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 Method & Data

- A pilot study was undertaken to compare the use of the evaluative crisis noun 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corpus</th>
<th>Texts #</th>
<th>Words #</th>
<th>Nouns #</th>
<th>Noun/mill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EUParl</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>379,108</td>
<td>66,671</td>
<td>140,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GBGov</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>2,236,782</td>
<td>337,787</td>
<td>130,736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TimesJan</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>203,363</td>
<td>27,201</td>
<td>133,756</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>870,368</td>
<td>119,168</td>
<td>136,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTJan</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>127,013</td>
<td>17,797</td>
<td>140,120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

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.

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


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

slg469@bham.ac.uk  @SLGlaas