

Collocations in Politics: a Pragmatic Study of the Former British Prime Minister Theresa May's Brexit and Resignation Speeches

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Abstract:

The present study examines the types and functions of collocations in two of the former British Prime Minister Theresa May's political speeches: the Brexit and the Resignation speeches. The discussion is built upon Tanskanen's (2006) model of analysis. The main aim of this study is to identify (collocations) and to investigate their functions in the Prime Minister's two political speeches. This investigation discloses the hidden messages behind using collocations in May's two political speeches.

Key words: Collocations, Political discourse, Theresa May .

المتلازمات اللفظية في السياسة: دراسة تداولية لخطابي بريكست و الإستقالة لرئيسة

الوزراء البريطانية السابقة تيريزا ماي

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ملخص البحث:

تبحث هذه الرسالة في انواع و وظائف المتلازمات اللفظية لخطابين سياسيين لرئيسة الوزراء البريطانية السابقة تيريزا ماي تحديدا خطابي بريكست والاستقالة معتمدة على نموذج تانسكانن للتحليل . إن الهدف من وراء هذه الدراسة هو تحديد المتلازمات اللفظية و البحث في الوظائف التي تؤديها. ويفصح البحث عن الرسائل المبطنة خلف استخدام المتلازمات اللفظية في خطابي ماي السياسيين .
الكلمات المفتاحية: المتلازمات اللفظية، الخطاب السياسي، تيريزا ماي .

1. Introduction

Language is an integral part of our life. The way people use language varies from person to person depending on the message they want to convey. Therefore, different types of discourse can be found such as legal discourse, medical discourse, religious discourse, political discourse, etc. Each type is used in a specific situation for special purpose or reason. For example, politicians use certain techniques in their political speeches to achieve their interests; one of which is repetition which involves not only repeated words, but also phrases, clauses and even letters or ideas. Repetition can be of different types such as: synonyms, antonyms, collocations, paraphrasing, etc. which perform various functions like emphasis, expressing emotions, persuasion, etc. Collocation which is one of the major types of repetition and the main concern of the study plays an important role in discourse which can be seen in the way it builds the text and how it works as a powerful technique used by language users to deliver their own messages.

2. Tanskanen's (2006) Model

Tanskanen developed her own model which consists of a number of categories of lexical cohesion that are adopted from previous models. It was proposed in (2006) in her book *Collaborating towards Coherence*. This model includes the two basic categories borrowed from Halliday and Hasan's classification, namely: **reiteration** and **collocation**. Each of them consists of different ingredients which Tanskanen thinks "will not make the present model of analysis more complicated than necessary, but will instead provide a good basis for understanding the work done by lexical cohesion in discourse" (Tanskanen, 2006: 46-49). According to Tanskanen's (2006) model, reiteration relations involve **the simple and complex repetitions, substitution, equivalence, generalization, specification, cospecification, and contrast**, whereas, collocation relations consist of **ordered set, activity-related collocations, and elaborative collocations**.

3. Collocation Relations

The basic definition of collocation is introduced by Halliday and Hasan's (1976) in that they think collocation is "*the association created by habitually co-occurring lexical items. The items occur in similar environments because they describe things or happenings that occur in similar situations*" Tanskanen (2006: 60-61).

3.1 Ordered Set

Tanskanen (2006: 61) discusses the first subcategory of collocation relations which is the easiest to recognize among other subcategories. This category includes members of ordered sets of lexical items, such as, **colors, numbers, months, days of the week** and so forth. This type of relations is easy to find but infrequent. The following sentence suggests ordered set, **today – tomorrow – yesterday**:

The working people of today are the pensioners of tomorrow; the single people of today were the children of yesterday and are the parents of tomorrow.

3.2 Activity-related Collocations

According to Tanskanen (2006:61-62), the other collocation relations are not as systematic as the first one. They are kind of problematic because they do not follow certain rules, instead they are “based only on an association between items”. Activity-related collocations means the relation between items is based on an activity, so that to identify such items it is helpful to think of the relationship as resulted from such a relation. For example, the relation between **meals** and **eat** in the following sentence:

It means of course that they will have the utmost difficulty in paying for their meals in the refectories and that means that the refectories go into deficit if they can't afford to eat here

3.3 Elaborative Collocations

Tanskanen (2006:63) states that this category is “for all those pairs whose relation is impossible to define more specifically than stating that the items can somehow elaborate or expand on the same topic”. She, further, adds that the relationship between items is not random; rather, it is based on a frame concept. Frames are “*knowledge structures evoked by lexical items*”. This means that, if a text starts with a word like **education** so the frame is **education** and the following items are identified according to this frame. In the following example it can be noticed that **Cambridge** evokes **the university** frame, and **the Mill Lane lecture room** can be interpreted within this frame:

At the beginning of the Michaelmas term 1955, Sylvia's first year at Cambridge. I had walked into the Mill Lane lecture room a few minutes early

4. Political Discourse and Political Discourse Analysis

Discourse deals with the language of people and how they use it to serve their communicative needs. Therefore, various forms of discourse are found according to when and how people use language. Political discourse is regarded as one of those types of discourse, which is considered as the language that is used by politicians. Politicians construct messages that include the ideas and beliefs they want their audience to accept. These messages are known as political discourse that is formed to influence the hearers with its content so that politicians reach their goals. The main purpose of political discourse is to persuade listeners with the ideologies of the speaker to achieve social, economic, or cultural goals (Abu Assi, 2016:26).

Political discourse is associated not only with the text but also with the readers or speakers which are usually professional politicians like “presidents, prime ministers and other members of government, parliament or political parties”. That is to say, politicians employ a tool to control their audience and persuade them to act (i.e. language) (Adday, 2017:15). Furthermore, political discourse is also referred to as “*the study of political language where the focus is on aspects of language structure as it constitutes and displays specific political functions*” (Wilson, 2015: 776). The aim of political language is to influence listeners with politicians’ ideologies that are hidden behind their words. The political language is full of figurative language that works to evoke the hearers’ emotions and manipulate their decisions (Khdair, 2016:21).

At its simplest, political discourse analysis is the study of any text or talk that is related to politics and it is either produced by one person or many people but refers to the same subject. The purpose of political discourse analysis is to better comprehend the political ideas (Wollacott , 2011as cited in Gadalla, 2012:10). The political speakers express their ideas and beliefs by forming sentences and selecting certain words that affect their audience. Thus, political discourse analysis investigates the whole text or talk rather than single words or sentences to understand the hidden political messages (Al-Saeedi, 2017:711).

5. Contextual Background of Theresa May’s Political Speeches

The following is a brief contextual introduction about the two speeches of the prime minster Theresa May.

5.1 Theresa May's Brexit Speech Background

The Brexit speech was delivered on 17 January 2017 in Lancaster House. Theresa May provided information about the future relationship of Britain with the European Union and the world. May explained in her speech that the purpose of Brexit is for UK to leave the Single Market and control its borders but UK will keep paying into EU budget. May ended her speech asking UK to stand together to achieve Brexit goals (Tolhurst, 2017).

5.2 Theresa May's Resignation Speech Background

Theresa May declared that she had decided to resign as UK Prime Minister in her speech on May, 2019. She confirmed that she would resign as a leader of the Conservative and Unionist Party on 7 June. She delivered her speech on the doorstep of 10 Downing Street. May also announced that the election for new prime minister would be in the following week and the successor would replace her as a prime minister of UK. Finally, May ended this speech with tears for leaving the job she loved.

6. Data Analysis

May's speeches are characterized by the use of collocations as a technique to build the speech and deliver implied political messages. The speeches carry ideologies that attract the attention of the listeners to particular political facts. The following analysis of the data will be presented according to Tanskanen's (2006) model.

6.1 Theresa May's Brexit Speech Analysis

The Brexit speech is the clearest declaration made by Theresa May to demystify her statement "Brexit means Brexit". The speech introduces May's vision for Britain's exit from the European Union. The Prime Minister mainly addresses and negotiates with the European Union, and she sets out a plan for the country, including 12 points that the government will use to negotiate Brexit. She also provides details about the future of Britain's relationship with the EU and the rest of the world. May tries to achieve certain objectives by delivering this speech to reach her main goal which is to leave the EU. She obviously follows the strategy of persuading by striking a chord in all sides. The analysis that follows elaborates the significance of collocations in **May's** Brexit speech. The types and functions of collocations used by **Theresa May** are covered and discussed in the analysis according to Tanskanen's (2006) model.

6.1.1 Collocation Relations in Theresa May's Brexit Speech

Collocations are known to be difficult to identify; nevertheless the following discussion presents the three types of collocations.

6.1.1.1 Ordered Set

The first and clearest subcategory to be recognized in the classification of Tanskanen's (2006) model is the ordered set. However, they are not frequent in **May's** Brexit speech, that is to say the text is free of ordered set collocations.

6.1.1.2 Activity-related Collocations

The other type of **Tanskanen's** collocations is the activity-related collocations. Many activity-related collocations have been employed and sometimes repeated by **Theresa May** in her Brexit speech. Some of these relations will be offered in the following examples, the collocations "**shape - future, world, Britain**", in the sense that "**shape**" collocates with each of the nouns "**future**", "**world**" and "**Britain**". Also, the collocations "**embrace - world, policies**", in that "**world**" and "**policies**" are related to "**embrace**" by collocations relation.

The usage of the collocation in this example suggests the reasons why the British people voted for Brexit. The repetitive use of these collocations assures that Britain's exit from the EU is in favor of Britain and the whole world, particularly with respect to its contribution in developing and enriching the country throughout forming new partnerships and doing businesses all over the world. Next, illustrative examples are presented:

- (1) "They voted to shape a brighter future for our country".
- (2) "... we shaped them a brighter future".
- (3) "...will shape the world ahead".
- (4) "...shaping that stronger, fairer, global Britain...".
- (5) "...leave the European Union and embrace the world".
- (6) "...embrace the policies that would attract ..."

It is also clear that **Theresa May** utilizes other activity-related collocations to affirm that she and her government work to reach a Brexit deal that serves the interests of everyone. For instance, the following items

whose relation is based on an activity are considered as activity- related collocations: “**get - deal**”, “**put - deal**”, “**reach - deal, agreement**”.

(7) “One that **gets** us the right **deal** abroad but also ensures we **get** a better **deal** for ordinary working people at home”.

(8) “I can confirm today that the Government will **put** the final **deal**...”.

(9) “... and **reach** such a **deal** now”.

(10) “... who helped him **reach** an **agreement**...”.

Besides, the activity- related collocations are included to describe and emphasize the positive changes that will be made to the UK and the whole world after exiting the EU to attract the attention of people to the advantages of Brexit and thereby enlist their support. Some of these changes are represented in the following collocations: “**control -immigration**”, “**strengthen - the union**”, “**Strengthening - the United Kingdom**”, “**empowering - the UK**”,

(11) “... we can **control** **immigration** to Britain from Europe”.

(12) “...**strengthen** the precious **union** between the four nations ...”.

(13) “**Strengthening the United Kingdom**”.

(14) “...**empowering the UK** as an open, trading nation...”.

All in all, the activity- related collocations are included in the text to serve mainly as a **convincing** strategy to inform the UK citizens of the significant role the government plays in protecting and serving them as well as persuading the EU that Brexit is for the common good. Also, these collocations perform the functions of **promising** and **unifying** the British people as well as **warning** the EU not to act in a way prejudicial to the interests of Britain.

6.1.1.3 Elaborative Collocations

Elaborative collocations represent the relation between items in the sense that one is elaborate on the other. **May** inaugurates her speech talking about the changes that the UK citizens demanded and voted for. Further, these changes are confirmed and demonstrated through the next lines which expressly state shaping a brighter future for Britain, leaving the EU, and embracing the world. This kind of collocations is employed for the purpose of promising and attracting the attention to Britain's entitlement of exiting the Union. The next example explains the usage of this elaborative relation:

(1) "... the British people voted for change. They voted to shape a brighter future for our country. They voted to leave the European Union and embrace the world".

One of the reasons for which Britain decided to leave the EU is that the UK is different from other member states in terms of political traditions. May expands on political traditions mentioning that the UK has no written constitution but a principle of Parliamentary Sovereignty, only a recent history of devolved governance, and a little history of coalition government as shown below. This type of elaborative collocations is also used to persuade the listeners of Britain's right to leave the Union:

(2) "Our political traditions are different ... we have no written constitution, but the principle of Parliamentary Sovereignty is the basis of our unwritten constitutional settlement. We have only a recent history of devolved governance - though it has rapidly embedded itself - and we have little history of coalition government".

May gives detailed information regarding the benefits that the UK will gain from controlling the immigration. That is to say, Britain will experience the following: "filling skills shortages, delivering public services, making British businesses the world-beaters they often are". This is an attempt to view the positive changes that people will witness after Brexit and thus accept and support the government's endeavors.

(3) "Because while controlled immigration can bring great benefits - filling skills shortages, delivering public services, making British businesses the world-beaters they often are ...".

As a reminder of Britain's participation in protecting Europe, May lists the measures needed to keep the continent secure whom are led by the UK itself. These contributions are "implementing sanctions against Russia", "working for peace and stability in the Balkans", and "securing Europe's external border". The employment of this elaborative relation confirms Britain's services to the EU as demonstrated below:

(4) "Britain has led Europe on the measures needed to keep our continent secure - whether it is implementing sanctions against Russia following its action in Crimea, working for peace and stability in the Balkans, or securing Europe's external border. ...".

Generally speaking, the elaborative collocations are also inserted to perform the function of **persuasion** in the first place, as well as shedding lights and **affirming** the hard work performed by the UK government to meet the needs of the citizens.

The Brexit speech includes small number of collocations. Out of three categories, the text has only two types of collocations: **activity-related collocations** and **elaborative collocations**. The collocations are used for the purpose of increasing the cohesiveness of the text. Besides, using collocations in an appropriate way reveals how skillful the speaker is at using vocabulary to construct an effective political speech. Table (1) views the distribution of the different functions served by the collocations relations. The different types of collocations have been used in **May's** speech to convince the audience with particular political ideas and beliefs and to give promises.

These collocations are employed on different occasions to induce people to change their decisions and positively respond to the Prime Minister's views by deluding or promising them. The two functions are mostly fulfilled by the activity-related collocations: Persuasion (48) i.e., (89%) and Promising (10) i.e., (83%), while, the elaborative collocations performs Persuasion (6) i.e., (11%) and Promising (2) i.e., (17%). It can also be seen in table (1) that collocations are used for the purpose of highlighting and affirming the major issues in the speech. Again, the activity-related collocations achieves (47) i.e., (94%) of the total emphasis function, whereas (3) i.e., (6%) is fulfilled by the elaborative collocations. However, the functions of warning (4) and unification (2) are used (100%) by the activity-related collocations in the sense that **Theresa May** avoids being violent and forceful. As well, her speech is designed to negotiate the Brexit terms; therefore the means of persuading and promising are urgently needed.

Table (1). Functions of Collocations Relations in the Brexit Text

N.	Collocations Relations	Ordered Set		Activity-related Collocations		Elaborative Collocations		Total	
		n.	Per.	n.	Per.	n.	Per.	n.	Per.
1	Persuasion	0	0%	48	89%	6	11%	54	100%
2	Emphasis	0	0%	47	94%	3	6%	50	100%
3	Promising	0	0%	10	83%	2	17%	12	100%
4	Unification	0	0%	2	100%	0	0%	2	100%
5	Warning	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%	4	100%

6.2 Theresa May's Resignation Speech Analysis

Theresa May announced her resignation in an emotional address at which she expressed deep regret that she could not implement the issue for which she held such a position, Brexit. In her speech, **May** explained that she had done everything she could to incline the Members of Parliament to agree on implementing the result of the Brexit referendum but she was unsuccessful. She emotionally ended her speech with gratitude and appreciation for affording her such an opportunity to serve her country.

Theresa May's resignation speech is designed as an attempt to win people's hearts; therefore it is full with emotion-inducing language. The analysis handles the way **May** utilizes collocations as a strategy of manipulating to reach her aims. Following Tanskanen's (2006) model, the analysis classifies and discusses the types and functions of collocations used by **Theresa May** in her resignation speech in order to gain a better understanding of it.

6.2.1 Collocations Relations in Theresa May's Resignation Speech

Having reviewed collocations relations in the Brexit address, the following analysis introduces this category as included in the Resignation speech.

6.2.1.1 Ordered Set

The first type of collocations in Tanskanen's (2006) model is the ordered set. As has been observed, no ordered set has been found in the current speech.

6.2.1.2 Activity-related Collocations

Activity-related collocations are noticed in **May's** resignation speech as viewed in the following analysis. In the examples below "**honour**" collocates with "**the result**", "**gave**" and "**give**" with "**choice** , **voice**", "**leave**" with "**the European Union** , **the EU** ", , and "**negotiated**" with "**the terms**". This employment reflects the significance of the role played by the Prime Minister **Theresa May** during her term of office and the daunting task she faced trying to deliver Brexit responding to public demands. As an attempt to gain people's love, **May** uses this kind of collocations to express her good intentions and the attention she devotes to her people.

(1) "And to honour the result of the EU referendum".

(2) "...we gave the British people a choice... the British people voted to leave the European Union".

(3) "I negotiated the terms of our exit...".

To assure conveying the main message of the speech, the Prime Minister repeats the idea many times using the following collocations: “**lead – effort**”, “**successor - chosen**”, “**electing - new leader**”, “**the process - has concluded**”, and “**leave - the job**”. All refer to **May's** decision of relinquishing the post of the British Prime Minister and choosing a new leader to hold that position.

- (4) “... a new Prime Minister to **lead that effort**”.
- (5) “... so that a **successor can be chosen**”.
- (6) “... the process for **electing a new leader** should begin...”.
- (7) “...until **the process has concluded**”.
- (8) “**I will shortly leave the job...**”.

Generally, the Prime Minister utilizes the activity- related collocations in her resignation speech to work as a **persuasion** tool. It is employed to inform the audience that **Theresa May** is leaving the job and reminding them of the government's accomplishments over the past three years. **May** refers and confirms the important role she did in serving her country. The usage manipulates the feelings of the listeners to understand and accept the Prime Minister and appreciate all the good she did for them throughout her tenure.

6.2.1.3 Elaborative Collocations

In the following example, **Theresa May** elaborates on the progress that the country has witnessed during her time by listing certain accomplishments. First, the work that David Cameron and George Osborne started has been completed which is represented in eliminating the deficit, the falling of Britain's national debt and the end of austerity. Good jobs for the future will also be created and people have been helped to enjoy the security of a job. More homes have been built and the first time buyers have been helped onto the housing ladder. Other issues have been mentioned as well such as: the environment is protected, plastic waste is eliminated, climate change is tackled and air quality is improved. Using elaborative collocations aims at creating a good public image by putting forward the different achievements of **May's** government. For the same reason above **May** expands on “**our values** in example (2) by mentioning the values that guided her throughout her work which are “ **Security, freedom, and opportunity**”.

- (1) “**I am proud of the progress we have made over the last three years. We have completed the work that David Cameron and George Osborne started: the deficit is almost eliminated, our national debt is**

falling and we are bringing an end to austerity. My focus has been on ensuring that the good jobs of the future will be created in communities across the whole country, not just in London and the South East, through our Modern Industrial Strategy. We have helped more people than ever enjoy the security of a job. We are building more homes and helping firsttime buyers onto the housing ladder – so young people can enjoy the opportunities their parents did. And we are protecting the environment, eliminating plastic waste, tackling climate change and improving air quality”.

(2) “...inspired by our values. Security; freedom; opportunity”.

In a general sense, the elaborative collocations in **May's** Resignation speech work to inspire the affection and sympathy of the listeners throughout presenting the goals she reached and the success her government made.

The Resignation speech contains only two categories of collocations relations with no Ordered set collocations. The collocations relations are included to create a connected, more understandable and cohesive text. The smart employment of collocations uncovers the skills and the abilities the speaker has to give the listener a good impression. These relations are necessary to build a powerful and influential speech. The distribution of the functions fulfilled by the collocations relations is introduced in Table (2). It is viewed that this kind of collocations is deliberately utilized for the purpose of assuring and persuading audience with the fact that **Theresa May** is quitting the job after all the sacrifices and the costly efforts she made.

Despite the struggles and the hardships undertaken by her, **May** was able to make remarkable contributions to her country. As a result, it is clear from the table that the collocations perform the functions of Persuasion and confirming. The two functions are generally fulfilled by the activity- related collocations; in that they get (36) i.e., (95%) persuasion and (8) i.e., (100%) emphasis. Elaborative collocations obtain (2) i.e., (5%) persuasion and (0%) emphasis. In relation to the unification function, it is not served by any collocations category in the text for the reason that the Resignation speech is not a unification address rather it aims at influencing and changing the way people think to be in **May's** favor.

Table (2). Functions of Collocations Relations in the Resignation Text

N.	Collocations Relations	Ordered Set		Activity-related Collocations		Elaborative Collocations		Total	
		n.	Per.	n.	Per.	n.	Per.	n.	Per.
1	Persuasion	0	0%	36	95%	2	5%	38	100%
2	Emphasis	0	0%	8	100%	0	0%	8	100%
4	Unification	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%	0	100%

6.3 A Comparison between May's Brexit and Resignation Speeches

Collocations relations contribute significantly in constructing the text. Table (3) offers a comparison between the percentages of the functions served by the collocations relations. It is observed that the main function fulfilled by collocations in the two speeches is Persuasion which gets (54) i.e., (59%) of the total in the Brexit text and (38) i.e., (41%) in the Resignation text. It is clarified above; the Persuasion is used for different intentions in each text. For the Brexit speech, **May** seeks to reach a win-win negotiation and find an outcome that satisfies and convinces all parties. At the same time, the Resignation speech is designed to improve **May's** political image in the eyes of the public after failing to deliver Brexit. To make her arguments more convincing, **May** employs the strategy of emphasis in both texts. She intends to confirm the points that seem to be attractive to the audience in order to earn their attention. Collocations serve (50) i.e., (86%) emphasis function in the Brexit text and (8) i.e., (14%) in the Resignation text. The other functions are presented in table (3) to be performed by only the collocations relations in the Brexit text. For the fact that the Brexit is based on negotiations, it is formed to contain functions like promising (12), warning (4) and unification (2) [each gets (100%) of the total]. These functions work as assistant tools to make the argument more powerful and persuasive, while the Resignation is a farewell speech that aims at improving the self-image rather than providing promises and threats.

Table (3). Functions of Collocations Relations in the Brexit and Resignation Texts

N.	Collocations Relations	The Brexit Speech		The Resignation Speech		Total	
		n.	Per.	n.	Per.	n.	Per.
1	Persuasion	54	59%	38	41%	92	100%
2	Emphasis	50	86%	8	14%	58	100%
3	Promising	12	100%	0	0%	12	100%
4	Unification	2	100%	0	0%	2	100%
5	Warning	4	100%	0	0%	4	100%

7. Conclusion

This study has examined the political Brexit and Resignation speeches of the British Prime Minister **Theresa May**. Analyzing the linguistic structure of the two political speeches reveals the attitudes of the Prime Minister towards sociopolitical issues which are reflected in her linguistic skills. The discussion has exposed that collocations has been employed by **Theresa May** deliberately to convince the EU and the British citizens of her political ideologies. As a means to strengthen her speech and make it more persuasive, **May** has used political functions such as: promising, emphasis, manipulation, emotional words, threats, and calling for unification. As proved in the analysis, the texts are mainly designed to fulfill the function of Persuasion representing the largest percentage among other functions.

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