



Sweden, France, Europe: Identity in the Corpus

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Sweden, France, Europe: Identity in the Corpus

On the whole, dictionaries do not like proper names. Only dictionaries of an encyclopaedic nature will include them. In the theory of signs, they are generally deemed empty of meaning; they simply designate. Their recalcitrant nature has been discussed by philosophers and linguists, but the problem of their true nature remains unresolved. Place names are often linked to proper names, but their situation is somewhat different. In bilingual lexicography, their inclusion is necessary to help the user move from *Sverige* to *Suède* and from *Frankrike* to *France*. In monolingual works place names are rarely present, except in specialised place name dictionaries. Such dictionaries abound, but meaning is avoided, the emphasis being on the origin of the name.

In looking at place names, it is proposed that the best approach is to adopt the prototype methodology proposed by Hanks (2000) to cover the various related features that may be attached to a place name. In this way, the word can be seen in geographical, but also cultural and historical terms. In addition, the name of a country may represent the people of a nation, or an idealisation of that nation.

The aim of this study is to look briefly at what corpus linguistics can bring to the study of place names. We shall look at 'Europe', 'France' and 'Sweden' with a view to seeing what meanings have been attached to these names. The aim is to carry out a purely corpus-driven analysis looking at how the French press views Europe and itself and also a third country, Sweden.

The Project and the Corpora.

This small study is part of a much larger multidisciplinary project looking at aspects of citizenship within the European Union – IntUne (www.intune.it). IntUne brings together sociologists, political sciences, media specialists and corpus linguists. The work of the media group is the constitution and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, of two series of corpora in four European languages, English, French, Italian and Polish. The LiCoRN research group (web.univ-ubs.fr/corpus) of the *Université de Bretagne Sud*, France is responsible for the French corpus. Each corpus will follow the same model with both print and televised news collected over a set period. Insofar as the first of the French corpora has only just become available reference will also be made to earlier studies carried out on the *Le Monde 2004* newspaper collection available from ELDA (www.elda.org).

Dictionary Reference

The three words we intend to look at do not have the same status. In one interpretation Europe may be seen as the hyperonym for the two other. However, whilst it may be true that both entities are to be found within something called Europe it will first be necessary to find out exactly what the latter is when seen in a corpus. First though, we shall look at what a popular French dictionary gives.

Le Petit Larousse (100th edition, 2005) is not at all corpus-based as corpora are yet to find a place in French lexicography, it is however a dictionary divided into two parts; a general dictionary and an encyclopaedic one. Europe is to be found in the encyclopaedic section where it has a long entry in which it is declared to be:

Une des cinq parties du monde (one of the five parts of the world)

This rest of the definition places Europe geographically, but neatly avoids defining the word 'part'. It also gives a map limiting Europe to the lands west of the Urals. From our schooldays we know that there are five continents, so we can safely assume that 'part' and 'continent' coincide in this instance. We are also given two compound forms, *l'ancien continent* and *le nouveau continent* (the old and new continents). The former is composed Europe, Asia and Africa, whilst the latter is America.

The *Larousse*, having a separate encyclopaedic section gives Europe and the constituent countries. The entry for France, *un état d'Europe occidentale* (a country of western Europe) covers 7 and a third pages. This detailed entry lists the administrative regions and departments and has detailed sub-entries for its institutions and its history. Sweden, like Denmark, Finland and Iceland, has an individual entry, but also one under Scandinavia. The individual entry covers the institutions, the geography, and history.

Europe seen from France

A preliminary study was carried out on *Le Monde* 2004 and published in the IntUne working papers and in an online journal, *Mediazione* (Williams 2007). This looked at the concept of identity in general before moving onto Europe. The outcome was that, viewed from France, Europe is a geopolitical area of very variable geometry. Two Europes do clearly emerge, that of the European Union and that of a continental area divided according to their position in relation to an undefined centre. The first varies in size according to the period, moving from the original community to the current 27 members. This enlargement has had a profound effect on the geographical divisions.

Life was at one time simple; we had Eastern Europe, the communist bloc, and Western Europe. The west could then be divided into northern and southern Europe. We also had continental Europe as opposed to the islands that lie to the West of the continental shelf.

By 2004 things had become more complicated. Eastern Europe continued to exist, but was tending to move East. *Le Monde* now spoke of a central Europe consisting of certain of the newer members, or soon to be members, namely Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Poland, Rumania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The northern new members had slipped back to being the Baltic States. The term Eastern Europe was still used, but carried a slightly negative connotation with the states still under Russian influence being the real members. This is confirmed by the emergence of the notion of PECO, *Pays d'Europe Centrale et Orientale* (Central and Eastern European Countries).

Western Europe is divided into north and south. Obviously Germany and the Scandinavian countries fall into the former, along with the Low countries and Belgium. The south is more complicated as southern also carries a connotation of less developed. France does not declare itself in any sector, but would naturally place itself in the developed part of Europe.

This breakdown is confirmed in the IntUne corpus although the negative connotation of Eastern Europe seems to have diminished leaving this as a vague term that can be used whenever the eastern half of Europe is to be talked about. If there is a need to differentiate the new entrants and the countries still under Russian influence we can speak of central Europe for the former and oriental Europe (*Europe orientale*) for the latter. We may be fairly clear on the boundaries of Europe as a continent, but the internal subdivisions are of highly variable geometry.

So far we have only seen geographical and geopolitical subdivisions; the next question is how the different Europes are portrayed. In this area work on the IntUne corpus has shown that three colligates are particularly useful in building a picture, these are 'en' (in) to describe a geographical space, the determiner 'une' (a) and 'qui' (which) to say what the paper, or those it is reporting want the entity described to be.

En Europe

En Europe refers to Europe as a general geographical space whilst *en Europe continentale* refers to an area that covers exclusively Western Europe. In this case the British Isles and Ireland are treated as a separate entity belonging to a

different unnamed part of Europe. Somewhat more surprising is the fact that Scandinavia is also not part of continental Europe.

Europe as a geographical whole is not too controversial and as the borders of the countries of western Europe are no longer contentious, we can simply describe France and Sweden in terms of encyclopaedic information. This, however, fails to tell us how the country is portrayed by others and how an individual country sees itself.

‘En Europe’ allows us to deal with Europe as a geographical space and to concentrate on different aspects and perceptions of the various Europes, ‘*une Europe*’ takes us to the Europe of the EU.

Une Europe

In French, names of countries are generally preceded by a definite determiner, hence ‘*l’Europe*’, ‘*la France*’ and ‘*la Suède*’. However, it is also possible to present a more idealised abstract picture of a country by replacing the definite with an indefinite determiner. In theory this device could be used for any country, in reality the press restricts it to their home area, hence in this corpus France with Europe as its a hyperonym.

‘*Une Europe*’ is clearly the political one of the EU. In *Le Monde* 2004 the dominant verbs with this construction are the two forms of to build – *bâtir* and *construire*. What the paper wants to be built is a ‘*Europe sociale*’, often qualified as ‘*plus sociale*’ (more social) and not ‘*libérale*’. By social what is meant is social protection in terms of employment laws, health benefits, ‘*libérale*’ in French refers to the free enterprise culture and generally has a strong negative connotation. The adjective ‘*sociale*’ is associated with ‘*une Europe*’ in 57 of the 67 occurrences of this formulae, either alone or associated with ‘*politique*’ (political) in 3 cases or ‘*democratique*’ (democratic) in 2. It must be borne in mind that this is a left of centre paper speaking during the debate on the EU constitution. At a time when the political elites in France of both left and right were preaching a yes vote, the ‘*sociale*’ was needed to buy the votes of the recalcitrant.

In 2007, the situation in France is changed by the election campaign and the weight of the ‘non’ vote of 2007. Amongst the various formulae we have ‘*une Europe de l’énergie*’ (a Europe of energy supplies), but this was tied to major merger moves at this period rather than an ongoing political debate. The social Europe is still there, but more open to criticism. Whilst calls for a federal Europe, ‘*une Europe politique*’ or ‘*une Europe fédérale*’, are still there, there is also ‘*une Europe des nations*’ – a Europe of nations states. The needs of political debate means that no-one wanted to stick their neck out too far, the safest procedure was to idealise further using the formula of ‘*une Europe qui*’.

A Europe which does

‘*Une Europe*’ gives us an abstract conception of a political entity. This formula can be enhanced to demonstrate a desirable idealisation in the speeches of politicians by adding ‘*qui*’.

‘*Qui*’ leads to an idealisation of the political Europe of the EU. There are a number of synonyms in the corpus for this political area and its organs of governance, EU is one of these, but Brussels and the commission may also be used to refer the whole. These all carry connotations, often negative in the case of the latter as politicians praise Europe as an ideal, but blame anything controversial on the institutions. This idealized Europe is not designated with the specific determiner ‘*le*’ but prefer the general determiner ‘*une*’. This gives what Sinclair & Renouf (1991) call a collocational framework with the pattern [*une*] [noun] [*qui*] or ‘*a something*’. ‘*Une Europe qui*’ is what politicians, via the press, tell us they are striving for and generally reports a speech. The utterer obviously believes these values should have a universal appeal.

So what do French politicians want for Europe? It goes without saying that hyperbole abounds, but they clearly want more Europe without really saying what this entails. In 2004, that is outside of election time, the call is for a Europe that moves forward, this is expressed with verbs as *avancer* (advance) and *bouger* (move). It should be effective (*marcher* – work) and which is widening (*élargir*) and open to the world (*ouvrir*). This ideal Europe would be both supranational (n *super-nation*) and a super power (n *superpuissance*). This is the view of a centre left newspaper at the time of the constitutional debate. It is very much the pro-European party machine speaking. At the time of the elections of 2007 the picture is slightly different as the call is for protection (vb *protéger*). This is not military protection, but social protection against the dangers of globalisation and delocalisation. Europe should then be open to the world, but closed to too much competition.

France as itself

It is not ‘*France*’, or even ‘*la France*’, but ‘*une France*’ that we shall look at. In 2004, ‘*une France*’ veers between a pessimistic France ‘*sans usine*’ (without factories) and ‘*une France sans cesse admirée*’ (a France unceasingly admired). The former relates to the questions of globalisation and delocalisation with the dangers to France of a threatening world economy, it also relates to the European theme with ‘*une France sociale*’. We get a ‘*France rurale*’ and a ‘*France provinciale*’, but apart from a certain feeling of gloom through words

such as ‘*inégalité*’ (inequality) and ‘*doute*’ (doubt) no real clear themes come through.

What is hapax in *Le Monde* can be confirmed in the 2007 corpus. The latter covers a shorter period, but with a wider variety of political outlooks, it is also right in the election period so that although politicians may be cagey about Europe, they have a lot to say about France.

The first ten collocates display a remarkable amount of platitudes, many of them emanating from the socialist candidate. We are to have a France that is *reconciliée* (reconciled), ‘*apaisée*’ (appeased), *fraternelle* (fraternal), ‘*solidaire*’ (showing solidarity), ‘*généreuse*’ (generous) and ‘*paisible*’ (peaceful). This will be ‘*une France neuve*’ (a new France). Rather than a significant picture of the country what we are getting is a lot of empty phrases. The picture proposed by the left is one of a divided country, a picture which makes sense bearing in mind the rather depressed attitude displayed in *Le Monde* of 2004. There are very few proposals for action. The collocates for action come from the right with the noun ‘*propriétaires*’, a call for a France of house-owners. The only significant collocate of ‘*une France qui*’ also comes from the right with ‘*une France qui travaille dur*’ (A France which works hard), another very Thatcherien principle. Obviously, the ‘France’ here is not the country, but the people.

Having seen France viewed from its press, we now turn to see how it looks at others, in this case Sweden.

Sweden from France

Of the Scandinavian countries Sweden occurs far more frequently than the other Scandinavian countries, or of the hyperonymic unit of Scandinavia.

A quick sorting of the concordance in *Le Monde* 2004 shows the different perspectives; geographical, historical, cultural, political and social. From a historical point of view with mention of past monarchs and the consul in Paris during the last war, Nordling, who, amongst other actions, saved Paris from destruction. Unsurprisingly the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and the Nobel prize are frequently cited. Sweden is also associated with industry, notably with Volvo and Saab. The image presented in the French press is of a model in matters such as social relations, education and industry.

Moving forward to 2007, the model takes on other important aspects. Names of countries come top of the list of collocates, but the two first lexical collocates are ‘*rallye*’ (car rally) and ‘*ISF*’ -*l’impôt de solidarité sur la fortune* (wealth

tax). The press notes that the Swedes are abandoning not only the wealth tax, but also the land tax. This appears in the right wing *Figaro* newspaper and adds weight to the right-wing candidate's attacks on taxes. Two other collocates reinforce the picture of a successful nation; '*PIB*' (*Produit Intérieur Brut* – gross domestic product) and '*derrière*' (behind). The first is rising, which is good, the second is often negative, but in this case it is the others, notably France, who are '*derrière la Suede*', behind Sweden, in areas such as research.

As with *France* and *Europe*, the colligates also play an important role. Although 'en' can simply indicate 'in Sweden' and cover a variety of contexts, it also serves to highlight the country when placed as theme. This formula does not generate sufficient data to study the collocates, but what is highlighted is interesting. In *Le Monde* we find statements such as:

En Suède, on travaille plus de 40 heures par semaine, (they work more than 40 hours a week)

In the IntUne 2007 corpus

En Suède, où le temps consacré à l'éducation pour la santé est dix fois plus important, la consommation est infiniment plus faible :
(where the time given to health education is ten times higher,
(Cannabis) consumption is lower.

In other words what is highlighted is the values that are considered lacking in France. Amongst our different prototypical features associated with a place name, we have to add nation-as-model, and in the French press it is clearly a role that Sweden holds.

Conclusions

What inferences can be drawn from this rapid study?

The first is that place names have multiple referents and are better treated as prototypes. Whether we refer to Europe, or individual countries we have very different, but related entities. All these related senses are realised through the collocational and colligational environments of textual usage. The phraseology of proper names can be rich.

The second is that stereotypes are often confirmed by the press. There may be two reasons for this, one is that they reflect a reality; the other is that the press chooses to reinforce the stereotypes. In this corpus Sweden is clearly seen as a role-model.

To take this further, the next stage can be linguistic, with a prototype model for these entities, and also cultural to see how different nations are portrayed in the press. This means building a corpus-driven picture of all the countries in the EU, to see how they see us and we see them. This would be an interesting challenge to better understand the self-image Europe and its constituent states.

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