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## “Don’t Call me Woke!”: Tracing the Pragmatic and Emotive Trajectory of the Word of Our Era

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**Denise Filmer**

University of Pisa  
[denise.filmer@unipi.it](mailto:denise.filmer@unipi.it)

**Gianmarco Vignozzi**

University of Pisa  
[gianmarco.vignozzi@unipi.it](mailto:gianmarco.vignozzi@unipi.it)

### Abstract

This paper investigates the fluctuating attitudes and emotional responses to the adjective ‘woke’ viewed through the lens of British news discourse. The study seeks to understand how recent newspaper coverage surrounding the notion of woke culture and its linguistic referents has influenced the semantic and pragmatic shifts of ‘woke’. The analysis is based on a self-compiled corpus of British newspaper articles featuring the contested term and is conducted both quantitatively and qualitatively. The polarisation of British newsbrands (quality vs. tabloids and left-leaning vs. right-leaning) seems to play a pivotal role in determining the way in which ‘woke’ is implemented within the text: either as part of journalistic discourse, as metadiscourse, or within reported discourse. The collocational analysis uncovers the discourses that most typically characterise news reporting on ‘woke’ highlighting different attitudes and representations. Having identified five key news narratives on wokeness, two mini case studies critically assess how multi-modal features contribute to and reinforce the meaning-making process, confirming the current polarised and ideologically loaded usage of ‘woke’.

### Keywords

woke and woke culture, media studies, British newsbrands, corpus linguistics, multi-modal critical discourse analysis