QUEERING COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES: A CASE STUDY ON SAME-SEX UNIONS IN THE UK AND IN ITALY

CARMEN SERENA SANTONOCITO
UNIVERSITY OF MESSINA

carmenserena.santonocito@unime.it

Abstract: This study centres on a cross-linguistic investigation of same-sex unions as articulated within speeches by British and Italian Prime Ministers. The analysis adds to the growing body of research on Queer perspectives and their incorporation into studies on gender and sexuality. It aims to bring together the multi-facetedness of Discourse, and its cross-contamination with Critical and Queer paradigms, as well as corpus-informed tools.

The aim is to showcase how the hybrid incorporation of Queer and Critical Discourse-oriented perspectives makes explicit both dominant and marginalized discourses. Methodologically, this is realized through the blending of quantitative and qualitative analyses that combine Queer and Critical paradigms with corpus tools.

The results uncover institutionalized heteronormativity operating to different degrees. The Queer engagement leaves open the possibility for a thoughtful reformulation which should challenge the same notion of inclusivity.

Keywords: same-sex unions; critical / queer discourse studies; corpus-informed; discourse of prime ministers.

1. Introduction: Updating collective identities and methods

Same-sex unions (henceforth, SSU) have been in the spotlight of institutional, social and academic debates for their non-alignment to normative sexual conduct and gender norms, which has ignited fervent debates across Western societies (Donà 2021). The harsh ideological opposition to SSU permeates also governmental and institutional discourses[1] where the opposition between the official diversity-friendly moves and emergent homophobic practices (Derks and van den Berg 2020) stands out. As a matter of fact, since the 2000s some Western European nations have been introducing inclusiveness policies and laws that recognise SSU; yet still, direct and indirect discrimination persists (Kollman 2009) in these countries. In 2021 ongoing discrimination and inequality were reported in a EU Resolution[2] that urged governments to take action so that SSU might enjoy equal rights to freedom of movement and family reunification.

Italy and the UK may be counted among those European countries that incorporate and promote broad values of gender and sexual inclusiveness. In fact, both nations legally recognized SSUs during the 2010s, although ultimately they established two different civil institutions, i.e., same-sex marriage in the UK in 2014, and registered partnerships between persons of the same sex, abbreviated to civil partnership (unione civile)[3], in Italy in 2016. However, the seemingly inclusive moves by British and Italian governments were not entirely accepted, as could be seen in the attitudes of certain conservative political representatives and social groups. Indeed, their reactions to these recognitions were in overt contrast to the official position with alarming homophobic outcomes (Winkler 2017; Winter *et al.* 2018). Relatedly, many supra-national bodies and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have reported increased structural discrimination (Makkonen 2002), together with verbal and physical attacks against SSU in recent years.[4]

It is thus no surprise that SSU have become a major social and political cause of the 21st century for their relevance to debates over equality, citizenship and the democratic rights of minorities (Winter *et al.* 2018). It follows that a wealth of academic reflection from a diverse range of frameworks and utilising multiple methodologies is contributing to this evolving subject matter (Paterson and Turner 2019). Among studies with a linguistic focus on the UK we can count Baker's (2004) examination of the discursive construction of same-sex relationships within institutional Discourse. In his corpus-driven study he argues that implicit homophobic arguments against non-normalised sexual conducts

---

[1] The Critical notion of Discourse (i.e., activity in which people accomplish social interaction through linguistic and other symbolic means) is capitalized, whereas discourse intended in its broader concept is not capitalized.

[2] European Parliament Resolution of 11 March 2021 on the declaration of the EU as an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone (2021/2557(RSP)) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri= CELEX%3A52021IP0089&qid=1647125049990

[3] if not otherwise stated, all excerpts in Italian were translated by the author.

[4] "Mapping of studies on the difficulties for LGBTI people in cross-border situations in the EU" https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/mapping_of_studies_on_the_difficulties_for_lgbti_pe ople_in_cross-border_situations_in_the_eu.pdf

Eurobarometer report on LGBTI acceptance is not the full picture https://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/news/latest-news/eurobarometer-report-lgbti-acceptance-not-full-picture

justify opposition to homosexuality, which is viewed as a dangerous and criminal act. Baker also locates a range of implicit homophobic discursive strategies; among others, the "thin end of the wedge", a metaphor with similar connotations to the "slippery slope", which also features in a study by the Discourse of Marriage Research Group (van der Bom *et al.* 2015). Bachmann (2011) conducts a corpus-driven analysis of thematically-related keywords that leads him to rule out the presence of contradictory and marginalizing discourses over SSU. He complements his analysis with broader discursive considerations and finds evidence of the "thin end of the wedge" metaphor too. Love and Baker (2015) engage in a comparative diachronic study of Parliamentary debates on equalizing the age of consent for gay people and on same-sex marriage recognition. The two scholars conclude that although explicit homophobic language has decreased due to social unacceptability, implicit discriminatory stances still underlie UK Parliamentary Discourse. For this reason, they lay bare the challenge of uncovering such subtle and covert messages that work to exclude LGBT*[5] groups.

As for the Italian case, few studies exist on SSU. Notably, the majority of these centre on socio-political debates (Donà 2009; Winkler 2016), and on legal matters (Winkler 2017). These contributions mark the complex entanglement of polarized ideological stances that result in unfair practices and persistent discriminatory legislation against SSU. Studies with a discursive focus refer to those conducted by Vigo (2015), and Lasio and Serri (2019). The former entails a cross-linguistic research centred on newspaper lexical choices to describe SSU in Italy and in the UK. Vigo shows the comparative extent of change within both British and Italian cultures when discussing SSU, formerly represented a taboo subject within both societies. The analysis suggests that British newspapers tend towards informality, while their Italian counterpart seem to address the topic with a greater degree of ambiguity and ambivalence. Lasio and Serri's study draws on the Foucaldian notion of sexuality (Foucault 1980), and a socio-psychological view of Critical Discourse Studies (henceforth, CDS) to explore speeches by Italian stakeholders who participated in the debate on the legal recognition of SSU in Italy. Echoing the UK-based studies, the authors conclude that the "natural order" argument reinforces seemingly irreconcilable differences between traditionally conceived opposite-sex marriage and SSU. This tends to legitimise the existence of oppositional views within Italian society, thus facilitating delay in the equalization of rights for individuals in SSU.

This literature review highlights the imperative for opponents of SSU to avoid overtly homophobic statements through the use of implicitness. Therefore, the combination of multi-angled views to reveal underlying patterns of exclusion and discrimination is pivotal. Coupling with existing research on SSU, this study combines two paradigms that are currently commanding scholars' attention (Koller 2019; Leap 2015), namely, Critical and Queer Discourse Studies (henceforth, C/QDS). As for the type of Discourse investigated, while works

---

[5] The acronym LGBT has acquired a wealth of variants during the last couples of years. Due to space constraints and as a form of inclusive language, in this study the wildcard after the acronym LGBT* is used to incorporate any member recognizing themselves into non-conforming sexes and genders. No form of disrespect is intended here in not using other initialisms.

outlined so far focus on different kinds of institutional and media discourses, this cross-linguistic analysis delves into speeches on SSU delivered by British and Italian Prime Ministers (henceforth, PMs).

The specificity of the research paradigm and the facet of the Discourse investigated motivate the following structure of the research questions:

- Methodological Research Question (henceforth, MRQ) to address the controversial views and scepticism (Koller 2019; Motschenbacher 2018) on C/QDS: to what extent can Queer-minded approaches be complemented with the traditional combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in studies on gender and sexuality?
- Study-focused Research Question (henceforth, SRQ) to address the ceremonial exercise of power (Edelman 1977; Fowler *et al.* 1979) of the Discourse of PMs: which linguistic and discursive resources are enacted to present SSU?

Section 2 highlights the relatively recent Queer approach to Discourse (2.1), and its consonance with CDS and corpus-informed methods (2.2). Section 3 explores the ideologically-laden identity work encompassed in the lexicalization of SSU. Section 4 brings together the combinations of C/QCDS and corpus-informed methods in an attempt to theoretically address MRQ. The latter is interwoven throughout the analysis, which is also devoted to answering SRQ. Section 5 presents a Critical and Queer-informed analysis while providing an explanation of how hybrid methods can work in discourse-oriented gender studies. Section 6 sums up the main results, and ties them to MRQ and SRQ. Finally, Section 7 reflects on the main gains and challenges of combining such diverse paradigms and methods.

2. Critical/Queer Discourse Studies

This section highlights how Queer conceptualizations should be considered as an additional aid that enables any Critical inquiry to reject a rigid monolithic model (2.1). The affinity of corpus-informed analysis with C/QDS then discusses reasons why researchers need to employ such a combination (2.2).

2.1. Why Queering?

Before entering the recent endeavour of Queering scholarly research in social sciences (Koller 2019; Motschenbacher 2019), it is necessary to note that in this article Queer is capitalized to refer to academic discussions engaged not only with the problematization of binary consolidations of sex, gender and sexuality (Milani 2013), but also with the broader challenge of normative discourses with regulatory consequences (Leap 2015).

Influenced by post-structuralist and performative constructions of gender and sexual dichotomies (Butler 1990), Queer approaches emerged during the 1970s and the 1980s as a reaction to rigid classifications of gender and sex; these dichotomies tend to dictate supposedly coherent and normative ways of expressing one's gender and sexual desire(s). While pre-Queer advocates

(Foucault 1978; Crenshaw 1991) problematized essentialist views on gender and sex and pointed to the complex layers of intersectionality, Butler's studies paved the way for the social dismantling of binary classifications related to sex (male/female), gender (masculine/feminine), and desire (heterosexual, different-sex/homosexual, same-sex). Adding to this, Cameron and Kulick (2003) noted that the way gender (as a social construction), sex (as biological and the presence of reproductive organs), and sexuality (as the sexual attraction or desire) are constructed through reiterated discursive materialisation (Butler 1993) dictates the tenets of patriarchal ideology (Lakoff 1973). Lazar (2005) acknowledged that patriarchy polarizes gender and sex to an irreducible binary that assigns to men (sexed males) and women (sexed females) specific identity construal, social roles and prerogatives with unbalanced power relations invariably privileging men.

The Foucauldian tenet of Discourse as a social constitutive, performative and interpretive process – thus averse to strict categorizations – finds commonalities with the recent Queer debate and justifies its incorporation in CDS, resulting in C/QDS (Koller 2019). Originally, C/QDS focused on relativizing the absoluteness of heteronormativity, i.e., dominant discourse-bound assumptions prescribing norms that result in perceiving heterosexuality as a naturalised, self-evident, privileged necessity (Wagenknecht 2007). However, current Queer denunciation does not involve only heteronormativity and LGBT* people, but rather all kinds of normalise-seeking phenomena. For example, it involves individuals diverging from unquestioned patriarchal constructs (cisgender couples unwilling to marry or to have children, those who cannot have children, mono-parent families) that face multiple levels of discrimination and social sanctions (Motschenbacher 2010). For this reason, C/QDS relativize normative processes and habits by confronting those with non-normative alternatives. Therefore, an enlarged Queer perspective presupposes an anti-speciesism mark going against all identity categories, since these are perceived as unstable, hegemony-bound social constructions that reinforce power hierarchies (Milani 2018). A Queer and Critical inquiry can thus be used as an anti-paradigm whose objective is to uncover dominant discourses that shape collective understandings of society and create unbalanced relationships, be these in the realm of gender and sexuality or in any other form of social injustice. Taking a Queer approach does not, however, mean rejection of any rule and resort to chaos and anarchy. Rather, Queer epistemology draws on the Derridean deconstruction of categories, i.e., a process conceived as conscious exposure to the inherent instability of categories in order to question their perceived naturalness and coherence (Derrida 1976).

C/QDS thus conceive the Queer view as an alternative angle and an additional aid to Critical enquiry in order to shift the perspective from a monolithic stance to a problematized fluid viewpoint that foreshadows static categorizations (Milani 2018). In other words, a Queer perspective adds to Critical enquiry in two ways; firstly, an anti-normative awareness that no longer unquestionably accepts binarism, as if dyads such as men/women or masculine/feminine were self-explanatory, biologically-based, macro-categories; secondly, it envisages the prospect of alternative and inclusive discourses that can oppose (hetero) normativity.

2.2. Queer, Critical and corpus-informed

The efficient incorporation of corpus tools in the methodology of sex- and gender-related studies (Paterson and Coffey Glover 2018) has initiated discussions on the compatibility of corpus methods with C/QDS (Motschenbacher 2018; Baker 2018). This has already proved its effectiveness, especially in studies on gender and sex (Heritage and Baker 2021; Krendel 2020; Paterson and Coffey Glover 2018), where more ontologically oriented methods contribute to uncovering the perpetuation of the heteronormative matrix (Atkinson and De Palma 2009), and dominant regimes on gender and sex (Motschenbacher 2018).

There are two reasons for the incorporation of corpus tools in this study. First of all, given the multi-faceted, ever-changing type of Discourse being investigated, i.e., the Discourse of PMs, and the conflictual nature of the topic addressed, i.e., SSU, a synergy of quantitative and qualitative analysis helps to ground controversial findings with evidenced data collection that embodies a view of social reality as more scholarly systematized. In so doing, the much-quoted risk of excessive introspection and unclear methodology is addressed (Vessey 2013). Second, the broad and flexible perspectives offered by the multifarious corpus approaches make for a good match with the deconstructing intent of C/QDS. Such perspectives range from corpora used as an inherently quantitative approach prioritizing frequency and typicality of syntagmatic patterns in language use (Sinclair 1991), to corpus data that consistently signpost linguistic (lack of) evidence to anchor qualitative-based findings or redirect researchers' attention (Marchi and Taylor 2018).

In a Queer fashion, we can resolve the much debated quantitative/qualitative polarization by borrowing McEnery and Hardie's (2012) reflection on the continual scale where all corpus studies should be positioned. Indeed, the same necessity to move constantly from frequency lists (more quantitative, famously referred to as corpus-driven approach) to concordances (more qualitative, i.e., corpus-based) enables us to consider qualitative and quantitative procedures as falling between two end-points of a continuum (Partington 2004)[6]. However, corpora "are not a linguistic panacea" (Motschenbacher 2018: 146), and reliance on quantification does not get the study any closer to the misconceived idea of non-biased research (Marchi and Taylor 2009). In addition, number crunching alone cannot reveal structural discrimination on non-aligned genders and sexualities. For this reason, a balanced methodological cross-contamination is even more significant for unveiling what is implied, insinuated or latently hinted at.

---

[6] Although what has been argued so far could equate to assimilating corpus-use of this study to well-known Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (Partington 2006), it is crucial to note that the methodology of this study is informed by corpus-use as a complementary tool to uncover relationships between language and the social context, specifically to reveal normalized meanings. The latter is generally one of the central concerns of Queer and Critical enquiry, intertwining the research interest of both corpus studies and C/QDS.

3. Labels, identities, ideologies that matter

Starting from the assumption that linguistic options to represent the world are a central issue to the Discourse of politics and institutions (Wilson 2001), Section 3.1 presents the Discourse of PMs, while Section 3.2 deals with the ideological resonance of identity labels in a C/QDS fashion.

3.1. The Discourse of PMs

The Discourse of PMs is inevitably affected by pervasive institutional obligations (Koester 2006). Given the indirect and ceremonially constrained exercise of power (Edelman 1977; Fowler *et al.* 1979), the examination of PMs' speeches can bear fruitful results in the dominant representation of SSU (Baker 2014). However, such pervasiveness and relevance have far-reaching implications, especially in our poly-cross-mediatized society (Abbamonte 2019). This is even truer as PMs' speeches are more likely to represent received wisdom on a subject and, in the long-term, they can anticipate normative familiarity with the public (Weiss 2013). Edelman (1977) notes that official PMs' speeches stand out for the attention to form and style since these communicate reassurance and righteous authoritativeness. Regardless of the content, PMs must convey reasonableness of their argumentations and attention to the public opinion. Hence, the importance of subtle discursive formations that may implicitly project institutionalised homophobia (Butler 2008) when communicating commonly understood views of righteousness.

Due to the crucial importance of stylistic devices and rigorous forms canonized by both written and unwritten rules, the Discourse of PMs follows a precise ceremonial and is accompanied by ritualistic formulas that characterize it as a specialized jargon. Ceremonials, rituals, and specific linguistic constructions allow for the establishment of normative authoritativeness and institutional recognisability of the governmental organization. The fact that PMs use their own jargon is understood as an implicit expression of loyalty to the dominant values in a government. Additionally, the public undeniably recognizes this jargon and, though often the meaning of words is not crystal clear to citizens, they nevertheless tend to feel reassured by the righteous objectives pursued by the governmental institution.

3.2. Labels do identity work

According to Baker (2008), identity labels address some of the wider issues regarding language, gender and sexuality. Notably, during the post-structuralist turn Althusser (1970) and Pêcheux (1982) claimed that ideology materializes in a variety of forms, including lexical choices whereby the meanings of words are transformed according to who uses them or, in Foucault's (1972) view, in relation to particular discursive formations. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) recognized that political and institutional leaders have unprecedented access to huge audiences on a daily basis, providing numerous opportunities to win support, but also harmful effects when transmitting extremely polarized views.

These ideas are further developed in CDS. Firstly, Critical scholarship advocates that language-use and discursive practices make their contribution "to reproducing and/or transforming society and culture, including power relations" (*Ibid.*: 273). Secondly, Critical scholars maintain that discursive practices disseminate ideology in subtle ways through the use of specific words and expressions, which evoke but leave untroubled implicit sets of ideological assumptions. In this sense, CDS practitioners claim that Discourse "does ideological work" (*Ibid.*: 275) articulating specific representations of reality and identities. Therefore, it is the attentive selection of words and expressions, as well as the cohesion of formulaic patterns, that initiate the ideological significance of Discourse (Cavaliere 2012). Van Dijk (1998) introduces a socio-cognitive element to this discussion, positing that titles, labels, and *ad-hoc* chosen terms constitute macro-propositions that frame ideological assumptions. To this it can be added that "any choice of label is inherently political" (Milani 2015: i).

In relation to the labelling of problematic and unstable concepts such as those related to gender and sexuality, Motschenbacher (2011) notes that language and specialized terms present a "poststructuralist problem because [they] can only construct the world in an incomplete fashion that ignores certain aspects about referential objects" (*ibid.*: 157). This is even truer for concepts located on a continual scale – such as identity continua. For this reason, terms designating always-developing realities experience a process of ongoing interpretation that in practice leads to their unsystematic use (Motschenbacher 2010). This high degree of variation affects jargon in the field of politics and institutions as well. Terms may vary quantitatively and qualitatively according to historical processes and socio-cultural dynamics (Chilton 2008). In some cases, semantic penumbra of constantly changing terms prevails, while in other cases communities posses crystalized terms and concepts that keep the ideas current in the collective consciousness (Fowler 1985).

4. *Hybrid methodology*

Since the communicative resources to present SSU concern highly contested identity formations and are enacted at various discursive levels, we employ a hybrid methodology by combining tools derived from corpus studies (4.1) and C/QDS paradigms (4.2).

4.1. Corpus tools and design

This study is defined as corpus-informed in the sense that corpus search intervenes in the analysis for detecting certain lexical patterns contributing — together with tools outside corpora — to the discursive construction of SSU. To this aim, among the various analytical tools offered by corpora, we look at frequency lists and concordances by using the SketchEngine. While frequencies can be useful in revealing common patterns or themes in corpora (Baker 2014), concordances are considered the starting point for qualitative analyses based on making sense of the contexts where word patterns occur. In particular, close-

reading of expanded versions of co-texts is strongly recommended in C/QDS (Motschenbacher 2018; Paterson and Coffey-Glover 2018). In addition, frequency lists and concordances are helpful to identify regularities, repeated use, but also absences (Schröter and Taylor 2018; Sundaram and Sauntson 2016).

The two corpora collect official speeches by UK PM David Cameron (henceforth, DC) and Italian PM Matteo Renzi (henceforth, MR) in the time-frame 2011-2016. This specific time span covers the years immediately preceding and following the enactment of legislation recognising SSU. The speeches were downloaded from institutional websites[7] using a lexical criterion: speeches containing *same-sex*, *gay marriage*[8]* form the Cameron corpus (henceforth, C-cor), whose size includes 41,879 tokens; speeches containing *union* civil*, union* tra persone dello stesso sesso* make up the Renzi corpus (henceforth, R-cor), whose size includes 35,067 tokens. These expressions were chosen for their relevance to the topic addressed (Abbamonte 2018). For the purpose of this study, written textual data constituted the core of the analysis, though when multimodal elements such as video or audio versions of the speeches were available, these were considered for cross-checking of possible biases in transcription.

Methodological concerns on the procedure for corpus design involve the nature of the dataset and corpus representativeness. Atkinson (1984) acknowledges possible challenges in transcriptions when dealing with automatically transcribed spoken data, in spite of all efforts to double-check for involuntary omissions. Additionally, KhosraviNik and Unger (2016) warn against replicability in data retrieval, which must account for the ahistorical nature of the continuously changing digital ecosystem. As for corpus representativeness, it must be noted that the small size of the two corpora is due to the specificity of the Discourse they collect. Additionally, in C/QDS what matters for achieving representativeness is not the high quantification of words; instead, the focus rests on the ability and usefulness of such representativeness to detect normalized patterns and, consequently, marginalized discourses. Therefore, C-cor and R-cor are not intended to be representative of the entire Discourse genre of the British and Italian PMs; rather, these corpora account for the topic addressed (SSU), and the formulaic unidirectionality of the message.

4.2. C/QDS array

Since C/QDS paradigms translate into various methods of analysis, and may overlap with a number of commonalities, the present study borrows from more than one tool. The C/QDS methodological framework results from the merging of a series of elements derived from the discourse-historical approach (Wodak 2001), van Dijk's (2006) ideological square, van Leeuwen's (1996; 2008) socio-semantic inventory, and Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics

---

[7] https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/prime-ministers-office-10-downing-street for DC http://www.governo.it/Presidente/Interventi/index.asp for MR
[8] In corpus tools, wildcards are used to ease search of different word forms. Namely, after the wildcard any sequence of zero or more characters can follow.

(henceforth, SFL). Such hybrid approaches draw together grammatical, textual and syntactic levels that prompt discursive representations.

This methodological blending is advocated by many scholars, including Jørgesen and Phillips (2002), and Balirano and Hughes (2020). Among the vast array of instruments, we use the following because they direct attention toward parts of language that are most likely to prompt polarized discourse in need of closer examination.

- Referential strategies (Wodak 2001) for naming individuals or groups. These include: (1) avoidance, and (2) membership categorization.
- Ideological contraposition us *vs.* them (van Dijk 1995), which involves: (1) othering, labelling of the out-group as minor or inferior; (2) use of euphemisms; (3) vagueness, use of vague expressions that do not have precise referents and thus can alternatively align with positive or negative representations.
- Lexicalization (Halliday 1978), i.e., the provision of a term for a concept. Since lexical processes reflect the interests and views of social groups, Halliday distinguished among: (1) overlexicalization, when many words are available to express one concept; (2) underlexicalization, lack of a specific term to squarely encode a concept; (3) relexicalization, vocabulary that encodes specific concepts in expressions that are associated only with a specific setting.
- Inventory for actors' descriptors (van Leeuwen 1996; 2008), including: (1) beneficialization, i.e., passivization through beneficiary roles; (2) indetermination, i.e., unspecific and anonymous representations; (3) assimilation and collectivization, the first is realized when groups are referred to as indistinguishable, while the second occurs when groups are defined as collective categories; (4) genericization, i.e., symbolic removal of subjects; (5) differentiation, distinct polarization self *vs.* others; (6) categorization, when individuals are referred solely in terms of the function/category they represent in society.

Each of the above instruments intervenes in shaping SFL meta-functions that involve every communicative event (Jewitt et *al.* 2016). Therefore, the distribution of such meta-functions is also indicated. Synthetically, these include: (1) ideational meta-function, constituted by experiential and logical meta-functions that construct and connect our experience of the world; (2) interpersonal meta-function, enacting social relations and expressing stances; (3) textual meta-function, organizing information.

5. Discursive and textual representation of SSU

Section 5.1 delves into the analysis of the Italian case (R-cor), while Section 5.2 examines the British case (C-cor).

5.1 SSU in the Italian speeches

In table 1 the SketchEngine queries are listed on the left-hand side, while the different forms of each query are listed on the right-hand side, with the number of occurrences in squared brackets. The wild card "*" is used when it is necessary to search for masculine and feminine singular and plural forms, e.g., "coppia/coppie".

Table 1. SSU in the R-cor

SketchEngine Queries	Occurrences
Person* dello stesso sesso	Persone dello stesso sesso (same-sex people) [3]
Person* che	Persone che si amano (people who love each other) [4] Persone che si vedono riconosciuti diritti (people who see their rights recognized) [2]
Person* car*	Persona cara (loving person) [1]
Chi	Chi non sa dove festeggiare (who doesn't know where to celebrate) [1] Chi per tanto tempo ha nascosto (who has hidden for long) [1] Chi si sente finalmente riconosciuto (who finally feels recognized) [1] Chi vede che […] gli vengono restituti diritti (who notes that their rights are restored) [1] Chi semplicemente non sta più nella pelle (who simply is beside themselves with joy) [1]

As is clear from the occurrences above, at the intra-textual level there is minimum presence of referential strategies to name individuals directly involved in the construction of SSU. The first striking element of note is that same-sex couples are not mentioned as social subjects, neither by reference to their emotional bond nor via mention of their civic status. Indeed, there is an absence of terms such as "coppie gay/lesbiche" (gay/lesbian couples), "unioni gay/lesbiche" (gay/lesbian unions) or "unioni tra persone dello stesso sesso" (same-sex unions). Such specific terms are indirectly evoked by the indefinite relative pronoun "chi". When same-sex couples should express their interpersonal meta-function, i.e., when they are referred to for the civic function they perform, entering a legally committed union is transformed into a state action through nominalization, i.e., "unioni civili" (civil unions). Apart from "unioni civili", the erasure of the concrete action is expressed also through the following nominalizations: "unioni di fatto" (*de facto* unions), "unioni alla tedesca" (German-like unions), "civil partnerships". The last one is not translated here because it does not fully equate to the English "civil partnership"; in fact, notwithstanding the sameness of the form, the concept in Italian does not correspond to the English term.[9] The latter thus is a clear example of resorting

[9] Due to the recent change in the UK and Italian legislation it is noteworthy that until 2018 *civil partnerships* were possible only to same-sex couples in England and Wales. In late 2019 the law was changed, and since then opposite-sex couples have been able to enter into civil. This means that when referring to *civil partnerships* in the C-cor, the dataset does not include latest

to the use of foreign words not because of underlexicalization, but prompted by the sole aim to avoid ideologically marked and problematic choices in the Italian language.

As for the query "person* dello stesso sesso" (same-sex people), in terms of ideational meta-function this appears to be a euphemism to avoid the overt mention of same-sex couples. Despite the apparent unmarkedness of this phrase, which could point to the hybrid and non-normalized state of SSU, its use actually indicates markedness, and favours the erasure of SSU as active and unique subjects. In fact, if we compare the lexicalization to refer to opposite-sex couples (i.e., "famiglie", "un uomo e una donna"), their ideational meta-function indicates an unmarked prototypical social group that perpetuates patriarchal constructs. In terms of the relationship between terms and objects, "persone dello stesso sesso" does not seem to relate to the existing entity it should logically refer to, i.e., same-sex couples. The following excerpt is illustrative of this mismatch:

> (1) La legge alla tedesca è un buon punto di mediazione e consente di dare alle persone dello stesso sesso i diritti civili[10]

In the excerpt above there is a mismatch in terms of ideational meta-function, because of the inappropriate representation; in other words, "persone dello stesso sesso" prevents an authentic construction of our experience of the world. Indeed, in (1) it seems more reasonable that "diritti civili" (civil rights) are granted to same-sex couples, rather than same-sex people. Here the hypothesis of hypercorrection (Labov 1966) seems legitimate. While making an effort to conform to a more context-appropriate language to allude to SSU, the Italian PM reveals linguistic insecurity (Bucci and Baxter 1984) for a problematic and tabooed topic which seems to be overtly avoided in formal contexts. Since "persone dello stesso sesso" has three occurrences in the R-cor, it is noteworthy that this hypercorrection happens consistently, maybe as an over-application of the English morpheme "same-sex". Despite its hypercorrectness, we could argue that the literal translation of a foreign morpheme ("same-sex" into English, "stesso sesso" in Italian) to avoid a subject that is supposedly considered distasteful reinforces the hypothesis of a taboo topic. Considering the rest of (1), the reference to proximity to the German model displays the interpersonal meta-function whereby Germany and Italy are placed on the same level. Throughout the R-cor the Italian PM often makes comparisons with Germany, evaluating this country partly as a model to emulate, partly as a challenging ally with whom Italy can nevertheless engage in a sound competition. The word "mediazione" (mediation) reveals the internal tensions among the many wings of MR's coalitions, together with the contrasts emerging from right-wing conservatives.

---

modifications to the law. In Italy the same term, *civil partnership*, is an Anglicism which is synonym of *unione civile*, and, since 2016 it regulates SSU thanks to law 76/2016 regulating civil unions between same-sex people and cohabiting couples. The latter, in Italian "convivenza di fatto" or "unione di fatto" regulates unions between opposite-sex people (before 2016 no SSU was recognized in Italy).

[10] The German law is a good point of mediation and allows us to grant civil rights to same-sex people.

The query "person* che" is a dependent relative noun-phrase, occurring only in the plural form and with vague referents intended to construct the ideational meta-function. In this case there is no specific lexicalization as SSU are not designated with precise referents of the real world. This vagueness, on the one hand, does not constrain SSU in any categorization, thus allowing fuzzy-bordered subjects the expression of multifarious possibilities of being. Subsequently, this might resonate with a Queer mind-set. On the other hand, the same vagueness entails such a neutrality that negative or positive messages can be attached to the social group depending on the case, without any risk of losing face. Since this term is a dependent noun-phrase, this means that to make sense it needs to be accompanied by some form of predicate. Looking at the predicates, the first one refers to the behavioural process of loving each other, i.e., "persone che si amano" (people who love each other). According to Dedaić (2006) an appeal to emotions and to loving feelings when speaking in public is aimed to induce pathos, which, in this case, serves to mitigate rational ideological oppositions. Simultaneously, reference to feelings enhances common ground and consensus among the audience by creating temporary emotional interconnections. However, when looking at the extended concordance, it can be noted that the feeling of love comes imprecisely from two subjects whose harmless loving relation is covertly questioned by a rhetorical question.

> (2) L'ho fatto perché è giusto, due persone che si amano che paura possono fare?[11]

The apparently genuine question that should encourage to accept same-sex couples conversely positions the latter as people who are different from "the norm". This evokes uncertainty, ambiguity, fear, confirmation-seeking, and it reveals the lack of knowledge on SSU beyond heteronormativity. The othering effect (Coupland 2010) created by the contraposition between the PM and the out-group is visible in the syntactic construction. Firstly, the use of impersonal "è giusto" (it is right) marks a strong modality and the completion of one's duty, positing the fairness of the act as an external obligation dictated by circumstances, and not directly involving personal and political beliefs. Secondly, the opposition of the implied personal pronouns stands out: first person singular is used by MR to differentiate himself from third person plural pronoun, i.e., the out-group. The emphasis on a different kind of love whose effects should cause no harm to others is expressed through the final rhetorical question that appears anything but rhetorical. Indeed, it hints at the oddness and otherness of same-sex couples. The other predicate refers to the recognition of rights, i.e., "persone che si vedono riconosciuti diritti" (people who see their rights recognized). In this case the force of the predicate gradually dissolves as the reflexive verb-form "vedersi" has a passive meaning, which is further reinforced in the past participle "riconosciuti". The action basically does not reverberate on the indirectly implied subjects, i.e., SSU; rather, it is neutralized and performed by an external entity evoking a sense of beneficialization. In this

---

[11] I did it because it's right, two people who love each other, how can they be scary?

case, the vaguely defined "persone" benefits from having their rights recognized with action attribution being de-emphasized by the transitivity structure.

Although not constituting a specific case of lexicalization, the query "person* car*" (loving person), indirectly addresses SSU and entails interpersonal meta-function that positions the speaker's point of view in direct involvement and solidarity with the matter. In addition, the personal touch of this utterance is reinforced by a memory.

> (3) Ma a me piace pensare semplicemente a qualche persona cara che oggi si sente parte di una nuova stagione di diritti. E io aggiungo di doveri. E mi piace ricordare chi non è più con noi, per esempio Alessia. E questo mi basta.[12]

This excerpt exemplifies a number of controversial aspects at stake when referring to SSU in the R-cor. On the one hand, the indefinite adjective "qualche" (some), whose presence might be also motivated by the conversational tone of politicians (Demata 2018), communicates vagueness and lack of interest in specifying who should be the beneficiaries of this new season of rights. On the other hand, the distancing effect created by this vague quantifier is mitigated by the personal memory of Alessia, whose identity is not explicitly mentioned. Only through intertextual and inter-modal inferences we discover that Alessia metonymically refers to the LGBT* community, being the only indirect reference in the whole R-cor to a LGBT* person. In fact, cross-referencing with the visual mode helps to connect the name Alessia to the LGBT* activist Alessia Ballini, thanks to a picture of her that is shown on a screen during MR's speech. The personal narrative on Alessia, although it can potentially create common ground and plausibility for the speaker (Labov and Watelsky 1967), refrains from constructing any detail on the subject. So, despite the explicit nomination of the individual (limited to her first name), at the textual level indetermination prevails.

Further, the query "chi" (who) is not a real case of specific lexicalization as the ideational meta-function of this indefinite relative pronoun designates SSU as undetermined individuals. The result of such indetermination anonymises SSU, as if their personal identities were irrelevant to the discussion. Moreover, the indefinite pronoun in nominal function is accompanied by epistemic verbs such as, "non sa" (doesn't know), "si sente riconosciuto" (feels recognized) that preclude the subjects from any concrete action, and by other verbal constructions pointing to marginalization and silenced practices, such as "ha nascosto" (has hidden). In contrast, some predicates refer to celebrative actions, namely "festeggiare" (celebrate) and "non stare più nella pelle" (be beside oneself with joy). It must be noted that these occurrences are part of speeches delivered after legal recognition of SSU. The excerpt below is taken from an official declaration delivered after civil unions became law:

---

[12] But I'd like to think simply of some loving person who today feels part of a new season of rights. And I add, duties. And I'd like to remember someone who is no longer with us, for example Alessia. And this is enough for me.

(4) È un giorno di festa per tanti, oggi. Per chi si sente finalmente riconosciuto. Per chi vede dopo anni che gli vengono restituiti diritti talmente civili da non aver bisogno di altri aggettivi.[13]

The repetition of the noun-phrase "per chi" (for those) presents the contraposition between past denial and present recognition, further marked by the time expressions "finalmente" (finally), and "dopo anni" (after years). It must be noted that recognition of SSU is defined simply as a civil right, and no other forms of evaluation are attached. The lack of any adjectives can be interpreted as an honest commitment to this matter, but it may well be part of a neutralizing strategy in order to avoid any qualifier for SSU, which could prompt criticism from both supporters and opponents. In addition, apart from the indefinite "chi", a similar pronoun with undetermined reference is "tanti" (many). Noted in this case also, SSU are not referred to as individuals worthy of distinct relevance; rather, they are assimilated into an undistinguished group that remains distant and different from PM's occupations.

5.2. SSU in the British speeches

In table 2 the SketchEngine queries are listed on the left-hand side, while their different forms are listed on the right-hand side with the number of occurrences in squared brackets. The wild card "*" is used when it is necessary to search for singular and plural forms, e.g., "couple/couples".

Table 2. SSU in the C-cor

SketchEngine Queries	Occurrences
Gay couple*	Gay couple [1]
Same sex couple*	Same-sex couple [2] Same-sex couples [3]
Same sex married couple*	Same-sex married couples [2]
Same sex couple* in civil partnership*	Same-sex couples in civil partnerships [1]
People	People [3]
Men and men	Men and men [3]
Women and women	Women and women [3]

At the intra-textual level there is a moderate presence of referential strategies to name individuals directly involved in the construction of SSU. In the C-cor these are mentioned only as social subjects with minimum level of lexical variation, as testified to by the synonymic forms "gay couple*" and "same-sex couple*". There is also reference to their civic status, which from 2004 to 2013 could only be "same-sex couple* in civil partnerships", while now it is enlarged to "same-sex married couple*". Similarly to the R-cor, vague expressions such as "people", "men and men", "women and women" are present, although these involve different discursive strategies.

---

[13] It is a day of celebration for many, today. For those who finally feel recognized. For those who see after years that they are given such civil rights that these do not need other adjectives.

The query "gay couple*" occurs only once in its plural form. Although in the English language the term "gay" has become a hyperonym encompassing a general discourse of sexual and gender liberation (Milani 2015), in this case the low presence of this expression does not seem to adhere to a Queer fashion, which however leans towards masculine predominance. Rather, the choice of not over-using the term "gay couple" might be encompassed within a national language policy campaign led by activist groups such as Stonewall, which advocated for greater inclusivity.[14]. So, instead of over-reliance on the markedness of the term "gay couple" (Jones *et al.* 2017), the more inclusive preference is for "same-sex couple". Notwithstanding the inclination to inclusivity, in this case the expression is contrasted with heterosexual couples. Therefore, its presence highlights the interpersonal meta-function that opposes the pairs heterosexual couple *vs.* gay couple, betraying the perception of the deviant nature of gay people, usually opposed to straight people (Turner *et al.* 2018). This usage seems to persist notwithstanding the fact that the terminological opposition gay/straight has long been discouraged in inclusive language forms (Baker 2005). In the case below, although the link is not overt, it can still be noted:

> (5) And it's really saying, if you're going to get, to have a civil marriage, you can have a civil marriage as a heterosexual couple or a civil marriage as a gay couple.

In (5) opposite-sex couples and same-sex couples appear to be contrasted to highlight the liberal and democratic commitment of DC and his party, but with no intent to give action to the epistemic reality of the two kinds of couples, collectivized and perceived as static subjects. So, in this case, when referring to marriage, be it same- or opposite-sex, the emphasis remains strictly on the judicial matter. The opposition "heterosexual couple" / "gay couple" signals the afore-mentioned heteronormative dualism that recurs throughout both corpora. However, although "gay couple*" is not the most inclusive choice, it must be noted that an even more pejorative option is absent from the C-cor, namely, "homosexual couple*". This absence might be motivated by the derogatory connotation of "homosexual", which in British English has medicalized references, as discussed at length inside and outside academia (*ibid.*: 3).

"Same sex couple*" has four occurrences, two in the singular form and two in the plural form. As discussed above, if compared with the synonymic expression "gay couple", its higher presence is motivated by the deeper cultural and sociological discussion for more inclusive forms that has also permeated the political debate. The following excerpt shows how interpersonal meta-function is enacted through DC's intent to create a stance whereby framing same-sex marriage within the core points of his party:

> (6) I think that the Equal Marriage Bill is about extending marriage to same sex couples.

---

[14] https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/rshe-march2022_-_final_edited_pdf.pdf

In this case SSU are genericized since their struggle is decentralized to give space to the concession of a benefit, enacted by the PM himself. Moreover, although "same sex couple" is considered an inclusive choice by many academics (Turner *et al.* 2018; Paterson and Coffey-Glover 2018), the same scholars recognize that a Queer perspective unveils the introduction of same-sex marriage by a British Conservative government as an attempt to assimilate SSU to heteronormative ideals, and, simultaneously, as an endeavour by a patriarchal government to sanitize SSU.

As for the phrases "same sex married couple*" and "same sex couple* in civil partnership*", these ease the construction of the ideational meta-function since they indicate the possibility for both civil statuses. However, close scrutiny of the following passage reveals the prominence given to the dominant group:

> (7) The policy benefits married couples, including same sex married couples and civil partners where one is a basic rate taxpayer.

As a matter of fact, "married couples" refers to the normalised commonplace that a couple is formed by two opposite-sex people. Married opposite-sex couples are thus considered the norm, from which same-sex marriage departs. Even when envisaged in the legislation under scrutiny, the abnormality of SSU must be specified. This signals that same-sex marriages, although available for British citizens, are different and have to be identified as such from the dominant common-sense understandings of a "married couple". Indeed, the former are in continuous need of specification and explanation, as if their existence required justification.

The query "people" features the ideational meta-function for it aids in the social construction of SSU. The employment of such a vague designation to represent SSU seems a reasonable and neutral choice at the identity level, because the focus rests on the social actors, who are presented primarily as people (and the rest comes after); however, the risk is that such social actors become considered as self-standing entities. Indeed, the latter are not given any additional qualitative or predicative support. On the contrary, as can be seen in the following excerpt, "people" are portrayed as receivers/beneficiaries of the action:

> (8) The LGBT+ rights movement […] has campaigned for decency, respect and equal treatment; and underlying it all were simple demands: that people should be able to love and live equally with someone of the same sex, that people should be respected and valued for who they are.

In excerpt (8) modality plays a pivotal role in conveying subjective logical necessity. In fact, the information is presented as if the speaker were personally interested in and committed to achieving respect and equality. But this epistemic necessity ("should") clashes with the absence of the speaker, i.e., DC, who is not the subject of (8). In addition, looking at the predicates of "people", in the first case, agency is activated in the behavioural process of being able to love, while in the second case, the bestowed action is passively beneficialized by a third party that remains unknown. Excerpt (8) shows that, even if the vague reference

to "people" can be Queerly interpreted as an inclusive choice allowing for non-static categorizations, the fact that the speaker totally detaches himself from the supposedly praiseworthy affirmation betrays distance.

The query "men and men" / "women and women" enacts the ideational meta-function. The two phrases are not a form of specific lexicalization but their presence is key to understanding how SSU are categorized within the oppositional pair of men/women. This categorization recalls the heteronormative convention of assimilating sexual and gender practices into rigid identity categories. Moreover, these two expressions occur only in the plural form, pointing also to assimilation which does not place any value on individuals, and, in this case, connotes promiscuity. This echoes previous studies (Baker 2005; Bachmann 2011) on the negative construction of SSU as unable to maintain stable and monogamous relationships, thus considered unreliable and less committed.

> (9) For the first time, the couples getting married won't just include men and women but men and men, and women and women.

In the above excerpt the sequencing of the utterance marks the categorization of the social actors, together with the male primacy. In addition, since this phrase has three occurrences in the C-cor, double-checking reveals that male priority occurs three times out of three, meaning that there is no gender pair-terms alternation.

6. Discussion

Addressing MRQ, Queer-minded approaches can be complemented with the traditional combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, provided that researchers do not take any aspect for granted, and integrate the different discursive and socio-semiotics dimensions (Fairclough 1995; van Leeuwen 2008; Wodak 2009) according to the topic and context analysed. Agreeing with Koller (2019) and Motschenbacher (2010), the combination of C/QDS and corpus search suits the present study in that it does not merely document linguistic and discursive aspects of fixed sex and gender categories; on the contrary, it makes hetero-normative discourses explicit through textually verifiable data. Rather than complying with academic tribalism on the irreducibility of quantitative and qualitative oppositions (Marchi and Taylor 2018), corpus use informs this study in the sense that the presence or the absence of textual data is taken as empirical evidence to guide qualitative generalizability (Partington and Marchi 2015) and problematization of monolithic stances.

SRQ considers the different elements borrowed from C/QDS. The process of how meta-functions create contextually-derived meanings from discursive constructions and from lexicalization is shown in the following tables.

Table 3. Communicative resources to present SSU in the R-cor

R-cor			
Query	Meta-function	Discursive construction	Lexicalization
Person* dello stesso sesso	ideational	Avoidance/ euphemism	Underlexicalization/ Hypercorrection
Person* che	ideational	Othering/ beneficialization	Underlexicalization
Person* car*	interpersonal	Indetermination/ vagueness	Underlexicalization
chi	interpersonal	Indetermination/ assimilation	Underlexicalization

Table 4. Communicative Resources to present SSU in the C-cor

C-cor			
Query	Meta-function	Discursive construction	Lexicalization
Gay couple*	Interpersonal	Collectivization	Lexicalization
Same-sex couple*	Interpersonal	Genericization	Lexicalization
Same-sex married couple* / Same-sex couple* in civil partnerships	Ideational	Differentiation	Lexicalization
People	Ideational	Beneficialization / Passivization	Underlexicalization
Men and men / women and women	Ideational	Categorization / Assimilation	Underlexicalization

From tables 3 and 4 it can be noted that in both corpora the textual meta-function is absent, meaning there is no organization on the structuring of the message that presents SSU. In the R-cor the ideational meta-function tends to avoid or to leave behind SSU via othering and beneficialization. The latter happens also in the C-cor with "people", testifying to the exclusionary practice of backgrounding agency for SSU. Coming back to the Italian case, interpersonal meta-function seems to enact social relations coherently with the vague constructions derived from the ideational meta-function, that is, undetermined stances and relationships. The R-cor displays this negotiation of relationships (i.e., interpersonal meta-function) treating SSU as collectivized identities and generic quantifications. The ideational meta-function constructs SSU as different, or passive beneficiaries, or part of an undistinguished group subject to polarizations. Overall, it can be noted that excluding and polarized presentations of SSU deliver an imprecise construction of the agents, whereby logical connections with reality appear almost unfeasible. Therefore, it is no surprise that textual meta-function is not even activated in both cases.

As for lexicalization, its ideological significance for SSU comes to the fore when we acknowledge that in both corpora there is no high productivity of specific lexical patterns to refer to SSU. For specific lexical items we intend those prompting interdiscursive reference with the domain of gender and sexuality. This means that the provision of terms to explain the concept of SSU is rather

minimum in both corpora. The only specific lexicalization in the R-cor is "persone dello stesso sesso", signalled as a case of hypercorrection and linguistic insecurity. Therefore, the R-cor leans towards underlexicalization for its lack of specific terms to present SSU. This posits a number of problems for the linguistic community, including the PM, who, when encouraged to use inclusive language, resorts to avoidance, imprecise euphemisms and indeterminate words. On a broader discursive level, such awkwardness and reticence make SSU undervalued and unknown. It follows that there is a prevalent tendency to avoid overt institutional talking about them. The C-cor presents greater lexicalization with more explicit reference to the domain of gender and sexuality. However, we cannot refer to overlexicalization. The range of lexicalization could indicate a moderate variety within jargons and slangs of the dominant group, together with a degree of creativity to encode specific events or experiences. In this case, the moderate quantity of terms to refer to SSU reflects the interest and consideration the British-English community has put into the specific discursive construction of SSU. Although the overall picture may signal the C-cor as the most lexically inclusive to refer to SSU, heteronormative discursive conventions – i.e., male primacy, vague words and assimilation through the use of the plural "men and men" – betray the permanence of strict monolithic classifications and patriarchal ideologies.

The low level of lexicalization noted in both corpora is accompanied by generic use of terms referring to SSU. In this respect, both the R-cor and the C-cor share the use of superordinates like "people" / "persone" to designate SSU. In both cases we point to relexicalization since the most common meaning of "people" / "persone" ("human beings making up a group" for the English language[15]; "individui della specie umana, senza distinzione di sesso, età, condizione sociale e sim." for the Italian language[16]) is backgrounded for the sake of an alternative concept describing a specific entity perceived as new or different. The main differences consist in the fact that in the C-cor "people" designates SSU as a self-standing entity, while in the R-cor "persone" depends upon predicative constructions. The common point is that in both corpora the lexemes "people" / "persone" tend to construct SSU as subaltern out-groups, passive receivers or beneficiaries of patriarchal largesse.

Recalling the Queer fashion, we can affirm that lexicalization is unsystematic, despite the formal rigour in the Discourse of PMs. A lack of stable conceptualization for terms related to the domain of gender and sexuality seems legitimate not only for the patriarchal biases but also because of the high fluctuation of these concepts and identities that escape fixation. Therefore, even if underlexicalization might be part of the process of terminological formations in the domain of gender and sexuality, it surely highlights reticence, unfamiliarity and a constrained concept of inclusiveness. However, such vague and incomplete lexicalization has nonetheless provided a contextually informed detection of discursive strategies, polarized structures, and social action attributions.

---

[15] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/people
[16] https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/persona/

Considering the Queering intent that allows for the possibility of changing perspectives, lexis, and discourses – notwithstanding the constrained and ideology-laden Discourse of PMs – we agree with Fowler (1985) that views can be reformulated and brought forward in previously unthought-of way. Drawing on Giddens (1991), we also argue that a "reflexive construction of the self" (ibid.: 32) can dismantle divisive discursive practices through the creation of new possibilities to articulate meaning. Part of this reformulation starts from different linguistic and discursive representations that can be enhanced from lexical micro-level to discursive macro-level with the intent of transforming such misconceived representations. As for the case of labels and terms in the language of PMs, these seem to vary according to precise contexts but also arising from individuals' thoughtful choices. In Chilton's (2008) words, "the phenomenon of lexical meaning occurs both in the mind and in the mind-in society" since "individuals contest concepts in the public arena, such concepts vary across society and across time, […] they may be part of or have an influence on political action" (*ibid.*: 239).

Having verified the awkwardness and constraint in presenting SSU, we want to challenge the biased notion of inclusiveness that is forcedly heralded in various institutional contexts. We have further shown that the current notion of inclusiveness has revealed its numerous fallacies by enacting avoidance, erasure, passivization and other discursive strategies that can be summarized under the over-arching phenomenon of misrepresentation. For this reason, we argue for the gradual substitution of this hetero-normative inclusiveness with a Discourse of co-existence. In such co-existence, centuries-old discourses of normative righteousness blend in with new practices that view non-normalized realities, for instance SSU, as fully-entitled social actors that are firmly lexicalized and able to express their experiences, relations and messages via different communicative resources.

7. Concluding remarks

In order to examine the communicative resources enacted at the discursive and linguistic levels to present SSU (SRQ) this study adopted hybrid methods that provided a variety of Queer and Critical frameworks informed by corpus tools to analyse data from multiple perspectives (MRQ). Therefore, notwithstanding the fervent criticism for C/QDS lack of empirical applicability and relevance, we contributed to the view that Queer perspectives can be combined with tools traditionally allocated to the realm of quantification.

The results showed that the enactment of the socio-semiotic meta-functions reveals clumsiness in presenting SSU. The various discursive constructions point to avoidance, vagueness and polarization to different degrees, whereas lexicalization is low, constrained and unsystematic.

While we can argue the extent to which SSU are inclusively represented by PMs and political institutions at large, it is indisputably the case that the current period is pervaded by discourses about diversity and inclusivity, prompted especially by bottom-up advocacy. Therefore, this growing awareness cannot be

ignored even among the most heteronormative standpoints. As hard it might seem to disagree with diversity, the discourses of PMs still need to be grounded in better understanding of how to address SSU in order to appreciate this multifarious reality, and to spread a more authentic message.

This study brought to the surface the persistence of institutionalized heteronormativity. While there is still much to do, the hope is that, notwithstanding ongoing discrimination and sexism, studies like this can inspire further research and contribute to social change. Relatedly, bringing together Giddens' (1991) post-modern reflexivity and Queer challenges to binarism, future prospects may include contributions to linguistic and discursive reformulations that do not bring forward a normative inclusivity, but instead the creation of co-existing linguistic and discursive practices where non-normalized individuals can inhabit with traditional models.

Due to its topicality and to the multi-angled methodology, this study faces a series of inevitable challenges. Some can object to the combination of Queer theory for the investigation of the legal recognition of SSU, since this process can be viewed as homonormative institutionalization of a practice which should escape any constraining encaging. Nonetheless, here the legal recognition of SSU is viewed as a breach in the core values of heteronormative societies. Siding with Critical scholars (Fairclough 1992; Wodak 2001) we maintain that when ideological clashes and contrapositions abound, ongoing turmoil and resistance to change begin. Despite the seemingly irreconcilable positions, the legal recognition of SSU – be it in the form of a marriage or a civil union – is not the end of the journey. Quite the contrary, in a C/QDS fashion this is a starting point for a broader process of dismantling dichotomy-driven views that currently dictate the few possibilities of how to be a woman or a man.

REFERENCES

Abbamonte, L. (2019) "The 2019 State of the Union Address – Trump's presidential rhetoric vs fact check in our poly-cross-media environment", paper presented at *5th Estidia Conference* (Naples, 19th-21st Sept. 2019).

------ (2018) *'Black Lives Matter': Cross-Media Resonance and the Iconic Turn of Language*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Althusser, L. (1970) *Essays on Ideology*, London: Verso.

Atkinson E. and De Palma R. (2009) "Un-believing the matrix: queering consensual heteronormativity", Gender and Education, 21(1): 17-29, DOI: 10.1080/09540250802213149.

Atkinson, M. (1984) *Our Masters' Voices*, London: Routledge.

Bachmann, I. (2011) "Civil partnership – 'gay marriage in all but name'. A corpus-driven analysis of discourses of same-sex relationships in the UK Parliament", *Corpora* 6(1): 77-105.

Baker, P. (2018). "Language, sexuality and corpus linguistics: Concerns and future directions", *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 7(2),263-279.

------ (2014) *Using corpora to analyse gender*, London: Bloomsbury.

------ (2005) *Public Discourses of Gay Men*, London: Routledge.

Balirano, G and Hughes, B. (2020) "Introduction", in Balirano, G. and Hughes, B. (eds) *Homing in on HATE: Critical Discourse Studies of Hate Speech, Discrimination and Inequality in the Digital Age*, Napoli: Loffredo Editore, V-XIV.

Bucci, W. and Baxter M. (1984) "Problems of Linguistic Insecurity in Multicultural Speech Contexts", *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 433: 185-200.

Butler, J. (2008) "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Times", *The British Journal of Sociology* 59(1): 1-23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2007.00176.x.

------ (1993) *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, London: Routledge.

------ (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge.

Cameron, D. and Kulick, D. (2003) *Language and Sexuality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cavaliere, F. (2012) *The Shaping of the News. How Information can be Molded by the Press*, Roma: La Nuova Cultura.

Chilton, P. (2008) "Political terminology", in Wodak, R. and Koller, V. (eds) *Handbook of Communication in the Public Sphere*, Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 225-242.

Coupland, N. (2010) "Other" representation, in Jaspers, J., Östman, J. and Verschueren, J. (eds) *Society and language use*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 241-260.

Crenshaw, K. (1991) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color", *Stanford Law Review* 43(6), 1241-1299. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039.

Dedaić, M. N. (2006) "Political Speeches and Persuasive Argumentation", in Brown K. (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of language and linguistics*, vol. 9, Amsterdam; Oxford: Elsevier, 700-707.

Demata, M. (2018) "'I think that Maybe I Wouldn't be Here if it Wasn't for Twitter.' Donald Trump's Populist Style on Twitter", Textus 31(1): 67-90.

Derks, M. and van den Berg, M. (2020) "Public Discourses About Homosexuality and Religion in Europe and Beyond: An Introduction", in Derks, M. and van den Berg, M. (eds) *Public Discourses About Homosexuality and Religion in Europe and Beyond*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-20.

Derrida, J. (1976) *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore MD: John Hopkins University Press.

Donà, A. (2021) "Somewhere over the rainbow: Italy and the regulation of same-sex unions", *Modern Italy* 26(3): 261-274 doi:10.1017/mit.2021.28

------ (2009) "From Pacs to Didore: Why are Civil Partnerships Such a Divisive Issue in Italian Politics?", *Bulletin of Italian Politics* 1(2): 333-46.

Edelman M. (1977) *Political language. Words that succeed and policies that fail*, New York: Academic Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*, London; New York: Longman.

------ (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. and Wodak, R. (1997) "Critical Discourse Analysis", in van Dijk, T. (ed.) *Discourse as Social Interaction*, London: Sage, 258-284.

Foucault, M. (1980) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writing 1972-1977*, New York: Pantheon Books.

------ (1978) The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction. New York NY: Penguin.

------ (1972). The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language. New York: Pantheon.

Fowler, R. (1985) "Power", in van Dijk, T. (ed.) *Handbook of discourse analysis: discourse analysis in society*, London: Academic Press, 61-82.

Fowler, R., Hodge, B., Kress, G. and Trew, T. (1979) *Language and control*, London: Routledge.

Giddens, A. (1991) Modernity and Self-Identity, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985) *An introduction to Functional Grammar*, London: Edward Arnold.

------ (1978) *Language as Social Semiotic: the Social Interpretation of Language and Meaning*, London: Edward Arnold.

Heritage, F. and Baker, P. (2021) "Crime or culture? Representations of chemsex in the British press and magazines aimed at GBTQ+ men", *Critical Discourse Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/17405904.2021.1910052

Jewitt, C., Bezemer, J. and O'Halloran, K. (2016) *Introducing Multimodality*, London: Routledge.

Jones, L., Mills, S., Paterson, L. L., Turner, G., & Coffey-Glover, L. (2017) "Identity and naming practices in British marriage and civil partnerships", *Gender and Language* 11(3): 309-335. https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.27916

Jørgensen, M. and Phillips, L. (2002) *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, London: Sage.

KhosraviNik, M. and Unger, J. (2016) "Critical Discourse Studies and Social Media: Power, Resistance and Critique in Changing Media Ecologies", in Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds) *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies*, London: Sage, 3rd edition, 206-233.

Koester, A. (2006) *Investigating Workplace Discourse*, London: Routledge.

Koller, V. (2019) "Critical Discourse Studies of Language and Sexuality", in Hall, K. and Barrett, R. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*, Oxford Handbooks Online: Oxford University Press. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212926.013.5

Kollman, K. (2009) "European institutions, transnational netwirks and national same-sex union policy: when soft law hits harder", *Contemporary politics* 15 (1): 37-53.

Krendel, A. (2020) "The men and women, guys and girls of the 'manosphere': A corpus-assisted discourse approach", *Discourse and Society* 31(6): 607-630. doi:10.1177/0957926520939690

Labov, W. (1966) "Hypercorrection by the Lower Middle Class as a Factor in Linguistic Change", in Bright, W. (ed) *Sociolinguistics: Proceedings of the UCLA Sociolinguistics Conference, 1964*, The Hague: Mouton, 84-113.

Labov, W. and Watelsky, J. (1967) "Narrative analysis: oral versions of personal experience", in Helms, J. (ed) Essays on the verbal and visual arts, Seattle: University of Washington Press,12-44.

Lakoff, R. (1973) "Language and woman's place", *Language in Society* 2(1): 45–80.

Lasio, D. and Serri, F. (2019) "The Italian public debate on same-sex civil unions and gay and lesbian parenting", *Sexualities* 22(4): 691-709.

Lazar, M. M. (ed.) (2005) *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*, London: Palgrave-Macmillan.

Leap, W. (2015) "Queer Linguistics as Critical Discourse Analysis" in Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. and Schiffrin, D. (eds) *The handbook of discourse analysis*, Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, 2nd edition, 661-680.

Love, R. and Baker, P. (2015) "The hate that dare not speak its name?", *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* 3(1): 57-86.

Makkonen, T. (2002) "Multiple, Compound and Intersectional Discrimination – Bringing Experiences of the Most Disadvantaged to the Fore", *Institute for Human Rights Research Reports* 11: (http://www.abo.fi/instut/imr/norfa/timo.pdf).

Marchi, A. and Taylor, C. (2018) "Introduction: Partiality and Reflexivity", in Taylor, C. and Marchi, A. (eds) *Corpus Approaches to Discourse: A Critical Review*, Oxford: Routledge,1-15.

------ (2009) "If on a winter's night two researchers ... A challenge to assumptions of soundness of interpretation", *CADAAD* 3(1): 1-20.

McEnery, T. and Hardie, A. (2012) *Corpus Linguistics Method, Theory and Practice*, Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP.

Milani, T. (2018) "Queering Language, Gender and Sexuality: Theory and Practice", in Milani, T. (ed) *Queering Language, Gender and Sexuality*, London: Equinox, 1-12.

------ (2015) "Language, Gender and Sexuality in South Africa", *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus* 46: i.

------ (2013) "Are 'queers' really 'queer'? Language, identity and same-sex desire in a South African online community", *Discourse and Society* 24 (5): 615-633.

Motschenbacher, H. (2019) "Discursive shifts associated with coming out: A corpus-based analysis of news reports about Ricky Martin", *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23(3): 284-302. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1111/josl.12343

------ (2018) "Corpus linguistics in language and sexuality studies: Taking stock and looking ahead", *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 7(2): 145-174. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.17019.mot

------ (2011) "Taking Queer Linguistics further: Sociolinguistics and critical heteronormativity research", *International Journal of the Sociology and Language*, 212: 149-179.

------ (2010) *Language, Gender and Sexual Identity: Poststructuralist Perspectives*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.29

Partington, A. (2006) "Metaphors, motifs and similes across discourse types: Corpus- assisted discourse studies (CADS) at work", in Stefanowitsch, A.

and Gries, S. (eds) *Corpus-based approaches to metaphor and metonymy*, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 267-304.

------ (2004) "'Utterly content in each other's company': semantic prosody and semantic preference", *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 9(1): 131-56.

Partington, A., and Marchi, A. (2015) "Using corpora in discourse analysis" in Biber, D. and Reppen, R. (eds) *The Cambridge Handbook of English Corpus Linguistics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 216-234 doi:10.1017/CBO9781139764377.013

Paterson, L. and Coffey- Glover, L. (2018) "Discourses of marriage in same- sex marriage debates in the UK press 2011– 2014", *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 7 (2): 175-204.

Paterson, L. and Turner, G. (2019) "Approaches to discourses of marriage", *Critical Discourse Studies* DOI: 10.1080/17405904.2019.1657030.

Pêcheux, M. (1982) *Language, Semantics and Ideology*, London: Macmillan.

Schröter, M. and Taylor, C. (eds.) (2018) *Exploring silence and absence in discourse: Empirical approaches*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sinclair, J. (1991) *Corpus Concordance Collocation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sundaram, V. and Sauntson, H. (2016) "Discursive silences: using critical linguistic and qualitative analysis to explore the continued absence of pleasure in sex and relationships education in England", *Sex Education* 16(3): 240-254, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2015.1058771

Turner, G., Mills, S., van der Bom, I., Coffey-Glover, L., Paterson, L. and Jones, L. (2018) "Opposition as victimhood in newspaper debates about same-sex marriage", *Discourse and Society* 29(2): 180-197.

van der Bom, I., Coffey-Glover, L., Jones, L., Mills, S. and Paterson, L. (2015) "Implicit homophobic argument structure: Equal-marriage discourse in The Moral Maze", *Journal of Language and Sexuality* 4 (1): 102-137.

van Dijk, T. A. (2006) "Politics, ideology, and discourse", in Brown, K. (ed) *The Encyclopedia of language and linguistics*, vol. 9 Oxford; New York: Pergamon Press, 728-740.

------ (1998) *Ideology: a multidisciplinary approach*, London: Sage.

------ (1995) "Ideological Discourse Analysis", in Ventola, E. and Solin, A. (eds.) *New Courant. Interdisciplinary Approaches to Discourse Analysis*, 4:135-161.

van Leeuwen, T. (2008) *Discourse and Practice*, Oxford: OUP.

------ (1996) "The representation of social actors", in Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. and Coulthard, M. (eds) *Texts and Practices*, London and New York: Routledge, 32-70.

Vessey, R. (2013) "Challenges in cross-linguistic corpus-assisted discourse studies", *Corpora* 8(1): 1-26.

Vigo, F. (2015) "And what about same sex marriages? A corpus-based analysis of lexical choices and social attitudes", in Balirano, G. and Nisco, M. C. (eds) *Languaging Diversity. Identities, Genres, Discourses*, Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 197-210.

Wagenknecht, P. (2007) "Was ist Heteronormativitat? Zu Geschichte und Gehalt des Begriffs", in Hartmann, J., Klesse, C., Wagenknecht, P., Fritzsche, B.

and Hackmann, H. (eds) *Heteronormativitat. Empirische Studien zu Geschlecht, Sexualitat und Macht*, Wiesbaden: VS Verlag fur Sozialwissenschaften,17-34.

Weiss, M. (2013) "Prejudice Before Pride: Rise of an Anticipatory Countermovement", in Weiss, M. and Bosia, M. (eds) *Global Homophobia*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 149-73.

Wilson, J. (2001) "Political Discourse", in Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D. and Hamilton, H. (eds) *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Oxford: Blackwell, 399-415.

Winkler, M. (2017) "Italy's Gentle Revolution: The New Law on Same-Sex Partnerships" *The Digest. National Italian American Bar Association Law Journal* 25: 1-31.

------ (2016) "At Long Last, Italy Moves to Comply with European Human Rights Imperative to Recognize Same-Sex Partners", *LGBT Law Notes* https://www.academia.edu/26095488/At_Long_Last_Italy_Moves_to_Comply_with_European_Human_Rights_Imperative_to_Recognize_Same_Sex_Partners

Winter, B., Forest, M. and Sénac, R. (2018) "Introduction", in Winter, B., Forest, M. and Sénac, R. (eds) *Global Perspectives on Same-Sex Marriage. A Neo-Institutional Approach*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 1-18.

Wodak, R. (2009) "Language and Politics", in Culpeper, J., Kerswill, P., Wodak, R., McEnery, A. and Katamba, F. (eds) *English Language. Description, Variation, Context*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 576-593.

------ (2001) "The discourse-historical approach", in Wodak, R. and Meyer, M. (eds.) *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage, 63-94.