



The voice of 'the people' in news discourse: a cross-cultural study of populism

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The project

Right-wing populism in the news media: A cross-cultural study of journalist practices and news discourse

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Populism as a particular appeal to (claim of representing) the people

“Populism ... is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society.” (Canovan 1999)

“Populism ... is a particular *moralistic imagination of politics*, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified – but ... ultimately fictional - people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior” (Muller, 2014: 19)



The overall question

How are populist representations of 'the people' articulated and negotiated in news media?

What we know

News journalism tends to be more critical towards right-wing populist parties/politicians

News journalism (in some context) tends to contribute to populist narratives/discourses

(E.g. Herkman, 2016; Moffitt, 2016; Mudde, 2007; Esser et al 2017)

What we know less about

HOW news journalism contribute to such narratives

What discursive practices and mechanism?



Data

Broadcast news from EUP election campaign in 2014 + election campaigns and other news events in 2016 and 2017 (four countries)



Analytical framework

The socio-cultural and political contexts

The news discourse

The practices, sub-genres and structural elements of (in this case) broadcast news/journalism (Montgomery, 2007)

The discursive representation of actors/identities and relationships

Stance

How journalists position themselves and others, position actors as good or bad etc.



Four central practices (and elements) of the news discourse



1. The framing of news reports (in news headlines, reporter voices etc)

Example (Nick Robinson, BBC News May 1, 2014)

“The gap between what people are being told, that their business or the economy really is recovering, and what they feel is a real problem for the government because it fuels a sense of unfairness. A sense that someone else, somewhere else, is doing a whole lot better than me.”

Ref: Ekström and Morton, A (2017) “The performance of right-wing populism” In Ekström, M and Firmstone, J (Eds) *The Mediated politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse*. Palgrave.



2. Vox pops: Citizens' entitlement to speak with their own voice. How citizen's voices are contextualized (made meaningful)

Example: (French TF1 May 7th 2014)

Voice over: Will people here feel more European than elsewhere
when it comes to voting on 25th May?

Vox pop 1: I don't believe in anything any more

Vox pop 2: I don't vote

Vox pop 3: personally I don't really care

Vox pop 4: what's the point (.) whether we vote or not- nothing much will change

Ref: Ekström, M and Tolson, A (2017) Citizens talking politics in the news.

In *The Mediated politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse*. Palgrave.



3. News interviews: Politicians enactment of populism in claims of representing the people and being one of the people

Example (Interview with Marine Le Pen (IE), in F2, May 21, 2014)

- IE **stop your statistics your graphs and your figures alright=**
IR [I can't stop them Madame le Pen because this is reality]
IE [**=the economy is about men and women who are born**]
IR you can't stop reality
IE **who live who** go to school who work who retire and who look after their health
/.../
and **what I see** Monsieur Lenglet **and what everyone sees**
out there on the ground is that all the jobs that have been
lost were lost because of unfair international competition

Ref: Ekström, M, Patrona, M and Thornborrow, J (2018) Populist style in mediated political performance, *Palgrave Communication*.

Ekström, M and Tolson, A (2017) Political Interviews: Pushing the boundaries of 'neutrality' .

In *The Mediated politics of Europe: A Comparative Study of Discourse*. Palgrave.



4. News interviews: Third party references in question design

Clayman (2007):

how journalists legitimize adversarial questioning in political interviews, claiming to ask the questions on behalf of the public (as public servants).

how journalists take up different stance in referring to people's opinions and voices ("I think what people are suggesting is ...", "People might be saying").

The role of a public servant is related to moral hierarchies, articulated in the stance journalists take up in relation to citizens and politicians.

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Stance: (a) the commitments to truth; (b) the evaluative (moral) stance



(All examples from UK)

Example 1 (Paxman interviewing UK EU Commissioner, BBC 1 24/5 2016)

IR many people fee::1 (0.5)

>that they have no control< over these institutions
which is just (.) obliging an elected government
to pass various regulation
just telling us how we should live our lives
Do you understand that anxiety?



Example 2

(Interview with David Cameron, ITV news 10 16 May 2014)

IR Has Nigel Farage read **the British people** in a way in which you haven't because **they clearly think he** understands their concerns particularly about immigration (.) and you don't,



Example 3

(Interview with David Cameron, Channel 4 news, 21 May 2014)

IR but people below don't
fee[I like that,

IE [Yeah but I think we I- I-
[I totally-

IR [And they .hh they think [you're=

IE [Yeah,

IR =remote you're an old etonian .hh you've got an
etonian crowd around you then in some way you're
remote from them, .hh It's alright for you ()
but not for them,

IE Well I don't think that's what the issue is
I think what the issue is- is that people have had a
difficult economic time in our country ((continues))



Conclusion

1. The active role of journalism in the construction of a moralistic imagination of the people.

In some contexts, established practices of news journalism (and the related social relationships) turn into populism.

Journalists invokes (or intensify) a moral order

2. Evaluative stance as a key discursive mechanism in the construction of populist discourse
3. Populist representations of ‘the people’ appear in milder and stronger versions (mitigated or intensified; indicated or explicitly stated).
Reporters *mimic* populist discourse, *validate* populist claims and rhetoric, and *contribute a favorable context* for populist actors to exploit.
4. In what context – media contexts and socio-political context – does this happen?