

Researching the European Parliament with Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies: From the micro- and macro-levels of text to the macro-context.¹

Abstract

Parliaments are important and complex institutions. However, they are notably under-researched within linguistics and related fields. This is certainly the case with the European Parliament (EP). Drawing both on Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) and prior, manual research on parliamentary communication, this paper proposes and applies an analytical protocol to examine EP speeches. Although these are disseminated in various forms and through dissimilar means (e.g., live at the EP; the audiovisual format via streaming or recorded videos; or published as parliamentary proceedings), here we focus on proceedings--one of the EP's main sources of official representation. Following the EP's (unique) practice, where official proceedings do not distinguish between original and translated speeches but consider all texts of equal (legal) status, this study delves into all speech production in English, without separating source and target texts. In the most orthodox of CADS traditions, analysis proceeds from micro and macro-levels of texts into the macro-context (unlike other academic approaches, in which it proceeds in the opposite direction). This direction forces us to move from tangible, specific data to the enveloping setting in which these data are exchanged.

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Resumen

Las cámaras legislativas son instituciones de indisputable importancia y elevados niveles de complejidad. Sin embargo, su estudio se ha visto descuidado por los ámbitos lingüísticos hasta hace poco. Éste es, sin duda, el caso del Parlamento Europeo (PE). Sobre la base metodológica de los Estudios de Discurso Asistidos por Corpus (o CADS, en sus siglas en inglés) así como la plataforma teórica de análisis manuales del género parlamentario, el presente trabajo propone y aplica un protocolo de estudio del discurso parlamentario. Aunque los discursos del parlamento europeo se publican en formatos y medios diversos (en directo, en la Eurocámara; en formato audiovisual, mediante comunicaciones en línea o enlatadas; o publicadas oficialmente, en el texto de las actas parlamentarias), aquí nos centramos en las representaciones oficiales de las actas parlamentarias. En consonancia con la práctica del PE (única en su género), que no hace distinciones entre discursos originales y traducciones sino que los equipara a todos en cuanto a su estatus (jurídico), este estudio examina la producción discursiva del PE en inglés, con independencia de la lengua origen de cada texto. En línea con la más ortodoxa de las tradiciones de los CADS, el análisis procede desde niveles micro y macro textuales hacia el contexto (y no al contrario, como ocurre en otros enfoques investigadores). Esta dirección nos obliga a concentrarnos en datos concretos y tangibles para luego explorar el medio en el que se emitieron estos.

Keywords

Political discourse, European Parliament, corpus linguistics, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS), ECPC

1. Introduction

Parliaments are institutions of the utmost importance in today's world. Democratic systems, hegemonic forces, and (new) media count on parliamentary legislative bodies to contribute to governance of and policy formation for the respective geopolitical entities to which they belong, usually national but sometimes transnational. It is in parliaments that crucial political and legal issues are discussed and then approved or rejected. It is in parliaments that governments are monitored and controlled and in parliaments that accountability is primarily safeguarded (in democratic systems). In addition, in non-democratic systems, parliaments often serve as the forums through which an approximation or illusion of democracy is created.

Due to their importance, it is hardly surprising, then, that parliaments are the topic of extensive research in areas such as political science (see, for example, Bowler, Farrell, and Katz 1999; Box-Steffensmeier, Henry, and Collier 2008; Hix 2001; Huber 1996; Laver and Shepsle 1996; Shepsle and Weingast 1995; Tsebelis and Money 1997; Warwick 1994). However, up until recently, they have been notably under-researched within linguistic and related fields, in spite of the fact that they have been defined as "institutions which are dedicated to talk" (Bayley 2004b, 1).

At any rate, with the turn of the 21st century, there has been a growing number of language-related publications showing an increasing interest in parliamentary communicative exchanges (for a thorough bibliographical compilation, see the following major edited volumes: Bayley 2004a; Chilton 2002; Ilie 2010a; Wodak and Van Dijk 2000). All these publications highlight a twofold insight: (a) that parliaments are complex entities and (b) that they can be approached from a wide range of discourse-related standpoints.

Parliaments are complex in many ways. First of all, there are many different types of parliamentary institutions. Bayley (2004b, 6) underlines that dissimilar socio-

political traditions and historical frameworks result in parliamentary “institutions that vary according to constitutional frameworks, their function within the political system as a whole, representativity and political culture.” The exact nature of all this variation evolves over time. Furthermore, there are different types of participants (speaker/president, interlocutors, insiders, outsiders; Ilie 2010b, 66), who take part in a regulated or creative, polemical or argumentative genre made up of subgenres such as ministerial statements, speeches, debates, oral/written questions, and Question Time interventions (Ilie 2006, 191), realized by an almost inexhaustible range of topics and formal (oral, dialogical, immediate, dynamic, co-operative) features, especially in relation to speech acts and turn-taking (Quintrileo 2005). And all this takes place at specific times (e.g., some parliaments meet routinely, others only intermittently) and places (that is, in chambers with various physical structures and communicative environments) in specific contexts (e.g., full sittings, committees, corridors), affecting the (e.g., conciliatory/oppositional) nature of debate.

Language analysts have approached this complexity from equally complex or multifaceted standpoints, informed by a variety of frameworks drawn from the fields of pragmatics, rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics, (critical) discourse analysis, cognitive linguistics, and others. This research area has truly acquired multidisciplinary scope. For example, Muntigl (2000) completes a functionalism-based description with recourse to (Kenneth) Burkean rhetoric; Miller (2004) refers to appraisal theory; Vuorikoski (2004) moves within interpreting studies; Íñigo-Mora (2010) draws on discursive psychology; Lorda Mur (2010) merges discourse analysis and rhetorical notions; Van Dijk is well-known for his socio-cognitive contributions (see, for example, Van Dijk 2010); and Montesano Montessori (2014) enriches a Fairclough-and-Wodak-inspired approach with Laclau and Mouffe (1985)’s discourse theory; among others.

Nevertheless, there is only a handful of studies that have examined parliamentary communication from a Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) perspective (Baker 2006; Baker 2010; Bayley, Bevitori, and Zoni 2004; Bayley and San Vicente 2004; Bevitori 2004; Dibattista 2004; Garzone and Santulli 2004; Vasta 2004), even though, this approach has had “impressive results” (Garzone and Santulli 2004, 353) in many a field. And none of these studies focus solely on the communicative dynamics of the European Parliament. However, much of Europe’s most important decision-making occurs in the multilingual Euro-Chamber (remember the EP has 24 official languages). Its 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)--few of which are not attached to any parties, while the rest are grouped in at least 7 parliamentary groups²-- defend agendas that not only influence ideologies, behaviours, and the language of national houses but which have a very real impact upon the lives of everyday citizens in the European Union.

Therefore, the present paper aims to contribute to filling this gap. In the following sections, we propose and apply a (thus far, infrequently-used) Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies’ (CADS) exploration of European Parliament (EP) speeches in English. The paper comprises four main sections. After the introduction (section 1), we present an overview of CADS and clarify the main “points of entry” (Orpin 2005, 38) to the work (section 2). We identify the Corpus Linguistics (CL) tools used here; describe the European Comparable and Parallel Corpus (ECPC) Archive, on which the analysis is performed; and present the theoretical platform informing this study, derived from prior, manually-produced research. This section ends with a recapitulating sub-section that briefly describes the methodology of the paper. In section 3, two sets of analyses

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/20150201PVL00010/Organisation-and-rules>

follow. In typical CADS fashion, the two sets of analyses select textual data (at a micro- or macro-level) before discussing some aspects of the contextual setting in which these are exchanged. This textual-contextual synergy is discussed in section 4, the conclusion, which also links the results of this study to the present, difficult situation in the European Union (EU).

2. Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)

Across various fields, researchers have favored CADS and provided guidelines for its application (Baker 2010; Baker et al. 2008; Baker and McEnery 2005; Garzone and Santulli 2004; Hardt-Mautner 1995; Koller and Mautner 2004; Mehan 1997; O'Halloran and Coffin 2004; Orpin 2005; Stubbs 1996). These researchers often (though not exclusively) complement quality with quantity and theory with data. To do this, they move from the micro-textual level to the macro-contextual sphere (Baker 2010, 7), unlike other academic approaches, such as Critical Discourse Analysis, that normally proceed from context to text. Data are compiled within corpora and are normally organized and selected according to repetitive patterns and using different tools (such as frequencies, distributions, collocations, clusters, concordances, and keywords).

In synergic studies like CADS, as Orpin (2005, 38) admits, “[t]he major problem is deciding where to start.” In such cases, at least three factors determine entry points to research: (a) the corpus-based tools for specific analysis; (b) the corpus (or corpora) to be studied; and (c) the theoretical platforms, if any, that inform the study.

2.1 Corpus tools for analysis

The first point of entry into CADS research is the specific Corpus Linguistic tool or set of tools that are to be used for the analysis. The most popular and traditional are statistical data, as an “indicator of markedness” (Baker 2010, 125); wordlists, as the most basic “point[s] of entry” (Baker 2010, 133) of analysis; keywords as “somewhat more sophisticated” (Baker 2010, 134) means of research; and concordances (with associated information, such as collocates and clusters). The present study mainly opts for two of these tools--keywords and clusters--as they are generated by popular concordancer WordSmith Tools 6.0.

In the (quantitative, qualitative) synergic spirit that informs this paper, it is only logical that keywords are opted for. Basically, according to Evison (2010, 127), keywords result from the comparison of the frequency of terms in a given corpus (such as our ECPC corpus, described in section 2.2) with that in a reference or benchmark corpus (such as Clear’s 2003 Bank of English corpus--BoE). Hence, they are not only of research interest due to quantitative reasons (i.e., frequency) but also (and mainly) due to qualitative criteria (idiosyncrasy vis-à-vis the benchmark). It seems to us that keywords are a good, informative, place to start researching.

According to Biber et al. (1999, 992), clusters are “sequences of word forms that commonly go together in natural discourse”. Clusters expand the micro-data (in our case keywords) under analysis and are a potential first step towards more macro-contextual levels. When dealing with clusters, specialists apply “cut-off points for lexical bundles which ‘count’” (Kopaczyk 2012, 86). These are threshold levels below which their (quantitative) relevance seems diluted. In this paper, we adopt the threshold advocated by Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1998): only clusters above 40 occurrences per million words are seen as quantitatively reliable.

2.2 *The ECPC Corpus Archive*

The second point of entry into CADS research is the specific corpus or set of corpora upon which analyses are to be performed. The present paper resorts to the European Comparable and Parallel Corpora of Parliamentary Speeches (ECPC) Archive, compiled at the Universitat Jaume I (Spain).³ The ECPC is a collection of corpora containing speeches (in English and/or Spanish) from three European chambers: The European Parliament (EP), the British House of Commons (HC) and the Spanish Congreso de los Diputados (CD). The EP corpus (which is used in this paper) consists of day sessions of the European Parliament proceedings, ranging from 15 April 1996 to 25 June 2011. These sessions are published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* (and its equivalents in the rest of EU languages) and are downloadable from the EP's website.⁴

There are two main EP subcorpora: EP_en, the official English version of EP proceedings, and EP_es, its official Spanish counterpart. The former (used for this research) has 51,345,208 tokens of (oral/written) speeches.

This section concludes with two cautionary notes. First, the ECPC Archive consists of EP speeches, published as part of parliamentary proceedings. There are other formats and channels used to disseminate EP speeches (e.g., live at the EP or the audiovisual format via streaming or recorded videos). Here we focus on parliamentary proceedings, as they are one of the most established sources of EP's official representation and discourse. Second, the present study does not make any distinctions between the original and translated speeches in English of the EP_en corpus. This is

³ The ECPC Archive is freely available to the academic community at <http://ecpc.xtrad.uji.es/glossa/html/index.php?corpus=ecpc>.

⁴ Day sessions may be downloaded at <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>.

because, EP proceedings assign equal (legal) status to source and target texts, which are all conceived as a unified whole and are part of what is popularly known as Euro-jargon or Eurospeak.

2.3 The informing theory

The third point of entry into CADS research is deciding if the analysis must be performed with or without a prior theoretical platform. CADS scholars from a Neo-Firthian school of thought (such as Sinclair, 2004) approach the data without any pre-conceived theoretical assumptions. Others (such as McEnery and Hardie 2011) prefer to depend on theoretical premises that will provide concepts and methods. In this regard, we choose the latter approach and review prior theoretical work on parliamentary communication (developed manually) to guide our analytical steps. This review is essential as it helps us be more specific about our research protocols. As seen previously, CADS tends to recommend analyses that move from the micro-textual levels to the macro-contextual spheres; but they do so in a manner that does not include many specific instructions. Manual research is more concrete and splits the textual and contextual levels into four, more detailed sub-levels: micro-textual, macro-textual, micro-contextual, and macro-contextual. Furthermore, manual research provides informative clues as to what merits the researcher's interest in each of these levels.

We list some of the areas of interest for three of these sub-levels here: the micro-textual, macro-textual, and the macro-contextual. However, this work does not refer to the micro-context, which concentrates on the dynamics of live debate situations within chambers (for more information on this sub-level, see Van Dijk 2004 and Quintrileo 2005). As seen above, the ECPC Archive consists of the specific official representation portrayed by parliamentary proceedings (rather than live debates).

2.3.1 *The micro-level of parliamentary texts.* Prior studies revolving around the micro-level of parliamentary texts have focused on lexico-grammatical items and rhetorical strategies. Some studies concentrate on specific features and examine, for example, cohesive elements (Muntigl 2000), phraseology (Elpass 2002), lexis-based metaphors (Musolff 2004), rhetorical devices (Vuorikoski 2004), transitivity patterns (Calzada Pérez 2007), or the use of pronouns (Van Dijk 2002; Van Dijk 2004; Lorda Mur 2010). Other studies cover a wider range of features at once. Antelmi and Santulli (2010), for instance, compare the most prominent lexical choices, syntactic structures, and argumentation strategies of two parliamentary speeches delivered by Italian politicians Silvio Berlusconi and Romano Prodi in the Italian Chamber. On a totally different note, but also of interest, is Montesano Montessori (2014, 175), on Mexican legislators' "empty signifiers" ("signifiers without a particular signified") and "nodal points" ("privileged signifiers that fix the meaning"), a distinction Montesano Montessori borrows from Laclau and Mouffe (1985). These post-structural concepts are particularly illuminating because they help us abandon the static nature of other approaches in favor of the semantic fluidity of communication.

In this paper, we focus our attention on specific lexical items (rather than a combination of lexico-grammatical features), selected using Corpus Linguistic methods. We start our analysis by generating the top 50 keywords in the ECPC Archive. This research also draws on Montesano Montessori's work. Hence, in our first set of analyses (see section 3.1. below), we mainly examine the key adjective "economic" and its fluctuation as a nodal or empty signifier.

2.3.2 *The macro-level of parliamentary texts.* Scholarly questions have also been directed at the macro-textual level of parliamentary communication. In this sense, academics have analysed the argumentative and counter-argumentative macro-structures of these texts (see, for instance, Vuorikoski 2004, and Calzada Pérez 2007), made up of (a more or less complex version of) “claim (or counter-argument) followed by support for claim (or reason)” (Bayley 2004b, 24). Experts have also focused on texts’ ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, largely determined by and simultaneously determining the contextual levels (Vasta 2004, for example, refers to the metafunctions in the Italian Chamber of Deputies). Some have also centred their studies on (macro)semantic topics (at different levels of realization), which are referred to in slightly different manners and with slightly different implications. Wodak and Weiss (2004, 235), for example, refer to “topoi” and “topical networks”, while Garzone and Santulli (2004, 358) choose the notion of “motifs.” These themes become the centre of research. For instance, Krzyżanowski (2005) and Oberhuber (2005) review the European Constitution; Mehan (1997), Martín Rojo and Van Dijk (1997) and Van Dijk (2000) explore immigration; the papers contained in Muntigl, Weiss, and Wodak (2000) share an interest in unemployment; and Wodak and Weiss (2004) consider representations of the European Union.

This paper is informed by the notion of topical networks to which we refer as semantic chains (or semantically-related items). These constitute the main analytical focus of the second set of analyses.

2.3.3 *The macro-level of parliamentary context.* On the global (macro-) level of parliamentary context, a high degree of abstraction may be identified. Academics such as Bayley (2004a), Madzharova Bruteig (2010) and Ornatowski (2010) place great

emphasis on the influence of culture and history, at large, upon parliamentary exchanges. Depending on overall cultural rules (e.g., of politeness, preference for concrete or abstract language, forms of political representations, relative strength of political parties, etc.), parliamentary communication adopts different forms. As Bayley (2004b, 14) points out:

It can thus be hypothesised that the social and institutional norms and, perhaps above all, the history of a given culture will determine to some extent the kind of language that can be used in parliament.

Other scholars (such as Van Dijk 2004 and Quintrileo 2005, later on) single out specific parameters that provide a clearer picture of this level: overall domain, societal/global action, and institutional participants. Van Dijk (2004, 355) assigns parliaments to the overall domains of politics (or “doing politics”, as he describes it), justice, and law. Within this domain, “global acts of legislation or governing the country” (Van Dijk 2004, 356) take place. Specifically, Van Dijk mentions representing one’s constituents, governing the country, criticising the government, engaging in opposition, implementing party programmes, and making policy. On the macro-level of context, global actors or institutional participants may be identified; as Van Dijk (2004, 356) puts it:

[W]e do not merely understand political debates as being defined in terms of MPs [Members of Parliament], but also as confrontation between political parties, between government

and opposition, and parliament as an institution that “does” things to institutions.

Seen from a slightly different perspective, this is the level of Fairclough’s (e.g., 2001, 232) social orders and orders of discourse. The way parliamentary sessions develop is largely determined by factors intervening at these orders of discourse and may vary from parliament to parliament.

Each of our two sets of analyses concludes with a discussion of the macro-context. The first set draws on the need for historical considerations to be explored (as per Bayley 2004a, Madzharova Bruteig 2010 and Ornatowski 2010). In turn, the second set focuses on Van Dijk’s (2004) and Quintrileo’s (2005) specific contextual parameters, with an emphasis on the role of participants.

2.4 Proposed analytical method

In sum, by deciding on our three points of entry, we can now draft a methodological protocol for this paper’s analytical component. Informed by both CADS and prior manual research, we propose to perform two sets of analyses (Set 1 and Set 2) on the ECPC Archive, each of them comprising two consecutive steps (Step 1 and Step 2). Set 1 starts with the generation of micro-textual items (i.e., ECPC’s top 50 keywords) that are then grouped according to basic categories. Step 1 in Set 1 mainly focuses on the key adjective “economic” and its quantitatively reliable three- to four-word clusters. Drawing on Montesano Montessori’s work, the discussion illustrates the fluidity between empty and nodal signifiers. Step 2 in Set 1 proposes a historical account of the period under exploration, as advocated by Bayley, Madzharova Bruteig, and Ornatowski. Set 2 revolves around semantic chains. Step 1 in Set 2 concentrates on

chains formed with top key nouns and verbs. Step 2 in Set 2 explores Van Dijk's and Quintrileo's contextual parameters with special attention to participants.

The textual-contextual protocols applied here are by no means the only ones possible. For example, our studies could have departed from the micro-level of texts and end in the macro-contextual parameters proposed by Van Dijk and Quintrileo. The macro-level of text could also have been followed by the cultural-historical approach proposed by Bayley. Moreover, we could have equally focused our analysis on other components discussed by previous research. However, we believe, a priori, that our analytical sets and steps will yield valuable results.

The main aim of the research is exploratory, and it attempts to examine whether CADS produces effective information about the institution under study and whether results may provide tentative hints to approach the EU in a critical manner.

3. Analyzing EP_en corpus: From text to context

3.1 Set of analyses 1

3.1.1 Step 1: Out of the micro-level of text. One way to move from the micro-level of text to the macro-context is by performing a simple analysis with WordSmith Tools 6.0's keyword utility. As explained in section 2.1, this compares the words of a given corpus (e.g., the EP_en corpus) with those of a reference corpus (in our case, Clear's 2003 Bank of English corpus or BoE), and produces a selection of those terms that are of unusual frequency. In other words, keyword lists contain the most idiosyncratic terms (and patterns) of the chosen corpus. If the corpus is representative (as it is here, where it contains all EP speeches in English from 1996 to 2011), results can be extrapolated to

the whole of the EP proceedings genre (in English Eurospeak) with relative confidence, and hence to the official representation of the EP discourse (in English Eurospeak).

Due to space constraints, this paper focuses on the top 50 EP_en keywords, displayed in Table 1 below. These terms may be assigned to six main basic groups: nouns, adjectives, pronouns, verbs, (including potential auxiliaries), function words (excluding potential auxiliaries), and symbols and abbreviations (such as “#”, which generally designates numbers in WordSmith Tools 6.0, and “no.”, short for “number”). Notice that the figures in brackets next to each term refer to that word’s place in the keyword list. Some forms can be placed under multiple categories; for instance, “need” (25) can either be a content noun (“Because there is a need for more Europe”), a verb (“They therefore need special assistance”), or an auxiliary (“we need not only a treaty”). For clarity, we have placed these ambiguous forms under whichever category accounts for the highest frequency of that word in the corpus.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Drawing on the theoretical notes in section 2.3.1 (see Laclau and Mouffe, via Montesano Montessori 2014), some of the lexicogrammatical items in the table seem to have greater potential than others to be empty signifiers (that is, “signifiers without a particular signified”). At first sight, pronouns and functional words fit the bill here because their meanings keep changing from situation to situation (e.g., “she” may refer to a certain person A in speech 1 and to a different person B in speech 2). Conversely, without further analysis, it would be logical to classify key nouns and adjectives, in particular, as nodal points (or “privileged signifiers that fix their meaning”) (e.g., “The European Commission” refers to the same institution throughout). In fact, nouns and adjectives constitute the crux of any text (in our case, EP_en speeches), and are the

basis upon which the skeleton of proceedings discourse is built. Symbols could either be seen as empty (i.e., “#”) or as nodal (i.e., “no.”).

However, the difference between empty and nodal signifiers is not as neat as it might initially seem, and requires caution, as we see when we proceed with our micro-textual analysis, beginning (arbitrarily) with the adjective column. There are only two adjectives among the top 50 keywords in the corpus: “European” and “economic.” Triangulating (at greater length than this paper allows) the use of “European” in EP proceedings with Wodak’s (2011, 94–112) results about MEP’s views on the notions of “European” and “Europeanness” is the topic of a forthcoming paper. Thus, we will here focus on the term “economic.”

Focusing on “economic” entails getting more information about how the term is idiosyncratically used in the EP_en corpus. To do so, we opt for cluster analysis and adopt the threshold of relevance set by Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1998): only clusters above 40 occurrences per million words are regarded as quantitatively reliable (see section 2.1).

If we look at EP_en’s three- and four-word clusters (a standard type of CL analysis) around the term “economic” with over 2000 occurrences (since our EP_en is around 50 million words) this is what we get:

[Insert Table 2 here]

As we see from Table 2 above, the most frequent cluster in EP proceedings from 1996 to 2011 is “economic and social” (with over 5000 occurrences, more than double the threshold level). Next come clusters that together make up the name of an important EP body, the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON). “Economic”, then, is a nodal signifier whose most “privileged” meaning is in association with “social” matters (such as “economic and social cohesion”, with 768 occurrences or

“economic and social development”, with 386 occurrences) or institutions that deal with economic and social issues (such as the Economic and Social Committee, with 493 occurrences). “Economic” is also a nodal signifier that appear as part of a meta-reference – an EP institution – through which (via metonymy) the EP points at itself.

Nevertheless, this nodal signifier’s meaning is not totally fixed or static but fluctuates (like empty forms), as we see if we analyse the term at three different points in the EP_en corpus: before the turn of the century (1999), in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century (2005), and at the end of it (2010). To do so, we create three subcorpora: EP_en_99 (3,021,857 tokens), EP_en_05 (3,214,605 tokens), and EP_en_10, (3,106,780 tokens). Our cluster cut-off point will theoretically now be around 120; however, we prefer to open the span only slightly, and show below the first 20 clusters in each year, so that we have access to wider meaning.

[Insert Table 3 here]

What Table 3 shows is that the “economic” nodal signifier is reasonably stable but, as mentioned above, not totally static. Over the decade, the combination “economic and social” is a constant. However, other clusters appear throughout the three subcorpora, in varying degrees. For example, co-occurrences related to the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs permeate all lists, but at different positions. Furthermore, there are clusters that appear among the top 20 in two of the subcorpora but disappear from the third; for example, “political and economic”, at position 20 in EP_en_99 and position 15 in EP_en_05. Finally, there are word sequences appearing in one subcorpus only. This happens with “economic growth and”, in position 11 in EP_en_05. It is also the case of “the economic crisis” (at position 2 in the EP_en_10 subcorpus), among others.

These results recall the post-structuralist claim that signifiers are not unitary entities, but multifaceted realities that may be both nodal and empty at once. The adjective “economic” is, so far, nodal in EP proceedings with regard to its association with “the social” and also as part of the ECON (meta-)reference. However, at the same time, “economic” leaves empty room for newly acquired/discarded meanings (such as the “economic growth and” or the “the economic crisis” clusters) that result from but also impact upon the macro-context.

3.1.2 *Step 2: Into the macro-context.* Our study of the key adjective “economic” in the EP_en corpus at large can be connected to some interesting historical-contextual facts. It is hardly surprising that the “economic and social” cluster leads to one of the most stable nodal meanings of this signifier in the corpus. In fact, economic and social matters have been profoundly associated in EEC/EU documents ever since the signature of the Treaties of Rome on 25 March 1957 establishing the seminal institutions of the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). Already on page 2 of this EU founding treaty, we find: “RESOLVED to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action to eliminate the barriers which divide Europe.”⁵ Furthermore, if we query all major EU treaties from 1957 up to the present day – the Treaties of Rome, the Treaty of Maastricht (1992), the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), the Treaty of Nice (2001), and the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) – we realize that in all of them, the “economic and social” sequence is the most frequent and idiosyncratic cluster around “economic.” Thus, the EU as a whole (and not only the EP) throughout its history (and not only from 1996 to 2011, the timespan of our corpus) has been keen to connect the social and economic

⁵ Download treaties from http://europa.eu/eu-law/decision-making/treaties/index_en.htm.

realms. It is as if the “economic and social” association has been verbally primed (as per Hoey 2005) by EU institutions and pushed into the centre of the EU/EP.

The study of the three EP_en subcorpora (for 1999, 2005, and 2010) also produces interesting results regarding historical associations of the shifting nuances of the term “economic.” By 1999, EP institutions (i.e., The *Committee of Economic and Monetary Affairs*) largely monopolize the clusters. This is only logical, since 1999 is the year when the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force, right before the signing of the Treaty of Nice in 2001. These treaties reorganized EU institutions and assigned greater monitoring power to the EP especially on economic matters. The year 2005 sees the failure of the European Constitution (which was intended to integrate the EU more closely) and an EU identity crisis (Schulz 2013) that may account for the fact that other, more promising aspects of European affairs (encapsulated by clusters like “economic growth and”) are repeated as (fluctuating) mantras. Finally, the EU world, its structure, its enticing benefits are relegated to a secondary position as the global economic crisis fully impacts on the EU in 2010. The EP’s main goal remains in principle safeguarding Europeans’ “economic and social” welfare, but discussion of means to achieve it (EP committees, for example) is displaced by the threat of the “economic crisis.” Notice that the “financial” now acquires a major role in EP_en_10 clusters: the crisis was after all the result of financial wrongdoing.

3.2 *From the macro-level of text to the macro-context*

3.2.1 *Step 1: Out of the macro-level of text.* With CADS, we can also proceed from the macro-level of text to the macro-context, for example, by considering the “topical networks” mentioned in section 2.3.2, which we turn into “signifying chains” (or semantically related items) formed by the nouns in the keyword Table 1. We also touch

upon verb chains only briefly, and reserve function words, pronouns, and symbols for future research. Notice that we do not take up adjectives again, since they were examined above.

If we organize the top 50 key content nouns according to clearly discernible “signifying chains”, a neat idiosyncratic map of the macro-meaning of the EP proceedings comes to the fore. There are five possible chains:

- a. Institutional participants (at the European level): “Commission”, “Parliament”, “EU”, “Union”, “Council”, “President”, “Europe” (632,649 tokens)
- b. Institutional participants (at the national level): “states”, “countries” (212,368 tokens)
- c. Ordinary participants: “people”, “citizens” (123,869 tokens)
- d. Parliamentary “products”: “measures”, “reports”, “rights” (223,478 tokens)
- e. Time: “time”, “years” (116,388 tokens)

As seen from this list, EP_en proceedings speeches place various types of participants in the most prominent place. Institutional participants at the European level totally predominate over participants at the national level (almost three times as much). This difference is even larger when we consider that ordinary participants (“citizens” and “people”) are overwhelmingly European (as is seen from the analysis of concordances, something which is not discussed here due to space constraints).

Some key verbs may also be arranged in signifying chains:

- a. Potential auxiliaries (“is”, “are”, “has”, “been”, “was”, “am”, “were”, “being”, “does”, “had”)
- b. Modal verbs (“must”)

c. Verbs of action (“take”, “made”)

d. Verbs of diction (“say”, “said”)

We reserve modals and potential auxiliaries for later attention and concentrate on verbs of action and diction here. This is not to say that the especially high frequency of modals and auxiliaries in the EP is of no interest. Quite the contrary. For example, the idiosyncratically strong use of hard modality in EP English (represented by “must”) contravenes the current behaviour of UK English, where according to Paul Baker (2010, 66) it is in clear decline, due to “a number of trends [...], including democratization,” (Baker, 2010: 66) or “personalization and conversationalization of public discourse” (Baker 2010: 67), which were often initiated in American English. This phenomenon deserves more reflective attention (see also Calzada Pérez, In press), which is why we reserve these areas for future research.

At first glance, it might seem that (some) verbs of action (those realized by “take” or “made”) are highly represented in our EP_en corpus. However, if we poke into quantitatively reliable clusters around these two verbs (as before, those with 2000 instances in our 50 million word EP_en corpus), we realize appearances can be deceptive. Let us look at reliable clusters around “take”:

[Insert Table 4 here]

As seen in Table 4 above, “take” creates three signifying sub-chains:

- a. with an existential value (e.g., “vote will take place”), totalling 16,032 occurrences and 60.95% of reliable clusters
- b. with a mental slant (e.g., “take account”, “take into account”), totalling 5,057 occurrences and 19.22% of reliable clusters; and

c. others, like “take a”, “take the”, totalling 5,211 occurrences and 19.81% of reliable clusters

Evidently, at least 80.17% (60.95% + 19.22%) of these clusters are not of action and give a rather less active impression of the official discussions recorded by EP_proceedings.

A closer look at “made” reveals that its quantitatively reliable clusters are always part of passive structures. Thus, “made” can function as a verb of action, but often in a passive fashion. This again tones down the potential for active behaviour at the EP. (See Table 5).

[Insert Table 5 here]

Finally, as seen in Table 6, quantitatively reliable clusters point at the fact that “say” or “said” are what they seem at first: truly verbal processes, which co-communicants are careful to cushion in a particularly polite manner (e.g., “would like to say”, “have to say”, “must say”, etc.).

[Insert Table 6 here]

3.2.2 *Step 2: Into the macro-context.* As advanced in section 2.3.3, the previous macro-textual results may be contextualized by considering Van Dijk (2004) and Quintrileo’s (2005) notions of domain, societal/global action, and institutional participants.

Discussing EU-related visions, ideologies, and utopias, Wodak and Weiss’s (2004, 225) interesting paper shows how, with the turn of the 21st century, Europe has started “soul searching” or “doing Europe.” Prominent among the various agents engaged in this introspection is the EP, which has accrued power with the signing of each treaty. Based on this, we assert that the EP’s main global domain not only involves

“doing politics,” with its related societal/global actions (see section 2.3.3)--like other parliamentary chambers, as per Van Dijk (2004)--but “doing Europe.” Furthermore, our data indicate that by “doing Europe,” the EP--in Van Dijk’s (2004) terms--reaffirms three global participants in the most prominent positions: EU institutions (Parliament, Commission, and Council), national member states, and European citizens/people(s). However, these positions differ from those established in the metanarrative that describes the EP as:

an important forum for political debate and decision-making at the EU level. The Members of the European Parliament are directly elected by voters in all Member States to represent *people’s interests* with regard to EU law-making and to make sure other *EU institutions* are working democratically [emphasis added].⁶

The linguistic results place European institutions at the center of the EP discussion and make the role of national members visible; however, in contrast, the metanarrative assigns this place to EU citizens and hides the role of national members completely. These (and other) deviations between linguistic data and the ideological message around Europe built by the EP are worth further research. At this stage, one can only hypothesize that they could play a role in the EU citizens’ apathy towards the role of the EP (the average turnout at the European Parliament elections is 42.6%).⁷

⁶ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en>

⁷ <http://www.ukpolitical.info/european-parliament-election-turnout.htm>

Regarding the EP's functioning, our data show that, again, in line with Wodak and Weiss (2004, 236):

to the outside, Europe has to be strong and active [...]; to the inside, it has to be reflective ("Who are we?"). The first perspective demands a strong, active Europe [...], the second requires discussion, dialogue and reflection [...].

Notice that EP debates are primarily targeted at EU insiders (other members of the European Parliament, EU institutions, EU citizens, etc.). Hence, our results on verbal signifying chains largely coincide with Wodak and Weiss's analysis: reflection (in the form of mental processes, e.g., as unleashed by "take"); discussion and dialogue (in the form of verbal processes, e.g., as initiated by "say" and "said," cushioned with various forms of politeness); and some passivization (e.g., as built around "made"), where action is relegated to a secondary place, for reasons that need further research. In fact, this paper should be considered a part of a larger on-going research effort that will attempt to delve deeper into these and other data, and examine them in a more detailed manner.

4. Conclusion

Informed by CADS, this paper performs two sets of analyses of EP proceedings in English, as compiled in the ECPC Archive. This Archive contains material that constitutes a source of EP official representations and messages and allows us to move from the micro and macro-levels of texts into different aspects of the macro-context. By

selecting the ECPC Archive's top 50 keywords, we identify its most idiosyncratic features, which help us focus our research.

The top key adjectives reveal that one of the most idiosyncratic topics discussed at the EP is related to economic matters. While this result is hardly surprising (and agrees with historical facts about the EP), it is interesting that terms are fluctuating signifiers to a greater or lesser extent and that CADS may aid us in spotting these fluctuations. Hence, in 2005, "economic" is seen as associated with "growth," while five years later, in 2010, it is closely linked to "crisis." Times change and language changes accordingly. Even with seemingly fixed, nodal items from today's perspective (such as the "economic and social" cluster, which has remained stable throughout the years, as seen in our first set of analyses), one can never guarantee that they will not turn into empty signifiers that lose strength and change meaning, or even disappear. In fact, it can be argued that, underlying the vote for Brexit in the United Kingdom in 2016, there may be the uncontrollable erosion of some of the EU's most idiosyncratic nodes. When the British Government states that they are unwilling to make concessions on the largely social and humanitarian issue of immigration in exchange for free access to the economic space of the single market, the connection between "economic" and "social" spheres (the way it has always been understood within the EU up to the present) is clearly being challenged.

The top key nouns (naming the most prominent institutional, national, and individual participants in EP speech) illustrate a disagreement between the linguistic data exchanged in the Euro-Chamber and the metanarrative with which it also aims at "doing Europe." One can only hypothesize that this disagreement may lie behind some of the EU citizens' apathy towards the Euro-Chamber. The top key verbs reveal that the Members of the European Parliament make extensive use of expressions of dialogue

and reflection rather than action. While it is only logical that a parliamentary house talks about and reflects on the important decisions that are under its scope, we might wonder whether this is the best style for today's badly-hurt EU.

Hence, when resorting to both manual, qualitative research and new electronic tools and quantitative methods, CADS not only allows us to complement micro-data with macro-contextual information, and vice versa, but also provides material that may contribute to critical thinking regarding today's EU.

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Tables

Table 1: EP_en Top 50 Keywords

Nouns	Adjectives	Pronouns	Verbs (including auxiliaries)	Function words (excluding auxiliaries)	Symbols
States (15) Commission (16) Countries (19) Parliament (21) People (22) EU (23) Time (24) Rights (27) Union (30) Council (37) President (39) Years (41) Citizens (42) Report (43) Measures (47)	European (11) Economic (44)	I (5) We (18)	Is (2) Are (7) Has (9) Must (13) Been (14) Was (17) Need (25) Am (28) Take (31) Made (32) Were (34) Being (38) Does (40) Say (45) Had (49) Said (50)	The (1) That (3) On (4) To (8) This (10) As (12) 's (20) Very (26) Up (33) Out (35) Because (37)	# (6) No. (29)

Europe (48)					
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Table 2: Three- and Four-Word Clusters over Threshold Level (2000 Instances/Million Words) for “Economic”

No.	Cluster	Freq.
1	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	5086
2	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	4098
3	THE ECONOMIC AND	2696
4	ON ECONOMIC AND	2543
5	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	2430
6	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	2411
7	ON ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	2367
8	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND	2319
9	THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	2303

Table 3: Top 25 Clusters for “Economic” for Each Year

ECONOMIC						
	EP_en_99	Freq.	EP_EN_05	Freq.	EP_en_10	Freq.
1	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	313	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	286	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	567
2	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	270	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	176	THE ECONOMIC CRISIS	481
3	THE COMMITTEE ON	198	ON ECONOMIC AND	135	THE ECONOMIC AND	442
4	ON ECONOMIC AND	172	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	130	ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL	416
5	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	165	AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	130	OF THE ECONOMIC	362
6	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	163	ON ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	124	AND FINANCIAL CRISIS	302
7	AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	163	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	124	ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS	291
8	ON ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	159	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND	123	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	260
9	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND	159	THE COMMITTEE ON	119	THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL	210
10	THE ECONOMIC AND	151	THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	119	THE CURRENT ECONOMIC	208
11	THE COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	151	SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC	109	FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC	208
12	AND MONETARY AFFAIRS AND	108	THE ECONOMIC AND	97	AND ECONOMIC CRISIS	182
13	MONETARY AFFAIRS AND	108	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND	85	SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC	182
14	MONETARY AFFAIRS AND INDUSTRIAL	104	ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND	73	FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS	180
15	AFFAIRS AND INDUSTRIAL	104	POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC	73	OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS	156
16	THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	102	OF THE COMMITTEE	56	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	156
17	OF ECONOMIC AND	91	AND SOCIAL COHESION	56	AND MONETARY AFFAIRS	156
18	SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC	87	OF THE COMMITTEE ON	56	ECONOMIC SOCIAL AND	146
19	AND MONETARY UNION	83	THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	53	ECONOMIC GROWTH AND	143
20	ECONOMIC AND MONETARY UNION	81	OF THE ECONOMIC	53	ON ECONOMIC AND	142
21	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION	80	ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COHESION	51	THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL	141
22	AND SOCIAL COHESION	80	ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND	45	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC	139
23	OF THE COMMITTEE ON	76	ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL	44	ON ECONOMIC AND MONETARY	136
24	OF THE COMMITTEE	76	IN THE ECONOMIC	40	COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC AND	136

Table 4: Reliable Clusters around “Take”

Cluster	Freq.
WILL TAKE PLACE	4865
VOTE WILL TAKE	3725
VOTE WILL TAKE PLACE	3724
THE VOTE WILL TAKE	3718
TAKE ACCOUNT OF	2952
TO TAKE THE	2909
TO TAKE A	2302
TAKE INTO ACCOUNT	2105

Table 5: Reliable Clusters around “Made”

No.	Cluster	Freq.
1	TO BE MADE	2840
2	MADE BY THE	2712
3	HAS BEEN MADE	2519

Table 6: Reliable Clusters around “Say”/ “Said”

Cluster	Freq.
TO SAY THAT	9381
LIKE TO SAY	6136
SAY THAT THE	3546
WOULD LIKE TO SAY	3202
HAVE TO SAY	2868
LIKE TO SAY THAT	2807
IS TO SAY	2477
SAY THAT I	2392
I HAVE TO SAY	2253
AS I SAID	2230
THAT IS TO SAY	2141
SAY THAT WE	2121
I WOULD SAY	2034
I MUST SAY	1874
TO SAY THAT THE	1843
TO SAY TO	1622
HAVE TO SAY THAT	1584
SHOULD LIKE TO SAY	1414
TO SAY THAT I	1386
SAY THAT IT	1275
MUST SAY THAT	1274
TO SAY THE	1241
I MUST SAY THAT	1207
TO SAY A	1159
LET ME SAY	1120

TO SAY THAT WE	1074
SAY THAT THIS	1034
I CAN SAY	1022
WANT TO SAY	1016