

“The feminists turned into streetwise babes”

A diachronic corpus study of ‘feminism’ in
American and British English

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Outline

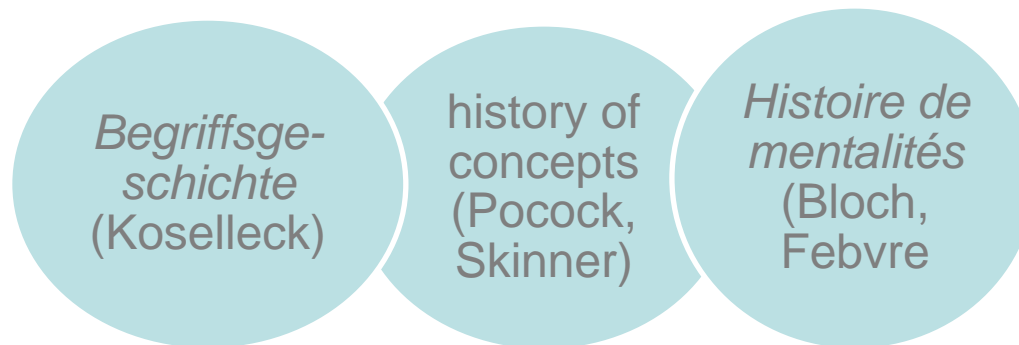
- Theoretical background: terminological and conceptual history
- Limits and advantages of corpus research
- Corpora and methods
- Results: 'feminis*' in American and British English, 1990-2010
- Implications for studying terms and concepts in discourse

Terminological and conceptual history

Term: a lemma and its derivations in different word forms

A term evokes/encodes a concept. Its usage in discourse influences the structure and content of the associated concept.

Terminological history: the changing connotations of a term over time



Methods for researching history of concepts: representative and comprehensive data; collocational analysis and triangulation, cf. discourse-historical approach

Theory

Corpus research

Corpora and
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Concepts as socio-cognitive representations

Socio-cognitive representations (SCRs)

- are cognitive structures jointly acquired, held and presupposed by members of a group
- combine beliefs, values, norms, goals and emotions; give rise to attitudes and expectations
- provide a shared frame of reference and thus enable communication
- establish social identities and relationships
- stabilise through repeated activation
- are continually renegotiated in discourse, through intertextual chains

Corpus research into terms in discourse

Limits

Images, fonts etc. often missing

Purely quantitative corpus analysis doesn't offer explanations for linguistic patterns: qualitative analysis needed

Some phenomena difficult to automatically identify (e.g. metaphor)

Advantages

Limits 'cherry-picking' of examples to prove a point

Minority positions more likely to be identified from large samples

Allows history of a term to be researched in comprehensive and representative samples of discourse

Previous research

Krishnamurthy (1996): 'ethnic', 'racial', 'tribal'

Hunston (2002): 'deaf'

Sigley and Holmes (2002): 'girls'

Baker and McEnery (2005): 'refugees', 'asylum seekers'

Mautner (2007): 'elderly'

Baker (2009): 'bachelor', 'spinster'

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The corpora...

American English

(sub-)corpus	tokens
COCA total	422.43m
1990-1994	ca. 100m
1995-1999	ca. 100m
2000-2004	ca. 100m
2005-2010	> 100m
1990-2010 academic	ca. 85m
1990-2010 fiction	ca. 85m
1990-2010 magazine (popular)	ca. 85m
1990-2010 newspaper	ca. 85m
1990-2010 spoken	ca. 85m

British English

(sub-)corpus	tokens
WordBanks total	553.17m
BrE 1990-2005	230.81m
BrE 1990-1994	60.78m
BrE 1995-1999	20.04m
BrE 2000-2005	150m
BrE 1990-2005 academic	36.98m
BrE 1990-2005 fiction	17.2m
BrE 1990-2005 magazine (special interest)	16.2m
BrE 1990-2005 newspaper	122.6m
BrE 1990-2005 spoken	35.39m

Corpora and
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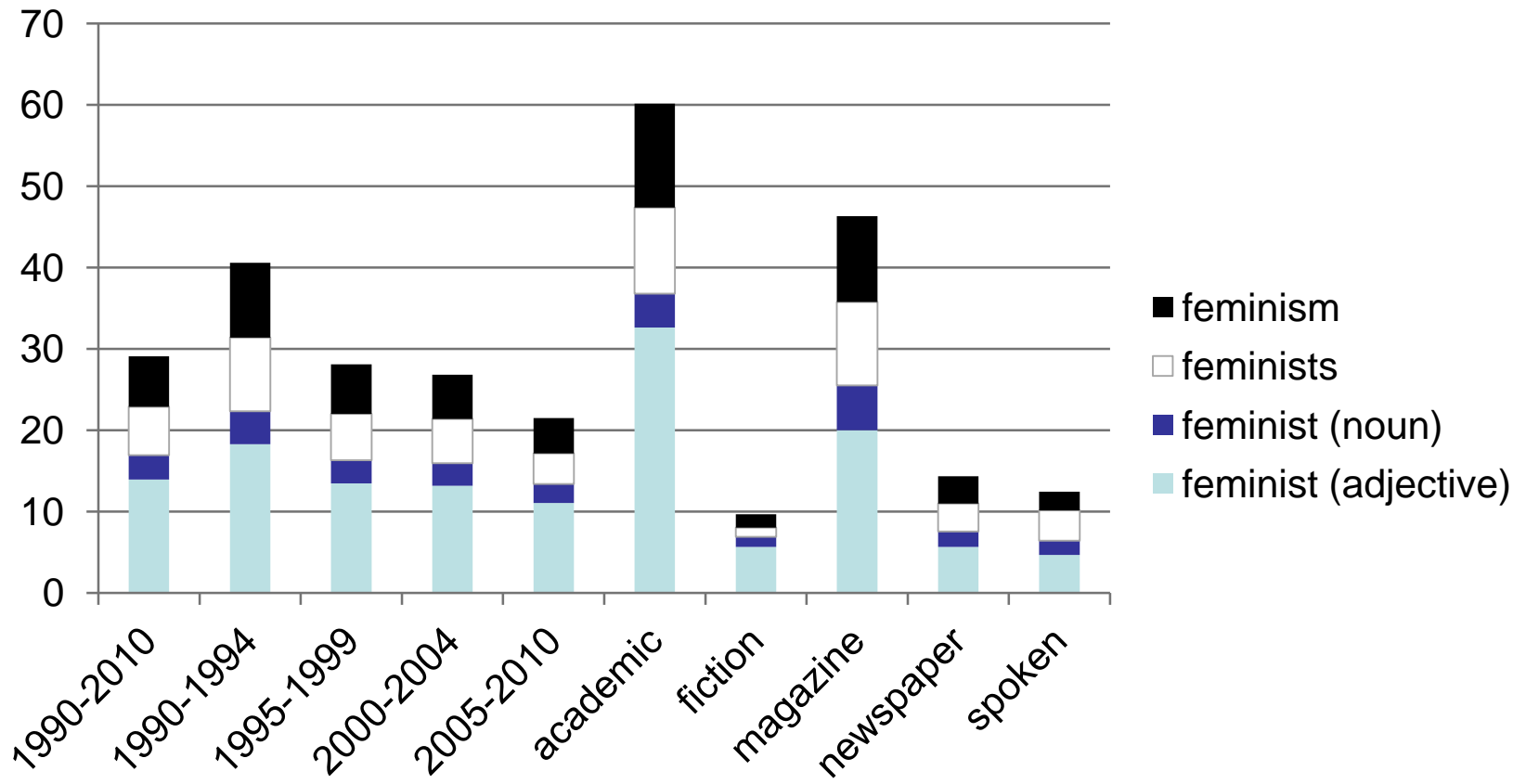
Implications

...and what we did with them

- Searches carried out on *feminist* (noun), *feminist* (adjective), *feminists*, *feminism* for both American and British corpora
- Relative frequencies compared across genres and time periods
- Collocate lists derived for the search terms, and for different genres and time periods, span of -4 to +4 words, lexical collocates used, collocates based on overall frequency
- Collocates grouped into semantic categories
- Concordances of search terms examined to derive better senses of uses in context
- Interpretation of results related to changing social context

Overall frequencies (1)

American English (1990-2010)



Theory

Corpus research

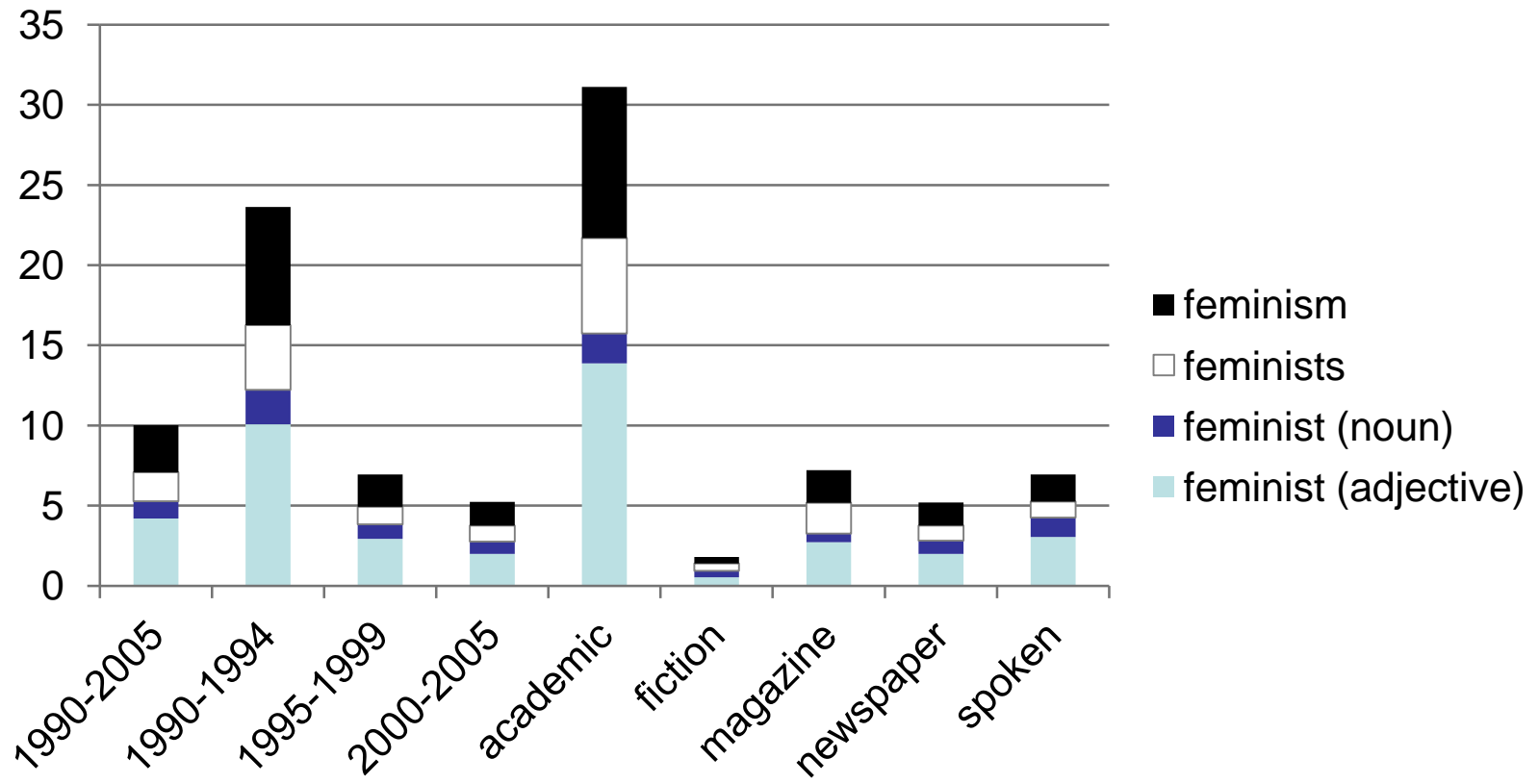
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Overall frequencies (2)

British English (1990-2005)



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Overall collocates and semantic categories

- majority of collocates refer to academic contexts: not surprising since feminism is most frequently mentioned in this category
- other categories, such as economics, religion, literature and sexuality also generally academic
- no religion or economics/business in British English, but evaluation
- larger 'other' category in British English because of verb collocates: effect of search statistics?
- difference in geography & culture: Islamic and Nicaraguan (American English) vs. American, British, Western (British English)

Collocates over time (1)

American English (1990-2010)

1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2004	2005-2010
Women	Movement	American	Women
Radical	Women	Women	Theory
Movement	Radical	Theory	Studies
Theory	Health	Studies	Movement
Criticism	Article	Movement	Scholars
Critics	Theory	Theology	Beliefs
Perspective	Studies	Analysis	Art
Literary	Issues	Radical	Theologians
Politics	Critics	Scholars	Sexual
Agenda	Theology	Critics	Radical
Contemporary	Majority	Commodity	Scholarship
Scholars	Modern	Politics	Majority
Theology	Nicaraguan	Majority	Activists
Militant	Scholars	Chain	Western
Scholarship	Perspective	Perspective	Gender
Ethnography	NGOs	Theorists	Scholar
Academic	Liberal	Gender	Contemporary
Anthropology	Politics	Islamic	Arab
Author	Philosophy	Cultural	Wave
Critique	Criticism	Theorizing	Perspective

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Collocates over time (2)

British English (1990-1994, 2000-2005)

1990-1994	2000-2005
Radical	Women
Lesbian	Movement
Women	Radical
Movement	Icon
Socialist	Years
Western	Modern
Analysis	Politics
Theory	Greer
Work	Writer
Political	Early
Politics	Germaine
Perspective	Men
Social	Become
1970s	American
Analyses	1970s
Different	Work
Criticism	Old
Know	Says
History	Groups
Militant	Militants

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Adjectival collocates over time (AmE)

1990-1994	1995-1999	2000-2005
17 different categories	13 different categories	13 different categories
Stance: extreme (10 types)	Stance: extreme (5 types)	Geography and Culture (9 types)
Time (3 types)	Time (6 types)	Religion (4 types)
Academic (4 types)	Geography and Culture (4 types)	Stance: extreme (3 types)
Literature (1 type)	Religion (3 types)	Time (4 types)
Sexuality: gay (3 types)	Academic (5 types)	Academic (5 types)
Political spectrum: left wing (3 types)	Sexuality: gay (3 types)	Sexuality: gay (3 types)
Political spectrum: liberal (2 types)	Political spectrum: liberal (1 type)	Stance: moderate (2 types)
Stance: moderate (1 type)	Political spectrum: left wing (4 types)	Evaluation: wrong (2 types)
Feminist concepts (1 type)	Status: important (2 types)	Political spectrum: left wing (3 types)
Religion (3 types)	Stance: moderate (2 types)	Literature (1 type)
Status: important (1 type)	Literature (1 type)	Political spectrum – liberal (1 type)
Geography and Culture (2 types)	Economics/Business (2 types)	Evaluation: bad (2 types)
Sexuality: heterosexual (1 type)	Evaluation: wrong (1 type)	Status: important (1 type)
Evaluation: bad (1 type)		
Evaluation: wrong (1 type)		
Economics/Business (1 type)		
Stance: anti-men (1 type)		

Spoken collocates (1)

American English (1990-2010)

1990-2010 except spoken	1990-2010 spoken
Women	Movement
Movement	Women
Theory	Radical
Radical	Militant
Studies	Groups
Scholars	Leaders
Theology	Author
Critics	Majority
Article	Gays
Politics	Mad
Perspective	Liberal
Criticism	Update
Contemporary	Revolution
Copyright	Writer
Gender	Agenda
Concord	Feminazis
Majority	Gloria
Scholarship	Liberals
Activists	Wave
Theorists	Gay

Spoken collocates (2)

British English (1990-2005)

BrE 1990-2005 except spoken	BrE 1990-2005 spoken
Radical	Know
Lesbian	Say
Women	Movement
Movement	Radical
Socialist	Think
Politics	Women
Western	Different
Theory	Mean
Work	Socialist
Analysis	History
Political	Early
1970s	Issues
Perspective	Separatist
Militant	Scholarship
Years	American
American	Liberal
Writer	Believe
Social	Makes
Modern	Mode
Criticism	Sixties

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Selected concordances (AmE) (1)

“The feminists” as wrong

The quote you are confronting me with has been pulled out of context by

the feminists,

who, by the way

DS: You despise feminists, don't you? # NM:

The feminists

are not equipped to begin to understand.

good at this. But the simple fact of the matter is that

the feminists

are very inconsistent here. How

much difference.

The feminists

won, but it turned out that they were fighting the wrong war. Despite

The feminists

of that period were blissfully unaware of what we, with 20-20 vision in hindsight

The problem is that

the feminists

glamorized work. I agree with you. Most women go to work because they

Selected concordances (AmE) (2)

“The feminists” as angry

The feminists and the Feminazis are already **angry** at him because they're not getting the payback

The feminists again **got mad** when Mattel put this doll out because this doll -- if you

They **got mad**-- the feminists **got mad** because, ladies and gentlemen, the dolls on occasion would say,

we are reaping the bitter harvest of those seeds of **hatred** planted by

Refusing you reply to those who flout you, # But yet allow the feminists to **rant**

And the feminists on this show were going (mimics anger) **breathing fire**. He's just

“The feminists are **in a fury** with me. They feel because so many more women are

Selected concordances (AmE) (3)

“The feminists” as hypocritical

were still left with the starkness of the **double standard** on the part of

the feminists,

who not only conspicuously

her to kiss his penis,

the feminists

suddenly turned into streetwise babes who could go Mae West one better

supporters in the very manner feminists deplore. **Yet**

the feminists

stood silently by, offered muted protest at best,

The feminists'

response to Willey's letters was radically **different from the excuses** they had made

among the effects of sexual harassment, **yet**

the feminists,

so far from pointing this out, let Willey twist in the wind while

in on this point, because it's a legitimate point, Mandy.

The feminists,

on this issue, **have been terribly quiet,** and it's

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Summary and interpretation of results (1)

- term feminis* decreasing in prominence and differentiation over time: concept/SCR in quantitative and qualitative historical decline
- time contrast in later periods: feminisms differentiated and problematised
- personalisation after 2000 reflects growing individualism (but Gever 2003: 81-114)
- term used mostly attributively, i.e. linked to other concepts/SCRs
- term closely linked to academic genres and discourses: exclusive/elitist, linked to SCR of (women) academics
- delegitimation strategies:
 - homogenisation
 - attribution as wrong, angry/irrational, hypocritical: normative SCR of women reinforced

Summary and interpretation of results (2)

- concept/SCR of feminism embedded in cultural context (e.g. religion), politics (e.g. 'Islamic') and discourse conventions (strong negative evaluation in spoken AmE)
- academic link retained in AmE, but not in BrE (opposite in spoken genres): effect of included genres?
- extremism foregrounded in later BrE texts, backgrounded in later AmE text: effect of retained academic link and greater cultural differentiation in AmE?
- more cultural/geographic and religious differentiation in AmE post-9/11: effect of included time periods?

Implications (1)

theoretical:

notion of 'concept' in *Begriffsgeschichte* needs to be more differentiated between term and associated concept

cognitive extension of 'concept' builds on notions in history of concepts and *histoire de mentalités*

political:

focus on extremism in written BrE and spoken AmE endows SCR of 'feminism' with negative value and affect

'feminist' as term – but not necessarily as a concept! - triggering resistance

link to academic discourse historically correct but increases distance and hinders identification

feminist critique to be complemented by positive messages

Implications (2)

methodological:

discourse analytical approach provides more fully-fledged picture than focus on langue/parole or speech acts

diachronic concordance and collocation analysis to research terminological history

first step in researching conceptual history

Over to you: questions, comments, contributions

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