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The front page as a canvas for multimodal argumentation: Brexit in the Greek press

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In this paper, we analyze the front pages of mainstream Greek newspapers with the highest circulation reporting the official result of the Brexit referendum in 2016. Our analysis seeks to extract the standpoints and arguments that circulated in the Greek mainstream press on that day by studying the headlines and visuals on the front page. We study the front page not merely as an informative genre but crucially as an argumentative one, where the arguments can be reconstructed with the help of tools from argumentation theory combined with principles from multimodal critical discourse analysis. The proposed approach makes it possible to compare how the different ideological orientations in the Greek public sphere were steered by the representation of this piece of news. We show that, despite their ideological background, the newspapers under study converge to the construction of Brexit as a menacing phenomenon that puts the EU integration to the test and, as such, as an event that should have been avoided.

KEYWORDS

multimodal argumentation, front pages, multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), Pragma-dialectics, Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT), Brexit

1. Introduction

Media do not merely present varying and opposite views on public matters but also influence public policy debates by the choices they make about which views to present and how to present them (Entman, 2010). Printed newspapers have traditionally played a key role not only in representing public opinion but also in steering it (Baker et al., 2013). Despite the challenges they face from digital media, they “continue to form an important part of the media mix” (Cole and Harcup, 2010, p. 15) in both printed and digital format. The newspaper front page has been a window to these positions and positionings (Reisner, 1992; Frost, 2003). Niemeyer (2019, p. 188), studying the front pages of international newspapers on the aftermath of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, treats them “as a symbolic and temporal indicator of how an event is interpreted, understood and (per-)formed.” She explains that the front page plays a special role in the mediatization process in the sense that it symbolically “freezes” the live coverage of the ongoing events, which differs from the constant updating of the news webpages. Decisions about which story is published, in which section of the newspaper or part of the page, and how it is presented play a role in construing the newspaper’s position as reflected on the front page (Lopez Pan, 2015).

In order to account for the role of newspapers as contributing to public debates one needs a micro, argumentative analysis, that complements a macro, social analysis. In this way, the arguments (often implicitly) put forward in each newspaper and the ways in which these interrelate among different newspapers can be recovered, while the reasoning that underlies the presented viewpoints can be made explicit. The challenge that one faces in this endeavor is that the front page is a multimodal genre (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998; Bateman et al., 2007) and that at first sight it seems to contain a number of opinions rather than fully developed arguments. While the front page has been studied from a variety of perspectives, (such as content and theme analysis, diachronic change, and critical discourse analysis, among others), it has not been adequately studied from a rhetorical and argumentation studies perspective. Kress and van Leeuwen (1998) or Bednarek and Caple (2017), for example, account for how social events are constructed multimodally on the front page, without however using categories that can explain how the various semiotic choices can be said to cue specific standpoint-argument pairs, and how these may relate with others conveyed on the front page of other newspapers concerning the same event. In this paper, we propose to study the front page as a site for recovering arguments in favor of certain standpoints, hence the idea that the front page constitutes the canvas for multimodal argumentation. We are interested in showing how insights from the fields of multimodal (critical) discourse analysis combined with argumentation theory can shed light on the ways in which macro-level values and opinions projected by the media converge or diverge among newspapers of different ideological backgrounds.

As a case in point, we study the front pages of five Greek newspapers with the highest circulation published in the aftermath of the 2016 referendum about the UK leaving the EU (henceforth Brexit). In particular, we focus on the front pages of the centrist newspapers *TA NEA* and *ETHNOS*, the left-wing *EFIMERIDA TON SYNDAKTON*, and the right-wing oriented *ELEFThEROS TYPOS* and *KATHIMERINI*. Unlike other front pages dedicated wholly or mostly to an important piece of news of the day (such as the 9/11, natural disasters, social unrest, etc.) which tend to be more of the epideictic type (see Lopez Pan, 2015), this specific event and its treatment on the front page have a deliberative tone (see Ettema, 2007), which our analysis seeks to bring forward. Brexit has been considered both as the culmination of processes that had started long before and as the beginning of a series of processes on UK soil, the rest of Europe and the world, what Zappettini and Krzyzanowski (2019, p. 382–383) eloquently describe as a “critical juncture.” Media supporting the “Leave” campaign were pointing to continental Europe’s problems in order to back up their overall Eurosceptic agenda (Koller et al., 2018; Ridge-Newman et al., 2018), while the European press, although rather disengaged on first sight (Borchardt et al., 2018), portrayed Brexit as adding to a series of “crises” with tremendous consequences for the present and future of the EU (see Katsambekis and Souvlis, 2018; Krzyzanowski, 2019).

We have chosen to study Greek newspapers with the aim of showcasing how the implications of Brexit were reported in a crisis-ridden society such as the Greek one. Within the Greek context, the news about Brexit came at a time when the country was facing an increasing mobilization of refugee populations on its

territory- what was labeled as “refugee crisis” by dominant social actors and institutions in Europe (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018) while still recovering from the 2009 Eurozone debt crisis, the austerity bailout programs and doctrines put forth by the “troika” of the EU, ECB and IMF (Kelsey et al., 2016) under the menace of a loss of Greece’s Eurozone-membership (the so-called “Grexit”; see e.g., Serafis and Herman, 2018). As such, among the macro-level views circulating in the Greek public sphere, xenophobic and austerity ones were the most dominant. As Borchardt et al. (2018) observe in their report about the coverage of Brexit in Europe’s media, Greece was the third country, together with Spain, that paid the greatest attention to Brexit, following Ireland and Germany, with the Greek media overall expressing strong anti-Brexit sentiments and strong belief in the EU perspective. Despite the unanimous emphasis on the negative consequences of Brexit for the EU, it is worth studying closer the standpoints sustained by Greek newspapers of different ideological positions across the (center-) right vs. (center-) left spectrum to identify the different goals that the reporting of Brexit helped to pursue (that is, to deter the citizens from even thinking about an exit from the EU or to invite them to demand a different kind of EU).

For this purpose, we combine principles from multimodal critical discourse analysis (henceforth MCDA; see Machin and Mayr, 2012) and multimodal argumentation (see Tseronis and Forceville, 2017; Rocci and Pollaroli, 2018; Tseronis and Pollaroli, 2018). We consider the front page as a multimodal text, which not only conveys a specific stance but also constructs arguments, recontextualizing Brexit in the Greek public sphere as an event shaking the tectonic plates of the EU *status quo*. By focusing on the semiotic resources that help convey the newspaper’s stance, we aim to show that despite the relatively factual and unanimously negative presentation of Brexit, there lie differences concerning the interpretation of its causes and consequences. While the newspapers under study address multiple and heterogeneous audiences mainly within Greece, they try to balance between their own editorial profile and the interests they represent, and to position their viewpoints within the overall EU public debate. These differences, we argue, do not only bring to the fore different ideological and political interests but they also convey an urge to secure the project of EU integration at any cost. We maintain that such multimodal practices risk justifying and legitimizing voices that underpin EU’s disintegration.

The paper is organized as follows: In Section 2, we provide a brief literature review of the genre of front pages in order to argue that an argumentation studies perspective can better help to recover the opinions and positions that the editors are said to assume. In Section 3, we argue for the need of integrating analytical categories from argumentation theoretical models such as Pragma-dialectics and the Argumentum Model of Topics in the study of multimodal discourse. Section 4 presents our proposal for a methodology that combines principles from multimodal critical discourse analysis and multimodal argumentation in order to account for the argumentative nature of the newspaper front pages. In Section 5, we present the micro-level analysis of the selected front pages, followed by a discussion of the implications for the macro-level comparative analysis in Section 6.

2. Front page: from multimodal meaning-making to multimodal argumentation

Media, in general, and newspapers, in particular, are said to play an important role in a democratic society, not only by informing citizens about ongoing and current issues at local or (inter)national level, but also by taking directly or indirectly part in the discussion of issues that concern the public interest (Ettema, 2007; Gavin, 2018). Which news items are selected for coverage, what relative importance is assigned to each, and how they are framed are choices that editorial teams make which contribute to the role of media as setting the agenda for the public discussion, and eventually as influencing the readers' attitudes and opinions (Reisner, 1992). The front page of the printed newspaper has traditionally been considered as having a distinct promotional and ideological function: to draw the reader's attention to the paper while highlighting the stories of the day, following the newspaper's editorial line. As Niemeyer (2019, p. 190) puts it:

Ranging from hot emotional reactions to a particular aesthetic and reflection, consisting of graphic elements that vary according to the editorial line and the media agenda, while also reflecting the economic climate of the press industry and the expectation horizon of its readers, the front page communicates more than just the news. It can participate in the formation of collective memories and also act as a first-hand historical source.

Studies of front pages have focused on the diachronic changes of the layout (Utt and Pasternack, 2003; López-Rabadán and Casero-Ripollés, 2012; Bucher, 2017), the framing strategies for the presentation of main stories (Hart, 2017), or the internal processes for the selection of featured stories during the so-called news conference (Reisner, 1992; Zampa and Bletsas, 2018). Scholars have also paid attention to the distinct ways in which the various constitutive elements of the front page (textual, visual, and graphic) are arranged in order to create a coherent and meaningful multimodal document. Kress and van Leeuwen (1998), for example, analyzed front pages in order to illustrate their descriptive framework for the study of layout, which consists of the three signifying systems of information value, salience, and framing. Their aim was to show the relevance of such a framework for critically analyzing the press and its role in contemporary society. Bateman et al. (2007) focused on the systematic identification of the signifying units that may characterize the front page as a multimodal genre; that is, as a collection of semiotic resources that combine on the two-dimensional printed or digital canvas to create a coherent whole which is unique for each newspaper, and which may change over time. They propose a series of layers for the description and annotation of the front page, which combine insights from linguistics and discourse analysis as well as document production and design. Bednarek and Caple (2017) focused on yet another dimension which governs the selection of the various semiotic resources and their combination in media discourse, and which also apply to the design of the front page, namely news values. In their book, they provide an example analysis of the front page of *The West Australian* after a terrorist attack in 2014,

where they conclude that the semiotic resources “construct this event as maximally negative for an individual ordinary citizen and by extension, the Australian nation— including the local *West Australian* target audience” (Bednarek and Caple, 2017, p. 131).

The above studies have certainly helped to explain the distinct characteristics of the front page as a multimodal genre, to reveal interesting results about the content or type of news stories appearing on it, and to draw diachronic or synchronic comparisons about which stories are covered and how they are framed. But, for the most part, they do not seek to account for the complex ways in which the meanings recovered from the semiotic interplay on the front page can be said to construct arguments, that is provide reasons for a standpoint. While Bednarek and Caple, for example, provide the gloss of the front page for the Australian newspaper cited above, they do not have the tools and categories to explain how the meaning potential that they describe ends up having an argumentative function. If one wants to capture the communicative role that the front page has as the newspaper's editorial voice and the role that the newspaper plays in representing the news, an argumentative account is also needed. That is, one needs to have recourse to tools and concepts from argumentation studies which allow one to recover the reasoning process underlying the claims made, to identify the unexpressed premises, and to reconstruct the argumentation that supports the standpoint presented on the front page (see Yanoshevsky, 2007, p. 421; Serafis, 2022, for similar points). In this paper, we propose to study the front page as a canvas for recovering arguments. Doing this, can help to better explain how newspapers play a role in ongoing debates about policies and social issues.

3. MCDA meets argumentation theory

Our study is grounded on approaches belonging to MCDA and argumentation theory. Although Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) have incorporated tools from argumentation studies (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Richardson, 2007; Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012; Boukala, 2019), a systematic integration of discourse-analytical and argumentative tools through the prism of MCDA remains overlooked (see, however, Richardson and Wodak, 2009; Serafis et al., 2020; Serafis, 2022, 2023). Our study aims to contribute to this direction.

MCDA attempts to trace and scrutinize how different semiotic modes (e.g., language, image, sound), jointly (re)produce power inequalities (Machin, 2013). In this frame, an accepted principle, which our analysis also follows, is that of the interrelation between the “macro-level” of dominant values and views, and the “micro-level” of discursive choices and strategies (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 85–89). In our case, macro-level refers to the doctrine of austerity, as this became dominant by political and media discourses in the context of the Eurozone crisis as well as xenophobic values that reigned during the so-called “refugee crisis” and facilitated, as a whole, voices that argued in favor of a stronger integration of the EU project on an austerity and exclusionary basis that has characterized the “fortress-Europe” perspective since then (Kelsey et al., 2016; Bevelander and Wodak, 2019). Micro-level refers to the (multimodal) choices regarding the design of the Greek front pages and the micro-argumentative moves that can be reconstructed

based on it. We assume that through this macro- and micro-level interplay representations of social reality are provided (i.e., discourses; see [Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001](#); [Fairclough, 2003](#)), which encapsulate an argumentative potential (see [Mohammed, 2019](#)).

This perspective on the argumentative potential of discourses follows [Amossy \(2009, p. 254\)](#) who claims that “discourse is pervaded by a general argumentativity [...]. It always answers some explicit or hidden question or at least suggests a way of looking at the surrounding world”; an argument also appearing in seminal CDS studies (see [Wodak and Meyer, 2016, p. 27](#)). From this point of view, an (often implicit) argumentative potential lies at the core of public discourses and therefore “argumentative analysis tools [...] are required to highlight opaque aspects that inform and contribute to the emergence of this argumentative potential in genres of discourse” ([Serafis et al., 2020, p. 549](#)). Recourse to analytical categories from argumentation theory can help to capture this argumentative potential and thus complement an MCDA analysis, which although inherently acknowledges the importance of arguments and ideological influence in discourse, and is designed to interpret the various modalities (textual, visual, graphic, etc.) used in media communication, it does not explicitly focus on this dimension.

Following suit, for the study of the argumentative potential of these semiotic choices, we need to have an understanding of what argumentation is and what the constituents of arguments are. For this purpose, we follow the perspective to the analysis of argumentative communication advocated by Pragma-dialectics ([Van Eemeren, 2018](#)), a framework that has been used already within CDS (see [Ihnen and Richardson, 2011](#); [Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012](#); [Forchtner and Tominc, 2012](#)). According to [Van Eemeren \(2010, p. 29\)](#), argumentation is defined as:

A communicative and interactional (speech) act complex aimed at resolving a difference of opinion before a reasonable judge by advancing a constellation of reasons the arguer can be held accountable for as justifying the acceptability of the standpoint(s) at issue.

Firstly, this definition recognizes that argumentation is a communicative activity rather than a mere linguistic or verbal one. If contemporary communication is based on the interplay of multiple semiotic modes, as [Kress \(2010\)](#) claims, then argumentation cannot be simply monomodal. Secondly, it implies that individuals or institutions engaged in an argumentative discussion strategically choose the modes (and the relevant content) that will form their argumentation in a specific context. Consequently, in the argumentative analysis of multimodal discourse, attention should be placed to “the distinct semiotic resources that can be employed to convey argumentation in a given context” ([Tseronis, 2018, p. 52](#)).

Argumentation theory can also help us understand how certain views and opinions end up gaining traction with certain audiences and not others, as well as how different views expressed in the public sphere may relate with each other. [Lewiński \(2014\)](#), see also [Aakhus and Lewiński, 2017](#) has proposed studying argumentation as a polylogic phenomenon, that is, as taking place simultaneously in multiple spaces, by multiple actors who raise multiple issues, and

with multiple objectives. This perspective conceives of the broader public sphere as a vast network of sub-spaces and players where multiple micro-argumentative moves on different topics converge or are juxtaposed. Building on this idea, [Mohammed \(2019, p. 309\)](#) suggests analyzing public political arguments as stemming from “a series of simultaneous discussions.” To this end, she introduces the concept of standing standpoint defined as follows:

[a] standpoint that is attributed to an arguer on the basis of an argument that has become publicly associated with the standpoint may be referred to as a standing standpoint. [...] [I]t takes effect only once a certain context is in place. If argument (x) has become publicly associated with standpoint (y), advancing (x) triggers the attribution of standpoint (y) to the arguer who has advanced (x) as long as there is no evidence to the opposite ([Mohammed, 2019, p. 318](#)).

The acknowledgment of the inherent argumentative and polylogical nature of public discourse in general and of mediatised discourse in particular gives rise to the following two analytical challenges when studying multimodal argumentation in the front pages about the Brexit referendum. The first is that even if Brexit was generally portrayed by the European press as a menace for the EU integration project which should consequently be avoided, this very viewpoint could be (and, as we show, was indeed) supported by a mosaic of parties within different national contexts. In the case of Greece, this translates into newspapers that had varying political perspectives on the questions of austerity measures despite their overall agreement that Brexit was bad for the EU. One would therefore need to account for the way argumentation is designed in this specific context by the different parties in order to point toward the standing standpoint that the EU’s integrationist project should be preserved. The second challenge is that assuming that standing standpoints are always implicit, one needs to deal with enthymematic multimodal micro-argumentative moves. That is, apart from scrutinizing the meaning constructions and presenting a plausible reconstruction of the main arguments (through the prism of the pragma-dialectical reconstruction), we also need to externalize the argumentative inferences triggered by the multimodal configurations (see also [Serafis et al., 2020](#)). We explain the methodological steps we followed in order to address these challenges in the following section.

4. An integrated method for extracting argumentative inferences at the micro-level

For the micro-level analysis of the front pages, we focus on both the linguistic analysis of the headlines and the semiotic analysis of the visuals as well as their arrangement on the page. We thus interweave analytical principles and tools from multimodal discourse analysis (see [Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2020](#)) and multimodal argumentation (see [Tseronis, 2017, 2018](#)). Our aim is to show how the interplay of different semiotic resources provides the basis on which a standpoint and arguments in support of it can be plausibly reconstructed, that is how the

meaning potential ends up having argumentative relevance. To this direction, we also employ the tools of the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT; Rigotti and Greco, 2019), which helps unveil the inferences that warrant the connection between the standpoint and its supporting argument.

The AMT differentiates between two main components that constitute the inferential configuration of a single argument (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 208–216 for an overview), namely the “procedural-inferential component” and the “material-contextual component.” Each component consists of different elements, which represent the parallel inferential steps necessary for arriving at a first conclusion that counts as the main support for the standpoint (i.e., final conclusion). The procedural-inferential component represents the logical side of the inferencing process and consists of (a) “the source from which arguments are taken” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 210), called the “locus,” and (b) “the logical principle of support of arguments” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 209), called the “maxim.” The material-contextual component represents the context-based side of the inferencing process and consists of (a) the contextual background shared by the participants in an argumentative discussion, called the “endoxon,” which “is a general premise that is accepted by the relevant public [...] in a specific argumentative situation” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 214) and, (b) the “datum,” which is a “premise of a factual nature” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 215) that, as we propose, is derived from the text and its encoded meanings (see also Serafis, 2022, p. 329). The intersection of these two components forms a quasi-Y structure which, passing through a first conclusion, leads to the final conclusion, which is the defended standpoint.

The argumentation structure that is recovered following Pragma-dialectics, combined with the explicitation of the inferential steps involved in the process of supporting a standpoint according to the AMT, provide a heuristic tool that guides the reconstruction. Which content is to be reconstructed as having which argumentative function is to be determined by the plausible argumentative reading path constructed by the interrelation of the various semiotic modes on the front page. Such a reading path may start with the headline which usually attracts the attention both because of its size and its placement on the page. From then on, depending on the design of the page, photos and graphic elements can also draw attention because of their size, color or placement. Identifying the standpoint from the main headline, however, is not as straightforward as one would think. The extraction of propositions that can be plausibly arranged in an argumentation structure, presenting the standpoint and the arguments in support of it, depends on the intricate ways in which the content of the photos (i.e., represented actors and actions) interacts with the content of the headline and subheads. The challenge that the argumentation analyst faces when analyzing front pages is that these contain several texts of different types (briefs, news stories, promotions), each with its own content and potential arguments, combined with a variety of images and other visual elements. It therefore becomes difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct one overarching argument (standpoint-argument pair) from the whole of the front page. Nevertheless, when the layout is of the so-called “magazine-style front page” (Harrover and Elman, 2013), which resembles that of a magazine, in the sense that it focuses on one main story, the reconstruction of an overarching argument may be

easier (see Tseronis, 2017).¹ In our subsequent analyses, we thereby focus on the argument recovered from the main story on the front page and do not suggest that the whole of the front page invariably construes a single argument.

5. Multimodal argumentative analysis of Greek front pages on Brexit

The front pages we selected for analysis appeared on Saturday 25 June 2016, and belong to five newspapers that are part of the mainstream political news press at national level with the highest circulation (see Papathanassopoulos, 2004). We did not consider the front pages of newspapers that have a special focus on politics and economy, politics and sports or gossip news, represent the views of one specific political party or circulate on weekly rather than a daily basis. The five newspapers that we analyze below can be placed in a more or less clear way along the left, the center, and the right side of the political spectrum. These are the left-leaning *H EΦΗΜΕΡΙΔΑ ΤΩΝ ΣΥΝΤΑΚΤΩΝ* (I EFIMERIDA TON SYNTAKTON), the right-leaning *H ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΗ* (I KATHIMERINI) and *ΕΛΕΥΘΕΡΟΣ ΤΥΠΟΣ* (ELEFTHEROS TYPOS), and the centrist *ΤΑ ΝΕΑ* (TA NEA) and *ΕΘΝΟΣ* (ETHNOS). They represent national daily brand names with the highest circulation and longest history. Moreover, in most of the cases, the newspapers are part of wider oligopolies since their owners are also TV-channel and football-club owners, among others (see Serafis, 2023, p. 18–19 and references therein). In that sense, our study captures the different, mainstream voices (Psychogios, 2004) whose perspective offers different constructions of the topic under study.

Specifically, *ΤΑ ΝΕΑ* (first published in 1931) and *ETHNOS* (first published in 1913) are newspapers that have historically belonged to the progressive part of the spectrum and have been closely related to the Greek socialist party (PASOK) after the restoration of democracy in Greece (1974). The first one was acquired in 2017 by Alter Ego Media, which also includes the TV channels *MEGA* and *One* and is owned by Vangelis Marinakis who also owns a football club (i.e., Olympiacos in Piraeus, Greece) and ships. The newspaper took a more centrist/center-right perspective since the acquisition by Marinakis. *ETHNOS* is owned by Ivan Savvidis who is also the owner of the TV channel *Open* as well as the football club PAOK in Thessaloniki, Greece, and follows a more center-left positioning. *KATHIMERINI* (founded in 1919) and *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS* (founded in 1916), on the other hand, are historical newspapers that echo conservative, right-wing perspectives. The first one is a prestigious conservative newspaper, owned by Themistoklis Alafouzos who is a member of a well-known family that also operates in shipping and sports industries. The second one is an established newspaper of the right-wing spectrum, closely related to the conservative News Democracy party, owned in the past (2006–2009), among others, by Theodoros Angelopoulos, member of a powerful steel industry family and Gianna Angelopoulos-Dakalakis, former MP with the conservative New Democracy Party, and leader of the

¹ The reporting on Brexit is one case where most of the newspapers (both in Greece and internationally) used the poster/magazine layout.

Athens 2004 Olympic Games Committee. Finally, *EFIMERIDA TON SYNDAKTON* (firstly published in 2012) was founded as a cooperative, left-wing newspaper by former employees of the historical left-wing newspaper *ELEFTHEROTYPIA*, which went bankrupt in 2011. The newspaper still echoes left-wing voices in the Greek mediascape, being closely related to the left-wing party, SYRIZA.

In what follows, we focus on the micro-level of the front pages and account for the ways in which the interplay between content and form, conveyed verbally or visually, in the design of the front page can be said to construe an argument, as well as explain the inference process that underlies it. We analyze the front pages in order of their semiotic and argumentative complexity, starting from the more straightforward cases.

Of the five front pages, the one by *TA NEA* (see Figure 1A) is the least semiotically complex and allows for a more or less straightforward argumentative reconstruction. The headline “Beware of Brexit...” is both visually salient, thanks to its size and placement (Kress and van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 201), and verbally salient, thanks to the use of the imperative and its allusion to the famous phrase “Beware of Greeks bearing gifts.” The headline appears overlapping a fading UK flag. Accordingly, we could plausibly interpret this visual choice as an objectivation (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46) of the UK leaving the EU, and thus as construing Brexit as a fading moment for Britain in its long-standing EU history, something which, according to the headline,

should threaten the audience. The subhead “Manifest and hidden risks for Greece” provides the argument for this Brexit-threat. The argumentation structure from the elements of this front page can be reconstructed as follows²:

1. One (Greece) should fear the Brexit
 - 1.1 UK leaving the EU entails manifest and hidden risks for Greece

The inferential configuration of the above structure can be accounted for by the AMT as follows (see Figure 1B). The procedural inference that underlies this standpoint-argument pair is based on the “locus from promising and warning” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 265), which can be translated in terms of the maxim: “if someone is not compliant with the warning, severe consequences will follow.” The material-contextual component of the inference relies on an endoxon that could be phrased as “threats are bad” and the datum that is derived from the multimodal configuration which can be verbalized as: “Brexit makes the UK

2 For the reconstruction of the argumentation structure, we follow the pragma-dialectical notational system according to which 1. indicates the standpoint, 1.1. indicates the main argument in support of it, and 1.1.1. indicates a subordinate argument (see Van Eemeren and Snoeck-Henkemans, 2017, p. 61).

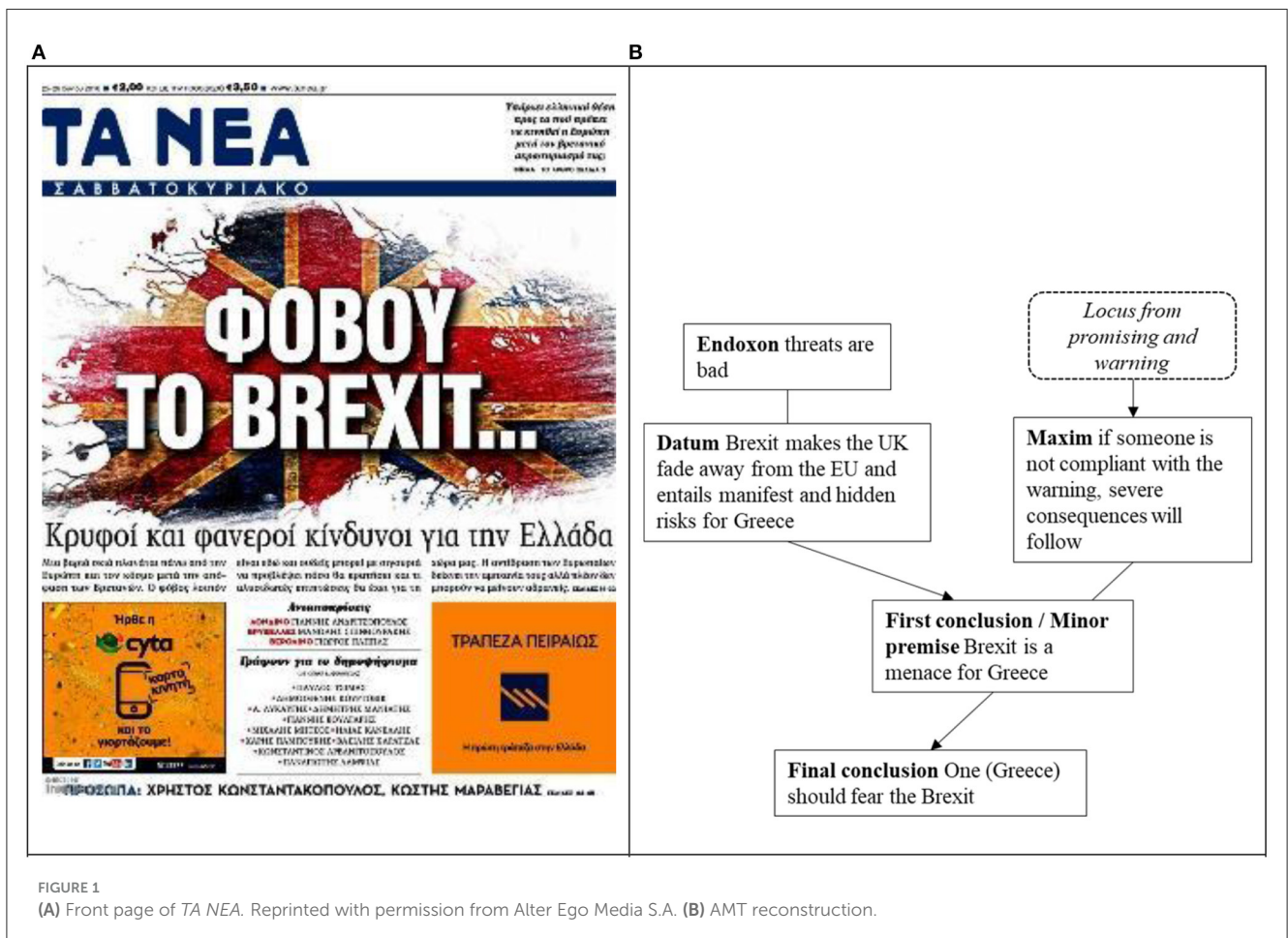


FIGURE 1 (A) Front page of *TA NEA*. Reprinted with permission from Alter Ego Media S.A. (B) AMT reconstruction.

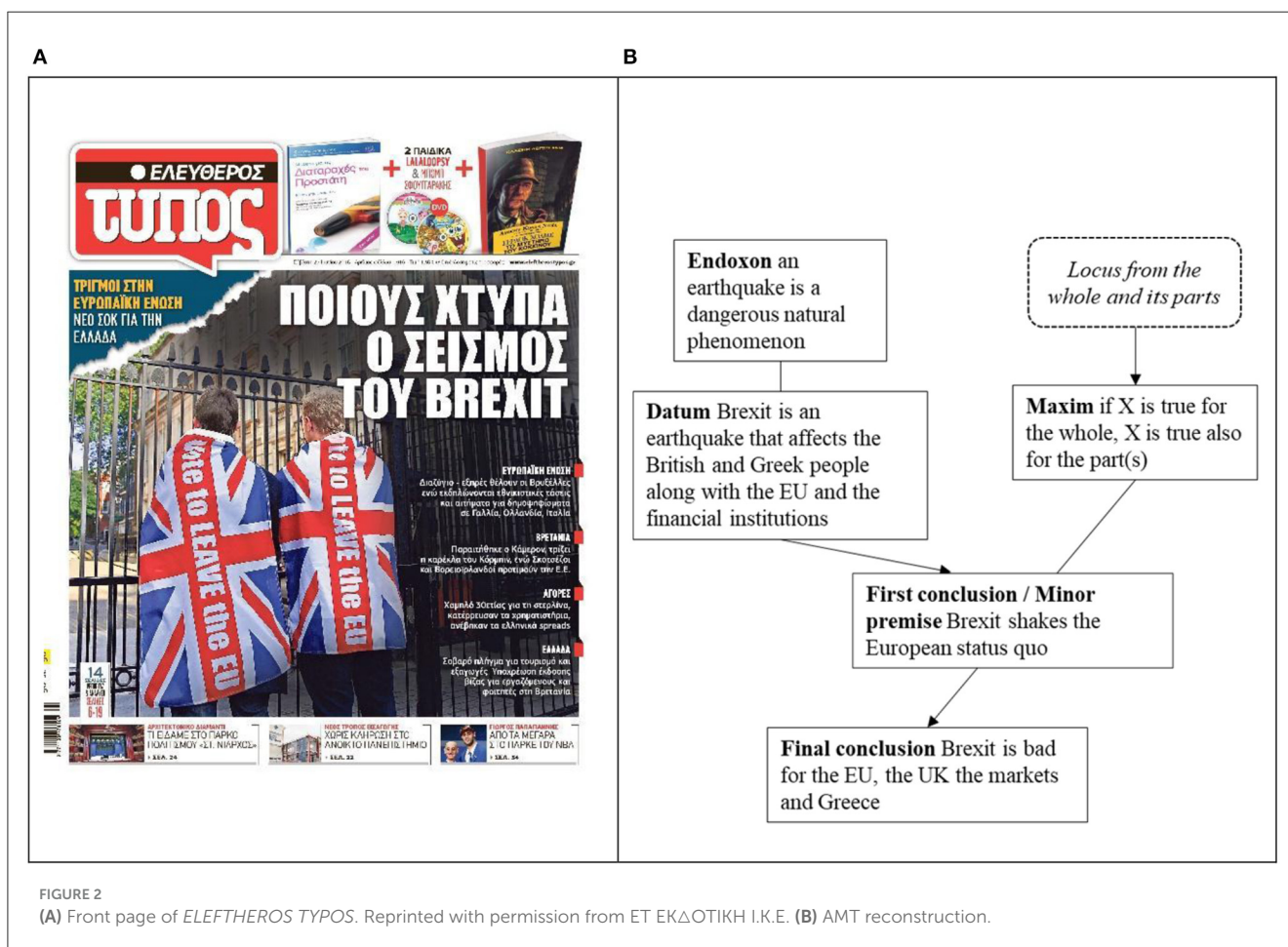
fade away from the EU and entails manifest and hidden risks for Greece.” At the intersection of the two components, the first conclusion would be: “Brexit is a menace for Greece” and therefore the standpoint is: “One (Greece) should fear Brexit.”

The front page of *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS* follows a typical magazine design layout by having all the text about the Brexit news story appear integrated in the photo which occupies almost the whole page except for the bottom banner (see Figure 2A). The headline “Who is struck by the Brexit earthquake” is visually salient and poses a question to the reader which is answered by the four chunks of text with the following subheads: “EUROPEAN UNION,” “BRITAIN,” “MARKETS,” and “GREECE.” In this way, the newspaper constructs the sense of an emergency through the metaphorical use of the process noun “earthquake” that affects significant social actors, such as the assimilated/collectivized Greek and British people represented through the respective mass nouns (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 37), as well as the financial status quo in the EU (collectivized by the mass noun “markets”). This verbally encoded meaning interrelates with the meanings conveyed by the content of the photo on the background. Two individuals are depicted in close distance to the viewer (see Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 141), covered with the British flag on their shoulders, with the main slogan of the Brexit campaign “Vote to LEAVE the EU,” waiting outside the closed gates of Downing Street, the official residence of the British Prime Minister. The individuals

appear involved in a behavioral process (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 171), since they are depicted waiting outside the closed gate, presumably waiting for Cameron’s resignation speech. The choice of this photo, instead of one where the Brexit supporters would appear cheering for the result, for example, suggests that the newspaper focuses on the barriers (i.e., a visually realized objectivization of the restrictions that are about to be raised by the EU member-states due to Brexit) and the idea that supporters of Brexit are also among those struck by the earthquake. Accordingly, a rather straightforward argument may be reconstructed as follows:

- 1. Brexit is bad for the EU, the UK, the markets, and Greece
 - 1.1 Brexit is an earthquake that causes cracks in the EU and shock to Greece

The inference that underlies this standpoint-argument pair is guided on the procedural-inferential component by the “locus from the whole and its parts” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 233-234), which is realized in terms of the maxim “if X is true for the whole, X is true also for the part(s).” On the material-contextual component, the inference is guided by the endoxon that “an earthquake is a dangerous natural phenomenon” and the datum, derived from the multimodal meaning of the front page, namely: “Brexit is an earthquake that affects the British and Greek people along with the EU and the financial institutions.” At the intersection of



these components, the first conclusion would be: “Brexit shakes the European status quo as a whole,” which, if taken along the inferential lines of the maxim, results to the evaluative standpoint: “Brexit is bad for the EU, the UK the markets, and Greece” (see Figure 2B).

On the front page of *EFIMERIDA TON SYNTAKTON*, the Brexit story is presented in a similar magazine design layout, but the image with the integrated text ends up covering less space with boxes containing other news stories on the left side and banners with advertisements at the bottom (see Figure 3A). The headline reads “[It is] This Europe [that] brought Brexit” where the deictic element functions as “identifying a particular subset of the ‘thing’ that is being referred to” (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, pp. 312–314). The photos of the British Prime Minister Cameron and the Federal Minister of Germany for Finance Schäuble illustrate the reference of the deictic pronoun. Both were members of the center-right European People’s Party (EPP), which dominated European public politics with their pro-austerity agenda during the 2010–2018 EU/Eurozone debt crisis. By presenting these associated individuals right below the headline, the newspaper attempts an individualization (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 37) of the austerity EU policies (“This Europe” meaning the right-wing, neoliberal forces in the EU) that, according to the newspaper, resulted in Brexit. Moreover, Brexit as a decision of the UK is construed in terms of an “[o]bjectivated action” (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 63) realized by the process noun “Booming slap” that functions as

subject of the clause in the subhead “Booming slap to the policies imposed to the EU by Berlin.” Through this explicit negative representation, Brexit is viewed as a reaction to EU austerity doctrines while the newspaper implicitly presents its anti-austerity perspective. The argumentation structure can be reconstructed as follows:

1. Brexit shows the need for (an anti-austerity) political change in the EU
 - 1.1 Brexit is the result of dominant austerity policies (imposed by the EPP)

The argumentative inference that underlies this structure is guided, on the procedural-inferential component, by the “locus from termination and setting up” (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 263), which requires a change of action to address a negative phenomenon (in our case, the proposal for a political change in the EU). The respective locus is realized by the maxim “if X is bad, X must be changed.” On the material-contextual component, the inference is led by an endoxon that results from the foundational EU values, namely: “the EU project provides prosperity to the European people” and the datum: “dominant EU austerity policies, implemented by the EPP, violated European peoples’ prosperity and caused Brexit,” based on the multimodal analysis of the contents of the page. The interplay between the two components leads to the first conclusion: “Dominant EU austerity policies that caused Brexit

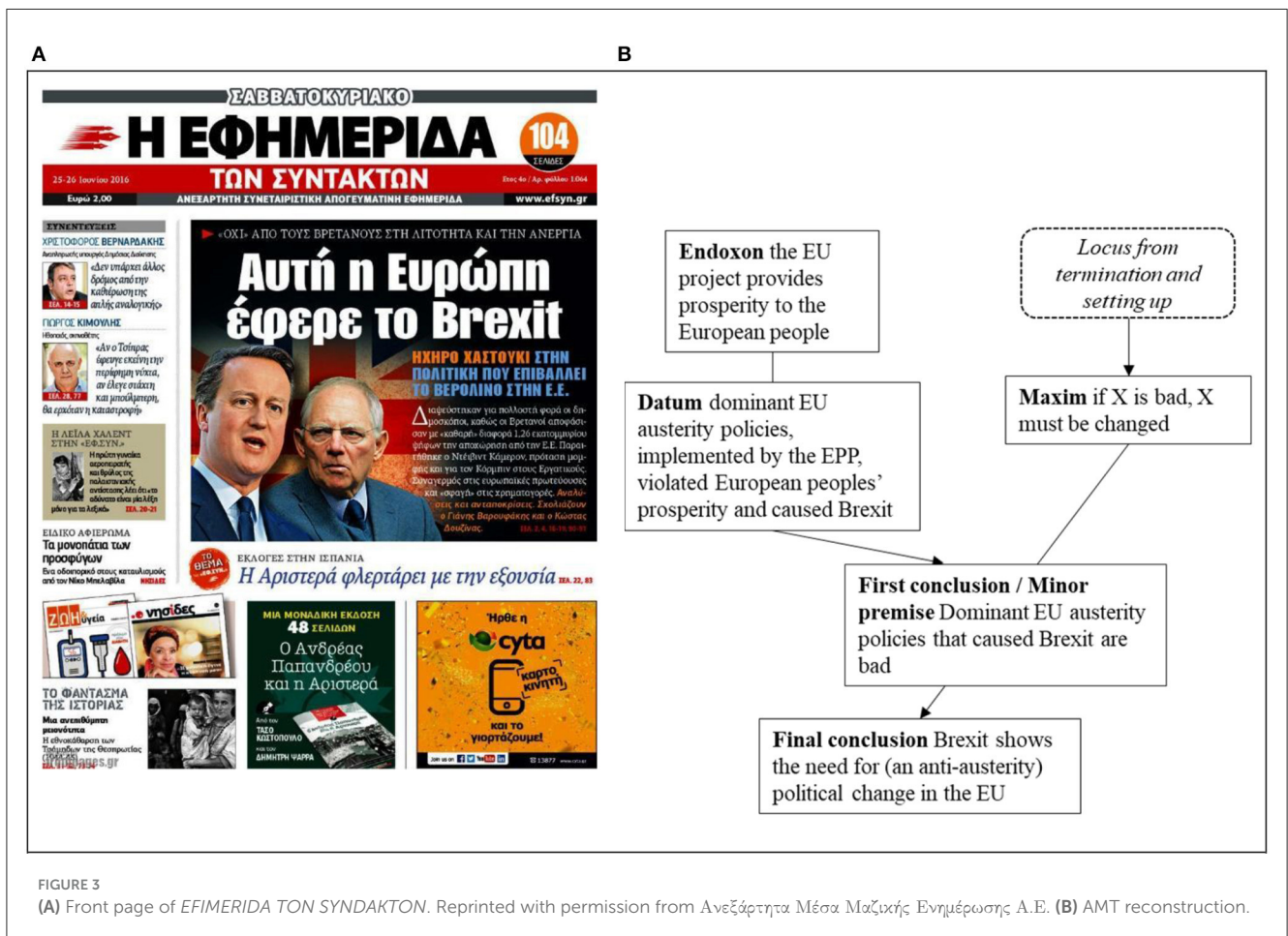


FIGURE 3 (A) Front page of *EFIMERIDA TON SYNTAKTON*. Reprinted with permission from *Ανεξάρτητα Μέσα Μαζικής Ενημέρωσης Α.Ε.* (B) AMT reconstruction.

are bad,” which is evidently something that needs to be changed and, as a further step in the inference (linked to the maxim), leads to the standpoint: “Brexit shows the need for (an anti-austerity) political change in the EU” (see Figure 3B).

Similar to the front page of *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS*, *ETHNOS* newspaper devotes the entire front page to the Brexit story, except for the news items appearing at the bottom banner. But unlike *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS*, here we have separation of images and text (see Figure 4A). The top part of the page is dominated by a shredded EU flag over which the kicker “Brexit feeds centrifugal forces in the whole Union” appears. One of the stars of the flag is suppressed, denoting the UK’s decision to leave the Union (through objectivation in van Leeuwen’s terms). This multimodal composition crowns the headline “The fear of a domino effect roams Europe.” Accordingly, Brexit is constructed as an event that risks disintegrating the EU project since it can be perceived as an exemplary case of powers aiming at EU’s disintegration. Of the three photos that appear on the page, the biggest one is of the leading figure of the Brexit campaign, Nigel Farage, celebrating victory with Brexit supporters. Brexit is thus personified through the individualization of Farage on the front page. The other two photos are the headshots of the EU leaders, Angela Merkel and François Hollande who individualize a pro-EU stance. The relative size difference (see Ledin and Machin, 2020, p. 171-172), and, even more importantly, the arrangement of the three photos draws the viewer’s attention to the striking contrast in the facial expressions of Farage, on the one hand, and of the two EU leaders, on the other. Farage is portrayed surrounded by a group of supporters as the active force in an emotional process,

conveyed by “the particular facial expression which indexes [his] mood” (Ledin and Machin, 2020, p. 56), that is the emotion of joy arising from the result of the referendum. On the contrary, the two EU leaders appear to have rather skeptical, if not sad, facial expressions.

Moreover, the photo of triumphant Farage clearly on focus contrasts with the headline speaking of “fear of domino effect” and thereby seeks to draw attention to the negatively perceived, extreme right-wing and populist political load that he brings to the fore (see e.g., Wodak and Krzyzanowski, 2017, on negative conceptualizations of the right-wing populist phenomenon). All in all, the meanings deriving from the front page portray Brexit as a victory of the populist right-wing forces in the UK against those in favor of the EU integration project, construed as a menace that risks disintegrating the EU as a whole. The choice of the verbal and visual content and the arrangement of text and image give rise to complex interpretations about the standpoint-argument pair that can be reconstructed as follows:

- 1. Brexit will lead to EU’s disintegration
 - 1.1 Brexit feeds the centrifugal powers in Europe
 - 1.1.1 Brexit is a victory of extreme right-wing, Eurosceptic populist forces and a loss of pro-integration forces

The complexity of the text and the image leads us to reconstruct two arguments that interrelate in support of the standpoint, a structure known as subordinative argumentation (Van Eemeren and Snoeck-Henkemans, 2017, p. 58; see also Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 233). Two inference structures can be proposed in order

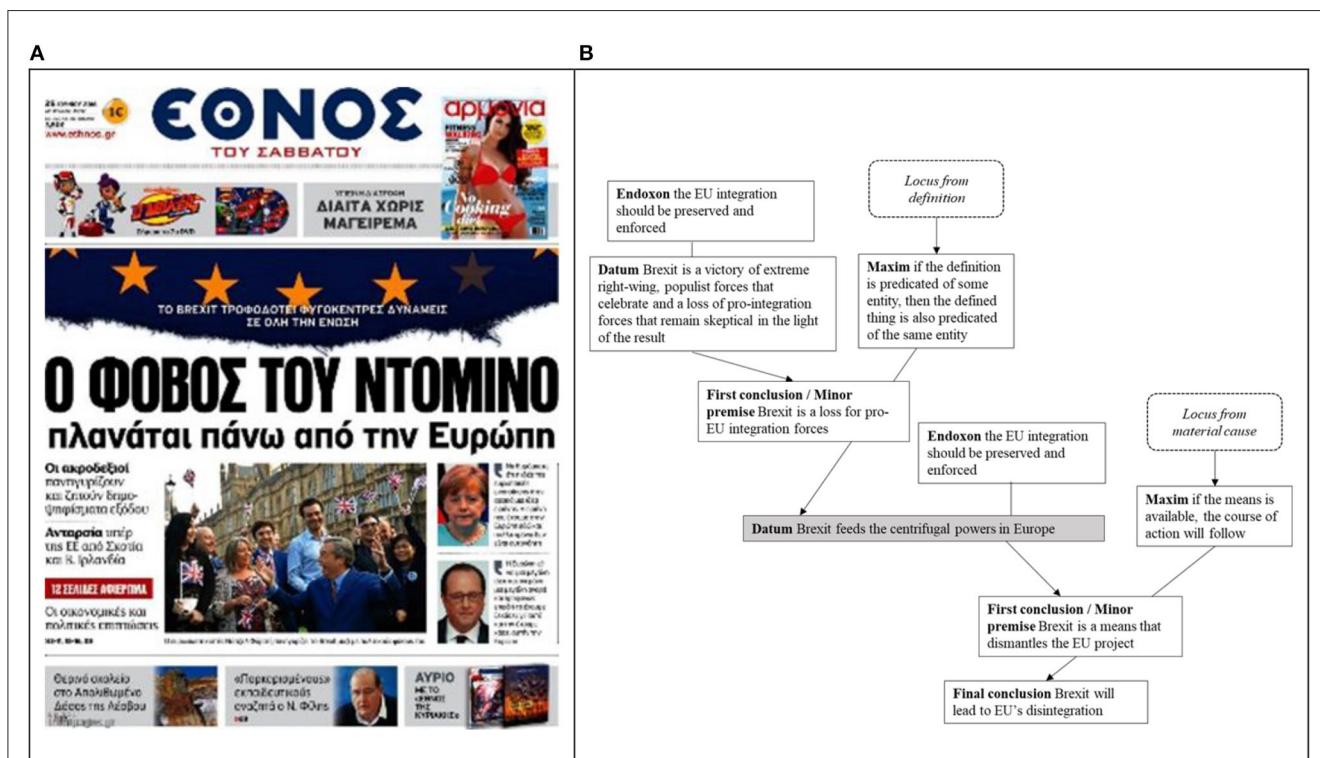


FIGURE 4 (A) Front page of *ETHNOS*. Reprinted with permission from ΠΑΔΙΟΤΗΛΕΟΝΤΙΚΗ Α.Ε. (B) AMT reconstruction.

to explain how the newspaper supports its claim that Brexit will lead to EU's disintegration in two steps (1.1 and 1.1.1). As far as the procedural component of the inference is concerned, argument 1.1 is based on the "locus from material cause" (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 258–259 and p. 266), which gives rise to the maxim "if the means is available, the course of action will follow." On the material-contextual component of the inference, an accepted endoxon within the EU member-states could be the following: "the EU integration should be preserved and enforced" while the datum, realized by the multimodal integration of the kicker and the EU flag, is: "Brexit feeds the centrifugal powers in Europe. At the intersection of the two components, the first conclusion could be: "Brexit is a means that dismantles the EU project," which connects with the maxim and leads us to the standpoint "Brexit will lead to EU's disintegration."

The argument 1.1.1 further backs up the datum of the previous inferential configuration (Brexit feeds the centrifugal powers in Europe) (see Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 233–234). The procedural component of the inference between premise 1.1.1 and premise 1.1 is based on the "locus from definition" (Rigotti and Greco, 2019, p. 302). This is realized by the maxim: "if the definition is predicated of some entity, then the defined thing is also predicated of the same entity." On the material-contextual component, the same

endoxon could be assumed, namely, "the EU integration should be preserved and enforced," while the datum realized in this case by the contrast in the visual portrayal between Farage and the two EU leaders as well as the overall framing could be: "Brexit is a victory of extreme right-wing, populist forces that celebrate, and a loss of pro-integration forces that remain skeptical in the light of the result." The first conclusion, namely: "Brexit is a loss for pro-EU integration forces," interrelating with the expressed maxim, could give rise to the sub-standpoint (premise 1.1): "Brexit feeds the centrifugal powers in Europe" (see Figure 4B).

The front page of *KATHIMERINI* does not, technically speaking, follow the magazine design layout, since it consists of a number of columns and text boxes typical of the broadsheet format. Upon closer inspection, however, more than half of the stories appearing on the page concern the Brexit referendum (see Figure 5A). Based on the main headline "Global shock by Brexit" appearing at the top as well as on the headlines for other related stories, such as "Fears for damage in tourism and exports," Brexit is presented as causing an emotional process realized through the process noun "shock" and as affecting negatively the economic activity. The subhead under the headline, "Tough political directions by the EU—Cameron's resignation—Enforcement of extremists and populists in other

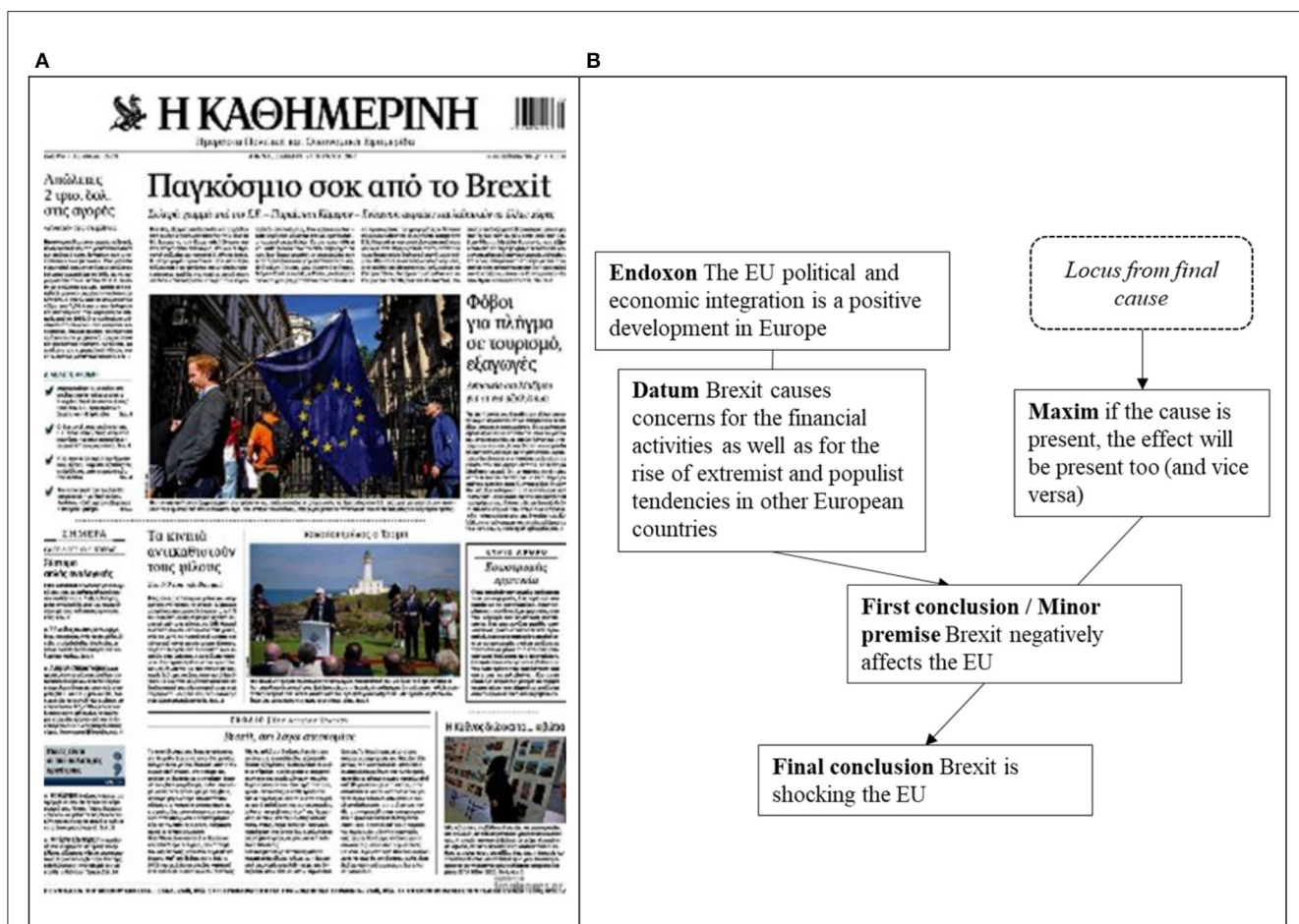


FIGURE 5 (A) Front page of *KATHIMERINI*. Reprinted with permission from ΝΕΕΣ ΚΑΘΗΜΕΡΙΝΕΣ ΕΚΔΟΣΕΙΣ ΜΟΝΟΠΡΟΣΩΠΗ ΑΝΩΝΥΜΗ ΕΤΑΙΡΕΙΑ. (B) AMT reconstruction.

countries” provides the consequences of the shock triggered by Brexit.

The main photo on the page, although separated by the text, illustrates the reaction to the shock caused by Brexit, depicting a supporter of the “Bremain” campaign as the active participant in a material process (holding the EU flag), but also in an emotional one realized by his rather gloomy facial expression, something that is also explicated by the caption under the photo. As such, the Breainers, represented through this individualization (Ledin and Machin, 2020, p. 48-50), are portrayed as participating in the sorrow caused by Brexit and its consequences. The second photo on the page is from US President Trump’s visit to Scotland with the headline “Trump is satisfied.” The choice to include this photo on the front page can be explained by the comment provided in the caption, namely that President Trump commented on the similarities between the Brexit campaign and his own campaign. One could then say that an additional reason is provided to support the standpoint that Brexit is a very bad outcome, namely that right-wing populist Trump finds it a satisfactory result. The argumentation structure can be reconstructed as follows:

1. Brexit is shocking the EU
 - 1.1. Brexit causes concerns for the financial activities as well as for the rise of extremist and populist tendencies in other European countries

The procedural component of the inference is led by the “locus from final cause” (means-end argumentation), realized by the maxim “if the cause is present, the effect will be present too (and vice versa).” On the material-contextual component, an accepted endoxon would be: “The EU political and economic integration is a positive development in Europe” and the datum that interacts with this, derived from the overall multimodal meaning construction of the front page, is: “Brexit causes concerns for the financial activities as well as for the rise of extremist and populist tendencies in other European countries.” At the intersection of the two components, a first conclusion would be: “Brexit negatively affects the EU” leading, through its connection with the aforementioned maxim, to the standpoint: “Brexit is shocking the EU” (see Figure 5B).

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this section we discuss how the newspapers compare with each other given their ideological similarities and differences and how this comparison can help us reconstruct a standing standpoint (Mohammed, 2019). At the same time, we argue why this line of research contributes to MCDA and argumentation studies by showcasing how micro-level multimodal discourse-argumentative analysis scales to macro-level discourses and perspectives. We end the section by outlining some avenues for future research.

Summarizing the findings of our analysis, we identify three perspectives that the different newspapers adopt on the topic of Brexit: (a) Newspapers that focus on the Greek perspective, commenting on the (negative) consequences for Greece, (b) those that focus on the British or European perspective and evaluate the result of the referendum as negative for the UK or EU, or

interpretate its consequences for the future of Europe, and (c) those that pay equal attention to the Greek and European perspective, evaluating the result of the referendum. Almost all newspapers appear to focus on the European and UK perspective, apart from *NEA* that explicitly mentions Greece, and *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS* that explicitly mentions both the national and the European as well as British perspectives. As it may have been expected, it is the left-wing press (*EFIMERIDA TON SYNDAKTON*) that focuses on the political and financial causes of the Brexit and argues for a change, connecting with political voices (such as the ones coming from the left-wing party SYRIZA) that have been challenging the dominant austerity doctrine put forth by the “troika” since the very beginning of the EU/Eurozone debt crisis and thereby sustaining an anti-austerity macro-level discourse. On the contrary, the right-wing press (*ELEFTHEROS TYPOS* and *KATHIMERINI*) appears to suppress anti-austerity voices by focusing on the consequences of Brexit for the markets and the financial status quo in the EU; following an attempt made by dominant EU voices to frame any exit from the EU/Eurozone as a menace for the existence of the project as a whole (see e.g., Serafis and Herman, 2018 on the discussion about “Grexit”). This being said, all newspapers except for the left-wing one make use of negatively valued terms to describe the event with process nouns such as “fear,” “shock,” and “earthquake” on their front page. When looking at the images, *EFIMERIDA TON SYNDAKTON*, *ETHNOS* and *KATHIMERINI* also have photos of individuals with a clear expression of emotion.

Despite the different framing of the event, we witness a convergence on the conceptualization of Brexit as a menacing phenomenon for the EU institutions and member-states. The centrist newspapers *NEA* and *ETHNOS* share the view that Brexit is to be feared because of the negative consequences it will have for Greece or the rest of the EU mainly on political level. An implicit warrant in this reasoning is that the EU integration project should be supported, without, however, mentioning a concrete perspective that could positively present the EU to the readers. The right-wing oriented newspapers *ELEFTHEROS TYPOS* and *KATHIMERINI* put forward the same evaluative claim regarding Brexit but focus on the people or sectors (of economy) that are affected by Brexit in their arguments. The left-wing oriented *EFIMERIDA TON SYNDAKTON*, on the other hand, points to the politics that have led to Brexit and puts forward a standpoint inciting for change on a European level. It blames the dominant center-right and pro-austerity European forces for the result of the referendum, posing, at the same time, a dilemma for a new direction toward a Europe of the people in order to avoid a possible disintegration of the EU.³ In this case, too, albeit from a different ideological standpoint, the reasoning is warranted by a positive evaluation of European integration, focusing however more on social needs of people rather than the needs of the financial markets. In the light of our analysis, a standing standpoint toward which all the newspapers under scrutiny seem to be associated with, could be the following one: “The EU integration project should be preserved at any cost.”

³ Interestingly, *KATHIMERINI* appears to respond to the view that it is financial policies that led to Brexit in an opinion article on the front page, titled “Brexit, not because of economy”.

Gavin (2018, p. 828) argues that media can have complex, multi-layered, longer term (and definitely not insubstantial) impacts on citizens, not least with regard to the creation of significant, politically important, misperceptions among electorates. He also observes that there is a lack of a coherent picture regarding political alignment of readers and political positions of newspapers, as well as that there is variation in converging or diverging positions expressed in the printed media depending on the topic (compare Brexit and climate change, for example). In the case of the Greek press reporting on Brexit, we could then say that the front pages converge on the standing standpoint about avoiding EU disintegration while they diverge at the level of the arguments why this should be avoided. In other words, the standing standpoint is premised on a series of arguments that back up each one of the single standpoints reflecting the newspapers' diverging political perspectives on the topic. What is striking, however, is that almost all newspapers, with probably the exception of the left-wing oriented one, avoided a discussion of the reasons why Brexit happened, something which ended up reinforcing the Eurosceptic disintegration discourses revolving around this particular event.

Scaling from this very standing standpoint, as it emerged from the convergence of different inferential lines reconstructed at the micro-level, we can move to the discussion at the macro-level about the reasons why the EU dominant integrationist discourses appeared to be so fragile against Eurosceptic voices that paved the way for Brexit and ultimately delegitimized the systemic values of the European project (see Zappettini and Bennett, 2022). As recent studies testify (see Serafis and Assimakopoulos, 2023 and references therein), at the time Brexit happened, "othering" processes were becoming more and more common across the EU, jeopardizing fundamental values and the very idea of solidarity and inclusion on the basis of which the EU project was founded. Among others, a Southern- versus Northern EU member-states division was established during the Eurozone debt crisis coupled by a "We-Europeans" versus the "refugee/migrant-Other" juxtaposition during the so-called "refugee crisis." The peak period of both of these crises coincided with Brexit. It is more than a truism, nowadays, that the media played a crucial role in normalizing (Krzyzanowski, 2020) and institutionalizing (Serafis et al., 2023) certain discriminatory attitudes in alliance with dominant political actors (Krzyzanowski et al., 2018) throughout the continuum of "crises" that the EU faced since 2009.

Against this background of multiple crises, the underlying claim collectively put forward by the Greek press ended up asking a notable part of the society, for whom the fundamental values of the EU project have been delegitimized since the 2009 crisis, to protect that socio-cultural and political project at any cost, without however opening up a sincere discussion about it. A deep and critical discussion about the pros and cons of the EU's actual situation, the reasons for its transformation, the dominant austerity, xenophobic and other discourses that circulated in its public sphere as well as the potential (social, cultural etc.) inequalities these may (re)produce would have helped to build a more convincing line of defense against Eurosceptics. The proposed framework and the resulting

analysis could prove to be useful toward opening such a debate, since they could enable social actors to unveil and scrutinize the opaque ideological lines and the weaknesses of reigning discriminatory attitudes that are sustained by implicit argumentative inferences.

In this paper, we argued that a systematic integration of multimodal discourse-analytical perspectives and argumentation studies is necessary in order to account for the ways in which the public can be steered by media, in general, and newspapers, in particular. We focused on the printed front page as a canvas where verbal and visual content arranged in specific ways can give rise to argumentative inferences which suggest specific argumentation structures. Identifying these argument-standpoint structures at the micro-level makes it possible to compare the standpoints advanced among newspapers of different political ideologies and to discuss the ways in which they converge or diverge at the macro-level. The study contributes to existing studies of newspaper front pages by proposing an integrated method for extracting argumentative inferences and structures from the semiotic choices made on the front page. It also contributes to CDS/MCDA by focusing on a concrete political event that has up to this day repercussions not only for the UK but also for Europe and Greece, and accounts for the role that media played in terms of how it was represented and argued about. The proposed integrated micro-argumentative approach can be used in order to move beyond the study of meaning potential at large and pave the way toward the systematic study of the argumentative potential realized in multimodal media texts (see Serafis, 2023).

In a future study, it would be of interest to empirically test the reading paths suggested by the interplay of the semiotic resources and their alignment with the proposed argumentation structures and underlying inferences. Moreover, work toward a systematic annotation scheme for multimodal and argumentation related categories would help to search for patterns in a much larger corpus of front pages reporting on Brexit or any other event on a national or international scale. It would then also be possible to have some empirical grounds for distinguishing cases where argumentative structures and inferences can be construed from the semiotic configuration of the page from others where this is partially possible or not possible at all.

Data availability statement

The original materials analyzed in the study are included in the article, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

Written informed consent was not obtained from the individual(s) for the publication of any potentially identifiable images or data included in this article because the data analyzed are front pages of newspapers where photos appear of politicians and other public figures.

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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