

"Empty or overloaded? A comparative analysis of the keywords populism and populist in Belgian, French, and Spanish political and media discourses"

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ABSTRACT

Populism is a highly contested concept in academic and public debate which has been discussed within various fields as being "exceptionally vague" and used "in different contexts to a bewildering variety of phenomena" (Canovan, 1999: 3). Recent studies that analyse the uses of the term in discourse from the perspective of linguistics (Kranert, 2020; Thornborrow et al., 2021) have provided empirical results that present a challenge to a common view on populism as "empty" or "floating signifier" (Laclau, 2005). These studies suggest that populism is not used randomly, nor can it be perceived as empty of meaning. More research on the pragmatic function of the term in discourse is needed to understand this polysemic term. This paper presents some of the findings from the cross-linguistic analysis of the terms populism(s) and populist(s) in Belgian, French, and Spanish media discourses. Specifically, through the lens of sociopolitical keywords (Jeffries and Walker, 2017) and discourse keywords (Schröter et al., 2019), it compares the occurrences of the token *populis** in media outlets of French-speaking Belgium, Dutch-speaking Belgium, France, and Spain published in 2019. Using a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach, this paper analyses quantitatively and qualitatively articles containing *populis** collected from digital media sources including public-owned media, established media, serious-popular media, and free daily media in each country. By analysing different types of media discourse in the studied sociopolitical contexts, this paper aims to determine the features o...

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