**“…a long journey through the valley of the shadow…”:**

**A comparison of Irish and British news discourse on the Irish Civil War**

The Irish Civil War (1922-1923) arose from a split in the Irish nationalist movement following the ratification of the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed by the British and Irish delegations in December 1921. The War has been thoroughly analysed from the perspective of military strategy (Kissane 2021), in comparison with similar conflicts in Europe (Kissane 2020), in the context of its implications for State-building and society in Ireland (Ferriter 2021) or, more recently, with respect to gender-based violence (Clark 2020). On the other hand, the idea of investigating the conflict from a discourse perspective is novel. The aim of this paper is to identify recognisable patterns across Irish and British news discourse on the Civil War. A comparative study was thus undertaken of two small corpora – one including texts from *The Free State* in Ireland, the other from a random sample of British newspapers – covering the War’s most critical period (June-October 1922).

From a methodological point of view, the study implemented a qualitative approach. Jackson et al. (2007: 23) refer to “qualitative enquiry” as research encompassing “all forms of social enquiry that rely primarily on non-numeric data in the form of words, including all types of textual analyses”. The latter also comprise discourse analysis, which they describe as “a way for examining language as it is used in specific contexts […], highlighting the practices that comprise the ideologies, attitudes, ideas, and courses of action that systematically constitute the subjects and objects of which people speak” (Jackson et al. 2007: 24). As far as this study is concerned, the “analysis was based on a close reading of the texts, not a key word search” (Mueller et al. 2019: 3). More specifically, the research was aimed at identifying any common and/or distinctive patterns in terms of the discourse strategies through which the news outlets analysed here reported and commented on the War as well as the two sides that fought it, and they lent critical insights on the background to the conflict.

This is in keeping with Wodak et al. (1999: 30), who developed a descriptive model through which three dimensions of analysis are closely interwoven. These are the thematic contents of texts, “strategies”, and “means and forms of realisation”. They therefore propose to engage in discourse analysis starting from a categorisation of major thematic areas, moving on to strategies as linguistic acts converging in the achievement of overriding objectives, and finally looking at recurrent linguistic means at the level of “lexical units and syntactic devices” (Wodak et al. 1999: 35). Although this work does not systematically look at lexical or syntactic devices, the methodological rationale behind it was in effect close to Wodak et al.’s (1999). The study may consequently be seen as a primarily data-driven, historical discourse-analytic study of regular patterns of language use within news reports and editorials on the Civil War from both sides of the Irish sea.

The data revealed that the discourse of *The Free State* and that of much of the British press intersect at various levels. First, they both appear to represent the Free State Government as the only legitimate authority in the War. Likewise, they go to great lengths to portray anti-Treaty Irregulars (and their mindset) as hopelessly misguided. In addition, they both draw on Irish history as a background to the conflict. If, however, *The Free State* looks at watershed moments such as 1916 and the fight for Independence as synonymous with the achievement of national aspirations, the British press’ commentary reconstructs Irish history to highlight major shortcomings in Ireland’s nation building.

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