

## **Political Catchwords in Our Time: Texts and Contexts**

A workshop of the Language, Literature and Politics (LLP) Group of The Open University, UK

**Dates:** 2 and 3 June 2023

**Venue:** Elm Grove Conference Centre, Roehampton University, London SW15 5PH

### **PROGRAMME**

#### **2 June 2023**

10:15-11:15

**Session 1:** Opening considerations

Introduction to the workshop

**Alan Durant (Middlesex University, UK):** Catches and Keys: cultural significance in different types of word

Words and phrases are routinely categorized linguistically by grammatical form or etymology; and they are sometimes characterized in terms of properties of meaning (e.g. as synonymous, polysemous, opaque idioms) or grouped by relatedness of meaning (in a thesaurus). Evocatively but less precisely, expressions can also be described as having particular kinds of social diffusion and significance when used in discourse as “catchwords”, “buzzwords”, or “key words”. As context for more specific discussion, my presentation reviews this last, “social significance” way of thinking about expressions. Or ways - my presentation will outline a number of established intellectual approaches, highlighting their aims and methods. In doing so, I will also speculate about what each might contribute as regards wider, cultural and political communication.

11:15-11:30

Coffee break

11:30-13:00

**Session 2:** Catchwords and Contexts

**Tahrir Hamdi (Arab Open University Jordan):** Political Catchphrases in the Arab region: Between Revolutionary Agency and Interventionist Destruction

Political catchphrases have proved to be very effective in bringing about change in the Arab region as recent events have shown, especially with reference to the so-called “Arab Spring,” recent protests in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Arab world. Sometimes, these catchphrases are harbingers of revolutionary agency in the sense that they “court those who share those collective interests” (Gupta, 2022: 3); however, at other times, they seem to respond to a more specifically narrow (perhaps external) divisionist agenda, bent on changing the status quo inside a certain country. My presentation will focus on some of these political catchphrases by examining their political, cultural and social contexts—why and how they came about.

**Aziz Thabit Saeed (Arab Open University Kuwait):** Catchwords and catchphrases that emerged during the Arab Spring period and continue to be used today

This study/workshop explores the prominent catchwords and catchphrases that emerged during the Arab Spring period and continue to be used in gearing current uprising movements and fueling their sustainability in Arab countries such as Lebanon and Sudan. More specifically, the study attempts to seek answers to the following questions:

1. What are the most prominent catchwords and catchphrases that emerged during the Arab Spring period and sustained until today? What are the reasons for their sustainability?
2. Did the prominent catchwords and catchphrases that sustained until today undergo any change in wording?
3. What are the prominent catchwords and catchphrases that have been newly coined by rallies that are calling for regime change in the current hot spots in the Arab World?
4. Are the catchwords the same in all areas undergoing political turmoil?
5. Which code of the language characterizes the common catchwords and catchphrases, the Standard, or the regional vernacular?
6. How are the most common catchwords and catchphrases manipulated?
7. What are the common translation strategies used to render such expressions? Do translators resort to explanation, transliteration, etc.?

13:00-14:00

Lunch break

14:00-15:30

**Session 3:** Catchwords and Contexts

**Alexandra Bagasheva (Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria):** “Novoto normalno” and “novata normalnost” in Bulgaria discourses – a qualitative sketch

The presentation showcases the thematic areas in which the concept of “novata normalnost” and its variant “novoto normalno” are most frequently used in Bulgarian discourses in digital media outlets. A contrastive framework is employed to highlight the basic differences in the lifespan, connotations and contextualisation of this (political) catchphrase in English and Bulgarian (with the English data taken from Gupta 2020). The thematic areas in terms of the frequency of the use of the phrase in Bulgarian can be ordered in the following manner:

- i) The pandemic and lockdowns
- ii) Business climate, ethics and practices (including financial stability, office practices and new technologies)
- iii) Gender conceptualization
- iv) Climate change
- v) Countering political affinities
- vi) Art

Beside commenting on the lacunae in the usage of the phrase in certain thematic areas in Bulgarian (in contrast to its presence in English), the sketch offers an assessment of the framing of the phrase in Bulgarian discourses.

**Sylvia Shaw (Westminster University, UK):** Running jokes and chained events in parliamentary discourse

In this talk I will examine the role that repeated jokes and phrases play in creating and maintaining fraternal networks in the UK House of Commons. Drawing on parliamentary data from 2017-2021, I

identify examples of jokes and jibes that are repeated across time, thus creating interdiscursive momentum that can benefit some speakers and exclude others by creating in-groups and out-groups within the parliamentary setting.

15:30-15:45

Coffee break

15:45-17:15

**Session 4:** Catchwords and Contexts

**Mohd Asaduddin (Jamia Millia Islamia, India):** Political catch phrases and the free fall of Indian democracy

The rightwing BJP government in India came to power in 2014 on the twin plank of nationalism and communalism. To capture power and then to consolidate their position the party deployed an array of slogans, like “achche din”, “Make in India”, “tukde tukde gang”, “atmanirbhar bharat”, “sabka sath, sabka vikas” etc. that were designed to dupe people and sell them an unrealizable dream. The slogans gain particular resonance and credibility because they emanate from none other than the ‘supreme’ leader of the BJP who is a skilful showman and demagogue of the first order. My presentation will focus on the provenance and impact of such political catch phrases on the fate of Indian democracy.

**Sudhir Selvaraj (Bradford University, UK):** Unpacking the "threat" of "Conversions"

“Conversions” has increasingly become a political buzzword in India to articulate the “threat” of India’s religious minorities to the Hindutva understanding of the “Hindu” nation. These notions have been a prominent theme of the Hindutva ideology since the late 19th century and have become mainstream as the Hindutva movement has gained political and social prominence in India over the past two decades. Inspired by the work of Johan Galtung, I see this discourse as a form of cultural violence against India’s Christians. Particularly, the Christian “threat” of conversions in Hindutva is perceived to be interference by Western Christian countries in India’s affairs and the perceived targeting of vulnerable groups like Dalits, Adivasis and women, using nefarious tactics of “force”, “fraud”, and “allurement”. Notably, the “threat” of conversions has been vital to justifying direct violence against Christians and structural violence such as anti-conversion laws and the denial of state resources to Dalit Christians.

**3 June 2023**

10:00-11:30

**Session 5:** Methods

**José Manuel Noguera Vivo (Universidad Católica de Murcia, Spain):** Catchwords, Politics and Social Media: Sticky metaphors and other false friends in research

The problem of sticky metaphors is that they set a frame which could be entirely wrong, so a change of research paradigm is needed. Also, the social polarization and web architectures of social media promote everything but critical and worthy debates, and it is quite difficult to talk about "representative" samples when maybe we should look for significance (case studies) of samples rather than their representativeness. Echo chambers and filter bubbles are some examples of these sticky metaphors but not the only ones. In addition, we will discuss other "false friends" in research of political catchwords on social media.

**Brian Alleyne (Goldsmiths University of London, UK):** A sociological approach to analysing UK government use of the term 'woke'

Members of the UK government have used the political catchword 'woke' and related terms 'wokeism' and 'wokerati' in various statements. People have responded in commentary across several online media platforms to the government's use of 'woke' as political characterisation. The presentation will summarise how to find and capture target discourse containing 'woke' and closely related catchwords online and how to analyse captured material in specialised software.

11:30-11:45

Coffee break

11:45-13:15

**Session 6:** Methods

**Ayan-Yue Gupta (Bristol University, UK):** Using Large Language Models to capture variation in the meaning of catchwords: Resilience, Sustainability and Wellbeing

I describe a method for the automatic extraction of the different senses in which words are used which makes use of large language models, thereby allowing large scale analysis of the different meanings generated by the spread of catchwords. To illustrate how this method works, I present my thesis research. In my thesis, I use the large language model BERT to extract the different senses generated by the spread of the policy catchwords resilience, sustainability and wellbeing through the central departments of the British government during 2000 -- 2020.

**Em Dean (The Open University UK):** A preliminary survey of research methods that may be employed for the quantitative analysis of political catchwords

13:15-14:15

Lunch break

14:15-16:00

**Session 8:** Panel Discussion

**Dan Taylor, chair (The Open University UK), Tommy Sissons and Daniel Trilling:** Keywords under contestation: borders, class, resistance

This roundtable brings together some leading practitioners in the arts, journalism and creative writing whose work relates to the crises and faultlines in a fragmented British politics and identity. From corrupt institutions and racist bordering practices to recovering sites and scenes of contestation and resistance, this roundtable will ask questions about power and identity, and get under the surface of some of the keywords that shed light on this politics. It'll also reflect on methodological questions as to how – and why – we use different creative and practical forms to engage publics, and what those forms mean for radical politics and critical inquiry.

16:00-17:00

Tea and Concluding Observations