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Letters to the Editor and the suffrage movement, 1908-1914

This paper explores the terminology used by suffrage organisations in the Letters to the Editor section of The Times newspaper between 190 and 1914. The study is based on a corpus of 7 million words from the Times Digital Archive and combines a corpus linguistic approach with concerns in critical and historical discourse analysis.

The suffrage movement was not a unified one; rather, it was composed of various groups with differing backgrounds, ideologies and aims, and different terminology used to describe different factions of the movement. My research has indicated that the more inclusive term suffragist was used in conjunction with activities more often associated with suffragette groups; however, it was unclear as to whether it reflected self-identification on the part of suffrage organisations usually associated with the term suffragette (especially the Women's Social and Political Union) or whether it was a result of conflation of the two groups by the newspaper. In this paper I focus on the Letters to the Editor section. These pages offered a platform for public discussion of women's suffrage, universal suffrage and equal franchise, both between suffrage supporters and opponents and between different suffrage organisations. These factors make it a useful point of comparison to hard news reporting. I examine collocates of *suffragist*, *suffragists*, *suffragette*, *suffragettes*, *National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies*, *NUWSS*, *Women's Social and Political Union* and *WSPU* to investigate how different identities and organisations within the suffrage movement were discussed. I then analyse these with a particular focus on contested terminology and identities, such as debates over who is and is not a suffragette or suffragist, the activities associated with each group, what counts as direct action, the types of protest or lobbying they should or should not engage in, and condemnation of activities. These will be compared with the results from my earlier research and historical research to offer greater understanding of the tensions between different suffrage organisations and their development in public correspondence.

Through a flexible and interdisciplinary combination of established historical approaches, discourse analysis and corpus linguistic methodologies, this investigation both refines our understanding of the suffrage movement and its socio-historical context and offers an insight into the structures and language of complex political protest organisations.