not to have his sisters, brothers and dad with him. But he understands because of the war we are all in separate places. But he said he has lots and lots of relatives with him. He really appreciates their help and I want to thank them so much too. He is so proud of his kids – that they are the wake up call to the world, he is proud of them because they will make it better for other Syrians in desperate need.

## 5 Conclusion

Although much debate revolves around the idea of the publication of the photo of Alan Kurdi, whether or not a photo of a child should be circulated, the present study reconstructed this notion by revealing an ex-

traordinary wave of sympathy and compassion expressed through media and by demonstrating that media language is not neutral. Throughout all the detailed text analyses an analytical framework emerged which shows how the micro-level analytical categories are linked to the macrostructures at work. Within such a context, this study revealed that there are major similarities in the micro-linguistic categories used in the representation of the drowned refugee boy by the Greek online media, e.g. loaded words, metaphors, as well as the overall communicated messages are similar and the macro-structural contexts behind the processes of interpretation of these discourses play a determining role in transferring certain meanings and they all contribute to a similar construction of this tragic story, which means that the issue became a symbol of the refugee crisis and should be taken up in a basic human rights perspective.

As noted above, our findings suggest all the articles analyzed in our study as mediated emotional and humane narratives of the dramatic situation and actually include a rich variety and situated uses of emotional words and metaphors. This paper identified and documented the use of emotional representations as the narrative focus in news headlines and stories. Refugee emotions were featured in the Greek journalistic discourse and appeared from the narrative as a point of solidarity to the plight of these vulnerable people. Based on the above analysis, one can safely argue that emotive language is widely used and alongside with the heartbreaking photos of Alan Kurdi's lifeless body is intended to inspire emotion in the recipient. In this major humanitarian story and in particular in this corpus data analyzed, we see journalists informing and presenting humanitarian aspects and realities of the tragedy, in other words we see journalists living the story rather just telling it. This engagement becomes apparent through the use of dramatized and strongly stigmatized words and phrases with clear focus on verbal structures. Besides, the choice of a verbal against a nominal structure shows a deeper blending and participation of the descriptor in the event that is transferred in a wide audience. In contrast, the choice of a noun demonstrates a more descriptive function of the discourse by the user, who is usually distant from the event. It is clearly observed the media's attempt to humanize

## I N T E R F A C E

the impact of war and the drama of millions of refugees expressing emotional outbursts ranging from anger, empathy, grief, shame, revulsion, activism of media coverage. Without the media's interference and emotional discourse, the only thing that is displayed in the photo of Alan Kurdi, is a death of an anonymous child. With more context and specific linguistic approach, the pain of the child and his family's tragic situation becomes an opportunity for the reader to sympathize. In this case, Alan Kurdi was no longer another anonymous death but become a symbol of Europe's refugee crisis. These shocking and disturbing pictures were a particularly powerful means of communication, haunted and captivated us, whereas media narratives helped us understand them. These photographs struck an emotional chord with viewers and served as a wakeup call for citizens and governments in Europe to find ways to help the thousands of refugees.

Our conclusions are subject to limitations. A larger sample size, achieved by choosing a longer timeframe or including more publications could have increased the validity of our conclusions. Our analysis included only online news and therefore cannot be taken as representative of the wider media's role in representing the emotional responses. Our approach consisted of critical discourse analysis, which is more oriented towards providing a critical perspective and carried out a close analysis of a small sample of texts in the corpus, identifying discursive strategies such as labeling social actors, forms of argumentation and strategies of intensification or mitigation. "Corpus linguistics methodology can also be used to triangulate the findings of Critical Discourse Analysis studies, which allows for a higher degree of objectivity and enables the researcher to approach the texts (relatively) free from any preconceived notions regarding their linguistic or semantic pragmatic content" (Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008: 7). A corpus approach guards against the accusation that critical discourse analysts could "cherry-pick" or intentionally select data or linguistic features for analysis to prove as preconceived point (Baker & Levon, 2015, p. 222). Van Dijk (2006, p. 115) describes his approach to Critical Discourse Analysis as having a "theoretical framework that is multi-disciplinary, articulated by the fundamental triangulation of discourse, cognition and society", while

Wodak (2007, p. 210) notes that “one of the most salient features of the discourse –historical approach is its endeavor to work interdisciplinary, multimethodically and on the basis of a variety of different empirical data as well as context theories”. Such an approach is described by Baker et al. (2008) as a “useful methodological synergy”. Additionally, the image had a significant effect on shifting public perception to the Syrian refugee crisis as well as sparking a debate around the ethics of the circulation of such images. Further research might analyze the multitude of underlying, connected, contradicted and changing emotional responses and the contrasting ideological perspectives expressed through the media before and after the initial circulation of the photo, might capture the dynamically changing frame surrounding the dramatic situation and might reflect the problematic nature of the photograph, weighing up its potential power to offend as well as move hearts. The story behind his tragic death is more complicated than it first appeared. Linguistic report on emotions poses special challenges for journalistic objectivity for various reasons. Substituting facts and evidence with words that evoke emotions is considered to be an attempt to manipulate others into accepting the truth of the arguments. However, journalists do not emphasize on crisis according to humanitarian need or objective levels of severity, but rather by emotive stories, by powerful images, by human drama. In other words, they select and publish news stories based on their experience of what sells papers and what the public wants to read. So, the question remains whether the use of emotive language represent a moralizing function or a commercial promotion of the journalistic discourse.

Concluding, we had to deal with an extremely interesting case of switching primary and secondary functions of the language, such as language ideology, propaganda, socio-poetic function and the commercial function of language.

## References

- Albert, C. S. & Salam A.F. (2013). "Critical Discourse Analysis: Toward Theories in Social Media". *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Americas Conference on Information Systems, Chicago, Illinois (August 2013)*.
- Baker P., Gabrielatos C., Khosravini M., et al. (2008). "A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press". *Discourse & Society*, 19(3): 273–306.
- Baker, P. & Levon, E. (2015). "Picking the right cherries? A comparison of corpus-based and qualitative analyses of news articles about masculinity". *Discourse & Communication*, 9(2), 221-236.
- Bamberg, M. (1997). "Language, Concepts and Emotions: The Role of Language in the Construction of Emotions". *Language Sciences*, 19(4), 309-40.
- Bell, A. (1995). "Language and the Media". *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 15, 23–41.
- Bell, A. (1991). *The Language of News Media*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Berry, M., Garcia-Blanco, I. & Moore, K. (2015). *Press coverage of the refugee and migrant crisis in the EU: A content analysis of five European countries. Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*. Retrieved October 20, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/56bb369c9.htm>
- Blommaert, J. & Bulcaen, C. (2000). "Critical Discourse Analysis". *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 29, 447-66.
- Boyd-Barrett, O. (1994). "Language and media: A Question of convergence", in David Graddol & Oliver-Boyd-Barret (Eds.), *Media Texts: Authors and Readers* (pp.121-155). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Bouvier, G. (2015). "What is a discourse approach to Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other social media: connecting with other academic fields?" *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 10 (2),149-162.
- Carstarphen, N. (2004 ). "Making the "Other" Human: The Role of Personal Stories to Bridge Deep Differences", in Hannah Slavik (Ed.), *International Communication and Diplomacy* (pp. 177-196). Malta and Geneva: Diplo- Foundation.
- Caviedes, A. (2015). "An emerging "European" news portrayal of immigration?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 41 (6), 897-917.
- Chatzissavidis, S. (1999). *Greek Language and Journalistic Discourse: Theoretical*

- and Research Approaches*. Athens: Gutenberg.
- Chomsky, N. (1987). *The manufacture of consent*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Zaborowski, R. (2017). "Voice and community in the refugee crisis: A content analysis of newspaper narratives in eight European countries". *International Communication Gazette*, 79(7), 613–635.
- Cottle, S. (2002). *Ethnic minorities and the media*. London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Couldry, N. 2012. *Media, society, world: Social theory and digital media practice*. London: Polity.
- Edwards, D. (1999). "Emotion Discourse". *Culture Psychology*, 5 (3), 271-291.
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Discourse and Power*. London: Longman.
- . (1995). *Media Discourse*. London: Edward Arnold.
- . (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Discourse*. London: Longman Group.
- . (2000a). "Critical analysis of media discourse", in P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media Studies* (pp. 308-325). New York: New York University Press.
- . (2003). *Analysing Discourse*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. & Wodak, R. (1997). "Critical discourse analysis", in T.A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Introduction to discourse analysis* (pp. 258-284). London: Sage.
- Fehrenbach, Heide & Rodogno, Davide (2015). "A horrific photo of a drowned Syrian child: Humanitarian photography and NGO media strategies in historical perspective". *International Review of the Red Cross*, 97 (900), 1121-1155.
- Fiske, J. (1994). *Media matters: Everyday culture and political change*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the news: Discourse and ideology in the press*. London: Routledge.
- Gabrielatos, C. & Baker, P. (2008). "Fleeing, sneaking, flooding: a corpus analysis of discursive constructions of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press 1996–2005". *Journal of English Linguistics*, 36(1), 5–38.
- Garrett, P. & Bell, A. (1998). "Media Discourse: A Critical Overview" in A. Bell & P. Garrett (Eds.), *Approaches to media discourse* (pp.1-21). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Goriunova O. & Vis F. (2015). *The Iconic Image on Social Media: A Rapid Research Response to the Death of Aylan Kurdi*. Visual Social Media Lab, Sheffield, UK. Retrieved October 20, 2017, from <http://visualsocialmedialab.org/>

## I N T E R F A C E

### [projects/the-iconic-image-on-social-media](#)

- Habermas, J. (2000). "The public space" in. P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media Studies* (pp. 92-98). New York: New York University Press.
- Hall, S. (2000a). "Encoding/decoding", in P. Marris & S. Thornham (Eds.), *Media Studies* (pp. 51-61). New York: New York University Press.
- KhosraviNik M. (2009). "The representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers during the Balkan conflict (1999) and the British general election (2005)". *Discourse & Society*, 20 (4), 477-498. London: Sage.
- . (2010). "The representation of refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in British newspapers: A critical discourse analysis". *Journal of Language and Politics*, 9 (1), 1-28.
- Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.
- Macagno F. & Walton D. (2014). *Emotive Language Argumentation*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- McCombs M. (2004). *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge, England: Polity Press.
- Reath, A. (1998). *Language and ideology*. London. Routledge.
- Reisigl, M. and Wodak, R. (2001). *Discourse and Discrimination: Rhetorics of Racism and Anti-Semitism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Slovic, P., Västfjäll, D., Erlandsson, A. & Gregory, R. (2017). "Iconic photographs and the ebb and flow of empathic response to humanitarian disasters". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 114 (4), 640-644.
- Sorrentino R.M. & Vidmar N. (1974). "Impact of events: Short-vs long-term effects of a crisis". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 38, 271-279.
- Tsitsanoudis-Mallidis, N. (2017). *The journalistic language as a vehicle of evaluation judgments and dissemination/ maintenance of negative stereotypes*. Speech at Seminar organized by Hellenic Broadcasting Corporation for journalists, communicators and organizations working in the area of migration and minorities within the "Respect Words: Ethical Journalism Against Hate Speech" project, which aims to combat hate speech, racist and xenophobic projections in the European media. Asociación De Emisoras Municipales Y Comunitarias De Andalucía De Radio Y Televisión, Comharchumann Cumarsaide Pobal Bhaile Atha Cliath, ERREPI S.p.A - RA-



- DIO POPOLARE, Radio Student Association - RADIO STUDENT, Foundation For Civil Radio Broadcasting (CIVIL RADIO), Radio Dreyeckland Betriebs GmbH, International Press Institute.
- Valentini, C., Romenti, S. & Kruckeberg, D. (2016). "Language and Discourse in Social Media Relational Dynamics: A Communicative Constitution Perspective". *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 4055–4073
- Van Dijk, T. (1988a). *News as Discourse*. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- . (1991). *Racism and the Press*. London: Routledge.
- . (1995). *Discourse analysis as ideology analysis*. London: Sage.
- . (1998a). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. London: Sage.
- . (2006). "Ideology and discourse analysis". *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.
- Van Leeuwen, T. (1993). *Language and representation: The recontextualisation of participants, activities and reactions*, Department of Linguistics thesis, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia.
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2014, 28 April). *Remarks by Antonio Guterres, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Conference on the Syrian Refugee Situation – Supporting Stability in the Region*. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/544fb4189.html>
- . (2015a, 30 December). *Over One Million Sea Arrivals Reach Europe in 2015*. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/5683d0b56.html>
- . (UNHCR) (2016). *Reporting on refugees: Guidance By and for journalists*. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from <http://www.unhcr.org/publications/brochures/58e1ed994/reporting-on-refugees-guidelines-by-and-for-journalists.html>
- Wodak, R. (1995). "Critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis", in J. Verschuren, J. O. Ostman & J. Blommaert (Eds.), *Handbook of pragmatics: manual* (pp. 204-210). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- . "Critical Discourse Analysis and the Study of Doctor-Patient Interaction" in B-L. Gunnarsson, P. Linell, & B. Nordberg (Eds.), *The Construction of Professional Discourse* (pp. 173-200). London: Longman.
- . "The discourse-historical approach", in Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.
- . "Pragmatics and critical discourse analysis". *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 15

## I N T E R F A C E

(1), 203-225.

Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (2009). "Critical Discourse Analysis: History, Agenda, Theory and Methodology", in R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage.

**Appendix<sup>21</sup>**

1.

<http://www.mixanitouxronou.gr/pagkosmia-friki-prokali-i-ikona-tou-nekrou-pediou-pou-xevrastike-sta-tourkika-paralia-kiyiyavuraninsanlik-i-anthropia-xevrastike-stin-akrogialia-o-titlos-tou-hastag-sta-mesa-kinonikis-diktiosis/>

The image of the toddler's death washed up on a Turkish beach caused an international outcry. "Humanity washed ashore", Hashtag's title across social media.

02/09/2015

2.

<http://www.protothema.gr/world/article/505307/nekroi-11-prosfuges-meta-ti-vuthisi-skafon-pou-tous-meteferan-pros-ko/>

Shocking images of drowned Syrian boys washed ashore sparked an international outrage

They were part of a historic flow of refugees from the Middle East to Europe attempting to reach the Greek island Kos

02/09/2015

3.

<http://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/sugklonistiko-ntokoumento-apo-tin-tragwdia-twn-prosfugwn-sto-aigaio>

Images of shame cause international outrage, Merkel wake up

2/9/2015

4.

<http://www.newsbomb.gr/kosmos/news/story/621046/ta-skitsa-gia-ton-mikro-ailan-poy-prokaloy-n-anatrixila-photos>

Heartbreaking cartoons inspired by images of Aylan Kurdi cause outcry (photos)

3/9/2015

---

<sup>21</sup> This Appendix lists the published online Greek news articles along with their links, publication dates and headlines, which were translated into English for the purposes of this paper.

## I N T E R F A C E

5.

<http://www.enikos.gr/international/337569/pagkosmio-symvolo-tis-trago-dias-sti-mesogeio-to-3xrono-angeloudi-photo>

The photograph of the three-year-old angel became the defining symbol of the tragedy in the Mediterranean sea– PHOTOS

3/9/2015

6.

<http://www.enikos.gr/society/337554/i-tragiki-istoria-piso-apo-tis-photo-pou-sygklonizoun>

The tragic story behind the most heartbreaking PHOTOS

3/9/2015

7.

<http://www.newsit.gr/kosmos/to-mikro-agori-poy-sokare-ton-kosmo-ayti-einai-i-istoria-toy/1442122/>

The little Syrian boy that shocked the world: Here's Who He Was

03/09/2015

8.

<http://www.protothema.gr/world/article/505609/pagosmio-sok-apo-tin-eikona-tou-nekrou-paidiou-stin-alikarnasso/>

The story of children washed up ashore shocked the world

03/09/2015

9.

<http://www.tovima.gr/world/article/?aid=734348>

Aylan Kurdi's story "moves" Europe

Heartbreaking message of the father: My children slipped through my hands

03/09/2015

10.

<http://www.koutipandoras.gr/article/o-trihronos-ailan-stoiheionei-tin-ey-ropi>

Image of the three-year-old Aylan "moves" Europe

3/9/2015

11.

<http://www.mixanitouxronou.gr/ta-pedia-mou-glistrisan-apo-ta-cheria-i-sigklonistiki-martiria-tou-patera-tou-mikrou-sirou-pou-pnigike-stin-tourkia-to-plio-vithistike-epidi-kapii-ek-ton-epivenonton-sikothikan-apo-tis-t/>

“My children slipped through my hands”. The father of the little Syrian boy described the heartbreaking story of family’s last moments: “The overloaded boat flipped”

03/09/2015

12.

<http://www.protothema.gr/world/article/506120/aylan>

Can the photo of Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi change the world?  
When the little boy was dreaming a better future

04/09/2015

13.

<http://www.avgi.gr/article/10937/5815425/synklonizei-o-thana-tos-tou-3chronou-prosphyga-ailan-kournti-photographies->

The death of the three-year-old Syrian boy Aylan Kurdi sparks outcry (photos)

4/9/2015

14.

<http://www.lifo.gr/now/media/74727>

Photographer who took the shocking image of dead Syrian boy: “At that moment, I was petrified”

4/9/2015

15.

<http://www.inewsgr.com/203/terastio-kyma-allilengyis-met-tin-eikona-tou-mikrou-ailan.htm>

Compassion towards refugees after the publication of Aylan’s image

5/9/2015

## I N T E R F A C E

16.

<http://www.mixanitouxronou.gr/skeftika-ton-diko-mou-gioexomologite-o-astinomikos-pou-vrike-to-apsicho-soma-tou-mikrou-ailan/>

“I thought of my own son”, says the Turkish police officer who found the lifeless body of little Aylan Kurdi

6/09/2015

17.

<http://www.newsbeast.gr/world/arthro/1938548/terastio-glipto-tou-mikrou-ailan-se-paralia-tis-gazas>

Tribute: A giant sand sculpture of the little boy in Gaza

7/9/2015

18.

<http://www.newsbeast.gr/world/arthro/1937375/to-apsicho-soma-tou-mikrou-ailan-se-gkrafti-sti-vrazilia>

A graffiti depicting the drowned Syrian toddler Aylan Kurdi in Brazil

7/9/2017

19.

<http://www.enikos.gr/international/338533/sygklonistiki-diamartyria-gia-ton-mikro-ailan-photo>

Protest over the little Syrian boy Aylan-PHOTOS

8/9/2015

20.

<http://news247.gr/eidiseis/kosmos/news/to-charlie-hebdo-prokalei-anti-druseis-me-skitsa-gia-ton-mikro-ailan.3664900.html>

Outrage over Charlie Hebdo cartoon of Syrian drowned boy

15/9/2015

[received February 8, 2018  
accepted May 30, 2018]



