

Discourses on nations

Perspectives from linguistics

“Discourses in Europe”

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VNiVERSiDAD D SALAMANCA

Discourses on nations

Outline

- 1 Debunking nations and names
- 2 National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective
- 3 Text linguistic opinion mining for detecting and analysing national stereotypes

Part 1

Debunking nations and names

What is Europe?

Germans, Alamanni and Saxons

*piudisk and *walhisk: us and them

Small elites, big names

Romans, Spaniards and Portuguese

Summary

01

1 · Debunking nations and names

What is Europe?

Discourses in Europe are not only discourses *on* Europe:

everything related to Europe falls within the scope of this course.

- Where does Europe begin and end?
- What is Central Europe?
- Why is Greece Southern Europe and not Eastern Europe?
- And what do the names of our countries and languages actually mean?

1 · Debunking nations and names

Nations through more than one lens

1

Linguistics

linguistic tools to research European discourse and national stereotypes

2

Culture

the cultural implications of how nations see and name each other

3

History

the shared and often conflictive past behind every name

DON'T BE A ...

Fachidiot

German, lit. “subject idiot”: a specialist who cannot see beyond the borders of their own discipline.

Speaking about Europe from a single discipline is not enough: linguistics has to take other sciences into account.

Only linguists and historians know the historical, political and cultural implications of the names we give to other countries and their languages — and of the names other Europeans give to us.

1 · Debunking nations and names

Germany, German, Alemania ...

ROMANCE NAMES FOR GERMANY AND GERMAN

Spanish

Alemania / alemán

French

Allemagne / allemand

Portuguese

Alemanha / alemão

→ strictly speaking: only south-western Germany and German-speaking Switzerland

- English *Germany* and *German* entered English through French. Etymologically they are *partial names*: they refer only to part of the Germanic territory and people.
- The **Alamanni** (*die Alamannen*) were just one of several continental Germanic tribes, settled in the south of present-day Germany and Switzerland after the invasions of the 5th and 6th centuries.
- The French had practically only contact with this border tribe — and extrapolated its name to all the other Germanic tribes and peoples who would later become “German”.

... and what about “tedesco”?

1 · Debunking nations and names

Everything is a matter of perception

The same historical period, the 5th and 6th centuries, seen from three sides:

LATIN NATIONS

Barbarian invasions

“invasiones bárbaras”, “grandes
invasions” — used only in Latin
nations

GERMAN

Völkerwanderung

“migration of peoples” — of
course, of their own peoples

ENGLISH

Migration Period

a more neutral, period-based label

1 · Debunking nations and names

The English: Saxons to the Celts

The Celts of the British Isles were overrun by Anglo-Saxon Germanic tribes in the 5th and 6th centuries — and must have been conquered first by the *Saxons*.

SCOTTISH & IRISH GAELIC, WELSH

Sasana / Sasanach

“England” / “English” — i.e. the land and people of the Saxons

SCOTS & SCOTTISH ENGLISH

Sassenach

historically a pejorative term: “a Saxon”

IRISH ENGLISH

Sassenach

the same term, used to insult Protestants

An attestation of the “excellent” relations Celts and Germans must have had in the British Isles ...

1 · Debunking nations and names

Us and them: *piudisk and *walhisk

*piudisk

“popular, of the people” — how continental Germanic peoples called themselves

GERMAN
deutsch

ENGLISH
Dutch

ITALIAN
tedesco

!!! RUSSIAN /
BULGARIAN
чуждый /
чужд
“foreign”

*walhisk

“foreign” — how they called all other peoples

GERMAN
welsch, die Welschen:
the Romance peoples
(French, Italians)

ENGLISH
Welsh: their non-
Germanic neighbours

The English borrowed the glottonym their closest neighbours, the Dutch, applied to themselves — and then had to find another term for the other continental Germans in classical Latin sources: *German*. The same word a German uses for the French and Italians is used by an Englishman for the Welsh.

1 · Debunking nations and names

Holland, the Netherlands, Paesi Bassi

Italian proceeded the opposite way to English: *tedesco* (itself a Germanism) for the German-speaking neighbours — and two terms for the Dutch-speaking country:

ITALIAN

Olanda

A **synecdoche**: Holland, in principle just one region of the Netherlands, stands for the whole country.

From Old Dutch *Holtlant*, “country of forests” — forests that have now disappeared.

ITALIAN

Paesi Bassi

A direct translation of *Nederland* or *De Lage Landen* (“the Low Countries”), popularised from the 15th century onwards.

ENGLISH

the Netherlands · Dutch

As with *Dutch*, the English did not bother to translate the name of their neighbour’s country.

1 · Debunking nations and names

The Slavs and their “mute” neighbours

SLAVIC LANGUAGES

němec / nemec

= “mute”, “a person who cannot speak”

→ **the foreign Germanic neighbour:
German**

- Besides the Latin *Germania*, German is called *němec* or *nemec* in the Slavic languages.
- Curiously enough, for all Slavs the adjective “foreign” is a Germanic borrowing from the earlier **piudisk*.
- Russian *чуждый* and Bulgarian *чужд* originally meant “Germanic” — today they mean “foreign”.

What is native to some is foreign to others.

1 · Debunking nations and names

Small elites, big names

A small but politically very important group gives its name to a whole territory — and then ends up assimilated socially and culturally.

Franks → France

Germanic people; “les français” have been named after them since the late Middle Ages. The Franks are to France what the Visigoths are to Spain — imagine La Roja as the “Visigothic” national team!

Langobards → Lombardy

“The country of the long-bearded”. The Langobards created Lombardy politically with their Germanic dialect, then assimilated: today’s Lombard is Latin-based.

Bulgars → Bulgaria

Originally a Turkic people who migrated in very small numbers to the Balkans, created Bulgaria and were assimilated into the vast Slavic-speaking majority.

Rus → Russia

A Swedish Viking clan that created a Slavic state in Kyiv by dominating the local Slavic tribes. Out of the Kievan Rus, Ukraine, Belarus and Russia were born.

1 · Debunking nations and names

Seen from Finland

What for a Russian — and for us — is a Russian, is for a Finn (with far more historical reason) a Swede.

FINNISH

Ruotsi

Sweden — still the country of that Viking clan, the Rus

FINNISH

Venäjä

Russia — simply the country of the Slavs

SWEDISH

Svenskarna

and for a change, the Swedes call themselves by yet another name

1 · Debunking nations and names

Who are the Romans?

Names of peoples and countries change over time with historical relations. The “country of the Romans” moved across Europe:



1 · Debunking nations and names

Spain, Portugal ... and Porto

The Iberian Peninsula has not escaped this terminological chaos either.

- Until well into the Modern Age, the toponym *Spain* included Portugal.
- In the first editions of *Os Lusíadas*, Camões was called “príncipe dos poetas de Hespanha” — prince of the poets of Spain.
- *Portugal* or *Portus Cale* was originally only the name of the port of a small town at the mouth of the Douro: today's Porto.

Portus Cale



Portugal

The people of Lisbon are Portuguese — but the place originally called Portugal later got the name of Porto.

1 · Debunking nations and names

Summing up: etymology and history

Russia	is a Swedish creation.
France & Lombardy	are of Germanic origin.
The Germans	are just a Swiss tribe to the Spanish and Portuguese — and “mute” to the Slavs.
The Dutch	are Germans to the English.
The English	are Saxons, i.e. Germans, to the Irish and the Scots.
The Portuguese	are, in reality, Spanish — and the Lisboners are from Porto.
The Romans	were first Italic, then Greek and finally Balkan.

Part 2 · A linguistic perspective

National stereotypes

What stereotypes are and what they do

Why they are so durable

Nation, victimhood and the “other”

The case of Germany after 1871

Historiography and stereotyping

02

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

What are stereotypes?

“probabilistic, generalised representations of any social group”

Greenland (2000: 15)

- They play an important role in **social cognition**: they allow people to categorise and thereby simplify the world around them.
- Their effects on **perception, thought and behaviour** are considerable.
- **Bias and prejudice** are an integral part of stereotyping, frequently leading to the denigration of “others”.
- The more social groups suffer from anxiety about other groups, the more they practise negative stereotyping (Berger 2021: 13).

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

Why stereotypes are so durable

1

Abstraction

Stereotypes are often highly abstract, which makes their cores durable and very hard to destabilise.

2

Immunity

At their level of abstraction, specific counter-examples can always be dismissed as the exception to the rule.

3

Self vs. other

National histories are often characterised by positive auto-stereotypes and negative stereotypes about “others” — external and internal.

4

Insecurity

Stereotypical ideas of “the other” stem from deep insecurities about national identity.

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

The nation in jeopardy

“The relationship between victimhood and violence is embedded in most national historiographies [...]. [The national idea] is first conjured up as being under threat. And it is this state of alarm that produces the energy to override competing identities, often violently. Violence is inscribed in the national narrative because the nation imagines itself first and foremost as a collective good that is incomplete and imperilled. In many ways, the national narrative must sustain itself by reproducing its own state of jeopardy. National histories tremble as a result.”

Peter Fritzsche (2008)

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

Germany after 1871: enemies within and without

Internal enemies

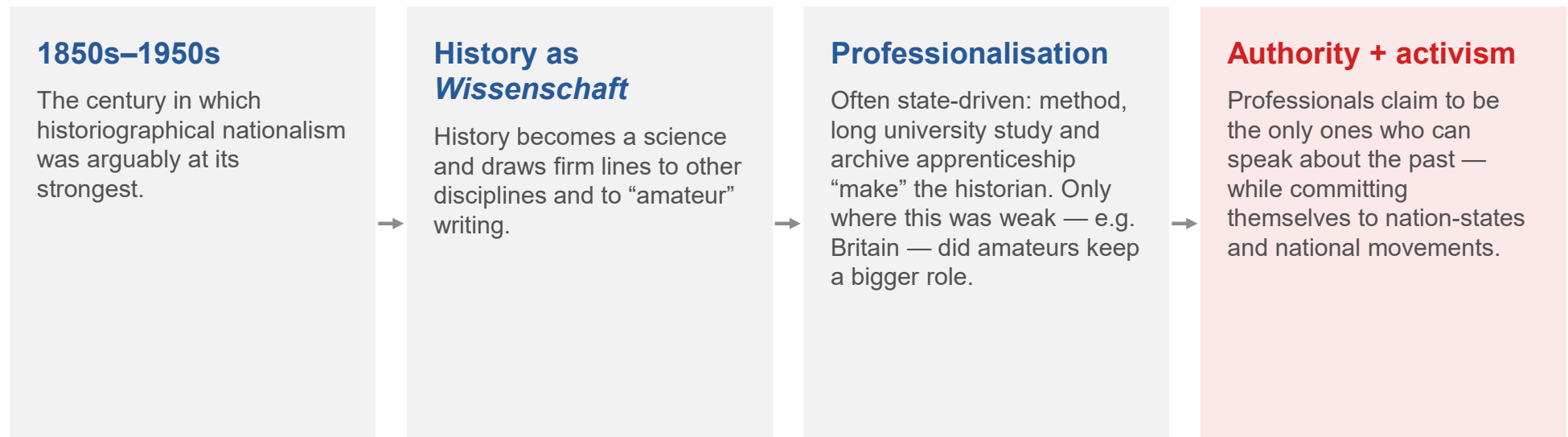
- An insecure national “we” that could not even produce a majority for unification in the first German parliament.
- **Catholics** (loyal to the Pope in Rome) and **Socialists** (loyal to international socialism) were denounced as “fellows without a fatherland”.
- The **Inferioritätsdebatte**: German Catholics seen as morally and economically inferior to Protestants — cf. Max Weber on the supremacy of Lutheranism.

External enemies

- **France**: the “historic enemy” that wanted to weaken, dismember and humiliate Germany for centuries.
- **Britain**: “perfidious Albion” — double-faced, untrustworthy, only looking for profit, unable to produce true *Kultur*.
- **Russia and Eastern Europe**: “Slavs”, allegedly culturally inferior, their civilisation partly owed to medieval German eastward colonisation.

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

Historians and national narratives



Scientificity went hand in hand with historiographical nationalism: historians did not prove immune to the general cognition processes of stereotyping.

Part 2

We cannot get out of our skin

Only recently have historians acknowledged that national historiography was corrupted by the concept of the nation-state. Stereotypes implanted by education and media will always be part of us — first we have to be clear about what has been implanted in our heads.

What do the Spanish think of the Portuguese? Of the Russians? Of the Germans?

And the other way around?

2 · National stereotypes from a linguistic perspective

Mapping national stereotypes



Part 3 · Using the example of Spain

Text linguistic opinion mining

Stereotypes, nation branding and social media

An empirical approach: text actions & sentiment analysis

Spain in the eyes of European Facebook users

Conclusions

03

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

An unusual but useful connection

- National stereotyping and othering can be studied from many perspectives in the Humanities — historians have played a major role in creating and spreading stereotypes.
- Here: a **text linguistic, pragmatic and media linguistic** approach — a useful, practical and straightforward method for the empirical analysis of national stereotyping.
- Goal: a **working tool** for evaluating national stereotypes on social media.
- Transferable to other ethnotypes — e.g. the Germans in the French press, or the Polish in Austrian internet forums.

CASE STUDY

The image of Spain in the eyes of

**Austrian · Flemish · French
· Italian · Polish · Bulgarian**

Facebook users

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Stereotypes and nation branding

“l’image de l’Autre est construite à travers un discours où le stéréotype règne en maître glorieux”

Laamiri & Ouasti (2001: 117)

In a globalised world of competing economies, national stereotypes can seriously hinder companies perceived as part of a nation. They are very hard to erase and need to be actively opposed.

NATION BRANDING IN SOUTHERN EUROPEAN CRISIS COUNTRIES

- 1 Help restore international credibility and investor confidence
- 2 Reverse international ratings downgrades
- 3 Fight negative ethnotypes with positive nation brand advertising

Dinnie (2008: 17). The cultural dimension of stereotyping and the economic facets of a nation brand are closely related.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

State of research

Nation branding

- Mostly conceptual; empirical research very limited (Papadopoulos et al. 2016).
- Empirical work is sociological: surveys, questionnaires, interviews — e.g. Pew Research Center on the euro crisis (Kohut 2012).
- Spain: Elcano Royal Institute, *Barómetro de la Imagen de España* (yearly since 2012); digital studies such as Pizarro (2014) and Corbacho Valencia (2014).

Linguistics

- Linguistic studies on national stereotypes are rare (Quasthoff & Hallsteindóttir 2016; overview: Viliñbahova 2014).
- **Semantics:** semantic and lexicographic stereotype research (Ossenberg/Baur 2016).
- **CDA:** van Dijk, *Prejudice in Discourse* (1984); Vienna School (Wodak) on identity and the Other.

The gap

- Text and media linguistics: very scarce (Dąbrowska 1999; partially Pümpel-Mader 2010).
- Social media neglected in text linguistics — unlike CDA, where the debate on social media data is ongoing (Unger, Wodak & KhosraviNik 2016).

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Why social media?

the new

“digital public
sphere”

Valtysson (2012: 77)

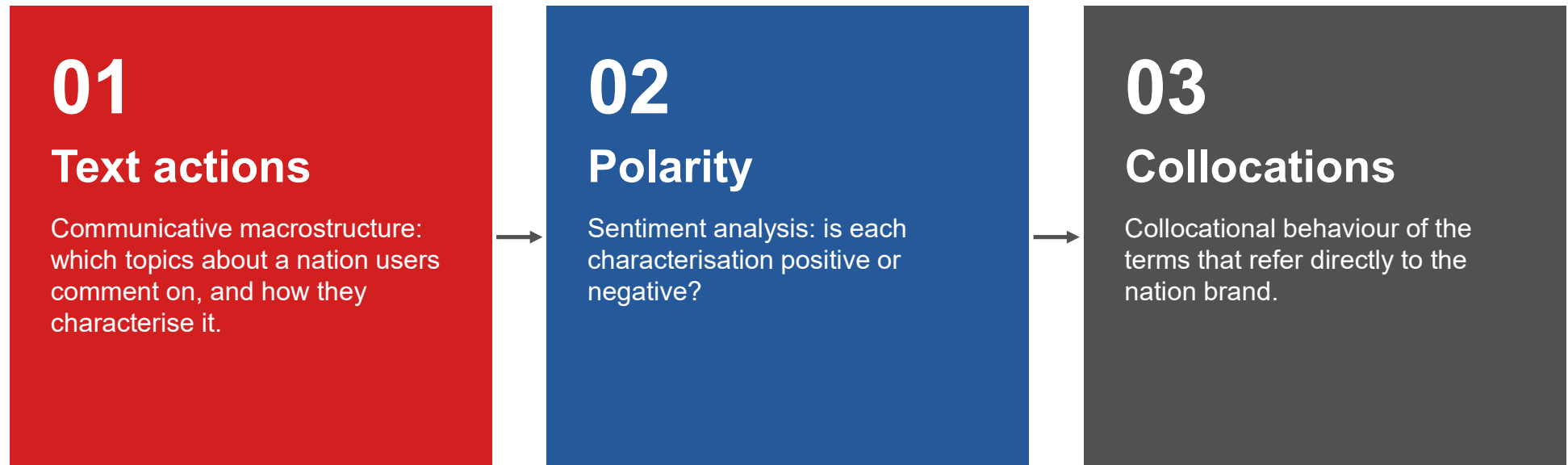
- Social media comments are mostly *intranational* textual interactions — vital for understanding how stereotypes on a nation are built up and spread.
- Media shape the perception of the other only to a certain extent: users form opinions by reading content posted by other users — some of them true opinion-makers.
- Crisis nations should know their image at a microscale to improve and adapt their nation branding.

And you?

Do you read comments on online news? Where — on the newspaper's website, on Facebook, on Twitter?

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

An empirical approach in three steps



A purely text linguistic approach, adapted to incorporate polarity as understood in sentiment analysis research.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Text actions

- Text actions (text acts) are the **main structuring element** of texts (Rothkegel 1992: 675), building on Rehbein (1977), Gülich (1986) and Brandt/Rosengren (1992).
- They describe the interaction between writer and reader as a thematic means of structuring a text — clearly modelled on **Speech Act Theory**.
- But, like Geis' Dynamic Speech Act Theory, they cannot be associated “with the use of particular linguistic constructions” (Geis 1995: 12).
- They are communicative actions constituting the text's **thematic structure** (Rothkegel 1984: 240ff).

Von der Lage-Müller's “Handlungsmodell”

Of the approaches to text acts (overview: Czachur 2007), this eminently descriptive model (Von der Lage-Müller 1995: 50ff) is the most suitable for detecting and categorising text actions related to national stereotyping.

Adapted here to social media comments about nations.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Three hierarchical levels of text actions

1 · What or who are we talking about?

MAIN TEXT ACTION
“commenting on Spain”

e.g. an Austrian Facebook user describing the Spanish as either hard-working or lazy

2 · Which topics related to it?

SECONDARY TEXT ACTION
“assessing the working ethos of the Spanish”

3 · How do we characterise it in terms of polarity?

PARTIAL STA · POSITIVE
the Spanish are hard-working

PARTIAL STA · NEGATIVE
the Spanish are lazy

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Adding polarity: sentiment analysis

the “task of identifying positive or negative opinions, emotions and evaluations”

Stock/Stock (2013: 435)

- Main purpose: to determine the contextual polarity of a sentiment (Hollander et al. 2016: 8).
- Mostly developed in computational linguistics (overview: Taboada 2016) — but polarity is also a common concept in imagology (Leerssen 2007: 344).

Approaches based on Von der Lage-Müller exist (Schröder 2003, Janich 2005, Golonka 2009, Ortner 2014, Sánchez Prieto 2017) — but no serious attempt so far to **link text actions with sentiment analysis**.

Here, the polarity of each secondary text action is broken down into **positive and negative partial** text actions. This lets us:

- determine which national stereotypes social media users comment on
- establish the polarity of those comments
- analyse stereotypes together with the text actions they shape

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

14 secondary text actions for Spain

Based on the list of national stereotypes in the Elcano Royal Institute's Reports on the Image of Spain (RI Elcano 2016: 29).

Society · 4	Economy · 4	Politics · 3	Other topics · 3
Describing Spanish society	State of the Spanish economy	Political system	Tourist destinations
Trustworthiness	Corruption	Political parties	Spanish culture
Amicability	Working ethos	Regional nationalism	Other topics
Tolerance	Affluence & material prosperity		

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Can text actions be classified automatically?

≤ 60%

maximum accuracy of speech act classifiers (Maximum Entropy, Support Vector Machines, Naïve Bayes) on 100 random French comments on Spain, compared with manual analysis

- Sentiment tools (SentiWordNet, Taboada's Semantic Orientation Calculator) were also insufficient.
- Why? Tools only work in the subject domains they were designed for (Moreno Ortiz & Pérez Hernández 2013: 98) — and there is no clear relation between a text act and its morphosyntactic and semantic surface.

THE SOLUTION: A PARTLY MANUAL, PARTLY AUTOMATIC PROCEDURE

1

Automatic segmentation into units of meaning (Python NLTK)

2

Manual revision and correction

3

Categorisation into secondary text actions

4

Polarity of each unit

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Collocations

- The collocational behaviour of key words referring directly to the nation brand can also shed light on national stereotypes on social media.
- Collocation: the recurrent co-occurrence of words, the “tendency for words to occur together repeatedly” (Saeed 2009: 60).
- Widely used in Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2003: 131) — may reveal stereotyping schemes.
- **But: large bodies of text are generally needed for significant results.**

TOOL

Sketch Engine

Lexical corpus manager and analysis software used for the collocation and keyword analysis in this study.

Co-occurrence counts with the key term
“Spain” · keyword extraction per subcorpus

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Corpus: Facebook conversations about Spain

Platform	Facebook — by far the most popular social media platform and the third most visited site on the internet (2016)
Source	Facebook pages of newspapers across Europe: news items prompt users to comment on Spain and its citizens
Search	Stories containing “Spain” / “Spanish” in each language, June–December 2016; sports and show business excluded
Inclusion	All comments in conversation threads with Spain as their main topic, beneath Facebook posts about Spain
Selection	Per country, the right- and the left-leaning newspaper with the highest circulation (national audit bureaus: ÖAK, CIM, ACPM, FIEG, ZKDP; Bulgaria: National Statistical Institute)

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The newspapers

Country	Centre-right	Centre-left	Region
Austria	Die Presse	Der Standard (weekly)	Northern Europe
Flanders	De Standaard (centrist)	De Morgen	Northern Europe
France	Le Figaro	Le Monde	Southern Europe
Italy	Il Corriere della Sera	La Repubblica	Southern Europe
Poland	Rzeczpospolita	Polityka (left-leaning weekly)	Eastern Europe, outside the Eurozone
Bulgaria	Kapital (weekly)	Trud (daily)	Eastern Europe, outside the Eurozone

Poland: Gazeta Wyborcza, the largest daily, had just two news items on Spain and very few comments; there are no relevant centre-left daily newspapers in Poland.

Bulgaria: like all Bulgarian dailies, Trud is a hybrid tabloid — the Bulgarian subcorpus is not fully comparable.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Corpus description

Country	Tokens	Units of meaning	Referring to Spain
Austria	5,948	398	140 (35.2%)
Flanders	4,274	297	124 (41.8%)
France	29,671	1,393	571 (41%)
Italy	28,672	1,596	803 (50.3%)
Poland	1,918	114	83 (72.8%)
Bulgaria	92	8	8 (100%)
Total	70,575	3,806	1,729 (45.4%)

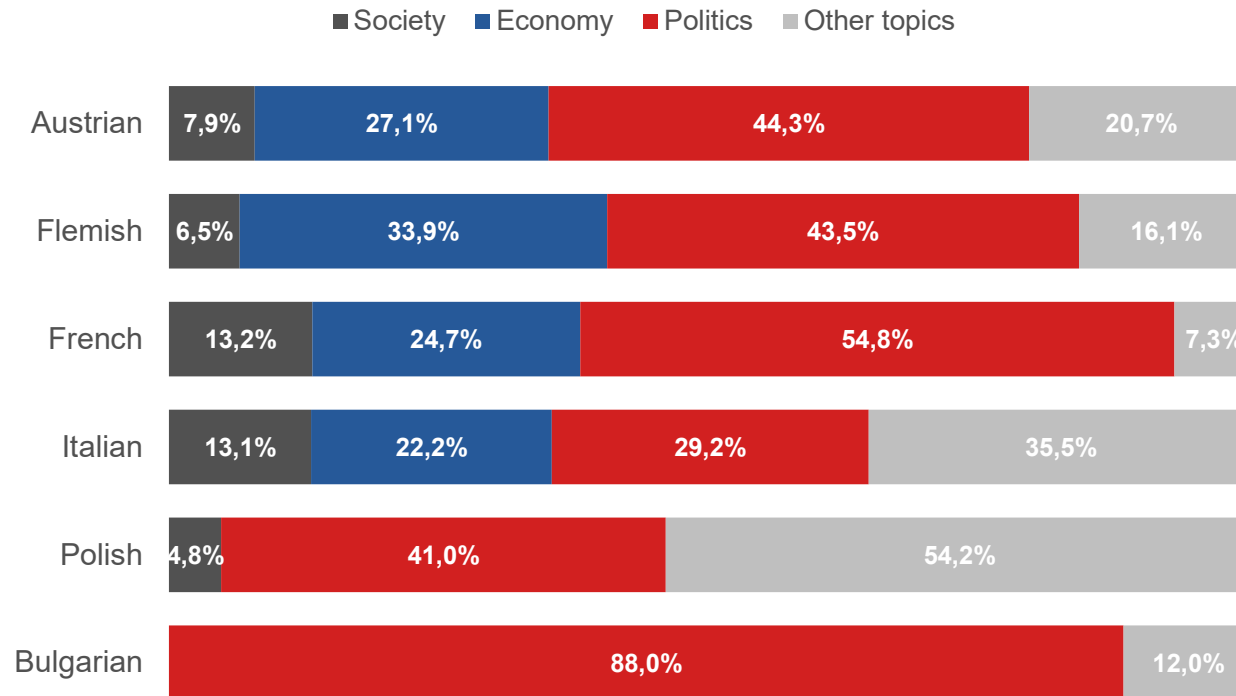
45.4%

of the units of meaning (= text actions) refer to Spain

Despite the corpus design, not even half of the text actions are about Spain.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Which topics do users comment on?



Secondary text actions (STAs) per topic, as share of all Spain-related STAs

- **Politics** is the most relevant topic for Austrian, Flemish, French and Bulgarian users.
- **Other topics** lead in the Italian and Polish subcorpora.
- Only **Western Europeans** assess the Spanish economy (22–34%). The crisis is not a hot topic in Poland or Bulgaria — at least not on Facebook.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Assessing Spanish society

	Austrian	Flemish	French	Italian	Polish	Bulgarian
Share of all Spain-related STAs	7.9%	6.5%	13.2%	13.1%	4.8%	0%
Describing Spanish society	n=9	n=4	n=20	n=24	–	–
+ Spain as a modern country	0	0	50% (10)	45.8% (11)	–	–
– Spain as a traditional country	77.7% (7)	100% (4)	35% (7)	45.8% (11)	–	–
Trustworthiness	n=2	n=4	n=22	n=68	n=4	–
+ The Spanish are trustworthy	0	0	45.4% (10)	7.4% (5)	75% (3)	–
– The Spanish are not to be trusted	100% (2)	100% (4)	54.6% (12)	70.6% (48)	25% (1)	–
Amicability	–	–	n=22	n=11	–	–
+ The Spanish are friendly	–	–	68.2% (15)	45.4% (5)	–	–
– The Spanish are unfriendly	–	–	18.2% (4)	54.6% (6)	–	–
Tolerance	–	–	n=13	n=2	–	–
+ Spanish society is tolerant	–	–	76.9% (10)	50% (1)	–	–
– Spanish society is intolerant	–	–	23.1% (3)	50% (1)	–	–

Share of partial STAs within each STA, n in brackets. Neutral PSTAs omitted. Majority values in bold: blue = positive, red = negative polarity.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Spanish society: findings

Austria & Flanders

Spain is more traditional than modern (77.7% and 100% of PSTAs). The stereotype of untrustworthy, unreliable Spaniards is deeply ingrained.

France

Spain is a modern country (50% vs. 35%), mostly friendly and tolerant — yet the Spanish are not always to be trusted (54.6%).

Italy

Divided on modernity. Nearly 55% see the Spanish as unfriendly, 71% as untrustworthy — but $\frac{3}{4}$ of these relate to one news item: a court acquitting a bus driver after a coach crash involving Italian students.

Poland

The most positive: 75% describe the Spanish as trustworthy. Bulgaria: no STAs on Spanish society.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Spanish society: examples

1

AUSTRIAN · TRADITIONAL SPAIN

Spanien sollte lieber die tierquäler bestrafen, die stierkämpfe abschaffen und die toten windhunde von den bäumen schneiden, auf denen die spanischen jäger sie am saisonende aufknüpfen

A-STAND 52

“Spain should rather punish the animal abusers, abolish bullfights and cut the dead greyhounds from the trees where Spanish hunters string them up at the end of the season.”

2

ITALIAN · UNTRUSTWORTHY JUSTICE

La giustizia spagnola, peggiore della nostra, se possibile.....

I-CORRIERE 42

“Spanish justice, even worse than ours, if that’s possible.....”

3

FRENCH · TOLERANT SPAIN

Je trouve que l’Espagne est un pays beaucoup plus tolérant avec l’homosexualité que la France. J’ai vécu à Madrid et personne ne m’a jamais insulté [...]. JAMAIS.

F-LE MONDE 119

“I find Spain much more tolerant of homosexuality than France. I lived in Madrid and nobody ever insulted me [...]. NEVER.”

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

Assessing the Spanish economy

	Austrian	Flemish	French	Italian	Polish	Bulgarian
Share of all Spain-related STAs	27.1%	33.9%	24.7%	22.2%	0%	0%
Shape of the Spanish economy	n=18	n=14	n=78	n=123	–	–
+ Strong economy	5.6% (1)	0	7.7% (6)	26% (32)	–	–
– Weak economy	94.4% (17)	85.7% (12)	83.3% (65)	58.5% (72)	–	–
Working ethos	n=4	n=5	n=7	–	–	–
+ The Spanish are hard-working	0	0	28.6% (2)	–	–	–
– The Spanish are lazy	100% (4)	100% (5)	57.2% (4)	–	–	–
Corruption	n=10	n=12	n=6	n=18	–	–
+ The Spanish are honest	0	8.3% (1)	33.3% (2)	33.3% (6)	–	–
– The Spanish are corrupt	80% (8)	83.4% (10)	67.7% (4)	67.7% (12)	–	–
Affluence and material prosperity	n=6	n=11	n=51	n=38	–	–
+ Affluent, prosperous country	0	27.3% (3)	3.9% (2)	7.9% (3)	–	–
– Impoverished, declining country	83.3% (5)	72.7% (8)	92.2% (47)	92.1% (35)	–	–

Share of partial STAs within each STA, n in brackets. Neutral PSTAs omitted. Majority values in bold: blue = positive, red = negative polarity.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

The Spanish economy: findings

A weak economy

“Shape of the economy” is the most frequent STA in all relevant data sets. Austrians and Flemish overwhelmingly describe the Spanish economy as particularly weak.

The Italian exception

26% describe it as strong and 15.5% as neutral — mostly when comparing the Italian economic situation with the Spanish one.

Lazy Spaniards

Working ethos is assessed in the Austrian, Flemish and French corpora: in all three, especially the first two, the Spanish are mainly characterised as lazy.

Corruption

Less common than expected — but when users comment on it, they consider the Spanish corrupt in a clear majority of cases.

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

The Spanish economy: examples (I)

AUSTRIAN · WEAK ECONOMY

*Ein Land, in dem
Arbeitslosigkeit, Schulden und
sinkende Löhne einen
Linksruck bringt...*

A-PRESSE 46

“A country where
unemployment, debt and falling
wages bring a shift to the left ...”

ITALIAN · COMPARING WITH ITALY

senza governo crescono del
3,5 %. noi con il bomba, pdioti
alfano e verdini,
0.0000000000000000 periodico

I-REPUBBLICA 331

“Without a government they grow by 3.5%. We, with ‘il bomba’, the ‘PD-iots’, Alfano and Verdini: 0.0000... recurring”

FRENCH · CORRUPT SPANIARDS

Le plus grave c'est que la corruption est complètement normalisée dans la société espagnole

F-MONDE 636

“The worst thing is that corruption is completely normalised in Spanish society.”

3 · Text linguistic opinion mining

The Spanish economy: examples (II)

The stereotype is still very much alive: Spain as an impoverished country in decline — the traditional view of Northern and Western Europeans for decades. Yet even Northern Europeans recognise that Spain is mainly a developed country.

7

FLEMISH · IMPOVERISHED SPAIN

*Hij heeft, en nog, de Spanjaarden uitgemolken
en de slechte resultaten zijn er, 22,8 %
werklozen, 28,6 % vd bevolking is arm, 50 % vd
jongeren hebben geen werk*

BE-DM 4

“He has, and still is, milking Spaniards and the bad results are there: 22.8% unemployed, 28.6% of the population is poor, 50% of young people are out of work.”

8

FLEMISH · DEVELOPED SPAIN

*Waar wachten jullie nog op, Brussel en de
Vlaamse rand, om net als rond Madrid vier
concentrische ringwegen aan te leggen!*

BE-STAN 39

“What are you waiting for, Brussels and the Flemish periphery, to build four concentric ring roads like around Madrid!”

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Assessing Spanish politics

	Austrian	Flemish	French	Italian	Polish	Bulgarian
Share of all Spain-related STAs	44.3%	43.5%	54.8%	29.2%	41%	88%
Political system	n=5	n=7	n=36	n=12	n=4	–
+ Spain is a stable democracy	40% (2)	28.6% (2)	41.7% (15)	66.7% (8)	25% (1)	–
– Lack of democracy in Spain	60% (3)	57.1% (4)	58.3% (21)	25% (3)	75% (3)	–
Political parties	n=50	n=35	n=224	n=206	n=6	n=7
+ Described positively	10% (5)	5.7% (2)	18.3% (41)	11.7% (24)	50% (3)	71.4% (5)
– Described negatively	82% (41)	85.7% (30)	65.2% (146)	62.1% (128)	16.6% (1)	28.6% (2)
Regional nationalism	n=7	n=12	n=50	n=16	n=24	–
Aligned with Spanish constitutionalism	42.9% (3)	25% (3)	50% (25)	56.2% (9)	75% (18)	–
Aligned with regional nationalism	57.1% (4)	75% (9)	30% (15)	43.8% (7)	8.3% (2)	–

Share of partial STAs within each STA, n in brackets. Neutral PSTAs omitted. Majority values in bold: blue = positive, red = negative polarity. Regional nationalism: no polarity assigned.

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Spanish politics: findings

Democracy

Spain is not considered a particularly stable democracy by Austrians, Flemish, French and Polish. The Italians, in contrast, overwhelmingly see it as stable (66.7%).

Political parties

Most political text actions focus on the parties. Austrians and Flemish are particularly sceptical — even hostile — describing politicians as corrupt and damaging to the Spanish people.

Eastern Europe

Poles and Bulgarians have a much more positive opinion of Spanish politicians — mostly as a result of comparing them with their own political system.

The Catalan question

French and Italians align with Spanish constitutionalism; Flemish (and Austrians) tend to welcome Catalan separatism; Poles stress that they do not understand it.

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Spanish politics: examples (I)

9

FLEMISH · THE PRIME MINISTER

De man die Spanje kapotbespaarde, wordt nu de premier van een minderheidsregering...

BE-DM 32

“The man who bankrupted Spain now becomes prime minister of a minority government ...”

10

AUSTRIAN · CORRUPT PARTIES

Sie [Die Spanier] sind empört über die Günstlingswirtschaft und Korruption in den beiden großen Volksparteien

A-PRESSE 45

“They [the Spaniards] are outraged by the favouritism and corruption in the two major popular parties.”

11

BULGARIAN · POSITIVE VIEW

Най-после, някой да го каже на ‘ясен български’!

BG-KAPITAL 1

“Finally, someone who says it in ‘plain English’!” — thanking the Spanish minister of economic affairs for his plain language

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The Catalan question: examples

12

FLEMISH · PRO-SEPARATISM

Catalonië onafhankelijk!

BE-DM 4

“Catalonia independent!”

13

POLISH · ANTI-SEPARATISM

*Debiły! Wszyscy separatysty
są debilami*

PL-RZECZPOSPOLITA 15

“Idiots! All separatists are
idiots.”

GRAMMAR CORNER

są debilami

A brief grammatical aside on (13):

In Polish, the verb *być* “to be” takes a predicative noun in the **instrumental case**: *debił* → *debiłami* (instr. pl.).

Flemish users tend to side with Catalan nationalism and separatism; in the Polish comment, all separatists are labelled “idiots”.

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Assessing Spain on other topics

	Austrian	Flemish	French	Italian	Polish	Bulgarian
Share of all Spain-related STAs	20.7%	16.1%	7.3%	35.5%	54.2%	12%
Tourist destinations	n=10	n=7	n=7	n=25	n=7	–
+ Positive comment	80% (8)	42.8% (3)	28.6% (2)	36% (9)	100% (7)	–
– Negative comment	20% (2)	28.6% (2)	42.8% (3)	52% (13)	0	–
Spanish culture	n=3	–	n=3	n=32	n=16	–
+ Positive comment	66.7% (2)	–	100% (3)	9.4% (3)	75% (12)	–
– Negative comment	33.3% (1)	–	0	40.6% (13)	12.5% (2)	–
Other topics	n=16	n=13	n=32	n=228	n=22	n=1
+ Positive comment	43.7% (7)	38.4% (5)	65.6% (21)	25.4% (58)	9.1% (2)	0
– Negative comment	43.7% (7)	30.8% (4)	15.6% (5)	50% (114)	13.6% (3)	100% (1)
Neutral	12.6% (2)	30.8% (4)	18.8% (6)	24.6% (56)	77.3% (17)	0

Share of partial STAs within each STA, n in brackets. Majority values in bold: blue = positive, red = negative polarity. Over ¾ of the Italian “other topics” PSTAs assess the Franco period.

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Other topics: findings

Tourism

Spain is still seen as an attractive tourist destination: high positive polarity in Austrian, Flemish and Polish text actions — but mainly negative in the French and Italian corpora.

Culture

Only Austrians, French, Italians and Polish assess Spanish culture: overwhelmingly positive in the French and Polish corpora, mainly negative or neutral in the Italian one.

Other topics

Flemish and French comment mainly positively, the Polish adopt a neutral tone. The Italian results are misleading: over three quarters assess the Franco period.

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Collocations and key words

COLLOCATES OF “SPAIN” (CO-OCCURRENCE)

French	Italian
Portugal (10)	Governo (12)
Pays (10)	Guerra (7)
France (3)	Franco (5)
	Italia (5)
	Paese (5)

TOP 10 KEY WORDS (MIN. FREQ. 5)

#	French	Italian
1	Espagne (87)	Spagna (197)
2	UE (51)	Spagnoli (54)
3	Podemos (41)	Podemos (31)
4	Espagnols (38)	Spagnola (28)
5	Brexit (20)	Dittatura (21)
6	Sanctionner (20)	PSOE (20)
7	Austérité (18)	Gibilterra (19)
8	Nationalistes (14)	Catalani (14)
9	Catalogne (13)	Dittatore (12)
10	Rajoy (10)	Rajoy (10)

- As expected, collocational patterns are neither representative nor relevant: almost no collocates for “Spain” in the Austrian, Flemish, Polish and Bulgarian data.
- Most key words relate to Spanish politics; very few to the economic crisis (French *sanctionner*, *austérité*).
- **Lexical approaches are of limited use with small data sets.**

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Conclusions: the method

A practical text linguistic approach to national stereotypes on social media — rooted in text actions and sentiment analysis, since lexical approaches are of limited use with small data.

1

Main text action

What or who are we talking about?

2

Secondary text actions

Which topics related to this object / reality / person?

3

Partial secondary text actions

How do we characterise it in terms of polarity?

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Conclusions: the image of Spain

Austria & Flanders

A rather traditional country in a heavy economic crisis; Spaniards and their politicians are untrustworthy and lazy. But Austrians appreciate Spanish culture, and Spain remains an attractive destination for both.

France

More positive: a modern country with friendly, tolerant people and valued culture — though not always trustworthy, not a particularly stable democracy, and in deep economic crisis.

Italy

Divided on modernity and friendliness. The Spanish are untrustworthy, the economy as bad as Italy's, tourism viewed negatively — but Spain is a stable democracy.

Poland & Bulgaria

The very few comments cast a rather positive light on Spain and the Spaniards as a people.

No surprising results — but a method to break down conversation threads about any nation into text actions and trace national stereotypes in text corpora.



Thank you

Raúl Sánchez Prieto · Discourses in Europe

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