

## Exploring Churchill's political speeches : The case for digitality in interdisciplinary linguistics and history teaching

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# Exploring Churchill's political speeches.

The case for digitality in interdisciplinary linguistics and  
history teaching

SABINE BARTSCH & DETLEV MARES

## 7.1 Introduction

Recent years have seen recurrent calls for interdisciplinary approaches to university teaching. Yet, although they promise an innovative combination of skills and competences from different disciplines, the transformation of different disciplinary traditions into workable didactic concepts presents a number of challenges. Successful interdisciplinary teaching requires the fruitful combination of skills and competences of teachers and students from different disciplinary backgrounds moulded into suitable didactic concepts. The prerequisite for the successful application of such concepts is the establishment of sufficient common ground for communication and collaboration.

In this chapter, we argue that such interdisciplinary didactic concepts can greatly benefit from digitality as a facilitator of interdisciplinary teaching and learning. We suggest a concept that uses political speeches as the object of study. It fundamentally builds on three pillars for an interdisciplinary, research-based teaching concept:

- disciplinary linguistic and historical expertise towards the analysis of political speeches as an activating topic in interdisciplinary groups;
- digital corpora and tools for annotation and analysis as the methodological basis for a joint learning and teaching platform; and

- a common set of goals including a historically as well as linguistically satisfying analysis of the corpus under study in which participants from both disciplines acquire enough joint interdisciplinary knowledge to accomplish a quality of analysis not possible in a purely disciplinary setting.

This paper presents the development and application of such an interdisciplinary and digital teaching concept, based on a course held with an interdisciplinary group of teachers and students in an undergraduate course at Technische Universität Darmstadt.

## 7.2 Political rhetoric as an interdisciplinary topic

From ancient times, political rhetoric has been well-established in the Western oratorical tradition. Classical accounts have defined ‘rhetoric’ as the art of public speaking (Nash 1989), yet, as Condor et al. (Condor et al. 2013) note, „[C]lassical work on rhetoric was not confined to the political sphere“, but also included judicial as well as epideictic or ceremonial oratory. They also point out that contemporary research on rhetoric extends to incorporate written text and digital communication as well as other modalities such as images and film. For the purposes of the seminar concept lying at the heart of this paper, we had decided to remain firmly within in the confines of classical definitions and concepts of rhetoric as public speaking as exemplified in Charteris-Black’s work on political rhetoric (Charteris-Black 2011; 2014). Starting with philosophers such as Plato and Cicero, rhetorical strategies and figures of speech have been categorised and subjected to linguistic analysis. However, mastering a set of rhetorical devices is but a necessary, not a sufficient precondition for a speaker’s oratorical impact. Political speech-making occurs in specific places at specific times. The local, social and temporal context in which political rhetoric is set, likewise, must be considered in any account of successful political oratory, shaping, as it were, the environment for the reception of speeches among particular audiences. In consequence, the analysis of political rhetoric must combine approaches from more than one discipline in order to attain a fuller picture of the potentials and effects of particular speeches at particular times. This interdisciplinary setup is of particular importance with respect to historical speeches whose effect on their audiences is not open to immediate study anymore but has to be reconstructed from limited available source material, thus often posing further challenges for the unwary modern recipient.

In this paper, we argue that the blending of methods from linguistics and history enhances both our understanding of historical oratory and of the role of political rhetoric

in current democratic societies. Politics in its truest and most ancient sense of „public affairs“ and the „res publica“ is by tradition and of necessity a communicative affair, resting as much on the skilful wielding of political power itself as on the skilled employment of powers of negotiation and persuasion. In these latter skills especially lies the success of many political acts and actors. It is thus of vital importance for the informed citizen to develop their ability not only to recognize and distinguish good from detrimental political action, but also to be able to detect the attitudes and strategies of the political leading class which often precede those deeds and which lead to justified trust or distrust.

The ability to lead and govern by means of rhetorical prowess rather than by action alone is a landmark of modern democracy and consensual social interaction:

„It has always been preferable for the governed to be ruled by the spoken word rather than by the whip, the chain or the gun. For this reason, we should be happy when power is based – at least to some extent – upon language; at least when our leaders are taking the trouble to persuade us, we have the choice of accepting or rejecting their arguments.“(Charteris-Black 2011)

These observations, aptly formulated by Jonathan Charteris-Black, support the general case for teaching the conditions and contexts of political rhetoric in schools and universities, so that members of the community, through suitable education, learn to critically engage with the oratory of the ruling political class and may be in a position to distinguish apt markers of persuasion from mere rhetorical powerplay or verbal and rhetorical acts of deception. Despite (and because of) the current importance of social media for the framing of political discourse, engagement with political rhetoric can and must be taught to facilitate the development of an awareness of the persuasive powers of political rhetoric as instantiated in political written and spoken text as encountered in our everyday engagement with the political sphere. This has traditionally relied on suitable readings of texts, often based on a carefully selected, almost canonical set of the finest specimen of political rhetoric, while often disregarding the more mundane examples of everyday political rhetoric. However, while making the general case for an extension of the materials suitable to be taken into consideration as specimen of political rhetoric, in this paper we single out a famous example of political oratory which shall allow us to concentrate the argument on the substantial benefits to teaching efforts from the use of digital means of linguistic analysis. Applied to historical speeches, they allow a better understanding of the democratic rhetorical tradition, while at the same time

having to be complemented by a historical perspective on the specific contexts in which the speeches were given.

The famous example consists of a select corpus of Winston Churchill's political speeches. Churchill transcends the boundaries of national politics and has become a household name in European politics not only for his politics and crafty self-expression (cf. Kielinger 2014: 37-39), but also for his rhetorical skill for which he was most notably honoured with the 1953 Nobel Prize for Literature. His speeches, while being counted by many among the rhetorically finest specimen of the genre of the political speech, are also a timely reminder of the challenges and pitfalls of European politics and integration. Churchill (1874-1965) was a politically active figure throughout a long life that extended over the turn from the 19th to the 20th century, the establishment of modern industry, the end of Queen Victoria's reign and the decline of the British Empire. His career spanned an era that was haunted by two world wars and the first decades of the Cold War. His speeches thus invite a closer look from the different angles of history, linguistics and the requirements of teaching. However, we do not claim to offer a full-scale analysis of his public speaking. His skillful use of language has already been subjected to historical linguistic scrutiny (see e.g. Rhodes James 1993; Cannadine 2002; Toye 2014), and we do not aim to provide a fundamentally new perspective in this field of research. Instead, we want to make the case for digitality as a technological foundation for the analysis and teaching of historical rhetoric, with Churchill's speeches serving as examples for the application and the potential of digital corpus linguistic methods in historical analysis.

### 7.3 Blood, toil, tears and sweat under the scrutiny of digital tools

Digital tools have been a backbone of many types of textual editing and analysis for more than 70 years now. Starting with initial attempts at machine translation subsequent to the invention of modern computing after the Second World War and projects such the lemmatization of the Index Thomisticus by Father Roberto Busa who famously teamed up with IBM to facilitate the digital processing of the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. Since these early efforts, digital text analysis has come a long way. With the availability of increasing amounts of digital text as born digital data on the internet, through large-scale digitization efforts and various other sources and the advent of the personal computer on the desktop of the individual researcher, teacher and student as well as in the classroom, new possibilities have become available not merely for reading and editing text, but especially for textual analysis based on electronic corpora.

Electronic corpora as principled resources of linguistic investigation have increasingly become available since the advent of the Brown Corpus (Francis et al. 1964) which is the first electronic corpus representing a selection of genres of American English of the year 1961. It is a sample corpus of one million running words (tokens) comprised of 500 samples of 2000 words each spanning a breadth of genres from as far afield as literary texts, scientific prose, religious texts and many others ([Brown Corpus Manual](#)). This first electronic corpus was complemented by the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) corpus (Johansson et al. 1978) ([LOB Corpus Manual](#)), a corpus designed after the model of the Brown corpus, but representing British English of the same time period and genre mixture. Since the early 1970s, increasing numbers of linguistic corpora have become available representing ever growing amounts of language data including the British National Corpus (BNC) (Burnard et al. 1998) which is a milestone national corpus representing British English of the mid to late 1970s, the 1980s and the early 1990s. Since then, a large number of corpora have emerged that are of varying utility for educational purposes. Additionally, bespoke corpora have been compiled for the study of specific research questions. The Obama Speeches Corpus (OSC) (Bartsch et al. 2009) may serve as an example from the domain of the study of political rhetoric and as a project that has evolved in a teaching context. All of these resources have been amply used in research and often simultaneously in didactic scenarios and have been scrutinized from the perspective of a vast variety of research questions.

For the course mentioned at the outset, two partially overlapping types of corpora formed the basis for analysis:

1. The Historic Hansard Corpus, a 1.6 billion word corpus comprised of all speeches held in the British House of Commons and House of Lords beginning in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (1803) and extending up until the early 21<sup>st</sup> century (2005) ([Hansard Corpus \(British Parliament\)](#)). The Hansard Corpus is a large-scale, comprehensive corpus which allows the study of a speaker and his or her interaction with their contemporaries, but in a very specific kind of setting, the Parliament.
2. The second type of corpus were bespoke corpora representing individual orators such as William Ewart Gladstone, Winston Churchill, Margaret Thatcher, to name but the most central ones representing the period since the Victorian age. The bespoke speaker corpora are smaller corpora representing one speaker only, but potentially in different settings inside as well as – predominantly – outside Parliament.

Both corpora comprise metadata allowing at least the temporal and local placement of each speech. Within the course, additional material was provided in the form of further secondary as well as primary texts, images, audio and video in order to allow us to explore the settings of the speeches which is very significant in order to fully grasp not only the contents of a speech, but also the reception by a specific audience. A good example of this are Gladstone's speeches from his Midlothian Campaign of the years 1879-80 which were delivered in instalments at different locations on a journey by train as well as subsequently printed in national newspapers (Biagini 1992: 395-416). Large audiences gathered wherever he got off the train to speak, often in make-shift improvised locations prepared for the speeches and closely followed by the press who set up camp by the train stops. In a similar fashion, two seminal speeches by Winston Churchill in which location and medial presentation can be shown as highly significant for the presentation and reception of the political oratory may serve as further examples. One is his Zurich speech to students and, the other, of course, the famous Blood, toil, tears and sweat speech that he actually gave twice, once when he set out to take over government as the new Prime Minister at the onset of the Second World War and via radio transmission to the general public. Again, not only the speech itself, but also its medial transmission and reception are of crucial significance for an understanding of both contemporary reception and our present-day understanding of the speeches and their significance for the time and location in which they were delivered.

Both types of corpora were made available in either their entirety or in carefully selected samples to the students via a bespoke web-interface or as local copies wherever this was possible and suitable for the purpose. Part of the curriculum entailed lessons in the employment and analysis of such corpora by a variety of digital tools and techniques as well as a critical engagement with the text type itself and its historical significance and linguistic, rhetorical features and their operationalization towards digital corpus study. The backbone of historical knowledge aided not only the interpretation, but also the identification of words and expressions from relevant semantic fields and rhetorical functions. The didactic concept thus builds on the interaction of linguistic and historical expertise as well as the operationalisation and explorative pursuit of questions to be addressed to a digital corpus of political speeches. Inspired by Tim Johns' (1988; 1991) glqq data-driven learning“ approach to foreign language learning aka „classroom-concordancing“, students were empowered and encouraged to explore and search for hints and evidence in authentic data, thereby learning not only about the historical and political contextualisation of speeches from recent European history, but also the me-

thods and techniques of linguistic corpus analysis. From these wider perspectives, we now single out the case of Winston Churchill.

#### 7.4 „That got the sods, didn't it?“ Churchill as a successful speaker: rhetorical means and historical contexts

In public memory, the image of Churchill as an outstanding speaker is closely associated with the wartime speeches, which he presented in the House of Commons and on BBC radio. Churchill is remembered as the defender of civilization against the forces of tyranny and evil, of pitting liberty and British virtues against the encroachments of Nazi barbarism. Yet, his oratorical success was no forgone conclusion. The main features of Churchill's rhetoric had been in place by his late 20s, and many of the formulas appearing in the wartime speeches were in evidence many years before. Churchill's oratory was rarely spontaneous, but well-prepared and well-rehearsed; the historian David Cannadine describes Churchill's speeches as „'hothouse plants': meticulously constructed set-pieces, carefully planned from beginning to end, with ample documentation to support the case being made, and with the arguments flowing in ordered sequence, until the peroration was finally reached.“ (Cannadine 2002: 91). Still, Churchill had to experience periods of notable oratorical failure, as in his „wilderness years“ of political isolation during the 1930s (Gilbert 2011). During those years, „the very luxuriance of Churchill's rhetoric“ (Cannadine 2002: 94), which he applied to many, even contradictory causes, made it sound arbitrary and hollow in many people's ears. Despite the oratorical skill he displayed – displayed too obtrusively, perhaps – Churchill seemed to be a shallow politician who was out of step with his times. The mighty rhetorical cadences of his oratory were seen as anachronistic compared to the more sober, colloquial style of Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin (in office three times between 1923 and 1937). Churchill's case indicates that it is not rhetorical skill alone that makes for a successful speaker; it is time and context which create the necessary preconditions for a close rapport between speaker and audience.

It was the Second World War which provided the time and context when Churchill's rhetoric managed to impress large audiences. Churchill became prime minister on 10 May 1940, the very day that the Germans launched their attack on France. Right from the start, Churchill had to rally his countrymen to the task of holding out against the enemy, despite Britain's growing political and military isolation after the fall of France. Churchill's voice became the voice of the „battle of Britain“, with people eagerly awaiting

his reports on the military situation in times of limited supply of media information from the different theatres of war.

Rhetoric was a crucial instrument in the war effort. When the Labour politician Clement Attlee was later asked which contribution Churchill had made to winning the war, he replied succinctly: „Talk about it.“ (quoted in Brendon 1985: 153). Churchill himself was very conscious of his impact as a speaker – just after rousing the House of Commons with „blood, toil, tears and sweat“, he remarked to an acquaintance: „That got the sods, didn't it?“ (quoted in Brendon 1985: 143). But just which elements of his rhetoric did prove crucial for success? We just give a few examples, which are to demonstrate the potential of linguistic rhetorical analysis and the use of query and concordancing on digital corpora – and thus uses of digitality – in the analysis of historical speeches.

## 7.5 Tools and tropes

Winston Churchill's legendary prowess as a speaker must doubtlessly be sought in his personality and background (albeit less in his somewhat unclear pronunciation). But likewise, his extraordinary command of the English language and expansive knowledge of the classical English literature, especially that of the Elizabethan period, accompanied by his exquisite mastery of tropes and other rhetorical means, all contributed to the appeal of his speeches. And it is this extraordinary command of language that lends itself to an interdisciplinary, linguistic and historical investigation in order to alert students to the use of rhetoric in persuasive political oratory.

In this section of the paper, we are giving an insight into some of the tools and techniques as well as the operationalizations of linguistically and historically informed features addressed in the interdisciplinary seminar. As an introductory glimpse of Churchill's rhetorical capacities and in order to acquaint students with potential features to look out for in other speeches, the „blood, toil, tears and sweat“ speech served as an initial example for a joint identification of previously introduced rhetorical features in the case of a single text. The structure of the speech – with the climactic eponymic message after a deliberately matter of fact justification for Churchill's take-over as Prime Minister and before the grave warning message preparing his compatriots for the hardship of ensuing war against Nazi Germany – is structurally unexpected and therefore extraordinary. The speaker's use of hyperbole as well as repetitions of salient terms underline the harshness of events anticipated as Britain faces the intensification of war. In an open class exercise engaging all students, features of potential interest were identified and annotated by

means of a digital editor visible for all. It is a technique that might be best described as digitally supported close-reading and is suitable as an introductory exercise because it is, in essence, akin to simple mark-up techniques such as underlining salient passages on the printed page. The difference lies in the fact that this exercise is conducted on a digital text document based on a commonly used human- and machine readable annotation style that has become a mainstay of digital editing and analysis, a simplified XML (eXtensible Mark-up Language) format designed so as to be subsequently queried programmatically. The annotated features are thus marked-up on the digital text in a bracketed format that keeps text and mark-up strictly apart for later analysis and does not rest on surface layout in contrast to underlining on a printed page:

```
<p>
We have before us <expression form="phrase" function="hyperbole">an ordeal of the most grievous
kind</expression>. We have before us <expression form="unigram_reduplication" function=
"exmpphasis">many, many long months of struggle and of suffering</expression>. You ask, what is
our policy? I can say: It is <expression form="phrase" type="collocation">to wage war
</expression>, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can
give us; <expression form="phrase_repetition" type="collocation">to wage war</expression>
against a <expression form="phrase" type="collocation" function="hyperbole">monstrous tyranny
</expression> never surpassed in <expression form="phrase" function="hyperbole">the dark,
lamentable catalogue of human crime</expression>. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim?
I can answer in one word: It is <expression form="unigram">victory</expression>, <expression
form="unigram" type="repetition">victory</expression> at all costs, <expression form="unigram"
type="repetition">victory</expression> in spite of all terror, <expression form="unigram" type=
"repetition">victory</expression>, however long and hard the road may be; for without <expression
form="unigram" type="repetition">victory</expression>, there is no survival. Let that be
realised; <expression form="bigram">no survival</expression> for the British Empire, <expression
form="bigram" type="repetition">no survival</expression> for all that the British Empire has
stood for, <expression form="bigram" type="repetition">no survival</expression> for the urge
and impulse of the ages, that mankind will move forward towards its goal. But I take up my task
with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men. At
this time I feel entitled to claim the aid of all, and I say, "come then, let us go forward
together with our united strength."
</p>
```

Figure 7.1: Rhetorical features in Churchill's „Blood, toil, tears and sweat“ speech (1940)

As can be seen from the annotation sample in Figure 1 above, the text – here rendered in black – is kept distinguishable and technically apart from the mark-up which is entered enclosed in in-line in brackets so as to be separate from the original text as well as query-able by means of linguistic analysis software. The advantage of this approach is that any findings that are made during the text analysis can be made explicit and thus reproducible in the text, and also subjected to later analysis by means of bespoke software. We will talk more about this step in the sections below.

Yet, the power of a digital analysis does not merely lie in this type of digital close reading and the possibility of manually enriching text with mark-up to highlight interesting features so as to make analyses transparent and reproducible, thus availing them to the scrutiny of the readership. An even more intriguing option is the possibility to

engage in distant readings (Moretti 2000) of larger amounts of data such that in the course of the analysis, students can zoom in and out focusing closely on individual texts or samples, but also operationalizing particular research questions in terms of queries for words or phrases and other linguistic surface patterns to be inspected over an entire corpus by a specific author, a group of authors or from a particular era or genre. In class, this allows a combination of close and distant reading for historical, rhetorical and linguistic analysis based on digital corpora. In order to teach this type of corpus linguistic analysis, suitable methods and techniques as well as tools implementing them have to be introduced in order to enable students to search over a digital text corpus and extract and inspect the results for interpretation. A good starting point toward this end is the introduction of the technique of concordancing as implemented in software as an entry-level, but scalable technique that implements a long-standing philological text analysis technique. A central implementation of concordancing we opted for in this course is Laurence Anthony's tool AntConc (Anthony 2019).

AntConc implements a frequently used technique of philological analysis, concordancing which displays a concordance view of textual data by means of an implementation of a sortable KWIC (Key Word in Context) concordance, where a specific key word or set of key words as the focus of the analysis appears in a justified middle column with a set amount of context shown to the left and right to allow for contextualized inspection of the data. The concordance is by no means an invention of the digital age, but has existed in paper-form as a tool for the scholarly study of texts at least since the Middle Ages where it appears in the guise of hand-crafted concordances to facilitate access to topical references in culturally important texts such as the Bible. Other texts deemed worthy of being (manually) processed and prepared for printed concordance access are the works of important authors, most prominently William Shakespeare, whose works are published as a printed concordance in Marvin Spevack's 1973 Harvard concordance to Shakespeare (Spevack 1973) and which form a central tool in the study of the works of the great bard.

Concordancing, as a philological technique of long standing, has received new impetus in the digital age with concordancing software becoming available at a time when also increasing numbers of digital and digitized texts have become available for being inspected and analysed in this way (Cameron et al. 1970). Digital concordancing software such as AntConc that is used in this class setting enables a number of functions beyond displaying text positions as concordances. It allows users to sort the concordance findings according to words in the left and right context of the search word and adds other functionalities such as the automatic creation of frequency lists of words in the corpus

under study as well as access to recurrent word clusters plus basic visualization functionalities, such as for example a lexical distribution plot showing how a search word is distributed over the corpora texts. AntConc has low technical demands at the users' end, requiring nothing but a reasonably up-to-date personal computer and some disk-space for the corpora – all very moderate due to corpora being stored in plain text format. Up-to-date versions exist for any of the current operating system types – Windows, Linux and MacOS – and it does effectively not require any installation whatsoever as it comes as a single executable file that can be placed anywhere on the users' machine without even requiring elevated user privileges, i.e. no administrator rights. For course settings, this last feature is crucial in the authors' experience, as high technical demands and complex installation procedures are often forbidding in teaching scenarios where these can be constraining technological and human factors.

AntConc was used alongside similar functionalities in a bespoke web-interface for likewise accessing digital corpora online which is the second type of access route we briefly discuss a bit further on in this paper. AntConc has the advantage of being freely available to be used on students' own computers which allows them the hands-on experience of loading, querying and sorting textual data thus enabling a more direct experience with linguistic data processing than a web-interface. The following section provides some examples of features studied by means of digital text analysis techniques. It describes the approach and features under study in terms of their historical and linguistic significance and their operationalisation and analysis aided by approaches supported by digital data and software.

## 7.6 Historical references and historical wording

In the first half of the 20th century, popular history in Great Britain was dominated by authors such as George Macaulay Trevelyan, Arthur Bryant or – indeed – Winston Churchill himself, who focussed on the constitutional history of the country. It was presented as an unfolding of British liberties and representative government against historical forces of reaction and stagnation. This sort of narrative projected national pride and self-confidence on the British people, was taught in schools and fostered an instinctive patriotism that could be resorted to in times of crisis. As John Plumb has argued, „Unless one comprehends this instinctive attitude to the past held by most Englishmen, one cannot understand the astonishing dialogue which Churchill held with his people throughout the war.“ (Plumb 1996: 69).

In his speeches, Churchill used to refer to glorious times of the past, when Britain's kings and queens seemed to have been valiant rulers and when the country was at the heart of the greatest empire the world had ever seen (Kemper 1996: 16). A question to be addressed to a small digital collection of speeches (six speeches, 17.500 tokens, 3027 types) is how we can study the linguistic means Churchill employs to evoke images of this empire, thus activating this sense of history. Students identified examples of terms that are characteristic and evocative of this imagery in individual speeches that we used as seed terms to query a small corpus to see whether these terms were used beyond the individual speech. The terms identified included for example: „glory, glorious, valour, valiant etc.“. These terms could, of course, be searched for individually as single terms, but this might miss grammatical variants of the search terms so it is often handy to formulate queries with short-cuts that generalize over different grammatical form and concatenate them in one query. For this purpose, so-called regular expressions can be used, a technique that implements in a search software a shorthand that looks for a particular character sequence common to all forms followed by a wildcard such as the asterisk „\*“ that stands for „any characters“ in a word bounded by either a sentence delimiter (full stop, question mark etc.) or white space as a word boundary. One might thus query for „glory, glorious“ or simply for „glor\*“, i.e. by means of truncation, on the assumption that this will find the relevant forms „glory“ and „glorious“ and possibly also other forms such as the plural of the nominal form, i.e. „glories“. Students can be taught simple basic regular expressions with relative ease, but also more complex queries are thus made possible. The following screenshot shows an example of such a regular expression query for the character sequences „glor\*|valour\*|valian\*“ which aim to find words such as „glory, glorious, valour, valiant etc.“ and their usage context in a corpus of six exemplary speeches:

Very consciously, Churchill also used a language that echoed well-known phrases from the plays of the Elizabethan poet William Shakespeare. In particular, references to his plays on the medieval kings touched deep cords of patriotic pride in British audiences, such as the popular St. Crispin's Day speech from „Henry V“ (Kemper 1996: 16). A language which might have sounded anachronistic and pompous in times of peace, became the foundation of national self-assertiveness in the period of war. The historical allusions conjured a common cultural bond between audience and the prime minister, while at the same time they affirmed the idea of a stout national character that would enable the English to win the war against Nazi tyranny (Mandler 2006: 188-195). Queries can be constructed to incorporate such key-words and -phrases, thus making it possible to explore the corpus for relevant and sometimes surprising findings.

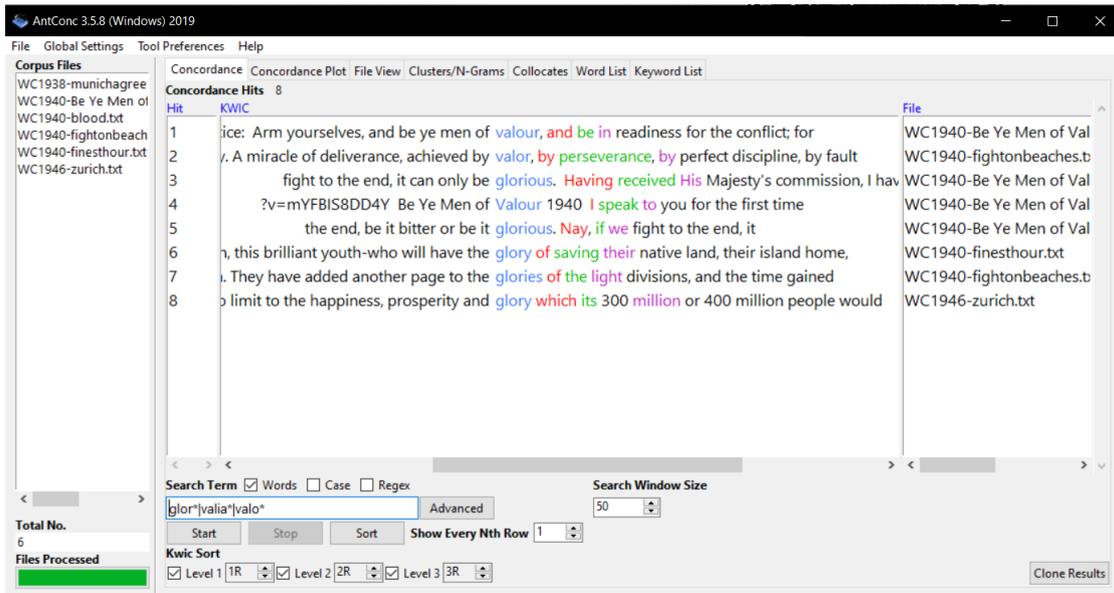


Figure 7.2: Examples from AntConc (query: glor\*|valia\*|valo\*)

A linguistic analysis of Churchill's speeches indicates his construction of Britain as an exceptional nation. AntConc helps us highlight terms like „island“, but also „Britain“ and „Europe“ as used in different contexts, instances of „Europe“ often being much more mundane and less emphatic than many a eulogy on British virtues. Churchill highlights the „*island home*“, „*our island*“ and historically established and cherished national values such as „*our old island independence*“. By pitching the „island“, „Britain“ and „England“ as terms for Great Britain against the „continent“ and „Europe“, some surprising findings emerge as well. One finding made by studying the distribution of sets of expressions over the six speeches forming the small speeches corpus is the discrepancy between Churchill's perception as an emblem of British nationalism in some circles and his presentation of the joint war effort with his continental allies and especially his evocation of strong and „*noble Europe*“ and especially his evocation as a „*united States of Europe*“ in his post-war speeches.

As it turns out, in many cases, other, co-occurring terms lead to interesting disambiguations and semantic clarifications. Thus, the term „island“ is not merely used as a noun in referring to Great Britain, but also as a modifier in phrases such as „island home“ and „island independence“. J. R. Firth's dictum that „[Y]ou shall know a word by the company it keeps“ (Firth 1957: 11) can be shown to hold true here in that words can be shown to assume very specific meanings and connotations in the context of specific

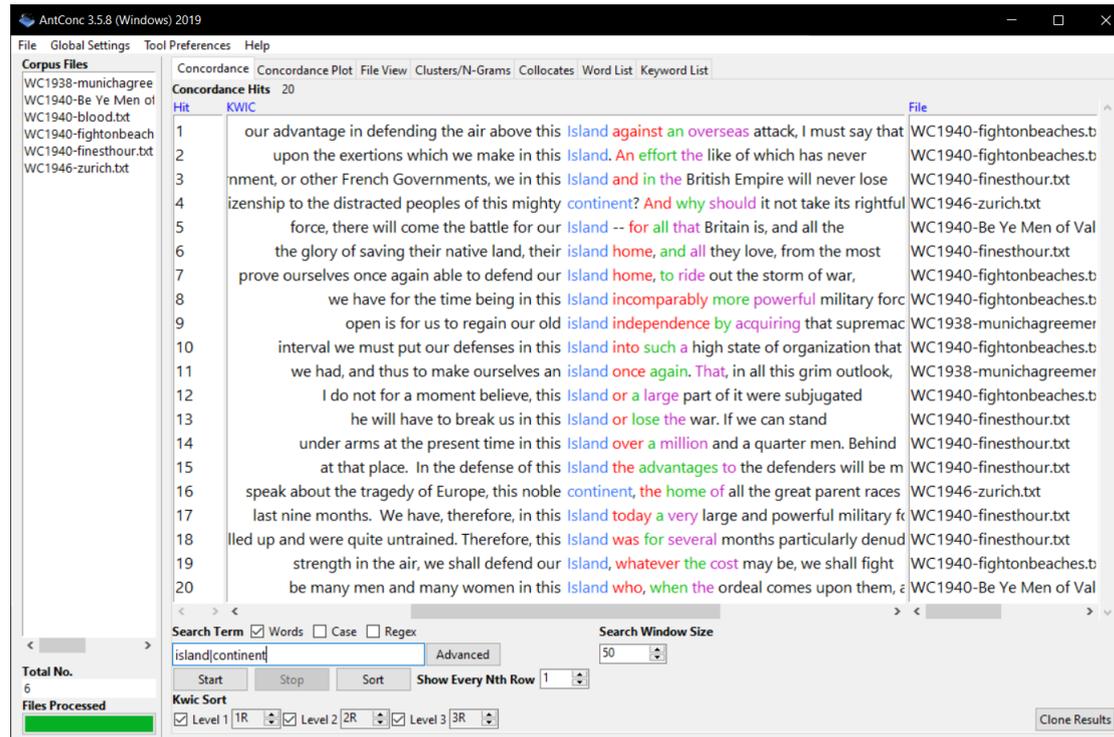


Figure 7.3: References highlighting British exceptionalism

other words. AntConc's Clusters/n-grams and Collocates functions help identify such recurring word combinations beyond their observation in the KWIC concordance even though technically, the identification of collocations proper clearly benefits from larger corpora due to the skewed distribution of vocabulary in language. However, the basic functionality of filtering a corpus for words in context can be used to disambiguate and closely study the use of historically charged terms such as „race“ to show the different meanings and contexts in which they are used and what meanings are evoked in the context of other words as for example in „island race“ or the deliberate connotations of such expressions. Words, after all, only develop their full meaning potential in the context of other words with which they often become very closely associated which can, in turn, be gauged on the basis of the frequency with which they co-occur. The study of digital corpora helps us get a better sense and understanding of this basic fact of language that also helps us see shifts in meaning on the basis of shifting contexts of occurrence of words over periods of time.

Churchill's construction of an exceptional British nation or „race“ formed the foundation for his exhortative calls for a determined war effort which he strongly evokes in

his famous war time speeches as the concordance of examples from two of these speeches from the onset of the Second World War shows in the screenshot (see Figure 4) below.

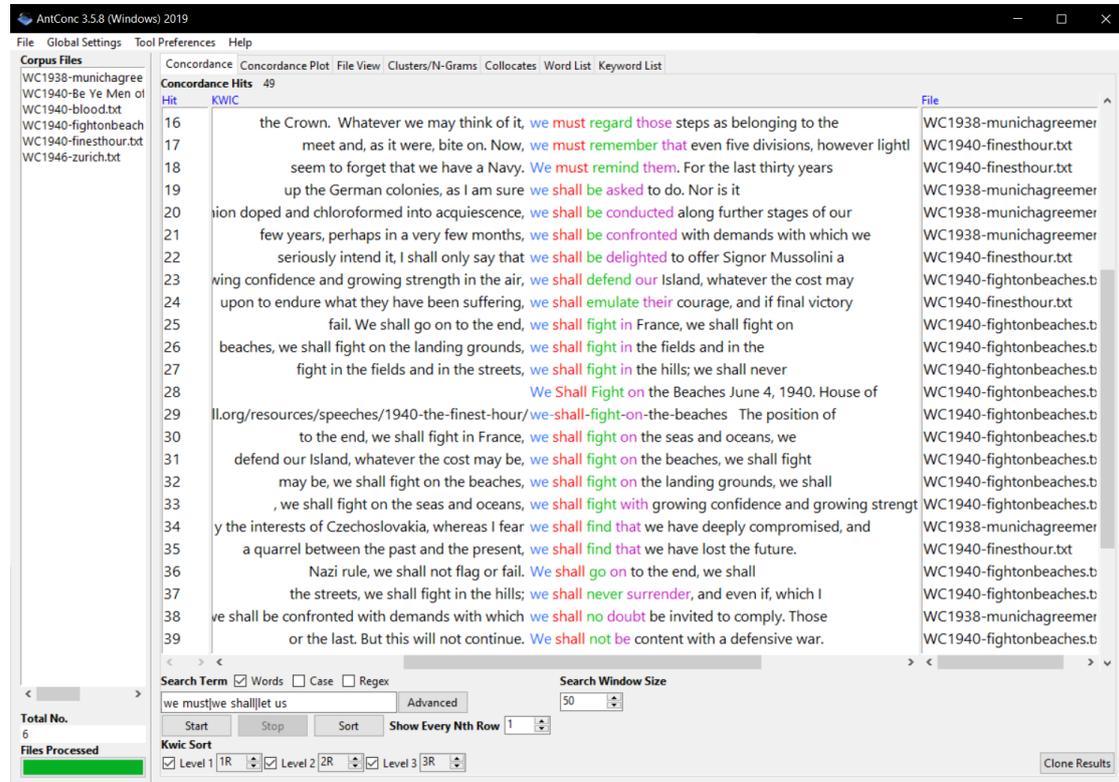


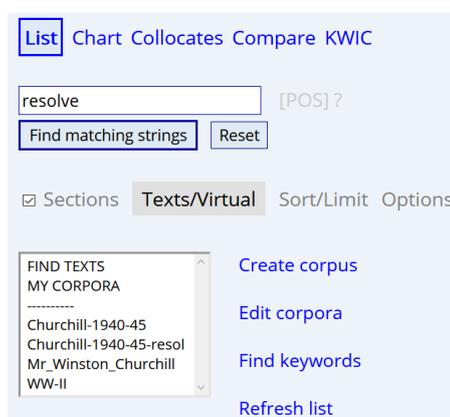
Figure 7.4: Exhortative phrases

In a speech on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday on 30 November 1954, Churchill presented himself as a modest man. Referring to his wartime orations, he credited the people of Britain and the Empire with having a „lion heart“; to him, it had only fallen „to give the roar“ (quoted in Cannadine 1990: 337). The nation’s „will was resolute and remorseless and, as it proved, unconquerable“ (quoted in Cannadine 1990: 337). However, as many contemporary witnesses suggest, Churchill’s rhetoric contributed to galvanising the British people and encouraging their determination to hold out against the enemy, even in the dark months of isolation in the fight against German invasion attempts. Even if we discount later myth-making (Toye 2013), Churchill’s major speeches during the Second World War are hardly disputed as prime examples of the profound effect political rhetoric may have in a situation of fundamental crisis.

A key term contemporaries used in their reaction to Churchill’s speeches was admiration for his „resolve“ in the face of danger. One observer, Vita Sackville-West, told

her husband in 1940: „One of the reasons why one is stirred by his Elizabethan phrases [...] is that one feels the whole massive backing of power and resolve behind them [...].“ (quoted in Cannadine 2002: 93). The concept of „resolution“ is one example for a direct link between the mentalities of speaker and audience because the latter's appraisal of the speeches is couched in the same rhetoric as the speeches themselves. Churchill could tap into a treasure of tropes and topics from a cultural heritage that he only needed to activate and direct to the war effort; the success of his speeches therefore rested on the junction between the self-imagery of the nation and the firm grasp of this cultural heritage by the speaker.

A digital probing into his rhetoric on the concept and semantic field of „resolution“ (with related terms, such as „resolve“, „steadfastness“, „purpose“ and „determination“) shows Churchill's carefully considered use of the concept to express an unbending will to fight, even in dire circumstances. In order to study expressions concerning „resolve“ in a wider context, we turned to the Hansard Corpus. The corpus can be accessed via web interface and allows the construction of virtual sub-corpora comprised of a subset of speeches, e.g. by a specific speaker, in this case Winston Churchill, from a specific time period, in this case 1940 to 1945.



| LIST NAME ↓                             | # SPEECHES ↓ | # WORDS ↓  |
|---|--------------|------------|
| <a href="#">CHURCHILL-1940-45</a>       | 3032         | 515,832    |
| <a href="#">CHURCHILL-1940-45-RESOL</a> | 2832         | 470,851    |
| <a href="#">MR_WINSTON_CHURCHILL</a>    | 5000         | 2,758,504  |
| <a href="#">WW-II</a>                   | 5000         | 11,243,540 |

Figure 7.5: Virtual corpora created in the Hansard Corpus

In that period of time, Churchill used the word „resolve“ 35 times, 28 times as a noun. It is often found in characteristic word combinations with specific adjectives as modifier to strengthen the force of this message, such as for example: „inflexible — sincere —

unconquerable — utmost — whole-hearted resolve“ as can be seen from the screen-shot below:

|    |        |               |   |   |   |  |
|----|--------|---------------|---|---|---|--|
| 2  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | anything about other French ships which are at large except that it is our inflexible <b>resolve</b> to do everything that is possible in order to prevent them falling into the German  |
| 3  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | , That this House welcomes the formation of a Government representing the united and inflexible <b>resolve</b> of the nation to prosecute the war with Germany to a victorious cos       |
| 4  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | declaring itself to be the only legal Government of Belgium, has formally announced its <b>resolve</b> to continue the war at the side of the Allies who have come to the                |
| 5  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | it perfectly clear then that whatever happened in France would make no difference to the <b>resolve</b> of Britain and the British Empire to fight on, " If necessary for years          |
| 6  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | country some indication of the solid, practical grounds upon which we base our inflexible <b>resolve</b> to continue the war, and I can assure them that our professional advisers o     |
| 7  | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | Friend the Home Secretary will be making a statement on that subject which will perhaps <b>resolve</b> some of the doubts, but we are very anxious to get this Measure through           |
| 8  | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | to the West, which certainly could be executed very swiftly if they were to <b>resolve</b> upon an assault upon this country; I can give an assurance to the House                       |
| 9  | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | devoted battle lines of the Russian Armies or to the majestic momentum of United States <b>resolve</b> and action, we may derive comfort and good cheer in our struggle which,           |
| 10 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | be the last 31 to suggest that it should be made retrospective: Our universal <b>resolve</b> to keep Parliamentary institutions in full activity amid the throes of war has been proved  |
| 11 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | and ardent desire to engage the enemy and that they will fight with the utmost <b>resolve</b> and devotion, feeling as they all do that this is the first time we                        |
| 12 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | and carried on henceforward to the end, embodies, we are sure, the <b>resolve</b> of the British people:   |
| 13 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | always put things at their worst and never allowed buoyancy, hope, confidence and <b>resolve</b> to infect his declarations: There ought to be a fair recognition of the difficulties    |
| 14 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | , which is the supreme barrier against their designs: If this should be their <b>resolve</b> , if they should declare themselves resolved to compass the destruction of the English-spea |
| 15 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | I am sure that we made their leaders feel confidence in our loyal and sincere <b>resolve</b> to come to their aid as quickly as possible and in the most effective manner                |
| 16 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | my mind above all others from this visit to Moscow-; the inexorable, inflexible <b>resolve</b> of Soviet 96 Russia to fight Hitlerism to the end until it is finally beaten              |
| 17 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | and protracted, but if everyone bends to the task with unrelenting effort and unconquerable <b>resolve</b> , if we do not weary by the way or fall out among ourselves or                |
| 18 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | recision and to convince all classes, races and creeds in India of our sincere <b>resolve</b> , the War Cabinet have agreed unitedly upon conclusions for present and future action w    |
| 19 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | was a more earnest desire between Allies to engage the enemy or a more whole-hearted <b>resolve</b> to run all risks and make all sacrifices in order to wage this hard war              |

Figure 7.6: Concordance lines „resolve“ in Churchill-1940-45 virtual corpus

Churchill's evocation of the resolve of his country and people and his specific use of modification underline the urgency of the message by means of specific adjectives such as in „inflexible resolve“, „inflexible steadfastness“. Other terms from the same semantic field that come to mind are „determination“ and „steadfastness“ again with similar modification patterns (e.g. „glorious steadfastness“).

|   |        |               |   |   |   |   |
|---|--------|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | C-1941 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | has become evident: The enormous power of the Russian Armies, and the glorious <b>steadfastness</b> and energy with which they have resisted the frightful onslaught made upon        |
| 2 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | to the Government: Every proof that is given to the world of the inflexible <b>steadfastness</b> of Parliament and of its sense of proportion strengthens the British war effort in a |
| 3 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | am sure the House would wish me to pay a tribute to the loyalty and <b>steadfastness</b> of these brave Indian police as well as of the Indian official classes generally whose       |
| 4 | C-1942 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | The Germans tell their own tales, which make no difference to the mentality and <b>steadfastness</b> of our people, but the Germans become the victims of their own lies:             |

Figure 7.7: Concordance lines „steadfastness“ in Churchill-1940-45 virtual corpus

This highlights another exploratory approach that lends itself especially to work with digital corpora that is the exploration of terms from a similar semantic field such as the aforementioned terms „resolve | steadfastness | determination“ and their specific modifiers. Queries for such terms can likewise be extended beyond the sub-corpus of speeches by a particular speaker as well as beyond a specific time-period. The following concordance lines are from a query of the term „resolve“ in a sub-corpus the years of the Second World War (1940 – 1945) in which the term occurs 150 times, 78 times as a noun.

It turns out that of the 78 times „resolve“ as a noun is used in the Hansard corpus over the period of the Second World War, 28 occurrences can be attributed to Churchill. A further exploration of the entire corpus shows that „resolve“ does indeed see an increase in the 1940s over previous periods of time as can be seen especially from the occurrences

|    |        |               |   |   |   |   |
|----|--------|---------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1  | C-1940 | Ridley (N)    | A | B | C | speech to agricultural England that would have brought it to its feet with a new <b>resolve</b> and a new devotion to purpose: His speech was couched in such terms of              |
| 2  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | , that is what we are going to try to do: That is the <b>resolve</b> of His Majesty's Government--; every man of them: That is the will   |
| 3  | C-1940 | Hall (N)      | A | B | C | important by the events of the last few weeks: It is now the unanimous <b>resolve</b> of the Government and of the country that until the great danger which threatens us           |
| 4  | C-1940 | Dalton (N)    | A | B | C | public opinion in the country that he has solved: He spoke of his fixed <b>resolve</b> to establish mastery in the air: In so far as he takes action which                          |
| 5  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | , far from cavilling or carping at the Government, have expressed with force their <b>resolve</b> to do everything that is possible in order to prevent them falling into the Germs |
| 6  | C-1940 | Ammon (N)     | A | B | C | show that we are determined to see this through in a spirit not only of <b>resolve</b> but also of intelligence:  |
| 7  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | it perfectly clear then that whatever happened in France would make no difference to the <b>resolve</b> of Britain and the British Empire to fight on," if necessary for years      |
| 8  | C-1940 | Churchill (N) | A | B | C | country some indication of the solid, practical grounds upon which we base our inflexible <b>resolve</b> to continue the war, and I can assure them that our professional adviser   |
| 9  | C-1940 | Sinclair (N)  | A | B | C | , far from cavilling or carping at the Government, have expressed with force their <b>resolve</b> to persevere in the war until victory is attained: My hon: and gallant Friend     |
| 10 | L-1940 | Wood (N)      | A | B | C | episode in the wider struggle of the war, and it has neither weakened our <b>resolve</b> nor reduced our power to achieve final victory: There is one other subject on              |
| 11 | L-1940 | Wood (N)      | A | B | C | , so far from having alarmed American public opinion, it has only strengthened their <b>resolve</b> to speed up American defence 444 and to protect United States interests in t    |
| 12 | L-1940 | Wood (N)      | A | B | C | royal road to victory: But there is in this country a mood of determined <b>resolve</b> which will be unmoved by dangers and which will struggle through pitfalls and will,         |

Figure 7.8: Concordance lines „resolve“ as a noun in all speeches of the Second World War in the Hansard

of the term per million words (see Figure 7 below, line four „PER MIL“), but picks up particularly from the 1970s onwards as can be seen from the relative frequencies of the term per one million words in the chart below. This would invite further comparative investigations over other time periods in terms of their specific historical events. This also serves to demonstrate how the reader can zoom in and out of the data investigating findings based on the data of a particular speaker, a specific time period and an entire corpus to gauge their significance.

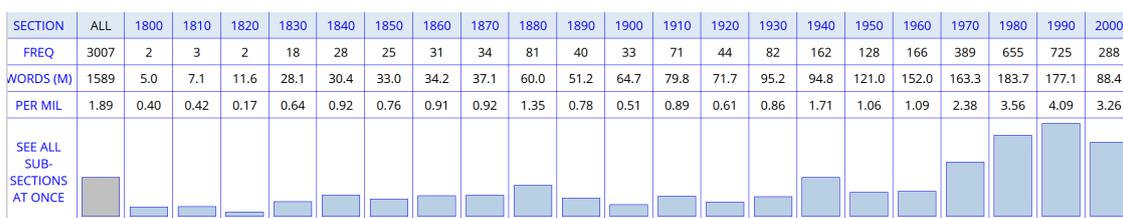


Figure 7.9: Distribution of „resolve“ as a noun over the entire corpus

Making sense of such findings is only possible based on joint linguistic and historical explorations, particularly when larger corpora such as the Hansard Corpus come into play. Further skills that have to be conveyed to students that are not explicitly described in this paper are the scrutiny of different data presentation formats such as the study of text examples in concordances and numerical data tables as well as skills in the interpretation of numbers such as in corpora of different sizes. When working with corpora, especially with corpora of substantially different sizes, it is crucial to not look at raw figures, but rather turn to normalized figures that enable comparison, such as the aforementioned expression of frequencies of occurrence as relative numbers per one million words. Historically and linguistically informed access to this kind of data can serve to enhance students' skills in the exploration of authentic historical data as well as their

understanding of methodological considerations such as handling digital text corpora and interpreting numerical findings, skills that are all too often lacking in general public debate.

Such exploratory studies on the basis of terms of historical and rhetorical interest can serve as a starting point to gaining a better sense of topics important for a particular time, but also the connotations of terms in their temporal and political context. To this end, it is important to use the knowledge encapsulated in the meta-data of a corpus, such as the meta-data on context (House of Commons, House of Lords or radio broadcast), speaker, time-frame etc. as well as the historical circumstances (e.g. war time speeches) in order to make sense of the rhetoric and the topics addressed in political speeches.

## 7.7 Conclusion

By no means do these few examples pretend to be a full-scale analysis of Churchill's abilities as a public speaker or the foundations of his success. A more comprehensive picture would have to take the precise political contexts of each of the speeches into account, thus giving a full picture of the reception with different kinds of audience which might be addressed by any one speech, such as British citizens, potential global supporters of the British war effort and carefully listening enemies (for examples see Toye 2014; Gilbert 1996). However, the observations made based on the combined study of the secondary literature, close readings of individual speeches and the joint study of a small digital corpus lead to a number of conclusions concerning the potential of such a combined approach for teaching. Our paper aimed to provide a sketch for the case of interdisciplinary linguistic and historical analysis and to show how concordancing as a tool applied to a plain unannotated corpus allows quick and easy-to-use access to material for further analysis of speeches, which can be combined with the study of further historical sources and secondary literature. The linguistic tools support historical research and the historical research helps identify search terms to be studied both in terms of their contextual embedding and their linguistic significance.

In teaching contexts, digital tools can be used to encourage students to engage not only with textbook materials, but to also explore original sources such as political speeches as provided e.g. in the Hansard Corpus or in web-archives. Political speeches are a particularly promising source type for teaching in a context of linguistic and historical interdisciplinarity since they constitute acts of communication aiming for immediate effect upon a given audience. This locates this form of language act in a particular context of time, place and rhetorical intentionality which raises historical questions which

can be addressed by linguistic means and vice versa. Tools such as AntConc or bespoke web-interfaces to corpora such as the Hansard Corpus offer an opportunity to integrate digital analysis from linguistics into such historical and linguistic teaching contexts. The necessity to make students think about which terms to search for in corpora at their disposal furthers fundamental competences of historical learning, because learners are made to understand that history does not exist by itself, but is directed by questions, whose phrasing has a crucial impact on the results. The rhetoric of political speeches offers countless choices of language analysis which may start off from either linguistic or historical questions and combines both in a deeper understanding of political rhetoric from an interdisciplinary perspective. This type of approach serves to further students' research and study skills and thus evolves their skills beyond the receptive study of text book material. To this end, it is of course necessary to incorporate mastery of tools and data into the teaching scenario and to convey concepts such as relative frequencies of terms, corpus size and design into teaching alongside competence in the study of historical sources and critical thinking about concepts, the way they are conveyed by means of language and the contexts in which they occur, including the general political situation and trajectory.

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