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The representations of freedom in The Sun newspaper between 2019 and 2021: A corpus-based study

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Abstract

Existing studies have highlighted the close link between language and society (Fairclough, 1992) and demonstrated the impact of Covid-19 on language (Mahlberg and Brookes, 2021). There are no studies to date that have examined the changing representations and conceptual shifts of *freedom* in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic years, which are expected to be affected by government policies on Covid-19.

The present study aims to fill this gap. Specifically, the objective is to examine the conceptual evolution of *freedom* in the years 2019 and 2021 and to interpret it in the light of socio-historical issues derived from the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The study is a corpus-based investigation undertaken on *The Sun Corpus (TS)*, i.e. a self-compiled corpus including newspaper articles published in the UK during the years 2019 and 2021. Media including newspapers are, indeed, influential discourses that shape the public view of particular events, current issues, and play “an important role in framing how people understand and respond to” contextual happenings (Brookes and Baker, 2021, p. 1; see Baker et al. 2013).

The analysis reveals that there is a shift in the use of the word *freedom*, which is depicted as an enjoyable experience in 2019 and seen in a negative shade in 2021. These results support the social conceptualization of language and reveal aspects that are of particular concern in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1992), aiming to examine how socio-historical aspects frame the linguistic representations of social issues like the Covid-19 disease.

Key words

freedom, representations, conceptual shift, Covid-19, corpus-based

1. Introduction

The present study aims to describe the representations of the word *freedom* in *The Sun* newspaper in pre-pandemic and post-pandemic societies. Specifically, the objective is to examine the conceptual evolution of *freedom* in the years 2019 and 2021 in the UK and to interpret it in light of socio-historical issues emanating from the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following the Neo-Firthian tradition (Sinclair, 1991; Stubbs, 2002), the senses of words are dependent on contextual factors and emerge from “some implicit negotiation between members of the talk exchange along with beliefs about how that word is conventionally used” (Murphy, 2003, pp. 18–19). Conventionality is a leading aspect in delimiting the meanings of words since they are defined intralexically, but they also incarnate the senses attributed by a linguistic community to a specific

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referent. In this view, the meanings of words are determined by the ways they combine into patterns, working as units of meanings whose connotation is also influenced by “inferences from real-world knowledge” (Stubbs, 2002, p. 19). Diachronically, there can be processes of “transfer of meaning to a given word from its habitual co-text” (Stewart, 2010, p. 5), which entails that the linguistic renewal of the lexical profile of a word can prompt processes of context-induced reinterpretation of extant meanings and favour the acquisition of new connotative features (Stewart, 2010). At the same time, adopting a socially oriented conceptualization of language, words’ senses and uses are shaped by societal issues that determine new meanings and discourses reflecting changing ideologies (Fairclough, 1992). Indeed, within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which informs the present study, the changing socio-historical settings and current societal issues affect the use of lexis and may promote cases of meaning recontextualization that show the adaptive nature of language in use influenced by both situational contexts and common knowledge of a community in a specific moment in time.

The shift from in-person to remote working, social distancing, mobility restrictions, and the national lockdown since March 2020 when Covid-19 was first reported in the UK can influence words’ patterns and uses and favour new discourses reflecting a society threatened by Covid-19. Existing studies have highlighted the close link between language and society (Fairclough, 1992; Baker and McEnery, 2005) and demonstrated the impact of Covid-19 on language (Mahlberg and Brookes, 2021). However, there are no studies to date that examine the changing representations and conceptual shifts of the word *freedom* in the pre-pandemic and post-pandemic years, which are areas covered in the present research.

The present paper is organized as follows: Section 2 includes the literature review and motivations, while Section 3 introduces the research questions. Section 4 focuses on the method: it describes the corpus used in the study and its compilation process, and the procedure followed for data analysis. Section 5 discusses the results, and Section 6 reports the conclusion and future paths of research.

2. Theoretical background

Existing studies have examined the link between language and socio-historical issues with various methods ranging from Discourse Analysis (DA) to CDA often triangulated with Corpus Linguistics (CL). There are two major research strands: (1) studies devoted to the examination of specific issues that are of current interest to society, and (2) studies with a focus on the language of Covid-19.

There is an increasing interest in the description of representations around social realities in recent times as witnessed by studies on *refugees* and *asylum seekers* (Baker and McEnery, 2005; Baker, 2006; Baker et al., 2009), or *Muslims* (Baker et al., 2013) and the Arab world (Partington, 2015). At the same time, there are works undertaken to examine health-related topics, such as obesity (Brookes and Baker, 2021; Brookes, 2021), or flu-like pandemics (Taylor and Kidgell, 2021), which exhibit changing features and innovative uses that mirror the socio-historical context.

Studies that have examined the language of Covid-19 include works aiming to describe, for example, the use of uncertainty constructions in media discourse (Müller et al., 2021) or networked discourses of bereavement in online Covid-19 memorials (McGlashan, 2021). They have demonstrated that language “can provide evidence of social experiences of the pandemic” (Mahlberg and Brookes, 2021, p. 441). These studies further enhance the influential effect of society on language and stimulate research on the role performed by the outbreak of Covid-19 on issues of current interest for people living the experience of the pandemic.

Starting from the assumption that Covid-19 has reshaped the lifestyle of everybody and that existing values around liberty and socialization have been revisited in the light of sanitary restrictions, the present study aims to examine the representations of *freedom* and its transformation in pre-pandemic and post-pandemic British society. The study is a corpus-based investigation that has been undertaken on a self-compiled corpus including newspaper articles published in the UK during the years 2019 and 2021. Newspapers are an important source of data for those interested in describing representations of specific topics (Brookes and Baker, 2021) including discourses around *freedom*, with discourse intended as the “system of statements which constructs an object” (Parker, 1992): the adoption of a conceptualization of discourse that crosses the linguistic context and lexical profile of a word allows the evaluation of the way aspects concerning freedom are treated before and after the outbreak of the pandemic.

Newspapers are influential discourses that shape the public view of particular events and current issues and give access to how people “understand and respond to” social issues (Brookes and Baker,

2021, p. 1) and how they frame them in language. This, indeed, could be the case of the outbreak of Covid-19 that has significantly affected habits, thoughts, and social perceptions of freedom.

The word *freedom*, which refers to one of the most affected areas during the pandemic, is expected to be characterized by meaning recontextualization and changing discourses because of the increasing number of restrictive measures adopted to face the danger derived from the spread of the virus. Specifically, in the UK many policies on Covid-19 were promoted by the government, leading to increasing restrictions on personal liberty from March 2020. On 23 March 2020, the UK entered into a new deal characterized by a lockdown that obliged people to stay at home to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, and that went on until 1 June 2020, when the restrictions were gradually eased. The experience of restrictions on personal freedom and the reshaping of social interactions are core arguments in the examination of the representations of *freedom* in the short period between 2019 and 2021, as they have generated a revived interest in preserving personal liberty during times characterized by restrictions and limited mobility.

3. Research questions

The present research aims to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the uses and meanings of *freedom* in *The Sun* in 2019 and 2021?

RQ2: What are the similarities and differences between discourses around freedom in 2019 and 2021?

4. Method

4.1. Data

The present research was undertaken on *The Sun Corpus*, a self-compiled corpus including newspaper articles taken from *The Sun* and published in the UK in 2019 and 2021.

The selection of *The Sun* was not based on consideration of the format of newspapers, that is, broadsheet and tabloid; instead, *The Sun* was chosen because it was the most read newspaper in the UK in 2019 and 2020 (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/246077/reach-of-selected-national-newspapers-in-the-uk/#>), which makes it a privileged source of data for the understanding of people's thoughts and perceptions of the new disease. Other relevant newspapers in the UK such as *The Guardian*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Daily Mail* are read nationally; however, they are not as popular as *The Sun*, which may be seen as a representative newspaper in the UK in recent years.

The Sun Corpus consists of 43,389 words and two subcorpora, i.e. *The Sun 2019* (*TS2019*) and *The Sun 2021* (*TS2021*), which include newspaper articles published in 2019 and 2021, respectively. Corpus architecture and size are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus architecture and size of *The Sun Corpus*

Subcorpora	Conventional name	Year	No. of words	No. of articles
<i>The Sun 2019</i>	<i>TS2019</i>	2019	21,826	25
<i>The Sun 2021</i>	<i>TS2021</i>	2021	21,563	29
Total			43,389	54

Each subcorpus covers data from 1 January to 31 December and includes diverse numbers of articles. Specifically, *TS2019* includes 25 articles for a total of 21,826 words whereas *TS2021* consists of 21,563 words distributed across 29 articles. *The Sun Corpus* overall comprises 54 articles and a total of 43,389 words.

To compile *The Sun Corpus* I used the LexisNexis UK database (<https://bis.lexisnexis.co.uk/research-and-insights/nexis>), which allows the selection of single newspapers and articles according to specific criteria, which are date and place of publication, types of newspaper, and key terms. Among all newspapers published in the UK, as suggested in Section 2, I selected *The Sun*.

The corpus was compiled with a stratified sampling frame by selecting texts including the word *freedom* randomly from each of the two years 2019 and 2021. All the selected articles were cleaned from

any extralinguistic element (i.e. graphics, metadata, day and month of publication) and stored in the two subcorpora *TS2019* and *TS2021*.

4.2. Procedure

The corpus was queried with the Desktop (offline) corpus analysis tool *#LancsBox6.0*, developed at Lancaster University (Brezina et al., 2020) and freely available at <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox/>.

Instances of *freedom* were retrieved using the KWIC tool in *#LancsBox6.0*, which identifies both Rf and Nf (per 10K). This tool also allows visualization of the context of use and concordances that can be sorted alphabetically both +1 to the right and -1 to the left. Concordance analysis allows the identification of co-occurring words of the searched terms and typical patterns of use (Baker, 2010). Concordance lines are useful to examine changing uses of *freedom* and diverse conceptualizations that emerge because of the recontextualization of extant meanings.

Once the meanings of *freedom* had been examined, the next step was the extraction and analysis of collocations as word associations, which can reveal discourse positions around specific topics and “the assumptions which they embody” (Stubbs, 1996, p. 172).

The extraction and analysis of collocations were undertaken with *GraphColl*, which identifies collocations and displays them as both tables and graphs. Collocates of the wild card *freedom* were retrieved with the Collocation Parameter Notation (CPN) expressed as ((CPN) 3a-MI (3), L5-R5, C3-NC3; no filters applied). Starting from the assumption that “different collocation measures in discourse analysis highlight different aspects of the collocational relationship between words” (Brezina, 2018a, pp. 273–274), I decided to select MI. The reason is that MI is an association measure “traditionally used in discourse analysis as it highlights rare exclusivity” (Gablasova et al., 2017, p.164): the “rare and unique combinations, often terms or compounds” selected when using MI (Brezina, 2018a, p. 274) give information on discourses around *freedom* and reveal *exclusive* patterns qualifying it.

Extracting collocates with MI is advantageous in evaluating the existence of exclusive and rare collocates (Brezina, 2018b), but it may also be limiting: it is useful if there is a cut-off point at 10 in collocation, and the measure is not very accurate if the analysis deals with low-frequency data because it can overstate the importance of an association between two words. The fact that the query *freedom* has just 135 hits in the corpus, which is very low in frequency (0.31%), could suggest the need for alternative association measures (AMs) like the Dice coefficient metric or MI2, Dice, and log Dice measures, which can explore collocates that occur exclusively in the vicinity of each other but do not have to be rare (Brezina, 2018b). AMs play a determining role in collocation extraction (Manning and Schütze, 1999), and diverse practical implications can be derived from their use (Baker, 2006). However, “there is no one measure which would suit all purposes and research questions” (Brezina, 2018b, p.67), which explains the use of MI in the present study.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Concordance-based analysis of *freedom*

The word *freedom* occurs in 135 hits that are Nf 31.11 (per 10K), which are distributed in the two subcorpora *TS2019* and *TS2021*, including 67 hits (Nf 30.95 per 10K) and 68 hits (Nf 31.73 per 10K) respectively. The fact that *freedom* occurs in both subcorpora with similar frequencies is an important starting point to evaluate the extent to which this word works as a key term in the data. Indeed, it is possible to hypothesize that the greater the frequency, the greater the salience of a word in a corpus is, especially when the corpora have been compiled by selecting that word as a key term, as is the case of *TS2019* and *TS2021* based on *freedom*. The fact that *freedom* has similar frequencies in *TS2019* and *TS2021* suggests that its salience has not changed in recent years. The existence of overlapping frequencies, nonetheless, does not exclude processes of ongoing innovation affecting the word *freedom*, as there could be other factors working as catalysts for the renewal of the word’s meanings and uses.

To obtain information on these aspects I have undertaken a concordance-based analysis. Querying *TS2019* and sorting the concordances to +1 to the right and -1 to the left have revealed that the word *freedom* mostly occurs with the meaning of ‘liberty of action’ and ‘liberty of self-determination’, but it also occurs as a specialized term referring to specific areas. Table 2 reports a random sample of the concordance lines that I selected manually after having examined all concordances of *freedom*.

Table 2. Concordance sample for *freedom* in TS2019

	Filename	Left	Node	Right
1.	2019.txt	killers is making a bid for	freedom	less than two years after his conviction.
2.	2019.txt	Freedom of Speech. Next it's	Freedom	of Choice. And soon, it's
3.	2019.txt	these planned restrictions on	Freedom	Of movement. Trouble is
4.	2019.txt	Freedom of Movement. Then it's	Freedom	of Speech. Next it's Freedom
5.	2019.txt	his faults. I enjoyed the	freedom	more than I imagined
6.	2019.txt	The long waltz to	freedom;	NEW STRICTLY JUDGE MOTSI DID
7.	2019.txt	and vowed to defend Press	freedom	once in No10. Front-runner
8.	2019.txt	blast chilling attack on media	freedom	SENIOR MPs last night told
9.	2019.txt	gave me a lot of	freedom	to play. He brought in
10.	2019.txt	And I still feel this	freedom	today when I am dancing

First, *freedom* is a term with a general meaning that refers to the liberty of decision, as in lines 1, 5, 6, and 10 where it is preceded by the word *feel* or line 9 where it is followed by a *to*-infinitive clause specifying the kind of activity that *freedom* refers to. Second, some occurrences of *freedom* are characterized by a more specific connotation. This group includes (i) reference to liberty of action in the *media* (line 8) and *press* (line 7) and (ii) reference to qualifying features of *freedom*, that is, *freedom of speech* (line 4), *freedom of movement* (line 3), and even *freedom of choice* (line 2).

The examination of random concordance lines in TS2021 demonstrates some commonalities with TS2019 but also some divergences. The existence of diverse linguistic contexts corroborates the role that the outbreak of Covid-19 played as a catalyst for the linguistic innovation of *freedom*. In TS2021, indeed, *freedom* does not refer to the media and press nor is it used to specify types of freedom as would be the case of *freedom of movement* and *freedom of speech* attested in TS2019. A sample of concordances of *freedom* is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Concordance sample for *freedom* in TS2021

	Filename	Left	Node	Right
1.	2021.txt	Chaka Chaka. Feeling of	freedom.	But there were very few stars
2.	2021.txt	they know it would curtail their	freedoms.	But what about the freedom of those
3.	2021.txt	Join vaccine push and win fight for	freedom	CLUTCHING her husband's arm, the women
4.	2021.txt	The latest delay to	Freedom	Day is a kick in the teeth.
5.	2021.txt	Somerset THIS delay of	Freedom	Day is wrong. The number of deaths
6.	2021.txt	joy of freedom OUR long crawl to	freedom	is almost over. What joyous relief
7.	2021.txt	WHAT is	Freedom?	It is personal liberty, it's a release from
8.	2021.txt	work that has been done for our	freedom	otherwise I wouldn't be here on Strictly,
9.	2021.txt	miraculous vaccines were the route to	freedom.	We didn't expect that to mean mandatory
10.	2021.txt	wimps of Sage and postponing restoring our	freedoms	while the rest of Europe opens up.

The examination of the concordances displayed in Table 3, which was combined with the analysis of the extended context, reveals that *freedom* is used as a term referring to liberty of action (lines 1,6, and 8), which is often influenced by contextual factors that can *curtail* it (line 2) or, instead, *open the route* to it (line 9). *Freedom* is defined as *personal liberty* (line 7) and is represented as something that cannot be taken for granted: people need to fight for it (line 3) and face delays in the easing of restrictions (lines 4 and 5). *Freedom* becomes a more complex concept in 2021, as witnessed by the use of the plural form *freedoms* (lines 2 and 10), which emphasizes the range of personal liberties anyone can have, e.g. liberty of self-determination, freedom of movement, freedom of speech. *Freedom Day* (lines 4 and 5) is an innovative pattern that is only reported in 2021 when people waited for and then celebrated the easing of Covid-19 restrictions.

To identify the differences in the uses of *freedom*, I aligned the results with Leech and Fallon's (1992) framework supporting the need for semantic classification of concordances to check for the senses in which words are being used. In the adoption of this approach, it is also important to bear in mind that static linguistic features and their online impact are just one side of the story; topic and/or theme identification in corpora and digital influence on the concept operate at a broader contextual level (van Dijk, 1980; Brookes and McEnery, 2019). In this view, I adapted the classification provided by Leech and Fallon (1992) based on categories like sport, social hierarchy, law and crime, and business, and examined all the concordance lines, grouping them according to the following taxonomy: uses of freedom with words referring to media (media freedom), press (press freedom), sex (sexual freedom), personal choices (freedom of choice), mobility (freedom of mobility), liberty to express their ideas (freedom of speech), easing of Covid-19 restrictions (Freedom Day), and liberty of action (freedom of self-determination). Calculating the rates of concordances included in each group, I then set Table 4.

Table 4. Representations of *freedom* in 2019 and 2021

	<i>TS2019</i> Nf (per 10 K)	<i>TS2021</i> Nf (per 10 K)	Diff. %
Media freedom	2.74	-	-0.02
Press freedom	4.12	-	-0.04
Sexual freedom	1.83	0.46	-0.01
Freedom of choice	0.45	0.46	-0.004
Freedom of mobility	1.83	-	-0.01
Freedom of speech	0.91	-	-0.009
Freedom Day	-	7.42	+0.07
Liberty of self-determination	18.78	23.18	+0.04

The quantitative analysis shown in Table 4 and examination of Diff % between *TS2019* and *TS2021* prove the changing representation of *freedom* in *The Sun*: (1) *media freedom*, *press freedom*, *freedom of mobility*, and *freedom of speech* are absent in *TS2021*; (2) *sexual freedom* is more frequent in *TS2019* than *TS2021*; (3) *Freedom Day* only occurs in *TS2021*; (4) the use of *freedom* as a general term referring to the 'liberty of self-determination' is more marked in *TS2021* than *TS2019*, which is the consequence of limited use of the word *freedom* as a specialized term within specific areas.

5.2. Collocational analysis of *freedom*

The examination of the uses of *freedom* and the changing features between 2019 and 2021 should be complemented with a collocational analysis giving information on the associations of the searched words within the context and revealing the assumptions they entail (Brezina, 2016).

Observation of the top ten collocates of *freedom* in *TS2019* reported in Table 5 suggests that the collocates that predominantly occur to the left (L) are *sexual*, *press*, *path*, *chilling*, and *bid*, whereas *movement*, *am*, *today* especially occur as right collocates (R). *Speech* and *exciting* are, instead, placed in the middle position (M), that is, they occur both to the left and to the right of the node.

Table 5. Top ten collocates of *freedom* in TS2019

Index	Position	Collocate	Stat.	Freq. (coll.)	Freq. (corpus)
1.	M	<i>speech</i>	9.33158591800276	4	2
2.	R	<i>movement</i>	8.91654764024566	6	4
3.	M	<i>exciting</i>	8.009657200332938	4	5
4.	L	<i>sexual</i>	7.746622898296072	4	6
5.	L	<i>press</i>	7.668620413610009	12	19
6.	R	<i>am</i>	7.594619701053908	3	5
7.	L	<i>path</i>	7.594619701053908	3	5
8.	R	<i>today</i>	7.524230551100393	4	7
9.	L	<i>chilling</i>	7.331585399017676	3	6
10.	L	<i>bid</i>	7.161660570570413	4	9

The representation of *freedom* as ‘liberty of action’ that emerged from concordance-based analysis (see Section 5.1) is construed as a positive experience in *TS2019*. The collocates seem to contribute to shaping *freedom* as an enjoyable experience characterising everyday life, as in examples (1) and (2):

- (1) ... Police threats to media **freedom** have no place in the UK... (TS2019)
- (2) ...it's Freedom of Choice. And soon, it's **Freedom**, full stop. (TS2019)

These features are also observable in the collocation graph including all collocates that *GraphColl* provides for *freedom* ((CPN) 3a-MI (3), L5-R5, C3-NC3; no filters applied), as in Figure 1.

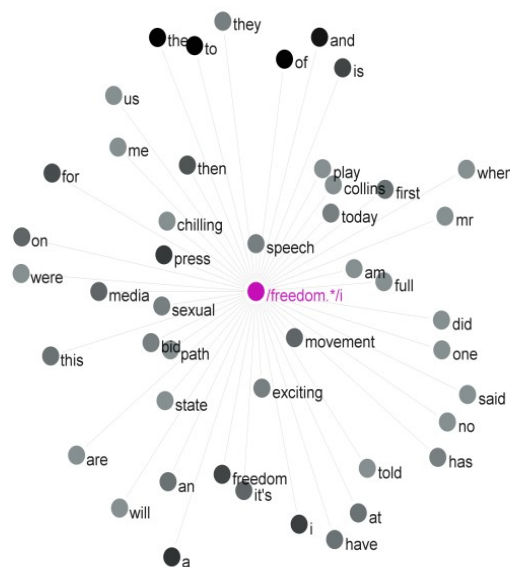


Figure 1. Collocation graph of *freedom* in TS2019

Table 6. Top ten collocates of *freedom* in TS2021

Index	Position	Collocate	Stat.	Freq. (coll.)	Freq. (corpus)
1.	R	<i>letter</i>	7.88025864782315	3	4
2.	R	<i>arrived</i>	7.558330552936094	3	5
3.	L	<i>fight</i>	7.558330552936094	3	5
4.	R	<i>finally</i>	7.558330552936094	3	5
5.	R	<i>day</i>	7.253476059461241	17	35
6.	L	<i>delay</i>	7.07290372576524	3	7
7.	L	<i>Indian</i>	7.07290372576524	3	7
8.	L	<i>our</i>	5.973368184295221	14	70
9.	L	<i>variant</i>	5.880258840442081	3	16
10.	R	<i>well</i>	5.880258840442081	3	16

As represented in Table 6, *fight*, *delay*, *Indian*, *our* and *variant* especially occur as left collocates whereas *letter*, *arrived*, *finally*, *day* and *well* are mostly set at the right of the node. The representation of *freedom* in TS2021 seems to be anchored to diverse values if compared with TS2019. Indeed, the positive shade that characterizes *freedom* in 2019 is weakened in 2021. In addition to collocates entailing a positive nuance like *arrived*, and *finally*, as in (8)-(9), there are collocates such as *fight* and *variant*, as in (10)-(11), which suggest that *freedom* is often something that is threatened or people wait for due to social restrictions:

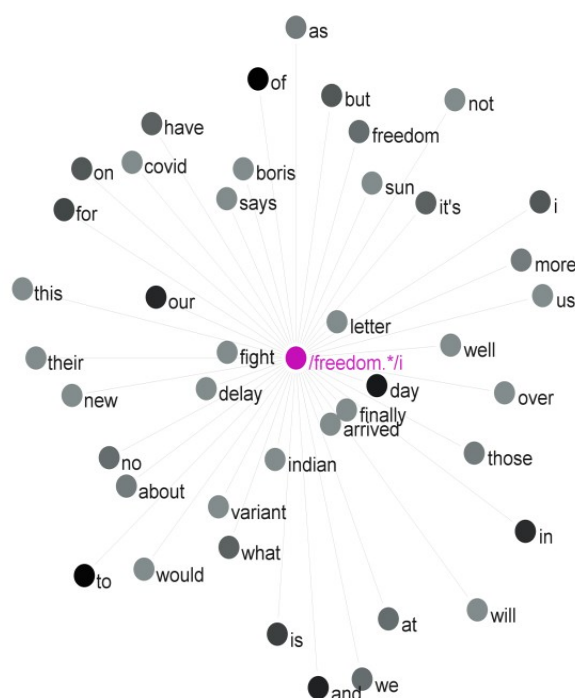
(8) **FREEDOM** Day finally arrived in England yesterday ... (TS2021)

(9) **FREEDOM** Day finally arrived ... (TS2021)

(10) Join vaccine push and win fight for **freedom**. (TS2021)

(11) ... threat the Indian variant places on our “**freedom** day”. (TS2021)

Extending the examination to all the collocates and observing the collocation graph ((CPN) 3a-MI (3), L5-R5, C3-NC3; no filters applied), as in Figure 3, it is possible to corroborate what has already been observed.

Figure 3. Collocation graph of *freedom* in TS2021

The strongest association is observable between *freedom* and the word *day*, maybe due to the already established use as *freedom day*, as in (12), which occurs in 16 hits out of the total 68 hits in *TS2021*. *Freedom Day* is the day when restrictions were eased and pre-pandemic life – including *freedom* with all its components – was partly restored. Other collocates like *fight*, *finally* and *delay* contribute to a negative representation of *freedom* construed as an uncertain status that is delayed, as in (13), embedding discourses that recognize the threat of Covid-19 and emphasizing the need for restoring it.

(12) THE Prime Minister is right to delay **Freedom Day**. (*TS2021*)

(13) The latest delay to **Freedom Day** is a kick in the teeth. (*TS2021*)

The examination of the adjectives that collocate with *freedom* in *TS2021* confirms these ideas and enhances the uncertainty that is perceived around it. Figure 4 shows the collocation graph including collocates and word class.

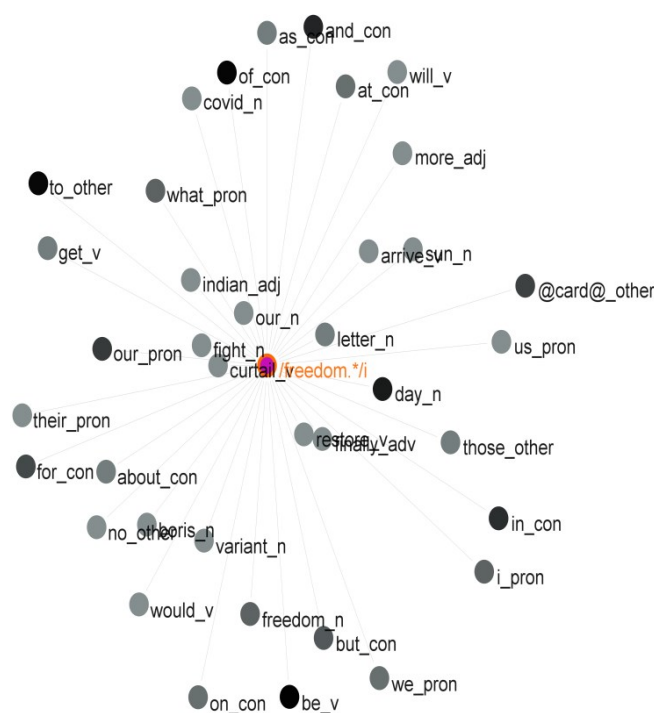


Figure 4. Collocates of *freedom* (word class) in *TS2021*

Observation of the graph in Figure 4 reveals that, except for *more*, there are no other adjectives qualifying discourses around *freedom* in 2021. The use of *more* is significant as it further corroborates the perceived need for restoring both pre-pandemic life and *freedom* as a *full state*, which is experienced by people who write and read the newspaper.

Overall, examination of the collocational profile of *freedom* based on MI reveals that the social context and the new experience of the pandemic brought a revised perception of personal freedom which was lived as a state that has been lost but that everyone aims to obtain again. All this corroborates the value of an integrated analysis combining qualitative and quantitative methods while shedding light on hidden discourses around *freedom*, which may only be accessed with mixed methods and interpreted in the light of socio-historical issues.

6. Conclusions

The aim of the present study was to describe the representation of *freedom* in *The Sun* newspaper in 2019 and 2021 and to identify cases of meaning shifts emerging from the outbreak of Covid-19.

The research has been undertaken on a corpus including texts taken from *The Sun*, which is the most read newspaper in the UK.

The analysis reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic has created the conditions for the linguistic renewal of the word *freedom*. Specifically, concordance-based analysis suggests that in 2019 there is a more specialized use of *freedom* that is linked to *media*, *press* and *speech*, which is rare or absent in 2021. In 2021 there are innovative uses like *Freedom day* and *freedoms*. These shifts may be explained in the light of the current situation in the UK, which was dominated by restrictions and national lockdowns just before 2021.

Examination of collocates reveals that in 2019 *freedom* is depicted as an enjoyable experience, whereas in 2021 *freedom* is also seen in a negative shade because it is threatened by Covid-19. This entails that the social context dominated by lockdown and restrictions in the social mobility has affected the way *freedom* is experienced and, consequently, talked about.

The results enhance the link between language and society as supported within the CDA framework while elucidating the huge impact of the pandemic on the conceptualization of *freedom* in the UK during the last few years. The findings are, however, far from being exhaustive; future paths of research will include the examination of representations of words or phrases such as *liberty* and *mobility* which are associated with new lived experiences of *freedom*.

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