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EAST, WEST AND WESTMINSTER: A CORPUS-BASED STUDY OF UK FOREIGN POLICY STATEMENTS REGARDING THE UNIFICATION OF GERMANY, OCTOBER 1989 TO NOVEMBER 1990

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a study of the language used to articulate UK foreign policy regarding the unification of Germany. It identifies events which drove changes in UK policy and explores changes in ministers' discourse as the government's policy evolved. The primary source material is a bespoke corpus extracted from Hansard, the official report on proceedings in the UK Parliament. It comprises the words attributed to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and his ministerial team between October 1989 and November 1990.

The paper identifies lexical items that are more frequent in speeches and statements relating to Germany than in the corpus as a whole and which display a large change in frequency within the period. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, it identifies distinct features of ministers' discourse that correlate with phases of policy. These include the prominence of Germany in ministers' discourse; ministers' lexical choices; and changes in the seniority of the ministers delivering the discourse. It also identifies one aspect of ministers' discourse that does not change in a way that correlates with phases of policy: their descriptions of the Warsaw Pact.

KEYWORDS

corpus linguistics; political discourse;
foreign policy

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1. Introduction

The fact that those in political power use language distinct from their predecessors and successors has been widely observed, including by Fairclough (2000) and Partington (2014). Changes of government, or of key personalities in a government, may mark the end of one 'phase' of political discourse and the beginning of another, and these are logical and predictable points at which to draw boundaries between phases.

With exceptions such as Nabers (2009), which charts the changing discourse of US President George W Bush following the terrorist attacks of 2001-09-11, there has been less consideration of any effect that outside events have on political discourse. Where a government is stable but a tumultuous world event takes place, this may bring about change in a government's policies, even when the personalities forming the government remain the same. This paper explores whether, when a government's policy moves into a new phase, there are corresponding changes in discourse. As such, it analyses event-driven, as opposed to ideologically-driven or personality-driven, discourse change.

The period chosen for this study was a tumultuous one in Europe's history: the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, in 1989-90. The paper draws on contextual sources to identify distinct phases and major themes in the policy of the UK government at that time regarding the unification of Germany. It then uses corpus techniques to identify changes in the lexical choices of the ministers responsible for the UK's policy that may correspond to these phases: the then Prime Minister (Margaret Thatcher), Foreign Secretary (Douglas Hurd) and Ministers of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, details of whom are given in Appendix A.

The corpus is extracted directly from Hansard, the official report on proceedings in the UK Houses of Parliament. It includes every comment attributed to the relevant ministers during the period of study, whether in the form of speeches during debates, statements or answers to questions. Following the terminology used in Parliament, these will be referred to as 'contributions'. Comments made outside of parliamentary proceedings are not included in the corpus.

The analysis focuses on three themes: Ministers' comments relating directly to Germany; their comments regarding unification; and the wider implications of Germany's unification for the security of the UK and Europe.

The purpose of the paper is twofold: to explore and illustrate how the techniques of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies can be applied to the analysis of event-driven change in political discourse; and to make a linguistic contribution to the understanding of the evolution of policy at a turning point in modern history.

2. Historical context

Prior to the period of this study, the UK's long-standing policy was to support the opening of the inner German border and the unification of Germany (Hurd, 2004, p.381). However, the sudden fall of the Berlin Wall on 1989-11-09 and its potential consequences were met with some apprehension, especially by the Prime Minister (Taylor, 2011, p.433).

In her memoirs, Thatcher (2011) does not at any point say she opposed unification entirely, but the UK Ambassador to Germany at the time believed that Thatcher 'would have preferred to see unification not taking place' (Mallaby, 1997, p.24). Hurd believed that Thatcher's concerns were 'deeply mistaken' (Hurd, 2003, p.382) and his officials warned that by opposing unification when Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev was not, Britain appeared 'more pro-Russian than the Russians' (p.383). Against this backdrop, the UK's policy between November 1989 and January 1990 can be characterised as one of reservations about and even objections to unification. This period is referred to in this study as 'phase one'.

By early February 1990, the United States of America was giving increasingly vocal support for unification (Thatcher, 2011, p.795). On 1990-02-06, the Prime Minister delivered her 'last tirade against German unification' (Hurd, 2003, p.384) and from this point on, the government's policy objective appears to have been to safeguard the UK's interests by influencing *how* German unification took place. Since World War Two, the UK, along with the US, Russia and France, had had particular rights and responsibilities regarding the city of Berlin. On 1990-02-13, the UK agreed in principle to a US proposal that the status of Berlin and external aspects of unification should be settled in a group that became known as the '2+4': West and East Germany; and the four post-war powers (Hurd, 2003, p.385). By July, West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was satisfied that he no longer needed to lobby other leaders to support unification, 'even the Iron Lady, who had come to terms with developments'¹ (Kohl and Diekmann, 1998, p.371). A 'Treaty on the Final Settlement with respect to Germany' was signed in Moscow on 1990-09-12 (HM Government, 1991) and Germany was unified on 1990-10-03. This period is referred to in this study as 'phase two'.

1 German: 'auch die »Eiserne Lady«, die sich mit der Entwicklung abgefunden hatte.'

3. Application of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) techniques

This paper is written from the perspective that CADS research can provide insights that are not only interesting to discourse analysts but may also be of use and interest to political scientists and historians. The writing of the paper was not motivated by a political goal in the sense that critical discourse analysts ascribe to their work, but aims to offer a new insight into the functioning of political discourse. Following the terminology of Baker and McEnery (2015, p.3), it is ‘curiosity’-based rather than ‘action’-based. This curiosity-based motivation for the paper also extends to a desire to study the discourse in depth by reading the speeches in full.

As CADS has ‘no overarching political agenda’ (Partington *et al.*, 2013, p.10), seeking instead to explain how linguistic resources are used in a given discourse, it provides the foundation on which to satisfy this curiosity in a structured and rigorous way.

CADS has been applied to a range of discourse types and political discourse features prominently within it. Duguid (2007) investigates the discourse of 10 Downing Street during the Prime Ministership of Tony Blair; Partington (2014) explores exchanges between the press and White House spokespeople; and Partington and Taylor (2018) is a study of how persuasion (or ‘rhetoric’) is used in political discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a small step from these discourses to the material analysed in this paper: political discourse delivered in the setting of a parliament.

4. Methodology

Hansard, the official report of proceedings in the UK Houses of Parliament, is an established source of information for research into political discourse. It is freely available online, provides a record of all proceedings in the Commons and Lords and is – in the words of the body responsible for its publication – ‘substantially verbatim’ (Parliament.UK, 2017).

The qualification ‘substantially’ is significant as the transcripts published in Hansard differ from a strictly verbatim transcript. Slembrouck (1992) observes four principal editorial processes: ensuring adherence to parliamentary protocols; filtering out ‘spokenness’; translation into formal, standard English; and ensuring ‘explicitness’ and ‘well-formedness’. Slembrouck concludes that the editorial processes display ‘an orientation towards a “normal” set of representational practices’ (1992, p.107), where the relevant norms are both those of formal English and those of parliamentary protocol.

Mollin (2007) further identifies changes to modal verbs; amplifiers including *very*, *really* and *absolutely*; changes between singular and plural; and changes of tense. She concludes that ‘The picture conveyed to the reader is one where MPs speak orderly (sic) one

after the other without any apparent meta-comments on how and when to speak'. (2007, p.208)

To assess whether the changes Slembrouck and Mollin observe are tolerable for the purposes of this research, a comparison was made between television footage (thatcher-itescot, n.d.) of a speech known as the 'Loyal Address' made by the MP Ian Gow following the State Opening of Parliament on 1989-11-21 and the Hansard transcript of the same speech (Parliament.UK, 2019, Commons Hansard vol. 162, col. 7). All of the editorial processes identified by Slembrouck were evident and their net effect was that the transcript contained 55 fewer words than were audible in the video, a reduction of around 4%. However, there were no significant changes to the noun and verb choices the MP made and the themes of the speech were as distinct in the Hansard transcript as in the MP's exact words. The analysis of this speech therefore gave confidence that Hansard would be sufficiently accurate for the purposes of this research.

The chosen date range for the corpus is 1989-10-17, when parliament returned from its summer recess and protests in East Germany were reaching their height, to 1990-11-16, when substantive business in parliament relating to the unification of Germany had been completed. Although interfaces such as 'Hansard at Huddersfield' (Jeffries *et al.*, 2020) and 'The Hansard Corpus' Corpus (Alexander and Davies, 2015) exist, these did not meet the requirements of this research, principally because they did not allow the viewing of complete speeches. The corpus was therefore extracted directly from volumes of Hansard (Commons volumes 158 to 180 and Lords volumes 511 to 523) which were downloaded as .XML files from the UK Parliament website (Parliament.UK, 2018). Contributions were selected for inclusion in the corpus if their 'date' tag fell within the given range and they were attributed by way of their 'member' tag to the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary or other Foreign Office ministers. In practice this meant that each line of text was then searched and marked for extraction if it met any of the following criteria:

- 1 The row contained the tag <dateformat> (as dates are shown in a separate line to contributions in the source material); or
- 2 The row contained the name and/or job title of a relevant minister, bounded by the tags <member> and </member>; or
- 3 The row immediately followed a row which had already been identified as a contribution by a relevant minister and this previous row did not contain the tag </membercontribution>.

Although the criteria were simple, characteristics of and inconsistencies in the formatting of Hansard made the undertaking more complex. The most significant was that the tag </membercontribution> was often missing, with the result that the contribu-

tion of the next member was marked for extraction even if they were not of interest for the study. However, as the tag <member> was reliably present at the beginning of each contribution, this was overcome by inserting an additional </membercontribution> tag before each <member> tag. Beyond this, there were changes in the ministerial team at the Foreign Office during the period covered by the study, with the result that the search criteria needed to be updated to reflect each change. It was also necessary to remove a few days' material from the end of the Lords data as the date ranges for the volumes of Commons and Lords Hansard did not align.

A series of tests was then carried out to verify that the extracted corpus met the criteria described above. This identified two missing contributions (one resulting from Hansard introducing the Prime Minister as the 'Prime Master' and one from an error in data extraction) and six unwanted contributions (five because searches for the Earl of Caithness — a Foreign Office minister in the House of Lords — unintentionally returned contributions by the MP for Caithness and Sutherland, and one because of a missing <member> tag in Hansard). The unwanted contributions were removed manually; the missing contributions were not added as they did not relate to foreign affairs and as such were extraneous to this study.

The resulting corpus consists of 7,043 contributions (669,680 words). Of these contributions, 38% are attributed to the Prime Minister, 6% to the Foreign Secretary, 47% to the Ministers of State at the Foreign Office who were members of the House of Commons and 9% to the Ministers of State who were members of the House of Lords.

5. Analysis

5.1. Selection of lexical items for investigation

The analysis in this paper focuses on lexical items which are strongly associated with ministers' discourse relating to Germany and which display a large difference in frequency between phase one and phase two. The corpus contains ten major speeches and statements relating to Germany (details of which are given in Appendix B), defined as a passage of text which Hansard attributes to one of the ministers with foreign policy responsibilities, and in which at least five lines of text contain the string *german*. These speeches and statements were used as a subcorpus to compare against the corpus as a whole and identify lexical items which were more frequent in ministers' discourse regarding Germany. As Table 1 shows, a comparison of this data (created using a set of scripts written specifically for this research in the Python programming language [Python Software Foundation, 2018]), identified several lexical items which appeared relevant to the topic of this paper and displayed a substantially higher frequency in the ten speeches and statements.

Lexical item	Frequency in whole corpus (tokens per million)	Frequency in subcorpus	Excess frequency in subcorpus
soviet	1089	3531	2443
germany	558	2633	2075
nato	610	2319	1710
german	462	1797	1335
gdr	226	1296	1070
unification	254	1296	1041
market	588	1212	624
security	907	1525	618
pact	96	585	489
warsaw	110	543	434

Table 1: Selected lexical items strongly associated with discourse relating to Germany

The frequency of each of these lexical items was then compared by creating subcorpora of the whole corpus for phases one and two. Table 2 shows the results of this comparison.

Lexical item	Frequency in Phase one (tpm)	Frequency in Phase two (tpm)	Frequency difference (tpm)
germany	322	667	345
german	227	570	343
security	675	1014	339
unification	58	345	286
gdr	200	238	37
market	670	551	-119
nato	506	657	151
pact	127	82	-44
soviet	934	1160	226
warsaw	148	92	-56

Table 2: Frequency of selected lexical items in phases one and two

The lexical items with the greatest difference in frequency between phases one and two were therefore identified as themes for analysis: *germany* and *german*, *security* and *unification*. This selection of themes is supported by contextual literature such as Hurd (2003) and Kohl and Diekmann (1998), which shows that the UK's policy towards German unification and considerations of security in Europe were important political issues in 1989-90. The literature also shows the interconnectedness of the issues to which many of these lexical items relate: the future of East Germany and that of the Soviet Union; the role of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as security alliances; and the implementation of market-based economic reforms in former communist countries. Whilst the remaining lexical items are not discussed as themes in their own right, they feature in the analysis where they are relevant to the selected themes.

5.2. Germany

Germany and the related forms *german*, *germans*, *germanys*, *germanies*, *frg* (denoting the Federal Republic of Germany) and *gdr* (the German Democratic Republic) appear in each month of the period studied except in August 1990, when parliament was in its summer recess, and September 1990, when Parliament was recalled for two days following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Figure 1 shows the total frequency with which these terms appear in the corpus, expressed as tokens per million words (tpm) on a month-by-month basis. It is

striking that the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 did not generate more references from ministers in the weeks that immediately followed: November and December 1989 are among the months with fewest references to Germany. References to Germany rose above 1,500 tpm for the first time in February 1990, when Douglas Hurd acknowledged that the unification of Germany was likely to happen ‘sooner rather than later’ (Commons vol. 167, col. 1088) and peaked at over 2,500 tpm in October 1990, immediately following unification. Overall there were 799 tokens of *germany* and the related forms during the period, making it the most frequency mentioned foreign country in the ministers’ discourse. The *soviet union*, including its related forms and those of *russia*, was a close second with 727 tokens, while the then UK territory of *hong kong* had 908 tokens, exceeding those of any independent country.

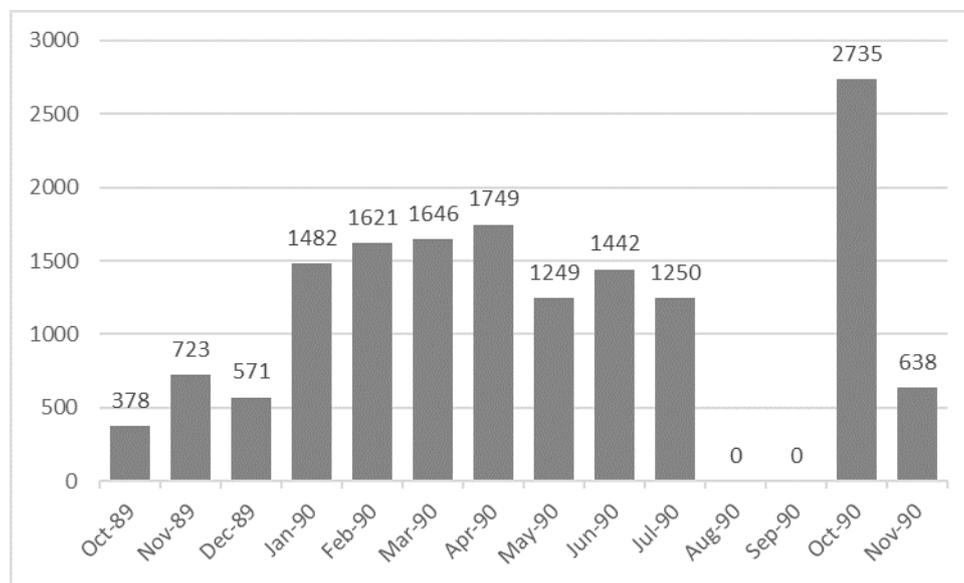


Figure 1: References to Germany, October 1989 to November 1990 (expressed as tokens per million words)

One reason for the relatively few references to Germany in late 1989 may have been simply that many other matters of foreign affairs merited discussion. Profound changes were taking place in the Soviet Union and every other country in central and eastern Europe. Hong Kong’s prominence in ministers’ discourse is due both to an influx of Vietnamese migrants and because of concerns for its future following the violent suppression of pro-democracy protests in China. However, another reason may be that the UK government did not have an agreed policy on German unification at this time, as Hurd (2003, p.383) notes. In this situation, avoiding saying too much about the unfolding events in Germany may have seemed a politically expedient course of action.

Analysis of bigrams of *germany* shows a number of changes which are unsurprising in view of the developing political situation: *east germany* and *west germany* fell in frequency from phase one to phase two, while *united germany* displayed the largest rise in frequency and *unified germany* showed a smaller rise. Perhaps more noteworthy is a rise in frequency of the modal verb constructions *germany will* and *germany should*, with these pairs displaying the seventh and tenth largest changes respectively.

In one of just two tokens during phase one of *germany will* (in which structurally *anxiety* rather than *Germany* is the subject) Minister of State William Waldegrave compares the economies of East and West Germany, reflecting that that the East's weakness may impact its relationship with the West – by implication, by making West Germany more reticent about any idea of unification:

The anxiety which we can now see developing in the GDR, as it begins to understand the weakness of its economy compared with the Federal Republic of Germany, will be one of the interesting phenomena of the next few years and may lead it into a little caution in terms of its relationship with the FRG. (Commons vol. 162, col. 948).

During Phase two, there were 17 tokens of *germany will*, with ministers affirming that unification would take place; evaluating the position and influence that a united Germany would have in Europe; and describing the process that would lead to unification. Ministers appear to have differed, however, as to the degree of enthusiasm they expressed regarding Germany's future. Lord Brabazon of Tara observed on 1990-03-21 that 'We are confident that a united Germany will emerge as a welcome and influential force for strengthening the European system' (Lords vol. 517, col. 330). By contrast, the word 'welcome' does not feature in Margaret Thatcher's lexical choices in relation to the unification of Germany. Her statement that 'the unification of Germany will happen' on 1990-07-11 (Commons vol. 176, col. 464) instead suggests that she viewed the situation with resignation.

The only token of *germany should* in phase one is in an answer given by Francis Maude to a question on 1989-11-13. Asked to articulate the government's policy on German unification, he replied simply that:

It has been the belief of successive British Governments that real and permanent stability in Europe will not be achieved so long as the German nation is divided against its will. As a first step, the people of East Germany should have the right to hold free elections and to self-determination. (Commons vol. 160, col. 13).

In phase two — during which East Germans first exercised these rights — a focus on the place of a united Germany in Europe can be observed. There are ten tokens of *germany should* in this phase, in each of which ministers call for a united Germany to be a member of NATO. As the next section will describe, this issue was a central concern for the UK government during the period.

The data on modal verbs needs to be treated with a degree of caution in view of Molin's observation that the Hansard transcribers occasionally replace one modal verb with another. However, a change — for example from *germany ought to* to *germany should* — would not alter the sense of ministers' comments calling for a united Germany to be a member of NATO. For this reason, the possibility of modal verbs having been changed by the transcribers is considered tolerable. Concordance lines for the strings *germany will* and *germany should* are shown in appendices C and D respectively.

5.3. Security

The word *security* is used in a wide range of contexts in the corpus, many of them unrelated to Germany unification. For example, ministers refer to *social security*, *aviation security* and the *UN Security Council*. The rise in frequency of *security* is very similar in the corpus as a whole and in the ten major speeches and statements relating to Germany (from 675 to 1014 tpm in the corpus as a whole and from 699 to 971 tpm in the ten speeches and statements), but to avoid the risk of misleading results, this section focuses on the ten speeches and statements.

Within the ten speeches and statements, the bigrams of *security* which display the greatest change of frequency between phases one and two are *european security*, which rose from 16 tpm in phase one to 102 tpm in phase two; and *our security*, which rose from 26 to 70 tpm. The frequency of these pairs is shown in Figure 2, noting that in some months there was no major speech or statement concerning Germany and hence there are several zero values.

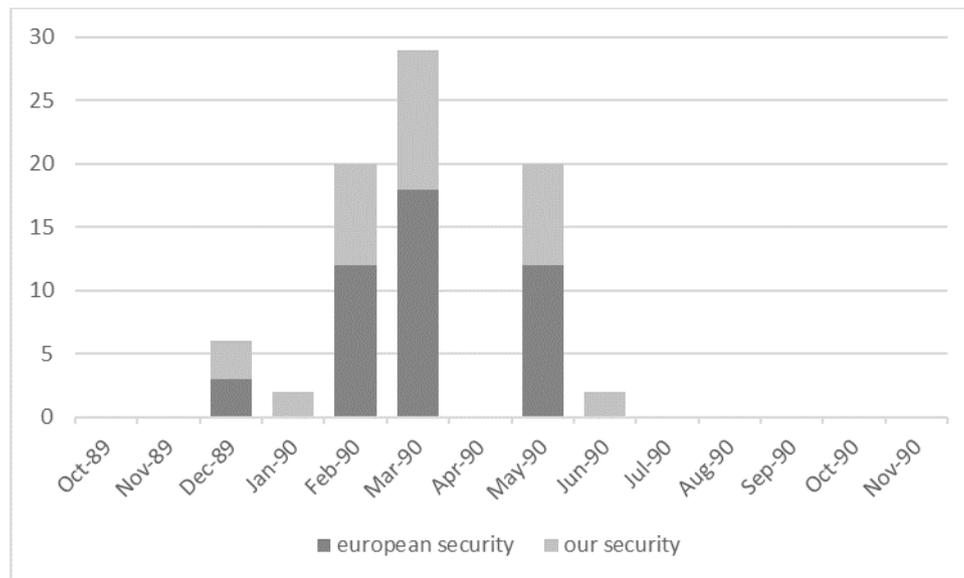


Figure 2: References to *european security* and *our security*, October 1989 to November 1990 (expressed as tokens per million words)

The contributions in which these pairs occur underscore ministers' attachment to NATO as a structure safeguarding the security of UK and Europe at the time. The security of the UK and of Europe are seen as one and the same, and NATO is described as 'central to our concept of European security' (Lords vol. 517, col. 329) and 'our shield and our security' (Commons vol. 174, col. 140). In a speech given on 1990-04-26, William Waldegrave set out three 'essential conditions' for the UK's security in light of the changes taking place in Germany:

First, a united Germany should be part of NATO, as that would offer the best security for Europe as a whole. Strikingly, that is the view not only of the Federal Republic and the rest of NATO, but of several eastern European countries. Secondly, United States and other stationed forces should remain in Germany, albeit possibly at reduced levels. Thirdly, NATO should continue to deploy nuclear weapons where strategy dictated it, and that should include Germany. (Commons vol. 171, col. 624)

While NATO brought together the United States and its west European allies, the Soviet Union and its east European allies sought to protect their security interests through the 'Warsaw Pact'. The traditional view of the UK government was that the existence of the pact represented a security threat to the UK. The string *warsaw pact* rises in frequency from 111 tpm in phase one to 163 tpm in phase two. The speeches reflect a gradual shift in ministers' view of the pact, from it being seen as an aggressive to a defensive alliance; from a source of confrontation to a negotiating partner; and from being an enduring part of Europe's landscape to an organisation with an uncertain future.

Perhaps the most startling language relating to the pact is found outside of the ten speeches and statements considered here. On 12 December 1989, following a European Council meeting, Margaret Thatcher argued that 'it is better to accommodate change—when it is change from Communism to a democratic system—by maintaining NATO and the Warsaw pact in position' (Commons vol. 163, col. 854). While it may seem extraordinary that the Prime Minister of a NATO member state should make this argument, Mrs. Thatcher would doubtless have been mindful of risks that could arise from a sudden implosion of the pact. Statements from Douglas Hurd supporting the continued existence of the pact are notable for their absence. Ultimately any assessment of how best to safeguard the UK's security interests was overtaken by events and, in March 1991, the Warsaw Pact was disbanded as a military alliance (Bohlen, 1991).

Although discussion of the Warsaw Pact is intrinsically linked to the theme of security, there is no discernible change in ministers' use of this expression that correlates to the phases of policy. In a sense this is unsurprising: there will typically be several strands to a government's policy on a particular issue and it is entirely possible to have a settled position on some strands while others are still being decided.

5.4. Unification

As the possibility of Germany becoming a single country grew in late 1989, there was an obvious need for a noun to describe the process – should it take place – of East and West joining together. In the German language, as in English, more than one possible term existed.

As there had previously been a single German state, one possible term was ‘Wiedervereinigung’ or ‘reunification’. The term ‘Wiedervereinigung’ featured, albeit not prominently, in Helmut Kohl’s ‘Ten point plan for Germany’ of 1989-11-28 (Deutscher Bundestag, 1989). Even before this, in a debate about developments in the European Community on 1989-11-15, Minister of State Francis Maude had declared that ‘It must be clear to all that the issue for the time being is not reunification, but reform’ (Commons vol. 160, col. 381). The term *reunification* has a relatively low frequency in the corpus at 23 TPM. The alternative term *unification* is first seen in the corpus on 1990-01-31, when Maude said that ‘It is inevitable that we should treat with caution also the unification of Germany’ (Commons vol. 166, col. 360) and has a higher frequency of 254 TPM. During the period covered by the study, both terms were used almost exclusively in relation to Germany and the few exceptions do not significantly affect the data.

The relative merits of the two terms were evaluated in an article published in the *New York Times* on 1990-02-25 (Safire, 1990). The author claims that after ‘blithely’ using ‘Wiedervereinigung’ in his Ten Point Plan, Kohl had since avoided the prefix because of the unease which it caused. ‘Wiedervereinigung’ had connotations of Germany returning to a form in which it had previously existed. The country’s pre-WW2 borders included areas which, after the war, became part of Poland. For Poland, it was vital that the ‘Oder-Neisse’ line established at the end of the conflict remained its border with any future German state.

At a similar time to the publication of this article, and the UK government settling its policy regarding the future of Germany, *unification* established itself as the preferred term of the ministers included in the corpus. Figure 3 illustrates this: from the point at which the term *unification* is first seen, it quickly outnumbers *reunification*, although the latter term does not disappear entirely. It appears likely that some kind of direction was given or consensus reached that *unification* was the more appropriate term for ministers to use.



Figure 3: Concordance plots for reunification (upper line) and unification (lower line)

Reading the ten speeches and statements in full reveals no instances in which ministers expressed outright opposition to the unification of Germany. However, they did express caution regarding the prospect and timing of unification. This caution is particularly noticeable in the first phase, when the word is used five times including in the following contribution from Minister of State William Waldegrave on 1 December 1989:

The changes in some of the countries that we have been debating, such as Bulgaria and the German Democratic Republic, are immensely welcome, but we are not yet in the new world. I suspect that Mr. Krenz will not be the answer in the GDR, and the Bulgarians are still talking about a more polite face for their regime rather than returning to their people the right to decide what regime they want to live under. Therefore, we have a duty to maintain the structure that has seen us through until now, particularly as it is not difficult to see how it can be adapted to manage peace, as it once prevented confrontation. The caution mingled with pleasure that we heard from many hon. Members is the right response. (Commons vol. 162, col. 1005).

One might infer from this caution that there was less than wholehearted and unanimous support among ministers for German unification. Mallaby comments that ‘I was between a Prime Minister who was very reluctant and an historic change which I and I think the Foreign Secretary considered positive’ (Mallaby, 1997, p.24). In a speech on 1990-02-22, Douglas Hurd acknowledged that the UK was perceived in some quarters as opposing unification. He argued, however, that this view was mistaken – the UK only wanted to ensure that external aspects of unification were properly addressed:

Our message was not one of obstruction, but that we risked muddle and instability if the issues were not addressed in some orderly way. Many felt those anxieties and told us about them and we were probably foremost in spelling them out. Because of that, a notion grew up, particularly in parts of the German press, that we were in some way going back on our traditional support for the principle of unification. I hope that that notion has now been dispelled to the comfort of us all. (Commons vol. 167, col. 1089)

6. Conclusions

This paper set out to explore whether, when a government’s policy moved into a new phase, corresponding changes in the government’s discourse could be identified. The an-

swer to this question, for the current data, is affirmative. Using the tools and methods of corpus linguistics it was possible to identify characteristics of language use associated with the two distinct phases in the UK's policy towards the unification of Germany between autumn 1989 and autumn 1990: reservations about unification and acceptance of unification. Table 3 summarizes the results of the analysis of the corpus.

Characteristics of discourse	Phases of policy		Change in discourse corresponding to phases of policy?
	Reservations about unification (Nov 1989 – Jan 1990)	Acceptance of unification (Feb – Nov 1990)	
Tokens of <i>germany</i> and related forms	<750 tokens per million each month	>1200 TPM each month except Nov 1990	Yes
Use of <i>germany will</i>	11 TPM overall	39 TPM overall	Yes
Use of <i>germany should</i>	5 TPM overall	24 TPM overall	Yes
Use of <i>welcome</i>	Not used in relation to unification	1x in relation to unification	Yes
Use of <i>security</i>	699 TPM in speeches re: Germany	971 TPM in speeches re: Germany. Strong focus on NATO membership	Yes
References to the Warsaw Pact	Gradual shift in how the pact is described		No
Use of <i>reunification</i> vs. <i>unification</i>	<i>reunification</i> dominant	<i>unification</i> dominant	Yes
Use of <i>caution</i>	5x in relation to unification	1x in relation to unification	Yes
Who gives speeches re: Germany	Ministers of State only	Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Ministers of State	Yes

Table 3: *Phases of policy and characteristics of discourse*

Between November 1989 and January 1990, Germany already featured prominently in ministers' discourse. Ministers were alert to the possibility of Germany becoming one country and referred to this possible process as *reunification*. Their reservations about it

happening were reflected in their lexical choices. They used the word *caution* five times and never used the word *welcome* in relation to the prospect of Germany becoming one country. Speeches relating to Germany were given by Ministers of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but not by the Foreign Secretary or Prime Minister.

Between February and November 1990, references to Germany became more frequent and the dominant term for the process of East and West joining together was now *unification*. Ministers increasingly used the string *germany will*, suggesting increasing confidence on their part to assert what the future would bring. Ministers used the word *caution* in relation to unification only once and the Foreign Secretary described the process as *welcome* for the first time. The Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and Ministers of State all gave speeches relating to Germany.

The theme of security is present throughout the corpus but particularly in phase two, when ministers established a clear narrative that, to preserve the security of the UK and Europe, a united Germany *should* be a member of NATO. Ministers' descriptions of the Warsaw Pact evolve through the corpus. There is a significant change between the earlier and later references, but it occurs gradually and there is no step-change that corresponds to the phases of policy.

The evidence presented in this paper identifies the following types of change in ministers' discourse between the two phases:

- 1 Change in the frequency of references to Germany in their discourse;
- 2 Change in lexical choices, reflecting a new narrative that they were seeking to establish; and
- 3 Change in the seniority of the ministers delivering the discourse.

The reasons why these changes in use of language took place are foremost matters of political history. The fact that ministers spoke about Germany at all is surely due to the connections between the UK and Germany as near neighbours, members of the EC and NATO, and because of the UK's post-war rights and responsibilities in respect of Berlin. The prominence of Germany in ministers' discourse is linked to the rapid and historic changes taking place during the period chosen for the study.

The fact that the phases of policy towards the unification of Germany correlate to several changes in language use suggests a causal link. It appears that, from February 1990 onwards, ministers felt more ready to talk about the prospect of German unification and more comfortable doing so. The fact that neither the Foreign Secretary nor the Prime Minister made a speech in which Germany was a major topic between October 1989 and January 1990 may reflect their earlier discomfort. Underlying all of this is the evidence

from contextual literature that the UK's long-standing support for unification was in question during this period.

Ministers' greater readiness to discuss unification from February 1990 onwards, and the more positive language they used, is probably due to a combination of factors. Gaining agreement on the framework to address external aspects of unification (the '2+4 format') was a significant step forward. There was probably also an acceptance that, with other major powers supporting unification, the UK was not in a position to stop or even delay it. Necessity would have played a part too: with the UK entering negotiations that would result in it signing a new treaty, ceding its rights and responsibilities in respect of Berlin, and passing legislation to integrate the former GDR into the EC, there was substantial parliamentary business to be done during this phase.

Beyond this, a final factor that emerges from reading the speeches is a desire on the part of ministers to portray the UK in a positive light. Particularly from February 1990 onwards, ministers present an image of the UK leading the way in Europe, winning others over regarding the external aspects of unification and certainly not obstructing the process. With at least some concerns alleviated, unification appearing inevitable, parliamentary business to do and an image to repair, there were powerful reasons for ministers to change their discourse.

Another important finding is that change in language use is observable even within the short time-period of this study. Some of the changes in ministers' discourse regarding Germany, such as the shift from 'reunification' to 'unification', could have been observed simply by reading the speeches. However, this approach alone would not have been sufficient to identify all of the changes noted here, nor to define their scale and timing as accurately. Combining a corpus-based approach with reading the speeches in the light of contextual material has shown the existence and nature of event-driven changes in ministers' discourse during this period and provided evidence of a co-evolution of policy and language. A larger study, analysing a wider range of linguistic features and covering a longer time-period, could test whether these changes are observable more widely.

Competing interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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Appendix A: Ministers whose contributions are included in the corpus

Role	Name	Dates in post
Prime Minister	Margaret Thatcher	Throughout period
Foreign Secretary	Douglas Hurd	Throughout period
Ministers of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office	Francis Maude	Throughout period
	Lynda Chalker	Throughout period
	William Waldegrave	Until 1990-11-02
	Douglas Hogg	From 1990-11-02
	Tristan Garel-Jones	From 1990-07-14
	Lord Brabazon of Tara	Until 1990-07-24
	Earl of Caithness	From 1990-07-24

Appendix B: Speeches and statements relating to Germany

Date	House	Description
1989-11-15	Commons	Speech by Francis Maude during debate on 'Developments in the European Community, January-June 1989'.
1989-12-01	Commons	Speech by William Waldegrave during debate on 'Eastern Europe'
1990-01-17	Lords	Speech by Lord Brabazon during debate on 'Germany: Unification Prospect'
1990-01-31	Commons	Speech by Francis Maude during Opposition Day debate on 'the European Community and developments in eastern Europe'
1990-02-22	Commons	Speech by Douglas Hurd and summing up by William Waldegrave on 'East-West Relations'
1990-03-21	Lords	Speech by Lord Brabazon during debate on 'Eastern Europe'

Date	House	Description
		and the Soviet Union'
1990-05-01	Commons	Speech by William Waldegrave during debate on 'Nuclear Missiles (West Germany)'
1990-06-11	Commons	Speech by Douglas Hurd and summing up by Francis Maude during debate on 'Developments in the European Community, July-December 1989'
1990-06-12	Commons	Statement by Margaret Thatcher following visit to USSR
1990-10-19	Commons	Speech by Tristan Garel-Jones during debate on the EC's package of legislative proposals integrating the former German Democratic Republic into the European Community

Appendix C: Concordances of *germany should*

No.		Concordance	
1	Organisation and for the view that a United	Germany should	be a member of NATO. That corresponds
2	agreed it was very important that a united	Germany should	be a member of NATO. This matter
3	interests of Britain and Europe that a united	Germany should	be a member of NATO. That proposal
4	remain. I explained our view that a united	Germany should	be a member of NATO – indeed,
5	view of both German Governments that a unified	Germany should	be a member of NATO. The two
6	The rest of us that a unified	Germany should	be in NATO. As the right hon.
7	nditions for continuing security. First, a united	Germany should	be part of NATO, as that would
8	. As a first step, the people of East	Germany should	have the right to hold free elections
9	of our policy this year that a united	Germany should	remain a full member of NATO. We
10	the security of us all that a united	Germany should	remain in NATO. However, there is a
11	ear statements from Chancellor Kohl that a united	Germany should	remain within NATO. This is the best

Appendix D: Concordances of *germany will*

No.		Concordance	
1	erman unification and are confident that a united	Germany will	be a welcome and influential force for
2	now. The unification of	Germany will	be in a much better position than
3	its economy compared with the Federal Republic of	Germany, will	be one of the interesting phenomena of
4	recess. Yes, it is a challenge, too, because	Germany will	carry — and deserves to carry —
5	an opportunity. As he knows, the unification of	Germany will	come about through article 23, under which the
6	Mr. Genscher say several times that a united	Germany will	comprise the territory of the Federal Republic,
7	under article 23. It follows that the whole of	Germany will	continue to be a staunch member of
8	procedure as I understand it — that East	Germany will	divide into five laender, that they will
9	of unification. We are confident that a united	Germany will	emerge as a welcome and influential force
10	we shall do so now. The unification of	Germany will	happen. East Germany will be in a
11	olding human rights standards. The unification of	Germany will	have important consequences for the United Kingdo
12	detail in his winding-up speech. A united	Germany will	lie at the geographical centre of the
13	They acknowledge that the future architecture of	Germany will	need to fit into the future architecture
14	in the position of Germany, in that East	Germany will	now become a member of NATO as
15	as members soon. The whole of the united	Germany will	of course be a member. The important
16	the new world order, in which the new	Germany will	play an important role. As we have

No.		Concordance	
17	which people are using rather easily. Naturally,	Germany will	probably be one of the dominant countries
18	are far poorer than those in France and	Germany will	say, "How in the world can we