

# Diversity: a journalistic (re)construction of a public issue in the Belgian francophone media.

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This paper discusses the circulation of the word *diversity* in the Belgian French-speaking press, with the aim of mapping the multiplicity of meanings that emerge from its usage and the correlation with institutional actors who promote them. The abundant literature around this very contemporary notion in Western countries show a strong polysemy that makes it a particularly vague word. Using the point of view of the francophone discourse analysis that observes the social construction of the discursive meaning, we start from the principle that certain lexical units appear at certain moments of their circulation as structuring public discourses, despite (and because of) the effect of vagueness that emerges in terms of meaning.

After a state of the art, this paper addresses the issue through the media discourse, especially from the construction of the question of diversity in a large corpus of French-speaking Belgian press. The corpus was collected on the Europresse database retrieving articles using the word *diversity* in three major French-language newspapers (Le Soir, La Libre Belgique and La Dernière Heure – Les Sports), over a period from the first of January 2000 to 31 December 2020. This corpus was then set to be used in textual statistical analysis software. The corpus contains 7,114,546 occurrences in 11,488 articles. The form *diversity* appears 13,865 times. The Lexicometric processing is accompanied by a systematic examination of the original text, which gives both a statistical and a qualitative analysis.

The aim is to observe how the notion is gradually introduced into the press as a 'formula' by the journalistic discourse but especially by institutional actors who defend very different meanings of *diversity*. The work on a large press corpus has a double motivation: firstly, to statistically map the meanings of *diversity* identified by the literature, and secondly to identify the moments when institutional actors "push" the notion in journalistic discourse. This double analysis seeks to show that the concept is informed by different actors, agendas and policies that range from the world of culture to that of business, which translates into a fuzzy concept with overlapping layers of meaning.

Our view is influenced by the sociology of public problems, represented in the French-speaking field by the works of Neuveu and Cefaï, which is complementary to discursive studies. If they identify the mechanisms by which social actors make sense of the world through situated statements, studies in information and communication sciences that mobilize the notion of public problem reflect on the action of actors in the visibility of a problem. According to Cefaï, a public problem is built through an exchange between defenders of the cause and a public (Cefaï, 1996). Starting from a problematic situation that raises many questions, the defenders organize themselves to formulate the problem, to make it visible to the public authorities and to seek solutions. To achieve this goal, they must define the problem by naming it, find causes and reasons, raise awareness, and engage individuals, groups, organizations and institutions (Cefaï, 2016). There is therefore a double dynamic of problematization and publicization. The "trouble" becomes a public problem only if it attracts public attention and becomes a collective experience, the goal being for the public authorities to grasp the problem.

### State of the art

In recent decades, the concept of diversity has spread throughout the Western world. Its polysemy and vague referent have not prevented it from becoming a keyword in industrialized countries, most certainly because it translates the policies of Recognition (Tylor, 1994) at work in the West while neutralizing the conflict of multicultural societies. The literature in the humanities and social sciences reports on the circulation of a term with a vague referent used overwhelmingly as Krieg-Planque calls a 'formula': an expression that imposes itself at a given moment in public discourse and that condenses complex social issues that the word in itself helps to shape (Krieg-Planque, 2009).

The notion of diversity was introduced in Europe at the beginning of the Twenty-first century under the influence of several actors: managers of US companies and international organizations (mainly the

UN and the EU) defending heritage or advocating for the end of (ethnic) discrimination (Mathien, 2013; Sholomon-Kornblit, 2018; Sénac 2012). In the United States, Bereni and Jaunait trace the appearance of the word *diversity* in a Supreme Court decision (*Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, 1978), in a context of institutionalization of anti-discrimination policies. The authors note that from the beginning, diversity is marked by a constitutive ambivalence: it is sometimes a means to access equality, sometimes an end in itself and therefore an autonomous norm (Bereni and Jaunait, 2009). All these influences are at work in the emergence of the notion in France and French-speaking Belgium.

Often in collocation with *cultural*, the word also appears regularly in national and international discourses related to the preservation of local cultural goods and services, facing the risks of standardization due to the market logic of cultural industries and the growing liberalization pushed by certain economic actors (Mathien, 2013; Sholomon-Kornblit, 2018). The UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, approved in 2005 and applicable from 2007, is a key element crystallizing this type of discourse, this declaration being promoted and expected by social actors such as "States, creators, artists and civil society groups" (Mathien, 2013).

In the corporate world, actors linked to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and human resources, requiring the translation of "social" or "human" topics into managerial language, have gathered resources to promote the notion, in particular through "an important discursive work, consisting in translating the category of antidiscrimination into the language of the company" (Bereni, 2009). In Belgium, this same type of dynamic is identified by Tandé (2013), listing the actors exerting an influence on the emergence of the theme: multinationals, consultants and human resources specialists or academics from management sciences and wishing to articulate diversity management with the newly created CSR. The convergence of managerial and anti-discrimination discourse will lead, in the 2000s in France, to the question of the representation first of "minorities" and then of "diversity" in the media (Nayrac, 2011), and will then appear in French-speaking Belgium, involving political and institutional actors as well as NGOs.

Several authors point out that in the post-multiculturalism era<sup>1</sup>, the notion of diversity seeks to take into account the complexity of cultural identities while rejecting community multiculturalism (Hall, 1997; Titley, 2014). This is reflected in the Belgian political agenda, where the fight against discrimination gives way to diversity, which appears alongside the concept of equal opportunities, in the extension of the issues of integration of migrants and ethnic and racial discrimination (Adam, 2006; Tandé, 2013). These issues are mainly addressed by NGOs, academics and public institutions. According to some researchers, the reformulation of the public problem of discrimination in diversity has led to a depoliticization of the issue (Tandé, 2013). Shortly after the introduction of the term and the ensuing debates, the specific issue of the representation of visible minorities in the media emerged as an integral part of the broader problem of diversity. In 2006, the government asked the audiovisual regulatory authority (CSA) to express its views on the "presence and representation of persons of foreign origin in the media" (Conseil supérieur de l'audiovisuel, 2006), which led to the implementation of public policies trying to address the under-representation of minorities. With this change of course, this polysemic word goes from a descriptive meaning ("diversity as variety") to a normative meaning, understood as an objective to be achieved and therefore an end in itself ("diversity as an injunction") (Calabrese, 2018a).

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<sup>1</sup>The post-multiculturalism era refers to a set of political and media statements in the early 2000s, related to the underperformance of integration policies in the Western world and the problems arising from this failure (see Meer and Modood, 2009). From the beginning of the millennium, many countries (especially European) that had engaged in multiculturalist policies retreated in favor of more integrationist policies.

In a social context where different interests, power relations and strategies have made its use "both necessary and problematic" (Maingueneau, 2014: p.98), the word *diversity* is manipulated "in political and social discourse without ever being explicitly defined" (Devriendt, 2012). Studies show how "diversity experts" mix discursive elements related to a managerial approach to equality issues, allowing "its users to link the term to a wide range of discourses and devices" (Bereni and Jaunait, 2009). The literature cited shows a word with unstable semantics with multiple programs of meaning (Siblot, 2003) that can be updated according to contexts and enunciators. Because, unlike other notions that are intensely debated in the public space (Calabrese, 2018b), *diversity* adapts to a number of contexts that actualize sometimes radically opposed meanings.

The rise of diversity (as a lexical unit, concept and ideology) since the 2000s in French-speaking Belgium has probably been influenced by all these international discourses. France in particular, as a border country sharing the same language and exerting a wider cultural influence, is a source of influence to be taken into account, particularly on issues related to discrimination (Adam, 2006).

*The lexical worlds of diversity and its use as a 'formula'*

Before starting the diachronic analysis, we wanted to map the different meanings of *diversity* using the IRaMuTeQ software. The grouping of statements into *clusters* (in word classes) produced by IRaMuTeQ identifies the lexical organization of the corpus by identifying the co-occurring relationships between words. This analysis reveals poles that segment the corpus into as many classes: "a vocabulary class is constituted and separated from the others when the most important interclass inertia is reached. Thus, words gathered within the same class have a similar co-competitive profile with each other and as different as possible from words of another class" (Guaresi, 2015). The results can be seen on figure 1 with four lexical groups in two main groupings: classes 1 and 2 (politics and promotion of minorities) and classes 3 and 4 (culture and a class difficult to name given the heterogeneity of the lexicon), structured by co-competitive links.

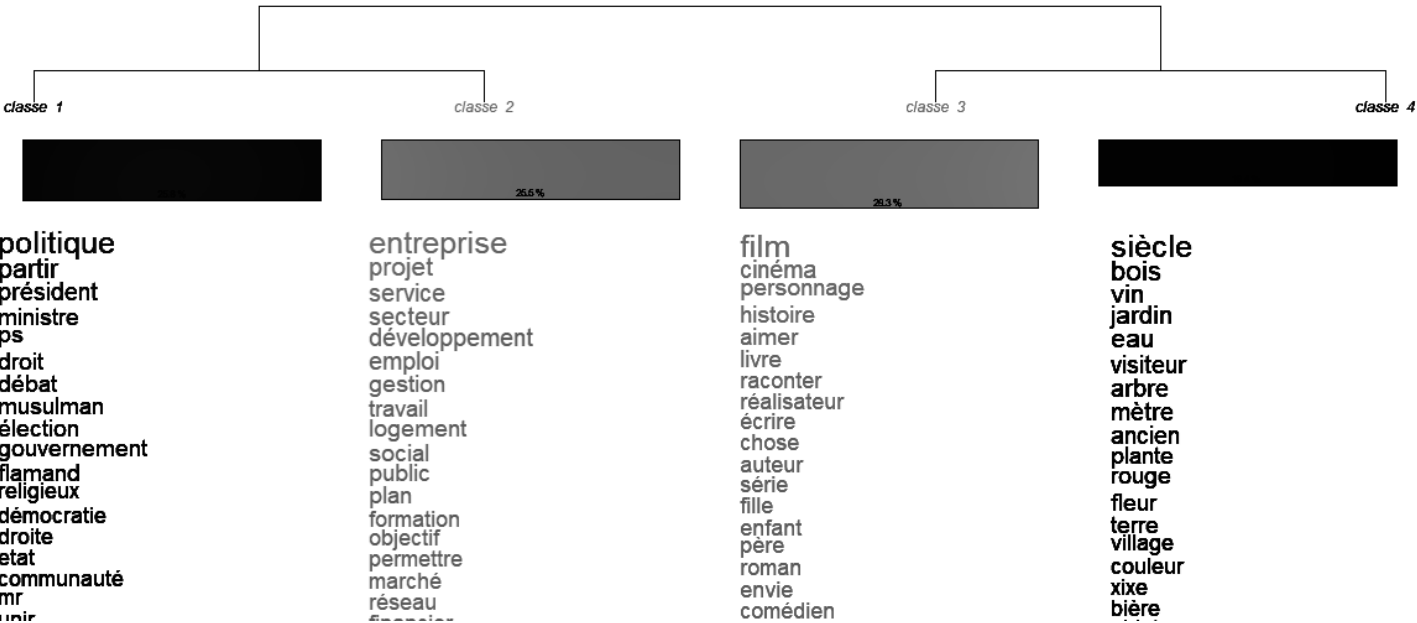


Figure 1 - Classification with IRaMuTeQ

The four lexical sets can be described in detail from the list of words that contributed to each class.

- Class 1: it brings together two lexical fields that represent two linked actors: that of politics (election, government, democracy) and that of minorities (Islam, Muslims, religion, racism, discrimination, immigration, integration). The semantic field of politics is in turn divided into Belgian and European politics. This heterogeneous class deals with the way in which the political world deals with the issue of diversity in a wide variety of ways such as by referring to immigrant or minorities but also cultural products, conflict management or the exaltation of abstract values.
- Class 2: it brings together institutional actors and minorities, with an overrepresentation of managerial discourse, identified in the state of the art as one of the contemporary pillars of the diversity spread. However, only a part refers to the notion of *diversity* as a 'formula', the others referring to the literal meaning of the word (diversity as a synonym for variety). The meaning of the promotion of visible minorities, is well represented in this class. Different to class 1, we find several action verbs and nouns that are associated, that might refer to the diversity-injunction that is achieved through proactive policies of 'promotion' of diversity.
- Class 3 brings together the lexicon of the performing arts, plastic arts and life stories represented on screen or in theatre. If the lexicon is rather homogeneous, the concordance reveals quite different uses of *diversity*: diversity as a variety of elements, whatever their nature (films, arts, architecture), ethnic diversity represented by visible minorities and finally ethnocultural richness as opposed to cultural globalization.
- Class 4 corresponds mainly to uses where *diversity* is synonymous with *variety*, which explains the heterogeneity of the vocabulary. In this class, the word appears mainly in syntagms such as *diversity of* or *diversity + Adj*.

Class analysis reveals the lexical and social worlds in which diversity is evoked in contemporary discourses: business, politics, media and the arts. These results confirm the state-of-the-art data, but do not contribute to discerning the different meanings of *diversity*, because these are randomly mobilized in the different lexical worlds, which reveals the polysemy of the term and its association with lexicons belonging to different semantic fields. However, we can identify some trends: while the managerial discourse will rather develop diversity-injunction, the European political discourse will promote the idea of cultural diversity to be defended. National and regional political discourse make an extremely diverse use of the notion: sometimes cultural, often ethnic; sometimes in injunction (implementation of policies), sometimes in the idealization of diversity as an abstract value.

The pertinent use of *diversity* for our study is when it is used as a 'formula', therefore when it has a fixed form, a discursive dimension, it constitutes a social referent and has a polemical aspect (see the analysis of Sholomon Kornblit based on Krieg-Planque). The classification shows the difficulty to isolate the 'formula' use of *diversity* from, for example, the everyday use of *diversity* as *variety*. In the case of *diversity* as *variety*, we can see that there are no polysemic or polyreferential aspects. If its everyday use can sometimes be determined by the use of the syntagm (as seen in class 4), it is not always the case. It is then necessary to take into account the inter-discourses to classify the use of diversity as a probable 'formula'. There are situations for example where occurrences of *diversity* do not have particular markers in their cotext but are informed by inter-discourses on multiculturalism who *ultimately* make them 'formulas'. It can be considered that the more the meaning is based on the shared inter-discourse, the more the use is form.

We can identify the following elements as contributing to the ‘formula’ use of *diversity*:

1. A nominal expansion predicts a non-‘formula’ use (*cultural diversity* being the exception);
2. The polysemy of the word (especially without nominal expansion);
3. The enrichment of meaning through inter-discourse and shared doxa;
4. Euphemistic use.

### *Diversity over time*

In order to evaluate the evolution of the uses of *diversity* over time in our corpus, we wanted to estimate if there were periods where the ‘formula’ was more present compared to the word’s everyday use. As it was not possible to do it automatically, we limited ourselves to a manual coding of the first 150 examples per year. As seen in figure 2, we can observe an increase in its ‘formula’ use from the mid-2000s with a peak of use in 2006, where it represents almost half of the use of the word. Then, this use drops slightly but rarely to the levels observed in the early 2000s. The increase in the fixed use of *diversity* from the middle to the end of the 2000s corresponds to a period, shown by the literature, of strong promotion of diversity, both in its managerial, anti-discriminatory use, and in the defense of cultural heritage.

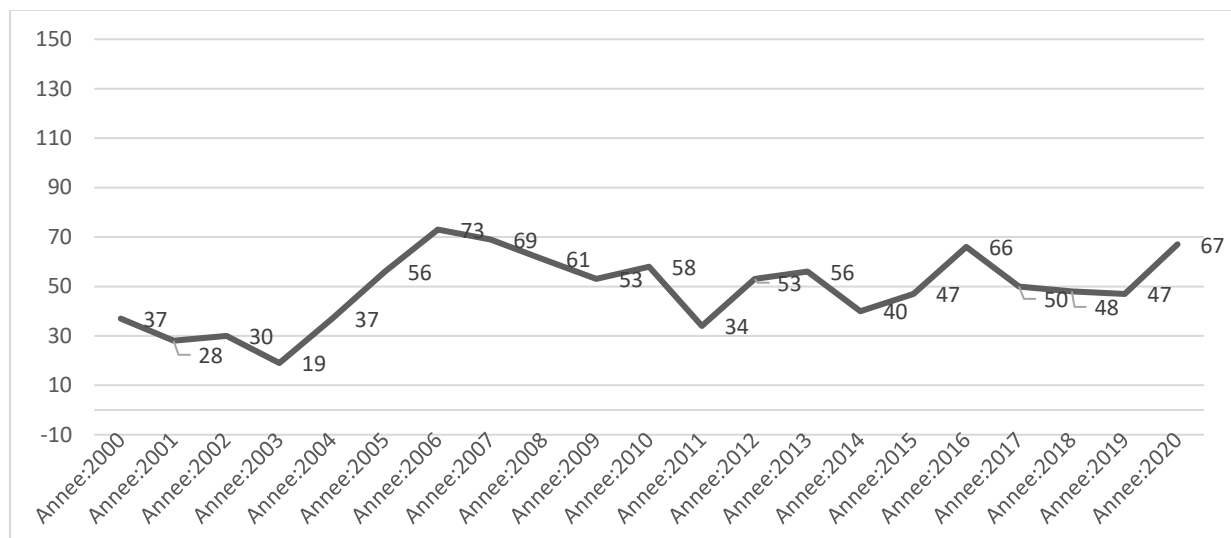


Figure 2 – Formula use of *diversity* per year (based on 150 examples/year)

Back to using statistical software, in order to observe which actors promote which sense of *diversity*, we analyzed the co-occurents of *diversity* year by year<sup>2</sup>. Unsurprisingly, the early 2000s left a lot of room for the use of *diversity* in its *variety* meaning. There are nonetheless already other uses, with few references to European contexts on topics such as the defense of cultural heritage, defense of minorities, migration, as well as the respect for diversity and social cohesion.

But it is really in the mid-2000s that the use of *diversity* in its discursive and fixed use accelerates, whether around its meaning of heritage protection or diversity promotion in entrepreneurial contexts.

The year 2005, when the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted, marked the regular appearance of a lexicon related to the protection of heritage. Although the *cultural diversity* collocation has been present since the early

<sup>2</sup> Based on a 7-word context, the first 100 co-occurents ranked according to their specificity index were retrieved from Hyperbase for each year. A frequency threshold was then applied, the cooccurrent having to appear at least 5 times in the corpus (Evert, 2009).

2000s, it is only in 2005 that we find, unsurprisingly, as co-occurents of *diversity* the lemmas *convention*, *protection*, *expression*, *artistic* or *UNESCO* but also *to safeguard* or *adopt*. The European institutions are also a central player in the media discourse on diversity, providing many arguments and lexical elements that will be used in the media, mainly the idea that the resurgence of nationalism in Europe can be explained by the lack of knowledge of cultural diversity.

That same year, there is a rise of appearances of co-occurents related to the managerial discursive field, mainly *companies*. A return to the corpus leads us to articles whose actors resonate with those identified in the literature review (Bereni, 2009; Tandé, 2013), such as (often international) private companies, "diversity entrepreneurs" (Bereni, 2009) such as HR and executives promoting CSR, as well as employers' organizations, political and institutional actors related to employment and the economy or academics.

There is often a use of *diversity* as a 'formula', rarely defined, but with a context that suggest explicitly or implicitly that it refers to ethnic origin, although, starting from the following years, *diversity* may also involve other "criteria". Some articles focus on a company communicating its point of view on diversity while many others concern events promoting diversity, organized mainly by public authorities, sometimes in collaboration with private companies and/or NGOs. Researchers from the social sciences or management are also important actors advocating for diversity. This year and those that follow, until 2008, co-occurents related to management are frequent (*manager*, *management*, *HRM*, *hiring*, *recruitment*), referring to tools (*plan*, *charter*), *favorizing*, *promoting* or allowing the *management* of diversity: a "diversity award", an "Equality-Diversity" label, a "Diversity and human resources of tomorrow" contest, various guides on good practices to promote diversity and a "charter of diversity in the company", drawn up by the Brussels Minister of the Economy and Employment and regularly signed by companies.

Over this period, the co-occurrence *discrimination* appears more and more regularly. This term is often articulated with *diversity* in a construction where the latter is to *be promoted*, *encouraged*, it must be *reflected*, when discrimination must be *abolished*, *excluded*, it must be *fought against*. Often in the context of public policies aimed at avoiding discrimination, in the labor market but also sometimes in other contexts. Around 2007 and 2008, there was also a greater presence of the co-occurent *equality* (*égalité*), sometimes appearing alongside *diversity* in the collocation *equal opportunities* (*égalité des chances*), a 'formula' that appeared in parallel with *diversity* (Tandé 2013).

From 2009-2010, co-occurents related to the management and defense of heritage appear less regularly. Its use as a 'formula' remains present but less frequent than in the previous period. Above all, the greater variety of co-occurents in the rest of our sample suggests that the period of intense promotion of the meanings of *diversity* as a defense of heritage and in its managerial and anti-discriminatory meaning has slowed down. It should be noted that by observing the co-occurrences related to the meaning of *diversity* as the handling of multiculturalism and the promotion of living together, they do not seem to appear on a particular moment but more sparsely over the entire period studied.

## Conclusions

Approaching the use of the 'formula' *diversity* in a large corpus was a challenge, by the very nature of this term, used, often non used as a 'formula', appearing in very different contexts and covering several meanings, themselves sometimes articulated with different public problems.

The use of a large corpus of press allowed us nonetheless to observe the circulation of the lexical unit *diversity* in the Belgian French-speaking press and to identify the moments when it appears as

structuring public discourse. We were thus able to observe a moment of intense circulation, namely the second half of the decade 2000-2010. During this period, *diversity* was promoted by a series of actors who mainly publicized two distinct public problems: the defense of heritage, facing the risks represented by the growing liberalization of international trade; and the promotion of minorities, mainly in companies, in a context of struggle against discrimination. The emergence of *diversity* in its use as a 'formula' in the Belgian French-speaking media arena during this period seems to be the work of these advocates, each deploying its own lexical repertoire. These actors are often international, whether they are international companies and institutions (e.g. UNESCO), European (e.g. the European Commission) or French actors whose speeches are regularly reported in the Belgian press. In our corpus, the trajectory of *diversity* in French-speaking Belgium seems to have a lot of similarities with its French equivalent. The Belgian actors identified are mainly business and political (mainly related to culture, economy or employment) actors, themselves probably influenced by international actors, mainly European and French.

The journalistic discourse seems to echo all these meanings, taking up uses from the actors without really questioning them. This is evidenced by the few metadiscourses on *diversity* observed in our corpus. The use of the 'formula' *diversity*, vague and polysemic, thus quickly seem to be part of the uses of journalists and other actors appearing in the sample. Nevertheless, there are certain moments of negotiation of the meaning of *diversity*, but mainly around the articulation of *diversity* with different "criteria" of minorities, via specialization (referring mainly to ethnic origin) or on the contrary to a "decategorization" towards other criteria followed by an "à la carte" choice (Doytcheva, 2020), which we will not discuss here in more detail.

For the next step, in our approach influenced by public problems, it would seem interesting to observe how this approach, which seems mainly top-down, pushed by political and institutional actors, has been able to potentially reconfigure already existing public problems, mainly discrimination issues.

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