

Name of the student:	Nicolas Rouillard
Title of the thesis:	Analyzing President Macron's Speeches: Shaping a European Narrative of "Europe de la Défense" amidst the war in Ukraine
Reviewer:	Dr Maxine David Leiden University

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The student asks two research questions (RQ): "Is President Macron building a European narrative on the concept of "Europe de la Défense" through his discourses on European Foreign Policy? And is he successful in doing so, or is he merely constructing a narrative based on French interests?". The first question constitutes a yes or no question that we do not usually ask but I can see that the second question goes some way to mitigating that. But the second question is itself problematic in that the framing suggests that the French interest cannot be consistent with a European one. Some might argue that, but that is the point, it is to be argued and not assumed. The relevance of the RQ really hinges on this so we have an early problem in that the rationale for the study is not made compellingly. The discussion on CDA in the introduction is equally problematic in that it implies the analysis is focused on Macron's power and the serving of his interests rather than France. Historical legacy and ideology are then brought into the mix, suggesting the thesis will be about an awful lot but potentially raising unrealistic expectations about what can and will be achieved. In short, the entire introduction needed to be revised.

The literature review suffers from the lack of a determined effort to identify arguments about the key concepts and policies as set out by scholars and to categorise them. As such, there is too little analysis and the student is vulnerable to the charge that they have not surveyed the literature to the degree that they can say they understand the longer and wider debates about European defence and French positioning whether ahead, in the middle or after them. The mixing of primary sources with secondary sources is not consistent with a lit review. Politicians and policymakers and practitioners all represent vested interests, we do not accept what they say at face value and this is why we review academic literature that is supposed to look at all sides of the arguments over a long period and interrogate the claims made. It is unfortunate that the student does not seem to recognise this (section 2.1). At other points, claims are made but not substantiated, e.g. that other European states distrust France (p. 13).

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

There is an extensive discussion of post-structuralism and critiques of other theories but I am not entirely sure why, the case for the method could have been made far more concisely and the thesis advanced. This is especially the case because sufficient time was not spent on making the case for the relevance of this discussion. For example, how does the discussion about binaries help us in relation to "Europe de la Défense"? I could not reconcile the content of section 3.2 with the "ideologies" part of the section title and then in this section, we are told that, "The ever presence of power in discourse from the post-structuralist point of view, as it sees all subjects being able to influence one another, confirms the importance to study power relations within the framework" and that this is relevant because "the discourses are from a head of state as he possesses a certain amount of legitimate power and authority due to his position" but this is then about a one-way wielding of power, contradicting what was said just prior to it. It is therefore difficult to credit the student with good understanding of the material they raise here. In respect of elsewhere, I would also urge the student to think very carefully about arguing that discourse is ever-changing and yet that it manages to construct a social reality and to think also about how that combines with the concept and fact of strategic ambiguity.

The student sets out their understanding of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and discusses Fairclough's three-dimensional framework as the method to be applied. We get another very lengthy discussion of method in the abstract and where it is discussed in relation to the subject matter at hand,

the decisions made are not all clear, e.g. why the imperative but not the interrogative or anything else in Table 2? The data selected first seem to be restricted only to Macron's speeches over the 2017-2024 period but we're later told that other speeches etc will be analysed. This entire chapter needed to be revised heavily to improve the structure, to get us to the point more quickly, and to make a more compelling case for the student understanding how to employ existing work to build their own theoretical and analytical framework. When there is so much extraneous information, one is left to wonder if the student really understands the task at hand. Despite all that (unnecessary) detail earlier, we are finally told the speeches are coded with the help of MAXQDA but what those codes are and how derived is left as an unknown.

When talking about the limitations, the problems with the thesis become self-evident. With all that the post-structuralists say about history and context, it is extraordinary that the student is alright with "miss[ing] historical perspective" and other factors that they acknowledge as important but just too complex to engage with. If one is seeking an uncomplicated theoretical lens, I would certainly not recommend post-structuralism! Equally, given one RQ talks about "success", it is difficult to see how the student thinks that this can be answered if they do *not* "extensively analyse how these speeches are received by their audience ..." – how else can they evaluate "which identities, norms and values are created with them" (p. 15)?

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

The empirical analysis reveals the student's lack of understanding about foreign policy generally. If only all those words expended unnecessarily on theory had been turned to a discussion of the foreign policy literature which talks extensively about context, including how foreign policy messaging is very often differently framed for the domestic audience versus external audiences and that for external audiences it will be further tailored. This literature is also strong on understanding that foreign policy is about relationships, negotiations and interactions generally, to say nothing of change and continuity. With this in mind, I am afraid I read pretty much all the arguments in the empirical chapter as unconvincing and lacking in insight since so much of what was concluded was obviously going to be so.

The Fairclough framework is evident but there is little or no engagement with the kind of latent material a post-structuralist lens would lead me to expect. The analysis is extremely intertextuality-light because of the narrowed document and contextualising range. Ultimately, I read the conclusions wondering what I had learned and why this thesis mattered. After all, if much of the post-structuralist discussion is to be believed, what was said by Macron does not matter in the longer term, surely? And what does discourse matter if we do not consider how it is received and what follows as a result? There would have been far more value in thinking about these things and also what changed and why and whether in a context that changes again, we might not see a return to earlier rhetoric and policy.

I initially read the student's acknowledgement "I wish to thank my family, especially my mom for endlessly listening to me while understanding nothing" with amused horror, since this seemed mildly insulting, to say the least. But I would now urge the student to ask whether he might not have been better thinking about her lack of understanding as an indication of the confusion within the thesis. I see the work here, I see the original research – but it has all been made far, far more complicated than it needed to be and I have serious doubts about how much of the theoretical discussion was really understood by the student, doubts further cemented by the fact that they return only to method and not theory in their final conclusions.

Most of the two research questions are answered – but not the one about success.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

The thesis was well-presented, although the student needed to create a section within the thesis to allow for Table 1 to be set out in landscape. We often grade online so instead it was left to me to reorientate the work. Referencing was largely performed well, although I prefer a single bibliography and at least one primary source was listed as a secondary one. Publisher locations needed to be listed


consistently, as did issue numbers and page ranges where appropriate. It is absolutely unnecessary to talk through the affiliations of authors or their book titles in the text, this is what references are for. The structure of the thesis was fine in places. Some of the material in the introduction was best left for a little later so that this was just about introducing the thesis itself. The discussion on theory was far, far too long and much of the content generally did not get us anywhere. That very long empirical chapter made, I am afraid, for very tedious reading. Better categorisation was needed as was deeper analysis with some quotes set out as evidence of the points. In a thesis that spoke so much about audiences, it is a shame the audience for the thesis was not given greater consideration.

The writing would have benefited from some revising and refining. I encourage the student to think about reading the work out loud since we can often hear mistakes versus seeing them. All abbreviations/acronyms needed to be spelled out in full (e.g. IHEDN). First person plural should only be used for co-authored work.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The thesis is strong in respect of engagement with the primary source material but the value of that exercise in terms of knowledge contribution is doubtful. Much more refinement of the thesis, especially in relation to the theoretical discussion and the delivery of the empirical evidence was needed.

Grade (A-F):	E
Date:	Signature:
5. 7. 2024	

GRADE CONVERSION MA EPS

Percentile	Prague	Krakow	Leiden	Barcelona
A (91-100)	91-100 %	4,51-5,00	8.0-10	9-10
B (81-90)	81-90 %	4,21-4,50	7.5-7.9	8-8,9
C (71-80)	71-80 %	3,71-4,20	7-7.4	7-7,9
D (61-70)	61-70 %	3,21-3,7	6.5-6.9	6-6,9
E (51-60)	51-60 %	3,00-3,20	6-6.4	5-5,9

Assessment criteria:

Excellent (A): 'Outstanding performance with only minor errors';

Very good (B): 'Above the average standard but with some errors';

Good (C): 'Generally sound work but with a number of notable errors';

Satisfactory (D): 'Fair but with significant shortcomings';

Sufficient (E): 'Performance meets the minimum criteria';

Fail: 'Some/considerable more work required before the credit can be awarded'.