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DIVERSITY OF THOUGHT AND THE CULTURE WAR
Journalistic Discourse Used as a Weapon

This study is part of a multi-year diachronic investigation that employs a MD-CADS (Modern Diachronic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies) approach to examine how the word 'DIVERSITY' is used in the British press and how this might reveal related social and political attitudes that are difficult to identify -particularly in a similar scale and with similar detail - using other approaches.

In this perspective, numerous studies showed how a quantitative and qualitative analysis of specific words - such as 'Muslims', 'immigrants', 'asylum seekers', 'refugees', or 'Rom' – and associated patterns in large linguistic corpora can highlight co-textual and contextual frames indicating positive or negative evaluations of the related sociocultural groups or associated political stances (Baker et al., 2013).

Other approaches describe how the linguistic choices adopted by writers or speakers can be either investigated as a subconscious expression of their stance and values or as deliberate persuasion and manipulation strategies. These include theories on 'Lexical Priming' (Hoey 2005), 'Forced Lexical Priming' (Duguid 2009), and recent studies on 'Fake News', the 'Illusory Truth Effect' and similar communicative features.

As a subconscious process, given combinations of lexical patterns reproduce similar discourses heard or read before and reflect positive/negative evaluations marking the speakers' beliefs, prejudices and stance. If the speaker is a journalist, of course, the readers are also exposed to the same patterns and associations which contribute to their subconscious positioning and to the construction of their 'fluency' and worldview.

As a conscious strategy, the repetition of lexical patterns might represent an intentional effort to determine the "perception of social consensus, namely, the perception that a belief is shared by many others" (Greifeneder et al. 2021: 78), thereby manipulatively affecting the readers' opinions and judgment.

A common thread in these approaches appears to be the insight that the simple repeated/frequent exposure (frequency being a central factor in a corpus driven quantitative analysis) of the reader/listener to words and linguistic patterns in a context characterized by the presence of positive or negative evaluative standpoints (evaluation is generally associated with qualitative processes rather than purely quantitative ones) does influence our opinion about these words/patterns and the related sociocultural context or groups. A quantitative analysis of linguistic items, therefore, can spread light on shifting personal viewpoints and lead to considerations about political and sociocultural issues.

The results described in this study, draw on an extensive quantitative and qualitative diachronic analysis on the usage of the word 'DIVERSITY' in a corpus of British newspaper articles collected during the pandemic from March 2020 to the end of February 2021. The data obtained were compared to data from the exploration of comparable corpora collected since 1993[1], highlighting variations in the usage of the word 'DIVERSITY' in terms of frequency,

[1] The corpora employed in different steps are:
From 1993 to 2013 the Sibol-Port Corpus (https://centri.unibo.it/colitec/en/research/corpus-assisted-discourse-studies-cads)
Corpora collected by the author:

context and semantic and associative fields. In particular, the study focuses on how the usage of the term in recent years has acquired a different dimension and 'fluency.' Previously, it was almost invariably associated with inclusive, empathetic, and positive contexts and was also largely used politically as a synonym for positivity (e.g., the European Community's slogan "United in Diversity") and progressive policies. Examination of recent corpora reveals that this positive dimension is maintained, but new patterns and contexts of use seem to delineate a growing criticism and conflictual attitude associated to some facets of the diversity paradigm. In particular, the study analyzes words that appear for the first time in conjunction with the term 'diversity,' such as 'WOKE / WOKENISM,' and words that have become much more frequent, such as 'TRAINING,' 'AGENDA,' and 'TICK-BOX.' These collocations, highlighted as emerging from the statistical comparison with previous corpora, highlight contexts in which the term 'DIVERSITY' loses its positivity to establish associations with problematic or negative issues or is openly criticized.

This is especially observed in the journalistic patterns and discourses developed by right-wing newspapers like the Daily Telegraph. However, it is worth mentioning that the same patterns and discourses are also reported – sometimes to be rejected - in left-leaning newspapers like The Guardian. This adds to the incremental effect of discourse (Baker 2005) ultimately exposing readers to them and contributing to a new 'fluency' in which there is a diversity that belongs to the right-wing culture and opposes the dominant left-wing perspective. This dimension is also explored through the examination of the combination 'DIVERSITY OF' and the inclusion of the term in quotation marks, as well as the explicit reference to a struggle for cultural dominance highlighted by the analysis of another emerging collocation: 'WAR'.

The discussion and conclusion suggest that the proposed analysis seems to highlight the emergence of new journalistic discourses that progressively challenge the traditional perception of the concept of DIVERSITY. This attack on a 'Left-wing Diversity' could be seen as one of the fronts in an open battle of words—a deliberate attempt to dismantle the liberal perspective in which the word had previously been employed as a symbol of inclusion and cultural richness and, consequently, to influence the readers. In a world where our control of the language we are exposed to is decreasing, this outline of DIVERSITY could be an example of how lexical features can be deliberately used to influence and steer the public opinion. It is suggested that a greater awareness of these possible manipulative mechanisms and how they can be discovered and highlighted may increase the readers' critical thinking.

Keywords: Corpus Linguistics; Journalistic Discourse; Diversity; MD-CADS.

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2015/16: 3 months (before and after the Paris terrorist attack)

2016/17: 5 months (USA Trump election and post Brexit)

2018/19 (16 months) and 2020/21 (12 months) only articles containing the word DIVERSITY