

The Online Visual Group Formation of the Far Right: A Cognitive-Historical Case Study of the British National Party

Robin Engström

This article investigates how the European far right, exemplified by the British National Party (BNP) uses images and other semiotic resources in online group formation. The data consists of a corpus containing all images occurring in articles published on the BNP website between May 2010 and March 2012. Flag elements are used as entry point to the analysis due to their high frequency in the corpus. The article proposes a cognitive-historical approach to Critical Discourse Analysis drawing on Cognitive Linguistics and the Discourse-Historical Approach. The analysis shows that images in BNP articles are not merely accessory features to text but that they send out ideological messages on their own and that they to a certain degree express what cannot be said using text. Flag images show how the BNP has undergone a visual transformation in the last decade, but also that the party constructs out-groups with anti-left and Islamophobic undertones.

Keywords: far right, fascism, Discourse-Historical Approach, Cognitive Linguistics, online discourse

1. Introduction

In these times of economic difficulty, more and more people decide to vote for far-right parties, and such undemocratic elements can now be found in national parliaments all over Europe, not to mention in the European Parliament itself. In most European contexts, far-right parties are not influential enough to have an impact on legislation, but they are pushing the borders for what constitutes acceptable political discourse. In 2013 this became clear when the British Home Office launched a campaign which saw a white van driving around in six London boroughs carrying a poster with the text “In the UK illegally? GO HOME OR FACE ARREST”. These two sentences echo the worldview of the far right, and could easily be mistaken for a far-right party slogan. In the last years, the UK in particular has seen an increase in far-right movements trying to impose on the public their conception of the nation and everything that they associate with it.

Concomitant with the rise of the far right in Europe is the increase in academic interest in these organizations. However, despite the modernization that the far right has undergone in recent years, which includes a switch to digital and social media, scholarly work tends to focus on textual aspects and overlook the visual. One political party which at an early point realized the benefits of multimodality is the British National Party (henceforth, the BNP): an Islamophobic party with its roots in the anti-Semitic movements of the interwar period. The BNP is to date the most successful far-right political party in the United Kingdom, and in terms of votes it is more successful than Oswald Mosley’s interwar British Union of Fascists and the National Front of the 1970’s ever were. While the party does not yet seem to be an electoral force to reckon with, in terms of multimodal self-presentation the BNP is a success story. In 2000, the domain bnp.org.uk was registered and the website instantly became an important communicative tool for members and activists. With the launch of its website, the BNP set the bar high; what was once an organization communicating mainly by distributing leaflets now had a platform which allowed text to be complemented by image, sound and film clips. Images

in particular play an important role in BNP discourse, and as seen in Figure 1, they often come with an ambiguous flavour that is hard to achieve using text only.



Figure 1. A visual element from the BNP website encouraging visitors to join the BNP

The image shown in Figure 1 features regularly in BNP articles, and illustrates on the one hand how important the Internet is to the BNP, and how important national symbols such as flags are, on the other. The central role of the Internet in the proliferation of nationalist ideas is epitomized by a hand grasping a computer mouse. Here, the mouse is likely to be used as a sign for another element, perhaps a heart, but perhaps even some sort of weapon. Moreover, the white hand, held against what looks like a blood-saturated Union Jack, reminds us that the BNP is an ethnic nationalist party. This image, which first appeared on the BNP website in the spring of 2013, is not merely a sign up button – it is an invitation to trolling.¹

There are several general accounts of the BNP, such as Copesey (2008) and Goodwin (2011), but the party's use of visual means has been given little attention. While there has been much research into the visual aspects of historical fascist parties' propaganda (see e.g. Braun, 2000; Antliff, 2007; Langston, 2008) studies of the BNP's visual discourse are limited to the work by Richardson (2011) and Richardson and Wodak (2009a, 2009b). These studies have, however, focused on printed material rather than online imagery.

The purpose of this article is to show how far-right organizations, exemplified by the BNP, use images together with other semiotic resources in order to create a divide between the in-group and purported out-groups. The BNP is a good choice for a study of visual discourse for a number of reasons: it is a household name, it is a nationalist party (and group formation is then arguably an important part of its narrative) and there is plenty of material to study. One type of semiotic feature that is particularly interesting to investigate is national symbols. The focus here is on the BNP's use of flag elements, which of course only make up some of the national symbols used by the BNP and other European far-right organizations. Flags are, however, clearly important to the BNP; the Union Jack is part of the party logo and the flag is the first thing you notice when entering the website. Moreover, flags are interesting because they have the capacity to be

¹ *Trolling* is an online term referring to the posting of false information or antagonistic messages on online bulletin boards and other online fora.

charged with including or excluding values, which means they can easily be recontextualized by far-right groups.

The next section presents the conceptual framework underpinning this article and introduces a model for discourse analysis which integrates concepts from the field of Cognitive Linguistics. Section 3 gives an overview of the articles and images analyzed. Section 4 is concerned with what can be called the in-group, i.e. the party itself, and the focus is on the use of flags as identity markers. Section 5 is concerned with flags in relation to the notion of out-group. Section 6 summarizes the analysis and offers new entry points for future analyses of far-right imagery.

2. Theoretical framework

This section outlines the theoretical framework, which combines components of Cognitive Linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis, the purpose of which is to develop a framework suitable for sociohistorical and cognitive analysis of text and image. This section starts with a general overview of Cognitive Linguistics and then looks at how it has been integrated with discourse analysis.

2.1. Cognitive Linguistics: situating concepts in structure

Cognitive Linguistics is an umbrella term for a considerable number of theories foregrounding amongst other things the view that concepts, rather than being understood in isolation, are profiled against larger, more complex structures. This article is anchored in the semantic theory of Langacker (1987, 2008), according to which concepts are understood in relation to a cognitive domain, i.e. a coherent collection of concepts, some of which are basic (e.g. colour, time) and some of which are complex (e.g. family relations, norms of society). When a concept is understood in relation to concepts pertaining to several different domains, these domains are referred to as the concept's domain matrix.

This article further adopts Paradis' (2005) understanding of lexical meaning, but adapts it for the analysis of discourse. Meaning should be viewed as emerging from the operation of meaning-making *construals* on conceptual entities known as *ontologies*, which are made up of *content structures*, or meaning proper, and *schematic structures*, which configure content.² Content can be classified using a set of labels including CONCRETE PHENOMENA, EVENTS, PROCESSES, STATES and ABSTRACT PHENOMENA, and schematic structures include but are not limited to MERONYMIC RELATIONSHIPS, BOUNDEDNESS, SCALE and BLEND. In studies of discourse, understanding of the content is not reached through strict word-to-concept mapping. Rather, as pointed out by Hart (2013), conceptualizations are based on overall impressions of text. This, in combination with the aim of Critical Discourse Analysis to lay bare power structures, entails that an ontology is more than just a configuration of concepts. It is a specification of one of many possible configurations of concepts used to achieve a certain communicative goal shaped by the addresser's worldview. Discourse is thus itself a larger configuration of ontologies which manifest themselves in, for example, the form of text or image.

Fauconnier and Turner (2002) use the term *blend* to refer to a conceptual configuration whose totality, or *emergent structure*, comprises but is not limited to the

² This use of the term *ontology* deviates from traditional philosophical usage where it refers to the study of existence. In Paradis' (2005) cognitive approach on the other hand, an ontology is the combination of conceptual content and structure (see Vossen, 2003 for an overview of how the term is used in different but related disciplines).

input from other mental spaces (memory-based schematic knowledge). An emergent structure requires at least four different mental spaces. A cross-space mapping links two different inputs together. The shared similarities of these spaces are contained in a generic mental space, which is also linked to the two input spaces. The blend is the fourth mental space, which selects parts from the input spaces without being reduced to merely a sum of the different parts. An example of a basic blend can be seen in Figure 8, where the Conservative logotype has been linked with the EU flag.

The decoding of ontologies takes place with the application of construals, which are general cognitive processes. Paradis (2005) lists four construal systems under which these processes are subsumed: *gestalt* (identification of relations between content structures), *comparison* (the judgement of the acceptability of word-to-experience mapping), *perspective* (the involvement of social actors, here with focus on the addressor-addressee relationship) and *salience* (the activation of content structures in relation to its schematic structures).³ In order to decode a message, the addressee has to apply the same construal as the addresser intended. Using the same construal as the addresser is not the same thing as agreeing with the addresser. However, if an addressee fails to decode an image in the way intended, the addressee is not likely to search for such structures in society. For example, if an addressee successfully decodes an image suggesting Islamification of a Nordic country, as seen in Figure 10, then the addressee may search for similar patterns in real life. As this article will show, in the hands of an organization like the BNP, content structures pertaining to different conceptual domains can be configured in such ways that they seem to stand in stark contrast to each other while they simultaneously are part of the same underpinning (discursive) logic. As will be shown, in BNP propaganda, world views are collided and concepts enter into a flickering quantum state expressing both positive and negative world views.

2.2. *Situating Cognitive Linguistics and social history in CDA*

Hart (2011a, 2011b, 2013) has broken new ground by integrating Cognitive Linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA). In Hart's Cognitive Linguistic approach to CDA, Cognitive Linguistics is seen as a way of enriching the interpretative stage of CDA, and the notion of construal is thus allowed to take centre stage. One aspect that has perhaps not been given enough attention, however, is the sociohistorical import, something which is at the heart of another influential CDA approach: the Discourse-Historical Approach.

The Discourse-Historical Approach (henceforth, the DHA) is primarily used for analysis of political discourse. Developed in the borderland between linguistics and sociology, it is one of many approaches subsumed under the umbrella term CDA. The DHA has been described by Wodak (2009, p. 38) as a "vehicle for looking at latent power dynamics and the range of potential agents". It does not provide a predefined methodology but offers a heuristic model of context where text is analysed recursively in terms of text-internal properties, interrelations, situational/institutional frames and wider sociohistorical context, thus moving from the very micro-linguistic to the very macro-social (see Reisigl and Wodak, 2009 for an introduction to the DHA).

³ There is a certain degree of terminological confusion or diversity when it comes to the names for (and number of) construal systems. Since Hart (2011a) first applied Cognitive Linguistics to discourse, *gestalt* has been added as a system connected to the strategy of structural configuration. The systems given in Hart (2013) correspond to those listed by Paradis (2005), with the small difference that the former refers to a system of *attention* and the latter to one of *salience*.

Here I propose a cognitive-historical approach to CDA which combines components of Cognitive Linguistics and the DHA. The organizing principle for this model is Pustejovsky's (1995) notion of *qualia structure*. Here, qualia structure is used to define the scope of different dimensions of discourse that an analysis should cover as a whole. Using Pustejovsky's (1995) model as point of departure, we can formulate four questions which structure the analysis and which correspond to the four dimensions of discourse:⁴

Constitution: What is the relation between the text and its constituent parts?

Function: What is the function and purpose of the text and its constituent parts?

Agency: How and why did the text come into being?

Similarity: What relates the text to other texts?

Constitution is concerned with formal description of a particular text or image. For images, this entails a description of iconography, and for text, the focus is on linguistic realizations of representation. In the broadest sense, representation refers to the mapping of linguistic or other semiotic realizations to a concept structure which can be subsumed under the labels CONCRETE PHENOMENA, ABSTRACT PHENOMENA, EVENTS, STATES or PROCESSES (Paradis, 2005). The move from theory to analysis entails selecting forms of representation to investigate or use as point of departure. In this article the focus is on the CONCRETE PHENOMENA flags (in relation to other semiotic resources), but focus could as well be on EVENTS such as police violence in political meetings (see Hart, 2013).

Function is concerned with mapping of meaning to linguistic realizations. The purpose of including a cognitive component in a critical discourse analysis is, as put by Hart (2013, p. 405), to "demonstrate the conceptual import of ideological language choices and to identify the particular parameters along which (potential) ideological differences in text and conceptualisation can occur." Discourse (as text or image) is schematized in order to show the relation of its component parts and meaning arising from the application of construals.

Agency is concerned with the text producers, more precisely with their reasons for discursive action and the circumstances around and directly leading up to discursive action. Just like in the DHA and in CDA in general, discursive action is explained primarily by theories from the field of sociology.

Similarity is concerned with comparison in contemporary or historical social embedding, akin to what is sometimes referred to as intertextuality (see Wodak and Fairclough, 2010 for a CDA perspective on intertextuality). Comparison is based on formal, functional or motivational similarity, e.g. the same use of words by different actors at different times or a comparison between actors with similar motives but with different ways of realization.

3. Methodology and data

The analysis is based on a categorization of all images published on the BNP website between May 2010 and 1 March 2012. These images are just as important as text in understanding how the far right, in this case exemplified by the BNP, discursively constructs in-groups and out-groups. All articles published within this time span,

⁴ Pustejovsky (1995) refers to these roles as constitutive, telic, agentive and formal, and they account for properties of lexical items rather than discourse. My use of qualia structure is thus a discourse-driven interpretation rather than a strict transferral of Pustejovsky's qualia roles.

amounting to 641, were downloaded from the news section of the BNP website, but there is plenty of more material available published both before and after the selected time span.⁵

Altogether the articles contain 10,784 visual elements, i.e. any data saved in an image file format (e.g. jpg or gif). The majority of these visual elements are non-BNP features such as buttons (RSS, Facebook, Twitter et cetera) and 3,179 are web banners appearing on many BNP pages. The choice was made to focus on images occurring in articles, which resulted in a corpus of 601 images. In order to structure the image corpus, the images were sorted into categories based on formal properties. First they were divided into photos and non-photos. The photo category was then sorted more qualitatively into three categories: photos of BNP members, photos of non-BNP members and still lifes. Non-photos were divided into the categories animation and montage (which combines animation and photo). The categorization made it easier to get an overview of the data, and it became clear that, while BNP imagery covers many domains, one type of visual elements binding the categories together are national symbols. Flags and flags elements stood out in relation to other iconographical features, altogether occurring in 164 images (27.29% of the total number of images occurring in articles), which encouraged me to use flags and flag elements as entry point to a more qualitative investigation of the role of visual elements in group formation. The images were thus investigated again and images containing (parts) of flags or flag elements were selected and compiled into a BNP flag corpus. The distribution of flags and flag elements is seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentages of different types of images containing flags or flag elements, and percentages of types of flags/uses of flags

Categories	%	Types of flags
Animations	35	Unmanipulated flags, manipulated flags, flag elements projected on other surfaces, whole flags projected on other surfaces, flags as part of logos or animated campaign material
Photos (members)	47,2	Demonstrations, meetings and conferences, troop veterans, Greater London Authority candidate
Photos (non-members)	5,5	Demonstration, flag burnings, troops, other
Photos (still lifes)	8	Torn flags, poppies, merchandise, memorials, demonstrations
Montages	4,3	Flag + Nick Griffin, flag + “Charlene” ⁶ , flag + money

Although this is a qualitative study, a few words can be said about the distribution of the different types of elements. The largest category is photos of members. Many of these pictures are taken at conferences or demonstrations. It is worth noting that unlike pictures of dead objects, which when they occur in an article typically occur only once, photos of party members often occur in larger numbers but in fewer articles. There is a tendency to use the BNP news section as a photo blog, particularly after a demonstration has taken place. Photos of non-members typically show non-BNP politicians, and often in unflattering situations, while montages are mainly used to advertise BNP events.

⁵ It is difficult to say exactly how many articles are available, but a likely estimation is 4,000-5,000.

⁶ Charlene Downes, a fourteen-year-old girl who went missing in Blackpool in 2003, presumed murdered. Images of Charlene feature regularly in BNP material and she has been transubstantiated into a symbol for the fight against child grooming, and following the logic of the BNP, Islam. This will be further discussed in section 5.

Besides the photo category, the animation category is where most flag images belong. The images analyzed in this article are the ones which most clearly show how flags and flag elements are connected to the notion of in-group and out-group.

4. Togetherness: Marking territory with flags

In December 2010, the BNP party leader Nick Griffin presented the new BNP logo at the party's national conference. The logo, said by Griffin to "illustrate exactly what this party is about" (BNP 1), was a part of a wider plan to modernize the party's image, following the success in the general elections the same year when the party got around half a million votes. In Figure 2, the current BNP logo is juxtaposed with the old logo, but also with the logo of another far-right organization, the National Front, and Oswald Mosley's interwar fascist party the British Union of Fascists.

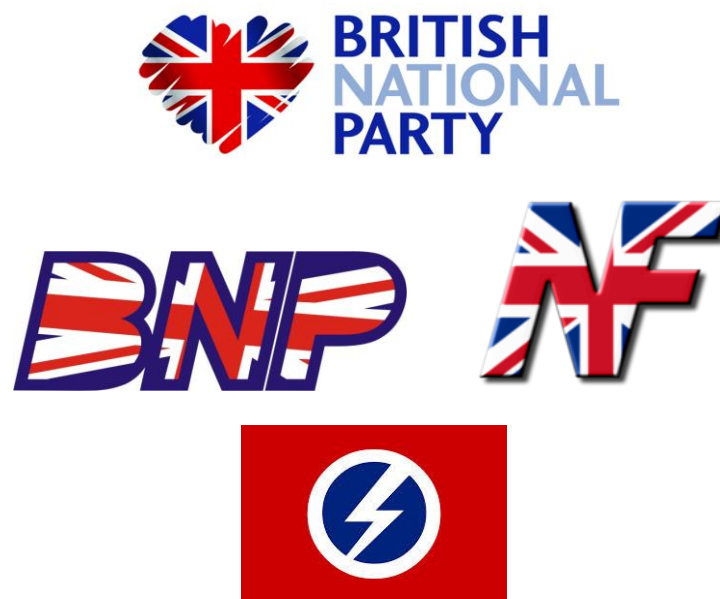


Figure 2. Up and down and left to right: the new BNP logo, the old BNP logo, the logo of the National Front (the forerunner of the BNP) and the logo of the British Union of Fascists (the most observed party of the interwar period).

The BNP has its ideological roots in interwar British fascism. The most influential fascist party in Britain before the Second World War was Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, but the BNP can be traced back to an even more anti-Semitic party, namely the Imperial Fascist League.⁷ The Imperial Fascist League had been founded in 1929 by retired veterinarian surgeon Arnold Leese (see Cross 1961 for one of the earliest accounts of British fascism). Leese's anti-Semitism was so deeply entrenched that, although initially it seemed like his party could merge with Mosley's British Union of Fascists, he later dismissed them as "kosher fascists" (Griffith, 1980, p. 99). After the war, Leese took two new protégés, Colin Jordan and John Bean, under his wings. Jordan and Bean would make a career out of National Socialism and founded a number of

⁷ The Imperial Fascist League did not have a logo but made use of the fasces, and later, the swastika (Griffiths, 1980, pp. 98f).

parties throughout their careers, one of them incidentally called the British National Party (dissolved in 1967). One of the leading members of this defunct BNP was John Tyndall, who would become one of the most influential people in the British post-war fascist movement. In 1967, Tyndall's party the Greater Britain Movement merged with the National Front and he became its chairman in 1972; a position he would hold until 1980. In 1982 Tyndall founded the current BNP and remained its leader until 1999. Thus, the logos seen in Figure 2 do not only share certain visual properties in terms of colour, they also have an ideological and historical affinity.

All four logos make use of the same colours, blue, red and white, thus grounding them in a British compositional tradition. The similarities between the BNP logos and the National Front logo are to a certain extent a consequence of the fact the National Front and the BNP are nationalist parties with a holistic approach to the British electorate; the logos are blends of far-right ideology and British identity, likely intended to express a distinct type of British nationalism. When it comes to the parties represented in the House of Commons, no party has a name containing the elements *Britain*, *British* or *United Kingdom*. Many such parties, however, are or have been active on the British political scene, some of which can be described as fascist, fascist avant la lettre or far right. Similarly, there are no parties in the Parliament using the UK flag or parts of it as a party logotype, although the Democratic Unionist Party uses combinations of red, blue and white (other nationalist parties use national emblems, however, e.g. the Scottish National Party's stylized Saltire or Plaid Cymru's daffodil).

A flag-emblazoned heart is a nationalist (or patriotic) symbol, but depending on whether biological aspects are taken into consideration, it can be interpreted either as a symbol of civic or of ethnic nationalism. The flag has been directly transferred to the heart shape without much alteration to the original composition of the flag, giving the St. George's cross the role of the aorta. The heart is sketchy, or soft around the edges. An unknown member who was quoted in the online article about the new logo concluded that it "softens the image a bit which is what we need" (BNP 1). This is an aspect worth emphasizing. Classical fascist symbols, as exemplified by the logo/flag of the British Union of Fascists, are part of our background knowledge of what fascist visuals are supposed to look like. In contrast, the new logo is sketchy, which downplays the resemblance to, on the one hand, the old BNP logo, and on the other hand, the logo of the National Front.

As seen in Table 1, almost half of the instances of flags in BNP articles are photos of members, taken either at meetings and conferences or at demonstrations. The BNP logo is the natural collecting point for the BNP in-group, but as mentioned, it is only a part of a much bigger transformation. Like many other parties with a dark past, the BNP has suited up, as seen in Figure 3.



Figure 3. Nick Griffin and fellow BNP members at the BNP 2011 Annual Conference. Pixelation added.

Figure 3 epitomizes the aesthetic transformation that the party has undergone in the last decade. The new softer logo works in tandem with the members' new look, resulting in a visual presence that historically has not been associated with the far right. The party proudly publishes photos such as Figure 3 on its website, but again, this is a rather new strategy. Compare Figure 4.



Figure 4. Nick Griffin in his youth, then a member of the BNP's progenitor the National Front

Figure 4 shows the BNP's leader, Nick Griffin, as a young man wearing a t-shirt with the words "WHITE POWER" written around a fist. Much has changed since this photo was taken in the 1970s when Griffin was an activist for the National Front. The motif on Griffin's t-shirt tells uninitiated spectators everything they have to know about the party's racial convictions, but this is something that has been downplayed recently, as seen in Figure 5.



Figure 5. Photos of BNP merchandise: to the left, a BNP sticker attached to a wheelie bin, to the right, a t-shirt with the BNP's flag-emblazoned heart. Pixelation added.

Figure 5 shows two photos used in articles promoting the BNP web shop Excalibur. The construal of perspective is complicated by a lack of a clear sender or deictic features. The logo, when attached to a wheelie bin and especially when seen on a t-shirt, is intended to be seen by people, yet the name of the party is omitted. This suggests that members are, if not ashamed, then at least cautious about being too open about their political leaning. Moreover, the t-shirt looks like something you can buy in any tourist shop in London, and therefore there is a considerable risk that people use the logo without knowing what it represents. As for the wheelie bin, it is important to note that what is considered banal or mundane is an important aspect of nationalism, as underlined by Billig (1995) or Rhodes (2009), who has even referred to the BNP as the "Banal National Party". Glorification of everyday activities was common already in interwar fascist art, but what Figure 5 is an example of is banal nationalism in absurdum. This particular use of flags, particularly from a nationalist point of view, is novel and both typical and atypical. It is typical because the use of flags is a way of expressing love for one's country. It is atypical, however, because flags tend to be something to be revered (see Billig 1995, 39f). Here, the symbol of the nation is attached to a container in which we dump garbage, and whether the party intended it or not, that is an opening for unflattering interpretation.

The BNP's explicit defilement of the Union Jack and other national symbols is further discussed in the next section. Naturally, not all instances of the Union Jack are negative, and the flag is still an object of reverence, but this is clearer in text than in image. There are a number of articles in which the public is urged to respect the flag,

using the cliché that many people have died for the flag. One article (BNP 2), most likely written by national organizer Adam Walker, shows that the party's love for the flag is still strong: "This is our country, if they don't like our flag they can go elsewhere."

5. Otherness: Colliding worlds with flags

A cornerstone in the BNP ideology is the belief that Western Europe, and Britain in particular, is taken over, or "colonized" to use the BNP term. The colonizing out-group is heterogenic in one sense as it comprises everybody who disagrees with BNP policies, but it is typically Muslim. The notion that Britain is infiltrated by sinister forces is frequently expressed in BNP articles and often illustrated using flags. These flags are not, however, some accessory visual features whose *raison d'être* derives from the text; they are complex ideological messages consisting of conceptual structures from distant domain matrices, thus suggesting conceptual relations that are not necessarily obvious to an outsider. This can be thought of as conceptual collision. The level of difference between the concepts collided may differ, but the general idea is that when an addressee applies a comparative and perspective construal, the message appears to be contrastive in favour of the BNP and antagonistic towards the represented out-group. The schematic structures of an antagonistic BNP image can be thought of as conceptual tenebrism. Tenebrism, also known as pronounced chiaroscuro, is an art term for extremely strong contrast between light and darkness, where the darkness is so overwhelming that the light becomes more prominent, and in fact the focus of attention.⁸ The BNP is this self-appointed light while all negatively perceived ways of organizing thought and society are darkness. As we will see, BNP imagery also contains images in which two negatively perceived concepts are blended. This section will also show that when flags are used in order to convey an ideological message, they are often defiled to a certain degree.

Vagueness is an important discursive strategy in BNP articles and in racist discourse in general; in-groups and out-groups in particular have to be inferred from the context. The BNP's negative other-representation of Muslims, the primary out-group, is well-documented. Richardson and Wodak (2009a) consider this particularly Islamophobic stage of the party's history in a much wider historical context in order to focus on the dynamics of out-group formation in BNP and other far-right discourse. Richardson and Wodak describe how the BNP has appropriated the phrase "British jobs for British workers" following a speech delivered by Gordon Brown. In the hands of the BNP, *British* has come to be used as a formal realization of an in-group with racist overtones, referring exclusively to whites. They argue that the BNP's use of the phrase is a recontextualization of formally and functionally similar phrases used in interwar British far-right politics to construct Jews as an alien life form. In the hands of the BNP, however, the phrase has now taken on anti-Muslim and anti-black meaning. While Richardson and Wodak have identified a fundamental shift, their analysis oversimplifies interwar fascist organizations' construction of non-British out-groups. This can be seen in Figure 6, which also shows us why cognitive approaches to discourse need to be complemented by critical reading of history.

⁸ Tenebrism is mostly associated with 17th century Baroque painters, typically in the style of Caravaggio. For an introduction to and discussion of the psychological effects of tenebrism, see Rzepińska and Malcharek (1986).



Figure 6. Two versions of the BBC logo

Early fascist groups, such as the British Fascists or the British Empire Union, were, at least initially, concerned mainly with the maintenance of the Empire and the fight against Bolshevism, which would entail that the phrase “Britain for the British” also sought to exclude anti-imperial elements as well as Jews (for an overview of the anti-Bolshevism of the interwar far right, see Linehan, 2000).⁹ The slowly changing meaning of *British* in the hands of the far right and the reconfiguration of the out-group is illustrated by Richardson’s (2013) analysis of the conceptualization of Britishness in the newspaper COMBAT, published by the 1960’s BNP and its progenitor the National Labour Party (NLP). The 1960’s conceptualization can be seen as an intermediate stage between the prewar and contemporary meaning of *British*. In the 1960s, *white* was used interchangeably with *British*, but it was still the Jews rather than the Muslims who were the chosen targets of disapproval. Disappointment with the declining status of the Empire had been replaced with disappointment with the Commonwealth, which the NLP wanted to replace with a “new Union of the white dominions” (Richardson 2013, 186f). Figure 6 shows how the BNP combines the interwar notion of the Bolshevik conspiracy with the more contemporary paranoia concerning an Islamic invasion of Europe. This is schematized in Figure 7.

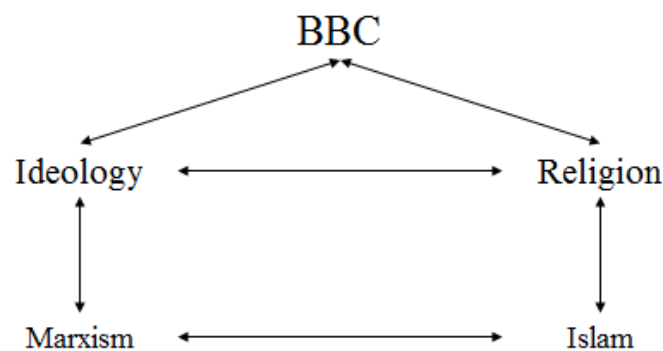


Figure 7. Schematization of Figure 6

⁹ Bolshevism seems to be the preferred term in much literature on interwar fascism, which mirrors the political language of that time. Also the BNP makes use of this term, and also makes references to the “Bolshevik Broadcasting Corporation”. Otherwise, the contemporary far right prefers to refer to different forms of Marxism (e.g. cultural Marxism, neo-Marxism, extreme Marxism) rather than Bolshevism.

The BBC is one of the BNP's most frequently mentioned objects of disapproval; in the 641 articles from which the image corpus is compiled, the party makes 541 references to the BBC. Figure 6 is a prime example of the paranoia that is so typical of the BNP's out-group construction. The manipulated BBC logos give the out-group an ethnic and an ideological anatomy, just like in the prewar and 1960's conceptualizations. As Richardson and Wodak (2009a) point out, there has been a shift in ethnic focus from Jews to Muslims, but the fear of the left is still present, as signalled by the hammer and sickle in the fake BBC logo shown in Figure 6. The crescent, star, hammer and sickle all feature in flags (Pakistan, the Soviet Union) but the symbols only do half the job. The black background in the original BBC logo has been replaced by green, the colour of Islam, and red, the colour of the revolution. The colours are important, because, as pointed out by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 2), they correspond to functions which in verbal communication are carried out by different word classes or clause constructions. Also noteworthy is the movement of the crescent/C in the green BBC logo, suggesting the downfall of the corporation, caused by Muslim infiltration.

The fake BBC logos occur both individually (one instance each) and together (one instance), but there are other images, and many articles, in which the notions of ideology (Marxism, which is the preferred BNP term) and religion (Islam) are mixed. In one article (BNP 3), the author complains that “[i]t seems that barely a week goes by when there isn't a story in the news about a far-left council, Muslim 'community group' or an ungrateful immigrant whinging about an indigenous Briton flying his own flag in his own country”. This co-occurrence cannot be explained by a principle of the economy of name calling, a “catch-all rant”, but is more likely an attempt to reconceptualize Islam as an ideology. Such an understanding of Islam (and indeed any religion) has obvious advantages for parties like the BNP. Politicians are expected to argue against their opponents' political convictions, not their religious beliefs. By reconceptualizing Islam as “political Islamism”, the BNP turns Islam into something which can be criticized by politicians without infringing on religious rights.

As mentioned earlier, the BNP also uses images to collide what they perceive as completely negative systems of organizing society. One such example can be seen in Figure 8, which is a blend consisting of the Conservative Party's logo and parts of the EU flag.



Figure 8. The Conservative Party's logo with the EU flag projected on the crown

The stars, normally in gold against a blue background, are now blue against a milky-yellow tree crown. This is likely to be an attempt to show the weakness of the Conservative Party by making the logo's otherwise green crown look yellowed by age.

Party symbols are popular objects of travesty for political opponents regardless of ideological identity, and a quick Google search produces numerous takes on the Conservative logo, e.g. with a sawn-off trunk. Figure 9 shows the role of enmity in BNP conceptualization.

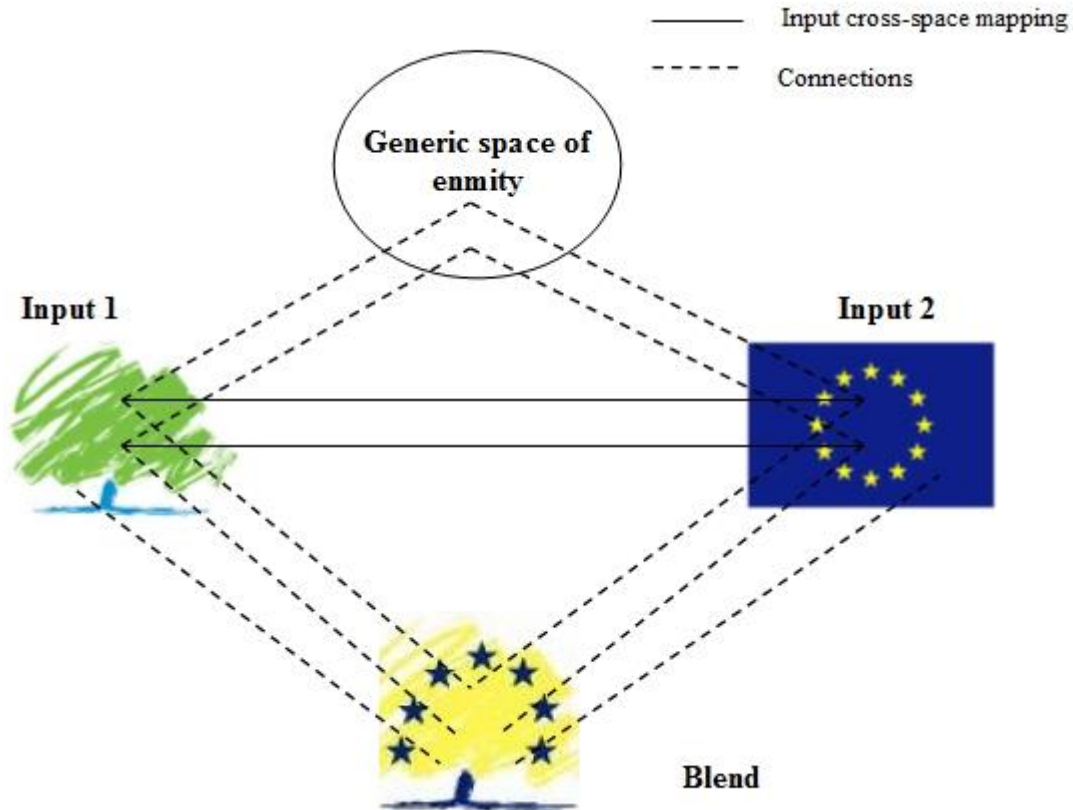


Figure 9. Schematization of Figure 8

Images occurring in BNP articles are almost always discursively motivated, and articles are not accompanied by stock photos just for the sake of illustration. Stock photos showing groups of unknown, smiling people performing different everyday activities, which you might encounter on other parties' websites, never occur in BNP articles. BNP images almost always send out a message on their own, a message which is complemented and amplified by the text. In such messages, the BNP is always, explicitly or implicitly, presented as the solution to a perceived problem. Figure 8 is an example of an image in which the BNP is the implicit solution. The party cadre knows that many people disagree with EU and Conservative policies, but also that just as many people disagree with the policies of the BNP, hence the tactic of broadcasting populist propaganda without a clear sender. Figure 9 offers a schematic reading of Figure 8 and shows that it is not merely a blend of Conservative and EU policies, but a construction of a BNP adversary, consisting of EU and Conservative elements but together resulting in something new. The BNP is an implicit actor here, as well as in many other images. Such

images could benefit the BNP even if the party's involvement is not explicit as successful de-legitimation of your opponent may result in self-legitimation.

Figure 8 was an example of how the systems of which the EU and the Conservatives are representatives were collided. Figure 10 on the other hand shows how the entity that nationalists hold most dearly, the nation itself, is under attack.

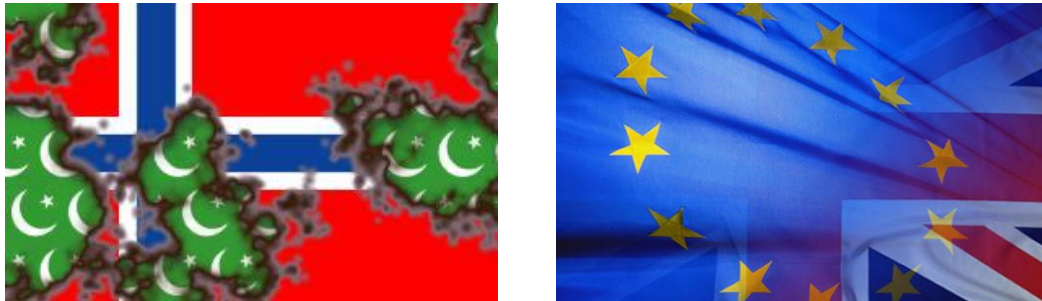


Figure 10. Two flag blends: the Norwegian/Pakistani and the UK/EU flags respectively

In Figure 10 we see representations of two nations, Norway and Britain, whose flags are rapidly disappearing. The Norwegian flag is burning up (or perhaps being destroyed by acid), revealing a repeated pattern of the Islamic crescent and star as seen on the Pakistani flag, signalling that the stealthy Muslim takeover of Western Europe is almost complete. The other image shows how the celestial blue of the European flag is diluting the royal blue of the Union Jack. In the hands of nationalists, this type of image is arguably a relatively new phenomenon as it does something that ought to be unthinkable of a true nationalist: defiling the nation's flag. Flags are national symbols intended to be saluted or revered, not defiled, at least not by the in-group for which the flag is used as an emblem. In this particular case the defilement of the Union Jack is achieved by having it swallowed by the EU flag, but in other instances the flag is superimposed by a moon and crescent, and in one case by something as banal as a banana. The technique of combining visual elements from different sources is far from new, and despite being seen as a traditionally leftist technique, it is not even new to the far right (Braun, 2000). What is new is the banality as self-infliction. This is a consequence of what is seen as "the war against our flag" (BNP 3), i.e. the BNP's attempt to show readers what the party thinks that the "enemies" are doing. In reality, however, the BNP defiles the Union Jack while hypocritically blaming it on someone else.

Beyond indicating that European nationalists take an interest in their neighbouring countries, this raises the question of what images do in relation to text. The article in which the Norwegian flag occurs puts forward the claim that all rapes committed in Oslo over the last years have been committed by Muslims (BNP 4). However, the Norwegian flag is not merely a complement to the article but expresses something which is not explicitly stated in the text, namely that the BNP compares immigration to Norway with immigration to Britain. The EU-Britain flag on the other hand occurs in an article which makes the claim that 7 out of 10 Brits want to leave the EU. Both flags in Figure 10 are thus images in which one positive worldview is purposefully collided with a negative. A schematization of the flags is seen in Figure 11.

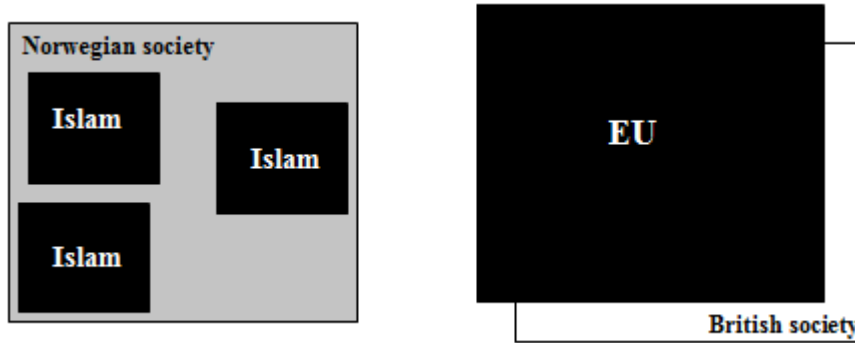


Figure 11. Schematization of Figure 10

The schematizations show a difference in how the overtaking of Norway is different to that of Britain. The purported overtaking by the EU is seen as a unified, top-down process while the overtaking of Norway is incremental and carried out by people, Muslims, rather than by a system, the EU.

Unlike Figure 10, which does not include textual features, Figure 12 shows how visual properties can be used to imply out-groups.



Figure 12. Two images describing Muslims as groomers/paedophiles. Pixelation added.

By playing with fonts, the creator of the image to the left is making cultures and ideologies clash. The image to the left is used in an article written by the BNP’s national organizer Adam Walker, announcing a demonstration that took place in Burnley in March 2012. The intent is quite clear; to stop grooming gangs, or the “Muslim paedophilia”, as they are referred to in the accompanying article. The image itself, however, does not explicitly identify Muslims as groomers, but rather suggests it by

contrasting two different fonts. In the upper part of the picture, the words “PROTECT CHILDREN” are written in a sans serif font substituting the BNP logo for the letter O. The logo renders the alternative reading “PROTECT BRITISH CHILDREN”, but does not necessarily tell a beholder unfamiliar with the BNP who the real sender is. The words in the other half of the image, “fight grooming gangs”, are written in a font emulating the Arabic alphabet thus rendering the reading “fight Arabic speakers, who are all groomers”. A similar observation on the generalizing power of images has been made by Machin (2013, pp. 349f) who notes that if a news story involving Muslims is accompanied by a picture of a woman in a burqa, this allows readers to make generalizations about the appearance of all Muslims. As Machin points out, such generalizations are unlikely to be made in the news text itself.

The images in Figure 12 are prime examples of the BNP’s tenebristic group formation, visually as well as conceptually. The large amount of darkness draws the attention to the light, used to represent the BNP and their argument. Rzepińska and Malcharek (1986) have noted that in tenebristic art, the source of light is often outside of the frame, but when inside the frame, the light typically emanates from a divine or angelic figure. In the right-hand image, light emanates from a crying child, giving the child an angelic appearance. This only serves to enhance the severity of the “crime” committed by the “Muslim paedophile gangs”. In other BNP images, pictures of real children are used rather than silhouettes. In his analysis of BNP leaflets, Richardson (2011) has shown how silhouettes, when depicting Islamic buildings, dispense with the need to incorporate linguistic material when referring to the out-group. While this holds true for the left-hand image, it most certainly does not for the right-hand one. Over and over again, the party fails to stick to its plan of visual representation (if such a plan exists) and when this happens, when a group of people is so clearly identified and negatively attributed and when racist ideas crystallize themselves so clearly, they cannot be denied or explained away.

It is also interesting to note how the Union Jack is only vaguely discernible in the upper part of the image, as if the party wants to convey a picture of Britain hidden away under a burqa. These two images are clearly more complex compositionally than the others we have looked at so far. A schematization of the left-hand image can be seen in Figure 13.

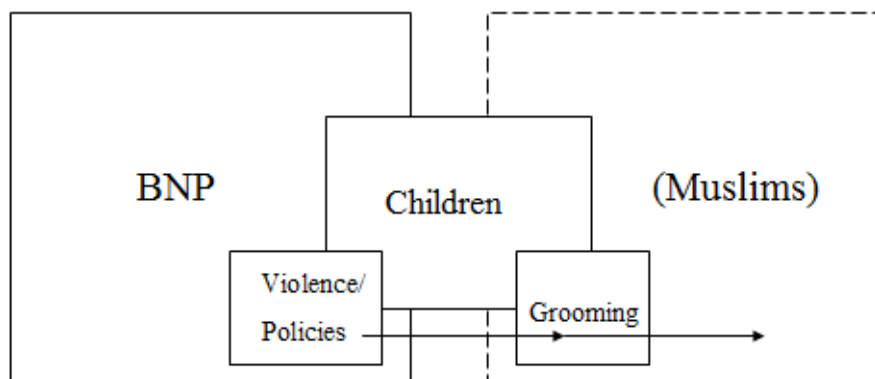


Figure 13. The component frames of the left-hand image in Figure 12

The images in Figure 12, and the left-hand one in particular, are not merely stylistic clashes but a clash between a purported Western and Eastern system of organizing thought and society. Muslims are implicitly constructed as an opposing force, and children are the entity linking the BNP to its out-group. What the arrow indicates is that it is not the abstract notion of paedophilia or grooming that the party attacks, but the people allegedly carrying out such activities, i.e. Muslims. This conceptualization identifies the problem of grooming as a Muslim problem. Violence, which was so central to interwar fascist art (see e.g. Braun 2000; Linehan 2000; Antliff 2007; Langston 2008) is no longer aestheticized; since the Second World War no such thing is possible for political organizations seeking legitimacy. But the violence is not gone. Instead of normalizing or banalizing it, it is implied. The use of verbs such as *fight* and *campaign* (which after all was originally a military term) and the fact that they target *gangs* rather than the abstract notions *paedophilia* and *grooming* suggest the use of violence without actually stating it.

6. Conclusions

The far right's use of images is an underprioritized area in discourse analysis. This article contributes to the field by focusing on the use of images in the discourse of one of the most talked about far-right organizations in modern time, the British National Party. The purpose of the article is to show how the BNP, which is seen as a representative for the European far right, uses images in in-group and out-group formation. Flags and flag elements were chosen as entry point due to their high frequency in a corpus of BNP images occurring in articles published between May 2010 and March 2012.

The BNP, like so many far-right parties, have undergone an aesthetic transformation over the years, exemplified here by the introduction of a new logo, breaking with the visual tradition of the far right by implying softness. As part of the party logo, the flag is used as a means of marking territory. Merchandise meant for public view, however, shows the flag-emblazoned heart without making explicit reference to the party in writing, suggesting members are cautious about being open with their political disposition.

As out-group markers, flags are used in different ways to express enmity, e.g. by suggesting left-wing and Muslim infiltration of the BBC, thus recontextualizing Islam as an ideology free to attack. In out-group formation, flags are used in BNP discourse as a means of expressing ideological messages grounded in the belief that there are good and bad ways of organizing thought and society. In such dialectic or multi-complex schematizations, a positive world view, typically an idealization of Britain, is made to collide with a purported negative view. Such conceptual schemata may take different shapes. The blending of the Union Jack and the EU flag, or the Norwegian and Pakistani flags, suggest that the two societies are taken over, or suppressed, by alternative ways of organizing thought and society. Certain images can be thought of as conceptual chiaroscuro as they juxtapose absolute light (the BNP) and absolute darkness (the claim that Muslims are groomers/paedophiles).

Besides showing that the BNP makes frequent use of images in relation to text, the analysis has shown that images are as important as text in far-right discourse. Images often send out a message on their own, and in these messages the BNP is either explicitly but more often implicitly given as the solution to a problem. Images function to a certain degree in ways that text does not. Images can be used to express ideas which cannot be

expressed in text, e.g. for legal reasons. Vagueness in text is a long-established phenomenon in political discourse in general, but this analysis shows that it is also an integral part of visual discourse, and that depending on the construal employed, several meanings can be inferred.

A secondary aim was also to further integrate Cognitive Linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis, and this is an aim which requires further attention. The visual aspect of European far-right discourse is largely unexplored, which is unfortunate as we are living in a time when far-right politicians are being more and more successful in their attempts to emulate the formal characteristics of the political establishment. Flags, naturally, are only one type of national emblems. Other symbols, such as the poppy, which the BNP is very protective of, have come into question, which is perfectly normal in an increasingly globalized and more peaceful world. Debates about nationhood and its manifestations will continue to emerge, requiring critical analysis.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor David Machin (Örebro University) and an anonymous reviewer for their critique, which helped me turn a rather messy collection of ideas into a more uniform whole. Also an indebted thanks to Professor Jordan Zlatev and Professor Carita Paradis (Lund University) for continued help and encouragement. Finally, thanks to Ann-Margret Olofsson, and all the office people at the Centre for Languages and Literature, Lund University. *Ad utrumque!*

Author address

Robin Engström
Department of Languages
Linnaeus University
Växjö 35252
Email: robin.engstrom@lnu.se

About the author

Robin Engström is a PhD Candidate in English Linguistics at Linnaeus University, with a background in political science and computational linguistics. Engström is interested in conceptual, visual and textual aspects of nationalist, far-right and fascist rhetoric and combines critical, cognitive and corpus linguistic approaches. He is currently working on civic forms of nationalism and linguistic aspects of the Scottish National Party's independence campaign.

References

- Antliff, M. (2007). *Avant-garde fascism: The mobilization of myth, art, and culture in France, 1909-1939*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. London: Thousand Oakes.
- BNP 1. (N.d.) British National Party unveils new party logo. Retrieved from <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/british-national-party-unveils-new-party-logo>.
- BNP 2. (29 February 2012). Attention! Flash demo in Burnley. Retrieved from <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/attention-flash-demo-burnley>.

- BNP 3. (10 November 2011). The war against our flag. Retrieved from <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/war-against-our-flag>.
- BNP 4. (N.d.). All rapes in Oslo committed by immigrants. Retrieved from <http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/national/attention-flash-demo-burnley>.
- Braun, E. 2000. *Mario Sironi and Italian modernism: Art and politics under Fascism*. New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Copsey, N. (2008). *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the quest for legitimacy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cross, C. (1961). *The Fascists in Britain*. London: Barrie and Rockliff.
- Fauconnier, G. and Turner, M. (2002). *The way we think: Conceptual blending and the mind's hidden complexities*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gentile, E. (1997). The myth of national regeneration in Italy: From Modernist avant-garde to Fascism. In M. Affron and M. Antliff (Eds.), *Fascist visions: Art and ideology in France and Italy* (pp. 25-46). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Goodwin, M. J. (2011). *New British fascism: Rise of the British National Party*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Griffiths, R. (1980). *Fellow travellers of the right: British enthusiasts for Nazi Germany 1933-9*. London: Constable.
- Hart, C. (2011a). Moving beyond metaphor in the Cognitive Linguistic Approach to CDA: Construal operations in immigration discourse. In C. Hart (Ed.), *Critical discourse studies in in context and cognition* (pp. 171-192). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Hart, C. (2011b). Force-interactive patterns in immigration discourse: A Cognitive Linguistic approach to CDA. *Discourse and Society* 22(3), 269-286.
- Hart, C. (2013). Event-construal in press reports of violence in two recent political protests: A cognitive linguistic approach to CDA. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 12(3), 400-423.
- Kress, G. and van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. London; New York: Routledge.
- Langacker, R. (1987). *Foundations of cognitive grammar, Vol. I: Theoretical prerequisites*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Langacker, R. (2008). *Cognitive grammar: A basic introduction*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
- Langston, R. (2008). *Visions of violence: German avant-gardes after fascism*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
- Linehan, T. P. (2000). *British fascism, 1918-1939: Parties, ideology and culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Machin, D. (2013). What is multimodal critical discourse analysis? *Critical Discourse Studies*, 10(4), 347-355.
- Paradis, C. (2005). Ontologies and construals in lexical semantics. *Axiomathes*, 15, 541-573.
- Pustejovsky, J. (1995). *The generative lexicon*. Cambridge, MS: MIT.
- Reisigl, M and Wodak, R. (2009). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). In M. Meyer and R. Wodak (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (pp. 87-122). London: Sage.
- Rhodes, J. (2009). The Banal National Party: The routine nature of legitimacy. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43(2), 142-160.

- Richardson, J. E. (2011). Race and racial difference: The surface and depth of BNP ideology. In N. Copey and G. Macklin (Eds.), *British National Party: Contemporary perspectives* (pp. 38-61). London and New York: Routledge.
- Richardson, J. E. (2013). Racial populism in British fascist discourse: The case of COMBAT and the British National Party (1960-1967). In J. E. Richardson and R. Wodak (Eds.), *Analysing fascist discourse: European fascism in talk and text* (pp. 181-203). New York and London: Routledge.
- Richardson, J. E. and Wodak. (2009a). Recontextualising fascist ideologies of the past: Right-wing discourses on employment and nativism in Austria and the United Kingdom. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 6(4), 251-267.
- Richardson, J. E. and Wodak, R. (2009b). The impact of visual racism: Visual arguments in political leaflets of Austrian and British far-right parties. *Controversia: An International Journal of Debate and Democratic Renewal*, 6(1), 45-77.
- Rzepińska, M. and Malcharek, K. (1986). Tenebrism in baroque painting and its ideological background. *Artibus et Historiae* 7(13), 91-112.
- Vossen, P. (2003). Ontologies. In R. Mitkov (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of computational linguistics* (pp. 464-483). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wodak, R. (2009). *The discourse of politics in action: Politics as usual*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wodak, R. and Fairclough, N. (2010). Recontextualizing European Higher Education Policies: The cases of Austria and Romania. *Critical Discourse Studies* 7(1), 19-40.