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A CORPUS-ASSISTED ANALYSIS OF THE TERM *POPULISM* IN FRENCH AND SPANISH MEDIA DISCOURSES

ABSTRACT

In this paper, we analyse the use of the lexemes populism(s) and populist(s) in French and Spanish media discourses during the electoral year 2019. This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion among scholars in different fields on the meanings and functions of these controversially debated terms by providing corpus evidence of how these terms are used in contemporary public discourses. Using a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach, we seek to examine how populism(s) and populist(s) are used in the media outlets from France and Spain, focusing on (i) the meanings of these socio-political keywords; (ii) the similarities and differences in the use of these lexemes in two languages (French and Spanish) and in four types of media (an established source, a serious-popular medium, a free daily medium, and a state-funded medium). First, we present a quantitative comparison of the occurrences of the terms in the French and the Spanish corpora. Then, we cover the findings of the collocation analysis of populism(s) and populist(s) focusing on the five strongest collocates of the terms in each corpus, as well as on the comparison of the collocates grouped into semantic categories. The analysis reports the recurrent and shared patterns of use of populis* across the two countries (e.g. the collocates rise, nationalism). Furthermore, the cross-linguistic analysis highlights numerous differences. Namely, it shows distinct uses of the word-forms of populis* (i.e. the use of the noun populism versus the use of the noun and adjective populist), and distinct uses of populis* across different types of media. Finally, the findings show how populis* functions as a socio-political keyword in a particular political context (i.e. a tendency to discuss populism as an abstract phenomenon in Europe in the French media versus a tendency to label concrete actors in the national context in the Spanish media).

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A corpus-assisted analysis of the term *populism* in French and Spanish media discourses

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1.   Introduction

A substantial amount of research on the phenomenon of populism in different parts of the world and during different periods of time has been conducted to date. There is a variety of definitions of *populism* in political science literature, as well as of approaches to understanding this object of study (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Hunger and Paxton 2022). In addition, different discourses about populism coexist contemporaneously – academic, media, political. All of this results in a growing use of this word and a fierce discussion about the meaning and the role of this global phenomenon in public debate.

In previous studies, *populism* has been analysed as an 'empty signifier' (Laclau 2005), that is, a word without a fixed meaning or a 'vessel capable of accommodating an excess of heterogeneous meanings' (Stavrakakis 2014:509). Moreover, *populism* has been referred to as a 'political buzzword' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017) which is attached to a multiplicity of actors and actions and is used randomly in media and political discourses (Bale, van Kessel, and Taggart 2011). Furthermore, previous studies have discussed *populism* and *populist* as terms which have stable collocation patterns (Shchinova, De Cock, and Hambye 2024; Thornborrow, Ekstrom, and Patrona 2021).

This paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion among scholars in different fields on the meanings and the use of *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* (see, for example, Eklundh 2020, a political science perspective; Goyvaerts and De Cleen 2020, a communication studies perspective; Kranert 2020, a linguistics perspective) by providing corpus evidence of how these terms are actually used in contemporary public discourses. This case study forms part of a broader research project TrUMPo (UCLouvain, Belgium) aimed at the interdisciplinary analysis of discourses about populism in several European democracies. It presents a comparative linguistic analysis of the use of the terms *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* across two languages (French and Spanish) and across four types of media (an established source, a serious-popular medium, a free daily medium, and a state-funded medium).

This paper employs a corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) approach (Gillings, Mautner, and Baker 2023; Partington, Duguid, and Taylor 2013; Taylor and Marchi 2018), and particularly, a more specialised approach of cross-linguistic CADS (Taylor 2014; Vessey 2013) to analyse the use of the terms *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* in media discourses produced during the electoral year 2019 in France and Spain. This period is chosen to study how these terms are used in a period when political actors classified as populists may enter a government coalition (in Spain) or when they are involved in a

political rivalry with a governing party (in France). Through the lens of 'keywords' (Jeffries and Walker 2018; Schröter 2008; Williams 1985), the analysis focuses on (i) the meanings of these socio-political keywords and (ii) the similarities and differences in the use of these lexemes in different languages, socio-political contexts, and types of media.

In what follows, I contextualise the present analysis in relation to the specificities of the languages and the socio-political environments of each country examined (Section 2). Then, in Section 3, I move to the presentation of the data and method of analysis. In Section 4, I present a quantitative comparison of the occurrences of *populism(s)* and *populist(s)*, and the findings of the collocation analyses. In Section 5, I discuss the main findings, and I conclude this paper by providing a summary of this case study and proposing possible avenues for future research.

2. Background

2.1. *Populism and populist as keywords in discourse*

In this paper, the terms *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* are viewed as *keywords*. The concept of *keyword* has acquired several definitions over the past decades, as well as approaches to the study of such words (for example, 'socio-political keywords', Jeffries and Walker 2018; 'discourse keywords', Schröter *et al.* 2019; 'statistical keywords', Scott and Tribble 2006; 'cultural keywords', Williams 1985). Following Kranert (2020), who points out the 'complexity, range, and diversity of meanings' of *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* (Kranert 2020:32), the present analysis of these terms is mainly influenced by the studies of 'socio-political keywords' (SPKWs) (Jeffries and Walker 2018).

Previous studies approaching SPKWs, have highlighted the idea that such words are 'socio-politically significant'; they have several different meanings and are subjected to different interpretations in a particular period (Jeffries and Walker 2012:209). SPKWs reflect 'the ideology/ies of a ruling class, political party or historical period' (Jeffries and Walker 2018:17). Moreover, SPKWs are politically and ideologically charged words, which can also be 'widely used outside the political arena in the period concerned' (Jeffries and Walker 2012:211).

Furthermore, Schröter (2008) argues that the central characteristic of keywords is that such words are contested in the public arena, that is they are discussed 'at a metalinguistic level' (Schröter 2008:51). Specifically, Kranert (2020) analysed metalinguistic comments that surrounded the terms *populism* and *populist* in German and British press. The analysis showed that (i) the instances of the open contestation of the meaning of these terms were not linked to the semantics of the terms according to the academic literature, and (ii) such metalinguistic comments occurred in the instances of the rejection of being called populist (Kranert 2020:55).

In this paper, approaching *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* as keywords in media discourses of the two countries, I seek not only to describe a lexical item and to identify to what actors and actions the label is attached, but also to understand how different political views, and especially different understandings of the political spectrum and of its divisions, are

conveyed by this ideologically loaded words and how they vary across socio-political contexts, languages, and types of media.

2.2. *Populism in France and Spain*

The political contexts of France and Spain in 2019 represent particularly interesting case study for the analysis of the terms *populism(s)* and *populist(s)*. In the two countries, actors and actions attached to very different ideologies have regularly been qualified as populists. Moreover, several elections involving those actors have occurred in 2019, mainly, European elections in both countries, and national, regional, and local elections in Spain. Thus, during this period, political competition is at its peak, and the emergence of discourses containing *populism/ist* is expected.

In France, the far-right party *Le Rassemblement national* (National Rally, RN) and the far-left party *La France insoumise* (France Unbowed, LFI) are two political parties referred to as populists *(Rooduijn et al.* 2019). In the French academic literature, the term *populism* is mainly associated with the right-wing and with RN in particular, and is used pejoratively (Hubé and Truan 2016). Regarding the left-wing, the LFI leader, Jean-Luc Mélenchon, 'has not been examined through this lens in any academic paper, even if he is constantly presented as a populist in the media' (Hubé and Truan 2016: 182). In addition, the analysis of the representation of populism in the French media discourse since 2015 up to 2018 points out that, when referring to national politics, the populist label is mainly attached to the right-wing and the leader of RN, Marine Le Pen; to a lesser extent, to the left-wing; and also to the centre – *populisme du centre* ('populism of the centre') (Göhring 2022:185).

In Spain, *Podemos* and *Vox*, two political parties on the opposite ends of the political spectrum, are often classified as populist political actors (Rooduijn *et al.* 2019). Since the emergence of *Podemos* in 2014, the term *populism* was largely used to refer to this far-left party and to its former leader Pablo Iglesias. A diachronic study of the terms *populismo* and *populista* in the Spanish press (de Santiago Guervós 2015) points out the pejorative use and the association with certain Latin American political movements. In addition, the study of the use of these terms by Spanish political actors on Twitter in 2019 (Shchinova 2023) has identified that these terms were used only pejoratively and were attached to political parties on the left, the centre, and the right. However, the populist label was mainly used to discredit the left-wing coalition government.

Finally, several socially significant events took place in 2019 in both countries. For instance, the trial of the Catalan independence leaders involved in the organisation of the 2017 Independence referendum took place, thus heating the debate on the state of the autonomous regions and independence. Previous research has pointed out that the Spanish media attached the negative label *populism* to Catalan independentism (Gamper Sachse 2018). In France, several massive protests of the anti-austerity movement *Gilets jaunes* 'Yellow Vests' occurred in 2019. These protests are often associated with populism and labelled populist in the media (Carpenter and Perrier 2023).

3. Data and Method

In this paper, I analyse comparable terms in two languages. Both in French and Spanish, *populisme/s* and *populismo/s* are nouns; *populiste/s* and *populista/s* are both nouns and adjectives. In both languages, these terms originate from the Latin word *populus* 'people'. Since populism is a phenomenon with several guises and a disputed concept in academic literature, the terms in French and in Spanish do not necessarily always function as exact translations. For instance, in France, the term *populisme* can in some cases be conflated with other terms, such as *poujadisme* ('poujadism'), *boulangisme* ('boulangism'), and *bonapartisme* ('bonapartism'), which are sometimes even used instead of *populisme* (Hubé and Truan 2016). However, such uses are less frequent and would be the object of a monolingual study. As the present analysis focuses on the cross-linguistic comparison, I consider that the terms chosen for this analysis are suitable equivalents.

The two sets of corpora analysed in this paper are part of a larger comparable corpus collected for the TrUMPo project. In the present case study, the corpora contain all articles with the token *populis** published in 2019 which were extracted from the websites of four media sources of France and Spain. For analytical purposes of the project and in order to maintain comparability across countries, the sub-corpora contain texts from the following types of media: (1) an established source, (2) a serious-popular source, (3) a free daily and traffic distributed newspaper, and (4) a public-owned media which includes information that appears on TV and radio (the proposed analysis is based on the articles published on the website of these media). The media sources selected for the analysis are presented in Table 1. The size of the French corpora is reported in Table 2a; the size of the Spanish corpora is reported in Table 2b.

Type of data source	Spain (number of articles with *populis**)	France (number of articles with *populis**)
Established source	El País (989)	Le Monde (361)
Serious-popular source	El Español (960)	Le Parisien (276)
Free daily source	20 Minutos (102)	20 Minutes (90)
State-funded media	RTVE (79)	Franceinfo (318)

Table 1. *Data sources selected for the analysis of the occurrences of populis**

Media source	Le Monde	Le Parisien	20 Minutes	Franceinfo	Total
Number of articles with *populis	361	276	90	318	1,045
Number of words in the articles with *populis	392,123	207,256	52,954	180,229	832,562

Number of occurrences of *populis** **(absolute frequency)**	813	433	124	535	1,905

Table 2a. Overview of the French media corpora

Media source	El País	El Español	20 Minutos	RTVE	Total
Number of articles with *populis**	989	960	102	79	2,130
Number of words in the articles with *populis**	1,185,742	556,193	138,916	18,502	1,899,353
Number of occurrences of *populis** **(absolute frequency)**	1,719	1,789	151	144	3,803

Table 2b. Overview of the Spanish media corpora

Differences in sizes of some of the sub-corpora in each set of corpora and the number of articles with *populis** already indicate some of the differences among the sources studied (for example, the length of the articles in an established source tends to be longer than in a free-daily source).

Several sets of data were created for this analysis. For both the French and the Spanish data separately, a corpus containing all articles from each media source was created to identify the general trends in the data regarding how *populis** is used in the media of each country. In addition, four sub-corpora per media source were created to conduct a more detailed analysis of the occurrences of different word-forms of *populis** in different media sources.

The first analytical step was to determine the frequency and the distribution of the word-forms of *populis** across the corpora. The second step was to examine the collocational profiles of *populis**. SketchEngine (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014) was used for collocation and concordance analyses. A list of collocates of each word-form of *populis** was retrieved from the French media corpora and the Spanish media corpora. Lexical items with a minimum raw frequency of three which are co-selected with the node word within a span of five words to the left and five words to the right were considered for analysis. The statistical measure of log-likelihood was applied. These choices were made due to the nature of the data and the research objectives. The same collocation window of 5L/5R was deemed adequate to analyse in comparable non-parallel corpora in two languages. Moreover, this span was chosen to identify broader patterns of the use of *populis**, rather than immediate patterns as would be the case within a span of less than five words.

First, to identify the general trends in each country, the five strongest collocates were retrieved from the whole data set for each word-form of *populis** and then separately in different types of media to verify whether there are similarities and/or differences in

how *populis** is used in each media source. Finally, the hundred most salient collocates in the French and the Spanish corpora and their concordance lines were examined and grouped into inductively created semantic categories. In the following section, the results will be presented as follows: frequency and distribution of *populis** are outlined in Section 4.1; the findings of the analyses of the collocational profile of *populis** are reported in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency and distribution of populis*

This section will briefly outline the distribution of the lexemes *populisme(s), populiste(s)* and *populismo(s), populista(s)* ('populism(s)', 'populist(s)') in French and Spanish media discourses in 2019. Table 3a shows the distribution of the four word-forms of *populis** in the French corpora.

	Le Monde		Le Parisien		20 Minutes		France info		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
populisme	356	43.79	69	15.94	15	12.10	118	22.06	558	29.29
populisme s	45	5.54	36	8.31	8	6.45	57	10.65	146	7.66
populiste	226	27.80	173	39.95	61	49.19	182	34.02	642	33.70
populistes	186	22.88	155	35.80	40	32.26	178	33.27	559	29.34
Total	813	100	433	100	124	100	535	100	1,905	100

Table 3a. *Populis** in the French media corpora (N is the absolute number of occurrences)*

We observe the following similarities in the distribution of the four forms of *populis**. The least frequent word-form among the lexemes under study is the plural noun *populismes*. It is considerably less frequent than the singular noun *populisme*, thus suggesting that populism is presented in the French media more as a single phenomenon and not as several types of populism.

The word-form *populiste* is used more frequently than *populistes*. In addition, there are proportionally more occurrences of the word-forms *populiste* and *populistes*, than *populisme* and *populismes* (except for *populisme* in *Le Monde*). Even though *populiste(s)* can be nouns and adjectives, the analysis of the concordance lines determined a more pronounced tendency to use these word-forms as adjectives rather than nouns. Thus, it indicates that in the French media under study, there are more uses of the terms that attribute populist traits or characteristics to an entity (for example, a movement or a party), than uses of the term as a noun to label individuals or groups.

Moreover, the differences in the distribution of the four forms of *populis** are the following. In the established source *Le Monde*, the singular noun *populisme* is used considerably more than in the other three media sources, suggesting that this type of media dis-

cusses the phenomenon rather than qualifies somebody or something by using the adject-ives/nouns *populiste(s)*.

In the free-daily *20 Minutes*, the word-form *populiste* clearly stands out among other word-forms, and is used as an adjective, as suggested by concordance lines. Thus, in this type of media, there is a more pronounced tendency to attribute populist traits or charac-teristics to something or somebody, rather than discuss the phenomenon of populism it-self.

The distribution of the four word-forms of *populis** in the Spanish corpora are presented in Table 3b.

	El País		El Español		20 Minutos		RTVE		Total	
	N	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
populismo	585	34.03	589	32.92	48	31.79	32	22.22	1,254	32.97
populismos	145	8.44	246	13.75	18	11.92	48	33.33	457	12.02
populista	501	29.14	389	21.74	25	16.56	7	4.86	922	24.24
populistas	488	28.39	565	31.58	60	39.74	57	39.58	1,170	30.77
Total	1,719	100	1,789	100	151	100	144	100	3,803	100

Table 3b. *Populis* in the Spanish media corpora (N is the absolute number of occurrences)*

The Spanish data displays the following similarities in the distribution of the four forms of *populis**. The established source *El País*, the serious-popular source *El Español*, and the free-daily newspaper *20 Minutos* show fairly similar tendencies regarding the use of the four forms of *populis**, namely, a very low frequency of the use of the plural noun *populis-mos* and relatively similar frequencies in the use of *populismo, populista, populistas*. The dis-tribution of the four word-forms of *populis** in those three types of media is rather homo-geneous, thus suggesting that, regardless the differences of the type of media and its read-ership, *populis** is used in a similar way.

The word-form *populistas* is used more frequently than *populista*. The examination of the concordance lines has shown that the plural form *populistas* is used as a noun and as an adjective. However, there are more nominal uses than in the French corpora. Thus, this suggests that in the Spanish corpora, there is a more pronounced tendency to label political actors as populists, rather than attribute populist traits and characteristics by us-ing a qualifying adjective. Also, the plural form of the noun indicates that in the Spanish context, the label is attributed to a group of people rather than to one person. In addition, the use of the plural adjective also indicates a tendency to qualify entities, objects in plural.

The differences in the distribution of the four forms of *populis** are the following. The state-funded broadcaster *RTVE* clearly stands out among the four media sources. Mainly the plural noun *populismos* is clearly higher in this type of media than in the three other sources. Such tendency might indicate that the public broadcaster pays more attention to

populism in its different guises, for example, in different countries and/or on different sides of the political spectrum, than in other types of media.

In the free-daily source *20 Minutos* and in the state-funded broadcaster *RTVE*, and to a lesser extent in the serious-popular source *El Español*, the frequency of the word-form *populistas* is considerably higher than *populista*. However, in *El País*, there are proportionally more uses of the singular word-form, rather than plural. Also, this difference is not that pronounced as in the other three types of media.

Thus, there are some similarities and even more differences between the French and the Spanish corpora. Mainly, regarding the similarities, the least frequent word-form across media sources in both corpora is the plural noun *populismos*, except for the public broadcaster *RTVE*. In addition, the singular noun *populisme/mo* is more frequent than the plural noun *populismes/mos*, thus showing the preference to talk about populism in media discourse of both countries as a unique phenomenon rather than in its different forms.

As for the differences, the Spanish established source *El País* does not stand out as much as *Le Monde* in the French corpora. In the French corpora, *Le Monde* stands out for its frequency of the singular noun *populisme*, while *El País* displays a more balanced use of *populismo*, *populista* and *populistas*. In addition, in the Spanish corpora, the established source and the serious-popular source show very similar tendencies in the use of the four word-forms of *populis**, as well as in the absolute number of articles containing *populis**, while in the French corpora, there is no such similarity. Moreover, the Spanish state-funded broadcaster clearly stands out in the distribution of the four word-forms of *populis**, with the highest proportion of the use of the plural noun *populismos* and the lowest for *populista*. The French state-funded broadcaster displays a more even distribution of the four word-forms, which also resembles the three other media sources (however, except for *populisme* in *Le Monde*).

4.2.   Collocational profile of populis*

First, to observe the general trends regarding the use of *populis** in each country, the collocation analyses were conducted within each corpus. Table 4a and Table 4b provide the total number of collocates for each word-form of *populis** in the French and Spanish media corpora, and the five strongest collocates of each word-form within a list of one hundred collocations and excluding function words, sorted according to the log-likelihood score. The raw frequencies and the log-likelihood scores for each collocate are indicated between brackets.

	Number of tokens of *populis**	Number of collocates of *populis**	5 strongest collocates of *populis** (according to LL)
populisme	558	236	montée 'rise' (35; 338.66); gauche 'left' (27; 157.33); contre 'against' (25, 136.40); Europe 'Europe' (24; 117.77); nourrit 'feeds' (7; 76.42)
populismes	146	77	montée 'rise' (71; 1,022.01); Europe 'Europe' (27; 211.38); comprendre 'to understand' (10; 104.79);

		débat 'debate' (7; 54.99); nationalismes 'nationalisms' (4; 52.62)
populiste	642	313 gouvernement 'government' (63; 453.85); droit 'right' (50; 319.7); parti 'party' (45; 275.54); italien 'Italian' (32; 253.37); mouvement 'movement' (32; 219.48)
populistes	559	280 nationalistes 'nationalists' (45; 479.06); partis 'parties' (56; 477.43); Europe 'Europe' (42; 251.21); mouvements 'movements' (25; 243.6); européens 'European' (28; 229.31)

Table 4a. *Five strongest collocates of populis* in the French media corpora*

	Number of tokens of *populis**	Number of collocates of *populis**	5 strongest collocates of *populis** (according to LL)
populismo	1,254	600	nacionalismo 'nationalism' (99; 999.41); (de) derechas 'of the right' (65; 623.40); (de) izquierdas 'of the left' (46; 405.11); auge 'rise' (42; 399.51); contra 'against' (33; 201.17)
populismos	457	224	nacionalismos 'nationalisms' (74; 1,076.18); auge 'rise' (31; 338.08); contra 'against' (41; 291.68); extremismos 'extremisms' (15; 197.23); Europa 'Europe' (31; 194.01)
populista	922	498	derecha 'right' (71; 511.63); radical 'radical' (35; 336.13); izquierda 'left' (44; 312.30); discurso 'discourse' (39; 304.53); partido 'party' (55; 298.46)
populistas	1,170	554	nacionalistas 'nationalists' (132; 1,882.65); separatistas 'separatists' (70; 804.30); partidos 'parties' (105; 787.33); movimientos 'movements' (48; 490.65); independentistas 'independentists' (45; 387.04)

Table 4b. *Five strongest collocates of populis* in the Spanish media corpora*

Several observations can be made. The analysis of the five strongest collocates of *populis** in French and Spanish corpora indicates that there are some similarities regarding the use of *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* in the French and the Spanish media in 2019. However, there are even more differences.

   Regarding the similarities, *montée* 'rise' is the collocate with the strongest association to *populisme* and *populismes* in the French media. As for the Spanish media, *auge* 'rise' also appears to be one of the five strongest collocates of the singular and plural nouns *populismo* and *populismos*. The examination of the concordance lines indicates that the phe-

nomenon of populism is discussed as being on the rise and expanding, mainly in Europe. However, the difference is that the French data, the rise of populism is discussed more in different European countries, rather than in the national context, while in the Spanish data, the national context is commented upon to a greater extent.

Moreover, in both corpora, we also find the preposition *contre/contra* ('against'), which is used in phrases such as *lutter contre la montée du populisme en Europe* ('to fight against the rise of populism in Europe') in the French corpus, and *la lucha contra el populismo* ('the fight against populism'), *el mejor antídoto contra el populismo de Vox* ('the best antidote against the populism of Vox') in the Spanish corpus. The latter use points to the far-right Spanish political party *Vox*.

In addition, collocates such as *parti(s)/partido(s)* ('party(ies)') and *mouvement(s)/movimientos* ('movement(s)') appear to be common among the French and the Spanish media when using the singular and plural adjectives 'populist'. Finally, in both French and Spanish corpora, we find the collocates *nationalismes/nacionalismo(s)* ('nationalism(s)') discussed in the context of the rise of the nationalist political parties in Europe.

However, we can observe the following difference regarding the collocates *nationalis**. In the French data, we find *nationalismes* ('nationalisms') and *nationalistes* ('nationalists') as collocates of the two word-forms of *populis**, while in the Spanish data, *nacionalis** is a collocate of the three word-forms of *populis**; namely, the singular and plural nouns *nacionalismo(s)* and *nacionalistas*. Also, the LL score is much higher in the Spanish corpus, than in the French corpus. This might suggest a more pronounced tendency to conflate populism and nationalism in the Spanish media. Furthermore, the concordance lines show that in the French data, the articles using *populism* and *nationalism* mainly discuss the international context and the rise of the far right. Very few occurrences touch upon the French political scene. In contrast, in the Spanish data, it is the national context that is commented upon the most. Moreover, in the Spanish data, the co-occurrence of *nationalism(s)* and *populism(s)* predominantly appear as reported speech of Spanish politicians in interviews and in articles reporting political events and politicians' interventions in public. We mainly find the uses of *populismo(s) y nacionalismo(s)* by the centre-right *Ciudadanos* and traditional right wing *Partido Popular*.

Another difference observed among the two corpora is that, even if we find lexical items labelling the divisions on the political spectrum, mainly 'left' and 'right', those terms are used differently in the French and the Spanish corpora. In the Spanish data, we find such phrase as *populismo de derechas y de izquierdas* ('right- and left-wing populism'), and also separately 'left' and 'right' as collocates of *populista*. Such uses refer to parties deemed populist in the national and international contexts. However, in the French data, only *gauche* ('left') collocates with *populisme*. The examination of the concordance lines shows that in those cases, the phenomenon of populism is mainly commented upon and discussed in interviews with experts in the field of populist studies or in articles about books on populism (for example, the collocate 'left' appears in the articles that touch upon the works by the political theorist Chantal Mouffe). However, there are occasional uses of *populisme de gauche* ('left-wing populism') which point to specific political actor, mainly, the left-wing

French politicians François Ruffin and Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Spanish left-wing *Podemos*.

Another difference of the Spanish corpora is the presence of such collocates as *extremismos* ('extremisms'), *radical* ('radical'), *separatistas* ('separatists'), and *independentistas* ('independentists') co-occurring with the three word-forms *populismos, populista, populistas*. These collocates have no equivalent in the French data, thus suggesting that such uses are specific to the political context of Spain. Also, the concordance lines confirm that these terms point to the political context of 2019, in which left-wing political parties are attacked for their stance regarding regional politics by using these negatively loaded terms. The use of *populists* in this case always refer to the left-wing *Podemos*. The most recurrent pattern identified in the concordance lines is use of *populists* in a list with other terms *nacionalistas, populistas y separatistas/independentistas* ('nationalists, populists and separatists/independentists').

Finally, 'Europe' is another common collocate in both the French and the Spanish media. However, in the French media corpus, 'Europe' is one of the five strongest collocates of the three word-forms: *populisme(s)* and both 'Europe' and 'European' collocates with *populistes*. In the Spanish data, 'Europe' collocates only with *populismos*. Thus, this tendency might suggest that the French media is concerned mainly with the phenomenon of populism, populist movements, and parties on the European level. In addition, as we have seen, in the Spanish data, there are more references to the national context, with such collocates as 'separatists' and 'independentists'.

In the next step, in order to see whether there are differences in the use of the terms across different types of media, the five strongest collocations were retrieved in each sub-corpus. Two word-forms will be commented in the present analysis: the singular noun *populisme/populismo* and the plural noun and adjective *populistes/populistas*. Table 5a reports the five strongest collocates of *populisme* in *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien*, and *Franceinfo*. It was not possible to retrieve collocates in *20 Minutes* due to the low frequency of the term in the sub-corpus (total of 15 occurrences of *populisme* in *20 Minutes*).

Le Monde	Le Parisien	Franceinfo
montée ('rise') (18; 171.92)	montée ('rise') (5; 50.61)	montée ('rise') (11; 108.06)
gauche ('left') (21; 127.22)	gauche ('left') (4; 24.30)	Europe ('Europe') (11; 67.69)
contre ('against') (18; 101.94)	Europe ('Europe') (4; 20.89)	dépasser ('to exceed') (4; 52.88)
nourrit ('feeds') (7; 76.27)	faire ('to do') (3; 15.91)	vagues ('waves') (4; 50.95)
économique ('economic') (10, 59.88)	/	grandissant ('increasing') (3; 45.36)

Table 5a. *Five strongest collocates of populisme in the French media*

The results of the analysis of the five strongest collocates of *populism* in different types of French media show that *montée* 'rise' is the collocate with the strongest association to *populisme* in the three media sources examined. In the public broadcaster *Franceinfo*, we find such collocates as 'waves' (*vagues*) and 'increasing' (*grandissant*), both reinforcing the idea of populism being on the rise and expanding.

In the established source *Le Monde*, collocates such as gauche 'left' (*gauche*), 'against' (*contre*), and 'to feed' (*nourrit*) appear to be the same as in the list of the five strongest collocates of *populisme* in the corpora comprising the four media sources. Finally, there is a modifier *économique* ('economic') among the five strongest collocates of *populisme*. This collocate is not negatively loaded, rather it is a term from political economy used in a descriptive way in articles that discuss populism in a broader way and provide theoretical debate contrasting 'economic populism' and 'political populism'.

In contrast, in the Spanish data, more observations regarding the collocates of *populismo* in different types of media can be made. Table 5b presents the five strongest collocates in the four media sources in the Spanish corpora.

El País	El Español	20 Minutos	RTVE
(de) derechas ('of the right') (47; 484.03)	nacionalismos ('nationalisms') (53; 625.99)	nacionalismo ('nationalism') (11; 146.99)	pop ('pop') (4; 52.86)
(de) izquierdas ('of the left') (34; 326.72)	nacionalismo ('nationalism') (61; 541.00)	libertad ('freedom') (6; 67.90)	nacionalismo ('nationalism') (4; 41.78)
nacionalismo ('nationalism') (24; 226.45)	contra ('against') (52; 326.29)	Madrid ('Madrid') (8; 55.42)	Venezuela ('Venezuela') (4; 37.61)
auge ('rise') (22; 220.04)	auge ('rise') (32; 302.84)	izquierda ('left') (5; 44.57)	europeas ('European') (5; 32.87)
disfrazarse ('to disguise') (12; 179.86)	(de) derechas ('of the right') (23; 203.38)	radical ('radical') (3; 33.34)	Elecciones ('elections') (3; 25.52)

Table 5b. *Five strongest collocates of populismo in the Spanish media*

The analysis of the five strongest collocates of *populism* in different types of Spanish media shows fairly similar tendencies in the established source *El País* and the serious-popular source *El Español*. Mainly, in both sources, there are collocates such as *nacionalismo(s)* ('nationalism(s)'), *auge* ('rise'), and *de derechas* ('of the right'). However, *El Español* stands out by the presence of both *nacionalismos* and *nacionalismo* with much higher scores than in any other media source. Slightly more differences can be seen in the free-daily source *20 Minutos* and in the public broadcaster *RTVE*. One collocate deserves particular attention, namely *pop* ('pop populism'), which is the strongest collocate of *populismo* in the *RTVE* data and which only appears in this media source. All the occurrences of *populismo pop* appear in the reported speech by Spanish politician Ángel Garrido (*Ciudadanos*), who

qualifies *Ciudadanos* as being *populismo pop* ('pop populism'), as opposed to *Podemos,* whom he qualifies as being *populismo heavy* ('heavy populism').

Moving on to the five strongest collocates of *populistes/populistas* ('populists') in the French and the Spanish media sources, in Table 6a and Table 6b, we can observe several similarities as well as differences.

Le Monde	Le Parisien	20 Minutes	Franceinfo
mouvements ('movements') (13; 131.61)	nationalistes ('nationalists') (11; 115.40)	partis ('parties') (8; 91.72)	nationalistes ('nationalists') (25; 277.43)
partis ('parties') (14; 111.79)	européens ('European') (10; 85.23)	nationalistes ('nationalists') (4; 48.22)	partis ('parties') (25; 227.18)
forces ('forces') (9; 84.76)	progressistes ('progressionists') (7; 79.53)	parlent ('to speak, 3d person plural') (3; 44.40)	Europe ('Europe') (17; 105.31)
dirigeants ('leaders') (9; 79.74)	partis ('parties') (9; 68.87)	théorie ('theory') (3; 31.52)	européens ('European') (11; 88.26)
gauche ('left') (11; 65.64)	Europe ('Europe') (11; 62.10)	Europe ('Europe') (4; 29.71)	Autriche ('Austria') (9; 87.68)

Table 6a. Five strongest collocates of populistes in the French media

El País	El Español	20 Minutes	RTVE
nacionalistas ('nationalists') (40; 458.06)	nacionalistas ('nationalists') (96; 1,048.42)	nacionalistas ('nationalists') (14; 183.86)	nacionalistas ('nationalists') (12; 122.66)
partidos ('parties') (49; 383.78)	separatistas ('separatists') (48; 496.98)	independentistas ('independentists') (15; 171.50)	partidos ('parties') (9; 68.83)
(de) derechas ('of the right') (25; 232.52)	partidos ('parties') (46; 329.94)	separatistas ('separatists') (5; 63.33)	derecha ('right') (7; 56.01)
movimientos ('movements') (22; 223.52)	movimientos ('movements') (21; 219.30)	extremistas ('extremists') (3; 43.17)	independentistas ('independentists') (6, 54.14)
derecha ('right') (31; 207.39)	fuerzas ('forces') (24; 204.62)	Gobierno ('government') (6; 31.17)	líderes ('leaders') (6; 52.97)

Table 6b. Five strongest collocates of populistas in the Spanish media

In both the French and the Spanish corpus, we find that the adjective *populist* is used to qualify such terms as *partis/partidos* ('parties'), *forces/fuerzas* ('forces'), *dirigeants/líderes* ('leaders'), and *mouvements/movimientos* ('movements'), suggesting rather homogenous use of these terms in both corpora.

In the French corpora, among the five strongest collocates there are 'European' and 'Europe', which appears in the three media sources except *Le Monde*. These collocates are not present in the Spanish data.

As in the case with the collocates of *populism*, we can also observe the presence of the collocate *nationalistes/nacionalistas*. It appears in the four Spanish media sources and with a much higher LL score in *El Español* than in other sources, the same as is the case with the collocates of the word-form *populismo*. Thus, it is the serious-popular media in Spain that mostly evokes *nationalism* together with *populism*. In the French data, this collocate appear in the three media source except of *Le Monde*. Moreover, this collocate is used in the French corpora predominantly as an adjective, as in *parties nationalistes et populistes* ('populist and nationalist political parties') and as a noun in the Spanish corpora, as *nacionalistas y populistas* ('nationalists and populists').

Another difference can be found in the collocates referring to the sides of a political spectrum. The collocate *gauche* ('left') appears only in *Le Monde*. The occurrences of this collocate point to more theoretical discussions of the left-wing populism, rather than to uses to label concrete actors. However, few articles target the LFI's leader. In the Spanish media, the opposite side of the spectrum is commented upon, with collocates such as *de derechas* in *El País* and *derecha* in *El País* and in *RTVE*. This result is different from the collocates of *populismo*, where 'left' and 'radical left' are among the five strongest collocates.

Finally, only in the Spanish data, we find collocates of *populistas* such as 'independentists', 'separatists', and 'extremists'. These collocates, however, are not present in *El País*. Such recurrent co-occurrence, as well as the recurrent co-occurrence with *nacionalistas*, suggests that these are fixed combinations frequently used by the media. Moreover, the concordance lines point to the fact that these fixed combinations always target the same political actors and socio-political contexts, particularly the possible participation of a political party labelled as left-wing populists (*Unidas Podemos*) to enter a coalition government with the centre-left political party PSOE. The articles using these fixed combinations mostly contain quotations of several Spanish political actors who denounce this coalition and use *populis** to discredit their opponents.

The differences between the collocates of *populisme/populismo and populistes/populistas* across different media sources in both French and Spanish corpora indicate that the type of media, the articles they produce, and the readership can influence the representation of *populis**. Thus, in the established sources, there are more analytical articles in which the phenomenon of populism is discussed, using the singular noun *populism* and referring to the theoretical aspects related to populism. In the public broadcaster, by contrast, there are more articles presenting recent news and specific events, such as elections, in which *populism* and *populist* is rather used to label concrete politicians. Such uses of the terms, however, do not necessarily discredit those politicians. In the corpora studied, the term is rather used to name concrete actors in Europe. As such, the results of the analysis of the five strongest collocates of *populis** in the French and Spanish media suggest that both the abstract use of the noun in which populism is discussed more from a theoretical point of view and the use that labels concrete actors function as a shorthand for a broader discussion of the political situation in the context of Europe.

4.3. Semantic grouping

In a second step, the first hundred collocates of *populis** (according to log-likelihood scores) in the French and the Spanish media corpora were examined and grouped into the following inductively established semantic categories: (1) words related to politics, such as (i) orientations, ideologies, attitudes, political labels; (ii) actors (individuals and groups); (iii) generic words related to people; (iv) events and actions; and (v) institutions; (2) locations and places (3) description of populism as a phenomenon; (4) words modified by the adjective *populist*; and (5) miscellaneous.

As for the first semantic category, in both the French and the Spanish data, we find collocates such as 'left', 'right', and 'centre' (the latter appears only in the Spanish list of collocates). These occurrences serve to structure the political landscape and are used to name and position political actors on the spectrum. However, when pointing to those actors on the political spectrum, there are uses of *populis** which occasionally represent populism and populists in a negative way. Negative connotations are clear in the cases when *populis** is associated with ideologies and orientations such as 'nationalism', 'extremism', and 'Euroscepticism', present in both corpora, as well as with 'communism', 'fascism', 'ultraright', present only in the Spanish data. In addition, in the Spanish data, the context-specific terms *izquierdismo* (the left-wing ideology), *constitucionalismo* ('constitutionalism'), and *batasunos* (name attributed to the members of the former nationalist Basque political party *Batasuna*) appear among the salient collocates of *populis**. Such collocates point to the debate concerning the state of certain autonomous communities of Spain and links the use of populism to the debate on regional autonomy and/or independence.

As for the second sub-category of the words related to politics, the populist label is attributed to a range of actors. In both the French and the Spanish data, there are references to individual actors and groups deemed populist in the national context and in other countries, mainly in Europe. The populist label is consistently used as a handy term attributed to actors that have already been labelled as populists in public discourse.

In the third sub-category, we find such words as *peuple* ('people'), *homme* ('man'), and *femme* ('woman'), and only in the French data. One of the well-known definitions of *populism* (Mudde 2004) consists of the dichotomy between 'the people' and the 'elite'. However, 'people' is not a frequent collocate in the data analysed and most of the occurrences appear in the articles providing theoretical debate on populism; only one occurrence of *peuple* appears to be used by a politician with the idea of 'the people' as a collective entity against the elite.

As for the second semantic category, in both the French and the Spanish data, we find references to the national contexts, other European countries and to populism as a world problem (e.g. as suggested through the collocate *monde/mundo* ('world')). In the Spanish data, however, there are also references to the regional contexts, mainly suggested by the adjective *catalán* ('Catalan populism') and to several Latin American countries.

In the semantic category that groups words related to the description of populism, in both the French and the Spanish data, there are nouns such as 'demagogy' and 'rise'.

Moreover, in the French data, we find the word *terme* ('term') suggesting the presence of metalinguistic comments and self-referential use of populism. However, this collocate is not frequent, thus suggesting that the concept of populism is not a contested term in the media analysed as it is claimed to be in the academic literature.

As for the verbs, in both the French and the Spanish data, populism is represented as something that needs to be stopped, suggested by collocates such as *frenar* ('to slow down'), *combatir* ('to fight') in Spanish, and *lutter* ('to fight') in French. Regarding the adjectives that modify 'populism', in the French data, we find collocates such as *économique* ('economic'), *pur* ('pure'), *simplifié* ('simplified'), *grandissant* ('growing'), and *autoritaire* ('authoritarian').

In the Spanish data, however, populism is rather represented as growing, expanding, and at the same time, dangerous, as suggested by collocates such as *creciente* ('growing'), *alarmante* ('alarming'), *peligroso* ('dangerous'). In addition, populism is presented as *viejo* ('old'), *rancio* ('dusty') and *barato* ('cheap'). Moreover, words such as *totalitario* ('totalitarian'), *antisistema* ('anti system'), *antieuropeo* ('anti-European'), *nacional-católico* ('national catholic') appear to co-occur with *populism*. All these modifiers of the noun *populism* point to the range of possible descriptors of the phenomenon used by the media in Spain.

The last category contains all other words which do not correspond to any of the preceding semantic categories. In the French data, such words are scarce and are either the neutral words, such as *forme* ('form'), *pensée* ('thought'), *consequence* ('consequence'), *contexte* ('context'), or more negatively loaded words, such as *crise* ('crisis') and *vagues* ('waves'), the latter being negative in the sense that populism is represented as a natural disaster. However, in the Spanish data, numerous words are grouped in this last semantic category. All these words represent populism as an extremely negative phenomenon through metaphorical descriptions, such as words related to the semantic field of war – *desfiles* ('parades'), *combates* ('fights'), *explosión* ('explosion'), *amenaza* ('threat'), *opresor* ('oppressor'), *enemigo* ('enemy'), *lucha* ('fight'), *fuerzas* ('forces'); words related to the semantic field of death – *letal* ('lethal'); *veneno* ('poison'); words that transmit the idea that populism needs to be prevented or stopped – *antídoto* ('antidote'), *vacuna* ('vaccine'), *muro* ('wall'); and finally, words associating *populism* with *pobreza* ('poverty') and *desigualdades* ('inequalities').

The analysis of the hundred most salient collocates in each corpus indicates an overall similar collocational profile of *populis** in the French and the Spanish corpora in terms of subdividing the collocates into the same semantic categories. The findings also point to the association of *populis** with terms typically presented in the academic literature on populism (for example, *demagogy, nationalism, Euroscepticism*), as well as with other terms which are more characteristic of the socio-political contexts of the countries studied. For example, in the Spanish data, in the context of the 2019 elections, the use of the word *constitucionalismo* ('constitutionalism') in opposition to populism is a recurrent strategy of the centre-right political parties to position themselves against the political parties forming a coalition government. The results also point to a predominantly negative evaluation of *populis** in the media discourse of both countries. However, *populis** is not used to

discredit or attack, but rather to refer to certain political actors that have already been labelled as populists elsewhere.

5. Conclusion

The present analysis has reported how *populism(s)* and *populist(s)* are used in the media outlets of France and Spain in 2019. A detailed analysis of the lexical environment of the terms has been focused on the meanings of these socio-political keywords in media discourse, and on the similarities and differences in the use of these lexemes in two languages (French and Spanish) and in four types of media (an established source, a serious-popular medium, a free daily medium, and a state-funded medium).

While most of the previous research on the meanings of populism in discourse has been focused on analysing one language and/or one discursive and socio-political context, this study has provided a comparative analysis of several aspects.

Firstly, it has compared the use of *populis** in two languages and in two countries. The findings have shown that in media discourse of both countries, the meaning of *populism* and *populist* is not being contested, as suggested by the almost total absence of metalinguistic comments. The terms are not subjected to contestation by journalists and are used to label actors and actions widely classified as populists in both national and international contexts.

The evaluation of the phenomenon and of the actors/actions labelled populist, as suggested by the collocational profiles of the terms, is negative in the media sources of both countries. In addition, in both languages, there are several recurrent collocates (e.g. *rise, nationalism(s)*). However, in the French media, populism is discussed mainly in the international context, while in the Spanish media, it is the national context that is commented upon the most. This difference can be explained by the fact that the national political context of Spain in 2019 was characterised by several elections being held throughout the year and more particularly by the creation of a coalition government with political parties classified as left-wing populists. In the data, the occurrences of *populis** in the reported speech of political actors show how the opposition used *populis** as a tool to discredit the Prime Minister by accusing him of forming a coalition with populists. This strategic political use of *populis** is also observed in Twitter discourse of Spanish politicians (Shchinova 2023). The fact that journalists reproduce such use of *populis** as a 'stigma term' (Kranert 2020) is worth emphasising as it shows the ideological load of socio-political keywords in discourse, and it points to how the political landscape is perceived in a particular period.

Secondly, this paper provided a comparison of *populis** in different types of media sources. The analysis of the frequencies of the terms has indicated that in the French media under study, populism is presented as a single phenomenon rather than in its different guises and is the subject of discussion in analytical articles, mainly in the established journal *Le Monde*. The comparison of different media sources indicates that there are proportionally more occurrences of the word-forms *populiste(s)*, than *populisme(s)* (except for *populisme* in *Le Monde*), thus pointing to a more pronounced tendency to qualify some-

body or something and to attribute populist traits. As for the Spanish data, the findings suggest that there is a more pronounced tendency to label political actors as populists by using the noun *populista*, rather than to attribute populist traits and characteristics by using *populista* as a qualifying adjective. In addition, the established journal *El País* does not stand out in the same way as *Le Monde*. Rather, it shares similar tendencies with the serious-popular journal and the free newspaper. The state-funded broadcaster *RTVE* clearly stands out among the four Spanish media sources. Mainly the plural noun *populismos* is clearly used more frequently in this type of media than in the three other sources. This tendency might indicate that the public broadcaster pays more attention to populism in its different guises, for example, in different countries and/or on different sides of the political spectrum, than other types of media do.

Furthermore, in this paper, I compared multiple datasets and employed different analytical tools available to corpus linguists (identifying five strongest collocates, categorising collocates into sematic groups, and analysing concordance lines). Such approach has provided corpus evidence of the recurrent and shared patterns of use of *populis** across the two countries, as well as it has highlighted the differences. Namely, the analysis has showed cross-linguistic differences and differences in the use of the word-forms of *populis** (the use of the noun *populism* versus the use of the noun and adjective *populist*). However, a more thorough discussion concerning the comparison of semantic groupings would have added even more to our understanding of the distinct uses of *populism/ist* as socio-political keywords in the two countries analysed.

Finally, by conducting a cross-linguistic and a cross-cultural analysis, the present paper has added new empirical evidence to the understanding of populism as a category. The findings may then help in the triangulation of research on populism conducted in other fields, such as communication studies and political science. Thus, more studies including other languages, countries, and types of discourses (for example, on social media platforms) will enrich the existing research on populism. Another possible avenue for future research is to focus more on the qualitative discourse analysis of the use of *populism/ist* to understand how the meanings of these terms are negotiated in interaction.

6. Funding

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