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BUT WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT INEQUALITY? IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONING AND ARGUMENTATION IN THE REPRESENTATION OF *ECONOMIC INEQUALITY* IN THE BRITISH PRESS

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Abstract – The aim of this chapter is to explore the discursive construction and representation of *economic inequality* in the British press in the period 2016-2019. For this purpose, the corpus consists of selected newspaper articles from three online newspapers *The Guardian* (liberal and left-leaning), *The Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* (traditionally conservative). A comparative analysis shows not only how the newspapers differ on the lexico-semantic and grammatical level in the discursive construction of key clusters around economic inequality, but also on the ideological argumentative level, in the way journalists position their ideas and engage their readers in order to defend and legitimize arguments. In their representation of economic inequality, the newspapers show through linguistic and argumentation analysis, whether they are aligned with the government, and as such broadly welcome greater wealth inequality, or whether, they actually resist current government policies. Hence, the main objective is to show how UK national newspapers have a double function in both reporting information, and also in construing an argument and aligning the reader to accept that argument. The methodological approach combines Corpus Linguistics (CL) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by theories on epistemological and ideological positionings as forms of pragma-dialectical argumentation (van Eermeen 2017; White 2006).

Keywords: argumentation; concur-concede counter patterns; ideological positioning; wealth inequality.

1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to investigate the linguistic construction and representations of *economic inequality* in the British press in the period 2016-2019. While a major objective is to identify key lexical items surrounding the concept, the paper specifically aims to analyse the argumentative patterns prototypical of argumentative discourse as a type of communication in the genre of newspapers. Such patterns consist of a constellation of argumentative moves which express opinion, defend a particular standpoint, and construct and uphold ideological values and beliefs (van Eemeren 2017).

Thus, the study critically explores the news discourse of three online British dailies, namely, the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, considered conservative right-of-centre newspapers, and the *Guardian* representing a left-liberal newspaper. Two comparable sub-corpora were formed: one sub-corpus consisting of articles from the conservative newspapers and the other of articles from the left-of-centre newspaper. The purpose of the research is to contribute to our understanding of the language of newspapers in relation to the intersection between argumentative structures, discourse, and ideology, developed on the basis of a pragma-dialectical model of argumentative discourse (van Eemeren 2017).

As a case study, the topic of *inequality* is not only a defining issue of our times, but it is also hugely ideological, prone to a language of debate in which value-laden argumentative patterns can be identified. In view of this, the newspapers were chosen on the basis of their ideological stance aimed at different readerships, the purpose being to explore how the newspapers engage their readership through ideological and dialogistic positioning. The general hypothesis is that in their representation of economic inequality, the newspapers will show through linguistic and argumentation analysis, whether they are aligned with the government, and as such broadly welcome greater wealth inequality, or whether, as one would expect of the left-leaning *Guardian*, they actually resist current government policies. Hence, the main objective is to show how UK national newspapers have a double function in both reporting information, and also in construing an argument and aligning the reader to accept that argument.

The linguistic investigation began by identifying patterns in the corpus, which were then carefully examined for their underlying ideology in the discourse, along with the views and values of the author/s, and the pragma-linguistic dialectical relationship constructed to align and persuade a perceived reader. Of course, *inequality* in itself is a vast multi-faceted theme. An inductive quantitative analysis allowed the retrieval of all associated lexis around *inequality* which would point to potential areas of interest in the corpus. Therefore, the focus is particularly on the lexis surrounding *economic* inequality due to two high frequency collocates which emerged in the corpora, namely *income* and *wealth,* along with other reoccurring economic-related collocates, such as *finance*, *cost*, *poor, poverty, rich, rise, wealthy, increasing, growing.* The second stage of the investigation consisted in expanding concordances of the data in order to identify underlying ideologies underpinned by propositions (van Dijk 1995), representing opinion newspaper journalism mainly on controversial matters. More specifically, the material analysed for the purpose of this research consists mainly of articles which can be classified under the sub-genre of commentaries, editorials, opinion columns, in order to have observable, argumentative discourse, all in

all more symptomatic of the writer's ideological positioning (Salvi, Turnbull 2010). Accordingly, as far as news text analysis is concerned, we can refer to Bell's (1998) framework which distinguishes between narration (intended as a descriptive accounts of events) and argumentation in journalistic discourse.

A secondary aim is methodological, that is, to show how Corpus Linguistics (CL) combined with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), informed by theories on epistemological and ideological positionings as forms of pragma-dialectical argumentation (White 2006; van Eermeen 2017), can be just as effective as largescale empirical studies in the social sciences for clarifying our understanding of social issues (Baker 2010). A word needs to be said here on the fact that, although the initial stage was corpus-driven with the frequency data acting as a 'map' pinpointing the most salient areas of interest, this research is also partly 'theory-driven' (Bednarek 2006), in that it draws on previous research into engagement theory in relation to patterns associated with the rhetoric of argumentation (Breeze 2016; White 2006).

1.1. Research questions

As this paper consists in drawing up a collocational profile of keywords around *economic inequality*, the aim can be considered twofold; i) to identify at the lexico-semantic and grammatical level key clusters around *economic inequality;* ii) to identify at the ideological argumentative level, the mechanisms by which journalists position their ideas and engage their readers in order to defend and legitimize, or reject their opponents' arguments.

Thus, the following research questions were formulated to assist the analysis. What are the most frequent lexical clusters or grammatical patterns that mirror *economic inequality*? How are the journalists' ideological arguments discursively constructed? Are there linguistic markers which indicate rhetorical argumentative moves, contributing to the pragma-dialectical relationship involved in the construal of audience engagement? Is the representation of *economic inequality* different according to the newspaper? Moreover, it appears that studies have yet to consider the interplay between what the papers are saying and how they foster a naturalizing discourse of the inevitability of economic inequality, a gap that this paper aims to fill.

Before continuing with a linguistic account of the research, I briefly outline the motivations for the study, provide some background knowledge, and define inequality for the purpose of this research.

1.2. Background

That inequality is a topic which has gained salience in the news is evident from an increase in the lemma *inequality* in newspaper headlines over the last few years. The software *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff *et al*. 2004) has a useful tool which quickly identifies the trend of a word (upward or downward) over decades. If one types in the search item *inequality* applied to the hosted 650-million-word *SiBol* newspaper corpus (compiled by linguists at the University of Bologna and the University of Siena), the arrow shoots upward over the timespan 1993 to 2013. Recent events also highlight the frequency of headlines on inequality, for example in connection with populist movements, such as the *Gilet Jaunes* riots in France and the *Umbrella protests* in Hong Kong (Angelique Chrisafis 17 March, *The Guardian* 2019). Scholars claim that inequality has become progressively more prominent since September 2001 (Heine, Thakur 2011), with international organizations frequently speaking of the 'dark side of globalization' and the need to address the root causes of poverty and desperateness, which appear to motivate perpetrators of political and social instability.

Fundamentally, the world is facing a growing number of complex and interconnected challenges, all of which accelerate economic and social divides and erode a country's social and economic fabric. Although global inequality has generally fallen in the last two decades, economic inequality has continued to rise among countries and within countries (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2012), and it is also extensively recognized that there is much greater *wealth inequality* in the UK today than in the 1970s (Cribb *et al*. 2012). Recent research attributes economic inequality largely to increasing divergence between public and private capital ownership, with the top 10% owning 100 times more than the bottom 10%, leading to more unequal wealth distribution (Stiglitz 2012). The 2019 *World Economic Forum* actually ranked inequality among the top five challenges that society faces, and even higher than climate change as a global risk. This makes it a serious issue and one which deserves more attention than it has effectively received, especially in linguistics (Toolan 2018; van Dijk 1994).

Like poverty, inequality is a relative concept and defies easy definition (Kress 1994). Its conceptualization includes social, economic, and political issues. For the sake of simplicity, this research adheres to the dictionary definition of inequality expressed in relation to numbers, size and status: for example, the *Oxford Lexico online* dictionary defines inequality as the 'difference in size, degree, circumstances'.[1] In fact, the terms and lexical items which emerged from the corpus closely conform to the above citation,

[1] https://www.lexico.com/definition/inequality

for instance, the evaluative notions *the top 1%* and *bottom 99%* are recurrent items in the corpus.

Bearing in mind the current socio-economic trends, this chapter addresses how *economic inequality* is approached and explained in the media, mainly by journalists, on the assumption that a country's policies are generally related to wealth and the economy, and are indicative of the state's intervention to mitigate forms of social divisions.

The framework outlined in the next section is directed towards answering the study queries, in order to provide a systematic account of how ideological positionings and argumentative moves are achieved linguistically.

2. Theoretical framework

I discuss here some general theoretical issues regarding the relationship between inequality, discourse, and communication, implying the need to draw eclectically from different frameworks.

The underlying premise, in line with socio-constructionist theory (Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 1995) is that media texts serve as advocates of social change and reflect the hegemonic discourse of society. Thus, this paper assumes that newspapers impact significantly upon people's attitudes towards societal issues. What is more, media discourse tends to display 'new attitudes as habitual, by making readers perceive certain events or societal changes as inevitable', (Gomez-Jimenez 2018, p.2) or even imperceptible (van Dijk 1995). I hypothesize that this 'naturalizing' tendency may be stronger in the right-of-centre UK press, which supports and welcomes the political and economic changes happening in the UK in the last two decades, as discussed in the analysis section.

We can also consider for the purpose of this paper studies which have contradicted the widely held assumption that broadsheets are typically associated with notions of neutrality and objectivity (Bednarek 2006; White 2006). These studies show how newspaper texts have the potential to influence 'assumptions and beliefs about the way the world is and the way it ought to be' (White 2006, p. 37). Similarly, Stubbs (1996) sees all utterances as attitudinal, in which writers 'encode their point of view' (Stubbs p.197). What is more, newspapers make every effort to negotiate alignment and rapport with a diverse readership, achieved through resources of engagement by which dialogic relations with the reader are carefully tempered. This paper looks at a particular aspect of the engagement process, in which positions may be challenged, dismissed or concurred (disclaim and proclaim propositions), observing one salient pattern, that of concur/concede-counter structures. In such structures, the writer signals concurrence with the reader on an issue only to counter the proclamation with another argument that may

refute the first one (Martin, White 2005). In other words, the writer sets up an argument in order to demolish it by means of specific lexical choices or patterns, often headed by adverbials (for example, *certainly, naturally, of course*) used to guide the reader to concur. Adverbials are often juxtaposed with proclamations associated with some form of countering an argument especially in newspaper discourse, and it is no surprise that these phraseological argumentative moves are salient in the inequality debate, in which writers adopt a stance towards value positions. Hence, a qualitative study also needs to take account of the point of view of value systems and the subsequent linguistic resources deployed (White 2006).

As economic inequality involves socio-political and economic issues and practices, the approach here is in the spirit of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2015). CDA's main purpose is to clarify the ideological potential of language and its influence on society and to enhance understanding of social issues, such as: class (Toolan 2016), religion, race and immigration (Baker *et al*. 2013), gender (Caldas-Coulthard, Moon, 2010), motherhood (Gomez-Jimenz 2018), *inter alia.* Recent research on inequality discourse in the media has emerged mostly from a neoliberal perspective of inequalities. Baker and McEnery (2015), for instance, identify the main discourses in Twitter responses to the TV programme *Benefits Street*; Watt (2008) analyses the discourse of council housing tenants and how they are portrayed in the media as a socially excluded 'underclass'.

Van Dijk (1994) was among the first to advocate a framework which featured the analysis of discourse structures, strategies, and linguistic choices as micro-phenomena connected to macro-phenomena like *inequality*. One of his most provocative assumptions is that the discursive reproduction of inequality is largely controlled by various elites, not only political or corporate elites, but also scholars and journalists (1994, p.22). In this way, dominant groups may control actions and minds, operating by manipulation or persuasion, through the production of social cognitions, as well as through processes of "inferiorization", marginalization, and exclusion. Moreover, dominance needs continuous legitimation, which is usually discursive, communicative, and highly ideological. These are processes that we can see operating in this case study illustrated in the results section 4.

Although there is a variety of literature from critical discourse studies which have discussed the connection between power and inequality (Toolan 2016, 2018; Gomez-Jimenez 2018), there is still a dearth of scholarship on the discursive construction of *economic inequality* in the press. This paper hopes to contribute to the field, identifying the extent these patterns are typical in the genre, and comment on their evaluative aspects and implicit ideology aimed at influencing societal attitudes.

3. Corpus, data and methodology

3.1. Corpus and data

Corpus linguistic principles guided the preparation of the corpus and the sub-corpora. The corpus was purpose-built using the search query *inequality* to reflect the current global socio-economic situation in the UK and worldwide. The time period (2016 to early 2019) coincided with the news section headlined *Inequality* recently created in both the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*, signaling the urgency of the issue. Personal news stories or 'hard news' (Bell 1998), as well as news articles related to 'Brexit' were removed so as to circumvent overt political discourse which may skew the information and the outcome. In this way, two comparable sub-corpora were built: one consisting of the texts such as editorials and other argumentative sub-genres from the broadsheet *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* (a middle-market tabloid), totaling 49,431 words, and the second consisted of texts from the *Guardian* (recently turned quality tabloid), totaling 51,370 words (Table 1). These newspapers were freely accessible online. Initially, I had intended to download only articles from the *Telegraph*, but it put up a pay-wall while accessing the articles, so in order to make both sub-corpora similar in total tokens I also collected articles from the *Daily Mail* which had a similar stance to the *Telegraph.* This made the sub-corpora quantitively more comparable.

Newspaper – corpus 2016 - 2019	**Size – total tokens**	**Number of articles**
The Telegraph	27,630	15
Daily Mail	22,365	21
	49, 995	36
The Guardian	51,370	39

Table 1
Summary of newspaper corpus data (2016 – 2019).

3.2. Methodology

The study integrates quantitative and qualitative discourse research methods, joining together the methods derived from corpus linguistics (CL) and discourse analysis, following frameworks such as those outlined by Partington *et al*. (2013) and Baker *et al.* (2013).

Admittedly, it is a small corpus, but this facilitated a manual analysis of all the articles. One of the advantages of CL quantitative retrieval techniques is that they identify quite a lot of data and unveil patterns which may otherwise be unperceivable to the naked eye. This combination of methodology is particularly replicable on large corpora. The drawback is that

CL retrieval may not capture everything and may miss something essential (Partington 2010; Baker, McHenry, 2015). For example, the concept of *inequality* can be expressed in other ways, such as *injustice, discrimination, unequal*; or some argumentation patterns use structures which are difficult to catch (for example, rhetorical questions such as *what's wrong with lowering taxes on the rich?*); or concede-counter patterns not marked by the presence of the usual adverbials (for example, *the trouble is the gini index is misleading*). Therefore, I could not count on CL software to retrieve everything in relation to my purpose, but I was able to analyze the most salient patterns which emerged in the corpora, mainly through collocate and concordance analyses. This consented the interpretation of various patterns of usage and the implications these might have on how readers interact with the issue of inequality in news texts.

Once downloaded, the texts were formatted into plain text files, labelled by newspaper, date of publication, and uploaded as a sub-corpus onto the software programme *Sketch Engine* (Kilgariff *et al*. 2004). The first step was to generate lemmatized word frequency lists for the two sub-corpora, which then became the basis of comparison. The resulting frequency lists and grammar sketches of high frequency lemmas were followed up using *Concgram* (Greaves 2009) to retrieve more information about dominant configuration patterns which led to a qualitative description of the data.

As mentioned in the introduction, I also draw on previous research on patterns associated with the rhetoric of argumentation (Bednarek 2006). More specifically, presupposed assumptions on argumentation strategies are considered as a spring-board for the analysis, with a starting point based on a pre-established group (list) of adverbs and contrastives (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969; Simon-Vandenbergen, Ajmeer 2007), many of which appeared within the collocational and colligational profiles of *economic inequality*. Once the most frequent adverbials were retrieved (such as, *of course, obviously, but, however, yet*), an automated search was carried out in the texts for other candidate adverbials (*certainly, undoubtedly, though, while*), followed by a manual analysis of the concordance lines, the immediate context and expanded co-text.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. Quantitative data

The first stage was to retrieve the frequencies for the lemma *inequality* in the two sub-corpora and draw up a word sketch with the most frequent collocations and grammatical colligations. Colligation refers to a grouping of words based on the way they function in a syntactic structure. This type of

pattern analysis is useful for placing the collocates into semantic syntactic functional categories (Halliday 1994).

Table 2 presents the top left (modifier) collocates in both sub-corpora, measured by frequency.

Newspaper Corpus 2016-2018					
The Telegraph/ Daily Mail	Total freq.	Relative freq.%	*The Guardian*	Total freq.	Relative freq.%
gender	41	0,098	economic	16	0,032
income	41	0,098	income	15	0,031
economic	10	0,024	wealth	10	0,020
wealth	10	0,024	gender	6	0,012
health	6	0,014	increasing	5	0,010
rising	5	0,012	rising	5	0,010
lower	4	0,010	world	5	0,010
poverty	4	0,010	against	4	0,008
British	3	0,008	health	4	0,008
growing	3	0,008	wage	3	0,006
reducing	3	0,008	financial	3	0,006
wage	3	0,008	increase	2	0,004
world	3	0,008	crime	2	0,004
against	2	0,005	fueling	2	0,004
earnings	2	0,005	social	2	0,004

Table 2
Top 15 left collocates of *inequality* in each sub-corpus.

We can see the results show items which overlap in the two sub-corpora reflecting a general trend for economic terms in this period of time, for example *wealth, income, finance, financial, economic, earnings, wage*.[2]

For a more complete picture of the narrative surrounding *economic inequality*, I considered the whole corpus and organized the collocates (including colligates) within textual proximity of *inequality* into systematic semantic categories (Table 3). This helped narrow down the areas for a more detailed qualitative analysis. The Collocation/Concordance tool in *Sketch Engine* was able to capture all nearby collocates. Obviously, any cut off point is arbitrary. For example, a fixed e word range at 15 to the left and right context, with the minimum frequency of 1, obtained 3, 068 collocates ranked

[2] Although the collocation *gender inequality* ranks high in both sub-corpora, signaling its value in the news, I do not discuss this issue here. I am certainly aware gender is linked to inequality in terms of economic discrimination, but its investigation and why it appears twice as high in the conservative newspapers is beyond the scope of this study. The item *gender* certainly deserves more attention than this study is able to give. A simple hypothesis for its re-occurrence in the *Telegraph/Daily Mail* could be due to the fact that the country in the period was run by a female prime minister, Teresa May, and there are frequent references to women entrepreneurs.

according to statistical measure.[3] Of course, it is not possible to report all the collocates here. I scrolled the first 1000 words, and made a representative selection of the most recurrent nouns, adjectives, adjuncts and verbs (frequency numbers in brackets). Sample collocates of low frequency are reported here, which nevertheless tell a story in the inequality debate. This kind of semantic syntactic category reflects a Hallidayan notion of functional categories which combines syntactic and semantic knowledge (Halliday 1994).

Category	**Collocates**
Wealth/ income /finance	*income (93), wealth (61), economic (53), tax/es (35), wage/s (15), pay (15), financial (14), economy (9), earnings (6), housing (29), inheritance (6), households (5), mortgages (4).*
Measure, quantity, size	*poverty (35 - including poverty level/line/rate/ trap), top (29), levels (26), gap (18), unequal (16), % (13), data (12), percent (13), bottom (13), growth (12), measures (10), gini (9), lowest (6), threshold (6), income bracket (2).*
Identity: status/class	*gender (40), middle class, squeezed middle, benefits, women (11), working class, elite, rich (25), social (19), poor (18), poorest (16), richest (13), the rich (11), women (11), maternity (4), black, white, Indian, lot in life (1), underclass (1).*
country//region	*world (31), US (24), countries (23), UK (13), Britain (9), Europe (9), London (8), Switzerland (7), Yemen (5), Germany (5), Africa (4), Northern Ireland (4), China (4), Cardiff (1), Grenfield Tower (1).*
nationality	*American, British (6), Scotland, Russian, Africa, Asian, Europe.*
religion	*Muslim (5).*
Attribution	*Stiglitz (23), researchers (13), Angus Deaton (10), Piketty (8), Nobel (5), Archibishop (4), Pope (3), academics, economists (15), journalists, Tories, government (8), IMF (7), Trudeau (7), Teresa May (6), Corbyn (4), Trump (3), Labour , MP, Oxfam (4), OECD, Johnson(2), Credit Suisse (1), Bank of England (1), experts (1).*
Lexico-grammatical markers	*according to (26), as far as, from the point of view of (1).*
Reporting verbs	*said (22), claim (16), mention (8), believe (5), report (5), challenge (1).*
Adverbials/connectives	*but (45), of course (22), obviously (10), surely (3), really (2), naturally (2), indeed (2), against, yet, however, though, while, between.*
Verbs – gerund	*rising (16), increasing (12), reducing (9), growing (7), tackling (5), fueling (4), obsessing (4), eradicating (2), widening (2), worsening (2).*

Table 3
Semantic categories of sample collocates of *inequality.*

[3] *Sketch Engine* uses T.score (for frequency) and logdice values (for significance). See Kilgariff *et al.* (2004) for an explanation of statistical measurements.

In sum, we can see economic-related words as a dominant semantic category in the narrative of *inequality*, but also *measurement, quantity* and *status*, for example, *top 1 %/ bottom 50%/90%, middle-class, working class, the poor*. Another prevailing semantic category is 'source attribution', a device for strengthening information reliability (*Stiglitz, Piketty, Oxfam, Archbishop of England, the Pope, Credit Suisse, IMF*). The fourth semantic category I discuss here is the frequent colligation of *inequality* with conjunctions and adverbials such as *but, inevitably, indeed, naturally, obviously, of course, while, yet*. These colligation patterns reveal important pragmatic and rhetorical functions. The following section (4.2) attempts to analyze these collocates in order to unravel the stylized patterns of argumentation and ideological positioning idiosyncratic to each sub-corpus, leading to interesting insights into writer engagement and reader alignment/disalignment.

4.2. Dominant argumentation patterns

This section presents a comparative analysis of the sub-corpora. However, first a concgram analysis of the word *inequality* (520 instances) is carried out in the total newspaper corpus. Table 4 reports the top 2 word concgram configurations (after removing prepositions and verbs), retrieved by the software *Concgram* (Greaves 2009). Here two particular patterns are focused on, namely, the high frequency concgram configurations *but/inequality* (46 instances) and *top/inequality* (29 instances). These patterns are considered because on close examination of the concordances and expanded text they frequently occurred in a discourse of defending or legitimizing government policies, or on the contrary denying and rejecting their effectiveness.

2-word concgram		**total freq.**	**relative freq.%**	**2-word concgram**		**total freq.**	**relative freq.%**
inequality	and	170	0,20%	inequality	world	35	0,03
inequality	income	82	0,08	inequality	top	29	0,03
inequality	gender	51	0,05	inequality	countries	26	0,03
inequality	wealth	50	0,05	inequality	levels	22	0,02
inequality	not	47	0,04	inequality	social	21	0,02
inequality	but	46	0,04	inequality	new	19	0,02
inequality	economic	44	0,04	inequality	poverty	17	0,01
inequality	US	40	0,04				

Table 4
Top 2-word concgrams for *inequality* in the newspaper corpus.

What is more, co-occurring lexical items 'serendipitously' led to the unfolding of other recurring patterns with the same pragmatic function (Partington 2010), fundamental to the construction of argumentative

propositions in the inequality debate. A recurrent pattern was that of high frequency co-occurring adjuncts, adverbials and conjunction constructions, co-occurring with the lemma *inequality* (for example, *of course/ but / inequality*) or similar patterns with *naturally / obviously / undoubtedly / really / surely / however / yet.* With reference to the second pattern, the noun and adjective *top/bottom* are high frequency lexical items in both sub-corpora, often occurring in the clusters *the top 1 %/ the bottom 99%.*

A qualitative examination of expanded texts in each sub-corpus led to the detection of two dominant pragmatic functions which emerged from the co-text analyses (discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2): i) the manipulation (spinning) of statistical data for the newspaper's communicative purposes; ii) concur/concede-counter patterns deployed to carry forward a point of view, first through concurrence and reader alignment and then by attacking and knocking down the opponents' argument. The presence of both types of argumentation patterns confirm recent studies in newspaper discourse (Breeze 2016; White 2006), but in this corpus these structures varied in intensity and distribution according to the newspaper.

4.2.1. Interpreting statistical data: top/bottom/inequality

We can begin by comparing and interpreting the high frequency clusters *the top 1 %/ the bottom 50%/90%* in the two sub-corpora, reflecting different value systems and ideologies. Figure 1 presents sample concgram configurations for *inequality/top/bottom.*

1 the population between the global bottom 50% and top 1%." The economists said wealth inequality had
2 so this data greatly underestimates the scale of top incomes. This has a large effect on inequality
3 might "drive economic inequality at the top, because those at the very top of the economic
4 to wealth and inequality among the UK's top 1% - and reveals that even when you're rich, you
5 of the income distribution than at either the top or the bottom. As for the period since 2007-08,
6 Pew. Read more: Guess How Much More Money the Top 1% Make than the Bottom 99% Middle class keeps

Figure 1.
top/inequality/bottom concgrams in the corpora.

A manual reading of expanded text showed that *top* and *bottom* mainly refer to people, places, regions and countries (for example, line 3 *people at the top/ those at the top*/). The evaluative function of these terms emerges later in the qualitative examination of expanded text. The newspapers discursively construct *top* and *bottom* according to their *doxa* and expected readership. Of relevance is how *the top / top / the bottom / bottom* act as orientational/ontological metaphors or metonymy, constructing a 'container' or 'box' in which people *at the top* live, or people *at the bottom* are excluded from (Kress 1994). Similarly, people live *above* or *below* a certain threshold and need *to get into, out of poverty* (for example, *in the top/bottom income*

bracket, the gap between the top and bottom, get into the top 1%).

The following expanded concordance lines (examples 1 - 3) illustrate how *top/bottom* are positioned ideologically, especially when juxtaposed alongside statistics and external sources of attribution (underlined here).

(1) The World Inequality Report, published by French economist Thomas Piketty […] which drew on the work of more than 100 researchers around the world, found that the richest 1% of the global population "captured" 27% of the world's wealth growth between 1980 and 2016 […]. "Whereas the income share of the top 0.1% has more than quadrupled and that of the top 1% has almost doubled, that of the bottom 90% has declined". *The Guardian,* 14 December 2017.

(2) Guess How Much More Money the Top 1% Make than the Bottom 99%. […] The amount of wealth needed to be considered part of the global 'elite' is not a fortune worth billions or even millions of pounds, […]. According to the Global Wealth Report 2018 by the Credit Suisse Research Institute, only a net worth of £669,735 ($871,320) is needed to be classed as being in the worldwide top 'one per cent'. *Daily Mail*, 2 November 2018.

(3) All in all, inequality remained stable last year. There wasn't even any of the middle-class hollowing-out that so many professionals constantly worry about: incomes grew slightly faster towards the middle of the income distribution than at either the top or the bottom […], Kallum Pickering, an economist at Berenberg Bank. *The Telegraph,* 27 July 2016.

The excerpts present data on *the top 1%/bottom 99%,* but their interpretations are at odds with each other. Above all, the ideological dimension differs. The *Daily Mail* and *Telegraph* do not describe the widening income gap and distribution of wealth as a plight of concern, as the *Guardian*. In excerpt (1) the *Guardian* journalist attributes the source of the data to '*over 100 researchers'*, including the top economist Thomas Piketty (see underscores). The reporting verb *said* evokes a neutral and balanced approach.

In excerpt (2) the same data are used by the journalist of the *Daily Mail,* but for a different communicative purpose. The headline *Guess how much more money the top 1% make than the bottom 99%?* somewhat downplays the seriousness of the issue. Here the *top* and *bottom* are spoken of in a jocular way, as in some sort of quiz show, which targets an audience interested in reading about millionaires and billionaires. In other words, the news value is 'entertainment', aimed at appealing to the fantasies of readers who are interested in *the 1% club*, and who are probably pro-government anyway. The emphasis on the nexus *money*, *worth* and *people* pertains to a neo-liberal discourse suggesting that 'people are only worth the money they have'. This is part of the 'normalizing' discourse, sometimes imperceptible to the daily reader (Toolan 2016). In excerpt (3), the *Telegraph* is preoccupied with the *middle* rather than *the top* or *bottom*. It constructs a *growing middle* in which

the world is generally richer, implying that the gap between the *top* and *bottom* cannot be increasing (leaving out much of the story). Therefore, inequality cannot be as bad as it is made out to be (that is, *There wasn't even any of the middle-class hollowing-out that so many professionals constantly worry about.*) Here the journalist discredits *professionals* (experts and academics) but resorts to his/her own reliable source of attribution, namely, an economist from the Berenberg Bank, to reinforce the *false myth* of rising inequality in the UK.

Excerpts (4) and (5) present exactly the same source of data, but from different viewpoints, illustrative of how interpretation clashes.

(4) Oxfam said billionaires had been created at a record rate […], at a time when the bottom 50% of the world's population had seen no increase in wealth. […]. "The concentration of extreme wealth at the top is not a sign of a thriving economy, but a symptom of a system that is failing the millions of hardworking people on poverty wages […]". *The Guardian,* 22 January 2018.

(5) Once again, Oxfam gets it wrong on global inequality and poverty. Some people are concerned with inequality – that is, the ratio between the richest and poorest in any given circumstances. Me – I've always been more concerned about poverty, – you should be wary of Oxfam's report, […] which claims the eight richest people in the world have the same wealth as the bottom 50 per cent. *The Telegraph*, 16 January 2018.

The lexical items *top* and *bottom* juxtaposed alongside other evaluative items, carry strong positive or negative connotations, depending on the ideological stance. The *Guardian* reports Oxfam's criticism of *a system* that has failed to provide for the population's *bottom* population, unveiling *grotesque inequality'*. On the contrary, the *Telegraph* uses the reporting verb *claim* which evokes a dubious stance towards Oxfam's data. Indeed, the *Telegraph* accuses *Oxfam* of *getting their statistics wrong again*, suggesting that Oxfam's data is controversial, false and may even be manipulated by 'left-wing ideology' therefore people need to be *wary* of Oxfam's interpretation of poverty which may be a 'conflict of interest'. The journalist gives a subjective opinion *Me* and *I think,* pulling along the readers by providing an argument which 'makes sense', as opposed to *some people*, and by dialogically interacting with the reader, for example, *you should be wary.* The journalist in this way appeals to the 'moral foundations' of poverty, not 'numbers' or 'ratios' in contrast to the *Guardian's* objective statistical reporting.

As we can see, what emerges from the sample excerpts is that informational reliability proves to be irrelevant, in that epistemic status and the steadfastness of knowledge are not necessarily the "primary determining communicative motive" (Martin, White 2005, p. 105). In other words, statistics and numbers can be spun for any purpose or intention, drawn up to make any case the writer wants the reader to hear. Despite the reference to attribution,

external sources are manipulated in the name of *doxa* and the putative audience. Therefore, what looks like objective attribution is in actual fact subjective and evaluative (Bednarek 2006; Hunston 2001) and forms part of the argumentative pattern which manipulates the data to align and satisfy reader expectations, according to the ideological beliefs of the journalist and newspaper.

All in all, to conclude on the concept of *the top 1%* and *bottom 99%*, although the widening economic gap is a major concern for the left liberal newspapers, the discourse of *top/bottom %* is viewed very nearly 'normal' or 'inevitable' in the conservative newspapers, reflecting an ideology which accepts *economic inequality* in times of economic growth, in the expectation of widespread prosperity. What becomes quite clear as the exploration unfolds is the intricate intertwining of argumentation, discourse, and ideology, interacting in complex ways, exposing systematic patterns acting as carriers of information, used to convey a line of vision of the writer, and his/her view of the social world (Vershueren 2012).

4.2.2. Concur/concede-counter argumentation patterns:of course…but

A recurring pattern retrieved by the software programs *Concgram* and *Sketch Engine* was the co-occurrence of the items *but/inequality*, frequently combined with certainty adverbials, and most often *obviously* and *of course*. (Figure 2 presents sample configurations). Paired rhetorical structures representing concurrence and concession, headed by certainty adverbials, and counter statements headed by contrastives, are standard in the genre of opinion columns and editorials and tend to follow a stylized pattern (Breeze 2016; White 2006). However, the newspapers differ in the intensity, frequency and distribution of these argumentative structures, at least as far as the discourse of inequality is concerned. Some patterns are idiosyncratic to one sub-corpus than the other. The concede-counter pattern consisting of adverbs and conjunctions occurred regularly in the *Telegraph/Daily Mail corpus* and to a lesser extent in the *Guardian.* Concordance analysis followed by expanded text analysis led to further insights and allowed the patterns to be systematically analyzed.

1 age of poverty, **inequality** and mass starvation. **But of course** this was nonsense. For **the** vast
2 common political view that **inequality** is rising, **but the** Institute for Fiscal Studies has found this
3 Topics **Yes, some people really struggle, but inequality isn't the problem ALLISTER** HEATH
4 of snakes and ladders, so how do you feel? Grim, **obviously- but**, as we learned last week, not as grim as
5 be good for the third children of poor families. **Obviously** it would reduce their numbers **but** those who
6 **But** why? What is so bad about **inequality? Obviously**, we are all in favour of the less well-off

Figure 2.
*but/inequality/of course/obviously/*concgrams – *The Telegraph/Daily Mail.*

The most frequent pattern encountered in the *Telegraph/Daily Mail* sub-corpus was that in which the proposition or concession came first, headed by an adverbial of certainty such as *of course, obviously, naturally*, or *certainly.* This was followed either almost immediately or at some instance by a counter-statement involving a contrastive, usually headed by *but,* and often including a denial with the negative particle *not,* as in lines 3 and 4 (Figure 2). Other frequent contrastive markers include *however, still, yet, while.*

Most often locutions marked by *of course, naturally, not surprisingly, admittedly, certainly,* and *undoubtedly* are used to emphasize what can constitute a possible common ground shared by the writer and reader. This type of concurring formulation is dialogic. However, at some point later, the writer withdraws and snubs what he/she just presented as agreement by using a contrastive or countering proclamation. This appears to happen quite a lot in any discourse which is arguing a belief and position (Martin, White 2005), particularly in such a controversial subject as inequality, and especially understandable in the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail,* where the journalist assumes that most readers agree with the government's policies. In this way, we can say the argumentation markers are used to prime the reader (Hoey 2005) to expect alignment or disalignment over a certain view.

Excerpts (6) and (7) below are examples of the main type of concur/concede-counter structures where a concurrence (agreement) or a concession is typically made and followed by a counter move.

(6) Half of us think there is a big gap between the richest and the rest and that it has a negative effect on the economy. Two thirds are in favour of a maximum pay ratio. But why? What is so bad about inequality? Obviously, we are all in favour of the less well-off becoming richer. But that is a different matter. The poor are, and have been, getting considerably richer [...] the improvement has been positively sensational. *The Telegraph,* 27 April 2016.

(7) Indeed, the pace of technological change may well mean things get worse before they get better, […]. No amount of top-down State initiatives, and no amount of fiddling with the tax and benefit systems, can change that. Of course, there is still a role for government. But it would be a terrible mistake to introduce the kind of quotas so beloved of the Left, […]. *Daily Mail,* 3 December 2017.

The examples above from the *Telegraph/Daily Mail* corpus illustrate recurring rhetorical moves involved in the argumentation around *economic inequality* debates. There is a constant tug-of-war created by the journalist who assures the reader that it is quite understandable to be concerned and frustrated about the gap between the rich and the poor. In excerpt (6), *half of us* heads the concurrence proposition that a lot of people (including the journalist himself) can see there is an *obvious* gap, thus establishing a

common ground of moral concern (that is, *obviously we are all in favour of the less well-off becoming richer*). The journalist then steps back, so to speak, to indicate a rejection of what was presented as a natural assumption, by introducing the counter-argument with the rhetorical question *but what is so bad about inequality*? This invokes a normalizing discourse, meaning 'we have always had inequality, isn't it part of history?' No answer is expected, but in this way, the writer rejects the *negative effect on the economy*. The counter proposition again headed by *but* introduces the writer's argument that *inequality* has to be put into historical perspective to prove that 'the poor in truth have been getting richer'.

Likewise, in (7) the locution used to signal concurrence is marked by the adverb *indeed* used to express emphatic agreement by acknowledging the difficulties. *Of course there is a role for government* concedes the need for state intervention, but the next proposition attacks the type of state intervention that is attributed to left-wing ideas, '*beloved to the Left'.* Although state intervention is generally an acceptable notion, the ideological dimension is constructed by the writer aligning with readers who reject any intervention representing 'leftist' ideology.

Intensifiers and emphatics, generally found in sensational news, have a powerful persuasive effect (for example, *positively sensational* in excerpt 6). It is not possible here to analyze the pragmatic function of all the adverbial markers in the corpus used to make some kind of concurrence or invite agreement. I point out here only some common emphatics which emerged, and ranked according to frequency: *deeply, in fact, completely, fully, indeed, positively, really, sincerely, surely, strongly, totally, utterly, very much, with conviction, without any doubt.*

Excerpt 8 is marked with annotations (italicized text in parentheses) and exemplifies the rhetorical patterns of concur/concede counter moves typical in the conservative newspaper sub-corpus.

(8) Listening to some strident Left-wing commentators, who talk as if Britain were some nightmarish Third World dystopia, I wonder if they have any sense of history at all. (*set up them v. us, appeal to common knowledge, align with expected readership)*, […]. Of course, Britain today is far from perfect, and life for those at the bottom can still be a struggle against hardship, anxiety and deprivation. […]. (*concede/concur, align with the 'bottom' readers*).
Yes, too many people rely on food banks. And yes, too many young people struggle to find rewarding jobs, get on to the property ladder or carve out a meaningful role in society (*concessions, inclusion/exclusion discourse*). Yet all too often, in our love for national self-flagellation, we forget the fundamental fact about modern Britain, which is that most of us lead warmer, healthier, richer and more comfortable lives than any generation before. (*counter argument, inclusive we/our/us, dialogic, reader alignment*) - Only three years ago, the BBC's Norman Smith […] claimed (*reporting verb evokes dubious*

> *information*) the Coalition Government's spending cuts were taking Britain back to the 'land of The Road to Wigan Pier', [...].
> But of course this was nonsense. (*rejection of Smith's argument, closing down alternative viewpoints, appeal to common sense of the readers*). For the vast majority, the world of the recent past, in which millions of people fought a daily battle against hunger, darkness, damp, disease and dirt, has mercifully disappeared (*counterargument, categorical rejection of other viewpoints)*. *Daily Mail*, 4 December 2017.

On the whole the language of the journalist in the *Daily Mail* is strong and emotional (for example, *nightmarish third-world, self-flagellation, despair, deprivation, disease, struggle*), evoking negativity, with the end aim of convincing the reader that the journalist's point of view is the only one worth having. The first proposition begins with categorical criticism of the lack of historical perspective in the inequality debate. The writer makes a provocative statement questioning the knowledge and intelligence of the 'left', *I wonder if they have any sense of history at all*. In this way, the writer appeals to the reader's 'better sense' of history and events, predicting a commonsense response before advancing the rest of his/her view. The second proposition follows with a series of concession markers: *of course, yes, and yes*, with the gist being that a life of *hardship* is a legitimate opinion to have: *of course things are not perfect* (under the Tory government) and *yes there are food banks, yes people struggle,* in a gesture of solidarity in contexts where the writer may anticipate disagreement on the part of the reader, at least initially. These certainty markers are a way of acknowledging the admissibility of an idea and showing that the writer is prepared to make concessions in terms of human rights in order to establish a particular position that the writer shares with the projected readers. Yet the counter statement argues that Britain, in truth, is on the whole 'wealthier and richer' and 'the poor are richer than in the past', discarding Norman Smith's opinion as *nonsense*. The writer ends with a denial which rejects all that has gone before, closing down any other line of argument. Since the reader has been assumed to agree with the three judgements headed by *of course* and *yes,* the reader is strategically positioned to agree with the final proposition (even if it runs in the opposite direction).

Rhetoricians have long known the importance of addressing a universal audience while simultaneously centering on a particular audience (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969). In this case, the writer realigns with the readers in the attempt to gain as broad a consensus as possible with the knowledge that many readers do generally agree with the stance of the newspaper. What is more, some readers may be among *those at the bottom,* and even resistant to the writer's primary position, but persuasive rhetoric enables the writer to enlarge his/her catchment area.

On the whole, concede-counter patterns were found to be most frequent in the *Telegraph/Daily Mail* sub-corpus, accounting for many of the instances retrieved. In the *Guardian,* the combination of adverbials occurred to a less extent, and often with other rhetorical strategies at play, for example source attribution and links to hypertexted reports.

The *Guardian* journalist in example (9) below is commenting on a previous comment by a conservative minister who advised poor families to have fewer children.

(9) For those harbouring some doubts about this approach, I'd recommend reading Charles Dickens's Little Dorrit, published in 1857. […]. A wee night out in the Campsie Fells […] would be good for the third children of poor families. Obviously it would reduce their numbers, but those who survived would get an early lesson in not expecting too much from the state. *The Guardian*, 28 October 2018.

(10) But, to Stiglitz, UBI is a cop-out. […]. "If we don't change our overall economic and policy framework, what we're going towards is greater wage inequality, greater income and wealth inequality […] and a more divided society. But none of this is inevitable". *The Guardian*, 8 September 2018.

In excerpt (9) the journalist criticizes the conservative MP for his 'shocking' ideas on poverty, conceding ironically *obviously it would reduce numbers*, *but* there is not much to expect of the current government. Excerpt (10) shows a common rhetorical pattern used by the *Guardian.* The journalist discredits data acclaimed by the opponents by referring to a credible source, in this case the Nobel prize winner Stiglitz who claims inequality is not at all 'inevitable'. This rhetorical strategy is common in both sub-corpora, but the *Guardian* tends to have more hyperlinks to official reports with the aim of reporting a 'true and fair view', to reassure readers that they speak the truth.

All the excerpts above illustrate the main function and special role of the concur/concede counter feature in the dialogic process of argumentation, along with the role they may have in constructing the ideological dimension of the text (Amossy 2009; Verschueren 2012).

Other features and lexical choices combined to create other rhetorical sub-categories of the concur-concede counter pattern. However due to space constraints these patterns are not reported here, but I just mention, for example, the juxtaposition of opposites within a phrase, evoking rhetorical contrast (White 2006), such as *family breakdown*/*social ills v. social progress/technological advances/benign effects*; the use of short digressions such as ironic, sarcastic exclamations, to invoke reader alignment, for example, *But so what! you don't say*; and the use of rhetorical questions by which the writer assumes that no answer needs to be supplied for a particular question, the answer being so obvious.

5. Conclusions

The combination of corpus-driven retrieved data and qualitative descriptive analysis, has proven to be useful as a methodology for challenging hypotheses and carrying out an in-depth investigation into argumentative discourse. With reference to the sub-corpora, retrieved patterns involving recurring lexical items serendipitously led to other patterns, guiding the research in a particular direction.

To refer back to the aims of the study and the research questions, what emerged from the corpus shows that *inequality* in recent years is represented predominantly by economic-related terms, evident from the high frequency collocates *income*, *wealth*, *the top 1 %*. This representation has given rise to explicit ideological positioning and specific argumentation structures recurrent in the narrative of *economic inequality*, where journalists construct their arguments in favour of, or against government actions. The quantitative analysis comprising the identification of key lexical, semantic and grammatical clusters, uncovered chief linguistic markers indicating rhetorical argumentative moves which contribute to the pragma-dialectical relationship involved in the construal of audience engagement. In particular, two dominant argumentative strategies emerged in the corpus: spinning statistical data for the newspaper's own ideological and communicative purpose, and deploying persuasive rhetorical concur-counter patterns to defend or fend off arguments in the inequality debate.

A comparative analysis highlighted the differences in the distribution and intensity of these patterns in the two sub-corpora. For example, concessive-counter patterns, a dominant pattern in which adverbials of certainty (*obviously, of course*) headed a concession made to align the audience followed by a counter statement headed by a contrastive, such as *but, yet,* are particularly frequent in the case of the right-of-centre newspapers, suggesting that the journalists are prone to 'charge' ahead to legitimize government actions in the economic inequality debate.

All in all, the linguistic investigation of this case study has proven that newspaper discourse is far from being neutral and objective (White, 2006). Although this is to be expected of the sub-genre of opinion columns, editorials and commentaries that do not purport to be neutral, it is not really what we would like to assume of ethical journalism practice. Undeniably, journalists cannot always guarantee the truth, but getting the facts right is one of the cardinal principles of journalism, along with 'a true and fair view'. Instead, we have seen how even objective claims become enmeshed with the communicative purpose of the newspaper. For instance, the *Guardian* which has a tradition of subduing its language to cultivate a 'neutral' approach of 'balanced reporting', nevertheless remains true to its left-leaning liberal

ideology and readership. There are examples of where it does not hesitate to use data to discredit opponents of their views, such as *there are lies, damned lies, and statistics*. In truth, the journalist always has a putative audience in mind, which he/she needs to align and engage with using pragma-dialectical patterns of argumentation and ideological positioning, as we saw with the example of *the top 1%* notion. Although the analysis revealed evidence of dialogic engagement in a broad sense, there is a fair amount of 'monoglossic' (White 2006) assertions, verging on subjective reporting. By this, I mean that arguments are presented and constructed only to be discarded or rejected in a counter move, leaving little room for alternative viewpoints. This is apparent in both sub-corpora, but it is much more frequent in the dailies which defend and support the government in office, sometimes resorting to strong, emotional and evaluative language. The *Daily Mail* is particularly sensational as shown by examples reflecting the news value of 'entertainment'.

What becomes quite clear is the normalizing narrative of all the newspapers in the corpora, albeit in different ways, for instance, *what's so bad about inequality*? (The *Telegraph*). The *Guardian* at times challenges the traditional view and calls for a reversal of the trend, for example, Stiglitz says *inequality is not inevitable.* However, both sub-corpora appear more intent on defending, denying or discrediting ideological positions rather than presenting solutions to the problem of economic inequality. In this sense both represent a neo-liberal discourse (evident from the predominance of the economic narrative), with few alternative ideas for a process of reversibility. This can be said to reflect current processes in globalization, which do not offer new models of social development, as long as globalization is sustained by the neo-liberal economic consensus. This explains why inequality is often depicted within a discourse of inevitability, normalized by newspapers albeit perhaps unintentionally, which may have a damaging effect on society because the habitual makes society complacent. Such circumstances could lead to the enforcement of dogmas like 'there will always be inequality', 'there will always be someone who has less than someone else'. In this way, inequality becomes acceptable, which makes it difficult to bring about change.

In sum, the identified argumentative patterns are important for our understanding of ideological debates. On the whole, the study has endeavored to carry out a detailed analysis aimed at a better understanding of argumentative strategies, which are ideologically loaded and value-laden, which guide the reader to accept the writer's beliefs. The phenomenon of inequality is particularly representative of this complex intertwining of discourse, argument, and ideology.

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