

A corpus-based discourse analysis of the representation of trans people in the British press from 2013 to 2015

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As demonstrated by numerous scholars (Baker and McEnery 2005; Bednarek 2006; Baker 2006, 2010, 2012; Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013; Partington 2015), Corpus Linguistics has proven to be a very useful and, at times, necessary tool for the analysis of large amounts of data in order to uncover linguistic and semantic patterns in the representations of social categories, minority groups or even individuals who managed to attract the attention of society upon them. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to highlight those linguistic and semantic patterns utilized in the representation of transgender people in the British press.

In the last decade, the construction of transgender people's identity and the representation of their community has been increasingly raising interest in scholars in the field of (socio)linguistics (Kulick 1999; Zimman 2009, 2010, 2014; Baker 2014) and, more in general, in society as a whole, due to the considerable attention drawn by public episodes in the social, cultural and legal spheres, such as the transition of former athlete Caitlyn Jenner, in the U.S.A, the various trans soldiers involved in public affairs in the last few years, as the Chelsea Manning case, or even the complex issue regarding gender neutral toilets, which raised discussions globally.

In a society where gender diversity is a highly discussed topic, language, due to its social function, may take on a significant role in shaping and representing new gendered communities of practice. The existing binary and heteronormative linguistic categories, generally used in defining gender, are clashing with the current, so far unrepresented and now emerging communities, possibly leading to the creation of new hybrid, inclusive, non-discriminating discourses that comprise social, cultural and legal issues. On the basis of this popularity, the press works as one of the most active actors in the creation of these discourses; therefore, it became the primary focus for the collection of the corpus under scrutiny in this investigation. The geographical area investigated, the United Kingdom, was chosen as it represents one of the countries that first introduced the world to the discussion about transgender equality as a consequence of the abovementioned Manning case. With regards to these assumptions, this study has the scope of investigating how transgender individuals and their communities are shaped in and through language, starting from the premise that language may profoundly influence the way gender is understood by society, being one of the most powerful means of manipulation, through which it is possible to persuade and even instill specific beliefs or convictions.

The corpus collected so as to pursue the aim of this investigation comprises eight British national newspapers, namely *The Guardian*, the *i*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times*, the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror* and *The Sun*. The newspapers were chosen according to their circulation rates, retrieved from the UK Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC 2015). Apart from distribution percentages, the other criterion followed in the selection of the newspapers was that of equally representing one of the dichotomies the British press is often defined by, that is, the distinction between quality and popular press (Jucker 1992). In fact, the first four newspapers can be considered as representative of the first category, while the others can be seen as belonging to the second. The news articles were collected in a time span that stretches from January 2013 to December 2015. Except for rubrics advertising the weekly television, cinema and theatre schedules,

different genres of news articles were included in the corpus (i.e., news stories, editorials, etc.), for a total of 3,119 news articles and over 2 million word tokens. For the purpose of this analysis, the TransCor (i.e., entire corpus) was divided into two subcorpora: the QualCor and the PopCor, each comprising all news articles from the quality press and the popular press respectively. Nonetheless, the analysis was conducted not only according to this distinction but diachronically as well.

Preliminary findings underline a difference in the representation depicted by the quality and the popular press, specifically in the use of terminology and, generally speaking, on the semantic prosody surrounding the topic. In fact, the collocation analysis highlights, for example, that while in many cases trans people are depicted as victims in the QualCor, they become the perpetrators of violence in the PopCor.

Moreover, despite the very short time span covered by the TransCor, one of the most impressive results, emerging from the analysis of the two subcorpora, was represented by the changing in use surrounding the adjectives 'transgender' and 'transsexual', shifting towards a more inclusive and unbiased rhetoric in the last year (2015). The investigation has underlined that, the two terms 'transgender' and 'transsexual' were initially used both as adjectives and as nouns, a function, the latter, which is disliked by the majority of the people belonging to the trans community. This trend tends to decrease in the following years, and the use of the two adjectives, erroneously used as synonyms and as nouns, starts to be used correctly more and more often.

Keywords were also an object of investigation. In order to compute the keyword lists for the QualCor and the PopCor, the BE06 corpus (Baker 2009) was used as reference corpora. This technique brought forward some other topics associated with trans people that did not emerge in the collocation analysis, such as the term 'sex'.

The research has used as its main corpus analysis tool AntConc (Anthony 2014), which has allowed to both perform the keyword analysis previously introduced and further explore the collocational patterns associated with the word displaying the highest degree of keyness.

In the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2005; Wodak 1997; Bucholtz 2003; van Leeuwen 2005) and through the use of Corpus Linguistics methodologies (McEnery and Wilson 1996; Baker 2006, 2014; McEnery and Hardie 2012), this study will present the final outcomes of a research that focuses on the representation of transgender people in the British press from the point of view of their depiction as social actors, the strategies of legitimization employed in this representation (van Leeuwen, 2007) and the semantic prosody (Sinclair 1991; Louw 1993; Stubbs 1996; Partington 1998; Hunston 2007; Partington, Duguid and Taylor 2013) constructed discursively in the description of trans social actors.

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