Mixed Voices: A Corpus-based Study of Hungarian Parliamentary Debates about the European Union

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1. Introduction

Emerging from a forty-year-long dictatorship, at the beginning of 1990s Hungary attempted a way back into the Western world: it revived its independence, it established democratic institutions, it opened its economic system to private property and to the global market. Hungary struggled to reconstruct its national identity in terms of peculiar Hungarianness and broader Europeanness, as a means to distinguish itself inside of a new comprehensive institution: the European Union (Kontler 2002: 20). Negotiations for EU-membership started on 31st March 1998 and ended on 12th April 2003, when the Hungarians voted to decide whether their nation should join the European Union. 83.8% of voters backed their country's will to membership: this straightforward result followed a massive parliamentary discussion about the topic and it guaranteed Hungary the access to the EU (Fornaro 2006: 249).

Nevertheless, the low participation of the electorate, assessed around 45%, made two points clear: first, it showed that the Euro-sceptic discourse had already penetrated Hungarian politics; secondly, it suggested that the dichotomic character of Hungarian "national self", alternating exclusive Hungarianness and full Europeanness, was not resolved (Romsics 2010: 566-567). But what were the Hungarian politicians' perceptions of the European Union between 1998 and 2003? And what kind of identity did they build for their country in discourses about the EU? Tackling these issues, this paper presents the outcome of a corpus-based study of perceptions and identities in Hungarian parliamentary debates about the European Union.

2. Perceptions and identities: the study of semantic preference and semantic prosody

From a textual point of view perceptions and identities may be reflected in lexical choices clustering around the concepts of semantic preference and semantic prosody (Mautner 2007: 56), collocational phenomena respectively consisting in the relation between "a lemma or word-form and a set of semantically related words" (Stubbs 2001: 65) and the tendency of the same lemmas or word-forms to co-occur with items having a positive, negative or neutral prosody (Stubbs 1996: 176). Studies on Euro-sceptic discourse in Britain (Mautner 2000, Teubert 2000) and on European political discourse (with a particular focus on Hungarian in Krizsán 2011) showed that semantic preference and semantic prosody play a paramount role in sketching perceptions and identities, outlining the net of one's ideological standpoint (Koller and Mautner 2004: 223). The former, in fact, spotlights the themes addressed by a speaker in relation to a pinpointed issue while the latter plots the same themes according to their positive, negative or neutral evaluative content (Partington 2004: 150-151).

3. Data and methodology: collocation analysis of the HUNPOL corpus

Aiming at the exploration of the Hungarian politicians' attitudes towards the EU, the present research is based on a self-collected corpus of Hungarian parliamentary debates (the

HUNPOL corpus), that consists of 444 texts totalling to 344748 running words. The speeches were delivered by Hungarian MPs and external advisors at parliamentary sessions between 31st March 1998 and 12th April 2003. They have been collected querying the website of the Hungarian Parliament with the search term *európai unió** ('European Union*') to guarantee that all the texts would be about the EU. A wildcard was employed at the end of the string owing to the agglutinative nature of the Hungarian language: Hungarian morphology is highly inflectional, resulting in the addition of derivational, grammatical and functional morphemes to the end of root items (Driussi 2012: 24). As a consequence, looking for *európai unió* only would have meant missing a list of forms like *európai uniós* 'of the European Union' or *európai unióban* 'in the European Union'.

Semantic preference and semantic prosody were spotted in the corpus by means of collocation analysis. This analysis was carried out with GraphColl, a software that enables to visualise a word's collocational pattern in the form of graphs (Brezina et al. 2015: 139). Collocates were extracted using Mutual Information (MI), an association measure that favours links between lexical words and that brings to the fore "highly specialised terms" (Evert 2008: 1238); MI minimum score was set to 5.0, after an empirical testing of the classical scores of 3.0 (Hunston 2002: 71) and 6.0 (Durrant and Doherty 2010: 145), and the minimum collocation frequency was fixed on 5 co-occurences of node (i.e. the core item) and collocate. Although the analysis of only five instances of any word-form could not lead to generalisations, such a low frequency threshold was selected to avoid discarding relevant lemmas due to the inflectional nature of the Hungarian language. I decided to look for collocates inside a span of 3, 5 and 7 words to the left and to the right of the node in order to uncover a broader variety of repeated co-occurrences: from the ones closely modifying the search word to those shaping discourse. Combining quantitative and qualitative techniques, I explored the concordance lines of the first- and second-order collocates of my query terms, so as to picture the whole collocational network of the concept I was interested in unveiling and to inform it with fine-grained details.

4.   Analysis: swinging between collocates and concordances

To outline the Hungarian politicians' perceptions of the 'European Union', I queried the HUNPOL corpus with the *európai unió** string. Searching within a span of 3 words to the left and 3 to the right of the node, GraphColl retrieved 33 collocates, which I manually grouped according to their semantics in the "joining the European Union", "requirements for EU-membership", "membership", "organisations other that the EU", "being" and "Hungarianness" categories. As can be seen in table 1, the EU was essentially spoken about in relation to the possibility to achieve membership and to the tasks to fulfil to make it possible. No clear evaluative content emerged from mere collocation analysis but an in-depth perusal of the concordance lines showed that the European Union was viewed by some as an 'opportunity' (*lehetőség*) that was wished for and as a trigger for development (*kívántunk alkalmazkodni* 'we desired to adapt') whereas it was regarded by others as something to oppose (*az európai uniós csatlakozás ellen* 'against joining the European Union').

Semantic category	Examples of collocates
Joining the European Union	*csatlakozás* 'joining', *csatlakozással* 'with joining', *küszöbén* 'approaching'

Requirements for membership	*előírja* '(it) requires', *jogharmonizáció* 'harmonisation of the law', *tárgyalások* 'negotiations'
Membership	*országaiban* 'in its countries', *tagállamok* 'member-states', *tagságunk* 'our membership'
Organisations other than the EU	*nato* 'NATO'
Being	*leszünk* '(we) will be', *történő* 'happening', *való* 'existing'
Hungarianness	*hazánk* 'our country', *magyarország* 'Hungary', *magyarországnak* 'to Hungary'

Table 1. Exemplary collocates of *európai unió** – MI(5.0), 3L-3R, C5-NC5

Expanding the collocation span to 5 and to 7 words to the left and to the right of *európai unió**, the collocates increased to 41 and 81 respectively. In the former case, they simply added new items to the aforementioned six categories (e.g. *megállapodás* 'agreement' and *támogatások* 'funding') while in the latter they provided new perspectives on the EU, encoded in lexical (for instance, *teszünk* '(we) do') and in stylistic features (as in *márpedig* 'well' or *szempontjából* 'from the point of view of...').

The Hungarian identity started being characterised in the "Hungarianness" grouping through word-forms like 'to Hungary' (*magyarországnak*) and 'our country' (*hazánk*) and it was further explored via the collocational networks of *magyarország** ('Hungary*') and *magyarok** ('Hungarians*'). With the 3, 5 and 7 collocation spans, 'Hungary' counted 13, 28 and 68 collocates and it appeared in terms of oppositions: it was active in wishing to join the EU (e.g. *kíván* 'desire', *csatlakozási* 'of joining') but still signalling its own borders (for example in *határait* 'its borders', *tartózkodás* 'stay', *külföldiek* 'foreigners'); it was or it could have been successful in Europe (*Magyarország lehet sikeres* 'Hungary can be successful') but it was still underdeveloped to some extent (*[a kormány] ne feledkezzen el a korábban méltatlanul elhanyagolt vidéki Magyarországról sem* '[the government should] not forget the Hungarian countryside, that has been unfairly neglected').

Through the 9 collocates of 'Hungarians', also the Hungarian people were portrayed in dichotomic terms: they differentiated 'Hungarians living in their homeland' (*anyaországon belül élő magyarok*) from those staying 'outside the national borders' (*határon túli*) or more precisely 'dwelling in the neighbouring countries' (*szomszédos államokban élő*) and needing to be protected by laws (*A szomszédos államokban élő magyarokról szóló törvény megalkotásának a vége felé közeledünk* 'We are approaching the completion of the law regarding the Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries')

5. Conclusion

The study showed that, in the years preceding Hungary's joining the European Union, the Hungarian politicians referred to the EU with mixed voices, alternating positive stances, claiming the need to join the EU to develop further and faster, and negative standpoints, warning that the EU-membership could cause a loss of national strength. The same doubts appeared even in the characterisation of the Hungarian identity. Hungarians pictured themselves as people in between: on the one hand, they hoped to enter the European Union and achieve full Europeanness, but on the other they convincedly recalled their Hungarianness in the historical division of their people across the country's borders.

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