BOOK REVIEW: BROOKES, G. & BAKER, P. (2021) *OBESITY IN THE NEWS: LANGUAGE AND REPRESENTATION IN THE PRESS.* CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS.

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Book Review: Brookes, G. & Baker, P. (2021) Obesity in the News: Language and Representation in the Press. Cambridge University Press.

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As a pressing public issue, obesity has become a mainstay in the media. While there has been a growing body of research on media coverage of obesity (e.g., Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017; Carbone-Moane & Guise, 2021), research presented in this book sets itself apart from the other studies in three ways. Firstly, its large-scale and recent media data (36 million words covering a decade of obesity coverage between 2008 and 2017 in the whole UK national press), secondly, its linguistic approach through the methodological synergy of corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis and, thirdly, its diverse analytical themes, including the comparisons between newspapers (Chapters 2 and 3), diachronic changes observed in the data (Chapter 4), highlighting the individualising discourse around obesity (Chapters 5 and 6), different perspectives on obesity representations including that of gender and social class (Chapters 7 and 8), and the readers' online comments (Chapter 9). These merits make the book a systematic and stimulating work on obesity representations in the British media, showing how linguistic choices made by the media stigmatise weight issues and people with obesity in society.

As an important prelude to the entire book, the Introduction is the longest chapter. It addresses the practical, theoretical and methodological issues of the study. The authors first introduce the key theoretical concepts in the book, e.g., representation, discourse, and news values and delineate the goal of the book, i.e., "examining the discourses that are used to represent obesity in the press, [...] that may not be beneficial to less powerful people in society" (p.7). In what follows, I argue that the authors have successfully achieved this goal.

In the remaining part of the Introduction, the authors move on to review obesity and obesity-related discourses in the media. One of the merits of the book is that the authors recognise the complexity of obesity but limit their perspective to the medicalised and moralised discourses. Readers learn that obesity is subject to a wide range of intertwined and contested discourses, while the linguistic dimension of the discourses remains insufficiently explored. The authors then introduce their corpus linguistic approach, including the data and corpus methods, especially the four corpus techniques, i.e., frequency, keywords, collocation analysis and concordance analysis. The authors clearly state which technique they will use for each research purpose, thus setting the scene for the coming chapters.

Chapter 2 focuses on the similarities of keywords in the corpus. The authors first explain how they organise their data into four sub-corpora based on the publication format and its political leanings i.e., Broadsheet Left, Broadsheet Right, Tabloid Left and Tabloid Right, and how they obtained the shared keywords by respectively comparing the sub-corpora with the written section of the British National Corpus (BNC). Based on the shared keywords, the authors find that, although the media frequently relate obesity to various medical terminologies (e.g., cancer), they do not tend to deem obesity a disease in itself. Instead, obesity is considered

as an issue of individual responsibility and individuals with obesity are portrayed as a burden to the National Health System (NHS).

Bearing the similarities in mind, the authors examine the differences between the media in Chapter 3. The authors first introduce their "remainder method", where one sub-corpus is compared against the remaining sub-corpora. This method enables the authors to find interesting differences between the sub-corpora. For example, Tabloid Right tends to use medical words and scientific research resources to imply a "personal responsibility" discourse towards obesity, while Broadsheet Right focuses on the economic loss caused by obesity and the institutions involved to imply a sense of societal responsibility around obesity. Similarly, the Broadsheet Left tends to construct obesity as a social problem, but they take a more critical stance towards the institutions, especially governments involved. For Tabloid Left, the Mirror focuses on female narratives of weight loss and parenthood, while the Morning Star is openly critical of large corporations (e.g., fast food companies) for their (in)action regarding the obesity issue. The authors explain the differences in terms of political distinctions and readerships of the newspapers.

Chapter 4 tackles the diachronic dimensions of the media representations, revealing how keywords change across years and months. This chapter is based on grouping the yearly and monthly keywords into twenty-seven major categories and explaining how the categories reveal the various dimensions of obesity representations. The yearly changes show that the category FOOD comprised the most frequent classification and how it also increased in frequency in most years. The media build individualistic models of obesity through an increasing problematisation of obesity and a decreasing mention of socio-political factors. The month-by-month analysis presents less variations, yet it shows an annual cycle where the representation of obesity fluctuates according to religious traditions, holidays and weather in different seasons. Both the yearly and monthly changes show that obesity tends to be envisaged as a personal problem and represented in individualising and shaming ways in the media, which are discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

In contrast with the previous chapters, Chapter 5 uses the techniques of collocation and concordance analysis to explore how individuals with obesity are referred to via nouns, adjectives, and verbs. The authors find that the media tend to describe individuals with obesity in negative terms using dehumanising nouns (e.g., gut-bucket) and negative adjectives (e.g., ugly). Eating-denoting verbs (e.g., guzzle) are used to suggest a lack of self-control in the eating behaviours among individuals, who are further linked with social deviance such as criminal acts (e.g., stealing food). The authors summarise the chapter by criticising the shaming discourses, especially the "joke discourse", emphasising that they are stigmatising, unhelpful and not constructive in solving the obesity issue.

Chapter 6 explores a more nuanced picture of the shaming discourse of obesity by focusing on four words, i.e., diet, body, health and exercise. The authors find that, though the media use discourses from scientific research, there is a lack of agreement on the best diet for losing weight. The authors find that metaphors, e.g., body as a sentient being or as an enemy, are used to represent bodies as distinct and separate from the self. In terms of health, although healthiness is clearly linked with qualities such as slim, the link between health and fat is contested. The authors further reveal that exercise is presented as problematic with an array of confusing

or contradictory messages. The authors conclude that there are reasons to doubt whether readers can get useful advice on weight loss from the media.

Chapter 7 investigates gendered discourses around obesity through comparing the ways in which the media represent men and women in their coverage of obesity. The collocational analysis of WOMAN and MAN shows that the media reflect and reinforce the traditional stereotypical ideologies of femininity and masculinity. Women tend to be represented in their relational aspect of identity (e.g., roles as caregivers in families) with more emotion disclosures (e.g., desperate). Their weight loss narratives focus on aesthetic values (e.g., wedding dress) as the key goal for losing weight. By comparison, men are more likely to be represented as losing weight due to health concerns, especially the threat of death, and their loss-weight narratives are presented in a stoical manner. Further, men's diets were sometimes referred to as experiments, lending evidence to the narrative of men distancing themselves from acts deemed feminine. Based on the evidence of these gendered representations, the authors point out that the media present a somewhat narrow or even outdated gendered picture, calling for the media to capture the complex and various gender roles involved in the obesity issue.

Chapter 8 explores the obesity discourse from the perspective of social class. The authors first justify their interest in social class by pointing out that unequal class relations are a driver of health inequality (including obesity) in the UK. Here, the authors explore how four social classes, i.e., upper class, middle class, working class and "underclass", are represented in relation to obesity. A somewhat complex picture of social class representations is uncovered. For example, the authors find that the left-leaning media stress the obesity rate among the upper classes, while the right-leaning data commend upper-class lifestyles that the lower classes should aspire to. The left-leaning media patronise the lower classes as aspiring to follow middle-class lifestyles, while the right-leaning media stress the equal or even higher risk of obesity among the middle-class. For the working class, the left-leaning media seem to acknowledge the relevance of social inequalities to obesity. However, the right-leaning media focus on the personal responsibilities of working-class individuals. As for the underclass" a notable feature is its low visibility, witnessed both by the lower frequency of mention and how individuals are "objectified" in stereotypes (e.g., lazy), especially in the right-leaning newspapers which tend to represent the underclass as deviant, often with the use of irony. The authors interpret the varying or even oppositional discourses through the perspective of the political leanings of the newspapers, for example, how the right-leaning media defend the neoliberal values of personal responsibility. The authors challenge the neoliberal approach, criticising its lack of empathy towards people, especially the underclass who are already vulnerable in a much-divided society.

Chapter 9 presents novel insights into reader comments, exploring the reception of the discourses emphasised in press representations of obesity. The authors first review existing research on reader comments and subsequently explain how they collect the thirteen articles and their reader comments from the Mail Online. Based on a keywords analysis, the authors find similarities and differences between the reader comments and the articles. Comments in general indicate a more stigmatising and shaming discourse than the articles, though there is a minority counter-discourse mentioning institutional factors (e.g., food marketers). The comments touch more on discourses of personal responsibility (e.g., blame) around food and lifestyle, echoing the neoliberal values discussed in previous chapters. On

the other hand, the articles use more science or research keywords (e.g., report) to evoke an expert discourse, which is not visible in the comments. The articles also use more moderated forms of modality (e.g., may) to mitigate their claims. The authors discuss the differences from the perspective of news values, sharing their concern over the "fat shaming" advocated in the comments in spite of acknowledging that the comments can nevertheless bring more voices to journalism in hotly debated social issues.

Chapter 10 contains conclusions. Although the authors mention limitations of their approach, e.g., their lack of multimodal data, in my view, the research methodologies constitute a particularly commendable aspect of the book. The methodological transparency is displayed at every stage of the analysis, where the authors explain in detail the methodological difficulties they faced and the solutions they chose. This is an excellent example of good practice in corpus research; it makes the book not only accessible to lay readers and novice researchers in corpus linguistics, but also gives credence to the results of the analyses and lays a foundation for future studies adopting similar methodologies. The authors conclude that the shaming discourse, with its neoliberal framework, is not conducive to solving the obesity issue as it fails to capture the complexity of obesity (e.g., through an overly simplistic discourse focusing on individual factors). Finally, the authors call for more diverse and balanced discourses, which could better serve the public and policy-makers in solving the obesity issue.

In conclusion, this book offers an illuminating example of exploring health communication using a versatile corpus approach (Brookes & Hunt, 2021). Although it only focuses on the written press in the UK context, the book is informative in revealing the complexity of obesity and in paying attention to the generally ignored groups (e.g., the underclass) in society. It can be recommended to anyone interested in obesity and its representations and, more broadly, in matters pertaining to health and health communication. It provides an excellent methodological toolkit of relevance to novice and more established corpus linguists and discourse analysts.

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