

Using the Greek parliamentary speech corpus for the study of aggressive political discourse

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This study investigates

- how (sexist) verbal attacks are constructed as dispreferred, therefore impolite actions in the context of the Greek parliament**
- the explanatory power of on record rebuttals to them**
- the potential of corpus linguistics to detect incidents of similar content based on verbal cues that contextualize aggression**

(1)

1. GS: Your Honor and Ms Kanelli...

2. HS: Ms Kanelli...

3. LK: Address your answer to yourself, since you intend to give me a lesson of bombast by referring to Arta and your home-village as if in your electoral campaigning!

4. HS: Ms Kalleni, Mr Minister has listened to you.

5. GS: Your Honor and Ms Kanelli we sit exams towards the Greek people.

Ms Kanelli wants to turn me into Kasidiaris, but I am not going to become Kasidiaris! You need Kasidiaris, Ms Kanelli but Stylios is not going to become Kasidiaris! Know that.

6. LK: I beg your pardon?

7. GS: **You want to turn me into Kasidiaris, but I will not become Kasidiaris,** because I have passed my exams with honors and because I sit exams towards the Artan people and the Greek people everyday and I am not interested in you personally grading me.

8. LK: Your Honor will you call him back to order after this or not?

((several turns aggravating tension/ Kanelli walks out of the sitting))

Rival political encounters within political/ parliamentary discourse

Disagreement, disputes and conflict are -more often than not- integral parts of social encounters. They constitute powerful ways of displaying stance, organizing resistance and opposition and rearranging social order.

Aggression, on the other hand, is basically behavior aimed at hurting another person or thing.

Distinguishing between aggression and conflict is not always an easy task.

Aggression and conflict **are constructed interactionally**, via the turn by turn participation in actual conversational sequences.

Analysis of aggressive encounters and of the turn by turn negotiation of meaning is the analytical choice made in order to analyze data which come from video-recordings of/and the official proceedings of parliamentary sittings.

This study investigates

- 1) How (sexist) **verbal attacks are constructed as dispreferred, therefore impolite actions** in the context of the Greek parliament.
- 2) The explanatory power of **on record rebuttals** to them.
- 3) **The potential of corpus linguistics to detect incidents of similar content based on verbal cues that contextualize aggression.**

Aggression and impoliteness: the analytical framework

In Brown and Levinson's framework (1987), **politeness** is defined as **a set of linguistic strategies designed to reduce threats to face and maintain communication.**

By way of contrast, **impoliteness** should have to do with **face-threatening speech acts and the breakdown of communication.**

However, recent approaches to im/politeness highlight **the essentialist aspect of the above mentioned definition.**

Ethnomethodological (Arundale 2010) & Social constructionist approaches (Culpeper 2005; Blitvich 2013; Watts 2010)

- Constructions marked as dispreferred define the limits of rival/aggressive discourse as an unmarked choice within political combat. The breakdown of communication, retrievable in the local context of the conversation, can be considered a marker of dispreferred communicative choices.
- Nevertheless, since parliamentary sittings are highly constrained formal procedures, breakdowns are not always possible or even eligible. Thus, sexist verbal attacks can be treated as part of the expected rivalry and not rebutted as abusive.
- The question therefore remains: what is the explanatory power of on record rebuttals to aggression?

(2) 28/6/2015: Parliamentary sitting on the referendum

Antonis Samaras, ex prime minister referring to the then house speaker Zoi Konstantopoulou:

“(...) και ’σεις κύριε Τσίπρα, να τη μαζέψετε”

“(...) **and you Mr Tsipras, you should control her**”

(3)

1. DTz: Stambouli Afroditi

2. SA: Pre[sent-feminine]=

3. DTz: [Present-masculine]

4. SA: =write down Your Honor.

[You have changed our sex], [to all of us]

5. DTz: [Bolaris Markos]

6. BM: [Present-masculine]

7. DTz: Learn grammar. Bolaris Markos.

8. BM: Present-masculine

(4)

AG: Thank you very much Your Honor (.) I would like to begin my speech with yesterday's events in ERT, and the image of Ms Konstantopoulou calling for help. **I, too, on my side, want to certify,** having been with Ms Colleague in the Lagard List ((committee)) for five months, **that it is absolutely obvious that she needs it and we should somehow help her.** Also, I should say that **the image of Ms Rahil Makri on the railings was really beyond [every expectation.]**

HS: [Please, please (x12)]

MPs: [strong protests]

(5)

1. MK: Colleague, don't talk. Listen. Learn how to listen.

2. ZK: Whom are you addressing?

3. MK: You go collect some child benefits

4. ZK: Whom are you addressing, sir?

5. MK: Calm down and go collect some child benefits. Do not continue!

6. ZK: Whom are you addressing?

7. HS: Why are you interrupting?

8. ZK: Call him to order!

((intense protests))

9. MK: Me, I will not be deterred, Your Honor, by those things!

10. HS: Ok go on

11. ZK: Your Honor, will you call him to order?

12. MK: Sit down! Step on the seats now!

((intense protests))

13. MK: I am glad, Your Honor, even if she steps on the seats. Honestly!

(6)

1. ZK: (...) Yesterday we waited for hours even for the ones who reserved their right to take stand and disappeared from the Committee. Come Ms-Mr: Petrako.

2. P: <X> thank you [very much Your Honor]

3. M: [Because- Mr Petrako] excuse me for a minute.

((I request the right to speak)) On a personal issue=

4. P: =If you allow me=

5. M: =No, I will not allow you. (...)

((several turns aggravating conflict))

6. Meimarakis: (...) And you are not going to give me lessons on how to behave, when with your behavior you do not inspire respect.

You have me li:ke an animal here and we are waiting Ms Her Honor ((ironically)) for two hours. Ok, we are waiting for you.

Will you offend as on top of everything. Well, enough, enough.

Discussion: exceeding the limits of the expected

If politic use of language equals unmarked linguistic choices, then this is not the case of discourse addressed to women members of the Greek Parliament. Despite the fact that the collapse of the formal parliamentary procedures is not always possible within sittings, cases of intense protests, temporary breakdowns and even the walkout of offended parties impede discussions in process. Reactions such as the aforementioned ones, contextualize impoliteness, i.e. the unacceptable use of abusive linguistic forms that clearly exceed the limits of expected political rivalry. They can also serve as markers of aggression and facilitate analysis via corpus linguistics technologies.

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