Using Sketch Engine to examine the presentation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press

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Abstract

The presentation reports on the outcomes of the ESRC-funded project, *Presentation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press, 1998-2009*. The project used a corpus-based approach, while also being informed by moral panic theory (Cohen, 1972), and notions central to Critical Discourse Analysis (e.g. Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

The project used a corpus of 143 million words, containing over 200,000 articles published in 12 national UK newspapers and their Sunday editions between 1998 and 2009. The corpus articles were derived from the *Nexis UK* online database, via a query containing the terms *Islam*, *Muslim*, and related words (e.g. *Quran*).

The analysis used Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004), an online corpus tool which utilises a grammatically tagged and syntactically parsed corpus to produce “word sketches”, that is, the grammatical constructions that a word is frequently found in, as well as its salient collocates within these constructions.

The analysis focused on the patterns of use of the word forms, *Islam, Islamic, Islamist(s)* and *Muslim, Muslims* (both as nouns and adjectives). The examination of their most salient sketches and strong collocates, as well as the most frequent nouns, adjectives and lexical verbs in the corpus lead to three interrelated observations:

• Islam is treated predominantly as an ideology, rather than a religion.
• The use of *Muslim* as an adjective is associated more frequently with issues of governance (e.g. politics, law) than with issues of religion.
• Irrespective of the stance towards Islam and Muslims that may be projected in particular articles or newspapers, the discussion of Islam and Muslims in the UK press is, overall, carried out within contexts of armed/social conflict and/or terrorism, and the attendant issues of social disruption, violence, destruction and death.

References


Title: The representation of Islam and Muslims in the UK press, 1998-2009

Funding body: ESRC

Principal investigator: Paul Baker

Co-investigator: Tony McEnery

Researcher: Costas Gabrielatos
Online database:  *Nexis UK*

Query

- Alah OR Allah OR ayatolah OR burka! OR burqa! OR chador! OR fatwa! OR hejab! OR imam! OR Islam! OR Koran OR Mecca OR Medina OR Mohammedan! OR Moslem! OR Muslim! OR mosque OR mufti! OR mujaheddin! OR mujahedine! OR mullah! OR muslim! OR Prophet Mohammed OR Q'uran OR rupoush OR rupush OR sharia OR shari'a OR shia! OR shi-ite! OR Shi'ite! OR sunni! OR the Prophet OR wahabi OR yashmak! AND NOT Islamabad AND NOT shiatsu AND NOT sunnily
Corpus

Articles: 200,000

Words: 143 million

Spelling normalisation

Sub-corpora:
- per newspaper
- per year (1998-2009)
- broadsheets/tabloids
- political orientation

Business
- Daily Express + Sunday Express
- Daily Mail + Mail on Sunday
- Daily Mirror + Sunday Mirror
- Guardian + Observer
- Independent + Independent on Sunday

People
- Daily Star + Daily Star Sunday
- Sun

Times + Sunday Times

Television + Radio
Corpus tools and methodology

Tools

• **Sketch Engine**, WordSmith 5

Methodology

• Detailed wordlist analysis, keyword analysis, **word sketches**
• **Concordance analysis**

Word Sketch

• Collocates of a word within a grammatical construction
  – *Muslim* _Adj_ + Noun collocates
# Sketch of Muslim used as an adjective

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th-century 1.222

neighbourhood 1.216

tid 1.16

design 1.155

prayer 1.09

character 1.043

N+for-i 5 0.0

chunk 1 3.65
Sketch of *Muslim* as an adjective

- **Noun collocates**

22 types with freq. > 500
- Less that 2% of sketch types
- More than 50% of sketch tokens

Less frequent types may, collectively, reveal a different picture (Baker, 2004)

Examination of all sketch types
<table>
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<th>Category</th>
<th>Collocate terms</th>
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<td>CONFLICT</td>
<td>extremist, fanatic, terrorist, fundamentalist</td>
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<tr>
<td>RELIGION</td>
<td>cleric, faith, month (=Ramadan), preacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>CULTURE/PRACTICE</td>
<td>festival, dress, culture, name, tradition</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDUCATION</td>
<td>school, teaching, education, college</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIEW/ATTITUDE/EMOTION</td>
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<td>POPULATION</td>
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<td>AREA/COUNTRY</td>
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<tr>
<td>GROUP/ORGANISATION</td>
<td>group, organisation, association, charity</td>
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<tr>
<td>AGE/SEX</td>
<td>woman, man, girl, youth, child, teenager</td>
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<td>FAMILY/RELATIONSHIP</td>
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<td>OCCUPATION/ROLE</td>
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<td>OTHER</td>
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<td>ETHNICITY/NATIONALITY</td>
<td>Briton, Albanian, Malay, Arab</td>
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</table>
Muslim-Adj: Noun collocates - tokens

- **DIFF. ATTRIBUTES**: 21.4%
- **GROUP/ORG.**: 5.6%
- **COUNTRY/ETHNICITY**: 37.6%
- **CULTURE**: 12.0%
- **CONFLICT**: 14.4%
- **RELIGION**: 8.7%
- **CULT./PRACTICE**: 6.5%
- **EDUCATION**: 3.7%
- **VAE**: 1.8%
- **AREA/COUNTRY**: 15.5%
- **POPULATION**: 14.8%
- **AGE/SEX**: 12.4%
- **FAMILY/REL.**: 3.9%
- **OCCUP./ROLE**: 4.3%
- **ETHN/NAT**: 0.3%
- **OTHER**: 0.8%

**Contribution by Concept**
- **DIFF. ATTRIBUTES**: 21.4%
- **GROUP/ORG.**: 5.6%
- **COUNTRY/ETHNICITY**: 37.6%
- **CULTURE**: 12.0%
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- **POPULATION**: 14.8%
- **AGE/SEX**: 12.4%
- **FAMILY/REL.**: 3.9%
- **OCCUP./ROLE**: 4.3%
- **ETHN/NAT**: 0.3%
- **OTHER**: 0.8%
The distribution in terms of tokens may be due to some very frequent types
Muslim_Adj: Noun Collocates – Types + Tokens

- AREA/COUNTRY
- POP.
- AGE/SEX
- RELIGION
- GOVERNANCE
- GROUP/ORG.
- CULTURE/PRACTICE
- FAMILY/RELATIONS
- VAE
- OTHER
- OCCUP./ROLE
- ETHN/NAT

Token/Types graph with categories spread across the plot.
Relative frequency (‰) in broadsheets and tabloids

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Conflict

- Daily Star readers have told Union Jack burning Muslims to sod off. On Saturday, we asked you whether the marauding extremists who torched OUR flag on OUR streets should be kicked out of OUR country. And thousands of you phoned to say YES. In a record reply to a Daily Star phone and text poll, a staggering 99.7 % told the fanatics to pack up and leave. Thousands of patriotic Brits deluged our voteline after we published sickening pictures of British Muslim extremists burning the Union Jack on the streets of London. The mob tore up an appeal from fellow Muslims for an end to bloodshed and chanted: "You will pay, bin Laden 's on his way". [Star, 05.04.2004]

- In February about 400 people attacked and burned a church in the southern city of Sukkur after accusations that a local Christian had set fire to pages from the Quran. After a similar allegation last November, a Muslim mob wielding axes and sticks set fire to three churches, a dozen houses, three schools, a dispensary, a convent and two parsonages. The attacks were the worst on Pakistan's Christian community since 2002, when Muslim fanatics led an assault on a church with grenades on Christmas Day. [Telegraph, 28.04.2006]
The category of conflict indicates instances when issues of armed/violent or social conflict are expressed directly.

However, discourses of conflict are pervasive, and are indexed by all other categories.
• WHEN a prominent Muslim cleric, Abu Qatada, was arrested in a South London flat last month after nearly a year on the run, security chiefs in Britain recognised that his supporters might seek their revenge. [Times, 18.11.2002]

•

• THE Muslim teaching assistant who insisted on wearing her veil in the classroom was following fatwa orders. Aishah Azmi, 24, took advice from Mufti Yusuf Sacha, a Muslim cleric in West Yorkshire. It's said the Mufti told her it was obligatory to wear the veil around men who were not relatives. [Star, 30.10.2006]
A LEADING barrister says Sharia law in Britain is "inevitable", despite 95% of Daily Star readers insisting it is wrong in our phone poll yesterday. Most of our readers believe that Britons should not have to live under the controversial Muslim code in their own country, which includes stoning to death for adultery and cutting off hands for theft. But former Chairman of the Bar Council Stephen Hockman said there was no reason why Sharia law could not be applied here. He said: "Given the world situation and our own substantial Muslim population, it is vital that we now look at ways to integrate Muslim culture into our own traditions. [Daily Star, 05.07.2008]
Reedah Nijabat, a young barrister whose family is from Pakistan [...] is convinced that what high-flyers like herself lack is their own watering hole - based on Soho's fabled Groucho Club - and has made it her mission to start one. So far, 30-year-old Nijabat has got a lease on three adjoining shops awaiting conversion and been promised bank loans of pounds 200,000. The site of the ArRum club is in the heart of loft-living, warehouse-clubbing, multi-racial Clerkenwell. So why do Muslims need a separate place to socialise? "Because most of them feel a bit uncomfortable about going to a bar or being offered alcohol, Nijabat says. While it's true that many second and third generation Muslims here feel more integrated and outgoing than their parents, Nijabat reckons their specific needs are not being met by the commercial sector. She's tired, too, of negative images of Islam in the media. There's a whole vibrant side of Muslim culture - marked by an interest in art, architecture and literature. [Guardian, 06.12.2000]
Recently, Bradford got its first state-funded Muslim school, sparking a debate over whether such religious schools - which already exist for Christians and Jews - would promote segregation. [Independent, 17.04.2001]

DOZENS of new Muslim state schools could be created in a controversial expansion of faith education planned by Ministers. Schools Secretary Ed Balls promised funds to take more than 100 private Muslim schools into the state sector to meet rising parental demand. But there were immediate warnings that setting up new faith schools could backfire by increasing religious tensions. Opponents said it could entrench segregation and called them 'plain madness'. And a Muslim leader admitted the biggest obstacle to the opening of new Islamic state schools was public fears that they would 'produce fundamentalists'. [Mail, 11.09.2007]
Those who have lived in Muslim districts frequently remark on the warmth and neighbourly atmosphere of streets which are often among the few in Britain where every resident knows the names of his neighbours. They furnish a sense of refuge, and immeasurably buttress the confidence of children and the old, who might otherwise find themselves culturally adrift and isolated. In the longer term, however, the Muslim community must ask itself whether the demographic map of the former mill towns of the North is an adequate reflection of its sense of Islam's necessary separateness. [Independent, 15.12. 2001]

Once the bombers' identities had been exposed, the usual platitudes followed thick and fast. They were variously nice, friendly, cricket playing, sports loving, community minded, wonderful with kids. Three lived in the Leeds area where, we are constantly told, the white and Muslim communities rub along together just fine. [Mirror, 17.07.2005]
Muslims presented as a nation or homogeneous population

• It also comes just before Mr Obama's visit to Europe and Turkey. It has already drawn warm praise from European leaders, who have been pressing for a new diplomatic push to underpin the international pressure on Tehran over its nuclear ambitions. And when he arrives in Istanbul, on his first presidential visit to a Muslim country, he can already show a substantial initiative to improve relations with the Muslim world. [Times, 21.03.2009]

• The Palestinian claim to statehood is unanswerable, and with wiser leadership it would have been flourishing for years. It is tragic that the cause is now being so ruthlessly exploited with Jew as a codeword for extremist incitement of hatred of America and the West. This is jihad. It is aimed at us all, at Europeans who "look like" Americans because they believe in liberal democracy and are infected by American culture. But its first victims are the Palestinians and the frustrated masses of the Muslim world. Their leaders have led them into ignominy in three wars. They have failed to reform their corrupt and incompetent societies. Habits of mind tending to approve terror are becoming ingrained in the Muslim world, sanctioned by the lethargy and prejudice in Europe. [Sun, 29.06.2002]
But not all is negative - at least not intentionally ...

- There should be no compromise on supporting universal human rights but there must be flexibility in how we go about achieving them. Navigating that narrow line demands a mixture of humility and solidarity. Take Islam and women in Britain. Since sexism is omnipresent it would be foolish to assume that it has escaped Muslim communities or that in some instances the position of some Muslim women is not particularly bad. It would also be arrogant to assume that Muslim women have not noticed this already or to ignore that some of them are doing something about it. Finally, it would be negligent to forget that Muslims are the most vulnerable to racial attack in Britain, which has seen a steep increase in fascist activity on the streets and at the polls in recent years and is involved in an illegal war against a Muslim country. Liberals outside the Muslim community have some choices. We can either condemn the entire community as sexist and impose our own priorities on them, thus leaving their communities more embattled and strengthening the conservative forces within them. Or we can talk to Muslim women's groups and feminists, of whom there are many, to see what their priorities are and to find some common ground where we can support them and them us, as we struggle against our own demons of racism and Islamophobia. [Guardian, 12.07.2004]
Emerging patterns

• The direct mention of armed/social conflict is both very frequent and lexically rich.
• Other uses of *Muslim_Adj* are usually embedded within discussions of conflict.
• In discussions of cultural aspects or education, there is a pervasive ‘Us vs. Them’ stance.
• *Muslim_Adj is* used much more often as a national/ethnic/cultural attribute than a religious one.
• Muslims are usually presented as a homogeneous group.