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The Economic Framing of Populism: A Linguistic Overview of US and UK Newspaper Headlines

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Abstract

The study explores the headlines of some British and American highcirculation broadsheet newspapers collected during the four months leading up to the nationwide vote regarding two major political populist events, namely the UK Brexit referendum and the US presidential elections (Inglehart/ Norris 2016). The aim of this study is to investigate how core areas of populist discourse linked to the above events were covered by the press, reputed as one the main channels of information dissemination (Watoson 2007), and how these issues were voiced to inform readers regarding the impact of their electoral choices on the future economic well-being of their respective countries. To this purpose, the headlines were analyzed at a more general level by using the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC), a corpus-assisted software tool (Tausczick/Pennebaker 2010; Pennebaker et al. 2015) to assess the overall tone of the messages. At a more granular level, they were analyzed by using the qualitative tools afforded by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (van Dijk 1995), the Social Actors Network (van Leeuwen 1996) and Appraisal Theory (Martin/White 2005; Ellsworth 2013) in order to reveal instantiations of populist political discourse strategies deployed by the UK Government and the US presidential candidate in their campaign documents. Central to this study's theoretical framework are the concepts of newsworthiness and framing (De Nies et al. 2012) as they shape the kind of reality that the political and media establishments co-jointly strive to portray. The results of this analysis lead to the preliminary conclusion that the press coverage of these events was markedly polarized and highly reliant on the strategies of populist discourse to reinforce views, engaging in a sort of press competition where some broadsheets were more successful than others in leading readers towards a partisanship-related vote.

Keywords

newsworthiness, framing, sentiment analysis, social actors network, appraisal theory

Exploring the Current Treatment of Populism in European Media: A Linguistic Case Study

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Abstract

Recently in the European political scene right-wing and left-wing populist parties have emerged in different countries: left-wing populism in Greece with SYRIZA (acronym for the Coalition of the Radical Left), and Spain with Podemos ('We can'), right-wing populism in France with the National Front (FN); in Germany with Alternative for Germany; in the Netherlands with the Party for Freedom (PVV); in Italy with the Five Star Movement (M5S) and Lega Nord; in Austria with the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ); in the United Kingdom with the UK Independence party (UKIP), among others. Most of these parties, regardless of their position on the political spectrum, reject the populist label. In this paper, we conduct an analysis of the linguistic treatment of populism in European media and its implications. We are aware that populism can be viewed from different angles, for example, as an ideology (Abts/Rummens 2007: 421), as a "political style" (Moffit 2016: 27), as political tactics (Weyland 2003: 1112), as a type of discourse (Hawkins 2009: 1047), or as the sum of all those (Caiani/Graziano 2016: 20). The present study approaches populism from an interdisciplinary stance through the linguistic study of a selection of texts extracted from the European media.

Four political movements were selected for analysis, one of them is currently in power after winning two consecutive elections, i.e. the Greek SYRIZA, and the other three parties have MPs in the parliaments of their respective countries. These are: FN in France, PVV in Netherlands and Podemos in Spain. We initially assumed that the media would change their wording according to their political affinity and inclination. Results show, nonetheless, that the variations observed seem to be more influenced by the media typology than by political considerations.

Keywords

media studies, critical discourse analysis, news analysis, populism in Europe

El Discurso sobre los Términos 'Populismo' y 'Populista' en los Titulares de la Prensa Española

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Resumen

Este artículo presenta los resultados de un análisis cuantitativo-cualitativo de los valores discursivos de los términos 'populismo(s)' y 'populista(s)' en un corpus de titulares de prensa publicados en El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia y El Periódico. El estudio, basado en el análisis crítico epistémico del discurso y en el concepto de encuadre, se centra en las dimensiones gramatical y léxico-semántica de ambos lexemas, con el objeto de identificar los marcos o encuadres interpretativos que los diarios elaboran hoy en día en torno a este fenómeno. Para ello, se tiene en cuenta también que el discurso mediático participa de la construcción del marco interpretativo del discurso político. Los primeros resultados muestran que, con pocas diferencias entre medios, las palabras co-aparecen a menudo con sustantivos y verbos de sema negativo que elaboran encuadres basados en una idea de amenaza incontrolable, principalmente en relación con determinados actores políticos tanto españoles como europeos.

Palabras clave

populismo, populista, prensa, discurso, selección léxica, sintaxis

Abstract

This paper presents the results of a quantitative-qualitative analysis of the discursive values of the words 'populismo(s)' and 'populista(s)' in a corpus of news headlines published in the digital editions of the Spanish press media El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia and El Periódico. Based on a critical epistemic discourse analysis approach and on framing theories, this study focuses on the grammatical and lexico-semantic dimensions of both terms, in order to identify the interpretative frames the newspapers elaborate around this current phenomenon. We also assume that media discourses participate in the construction of the interpretative framework of political discourses.

The results show that, with few differences among these media, both words often co-occur with negative nouns and verbs. This discourse frames the idea that there is a growing threat that should be prevented, mainly in relation to certain political Spanish and European political leaders.

Keywords

populism, populist, press, discourse, lexical choice, syntax

Understanding Trump: Power back to the People?

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Abstract

Trump's election in the US (November 2016) is another episode of the 'populist' wave that is competing with left-wing and right-wing mainstream politics. This paper adopts a critical discourse perspective to find out why US

voters decided to trust a rich and controversial businessperson who has often declared his contempt for politics and politicians. We try to outline, in terms of debate framing, some language features of Trump's communication that proved to be effective in the electoral contest and may serve to explain his final election. Qualitative analysis, based on pronoun distribution, tenses, and naming, is integrated with a preliminary quantitative analysis of campaign communication through a corpus of Trump's speeches (82 speeches, delivered from June 2016 to the acceptance speech delivered on November 9, 2016). This corpus is compared to the speeches delivered by Trump's political contender to the White House, Hillary Clinton (36 speeches, delivered from July 28 to November 9, 2016). As a result, we can see that Trump's informal style follows a clear strategy, which is the intention to trigger an emotional response from his audience in opposition to the political rationality of his rival.

Keywords

Trump, people, populism, campaign, discourse, power

Populismo en el Discurso Político y Mediático en América Latina: El Caso de Rafael Correa en Ecuador

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Resumen

Las últimas décadas han estado marcadas en América Latina por la presencia de gobiernos progresistas y populistas (Alcántara et al. 2016) que han venido a cambiar las relaciones históricas de los actores principales de la política latinoamericana, pero también su relación con los medios de comunicación. En el caso de Ecuador, Rafael Correa (2007–2017) modificó el panorama mediático y las relaciones entre el gobierno y los medios. Una de estas novedades es su contacto directo con la ciudadanía, cuestionando así la capacidad de mediación de los medios. Una de sus principales herramientas ha sido el Enlace Ciudadano, un espacio semanal de comunicación y rendición de cuentas convertido en el principal escenario de “campaña permanente” (Blumenthal 1980) no sólo con los líderes políticos, sino también con los medios de comunicación privados, a quienes el expresidente convirtió en adversarios políticos, siguiendo la lógica de la mediatización de la política (Mazzoleni/Schulz 1999).

Aunque la conceptualización de populismo no es tarea sencilla, entre los autores existe un acuerdo en la importancia que los líderes populistas dan al ‘pueblo’ y el antagonismo entre éste y los ‘otros’ (Deiwiks 2009). A partir de éstas y otras características, en el presente artículo realizamos un análisis del discurso político del expresidente Correa y del discurso de los principales medios de comunicación, a fin de (a) identificar si tienen características populistas; y (b) analizar si el discurso de Correa – dadas sus características como líder político populista (de la Torre 2012) – se refleja en el discurso de los medios. El corpus de análisis está formado por los Enlaces Ciudadanos y los dos principales diarios: El Telégrafo (público) y El Comercio (privado) del último trimestre de 2015. Los hallazgos obtenidos dan cuenta de algunas características compartidas entre el discurso político y mediático, pero también de importantes diferencias entre ellos.

Palabras clave

populismo, discurso político, medios de comunicación, liderazgo político, Ecuador.

Abstract

The last decades have been marked in Latin America by the presence of progressive and populist governments (Alcántara et al. 2016) that have come to change the historical relations of the main political actors, but also their relationship with the media. In the case of Ecuador, Rafael Correa (2007–2017) modified the media landscape and the relations between the government and the media. One of these developments is his direct contact with citizens, questioning the ability of the media to mediate.

One of its main tools has been the Enlace Ciudadano, a weekly communication and accountability space turned into the main stage of “permanent campaign” (Blumenthal 1980) not only with political leaders, but also with the private media, to whom the former president became political adversaries, following the logic of the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni/Schulz 1999).

Although the conceptualization of populism is not an easy task, among the populist leaders (Deiwiks 2009), there is an agreement on the importance of the ‘people’ and the antagonism between it and the ‘others’ in the populist leaders (Deiwiks 2009). Based on these and other characteristics, in this article we carry out an analysis of President Correa’s political discourse and the discourse of the main media, in order to (a) identify if they have populist characteristics; and (b) analyze if Correa’s speech – given its characteristics as a populist political leader (de la Torre 2012) – is reflected in the discourse of the media. The corpus of analysis is formed by Enlace Ciudadano and the two main newspapers: El Telégrafo (public) and El Comercio (private) of the last quarter of 2015. The findings

obtained account for some shared characteristics between the political and media discourse, but also important differences between them.

Tweets across the Borders: An Interlingual Study on European Populism

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Abstract

This study explores the discourse of four European populist and extremist parties on Twitter, namely Front National, Lega Nord, Movimento 5 Stelle and UKIP, both from a quantitative and a qualitative perspective. The analysis of the most frequent keywords in their tweets, compared to mainstream parties reference corpora, allowed to identify the most recurrent themes conveyed by the four groups. Results show a considerable number of common keywords in the examined parties, with the exception of Movimento 5 Stelle. Furthermore, the study of the keywords collocations depicts how each party describes common topics, such as immigration, finance and the European Union. Findings report that the majority of collocates are exclusively used by the populist parties in comparison with the reference groups, suggesting an apparent discrepancy between populist and established parties' discourse. Finally, tweets were annotated following the Appraisal framework (Martin/White 2005). This process highlighted how parties bond with their followers by identifying any propensity in the use of evaluative language, for example, instances of emotions, judgments, intensifications or expression of stance. Outcomes indicate that all four parties tend to intensify or decrease degrees of evaluation and to avoid engagement with different stances, whereas the expression of emotional, ethical and aesthetic judgments is similar in populist and reference groups.

Keywords

discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, appraisal theory, social networking, systems, populist parties, twitter

Resistance through Discourse in Right-Wing Online Commentary

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Abstract

This article argues that right-wing online commentary on news articles, despite its reputation for being poorly-written, insulting and ill-considered, is in fact often composed of discursive structures designed to mark its authors as members of a community of practice who use language to resist what they see as the dominant left-wing ideology in media outlets. First, I discuss the nature of Critical Discourse Analysis, in particular, its relation to the study of language as a tool for both social control and resistance to social control. I then show that online commenters on the Daily Mail Online newspaper website are a community of practice who have shared goals and a shared repertoire of linguistic tools. Finally, I examine some indicative comments qualitatively, in an effort to provide some insights into how right-wing commenters use language to re-frame arguments presented in online newspaper articles; by means of implicature, deliberate misspellings of key words, and straw man arguments about political correctness, they position themselves as marginalized members of society. Despite there being little or no evidence that online discussion of topics related to race are censored at the Daily Mail Online, comments arguing that political correctness prohibits certain types of speech remain popular with readers.

Keywords

discourse, CDA, resistance, community of practice, online comments