

IN, OUT, OR HALF WAY? THE EUROPEAN ATTITUDE IN THE SPEECHES OF BRITISH LEADERS¹

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Abstract – It cannot be denied that Britain is normally seen as an awkward partner in EU affairs (George 1994), and in many ways the British have always been half-in: in the two-speed Europe slogan, Britain is seen as a slow traveller (Musolff 2004), as a member that makes slow progress, if it is at all on the European path. The purpose of this paper is to try and unveil, with evidence at hand, the sentiment of the British leaders with respect to the European Union. Interestingly, the current government includes both Conservatives and Lib-Dems leaders, and it is well known that the former have been, more often than not, against Europe whereas the latter are highly passionate about their pro-Europeanism. Interviews, statements and speeches proper are thus analysed and compared: first wordlists are generated, then keywords lists and finally key-clusters lists (Scott 2012), with the purpose of identifying "aboutgrams" (Warren 2010; Sinclair, Tognini Bonelli 2011), and see what the two governments have in common, but mostly what differentiates them with regard to the European Union, i.e. what is prioritized in one administration and was not in another, clearly signalling a change in priorities (Cheng 2004; Cheng *et al.* 2006; Cheng *et al.* 2009). The study is a diachronic analysis, in the attempt to see how previous discourses have been reinterpreted, given that forty years after joining the Union the British are still reluctant Europeans who still consider Europe "abroad", thus slowing the "ever-closer union" envisaged in the Treaty of Rome, and who still have been calling for referendums, even more so after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty.

Keywords: European Union, UK, political speeches, opt out, aboutgrams.

1. Introduction²

This paper is part of a new project that originated with my undergraduate students at the Department of Political Science when we started to comment and analyse all the covers of the *Economist* representing Europe and the European Union, and we noticed that of all the images chosen to represent Europe, none seemed to suggest a wish to stay in the Union, but rather to leave. In particular, an article published in mid-2012 titled *A Brexit looms* seemed to suggest that the exit of the UK from the Union was looming large. The term *Brexit* was thus coined for the concept of the United Kingdom ceasing to be a member of the European Union, a portmanteau word formed from *Britain* and *exit*, after *Grexit* (Greek exit).³

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³ It is worth noting that there is a difference between Grexit and Brexit: Grexit was discussed in the context of the euro-zone crisis, and as a realistic possibility that Greece would be made to exit against its will. Brexit, instead, would be a voluntary decision by Britain to leave the EU (Schäffner, personal communication 2014).

It cannot be denied that Britain has always been an awkward partner in EU affairs (George 1994), and in many ways the British have only been half-in: in the two-speed Europe slogan, Britain is often seen as a slow traveller, as a member that makes slow progress, if it is at all on the European path (Musolff 2004).

In a special issue in the summer of 2011, in an article published in the Europe section, *The Economist* carried on its cover a cartoon depicting a very fast train with the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, driving it, and the then French President, Nicholas Sarkozy, sitting behind her in the driver's coach; in the distance, a slow train was depicted as carrying British passengers trying to signal something in a rather confused manner, in fact it is not quite clear whether by waving they are asking to wait or saying goodbye. The sentiment expressed in a front cover of *The Economist* of more than 20 years earlier (May 1990) does not differ much from today's attitude: the EC is depicted as a coach, with the French President, François Mitterrand, and the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, riding the front horses, the EC Commission President, Jacques Delors, as the coach-driver and other EC states' representatives on the driver's seat and in the carriage, with the exception of the British Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, who was depicted as sitting on the backseat, trying to apply the brakes (Musolff 2003). The Iron Lady's unwillingness to go faster certainly did not come as a surprise, and by then her statement that "If the train is going in the wrong direction it is better not to be on it at all" was already well known.

The British Euro-sceptical press and politicians were the first to employ the two-speed Europe formula and the associated scenarios of missing the EU TRAIN/BUS/BOAT/SHIP/CONVOY. John Major, in particular, endorsed the idea of Britain's status as a *slow mover*, holding on to the belief that it "was perfectly healthy for all member states to agree that some should integrate more closely and more quickly in certain areas"⁴. As a result, Britain was considered to be better off in the slow lane, with the slow track preferable to the fast lane, given that Europe was perceived as making overly fast progress and possibly racing towards a disaster, e.g. derailment, shipwreck, airplane crash (Musolff 2004; Semino 2002). Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) research has provided ample proof of the ubiquity of JOURNEY metaphors, as one of the most basic conceptual metaphors we 'live by'. Thus the well-known metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY is here amplified to become A POLITICAL PROCESS IS A JOURNEY and EUROPEAN INTEGRATION IS A JOURNEY.

Due to its very contentiousness, politicians have tried to avoid the two/multi-speed Europe phrase. In his speech on Europe delivered on January 23, 2013, David Cameron, in fact, rejected the whole idea of different speeds and slow and fast lanes in European politics: "Let us stop all this talk of two-speed Europe, of fast lanes and slow lanes, of countries missing trains and buses, and frankly let us consign the whole weary caravan of transport metaphors if you like to a permanent siding." In the same speech, he then went on: "Countries are different, they make different choices. We cannot harmonise everything". The words *harmonisation*, *harmonising* and *harmonise* are in fact very frequent in the EU treaties: in the Lisbon Treaty 37 occurrences of the lemma *harmonis** are found, with 43 instances in the failed European Constitution and 5 instances in the Nice Treaty. The word *harmonisation* appeared for the first time with 12 occurrences in the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999. Whatever the name – harmonization, integration, compact or union – the British people are reported as fearing the idea of a Europe in which national sovereignty is gradually eroded, and they have always been very skeptical of a United States of Europe and of the "ever closer Union" envisaged in the Treaty of Rome.

⁴ This quote was taken from *The Daily Telegraph*, September 8, 1994.

In the same speech the Prime Minister said: “Our geography has shaped our psychology: we have the character of an island nation, we are independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel. But this doesn’t make us somehow un-European.”

The cherry-picking attitude of the UK towards the European Union has annoyed some member states in particular: when French President Hollande called for a “multi-faceted Europe” he did not mean an “à la carte” Europe, nor a two-speed Europe (Milizia 2013b). Just before Cameron’s speech on Europe held in January 2013, EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy argued that “Britain cannot cherry-pick what EU policies he can sign up to”, and he warned that Mr. Cameron’s plans could undermine the Single Market. Guy Verhofstadt, Leader of the ALDE Group,⁵ Belgium, was reported as saying, “We need one European Union, a single European Union, and not a European Union à la carte as we have today, with opt-ins and opt-outs, and derogations, and exceptions, and rebates. If you can pick and choose, what shall be left of the Single Market? [...] Let’s be honest, and let Mr. Cameron be honest about it, a renegotiation as he wants means the end of the single market and in fact the end of the European Union”. Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann accused the British Premier of sending mixed messages in his European approach. Enda Kenny, the Irish Prime Minister, appeared more tolerant yet realistic towards his British colleagues, saying that it would be a disaster if a country like Britain were to leave the Union.⁶ Even friends in northern Europe think Britain is going too far in trying to create an à-la-carte membership: “You cannot just pick the raisins out of the bun.”⁷

In January 2014, a year after David Cameron’s speech on Europe, British leaders still seem to be at odds over the future of Britain in the EU, with the Prime Minister adamant in wanting to hold an in-out referendum on Britain’s EU membership and the Deputy Prime Minister opposed to it. The weekly paper *The European Voice* reports Nick Clegg as saying: “You can’t safeguard a single market if you say the rest of Europe has to play by the rules but we can’t ...You are either in or out”. He also added, “Conservative MPs now need to make up their minds. If they want full exit from the European Union, they should be free to argue it, but they should be candid.”⁸

Before the Treaty of Lisbon came into force in December 2009, no provision in the treaties of the European Union outlined the ability of a member state to voluntarily withdraw from the EU. The failed European Constitution provided in Article 60 the possibility to voluntarily leave the Union, and the voluntary withdrawal clause survived into the Lisbon Treaty, as we see in Article 50:

1. Any Member State may decide to withdraw from the Union in accordance with its own constitutional requirements.

⁵ ALDE (Liberals and Democrats in the European Union) is the third largest political group in the European Parliament, currently with 85 mostly liberal MEPs, holding the balance of power between the left and the right.

⁶ Herman Van Rompuy’s, Guy Verhofstadt’s, Werner Faymann’s, and Enda Kenny’s comments were all taken from a video available online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=49jQbnMeRGc>, titled EU criticizes Cameron’s referendum plan.

⁷ This quote was retrieved from an article published in *The Economist* on November 17, 2012, now available at <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21566649-rest-european-union-wants-britain-inbut-not-any-cost-europes-british-problem>.

⁸ This quote was taken from an article published in *The European Voice* on January 13, 2013, now available at <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/2014/january/british-mps-demand-eu-veto-power/79270.aspx>.

2. A Member State which decides to withdraw shall notify the European Council of its intention. In the light of the guidelines provided by the European Council, the Union shall negotiate and conclude an agreement with that State, setting out the arrangements for its withdrawal, taking account of the framework for its future relationship with the Union. That agreement shall be negotiated in accordance with Article 218(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. [...]

Thus, if Europe was regarded as a house with a closed or missing exit door (Musolf 2000), the Union has now become more willing to allow member states to withdraw. This is of course easier said than done, and David Cameron is well aware of the consequences and the risks of exiting altogether: “If the UK pulls out, it will be a one-way ticket, not a return.”⁹

As things stand now, opinion polls seem to suggest that nearly three quarters of the British people want to leave the EU. Cameron has promised the British people an in-out referendum if the Conservative party wins the next elections in 2015, but, in his speech on Europe, he said that he will campaign with “all my heart and soul for Britain to stay in the EU when the referendum comes”.

The purpose of this paper is to try and unveil, with evidence at hand, the sentiment of the British Ministers with respect to the European Union. We shall rely on a corpus of the current and the previous government: the previous administration, as is well-known, was essentially pro-European, with Tony Blair and Gordon Brown always trying to attack the idea that if Britain is a full-hearted member of the European Union then its identity as a nation is lost. The current government, a coalition government, born from the general election held in 2010 which resulted in a hung parliament, includes the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, whose leaders, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, do not see eye to eye on Europe: the Prime Minister who is adamant in wanting to hold an in-out referendum on Britain’s EU membership if the Conservative party wins the next national election in 2015, and the Deputy Prime Minister, as well as most Lib-Dems who are very strongly united on the EU question, and against a referendum altogether, unlike the Labour and the Conservative parties, both split on the issue.

2. The data

The corpus used for this investigation includes 17 years’ worth of British political speeches, delivered in the period 1997-2014. The data has been retrieved from the institutional website, where all the data is freely available: www.number10.gov.uk.

It totals 1.5 million words uttered by the current British Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister in almost four years of government, from May 2010 up to January 2014, and 5 million words uttered by the two previous Labour Prime Ministers in 13 years of government, with 10 years of Tony Blair and 3 years of Gordon Brown, for an overall total of almost 6 million words.

The number-10 website is very well set out and updated daily. It is highly user-friendly, and contains an ongoing record of current news, even though the new website is rather different and somehow more overarching than the previous: once it is accessed, the spoken data is included in the Announcements section, which in turn includes obituaries,

⁹ This quote comes from his speech on Europe, delivered at the City of London headquarters of Bloomberg on January 23, 2013.

government responses, news stories, press releases, speeches, and statements. For this investigation only speeches have been taken into consideration.

Assembling the corpus was rather time-consuming, in that the speeches section comprises not only the speeches delivered by the Prime Minister, but also those by other ministers, like Minister for Europe David Lidington and Foreign Secretary William Hague. Hence, a manual selection was carried out so as to include only David Cameron's and Nick Clegg's spoken data.

Statements were not included in the corpus, in that the language contained in them is often conventional, resembling more the written code with fewer and longer clauses, whereas spoken and spontaneous language contains more and shorter clauses (Halliday 2004: 20; Milizia 2006: 44). Yet, it is worth pointing out at this point that also the language included in the speeches proper cannot really be regarded as spontaneous and off-the cuff, as it were, but rather as written-to-be-spoken. Interviews would indeed contain more extemporaneous and impromptu discourse, but the current website does not provide a dedicated section for them.

The website of the previous government was constructed differently: it was clearly divided into speeches, press conferences, broadcasts, and interviews, including the so-called 'doorstep' interviews given by the Prime Minister. This section is not available in the current website: hence, for the sake of uniformity, only speeches proper were investigated in the previous and in the current administrations.

It is worth pointing out that for most of the speeches analyzed in class we downloaded both audios and videos, relying on the freely available online software *aTubeCatcher*: this proved to be highly profitable for research and pedagogical purposes alike. Students enjoyed watching and listening to videos: they first read the script as checked against delivery and finally they were able to individually follow the speech, paying attention to other details other than the text, such as accent, intonation, pronunciation, gestures and facial expressions.

Speeches of the new and the old administrations were then analyzed and compared: first wordlists were generated, then two- and three-word cluster lists, in the attempt to uncover which government (Labour or Conservative) makes more reference, in terms of frequency, to Europe and the European Union in general; then keyword lists and finally key-cluster lists (Scott 2012a) were computed, with the purpose of identifying "aboutgrams" (Warren 2010; Sinclair, Tognini Bonelli 2011) so as to see what differentiates the two administrations with regard to the European Union, i.e. what is prioritized in one administration and was not in another, clearly signaling a change in priorities (Cheng 2004; Cheng *et al.* 2006; Cheng *et al.* 2009; Milizia 2012).

3. Frequency as a guide to importance

Starting from the assumption that frequency is a guide to importance (Sinclair *et al.* 2004), and that the frequency with which words are used in a text can tell us a great deal of what the text is about and also about the authors (Archer 2009), or about the speakers, in the case in point, we started looking at the wordlists of the current and of the previous administration: grouping the words by semantic field, and focusing on the geographic semantic field, it clearly emerged that EUROPE and EUROPEAN always rank higher in the Labour corpus with respect to the Conservative corpus. Interestingly, EUROPE and EUROPEAN in the Labour corpus rank before BRITISH. Indeed, EUROPE is uttered in the Labour corpus almost twice as often as in the Conservative corpus (0.12 vs 0.07), as Figure 1 shows:

		File	Edit	View	Compute	Settings	Windows	Help
N		Word	Freq.		Word	Freq.		
			Labour			Conservative		
1		WORLD	0.25		COUNTRY	0.23		
2		COUNTRY	0.16		BRITAIN	0.19		
3		BRITAIN	0.13		WORLD	0.18		
4		EUROPE	0.12		BRITISH	0.12		
5		EUROPEAN	0.11		UK	0.09		
6		BRITISH	0.11		AFGHANISTAN	0.09		
7		IRAQ	0.10		EUROPEAN	0.09		
8		UK	0.06		EUROPE	0.07		

Figure 1
One-word lists grouped by semantic field.

Looking at the two-word lists, THE WORLD ranks first in both, whereas THE EUROPEAN is uttered by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown more often than THE UK, which is instead the main priority for David Cameron. As Figure 2 shows, THE UNITED follows in the Labour list, and interestingly we will see in the 3-word clusters list in Figure 3 that THE UNITED collocates with STATES more often than with KINGDOM and NATIONS, unlike in the Conservative list where THE UNITED KINGDOM reigns supreme: THE UNITED NATIONS and THE UNITED STATES are not even displayed in the first 200 clusters, which we set as a stop point for reasons of convenience.

		File	Edit	View	Compute	Settings	Windows	Help
N		Word	Freq.		Word	Freq.		
			Labour			Conservative		
1		THE WORLD	0.16		THE WORLD	0.13		
2		THE EUROPEAN	0.07		THE UK	0.08		
3		THE UNITED	0.06		OUR COUNTRY	0.06		
4		THE UK	0.05		THE EUROPEAN	0.05		
5		THE BRITISH	0.05		THE COUNTRY	0.05		
6		THE COUNTRY	0.05		THE UNITED	0.05		
7		IN IRAQ	0.04		THE BRITISH	0.05		
8		EUROPEAN UNION	0.04		THIS COUNTRY	0.04		
9					IN AFGHANISTAN	0.04		
10					UNITED KINGDOM	0.03		

Figure 2
Two-word lists grouped by semantic field.

N	File Edit View Compute Settings Windows Help			
	Labour		Conservative	
	Word	Freq.	Word	Freq.
		%		%
1	OF THE WORLD	0.04	IN THE WORLD	0.04
2	THE EUROPEAN UNION	0.03	THE UNITED KINGDOM	0.03
3	IN THE WORLD	0.03	THE EUROPEAN UNION	0.03
4	THE UNITED STATES	0.02	OF THE WORLD	0.03
5	THE MIDDLE EAST	0.02	IN OUR COUNTRY	0.02
6	THE UNITED NATIONS	0.02	IN THE UK	0.02
7	THE UNITED KINGDOM	0.02	IN THIS COUNTRY	0.02
8	IN THIS COUNTRY	0.02	AROUND THE WORLD	0.01
9	OF THE EUROPEAN	0.02	IN NORTHERN IRELAND	0.01
10	AROUND THE WORLD	0.01	OF THE EUROPEAN	0.01
11	IN NORTHERN IRELAND	0.01		

Figure 3
Three-word lists grouped by semantic field.

So far, by showing both the list of individual words and of two and three words as uttered in the Labour corpus of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown and in the Conservative/Lib-Dem corpus of David Cameron and Nick Clegg, and bearing in mind one of the main tenets of a corpus linguistic approach, that is, that a corpus search is sensitive to frequency, and that the high frequency of a word or phrase in a corpus points to areas that promise to be interesting (Forchini, Murphy 2008), I have tried to illustrate that in the current government Britain, the UK, and the United Kingdom take precedence over Europe and the European Union, mainly “in the national interest”, as the data shows.

As Summers (1996) points out, it is often opined that although things that are discovered from corpus analysis are obvious, and this seems to be the case – i.e. the previous administration not only had European integration at heart more than the current administration, but also that the coalition government, and David Cameron in particular, wants to avoid a fiscal union altogether – certain things only become obvious once the corpus has revealed them to us, statistically speaking.

4. Keys to the Conservative/Lib-Dem government

Scott and Tribble (2006) as well as O’Keeffe *et al.* (2007) demonstrate how individual keywords can help to reveal the aboutness of a specific text or genre, but it has been shown elsewhere (Warren 2010; Milizia 2010, 2011) that individual words leave much unanswered and we need to look at how they frequently combine meaningfully with other words to have a fuller picture of the text’s aboutness.

In Figure 4 the list displayed was obtained by referencing the wordlist of the current against the wordlist of the previous government, and the words that emerged – the keywords in fact – are those which have generated the greatest statistical prominence when compared with the Labour corpus, which was taken here as the reference corpus.

Keywords are local and not global, they are context-bound, so that they can be important here and now but quite ordinary in another context. It is important to bear in mind that what is meant by keyword is something different from ‘important word’ because in the software program we have relied on, *WordSmith Tools* 6.0 (Scott 2012a), keyness is defined by frequency, hence the notion underlying this is “outstandingness” based on comparison, the results of which will predictably be indicators of “what’s going on” in the study corpus with respect to the reference corpus (Scott, Tribble 2006; Milizia 2008, 2009).

In Figure 4 the word BIG is the first to arouse interest. The ones that come before it in the list are somehow obvious, in that, to borrow Scott's (2012a) words, Keywords usually throws up three kinds of words as key: first proper nouns, such as CAMERON, EDWARD, DAVID, MILIBAND, GADDAFI, NICK¹⁰; second, there are key words that human beings would recognize and these are the words which give a good indication of the text's "aboutness", such as EUROZONE, DEFICIT, LIBYA, GROWTH, SPENDING, BUDGET; third, there are high-frequency words like ABSOLUTELY, INCREDIBLY, and these would not usually be identified by the reader as key. They may be key indicators more of style than of aboutness (Scott 2012a; Milizia2006, 2010). The fact that Keywords identified word like BIG prompted me to go back to the text, to investigate why it cropped up with unusual frequencies.

Conservative vs Labour.kws							
	File	Edit	View	Compute	Settings	Windows	Help
N	Key word	Freq.	%	RC Freq.	RC %	Keyness	
1	EUROZONE	553	0.04	37			
2	CAMERON	530	0.04	91			
3	DEFICIT	565	0.05	121			
4	LIBYA	507	0.04	113			
5	DEPUTY	488	0.04	107			
6	EDWARD	351	0.03	19			
7	MINISTER	7,617	0.62	16,770	0.43	674.51	
8	PRIME	7,505	0.61	16,636	0.42	641.97	
9	DAVID	672	0.05	485	0.01	613.16	
10	RESOURCE	333	0.03	82		584.62	
11	MILIBAND	352	0.03	108		564.34	
12	GROWTH	1,038	0.08	1,166	0.03	558.59	
13	OPPOSITION	495	0.04	287		544.55	
14	LABOUR	733	0.06	700	0.02	493.47	
15	GOVERNMENT	3,673	0.30	7,581	0.19	436.89	
16	SPENDING	685	0.06	721	0.02	405.26	
17	BUDGET	821	0.07	1,058	0.03	351.91	
18	LIBYAN	171	0.01	29		339.30	
19	GADDAFI	163	0.01	29		318.98	
20	BIG	904	0.07	1,326	0.03	299.69	
21	COALITION	466	0.04	493	0.01	273.69	
22	NICK	180	0.01	68		260.61	
23	PAYING	298	0.02	231		253.75	
24	SYRIA	309	0.03	253		248.57	
25	TAXES	225	0.02	130		248.16	
26	ZONE	151	0.01	44		247.64	
27	ABSOLUTELY	777	0.06	1,189	0.03	234.13	
28	JOIN	443	0.04	516	0.01	225.30	
29	INCREDIBLY	190	0.02	100		224.43	
30	DEBTS	137	0.01	41		222.08	
31	BENGHAZI	76		1		217.33	
32	GREECE	124	0.01	31		216.43	

Figure 4

Keywords that emerge by referencing the Conservative against the Labour government.

In our spoken political corpus the frequency of BIG in David Cameron's and Nick Clegg's speeches is unusually high in comparison with Tony Blair's and Gordon Brown's (0.07% vs. 0.03%), and only in the extended cluster will it be clear that BIG has not retained its original lexical meaning and has no relation with the intended meaning of 'large in physical size' (*Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* 2011). Only in company with THE

¹⁰As Table 4 shows, for most of these words the Reference Corpus column (RC%), where the relative frequency of the word is reported, is empty, as well as the Keyness column, because the number was too small to show any significance as percentages in the corpus.

and SOCIETY, in the cluster THE BIG SOCIETY, will it be clear that this is one of David Cameron's slogans, which naturally never occurred in the speeches of the previous government.¹¹

The same holds for PAYING (23rd), which on its own leaves much unanswered, but in the extended cluster all uncertainties are removed (Warren 2010, p. 121), and it will be evident that it not as frequent with the lexical meaning of 'giving an amount of money to someone' (*Collins Cobuild Advanced Dictionary* 2011), but more as part of the cluster PAYING TRIBUTE, in combination with another word that was also picked up as key, JOIN (28th), to form the pre-constructed phrase JOIN ME IN PAYING TRIBUTE TO, so typical in the Prime Ministers' speeches. This corroborates Sinclair's (1992, p. 162) and Summers' (1996, pp. 262-63) assertion that some words are frequent because they appear in frequent phrases, as well as Sinclair's (2005) relativity process, according to which the intercollocation of collocates disambiguates words.

Let us now go to the two-word key-clusters in Figure 5: the semantic fields that stand out are foreign politics, mainly Syria and Libya, as well as Greece, and the economy, more specifically the European economy: the Eurozone, Eurozone countries, the single market, our economy. We can safely claim at this point, as will be shown in further detail in the next section, that the European economy and the single market are among the main concerns of David Cameron's administration.

As Figure 5 shows, just like in Figure 4, some words in the list are somewhat obvious: proper names pop up, EDWARD MILIBAND, the leader of the opposition, was uttered 0 times in the previous government¹²; DEPUTY PRIME and THE DEPUTY, part of THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, are both key because their frequency in Cameron's speeches is unusually high in comparison with Blair and Brown's speeches, being a figure of the new coalition government; COALITION GOVERNMENT is key too, together with THIS COALITION and COALITION AGREEMENT. NICK CLEGG, as well as the opposition and the old administration, in their different forms, LAST GOVERNMENT, PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, THE OPPOSITION, THE LABOUR, THE PREVIOUS, LABOUR PARTY, also emerge as key.

The clusters which in the list are of particular interest both conceptually and because they were uttered on 0 occasions in the previous government are BIG SOCIETY, GLOBAL RACE and ARAB SPRING.

With the exception of Arab Spring, which also occurs frequently in the Italian media with a straightforward equivalent counterpart, and refers to the revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, and civil wars in the Arab world which began in December 2010 (the date explains clearly why no occurrence was found in the previous administration), Big Society and Global Race can certainly be defined as the current government's signature.

Trusting the text and relying on Cameron's words, it emerges clearly that the Big Society was the flagship policy of the 2010 UK Conservative Party, and is now part of the legislative programme of the Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Agreement. The stated aim is to create a climate that empowers local people and communities, building a 'big society' that will take power away from politicians and give it to the people.

¹¹The word BIG in the Labour government has instead kept its original meaning and it collocates with words like ISSUES, DIFFERENCE, DECISIONS, CHANGE, CHALLENGES, STEP, INCREASE.

¹²At first sight it was surprising to find Edward Miliband as key, in that he was already a minister in the previous government. He is usually called Ed Miliband and perhaps the keyness comes from coalition speeches calling him Edward (Scott, personal communication 2014).

Conservative vs labour_2-word cluters_1st.kws							
	File	Edit	View	Compute	Settings	Windows	Help
N	Key word	Freq.	%C	Freq.	RC %	Keyness	
1	EDWARD MILIBAND	341	0.03	0		1,014.30	
2	THE EUROZONE	411	0.03	35		995.13	
3	DEPUTY PRIME	450	0.04	162		714.16	
4	BIG SOCIETY	231	0.02	0		687.09	
5	THE DEPUTY	344	0.03	76		664.98	
6	IN LIBYA	188	0.02	7		502.45	
7	THE DEFICIT	199	0.02	34		415.67	
8	LAST GOVERNMENT	172	0.01	24		378.15	
9	COALITION GOVERNMENT	128	0.01	7		329.24	
10	PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT	153	0.01	33		298.09	
11	OF LIBYA	99		0		294.46	
12	THE LIBYAN	131	0.01	18		289.04	
13	LIBYAN PEOPLE	89		0		264.71	
14	BUDGET DEFICIT	115		13		264.61	
15	THE OPPOSITION	293	0.02	268		232.22	
16	EUROZONE COUNTRIES	78		0		232.00	
17	THE LABOUR	279	0.02	248		228.17	
18	GLOBAL RACE	76		0		226.05	
19	IN SYRIA	115		27		217.74	
20	THIS COALITION	90		11		203.79	
21	SINGLE MARKET	200	0.02	148		196.08	
22	NICK CLEGG	83		10		188.51	
23	HOUSING BENEFITS	87		13		188.15	
24	ARAB SPRING	62		0		184.41	
25	OUR ECONOMY	292	0.02	323		183.01	
26	COALITION AGREEMENT	61		0		181.43	
27	CORPORATION TAX	110		38		178.03	
28	DIFFICULT DECISIONS	155	0.01	95		177.67	
29	MY CONSTITUENCY	183	0.01	138		176.35	
30	THE PREVIOUS	204	0.02	173		175.33	
31	LABOUR PARTY	208	0.02	184		170.99	
32	NORTH AFRICA	55		0		163.59	

Figure 5

Two-word keywords that emerge by referencing the Conservative against the Labour government.

In his speech on the Big Society delivered in Liverpool in 2010, Cameron explained why this idea represented such a different and bold social change:

Let me briefly explain what the Big Society is and why it is such a powerful idea. You can call it liberalism. You can call it empowerment. You can call it freedom. You can call it responsibility. I call it the Big Society. The Big Society is about a huge culture change ... where people, in their everyday lives, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their workplace ... don't always turn to officials, local authorities or central government for answers to the problems they face ... but instead feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities. [...] It's about liberation – the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from élites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street. [...] For years, there was the basic assumption at the heart of government that the way to improve things in society was to micromanage from the centre, from Westminster. But this just doesn't work. [...] It's about saying if we want real change for the long-term, we need people to come together and work together – because we're all in this together (Speech delivered by the Prime Minister on the Big Society, 19 July 2010).

Despite the claim that this is a revolutionary idea, the Prime Minister conceded, in his speech in Moscow in September 2011, that “the concept of the Big Society is one that has existed for thousands of years in our societies: it's getting ever more relevant and it needs

governments that understand that and that can help others to do good work, rather than to think governments do it all on their own”.

On this point, Nick Clegg’s opinions are perfectly in line with the Prime Minister’s ideas, and for this reason he was attacked by some grassroots Lib Dems for being too close to the Conservatives. He argued:

Both parties support the big society and a radical decentralization of public services, even if they have used a different language to fight its cause. The Prime Minister has coined the phrase Big Society while the Liberal Democrats tend to talk about community politics or just liberalism. But whatever the words we use, we are clear and united in our ambition to decentralize and disperse power in our society and that shared ambition is one of the bonds that will keep our coalition strong.

The Big Society policy is certainly reflected in David Cameron’s pledge to hold an in-out referendum in 2017 if the Conservative Party wins the next election in 2015: he will let the British people have their say about the UK’s relationship with the EU, and voters will be asked to choose between a renegotiated form of membership and exiting altogether.

The other key-cluster which can be regarded as the signature, as it were, of the current administration and that produced zero occurrences in the Labour corpus is “global race”.

This phrase is probably less opaque than Big Society, in that the adjective ‘global’ can be taken as a hint towards globalization. A week before the G8 summit in Lough Erne, Northern Ireland, on June 10, 2013, the Prime Minister pointed out that in this rapidly changing world our society today would be barely recognizable to previous generations. As one writer puts it, “Ten years ago Facebook didn’t exist. Twitter was a sound. The cloud was in the sky. 4G was a parking space. And Skype for most people was a typo”. David Cameron added, “We see competition that is more intense than ever before, involving more countries than ever before, who are more ambitious and determined than ever before. That is why I call it a global race”.

At the risk of being repetitive, the Conservative leader in his recent speeches has been saying persistently that this is a very tough economic time for every country, it is a moment of reckoning where we have no choice but sink or swim, do or die, and we all have to make sure we are fit and ready to compete in this world. Yet, even though the UK is involved in this global race competing against new rising countries in the south and the east of the world such as Malaysia, Indonesia, China and India, this global race is one that the UK is unambiguously losing: an analysis of growth by the House of Commons library showed that Britain is at the bottom of the G20 league table, having grown by just 0.4 per cent since the 2010 Spending Review, a poorer performance than that of every country except Japan and Italy.

This brief analysis of the above key-clusters which, not surprisingly, were never uttered in the previous government, and the analysis of the key-cluster in the next paragraph, provide further evidence that a search for key-phrases, that is, aboutgrams (Sinclair, Tognini Bonelli 2011) rather than key-words, brings us closer to an unambiguous understanding of the aboutness of the text or of the corpus (Warren 2010, p. 123), clearly indicating “what’s going on” today with respect to yesterday.

5. The Eurozone crisis: better off out?

It has been shown (Milizia 2010) that if an individual word is key, the very same word will not necessarily be part of the key-clusters. By way of illustration, in previous research I compared Tony Blair to George W. Bush and *climate* emerged among the first keywords. The cluster *climate change* with all its positional and constitutional variants (Cheng *et al.* 2006) was investigated in depth: once *climate change* was identified as the prototypical form, mainly for reasons of frequency, all its variants like *the climate is changing*, *the climate changing around us*, *how the climate will change*, *change in climate* were analyzed (Milizia 2010, 2013a). Yet, when we generated key-clusters to unveil aboutness, no cluster around *climate* figured top of the list, where instead *the Middle East peace process* occupied the first position, clearly indicating Tony Blair and Gordon Brown's main priorities at the time. It seems that this data bears out Warren and Greaves' (2007) claim, that is, that single word frequencies are not necessarily good indicators of the phraseological profile of a text, and hence of its aboutness, and conversely that some words may be associated in some of the most frequent phrases but not be among the most frequent single words.

In this research, instead, it was interesting to see that different results were yielded: the first keyword to emerge when comparing the new to the old government, as Figure 4 shows, was EUROZONE; this word was included also in the two-word key-clusters, THE EUROZONE, in the three-word key-clusters, IN THE EUROZONE, as Figure 5 shows, as well as in the four-word key-clusters, PROBLEMS IN THE EUROZONE, clearly signaling the importance of the matter, and corroborating the assumption that frequency is a major guide to importance (Sinclair *et al.* 2004).

Research has shown that the key-procedure has proved to be fairly robust (Scott, Tribble 2006), and in fact the phrases that have emerged with the aid of *WordSmith Tools* 6.0 (Scott 2012a) – the Eurozone crisis and the problems in the Eurozone – indeed relate to the major ongoing topics of debate (Partington 2003) of the current British administration.

As is well known, the UK opted out of the Economic and Monetary Union in January 1999. Only 17 out of 28 European Union member states have adopted the euro currency as their sole legal tender; of the other 11, with the recent accession of Croatia in July 2013, eight states are obliged to join once they fulfill the strict entrance requirements, whereas three EU member states (Sweden, Denmark, and the United Kingdom) are exceptions and thus under no obligation to join the Zone.

The process of European integration has repeatedly been described as a major achievement since the end of the Second World War (Schäffner 2012, p. 250), and the Common Market and the Euro as the common currency are seen as essential for the success of the European Union. Britain wants a European Union that is successful, yet it wants to continue to opt out of the EMU. Thus, if it is clear that the British have not made up their minds on whether they should stay in the Union or leave, they certainly have no doubts and are squarely decided on whether they should be part of the Eurozone area, and when asked whether they are better off outside the euro, David Cameron without any hesitation has answered in several interviews “You bet we are” (Milizia 2013b).

Looking at the collocates and at the clusters around EUROZONE, we notice that its main collocates are *problems* and *crisis*; in the patterns (Figure 6) *problems* and *crisis* occur on both the right and left of the node, together with *bailout* on both sides.

	L5	L4	L3	L2	L1	Centre	R1	R2	R3	R4	R5
1	THE	THE	PROBLEMS	IN	THE	EUROZONE	COUNTRIES	THE	TO	THE	THE
2	OF	A	TO	OF	A		AND	TO	THE	TO	TO
3	IS	TO	STABILITY	THAT	THAT		IS	WE	IS	OF	THAT
4	TO	IS	CRISIS	TO	TO		TO	IS	THAT	AND	OF
5	IN	THAT	COUNTRIES	OUT	SUCCESSFUL		CRISIS	AND	A	NOT	AND
6	A	AND	WE	A	FOR		MEMBERS	ARE	BRITAIN	IS	IN
7	THAT	WE	NOT	ON	OF		WE	IN	NOT	ITS	IT
8	BRITAIN	OUR	THE	WITHIN	WITH		BUT	HAVE	OUT	A	AS
9	AND	FOR	BAILING	OUTSIDE	BY		ARE	A	AND	S	WE
10	NOT	OF	THAT	FOR			THAT	NEED	WE	IN	PROBLEMS
11	ARE	IN	MEMBERS	AND			I	THAT	IT	BE	NOT
12	ABOUT	S	EUROZONE	WANT			BAILOUT	SORT	ITS	BRITAIN	HAVE
13	OUR	ARE	IS	THE			IN	BUT	WITH	THAT	EUROZONE
14	EUROZONE	FISCAL	INTERESTS	IS			IT	NOTEUROZONE		FOR	IS
15	I	BE	EXPORTS	GO			THE	FUND	OF	PROBLEMS	I
16	WANT	AS	STRONG	FROM			HAS	IT	ARE	COUNTRIES	A
17	FOR	NOT	IN	JOIN			WILL	AS	DO	IT	ARRANGEMENTS
18	WE	IT	WANT				INCLUDING	DEAL	AS	THEIR	BE
19	WITH	WITH	THIS				OF	I	HAVE	ALL	ON
20	IT	BRITAIN	DISCIPLINE				SO	WANT	FOR	WE	T
21	OUT	BRING	BE					BE	BEEN	ARE	
22	BE	AT	FOR					THINK	HAS	DO	
23			OUT					ARRANGEMENTS	T	GOING	

Figure 6
Patterns around EUROZONE.

The negative sentiment towards the Eurozone is arguably more immediately evident in the clusters around the node *the Eurozone crisis, problems in the Eurozone, sort out its problems, deal with its issues, a Eurozone bailout fund*.

Interestingly, in a study of the Euro crisis, Schäffner (2012) analyses the phrase *bail out*, so recurrent in the last few years in the discourse of politicians and journalists alike, and she explains that in German the concept of ‘bail out’ is rendered with the metaphor of the umbrella, clearly implicating the idea of being safe, being rescued from danger (Schäffner 2012, p. 258). This is how David Cameron perceives the idea of being part of the Eurozone: a danger, something to avoid altogether. He has always made clear that “the UK isn’t in the euro and isn’t going to be joining the euro”, “Britain will never give up the pound”, “Britain is not in the euro. And let me be clear: we are not going to join the euro, and frankly we are never likely to join”, “Britain isn’t in the euro and while I’m Prime Minister never will be”.

In his speech on Europe the Deputy Prime Minister expressed the very same idea when he said that “joining the euro will not be in our interests anytime soon – certainly not in my political lifetime.”¹³ He added:

In Europe today there are effectively three places you can be. They fit together like rings around a circle. There’s the core: where the Eurozone countries are now pulling together more closely, integrating further to shore up the single currency; then there is the ring around that – the inner circle, the states who aren’t in the euro, but are members of the EU; and the outer circle, where you find the accession countries, EEA countries, Norway, Switzerland, and so on. The UK is in the inner circle, but the terrain is shifting, the core is tightening, to what degree we don’t know. Some states on the outside are seeking, over time, to head further in.

¹³“Nick Clegg’s vision of the UK in Europe” speech was delivered on November 1, 2012 at Chatham House, the Royal Institutions of National Affairs.

And, as a different Europe emerges, over the coming years, we have to decide where the UK fits within it.

Interestingly, they have recently used the PLAY WITH FIRE metaphor to refer to the danger of staying in/out of the euro currency: Cameron voiced his misgivings arguing that “they [the Eurozone members] are playing with fire with their plans to lock the eurozone countries into a United States of Europe”¹⁴ and, along the same line but with the opposite meaning, Nick Clegg said that “Cameron is playing with fire over UK European Union membership, and if we go down this track, it is Britain that will get burned.”¹⁵

This is, in fact, what Nick Clegg mostly fears, that the UK could become more isolated, more insular, more marginalized, like a pigmy in the world, getting eventually burnt and regretting to be no longer part of the club. In the two-day debate held in March and April 2014 with the leader of UKIP Nigel Farage, Nick Clegg said, “I want us to be Great Britain, not Little England. It’s now the time to make our voice heard, because Labour and Conservatives are going to do nothing, nothing, to stop us from heading towards the exit.”¹⁶ He has made clear on several occasions that “We stand tall in Washington, Beijing, Delhi when we stand tall in Brussels, Paris and Berlin: leaving the EU would be economic suicide, we will not be taken seriously by the Americans, the Chinese, the Indians, all the big superpowers if we’re isolated and irrelevant in our backyard. Britain is stronger, better, greater, when we lead the debate in Europe, when we stand tall in Europe.”¹⁷

Even though David Cameron has often been defined an “islander”, Nigel Farage has argued that David Cameron’s speech on Europe was a very pro-European speech, all the way through, dressed with some anti-EU rhetoric.¹⁸ This is exactly why many people have oftentimes claimed that his messages to the British are rather misleading, being not entirely clear whether he wants to stay in or leave altogether. In the same interview Nigel Farage claimed, “We should have general elections now, we don’t want to wait for five years to have a say on this. We want a referendum, the sooner the better. It’s time to settle this European question in British politics”.

Indeed, as Cameron has stated on several occasions, to make a decision at this moment is not the right way forward, either for Britain or for Europe as a whole. In his plans, in fact, the Prime Minister wants to renegotiate the terms of Britain’s EU relationship ahead of the referendum. In Nick Clegg’s words, his strategy would be “condemned to failure, and would achieve only a little tweak here, a little tweak there, but it is actually a fundamental either withdrawal from the EU or something very close to it”.

We can safely claim, at this point, that whereas the two leaders in the coalition government are squarely decided over the position of the UK with respect to the common currency, there is no doubt they are at odds over the in-out referendum matter, with Nick Clegg warning that Britain is risking a lot by toying with exit in a referendum. The

¹⁴This quote was taken from an article titled *Cameron should read Maggie’s’ Bruges speech again – and then level with the country over Europe*, from *The Daily Mail*, available at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2056621/David-Cameron-read-Margareth-Thatchers-Bruges-speech-Europe-again.html>.

¹⁵This quote was retrieved from <http://www.totalpolitics.com/print/426707/nick-clegg-playing-with-fire-on-europe.shtml>, from an article titled *Nick Clegg playing with fire on Europe*.

¹⁶This quote was taken from the first debate on Britain’s future in Europe, held between Nick Clegg and Nigel Farage on March 26, 2014.

¹⁷This quote was taken from the Deputy Prime Minister’s speech on Britain and Europe, delivered on October 8, 2013, titled *In Europe for the National Interest*.

¹⁸This quote was taken from an interview with Nigel Farage on Sky News, soon after David Cameron delivered his speech on January 23, 2013, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpl9LbRQ-Vk>.

metaphor of the suicide, LEAVING THE UK IS ECONOMIC SUICIDE used by Nick Clegg, and the metaphor of the lock, JOINING THE EURO IS LOCKING OURSELVES INTO A PRISON, used by David Cameron, are both indicative of the fact there is still a big split in the UK, with most Britons who, forty years after joining the Union, still want to stay halfway out of the door.

The metaphor of the lock further reflects the fears of the Prime Minister, who sees a fiscal union as a form of constriction and lack of freedom, reinforcing the Eurosceptic view that participating in monetary union would result in a dangerous loss of independence on the part of the United Kingdom (Semino 2002) which, instead, is not willing “to give up that kind of sovereignty.”¹⁹

To conclude this section, and in relation to the fear of giving up sovereignty, it is worth adding that a key-cluster that emerged when referencing the new against the old government was NOT IN BRITAIN’S NATIONAL INTEREST, together with NOT IN OUR NATIONAL INTEREST. When these phrases were contextualized, it was discovered that they gravitated exclusively around Europe and the fact that Britain will not join the euro. Further investigation of the data revealed that when in the paradigmatic axis BRITAIN’S NATIONAL and OUR were substituted by THE, in the phrase IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST, the phrase was no longer specifically connected with the European issue, but was solely restricted to the coalition government, in the extended cluster TWO PARTIES TOGETHER IN THE NATIONAL INTEREST.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, trusting the text and the evidence of the data, I have looked at the current position of the UK towards the European Union. After a quantitative analysis showing that Europe and the European Union are more prominent in terms of frequency in the old government with respect to the new, which instead tends to privilege the United Kingdom, the wordlist of the coalition government was referenced against the wordlist of the Labour government and a list of keywords emerged, clearly indicating the major ongoing topics of debate of the current government. Even though several words in the list were worthy of interest, and were already pointers (Scott 2010; Stubbs 2010) to the aboutness of the current administration, it was soon apparent that “the word is not the best starting point for a description of meaning, because meaning arises from words in particular combinations” (Sinclair 2004; Warren 2010). Hence, the analysis proceeded towards key-clusters, arguing that an over-reliance on keywords means that important information regarding the aboutness of the corpus is not utilized, namely its phraseology (Warren 2010, p. 124). Thus two-, three- and four-word key-clusters were investigated, and after analyzing some phrases, in particular those that were never uttered in the previous government, such as ‘big society’ and ‘global race’, which were also identified as the signature, as it were, of the coalition government, the focus then turned to the clusters that ranked first in all lists: ‘eurozone’, ‘the eurozone’, ‘in the eurozone’, ‘problems in the eurozone’.

This study has proved that the key-procedure comes up with fairly robust results: the crisis in the eurozone and all the problems related to it are, beyond doubt, among the main concerns of the current administration, and are indicative not only of the text but also of the context in which the text is embedded. Not that the relationship of the UK with Europe and the UK’s reaction towards the single currency (EMU) has ever been an easy

¹⁹This quote was taken from a speech delivered by David Cameron on June 18, 2012, at Mexico G20.

one, but this diachronic research shows that the topic is being debated now more unusually frequently than in the past.

Britain joined the EC in 1973, over twenty years after the first of the European Communities (ECSC) was formed (George 1994). Within a year, the UK had established a reputation for being at odds with major Community initiatives and for taking an independent point of view on several matters. This reputation was consolidated over the next forty years.

Even though the former Prime Minister, Edward Heath, declared, as early as 1971, that “we as members of the enlarged Community should play our full part in the progress towards economic and monetary union,”²⁰ in 1999 John Major excluded Britain from the first group of countries joining the common currency. Even after the change of government to Labour in 1997, the British were slow to embrace integration (Musolf 2004), and today David Cameron is adamant when he claims that “the UK isn’t in the euro and isn’t going to be joining the euro” in the British national interest.

Gaining membership of EMU was a very difficult enterprise for all member States, Italy included (Semino 2002): many people in Italy were sceptical about the replacement of the Italian lira by the new currency, and yet the euro was given the green light. Some people were very enthusiastic about the birth of the new baby, as the euro was called at its inception (Semino 2002; Milizia 2013b): the then Italian Finance Minister, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, described monetary union as “the dream of a lifetime” (Semino 2002). The British press borrowed the same metaphor of the dream in relation to Europe, but Britain was not included: “Today, a European dream comes true. Europe’s dream, not ours.”²¹

As the evidence of the corpus has shown, forty years after joining the Union many Britons are still reluctant Europeans. The UK today is still adamant in staying outside the Eurozone area, yet politicians keep claiming that Britain must be at the heart of Europe. But as *The Economist* reports, “how would Britain fare outside a single-currency area – and how does staying out square with the oft-repeated wish to be at the heart of Europe?”²² (cited in Milizia 2013b).

Opinion polls seem to suggest that the country is divided into two, between euro-skeptics and enthusiasts: skeptics argue that “little Blighty” can stand alone, while enthusiasts argue that Britain must not stand aside. As one journalist put it, “in the 20th century we moved from Rule Britannia to Cool Britannia, with a combination of pragmatism and elegance; let’s hope that historians will not look back at European history in the 21st century and say ‘Fool Britannia.’”²³

²⁰This quote was taken from Edward Heath’s statement on June 10, 1971 when, addressing the House of Commons, he set out the United Kingdom’s position on the future of the pound sterling in an enlarged European Community. The statement is available at http://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2002/9/4/3f0cd4cf-4b4b-4d07-bf93-4f790dedb450/publishable_en.pdf.

²¹This quote was retrieved from *The Daily Telegraph*, published on January 1, 1999.

²²Research has shown that the idea of “Britain at the heart of Europe” originated from John Major. Yet, a further analysis has proved that Major himself told his biographer, Dr Anthony Seldon, that his choice of words had been a mistake and that he meant to say that Britain should be at the heart of *the debate* on Europe.

²³This quote was taken by Tristan Garel, from an article published in *The Statesman* on October 29, 2007.

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