

The Multimodal Representation of Italian Anti-Mafia Discourse: Foregrounding Civil Resistance and Interlocution in Two Global English Video Reportages

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Abstract

This paper examines the multimodal representation of civil resistance against Italian mafia (Cosa Nostra and 'Ndrangheta) in two English video reportages. More specifically, the analysis describes interlocutive relations between social actors displayed not only in the criminal, but also in the civil and media spheres, and allows for a multimodal description of cohesion on the macro level in these media formats. The theoretical focus is on the combination of the interpersonal metafunction in systemic-functional (multimodal) grammar and the cognitive notion of (intersubjective) viewpoint in cognitive grammar. The analysis of the video formats shows which activists are put onstage in different socio-economic settings (agriculture and education), and reveals the different extra- or intradiegetic perspectives taken by journalists in relation to civil and legal anti-mafia actors. The analysis discusses different (verbal and/or visual) techniques for relating individual viewpoints and inter-actor relations, as well as the active role of journalists in setting up cohesion between video sequences. As media discourse foregrounds anti-mafia activism and as it displays the embedded role of journalists in multimodal meaning-making, the conventional discursive representation of mafia is transformed: heroic images of mafiosi are (verbally and/or visually) backgrounded and the discursive emphasis is now on the transformation of civil society, where activists simultaneously tell and perform their breaking the law of silence. On a meta-level the paper opens up the theoretical project of (multimodal) Critical Discourse Analysis, bringing in an altered, Foucauldian concept of non-hegemonic power: the representation of mafia victims and social workers, no longer as undergoers of totalitarian criminal violence, but as active players peacefully and successfully opposing the mafia, is in line with the moral and empowering project of Foucault's hermeneutics of the subject.

Keywords

anti-mafia, video reportage, multimodality, critical discourse analysis, systemicfunctional and cognitive grammar, performance of resistance, social actors