

When a Concern becomes a Crisis

Evaluative Nouns & EU Discourse



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Introduction

- Evaluation in discourse around the European Union by the media, as well as by the political sources on whom the media reports, is likely to be significant for the outcome of the forthcoming referendum (Carey & Burton, 2004)
- Evaluative language is complex. There are many potential linguistic resources used to express evaluation. Some more overt than others (Martin & White, 2007)
- It has been suggested that nouns are significant in determining sentiment and identifying underlying ideology in political discourse (Yu, Kaufman & Diermeier, 2008)
- To characterise a situation as a 'crisis' rather than an 'issue' or a 'problem' is inherently evaluative, but no study has yet been made of this kind of noun.

Pilot Study Findings

Is there a Crisis?

- *Crisis* is the most frequent evaluative noun (per million words) in all corpora except GBGov.
- Whilst we might expect a media focus on 'bad news', the relatively high frequency in EUParl raises questions as to whether the same situations are represented differently in British Politics.

Most Frequent Evaluative Nouns (per million words) by Corpus

EUParl	GBGov	TimesJan	GuardJan	FTJan
crisis (745)	issue (911)	crisis (782)	crisis (822)	crisis (748)
issue (585)	benefit (744)	risk (516)	risk (530)	risk (629)
problem (589)	problem (541)	problem (398)	problem (448)	issue (472)
need (420)	crisis (401)	issue (349)	success (183)	demand (378)
risk (351)	success (152)	threat (192)	failure (173)	problem (394)

What Crisis?

- The most frequent pre-modifier of *crisis* in *The Guardian* is *refugee*. In all other corpora it is *financial*.
- A counter-discourse is apparent in the *Guardian* which is explicit in its insistence that the term 'migrant crisis' discussed elsewhere is inappropriate.

Whose Crisis?

- Regardless of whether *refugee* or *migrant* is used, the issue is predominantly construed as a problem for Europe and her politicians, rather than as a crisis for the displaced people.



Pilot Study Method & Data

- A pilot study was undertaken to compare the use of the evaluative noun *crisis* across political and media texts and to see whether differences might be found between sources that might be ideologically significant
- Corpus Linguistics allows analysis of large amounts of textual data, using specialist software, to reveal statistically significant patterns of language use.
- Five corpora (collections of texts) were compiled. Two political, from texts found on the EU parliament website and the British Government website, and three Newspaper corpora, from *The Financial Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*.
- Texts were selected for inclusion in the corpora on the basis that they focussed on economic and business oriented issues, with the aim of minimising 'emotive' discourse.

Summary of Project Corpora

Corpus	Texts #	Words #	Nouns #	Noun/mill
EUParl	334	379,108	66,671	140,836
GBGov	718	2,236,782	337,787	130,736
TimesJan	295	203,363	27,201	133,756
GuardJan	505	870,368	119,168	136,917
FTJan	179	127,013	17,797	140,120

Conclusions & Next Steps

- The selection and use of *crisis* to characterise a situation differs between sources and appears to be ideologically significant but more study is needed.
- A wider ranging study will be undertaken to explore use of *crisis* over time. It is not yet clear when and by whom it is decided that a concern has become a crisis.

References

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This study has been made possible thanks to a fully funded studentship from the ESRC via the University of Birmingham Doctoral Training Centre.



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