Frames and political choice in Scottish election campaigns

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Abstract

The paper presents interdisciplinary research using the framework of cognitive linguistics based metaphor theory and nationalism studies of political science. Frames of movement are placed under scrutiny during the discourse analysis of the 2016 and 2021 election manifestos of the Scottish National Party and social media posts. In relation to metaphors of movement, images describing the future of an independent Scotland are also detected. The authors attempt to analyse and interpret findings both from the perspective of cognitive linguistics and ethno-symbolism. Apart from the texts of the manifestos, the timeframe of the research involved social media posts two months preceding and two months following the elections in both cases. Methodology was issue-driven and computer assisted but supervised: key words linked to movement were extracted from the manifestos and clustered. Their occurrence and frequency in the social media posts was checked. In the qualitative analysis phase, messages of the manifestos and of the posts were contrasted in order to answer our research question what kind of persuasive political discourse was used when options for the citizens were outlined.

Keywords: discourse analysis, cognitive metaphor, nationalism, elections, Scotland

1. Introduction

The Scottish elections held on 5 May 2016 resulted in the victory of the Scottish National Party (SNP) with 63 Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSP); two short of achieving a clear majority (Aiton et al. 2016: 3). The SNP secured its third electoral victory in the history of the devolved Scotland, being in power continuously since 2007; however, the elections also had another winner. The Scottish Conservatives increased their share of votes and became the largest opposition party in Holyrood, surpassing Scottish Labour (Anderson 2016: 559–560). Thus, Scottish party politics was now placed on a new spectrum where the voice of independent Scotland was still represented by the SNP, but for the first time, the nationalists' biggest pro-Union opposition group was not Labour, but the Scottish Conservatives. With the SNP in power and the Conservatives as leaders of the opposition in Scotland and government party in Westminster, the polarization over the constitutional question became even deeper, a

situation which was exacerbated further by the June 2016 referendum on the UK's EU membership (Simpkins 2017).

This new dynamism in party politics remained unchanged during the 2021 Scottish elections which took place on 6 May. Undoubtedly, the biggest winner of the day was the SNP, which, with 64 MSPs, secured more than double the number of seats won by the second placed party, the Scottish Conservatives (Aiton et al. 2021:3). The campaign of political parties was faced with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, but relative optimism was also present as the rollout of vaccines was speeding up with 52 percent of the Scottish population receiving their first dose by 6 May (UK Government 2021). The results of the elections meant that the SNP came short of an overall parliamentary majority, but instead of forming another minority government, the nationalists made a cooperation agreement with the fourth largest parliamentary party, the Scottish Greens (Gilman and McKay 2021: 6–13). In the history of modern Scotland since the 1999 devolution, this was the third time a coalition government was formed to lead the country, but the first occasion that a pro-independence coalition was born with the prospect of holding another referendum on Scottish independence in the new parliamentary term.

2. Theoretical background: Nationalism, symbols and framing

Nationalism is a modern movement in politics, primarily concerned with elite-driven political and cultural transformation of a community (Breuilly 1993, 1996; Gellner 1983, Anderson 1983, Smith 2009). At the very core of the nationalist doctrine lies the central argument that a nation exists with distinctive character and the interests of the community must be prioritized over other considerations to ensure that the nation can secure independence (Breuilly 1993: 2). In this process, symbolic resources (traditions, memories, values, myths and symbols) play an important part as identification to specific community is not a static sense of belonging, rather a socially constructed and reconstructed attachment that is defined by political elites according to changing conditions and contexts (Özkirimli 2010: 88). Politicians give new meaning to already existing cultural symbols in a community, adapt old institutions and customs and even invent new traditions (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983: 1–2). The reason for this is that these symbols can be used as political resources; they become referents of identification for the community, making it easier to forge political identity and use it in the struggle for political power (Brass 1991: 15; O'Leary 2001: 148). Cultural and symbolic elements of myth, memory, value, symbol and communication code thus provide frameworks for political aspiration, and therefore, the study of nationalism should be primarily concerned with analysis of these resources (Smith 1986: 14; Smith 2009: 18).

Our research used two theories of political communication as background: the functional theory of political campaigns (Benoit 2017) and political framing (Druckman 2010). The functional theory (Benoit 2017: 196–202) centres on campaign topics and the way candidates establish preferability when distinguishing themselves from opponents by acclaiming, attacking and defending. Campaign discourse on their personality and programme is disseminated by various sources. As to candidates' character, personal qualities, leadership ability and ideals are presented. After assessing policy options, constituents are encouraged to

vote either retrospectively, based on a candidate's past deeds and merits, or prospectively, based on a means–end analysis of future plans and goals.

Framing has multiple definitions dependent on the discipline (e.g. psychology, linguistics, media studies) where it appears. Cognitive frames or conceptual frames are semantic domains which relate to particular events, each containing certain scripts, which comprise particular roles (Goffman 1974; Schank and Abelson 1977; Brown and Yule 1991; Ziem and Schwerin 2014). Framing is closely related to context in broad sense. The constituents of context are situation and language, whose perception by the participants in communication can be negotiated, consequently, it is considered dynamic (Verschueren 1999: 87–95). Out of the three decisive factors of the situation (the mental, the physical and the social world), the mental world of the participants in a communicative situation, that is, the cognitive and emotional condition of a targeted individual or community is the easiest to impact. This explains why framing is exploited in political communication: certain aspects of a topic may be foregrounded while others may seem non-existent or irrelevant. Thus, in media framing, for instance, an episodic news frame (a concrete, event- or person-related news report) or a thematic news frame (a more abstract news report on policy) can be selected. The significance of framing for political communication is that it prepares the target audience for recognising and complementing scripts and frames even when they are not explicitly worded. As a result, voters are self-persuaded as they believe they have developed a perspective for themselves. According to Druckman (2010: 187), in campaign communication framing may range from 'equivalence framing' (attributing minimal difference to two things) to 'emphasis framing' (placing something in two opposing contexts suggesting contradictory judgement), the latter being more typical in competing political programmes. Obviously, framing in political communication is intended to influence the voters' attitude and behaviour.

Metaphors and other figurative language are efficient tools of shifting frames nearly unnoticed, in other words, of re-contextualising facts and events. Cognitive linguistics theories have proven that metaphors and other figurative language are not simply rhetorical patterns, rather, ways of conceptualising things of both physical and social reality, including politics and international relations (Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Lakoff 1996; Gibbs and Steen 1999; Handl and Schmid 2011; Gibbs 2017). Cognitive linguistics research has produced a great amount of literature on the role of figurative language in discourse (for example, Gibbs 2008; Halverson and Engene 2010; Kövecses 2010; Semino and Demjén 2017). Political discourse analysis has integrated metaphor and metonymy as means of examination of political concepts (Carver and Jernej 2008; Rycker and Don 2013; Wodak and Frochtner 2018). Consequently, cognitive metaphor theory seems to be applicable in research into political framing as an impactful means of persuasion.

An attempt to interpret metaphors in the context of ethnosymbolism may prove fruitful. Since metaphors are closely interrelated with culture, we assumed ties between metaphors used in the SNP campaigns and Scottish cultural traits. As Anthony D. Smith stated, 'Landscape, language, ethno-history, public religion and rituals are foundations of ethnic traditions and national identity, which may provide cohesion to a national state' (2007: 335). In our analysis an investigation of metaphors of movement seemed appropriate for understanding the justification of Scottish independence efforts.

3. Methodology

A comparative quantitative and qualitative analysis of the 2016 and of the 2021 Scottish National Party Manifestos was conducted. We applied computer-assisted methods for a corpus-based analysis with a supervised approach (Franzosi 2018; Kutter 2018), using AntConc Tool. Regarding the political framing of independence efforts, we focused on conceptual metaphors which can nearly unnoticeably influence voters because they are deeply embedded in culture. Our focus was metaphors of movement representing political decisions and political action.

For identifying metaphors of movement referring to progression or the lack of it, we used the methodology of the Pragglejaz Group (Pragglejaz Group 2007; Steen 2007). After reading the manifestos several times, we double-coded verbs of movement for literal and non-literal meaning in context and grouped the ones found metaphoric into three categories: progress, stagnation/stationarity and regression. Then a quantitative analysis of the two manifestos was conducted with AntConc. Our presumptions were as follows:

Hypothesis 1 was that the change independence would mean would be described by the conceptual metaphor of progress (movement ahead), whereas failing to become independent would be equalled with stagnation or regression.

Hypothesis 2 was that references to Scottish identity would be made by citing shared heritage such as customs, language, historical monuments. In order to test this presumption, we have included in our research key word references to Scotland and Scottish people as well as allusions to cultural peculiarities.

All the language tools are considered functional in the campaigns, that is, they serve the purpose of persuasion. This is especially true for metaphors and metonyms as suggested by available literature (Charteris-Black 2011; Musolff 2015; 2016;). A limitation of our research is, however, that we have selected and focused only on the possible link between metaphors of movement and political choice.

4. General remarks on the brochures

The title of the 2016 brochure is *Re-elect* and the digital version of the brochure proposes downloading a vision app for further content. Its print copies were disseminated by post. Its cover bears the photo of Nicola Sturgeon and the first pages (2016: 1−3) provide a visual summary of the major achievements of the previous term of the SNP government. The section *Stronger for Scotland* describes the performance of the incumbent government in safeguarding national interests (2016: 4−5). Pages 6 and 7 include a photo of Nicola Sturgeon and her short, print message, page 8 and 9 highlight the major points of the party programme. An interesting feature of the 2016 brochure is the short, thematic messages by supporters of the SNP coming from various social backgrounds, which are illustrated by attractive photographs probably taken in their homes or everyday environment (2016: 10; 14; 18; 20; 22; 24). These show similarities to episodic news frames discussed above. The reader gets the impression they will read a programme compiled by "ordinary people", which makes them more receptive to the messages of the text of the manifesto. Only then begins the presentation of the formal text of

the programme with the contents page. It will be discussed in more detail below, in the section titled Framing independence endeavours in 2016.

The title of the 2021 brochure is *Scotland's Future*, which indicates that the future vision of an independent Scotland is placed in the focus. Nicola Sturgeon's photos are on the cover and on page 3, with her address between. The brochure has a digital version, which we have used for analysis, but it was also disseminated in print form. Remarkably, the digital version is accessible to all people having a disability. Its structure is discussed below in the section titled Framing independence endeavours in 2021. The graphics depict the people it is intended for, notably including faces from diverse age groups and ethnic groups, visually reinforcing the content on creating a modern, multi-cultural and multi-lingual, independent Scotland. Episodic news frames are applied about ordinary citizens who support the SNP. With short video messages by leaders of the SNP and supporters (2021: 14–15) it gives the impression that the reader can hear "the people's voice". On page 44, small clickable thematic icons guide the user to further details of the key programme points of the SNP. On page 75, a short video can be clicked on and launched, in which a young female voter summarizes the events of the previous year of the COVID pandemic, also describing the grievances of the Scottish people caused by the UK government and encouraging citizens to vote for SNP and independence.

In summary, the title of the 2016 brochure implies that achievements of the government and of the First Minister are centred on, probably encouraging retrospective voting, while the 2021 brochure seems to be more focused on the future of an independent Scotland, suggesting a strategy to gain prospective votes.

5. Findings and discussion

Hypothesis 1

An underlying feature of both the 2016 and 2021 manifestos was an event-structure metaphor (Lakoff 1993; Kövecses 2010), which could be summarized as a construction from the conventional metaphors PROGRESS IS MOVING FORWARD; CHANGES ARE MOVEMENTS; LONG-TERM, PURPOSEFUL ACTIVITIES ARE JOURNEYS; PURPOSES ARE DESTINATIONS (Kövecses 2010:162–165). This is reflected by the data on frequency of the elements in the categories. The tables below present data on the frequency of verbs of progression, verbs of stationary and verbs of regression in the 2016 manifesto entitled *Re-elect*.

Table 1: *Most used verbs of progression in the 2016 brochure*

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
continue	116
bring; bring forward	39
progress; make progress; increase, deliver, accelerate, see, sustain, support progress	18
act; take action; reinforce action	10
take steps	9
leave	3
go further	2
shift	2

replace	1
advance	1
Total number of most used verbs of progression:	**208**

Table 2: Most used verbs of stationary in the 2016 brochure

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
maintain	26
keep	13
remain	13
stand	11
stop; halt	5
stay	5
Total number of most used words of stationary	**73**

Table 3: Most used verbs of regression in the 2016 brochure

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
return	2
fall behind	1
go back	1
refuse to take steps	0
send into decline	0
does not take action	0
take wrong direction	0
Total number of most used verbs of regression	**4**

The most prominent feature of the data from 2016 is that references to movement ahead substantially exceed references to stationarity and, especially, regression. Another noticeable fact is that movement ahead is identified with independence (the word occurs 7 times, as well as "independent" in the 2016 manifesto). For instance, the section entitled Moving Scotland Forward starts with the following:

(1)   *We will achieve independence only when the majority of our fellow citizens are persuaded that it offers the best future for our country* (2016:23).

Thus, the efforts for independence are described metaphorically as progressing on a journey towards a destination which is the objective of political action: an independent Scotland. On the contrary, abandoning the objective of independence is described metaphorically as stopping along the journey and objections to attaining the goal of independence are impediments blocking the way forward.

(2)   *At the same time if there is a clear demand for a referendum no politician has the right to stand in the way of the people of Scotland to choose their own future* (2016:24)

In comparison to the data in the tables above, statistics on the same categories proved to be different in the 2021 manifesto, as it can be seen below.

Table 4: *Most used verbs of progression in the 2021 brochure*

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
continue	52
bring; bring forward	32
move; remove	24
progress; make progress;	22
increase, deliver, accelerate, see, sustain, support progress	
replace	7
take steps	7
shift	5
leave	5
leave	5
act; take action; reinforce action	5
advance	2
Total number of most used verbs of progression:	**174**

Table 5: *Most used verbs of stationary in the 2021 brochure*

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
remain	31
keep	23
maintain	18
stop; halt	6
stay	4
stand	2
Total number of most used words of stationary	**84**

Table 6: *Most used verbs of regression in the 2021 brochure*

Categories of verbs	Occurrences
return	6
take wrong direction	2
go back	2
refuse to take steps	1
send into decline	1
does not take action	1
fall behind	1
Total number of most used verbs of regression	**14**

One explanation for the significant increase in references to stationarity and regression is that the SNP got strong rival parties, the Scottish Conservatives, and the Scottish Greens, in the election campaign, which required clearer alternative visions of the future. In addition, Brexit reinforced the future vision of an independent Scotland and served as a strong argument for fighting for it in the hope of firm support from the European Union into which it may return. Remarkably, the tone of the 2021 manifesto is more determined. For example, it contains 18 mentions of *independent* and 16 of *independence*, which is more than double of the 2016 occurrences. More importantly, outspoken criticism and political attack are targeted at the Westminster government by the 2021 manifesto.

The metaphoric presentation of the complex political procedure of Scotland becoming independent can be summarised in Figure 1 below.
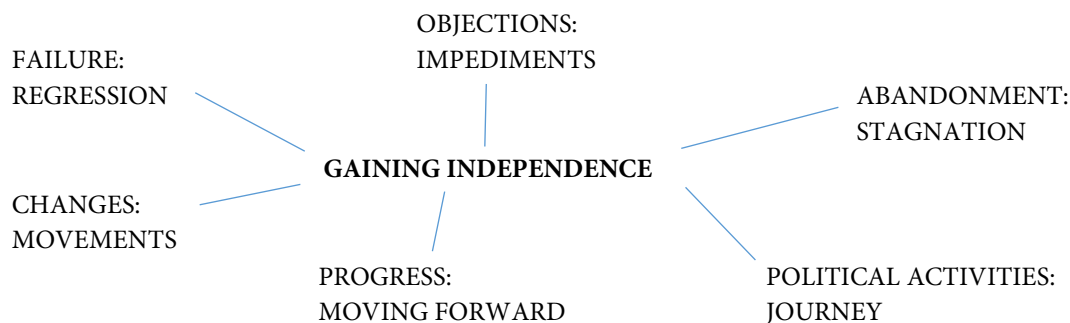

Figure 1: The event-structure metaphor of gaining independence based on Kövecses (2010: 163)

Hypothesis 2
We presumed that both manifestos would include allusions to Scottish identity and culture. Nevertheless, references to Scotland, Scots and other related words were diverse in amount.

Table 7: The frequency of references to Scotland and its people in the 2016 and 2021 brochures

Word	Occurrences in 2016	Occurrences in 2021
Scotland	318	361
Scottish	170	107
People	144	178
National	121	97
Communities	78	64
Community	62	52
Nation	19	16
Gaelic	4	18
Scots	2	7

It appears that *Scotland* was used both in its literal meaning (the geographical area) and non-literal (the state and its population) more increasingly in 2021, but mentions of *Scottish* and *nation* decreased in number. In contrast, references to Gaelic more than quadrupled by 2021. *Nation* and *national* seem to be slightly avoided in 2021, alongside with *community* and *communities*, which might be deemed too ethnicity-centred or nationalist. This may be underpinned by the increased use of *people*. *People* may be judged a more inclusive and stylistically less loaded term than *nation* or even *community*. The quote below is an example for innovative framing of the revival of national language and preservation of national culture.

(3)   *We will also bring forward a new Scottish Languages Bill which takes further steps to support Gaelic, acts on the Scots language and **recognises that Scotland is a multilingual society*** (2021:66). (Emphasis added by the authors.)

This illustrates how love for one's ancient native language is conceptualised in terms of globalisation and modern political discourse, and thus re-interpreted and re-framed. The quote implies that the Scottish National Party is tolerant and inclusive and is in harmony with multi-culturalism and multi-lingualism. This trend fits well into the Scottish political elite's

project of creating a so-called "multicultural Scotland" which sees the country as a civic and inclusive nation that wants to join the "family of nations" through independence (Leith and Soule 2012; El Fekih Said 2018; Keating and McGarry 2001; Bechhofer and McCrone 2009).

Framing independence endeavours in 2016

The contents page of the 2016 manifesto includes the following themes: A Healthier Scotland; A Smarter Scotland; A Wealthier Scotland; A Fairer Scotland; Scotland's Future; A Thriving Rural Scotland; A Greener Scotland; An Empowered Scotland; A Safer Scotland; An International Scotland; A Creative Scotland. The comparative forms of adjectives imply that the vision of the future involves improvement and development compared with the current state of the country, which is linked to independence. It is summarised as follows:

(4)   *We will undertake new work, starting this summer, with the aim of persuading a clear majority of people in Scotland that independence is the best future for our country.* (2016:11)

The language of the manifesto uses key words of the modern global and EU discourse, such as *innovation* (21), *internationalisation* (21), *sustainable* (27). On the whole, emphasis is laid on the description of Scottish independence efforts as fitting the modern global world:

(5)   *Scotland will use its international engagement to continue to act as a good global citizen.* (2016:41)

Unique Scottish tradition is mentioned in the section Thriving Rural Scotland, below the subheading Modernising Crofting (2016:25), when the community ownership of land known from national history is discussed. The sub-section includes a promise to maintain croft housing and establish a new system of new woodland crofts, apart from modernising legislation on crofting. This could be an example for filling an old, historical concept in the shared background knowledge of a community with new meaning. Crofting is actually framed as suiting the modern goal of sustainable agricultural production.

 Hutting, which is mentioned on page 27, was another peculiar characteristic of Scottish lifestyle between the two world wars, when industrial workers used to rent a small plot of land on which they built a small hut from timber. These huts had no running water and electricity in the past, which counted harsh conditions, however, currently it is regarded eco-conscious and eco-friendly (*What is Hutting?* n.d.). The manifesto promises to promote and help maintain the historically rooted hutting lifestyle. It is another example for a deep-rooted tradition reconceptualised and revived in the framework of modern life. Beside these two peculiarities of Scottish culture, the Gaelic language and Gaelic Art (2016:43) are mentioned, together with a Historic Environment Scotland Strategy (2016:44). On the whole, old Scottish lifestyle and independence are presented as the natural way of life of the people living in Scotland. Contrary to our expectations founded on ethno-symbolism, their Scottish nature is less emphatic, probably because of the impact of global culture and the objective of creating an inclusive, multi-cultural society.

Framing independence endeavours in 2021

The 2021 manifesto is structured around the following themes according to the contents page: Leading Scotland out of the COVID crisis; A democratic nation; Our vision; A caring society; An equal society; Living better; An economy that works; Land of opportunity; A net zero nation; Scotland in the world. As suggested by the section titles, the independence ambitions of Scotland are placed within the conceptual frames of a fair and inclusive society striving for the equality of citizens; the benefits of global economy, and protection of the environment, especially preventing climate change.

The language used for presenting the ideas integrates key phrases of modern EU discourse and globalist discourse. For example:

(6)   *Scotland is a **welcoming and inclusive nation**.* (2021:72)

(7)   *We **rely on migration** to grow our population.* (2021:72)

(8)   *We will work **to build Scotland's population sustainably**.* (2021:72)

(9)   (*Over the course of the next parliament we will:*) *Create a new global affairs framework, underpinned by Scotland's **fundamental values and priorities** and adopt a **feminist foreign policy**.* (2021:72)

(10)   *Support the establishment of an **Institute for Peacekeeping** and a **Scottish Council for Global Affairs**.* (2021:72)

(11)   *We place great importance on Scotland being **a good global citizen**.* (2021:74)

(emphasis added by the authors)

The examples prove that nationalist ambitions are framed as up-to-date and conforming to the trends in international relations. At the same time, the brochure refutes possible criticism claiming that independence would result in isolation and lack of development. However, whereas in 2016 certain cultural elements and Scottish lifestyles acted as references of independence endeavours, these were completely missing in 2021. The possible explanation for this is that the nation-building project has 'progressed' even further towards an outward looking and multicultural nationalism. Cultural references were left behind or were re-framed (such as Gaelic being understood as one of the many languages of Scotland) to fit the image of an inclusive and welcoming community. Therefore, a rather interesting, but seemingly contradictory pro-independence discourse emerged which defines the independent Scottish nation in terms of a globalist conceptual framing.

6. Conclusion

In our research metaphors of movement were examined through quantitative and qualitative analysis. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of key words was also conducted.

The independence efforts of the Scottish National Party are reflected in their 2016 and 2021 election campaign manifestos, in which an event-structure metaphor describing the complex process of gaining independence can be detected. Political struggle for gaining independence is conceptualised as movement forward during a journey, and problems are presented as blocking the way. Independence is progress, which suggests that the means and the end-state are interchanged. Abandoning the endeavour for independence would mean

regression or stationarity. Consequently, independence is described as a necessity for making progress. Hypothesis 1 has been supported.

The key words analysis of references to Scotland and its people did not confirm our expectations that a strong link could be established between allusions to cultural heritage and persuasive political communication. Instead, functional discourse was developed from a combination of SNP-related, EU-related and global discourse, which served the purpose of acceptance of the independence efforts home and abroad. Although it exploited a few culturally loaded words and concepts (especially in the 2016 manifesto), it did not fully underpin Hypothesis 2 concerning the cohesive force of shared cultural symbols and background knowledge of an ethnic group.

Our research findings are limited to the metaphor cluster of progress, stationarity and regression. Further examination of the conceptual metaphors may offer an explanation to the communication technique which has successfully mingled discourse about an independent Scotland, discourse about current global issues, and key words from shared Scottish background knowledge. Research should be extended to other election campaign brochures in order to gain a better understanding of the development of the SNP discourse.

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