

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The role of organizational language in gaining legitimacy from the perspective of new institutional theory

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Abstract

This research addresses the role of organizational language in the establishment of legitimacy from the perspective of New Institutional Theory. Several conceptual and methodical contributions have been made. First, by pairing cultural-cognitive legitimacy with phenomenological institutionalism and socio-political legitimacy with social organizational institutionalism, we have proposed a new way of classifying legitimacy. Second, we made connections between language strategies of organizations and cultural-cognitive and socio-political legitimacy. Finally, by re-categorizing language strategies aimed at legitimacy, we have provided a framework that is applicable in studying the relationship between different language strategies and legitimacy. Using this framework, we conducted an empirical study in which we analyzed the press releases of five major Turkish business groups. It was found that their language strategies were generally similar and mostly aimed at socio-political legitimacy.

Key words: Institutionalism; new institutional theory; organizational language; organizational legitimacy; Turkish business groups

Introduction

New Institutional Theory (NIT) asserts that organizations can present even their negative outcomes or results as acceptable to the public through ceremonies, rationalized myths, references to scientific authorities, statistics, expert advisors, etc. (DiMaggio, 1997; Meyer & Rowan, 1991), either by misrepresenting organizational reality to mislead the public or by justifying their activities to persuade society (Green & Li, 2011; Lawrence, 1999; Powell, 1991; Scott, 1991). In this way, organizations can achieve legitimacy in accordance with the norms, values, and expectations of their evaluators in their institutional environment (Bitektine, 2011; Navis & Glynn, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008). Thus, organizational language plays a key role in both changing organizational reality and justifying organizational activities (Heracleous, 2004; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). For example, the role of language was identified in legitimizing new organizations (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), start-ups (Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001), organizations in crisis (Massey, 2001), multinationals (Luyckx & Janssens, 2016; Vaara & Tienari, 2008); organizations in environmentally sensitive industries (Kuruppu, Milne, & Tilt, 2019); the petroleum industry (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012); public sector organizations (Wæraas, 2020); downsizing organizations (Hossfeld, 2018; Lamertz & Baum, 1998); and mergers (Vaara & Monin, 2010).

In general, despite numerous studies examining the relationship between language and legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Green & Li, 2011; Haack, Pfarrer, & Scherer, 2014; Harmon,

Green, & Goodnight, 2015; Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011; Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017; Vaara & Tienari, 2008), a number of issues remain neglected from conceptual, theoretical, and practical perspectives. Therefore, this study aims, first, to clarify some issues related to the relationship between organizational language and legitimacy from the perspective of NIT and, second, to provide empirical results by examining Turkish business groups' pursuit of legitimacy through organizational language. To this end, we address two research questions. First, what organizational language strategy influences what kind of legitimacy? Second, what kind of legitimacy does business groups in Türkiye seek through their language strategies? We believe that the results of this study will contribute to the literature by re-addressing and reconsidering some challenging issues.

We have identified four major challenges in the literature when examining the relationship between language and legitimacy. First, the differences and inconsistencies in categorizing language strategies in organizations (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006) lead to incommensurable empirical results in the literature, thus clarification is needed in categorizing language strategies. Second, there is no consensus on the classification of types of legitimacy (see, e.g., Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Archibald, 2004; Deephouse, Bundy, Plunkett, & Suchman, 2017) and we suggest that a new classification is needed. Third, while some studies discuss the influence of language on legitimacy (Golant & Sillince, 2007; Lounsbury & Glynn, 2001; Massey, 2001; Vaara & Monin, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), they neglect the point of which language strategy influences which type of legitimacy. Although some argue that such matching is theoretically impossible (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Deephouse et al., 2017: 40; Scott, 2014), we claim that making connections between legitimacy types and language strategies is both possible and necessary. Finally, most empirical studies examined language-based legitimacy through situational and temporal event-based documents (Hossfeld, 2018; Kuruppu, Milne, & Tilt, 2019; Lamertz & Baum, 1998; Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012; Vaara & Monin, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008), although for NIT, legitimacy is not defined by organizations' responses to situational and temporal events but by their long-term and stable behaviors and practices. Therefore, we suggest that it is more appropriate to use long-term periodic documents that can better reflect the language of the organization.

Based on these challenging issues in the literature, this study attempts to make some conceptual, theoretical, and methodical recommendations and provide empirical results from the selected Turkish business groups. In doing so, we will first propose a clearer classification of the dimensions of legitimacy. Second, for theoretical and practical reasons, we will attempt to reorganize organizational language strategies. Third, we will then match each organizational language strategy with the types of legitimacy since no such attempt has been made in the literature. Finally, to test our framework linking language strategies to types of legitimacy, we will examine the language strategies of selected Turkish business groups.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Organizational legitimacy

Legitimacy is an important issue in the literature of NIT (Colyvas & Powell, 2006; Meyer & Rowan, 1991: 53; Suchman, 1995: 572). The establishment of legitimacy depends on the congruence of organizational structure, activities, and outcomes with the regulatory, normative, and cognitive processes of the institutional environment (Scott, 2008: 427). Since legitimacy is arises from evaluative actors' perceptions of the organization, it is linked to symbolic organizational realities (Haack, Pfarrer, & Scherer, 2014; Harmon, Green, & Goodnight, 2015; Vaara & Monin, 2010; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006). Given that language is a symbolic phenomenon that serves to construct social reality (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004: 155), it therefore makes sense to establish a relationship between language and legitimacy.

Numerous attempts have been made to classify legitimacy. For example, Bitektine, Hill, Song, and Vandenberghe (2020: 108) and Aldrich and Fiol (1994: 648) proposed cognitive and socio-political legitimacy; Suchman (1995: 577) pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy; Scott (2014: 72–74) regulatory, normative, and cultural-cognitive legitimacy; Archibald (2004: 173) socio-political and cultural legitimacy; and Deephouse et al., (2017: 39–40) pragmatic, regulatory, moral-normative, and cultural-cognitive legitimacy. In addition, some recent studies have categorized the types of legitimacy as cognitive (cultural), regulatory, moral (ethical), pragmatic (instrumental), managerial (output), technical (professional), emotional, and industrial (sectoral) (Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, & Diez-Martin, 2018: 9; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Diez-de-Castro, 2021: 2–6). However, in our view, managerial (output) and technical (professional) types of legitimacies are not consistent with the logic of NIT and rather reflect the views of contingency theory (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017: 456–457). In the same way, the industrial (sectoral) distinction is not useful for classifying the dimensions of legitimacy because it refers to the sources of legitimacy (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008: 54; Deephouse et al., 2017: 36).

These distinctions are analytical conceptualizations that are likely to clash, and in some cases, they represent phenomena that cannot be separated (Deephouse & Suchman, 2008: 67; Deephouse et al., 2017: 40; Powell & Colyvas, 2008: 300; Scott, 2014: 74). In order to find a compromise in the categorization of legitimacy types, it is necessary to distinguish between ‘social-organizational’ and ‘phenomenological’ institutionalisms (Meyer, 2017: 834–835), with the former emphasizing the political and normative and the latter emphasizing the cultural and cognitive causes of the actor’s action. Given this distinction, and following Meyer (2017: 835) idea that cultural and cognitive processes tend to be phenomenological, while regulatory and normative processes have social-organizational features, it seems plausible to assign ‘socio-political legitimacy’ to social-organizational institutionalism and ‘cultural-cognitive legitimacy’ to phenomenological institutionalism. As can be seen in Table 1, we have placed cognitive and cultural legitimacy in the cultural-cognitive category and normative, moral, regulatory, and pragmatic legitimacy in the socio-political legitimacy category.

The rationale for this classification of legitimacy is related to the cognitive states of the evaluators who assess the legitimacy of an organization (Deephouse et al., 2017: 27). Table 1 shows which motivation or trait influences evaluators’ judgments when an organization develops a specific language strategy aimed at gaining evaluators’ legitimacy (Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Diez-de-Castro, 2021: 4). When such a specific language strategy is truly consistent with the evaluator’s cognitive categories (Bitektine et al., 2020), the actor making the judgment is passive (Tost, 2011), and in this situation, legitimacy arises automatically (DiMaggio, 1997). In such cases, legitimacy usually has a self-reproducing feature (Colyvas & Powell, 2006: 309), because it is based on self-evident beliefs and assumptions of the evaluators (Bitektine et al., 2020: 111; Suchman, 1995: 582). It is plausible to refer to this automatically derived legitimacy type as cultural-cognitive (Deephouse et al., 2017; Scott, 2014) and to define its formation process as phenomenological (Meyer, 2017). On the other hand, if a particular language strategy is consistent with the basic features of a collective/social structure (Bitektine et al., 2020) that the actor (evaluator) considers or observes when making a judgment (Haack & Sieweke, 2020: 153–154), then the actor is considered active (Tost, 2011) and legitimacy emerges at the end of a conscious deliberation (DiMaggio, 1997). Here, the actor pays attention to the support or opinion of the social majority in her/his assessment of legitimacy (Haack & Sieweke, 2020: 155). Therefore, it is useful to name this type of legitimacy as socio-political (Deephouse et al., 2017; Scott, 2014) and to define its formation process as social-organizational (Meyer, 2017).

Organizational language

The importance of language in understanding organizational symbols has been recognized since interest shifted from sociology and linguistics to the field of organizational theories (Putnam &

Table 1. The processes and types of legitimacy

Versions of legitimacy	Base of legitimacy	Actor's cognitive situation	Mode of actor's evaluation	Main types of legitimacy	Sub-types of legitimacy
Phenomenological (Meyer, 2017)	Category-based, cognitive (Bitektine et al., 2020)	Automatic (DiMaggio, 1997)	Passive (Tost, 2011)	Cultural-cognitive (Deephouse et al., 2017; Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, and Diez-Martin, 2018; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Diez-de-Castro 2021; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Prado-Roman, 2021; Scott, 2014)	<i>cognitive</i> (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Bitektine et al., 2020; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Suchman, 1995) <i>cultural</i> (Archibald, 2004)
Social organizational (Meyer, 2017)	Feature-based, socio-political (Bitektine et al., 2020)	Deliberative (DiMaggio, 1997)	Evaluator (Tost, 2011)	Socio-political (Aldrich and Fiol, 1994; Archibald, 2004; Bitektine et al., 2020)	<i>normative</i> (Scott, 2008; 2014) <i>moral</i> (Deephouse et al., 2017; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, and Diez-Martin, 2018; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Diez-de-Castro, 2021; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Prado-Roman, 2021; Suchman, 1995) <i>regulatory</i> (Deephouse et al., 2017; Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, and Diez-Martin, 2018; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Diez-de-Castro 2021; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Prado-Roman, 2021; Scott, 2008; 2014) <i>pragmatic</i> (Deephouse et al., 2017; Deephouse and Suchman, 2008; Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, and Diez-Martin, 2018; Suchman, 1995; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, and Diez-de-Castro, 2021; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Prado-Roman, 2021)

Fairhurst, 2001: 78). As a result, various aspects of organizational actors such as intention, value, social practice, and interaction have been studied (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a: 137–138). In studies where language and text are linked, language is used in a structural sense as a system of relationships between concepts, while text is used in the sense of practical outcomes that language produces at a particular time on a particular topic (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004: 155). In this respect, ‘text’ is an actual copy of the language used (Fairclough, 2003: 2). In a broad sense, the term ‘discourse’ is used to encompass all communication practices such as speech, conversation, rhetoric, metaphor, simile, sign, written interaction, visual and oral forms (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004: 3–21; Grant, Keenoy, & Oswick, 2001: 8; Oswick, Putnam, & Keenoy, 2004: 107).

Lockwood, Giorgi, and Glynn (2019: 10–14), in reviewing articles published between 1993 and 2017, found that the five most frequently used terms in the management literature were discourse (about 30% of articles), public language or strategic communication (18%), stories or narratives (18%), rhetoric (17%), and frame (15%), and they suggested that the concept of language encompasses all of these terms. For Fairhurst and Cooren (2004: 132) and Putnam and Fairhurst (2001: 80), the concept of language also seems to be better suited to understanding the formation and functioning of social structure because of its structural features. The concept of discourse, on the other hand, reminds us of the powerful intermediary actor (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017: 460). For these reasons, we prefer to use the term ‘language’ instead of ‘discourse’ in this study.

In the literature of NIT, a clear link is made between language and social structures or institutions. Language creates a cognitive framework that helps translate subjective meanings into social reality and classifies these meanings by creating fields of meaning or semantic domains. It affects social structures and institutions by contributing to the formation of situational rationalities (Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Prado-Roman, 2021: 1030; Heracleous, 2004: 178) and social identities (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2004: 157), which means that it has the capacity to create or change and reflect a social structure through its creative and productive properties (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a: 138). Although researchers in the early NIT literature ignored the role of language in the process of institutionalization (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004: 638), later proposals of language interactions (Powell & Colyvas, 2008: 279), the adaptive role of language (Hirsch, 1997: 1719), and the relationship between cognition and language (Phillips & Malhotra, 2008: 703–704) became prevalent. This is because language is intertwined with important cultural symbolic elements (Weick, 1993: 635) for organizations, such as myths, rituals, and stories (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001: 79), which are used by organizations for purposes such as legitimacy, prestige, image, and reputation (Golant & Sillince, 2007: 1152; Swidler, 1986: 273). In this process, the structural property of language determines which symbols and words make up linguistic forms (Loewenstein, Ocasio, & Jones, 2012: 45) and where their boundaries lie (Powell & Colyvas, 2008: 299). In this way, a growing number of studies (Lefsrud, Graves, & Phillips, 2019: 2–3; Puyou & Quattrone, 2018: 723–724) examine the effects of multimodal messages combining words and images on legitimacy.

In the literature, different terms such as rhetorical strategies (Bitektine & Haack, 2015: 64; Harmon, Green, & Goodnight, 2015: 78; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005: 45), legitimacy stories (Golant & Sillince, 2007: 1153), legitimacy strategies (Vaara & Monin, 2010: 11; Vaara & Tienari, 2008: 985); legitimation strategies (Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012: 1477), discursive legitimacy strategies (Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006: 797) are used to describe the linguistic forms that organizations use to obtain legitimacy from their institutional surroundings. However, we prefer to use the term ‘language strategies’ for the reasons stated above.

The relationship between organizational language strategies and legitimacy

Two groups of studies in the literature place organizational language at the center of NIT. The first focuses on the influence of organizational language on the process of institution formation and change (Clemente & Roulet, 2015: 96–97; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011: 1163;

Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015: 14; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004: 6–7; Fiss & Zajac, 2006: 1183; Gray, Purdy, & Ansari, 2015: 115–116). This approach is referred to as ‘communicative institutionalism’ (Cornelissen et al., 2015: 14) or ‘rhetorical institutionalism’ (Green & Li, 2011: 1670), which emphasizes the central role of language and meaning. The second group of studies questions the role of organizational language in establishing organizational legitimacy (Bitektine & Haack, 2015: 67; Green & Li, 2011: 1663; Leeuwen, 2007: 93; Patriotta, Gond, & Schultz, 2011: 1806; Vaara & Tienari, 2008: 991; Wæraas, 2020: 49). In these studies, legitimacy is presented as a perceptual process in which shared meaning emerges through language and is grounded in the structure of language (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017: 460). The notion ‘grounded in language’ also indicates approaches that explain legitimacy through language (Suddaby, Bitektine, & Haack, 2017: 460), while ‘linguistic method’ refers to all methods that examine the relationship between institutions and institutional factors based on language (Phillips & Malhotra, 2017: 401–402). The use of standard language practices to achieve legitimacy is defined as ‘institutional strategies’ (Lawrence, 1999: 166–167).

As illustrated in Figure 1, legitimacy is the way in which an organization is judged and perceived by its environment (Boyd, 2000: 345; Haack & Sieweke, 2020: 153) and emerges as a value in the thinking and actions of all evaluating actors (Harmon, Green, & Goodnight, 2015: 76). These actors make judgments about the social characteristics, actions, and outcomes of the organization based on their perceptions and beliefs (Tost, 2011: 687). Thus, if the forms of organizations’ language strategies do not match the institutional environment or the perceptions and beliefs of the evaluating actors, the desired legitimacy cannot be achieved (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004: 639). For this reason, organizations develop their language strategies by prioritizing the expectations of their institutional environment (Green & Li, 2011: 1663).

Researchers have proposed different categorizations of language strategies aimed at organizational legitimacy. Suddaby and Greenwood (2005: 45), for example, identified five types of them, namely ontological, teleological, cosmological, historical, and value-based, while Leeuwen and Wodak (1999: 104–110) identified four types: authorization, rationalization, moralization, and mythopoeia, and Vaara, Tienari, and Laurila (2006: 790) added a fifth category, namely normalization. Green (2004: 659–660) refers to three basic strategies: ethos, pathos, and logos. Bitektine

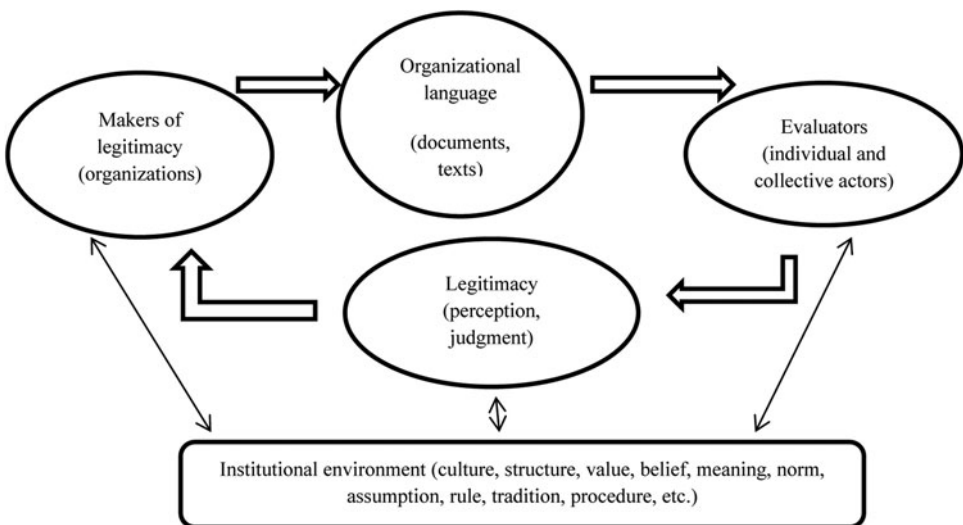


Figure 1. Language and organizational legitimacy.

Note. The figure describes the process by which organizational language influences audience perceptions and builds legitimacy.

and Haack (2015: 51–52) distinction between ‘propriety’ at the individual level and ‘validity’ at the collective level is related. A propriety evaluation occurs when the actor evaluates an organization or its actions as appropriate. Here, the actor’s assumptions about legitimacy are paramount. Validity, on the other hand, requires a collective consensus within the social environment to consider the organization or its actions appropriate. We need to keep in mind that evaluators, as individuals, are under the influence of the social context they belong to and therefore gradually adjust their propriety beliefs to their perceived validity (Haack & Sieweke, 2018: 491, 2020: 154). This link between propriety and validity demonstrates the need for a holistic and contextual perspective on the formation of individual judgments (Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzalez, & Prado-Roman, 2021: 1). In this context, Haack, Schilke, and Zucker (2021: 750) propose the concept of consensus as a meso-level legitimacy component that links the micro-propriety and macro-validity levels, where validity refers to an institutionalized perception of propriety at the collective level. Therefore, consensus is an intermediate structure that indicates the degree to which evaluators in a given social collectivity reach the judgment that a legitimacy is accepted. Adding the level of consensus to legitimacy allows us to account for the possibility that there are potentially conflicting judgments that can trigger a change in perception and explain the transition from individual to collective. In this study, however, we do not want to investigate the relationship between appropriateness and validity but rather wish to find out what language strategies influence them.

All in all, Bitektine and Haack (2015: 64–65) propose 11 strategies, five of which relate to propriety and six to validity. It seems that some of the proposed categories can be combined because of their similarities. For example, normative beliefs and ethical values (ethos) (Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, & Diez-Martin, 2018: 11–12; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales and Diez-de-Castro, 2021; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales & Prado-Roman, 2021: 5) and narratives and metaphors (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010: 1092) are combined because they have similar content. Narratives and metaphors are generally used to evaluate the social importance of organizations and to evoke positive connotations (Etzion & Ferraro, 2010: 1093; Navis & Glynn, 2010: 443). Similarly, strategies that emphasize natural development and favorable categories allow organizations to position themselves in favorable categories and benefit from the legitimacy spillover from the category to the organization (Bitektine & Haack, 2015: 64; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005: 45). These two strategies can be combined as they are often used together and produce similar results. For example, organizations can claim their international cooperation (favorable categories) (Vaara & Tienari, 2008) as a prerequisite for globalization (natural development) (Vaara & Tienari, 2011). As a result, as shown in Table 2, we propose eight language strategies that represent a model that relates language strategies to the level and type of legitimacy.

There is evidence in the literature as to which language strategy influences socio-political or cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Accordingly, we have attempted to assign language strategies to

Table 2. Language strategies and their relations to legitimacy

Levels of legitimacy	Language strategies that emphasize on...	Types of legitimacy
Validity (Collective level)	1- Endorsement	Cultural-cognitive
	2- Authority	Socio-political
	3- A natural development or favorable categories	Socio-political
	4- Historical story, narratives and metaphors	Cultural-cognitive
Propriety (Individual level)	1- Social beliefs and values	Socio-political
	2- Success of an entity	Cultural-cognitive
	3- Identity of an entity	Cultural-cognitive
	4- Social emotions	Socio-political

legitimacy types. Cultural-cognitive legitimacy refers to widely believed assumptions and is associated with the organization's congruence with cognitive categories in the minds of evaluators (Bitektine et al., 2020: 108; Suchman, 1995: 582; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005: 37). It is about self-evident truths and therefore results from compliance with cognitive categories (Bitektine et al., 2020). It is also related to pervasive knowledge and cognitive status. Thus, when a language strategy matches an assumed truth, the evaluator makes the legitimacy judgment without engaging with the environment (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994: 648; Haack & Sieweke, 2020). Here, legitimacy only comes from the evaluator's internal processes, and language strategies must focus on organizational content, such as the organization's identity, stories, narratives, successes, structure, and management practices.

Organizational structure and management practices refer to conformity to commonly accepted views and provide cognitive legitimacy. In general, the more the organization resembles the prototype of the accepted category, the higher the cognitive legitimacy (Bitektine et al., 2020: 110; Suchman, 1995: 598). Stories and narratives are usually presented to idealize the past (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005: 53), reflect the prevailing logic in the field, and can reveal the cognitive limitations of actors (Green & Li, 2011: 1685–1686; Golant & Sillince, 2007: 1164). Emphasis on achievements and successes (Golant & Sillince, 2007) aims to provide logical justification for an organizational action or motivation (Green, 2004; Vaara & Tienari, 2008; Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006) and is more likely to affect cognitive legitimacy as it relates to cognitive categories. Emphasizing the organization's identity through language strategies contributes to the perception of the organization as similar or different from other organizations. Belonging to the same category as other organizations provides evaluators with similar sensitivities when evaluating the organization. This is called category-based cognitive legitimacy (Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezas, 2012: 194; Glynn & Navis, 2013: 1132; Navis & Glynn, 2010: 441).

Socio-political legitimacy refers to the institutional environment's evaluation, justification, and acceptance of the organization's adherence to rules related to structure, practices, and outcomes (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994: 648; Bitektine et al., 2020: 108; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008: 53). This type of legitimacy comes from the evaluation made by comparing the observed organizational characteristics with the existing norms and regulations (Bitektine et al., 2020). In such an evaluation, the discourse intersects with an externally defined and agreed-upon benefit or norm, and therefore the evaluator makes judgments about legitimacy by considering external factors (Haack & Sieweke, 2020), such as the public, opinion leaders, government officials, norms, and legal regulations (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994: 648). Therefore, socio-political legitimacy is associated with social-organizational institutionalism (Meyer, 2017). Since legitimacy is based on external factors, organizations' language strategies emphasize factors such as authority, natural developments, norms, and feelings. Authority refers to laws, regulations, accrediting bodies, experts, or powerful individuals (Green, 2004: 660; Suchman, 1995) and therefore generates normative-moral legitimacy. Similarly, natural developments or favorite categories tend to justify actions and help create pragmatic legitimacy (Green, 2004: 660; Suchman, 1995), while normative beliefs and values generate moral legitimacy that appeals to socially accepted rules (Green, 2004: 660; Suchman, 1995). Lastly, feelings are very passionate appeals to the individual interests of the evaluator that create pragmatic legitimacy (Green, 2004: 659; Suchman, 1995).

After reorganizing the classifications of legitimacy types and the categories of language strategies and matching the language strategies with legitimacy types, a new model has emerged that facilitates the study of the relationship between language and legitimacy from an empirical perspective. In this study, we use this framework to examine the cases of five Turkish business groups.

Method

So far, our discussion has suggested that language strategies are an effective way for organizations to gain legitimacy from their institutional environment. There are numerous studies in the

literature that address this relationship. However, in contrast to the long-term logic of NIT, they are usually conducted using texts created for temporary or one-time events (e.g., Etzion & Ferraro, 2010: 1095; Hossfeld, 2018: 18; Lefsrud & Meyer, 2012: 1484; Luyckx & Janssens, 2016: 2; Vaara & Monin, 2010: 7). In this study, we compare the periodically published texts of the five Turkish business groups and investigate whether they reflect the shared meaning of the institutional environment. The texts made up of a total of 876 ‘press releases’ that were issued between 2011 and 2017 with the aim of informing the public about the activities and status of the business groups. They are freely available through their websites.

Research context

Turkish companies have developed in a state-dependent system since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 (Buğra, 2003; Özen & Önder, 2020, 2021). Although the role of the private sector and foreign investors in the economy has become more important with the change of Türkiye’s macroeconomic policy from import substitution to export-oriented development in 1980, the dominant role of the state in the economy and in resource allocation remains (Coşkun, Taş, & Gürler, *in press*). For this reason, it can be said that Turkish companies are still dependent on the state despite the liberalization of the economy (Buğra, 2003). However, since 1980, changes have been observed in the discourses of both the state and the private sector. With the vision of economic liberalization and internationalization, and with the help of the accession program to the European Union, terms such as economic growth, industrialization, progress, modernization, economic liberalization, and globalization have been used as legitimation tools to justify government policies and business practices (Gökşen & Üsdiken, 2001; Özen & Berkman, 2007). Obviously, this background has influenced the language and legitimation strategies of organizations in Türkiye.

In order to evaluate their language strategies more accurately, it is also necessary to describe the main characteristics of Turkish business groups. It is obvious that they are all family owned and that their boards are strongly controlled by family members (Özen & Önder, 2020, 2021). With few exceptions, they are highly diversified and operate in numerous unrelated industries, but have centralized authority structures (Gökşen & Üsdiken, 2001: 332). Most business groups had fragile social legitimacy due to their heavy dependence on the state and uncertainties in the political and economic spheres that hindered the development of a self-confident bourgeoisie (Buğra, 2003). Therefore, they often resorted to legitimizing discourses such as being a servant of the nation (Özen & Berkman, 2007: 829), modernizing and industrializing the country, and integrating the economy into the world (Coşkun, Taş, & Gürler, *in press*).

Selection of cases and data collection

The texts used in this research were produced by the five largest business groups for the purpose of evaluating actors in the institutional circle to gain organizational legitimacy. They all produce a large number of case-specific, regular, and periodic texts to inform the institutional circle or to manage perceptions. Therefore, a carefully designed sampling technique is required to select the appropriate business groups and the mass of material they produce. We first applied several criteria to identify the most appropriate cases for the purpose of this study. Business groups are the most common form of larger, usually conglomerate companies in Türkiye. They are well established, widely known to the public, active in the media, and owned by famous families who regularly participate in social and cultural events. Therefore, it seemed plausible to designate them as units of analysis for the study. Then, following the logic of purposive sampling (Flick, 2009: 257), we developed several criteria to select the most suitable business groups for the study. First, they must be among the largest companies, representing the scale and general outlook of the Turkish economy. Second, they must be visible to the public and willing to

communicate with the public by using various means and continuously producing materials that legitimize their actions. Finally, to meet the criterion of maximum diversity (Patton, 2015: 402), they must represent industrial and social diversity.

In this way, Doğuş, Koç, Sabancı, Yıldız, and Zorlu were selected to be among the 15 largest companies in Türkiye in terms of economic size (Çolpan & Hikino, 2008: 30). They are visible and in constant communication with the public. In terms of industrial diversity, Koç and Sabancı pursue a diversification strategy, while Doğuş, Yıldız and Zorlu are relatively focused on specific industries (Çolpan & Hikino, 2008: 30). We assume that they have all gained their legitimacy by being the largest, most admired (Çolpan & Hikino, 2008: 30), and most popular private sector companies (see various Capital Magazine surveys). Moreover, they are embedded in the social and institutional systems and, therefore, it is plausible to expect that their languages better reflect the institutional environment to which they belong (Bitektine & Haack, 2015: 62). Also, most of the other groups do not issue regular press releases and were therefore not included in the sample.

Obviously, the selected groups provide a large amount of textual material, e.g., financial reports, websites, and press releases. We chose press releases as the research material because they are published regularly and have more content on social, cultural, and political issues. Koç has been publishing press releases since 1999, Sabancı since 2000, Yıldız since 2011, Zorlu since 2007, and Doğuş since 2010, so we included all press releases published in the period 2011–2017 in our data. Details of the business groups and their press releases are presented in Table 3.

Data analysis

Quantitative and qualitative techniques of content analysis can be used to analyze any text in a systematic way (Flick, 2009: 30–323). Provided that systematic and extensive material is available (Mayring, 2011: 116–122), quantitative analysis aims to uncover the frequency of occurrence of certain aspects of the themes within the material, while qualitative analysis aims to uncover meanings and linguistic practices. Our data is suitable for both techniques. The categories of legitimacy and language strategies were derived from the literature. Texts were repeatedly and carefully examined according to the categories developed. Then, the codes that represented the categories were identified, and the themes were created by putting the codes into groups. New codes and themes emerged with each reading, and in some cases, they were combined until we finalized the codes and themes.

Table 3. The business groups and research materials

Business groups	Established in	Industrial concentration	Publishing press releases since	N/of press released analyzed	N/of coding
Doğuş	1951	Automotive, refreshments, tourism, energy	2010	132	553
Koç	1926	Diversified, conglomerate	1999	178	1,086
Sabancı	1932	Diversified, conglomerate	2000	236	1,985
Yıldız	1944	Food and beverage, retail	2011	125	852
Zorlu	1953	Textile, electronics	2007	205	1,669
Total				876	6,145

It should be noted that the number, length, and content of the press releases of each business group are different, and therefore the codes generated from them vary. The software 'MAXQDA 2018' was used to analyze the data and determine the frequency of the codes. Coding is generally about discovering regularities in the data. When creating themes, care should be taken to ensure that a theme can represent all associated codes (Flick, 2009: 306–324). To identify the codes, one of the authors repeatedly read and coded the texts with the help of an experienced colleague, while the links between themes and labels were checked by the authors. Then, each code was assigned to one of the eight language strategies previously identified under socio-political and cultural-cognitive legitimacies.

Tables 4 and 5 shows examples of codes, themes, and quotes from the texts published by the business groups to influence socio-political and cultural-cognitive legitimacy. To clarify the tables, we give some examples of how we linked quotes from the text to the language strategies. For example, in Sabancı's language, there is an emphasis on shared values and sensitivities such as equality and justice; '...we have helped ensure that girls have the right to access education, that women's position in the economy is strengthened, and that they have a voice in politics and at all levels of society' (Sabancı Business Group, 2015). This emphasis is on the moral values and beliefs of society. In Yıldız's discourse, the emphasis is on the technical side of the products as they are tested and approved by experts: '...(our bottled water product) Saka ... is blind tested by a group of 120 chefs and 12 experts in terms of production conditions, taste, and packaging ...' (Yıldız Business Group, 2012). Obviously, such discourse aims at expert authority. Similarly, Koç's discourse, '...our unity and solidarity, our brotherhood, our common values are being eroded ...' (Koç Business Group, 2017) emphasizes solidarity, unity, and brotherhood. This is a clear indication of positive emotions.

Research findings

Table 6 shows the number of occurrences and frequency of codes representing the language strategies used by each business group. Here we can see which language strategies are most frequently used by them and to which type of legitimacy they attach more importance.

When considering a single-language strategy, all business groups gave preference to the one aimed at influencing the normative beliefs and moral values of the evaluators. Among the eight language strategies, the least preferred one for Koç, Yıldız and Sabancı is the one that emphasizes propriety, while for Zorlu and Doğuş it is the one that uses stories, metaphors, etc. Sabancı uses all language strategies in a more balanced way than the others. It seems that Doğuş's least preferred language strategies are endorsement and historical stories and narratives. We think that their different social backgrounds and political views explain why they use language in slightly different ways.

Koç, Sabancı, and Yıldız's use of historical stories and narratives might be related to their age, as they are among the oldest business groups (Çolpan & Hikino, 2008). Koç's emphasis on corporate identity could be due to the fact that they see themselves as pioneers of Türkiye's industrialization and representatives of the official ideology (Gökşen & Üsdiken, 2001; Özen & Berkman, 2007; Özen & Önder, 2020, 2021). Obviously, Doğuş's strategies for socio-political legitimacy are more intense than those of the others. This can be seen as a precaution against the fragility of their social support (Özen & Berkman, 2007). The fact that Zorlu and Yıldız place so much emphasis on adopting global practices may also be due to their comparatively late entry into international business activities (Çolpan & Hikino, 2008). Nonetheless, all business groups place an emphasis on modernization, internationalization, and liberalization, which is consistent with their mission to modernize the country and integrate it into the global system (Gökşen & Üsdiken, 2001; Özen & Berkman, 2007; Özen & Önder, 2020).

The results in Table 7 show that the language strategies for socio-political legitimacy of each business group are more intense than cultural-cognitive legitimacy. Koç, Zorlu, Yıldız, Sabancı,

Table 4. Codes, themes, and categories in strategies affecting socio-political legitimacy

Category: socio-political legitimacy	Sample themes	Sample codes	Selected quotes
The social beliefs, values	Common values and sensitivities, culture and art, values, justice	Equality, gender, universal-national sensitivities, arts, justice, ethics, tolerance, trust, fairness	<p>‘... without one of peace, democracy, human rights, and development, there is no other ...’ (Koç Business Group, 2014)</p> <p>‘...we have contributed to girls’ access to the right to education, strengthening the place of women in economic life and empowering them to have a say in politics and in all levels of society’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2015)</p> <p>‘...’stay in the game’ is a platform that encourages children and young people to play basketball and thus stay away from bad habits...’ (Doğuş Business Group, 2016)</p> <p>“...Zorlu children’s theater (is going to) ... launch a competition called “a dream, a game” ...” (Zorlu Business Group, 2016)</p> <p>‘...Sakıp Sabancı Museum, ... created and implemented the firsts for the Turkish culture and art community’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2014)</p> <p>“...One of the social responsibility projects, “A Place for Art”, with the vision of adding value to the society ...” (Doğuş Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>‘...we have partners from all over the world. We are also responsible for them ...’ (Yıldız Business Group, 2016)</p> <p>‘...providing ... opportunities to different layers of society through approaches such as social responsibility, social citizenship ...’ (Doğuş Business Group, 2015)</p> <p>‘...the most important issue in Ülker’s life is ... being trusted, staying reliable ...’ (Yıldız Business Group, 2015)</p>
The authority	Emphasis on legal authority, emphasis on strong actors	Regulatory bodies, professional standards, scientific expertise, government, certification organizations	<p>‘...tenders take effect after approval by the Supreme Council of Privatization ...’ (Koç Business Group, 2013)</p> <p>‘it will be responsible for the restoration, restitution and strengthening of buildings...registered by the Istanbul No.1 Regional Council for the Protection of Cultural and Natural Assets ...’(Doğuş Business Group, 2013)</p> <p>‘... (our bottled water product) Saka ...undergoes a blind test examination of a group of 120 chefs and 12 specialists in terms of production conditions, taste and packaging...’ (Yıldız Business Group, 2012)</p> <p>‘...’E-Approval and Workflows Mobile Application Project’ ...by Koç Business Group was awarded the ‘SAP Turkey Mobility of</p>

			<p>the Year Award'. (Koç Business Group, 2013)</p> <p>'...Güler Sabancı ...ranked 7th on the "Most Powerful Business Women's International List" compiled by Fortune...'. (Sabancı Business Group, 2016)</p> <p>'...Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary with a special cake prepared by Mcvite's chefs ...'. (Yıldız Business Group,2017)</p>
Natural developments	Emphasis on political, social, technological developments	Globalization, modernism, climate change, artificial intelligence	<p>'...all liquid and solid wastes from here will be disposed of with zero damage to the environment...'. (Yıldız Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>'...it is working to use technologies such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, Industry 4.0, ... in the most effective way ...'. (Koç Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>'...with globalization, there is an increasing need for knowledgeable, well-equipped and talented individuals who are familiar with both local and global values and behaviors.' (Koç Business Group 2012)</p> <p>'...I strongly believe that the liberalization steps will increase in the coming period and a more competitive and efficient energy market will be launched'. (Sabancı Business Group, 2016)</p>
The social emotions	Positive emotions, negative emotions	Love, happiness, sadness, help and sharing, sacrifice and loyalty, fear	<p>'...the revenues, ... will be used to fulfill the wishes of children struggling with the disease ...'. (Zorlu Business Group, 2014)</p> <p>'...aiming at alleviating the suffering of those who were victims and lost relatives in the Soma crash ...'. (Doğuş Business Group, 2014)</p> <p>'...our unity and solidarity, our brotherhood, our common values are being eroded ...'. (Koç Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>'... we run the risk that our country will be one of the water-scarce countries in the coming years.' (Yıldız Business Group, 2013)</p>

Table 5. Codes, themes, and categories in strategies affecting cultural-cognitive legitimacy

Category: cultural-cognitive legitimacy	Sample themes	Sample codes /labels	Selected quotes
Organization's identity	Defining organization's identity in acceptable categories	Reason for existence, paralleling society' and organization's existence	'...Doğuş Group contributes to the economy and employment of the country with its investments ...' (Doğuş Business Group, 2016) '...we will continue to work as Turkey's Sabancı ...' (Sabancı Business Group, 2016)
Organization's success	Putting success forward, justifying failure	Displaying rewards, exaggerating successful results, redefining the problem, accountability	'...Zorlu Center ...was deemed worthy of 10 awards ...from the Marcom Awards. ...' (Zorlu Business Group, 2016) '...the procurement of United Biscuits...was awarded the Best Purchase of the Year Award ...by EMEA Finance ...' (Yıldız Business Group, 2015) '...as a result of factors such as the increase in car prices, special consumption tax hike, restrictions on vehicle loans and consumer confidence that was low before the election, we saw a contraction in the first half of the year as expected...' (Koç Business Group, 2014) '...production loss in our plants due to natural gas shortage in Turkey has negatively affected our profitability.' (Sabancı Business Group, 2012)
Stories, narratives and metaphors	Stories, narratives, myths, legends, rituals, metaphors, analogies	Success stories, heroes of the company, metaphors or analogies used to represent the company	'...Zorlu Business Group, whose foundations were laid in 1953 with a small loom in ... city of Denizli, continues to dream for Turkey today with more than 60 companies ...' (Zorlu Business Group, 2016) '...our community, which is almost the age of our Republic, witnessed many challenging periods of our country ...' (Koç Business Group, 2016) '...Mr. Sakıp was a man who inspired, influenced with leadership feature, and was full of tenacity to work.' (Sabancı Business Group, 2017) '... Vehbi Koç's ... almost impossible achievements, struggles, and gains to win in a life ...' (Koç Business Group, 2014) '...(we) celebrate the third Thursday of November every year as a happy day with employees...' (Yıldız Business Group, 2015) '... (our campaign) 'Ramadan Food Aid', which is given to families in need every year, will take place between 8–12 June this year...' (Doğuş Business Group, 2015) '...now we will not only be the 'Sabancı of Turkey', but also the

Endorsement	Endorsement of organization structure, management applications	Public approval of management techniques/practices newly created boards/units	<p>‘Sabancı of the next generation’ ...’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>‘...I firmly believe that we are a big family...’ (Koç Business Group, 2012)</p> <p>‘...Sabri Ülker, the ‘Biscuit Grandpa’ of Turkey ...’ (Yıldız Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>‘...we have created a Sustainability Board to manage sustainability efforts effectively and comprehensively ...’ (Zorlu Business Group, 2016)</p> <p>‘... notifications are rigorously examined by ...Ethics Committee.’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2011)</p> <p>‘...EfQM model opened a new vision ahead of us in those years ...’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2015)</p> <p>‘Zorlukteks... gained power with the authorized obligation status certificate (AEO) ...’ (Zorlu Business Group, 2017)</p> <p>‘...Reputation Institute’s Global Pulse survey identified us as Turkey’s most prestigious company ...’ (Sabancı Business Group, 2011)</p>
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Table 6. Breakdown of the codes by business groups

Language strategies that emphasizing on...	Koç (n/%)	Zorlu (n/%)	Yıldız (n/%)	Sabancı (n/%)	Doğuş (n/%)
Social normative beliefs and moral values	250/%22	307/%18	242/%28	564/%28	201/%36
Authority	138/%13	188/%12	105/%12	238/%12	92/%17
Natural developments or favorite categories	74/%07	274/%16	85/%10	296/%15	25/%05
Social emotions	150/%14	196/%12	119/%14	163/%08	86/%16
Socio-political legitimacy (Total)	612/%56	965/%58	551/%64	1.261/%63	404/%73
Organization's identity	229/%21	247/%15	68/%08	212/%11	71/%13
Organization's successes	120/%11	256/%15	75/%09	172/%09	50/%10
Historical stories, narratives, using analogies and Metaphors	94/%09	88/%05	94/%11	216/%11	13/%02
Endorsement	31/%03	113/%07	64/%08	124/%06	15/%02
Cultural-cognitive legitimacy	474/%44	704/%42	301/%36	724/%37	149/%27

Table 7. Breakdowns of codes by language strategies and legitimacy types

	Language strategies that emphasizing on...	Type of legitimacy	n	%
1	Social normative beliefs and moral values	Socio-political	1.564	%26
2	Authority	Socio-political	761	%12
3	Natural developments or favorite categories	Socio-political	754	%12
4	Social emotions	Socio-political	714	%12
		Sub-total	3.793	%62
1	Organization's identity	Cultural-Cognitive	827	%13
2	Organization's successes	Cultural-Cognitive	673	%11
3	Historical stories, narratives, using analogies and metaphors	Cultural-Cognitive	505	%08
4	Endorsement	Cultural-Cognitive	347	%06
		Sub-total	2.352	%38
		Total	6.145	%100

and Doğuş use language strategies related to socio-political legitimacy at 56%, 58%, 64%, 63%, and 73%, respectively, and the overall rate of socio-political legitimacy is 62%. It is clear that the main goal of the language strategies of these business groups is to gain socio-political legitimacy. This is in line with the findings of other studies conducted in Türkiye (Özen & Berkman, 2007; Özen & Önder, 2020, 2021). Powell and Colyvas (2008: 300) suggested that when there are contradictions, organizations prefer to develop language that is consistent with social and political norms rather than cultural and cognitive truths. Empirical research findings support this idea. As Özen and Akkemik (2012) note, this could be due to the internal inconsistencies of the business environment in Türkiye or the constantly contradictory institutional logics.

As the texts have holistic meanings, some words and phrases are coded with multiple types of language strategy and legitimation. The themes that include relations with international organizations, women, children, culture and art, a link between national sensitivities and society, emphasis on environmentally friendly products, pollution, exhibiting rankings, and appearing in business media were mostly used together. This cross-category pattern shows that organizations' language strategies emerge in a more institutional context (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000b: 1144–1145) and that they reflect organizations' intentions, cognitions, values, and emotions in a holistic way (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000a: 137–138).

As their official texts show, the content, theme, and word choice of the business groups are very similar. This supports NIT's assertion that the language forms of organizations in an institutional setting are similar and co-creative due to the regulatory power of the institutional structure (Green & Li, 2011: 1664; Lawrence, 1999: 167).

There is a great deal of overlap between the ways in which the business groups position themselves and adopt a particular stance and the conceptualization and categorization of the organizational legitimacy literature. Below are some examples of each category to make this situation clearer.

The business groups' emphasis on international collaboration and foreign partnerships is an investment in influencing evaluators' judgments, while their efforts to demonstrate their success through published lists and awards are aimed at attracting public attention and creating positive perceptions. Similarly, expressions such as 'national product,' 'benefit to society,' and 'representing the country' aim to strengthen the business group's connection with society. The importance of emphasizing the concept of 'nation' has been demonstrated in other studies (Gökşen & Üsdiken, 2001; Özen & Berkman, 2007; Özen & Önder, 2020). Philanthropy is a strong and common theme used by all business groups to stimulate the feelings of evaluators. This can be seen as an attempt to weaken the rationality of communication through emotions. Kobal (2022) also found that in addition to philanthropy, other similar concepts such as social benefit, kindness, and sharing were commonly used by organizations to gain legitimacy.

Another point revealed by the analysis is that macro concepts such as women and children are embedded in micro concepts such as the principles and policies of the business groups. This is consistent with Kobal (2022: 270) findings that social mission statements supporting children and women come to the fore in the legitimation process of organizations. At the same time, micro expressions such as corporate stories and successes are embedded in macro expressions, e.g., environmental protection, universal principles, and national interests. The strong emphasis on micro and macro issues by the business groups can be interpreted both as an attempt to build legitimacy and to present themselves as representing a group, value, or idea.

The business groups are thought to communicate with evaluators through institutionalized language strategies to build legitimacy. These strategies help them to have a positive influence on their evaluators.

Discussion and conclusions

Implications

Little theoretical or empirical progress has been made in the literature of NIT due to the lack of a framework that provides a holistic perspective that can be used both in the theoretical explanation of the relationship between language and legitimacy and in empirical testing. For this reason, the priority of this study was to propose such a framework.

Given the problems and differences in classifying legitimacy, we have argued that such classifications are necessary to clarify concepts, facilitate scholarly research, and increase the comparability of research findings. We believe Meyer (2017) distinction between 'social-organizational institutionalism' and 'phenomenological institutionalism' provides a useful framework for categorizing legitimacy. In addition, numerous other classifications of legitimacy have contributed to a clearer understanding of the subject (see Aldrich & Fiol, 1994; Archibald, 2004: 173;

Bitektine et al., 2020; Deephouse & Suchman, 2008; Deephouse et al., 2017; Diez-de Castro, Peris-Ortiz, & Diez-Martin, 2018; Diez-Martin, Blanco-Gonzales & Diez-de-Castro, 2021; Diez-Marin, Blanco-Gonzales & Prado-Roman, 2021; Scott, 2014: 72–74; Suchman, 1995: 577). In this study, we attempted to synthesize and clarify these classifications and presented a framework that is compatible with the theoretical perspective of NIT. According to this framework, the judgment is made automatically and in a passive cognitive state when the object of legitimacy refers to a phenomenon that is taken for granted by the evaluator. Since the legitimacy judgment is formed automatically, this legitimacy can be called cultural-cognitive. The perspective of phenomenological institutionalism is an explanation of processes in which the status of self-evidence is valid. However, when the object of legitimacy is evaluated, taking into account the features of external structures such as norms, beliefs, authority, or social majority opinions, the actor acts as a deliberative evaluator. In this case, the judgment of legitimacy is formed on the basis of the evaluator's conformity with the external structures. For this reason, such legitimacy can be called socio-political. The perspective of social-organizational institutionalism is explicatory in processes in which the status of the evaluator is valid.

Another contribution of this study is the reorganization of language strategies aimed at legitimacy. For example, Bitektine and Haack (2015) distinguish between normative beliefs and moral values. However, both our literature review and our research findings suggest that it is more useful and practical to combine them. Our suggestion to combine narrative and metaphorical strategies also proved plausible, as the texts we analyzed show that most narratives contain many metaphors. Therefore, categorizing between narratives and metaphors could be confusing and is not practical for researchers. Combining favorite categories and natural developments also seems quite plausible, according to our findings. For example, while globalization was generally presented as an inevitable and natural development in our analysis, it was also praised as a convenient category for which legitimacy was created. Overall, we believe that the reorganization of language strategies will clarify distinctions between categories and reduce ambiguity for researchers who need to analyze texts to understand language strategies for legitimacy concerns.

Another important contribution of this study is the attempt to illustrate which language strategy influences which type of legitimacy. Although language-based analysis offers a methodology that has the potential to explore the cognitive dimensions of legitimacy (Golant & Sillince, 2007: 1151), there are few studies in the literature that have implications for such an investigation. For example, we suggest that strategies that emphasize alignment with commonly accepted management practices (Suchman, 1995), narratives and stories (Golant & Sillince, 2007), and identity (Bridwell-Mitchell & Mezas, 2012) can be associated with cognitive legitimacy. Similarly, strategies that emphasize norms, regulatory rules, powerful actors, natural developments, moral values, and emotions (Green, 2004; Suchman, 1995) can be associated with socio-political legitimacy. Thus, according to our framework, if the language strategy refers to an organizational phenomenon such as a practice, story, achievement, or identity, its relationship to cultural-cognitive legitimacy should be examined. However, if the strategy relates to external structures such as authority, natural development, morality, and emotions that the evaluator takes into account when making judgments, then its relationship to socio-political legitimacy should be examined. We believe that such a systematization will advance research on this topic by enabling empirical studies to examine the relationship between language strategies and legitimacy subtypes.

Another contribution of this study is that it allows us to make comparisons with the results of previous studies conducted in the context of Türkiye. In this study, it was found that the business groups predominantly used language strategies associated with socio-political legitimacy. This finding supports the findings of Özen and Berkman (2007) and Özen & Önder (2020, 2021) studies, which indicate that ethos strategies that convey moral legitimacy are used in the diffusion of TQM practices in Türkiye. Similarly, according to Kobal (2022), the legitimate organizational identity constructions of social enterprises provide cognitive legitimacy. This is also consistent

with the relationship this research establishes between organizational identity and cognitive legitimacy.

Finally, we have emphasized that the temporal and situational material used in many studies is inappropriate. Instead, we suggest that to provide a comparable long-term perspective, researchers need to use regularly published texts to test the assumptions of NIT.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has some limitations. First, we used only the regular press releases of the business groups. However, in order to evaluate the coherence and differences in their language strategies, it is better to include in the analysis other regular and periodic texts, such as annual reports and sustainability reports, intended for different stakeholders. Second, we included in our study only those business groups that have established legitimacy and are already accepted by the institutional system. Subsequent studies may also examine organizations that are in the process of being accepted by the institutional system. This will allow researchers to make comparisons between two groups of organizations in terms of their language strategies seeking legitimacy. Third, it would be useful for further studies to focus on organization-specific variables such as age, size, industry, ownership structures, characteristics of owning families, degree of internationalization, and diversification that can be used to compare organizations' language strategies. Finally, further studies could take a longitudinal approach to find out how and why organizations' language strategies have changed over time.

Conflict of interest. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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