Corpus linguistics – Islam in the UK Press

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Corpus Linguistics

• An empirical form of analysis based on using collections of very large, naturally occurring language texts (corpora)

• Texts are sampled and balanced to be as best a representative of a particular language variety (e.g. reference: British English or specialised: Victorian novels)

• Computer software (WordSmith, Antconc) enables frequency-based statistics to be carried out, as well as presenting data so patterns can be more easily observed (Archer 2009)
• Analyses can be enriched by manual annotation
• Analyses can be enriched by automatic annotation of grammatical and semantic features also, for example.
Overview

• Word frequency, collocation, multi-dimensional analyses
• The focus of this talk – the corpus linguistics perspective on press reporting
• Some examples
• But first – multi methods
Our data

• Funded by ESRC, grant number RES-000-22-3536
• 200,037 newspaper articles about Muslims and Islam
• Published between 1998-2009
• Guardian/Observer, Independent, Times, Telegraph, Business
• Star, Sun/NOWT, Mirror, Express, Mail, People
• 143 million words in total
Muslims and conflict

- The word terrorism (and related forms) is more frequent than the word Islam (and related forms)
• All reporting about Mo Farah, August 2012, 330,000 words – only 23 mentions of *Muslim*

• To find himself the new centrepiece of a tolerant, multicultural Britain - the Londoner and devoted Arsenal fan is not just an Olympic champion but a champion of his Muslim faith - astonishes him. (Times, August 13, 2012)

• Being a Muslim has helped me a lot. You've got to believe in God. Everything happens for a reason, so you shouldn't get wound up. (The Star, August 11, 2012)
• Over half of the most frequent 4,000 words in the articles relate to conflict
• When compared to a large random set of news articles, the Muslim articles have a statistically significantly higher number of conflict words.
Extremism

• About 1 in 20 instances of the word *Muslim* or *Muslims* occurs directly next to a word which refers to extreme belief like *hardliner* or *fanatic*. This figure rises to 1 in 6 for *Islamic*.

• References to extreme forms of Islam or Muslims are 21 times more common than references to moderate Islam or Muslims.

• The tabloids do this most, The Guardian does it the least.
Devout Muslim = not normal

• "He was a devout Muslim, but he was a normal kid who loved Manchester United and played football and cricket." (The Mirror, 1 April 2004)

• FORMER classmates of Miss Begum said she had gone from being a 'normal' girl to a devout Muslim almost overnight. (Daily Mail, 11 February 2006)
Welcome to Muslim World

- *Community* and *World* are most common words that come after *Muslim* (occurring about 11,000 times altogether).

- Both are used to imply that all Muslims are the same across the UK or the whole world, and often in conflict with “the West”.

- “Given the sketchiness of the evidence released to the public by the US and UK governments there is widespread denial in the Arab and *Muslim world* that Osama bin Laden had any involvement in the attack on America on September 11.” (*The Guardian*, 24 October 2001)
The Mail’s Moslems

• By the year 2000 most newspapers had dropped the archaic spelling *Moslem*.

• In 2001, the Express and Mail started using it again.

• In 2002 The Muslim Council asked these newspapers to stop using *Moslem* as it sounds like the Arabic word for “oppressor”

• The Express stopped immediately. The Mail continued to use the spelling for a year.
Text Maniacs in *The Star*

- all our money goes on asylum & mosques. samwigan (16 May 2005)

- Y shud we change r way of life just 2 stop offending muslims. they aint neva gonna change theirs. Maybe they shud try eating pork. a nice bacon sarnie cud change any1's mind. (25 October 2005)

- The credit crunch could be a blessing in disguise. All the poles and muslim scroungers will go home if theres no money left to give out! (18 September 2008)
### Muslim Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Collocates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dress/the veil</td>
<td>wear, veils, veil, wearing, remove, worn, hijab, full, Straw, cover, Jack, Niqab, faces, face, headscarves, veiled, Straw’s, dress, covering, head, headscarf, traditional, burkas, burka, wore, dressed, covered, veiling, burqa, burkha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity words (age, gender and relationships)</td>
<td>young, men, children, women, people, girls, old, generation, husbands, marry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting and feeling</td>
<td>said, saying, feel, asked, call, told, asking, comments, say, ask, talk, revealed, believe, suggested, called, calling, urged, prefer, hope, know, wants, claimed, speak, question, warned, understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locations</td>
<td>British, Britain, country, world, London, English, western, Bosnian, constituency, society, Blackburn, France, Europe, street, Serb, town, French, Arab, community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>rights, allowed, forced, ban, issue, choose, debate, power, support, help, free, allow, row, required, banned, encourage, campaign, choice, freedom,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression</td>
<td>rape, abuse, attacks, oppressed, oppression, raping,raped, fear, honor, fearful, attacked, bodies, abused, killed, spat, torture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law and order</td>
<td>law, police, courts, laws, accused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Islamic, religious, Sharia, devout, Mosques, extremists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>get, go, stop, way, role, work, educated, given, lives, living, growing, release, separation, give, good, fact, consequences, make, held, life, working, film, live</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2006: Jack Straw’s article

• “wearing the full veil was bound to make better, positive relations between the two communities more difficult”

Jack Straw, The Lancashire Evening Telegraph
## Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Forced to wear it</th>
<th>Right to wear it</th>
<th>Choosing to wear it</th>
<th>Demanding to wear it</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Times</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mail</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Express</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Star</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mirror</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Guardian/Observer</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Adjectival collocates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Adjectival collocates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>burqa</td>
<td>all-enveloping, all-covering, tent-like, all-encompassing, full-length, obligatory,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(not) welcome, full, compulsory, unnecessary, wrong, traditional, pale, black,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>white, blue, Afghan, Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>niqab</td>
<td>(not) desirable, full, controversial, black, Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hijab</td>
<td>full-length, obligatory, contrary, compulsory, full, grey, traditional, correct, blue,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>black, bad, green, special, Muslim, white</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veil</td>
<td>full, full-length, all-enveloping, all-encompassing, full-body, obligatory, discreet,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>facial, Muslim, compulsory, divisive, black, thin, Islamic, traditional, blue, white,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>heavy, different, long, religious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jilbab</td>
<td>full-length, all-embracing, flowing, loose, full, traditional, black, Islamic, Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headscarf</td>
<td>Islamic-style, floral, traditional, obligatory, coloured, pink, black, Islamic,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslim, white, green, essential, red, blue, simple, Arab, important, small, religious,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>own</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Feminist arguments in left-leanining broadsheets

- Right after that, the misery began. Khalid tried to control her and force her to wear the hijab, the headscarf worn by devout Muslim women. (*The Observer*, April 23rd, 2006)
- Muslim women are being forced to cover up in a number of countries as part of a political backlash against growing freedoms (*The Guardian*, October 13th, 2006)
- Wearing a headscarf is a symbol of women's subjugation and those apologists, be they Muslims or so-called liberals, who want us to believe that Muslim women are given a choice of wearing the headscarf forget about the very strong sense of tradition coupled with intense intimidation by male relatives. (*The Independent*, December 30th, 2003, letters)
Right-leaning arguments against the veil

• Insult to men: ‘It seems to me that the real offence conveyed by the wearing of the full veil by Muslim women lies in the implication that no man can look on any woman without being consumed by unholy lust.’ *The Times* (August 30\(^{th}\), 2005)

• Health: ‘A growing number of Muslim women who wear the head-to-toe veil are being treated for rickets.’ *The Express* (October 6\(^{th}\), 2006)
Taboid arguments against the veil

• Threatens British way of life: ‘Anyone sincerely wishing to integrate into the British way of life would never wear such an alien and threatening outfit’ *The Express* (July 19\(^{th}\), 2007)

• A cover for terrorism: ‘This was the moment two armed robbers disguised as Muslim women in burkas were about to pounce.’ (*The Mirror*, June 3\(^{rd}\), 2002)
Water metaphor

• ‘elaborately-veiled Muslim women **gliding** along New Bond Street in London’ *The Mail* (August 9\(^{th}\), 2008)

• ‘**waddling** around a 21st-century supermarket’ (*The Mail*  November 10\(^{th}\) 2005)

• ‘**sailing** along’ *The Guardian* (January 22\(^{nd}\), 2004)
Furnishing representations

• ‘eyes peeping from yards of leg-tangling, windblown drapery... Maybe, inside all that dark material, they are brimming with self-esteem’” The Guardian (January 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2004)

• “I love soft furnishings,” I tell my laughing flatmates. “But that doesn't mean I want to be one... medieval costume... fabric prisons’ (The Mail November 10\textsuperscript{th} 2005)
The tabloid “horror” discourse

• ‘We let shroud-swishing zombies flout OUR standards of freedom and tolerance every day.’ *The Sun* (June 24th 2009) Julie Birchill

• ‘the living shroud... Who wants to wake from an operation to see a swaddled figure in the next bed?’ *The Express* (September 8th, 2006)

• How long before non-Muslim women are compelled to dress like bats to enter certain parts of certain British cities?’ *The Mail on Sunday* (July 16th, 2006) Peter Hitchens
“Reasonable” broadsheets: their rights, our rights

• ‘If Muslim women in Lancashire want to use the niqab to veil their faces, that is their right. But their MP is entitled to voice his concern that wearing it restricts his constituents' full participation in British society.’ The Observer (October 8th, 2006)

• ‘Even if hijab-wearing is a genuine choice, does that make it obligatory for us to respect it? Any more than hijab-wearers respect women who wear shamefully little? What we would not ban, we do not have to condone.’ The Guardian (January 22nd, 2004)
Summing Up

• The overall picture is that Muslims and Islam are connected to conflict, terror, extremism and even horror.

• The tabloids newspapers are the most negative – focussing on Muslims like Abu Hamza

• Opinion columnists and reader’s letters – opinion as a defence at the PCC.

• Much of this negativity is of very long standing, reaching back to at least the 17th Century
The Textual Tardis

- EEBO
- 19th Century newspapers online
- Times online
- Advantages over google ngram
- Over 600 million words in EEBO
- Terrabytes of data in 19th century newspapers
- The findings? Similar. Yet with Muslim world we can track the birth of a phrase.
Summing up

• Corpora can show us about the nature of writers
• Corpora can tell us about genre differences
• Corpora can tell us ‘about’ texts
• Corpora can help us decode argumentation strategies
• Corpora can help us track change through time
• Corpora can help us identify similarity over time
• Corpora can help us look at representation
• And more besides!
Thank you

