



## **Report**

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# **Examining Attitudes and Ideologies Represented in the British press in regard to Multilingualism**

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## 1 Introduction

The media plays a big part in reproducing and creating ideologies (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 202). That is why we chose to focus our study on how liberal and conservative media might potentially differ in their way of reporting. Based on this, we focused our research on three questions, which we assessed with the help of a media content analysis and a carefully formulated questionnaire:

- a. Do conservative and liberal media differ in their views on multilingualism? If yes, how so?
- b. Did the process of Brexit have an effect on how conservative and liberal media represent multilingualism? If yes, how so?
- c. Does the representation of multilingualism by conservative and liberal media correspond with their readers' views?

Our first research question was developed in order to explore potential differences between the liberal and conservative press. We decided to do so due to them being on opposite sides of the political spectrum and therefore representing the views of wider society. We also naturally assumed they would have differing views on multilingualism as they do on many other political issues, such as migration.

We chose to do this study because critically analysing the media outlets best represents the divisive nature of opinions on multilingualism. However, due to the lack of explicit literature and findings on this topic, we decided to complement our first research question with the third one, which we aimed to answer with the conduction of our questionnaire.

Regarding the second question since the 2016 EU referendum, discussions on multilingualism have been awakened due to its close association to migration -- a topic which has become the centre of the Brexit discussion. This links not only to our primary research question, but it is also the reason why we introduced the second question discussing the potential consequences of the Brexit process on attitudes towards multilingualism in the British press.

## 2 Methodology

### Media Content Analysis

For our primary research question, we collected a range of articles supporting different political ideologies and analysed the way they represent the topic of multilingualism. These articles are from The Guardian, which represents liberal media, and The Sun, The (Daily) Telegraph and the Daily Mail, which represent conservative media. To distinguish between the mentioned branches of the media, we took into consideration the newspaper outlets' affiliation to the political parties during the 2017 general election (McKee, 2017). The ones that have endorsed the Labour party we considered to be liberal, while the ones that endorsed the Conservative party we considered conservative (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 202). The articles that we have analysed for our secondary research question are from The Guardian and The Sun, which support different political parties, as already mentioned above. These examples helped us link the association of Brexit with language.

Our search for the articles commenced with LexisNexis by looking up the words “speak” and “English”, as well as using Google Search. The total number of collected articles is 14, out of which 8 are liberal and 6 are conservative. These were put into a table and analysed by the rhetorical devices utilised by the journalists and the topics. We have provided this table in the appendix section (*Appendix 1*). Inspiration for our article analysis was received from Purcell et al. (2014) and was therefore structured into two parts: the thematic and conceptual analysis. In the first part, we focused on recognizing explicit themes within the articles, while we focused on examining more subtle and implicit messages in the second part. (Purcell et al., 2014, p. 1143).

### Questionnaire Analysis

In order to answer our third research question, we decided to formulate a questionnaire. We asked for some personal details so that our analysis could be distributed by general characteristics as well as going into detailed research of people's opinions on multilingualism. The questionnaire consisting of 10 questions was created on the 'Survey Monkey' platform and was then shared on social media portals, such as Facebook, Snapchat and Messenger. In total we received 126 responses, but due to the restrictions on the platform of additional payment plan, we were only able to access 100 responses and all analysis was done manually.

The analysis included the age range, basic attitudes towards multilingualism and the contribution of migrants to the British community, the representation of readers' opinions in the media, the range of languages as L2 and the range of languages of non-native speakers as L1. This analysis helped us build evidence for our claims and possible answers to our research questions. The questionnaire itself can be found in the appendix section (*Appendix 2*).

Upon reflection, it became apparent that several additional questions to the questionnaire would have been beneficial in terms of answering our research questions. We believe that asking the participants to specify their L1 and L2 as well as their voting intention regarding the 2016 referendum, alongside our existing questionnaire would have allowed us to complete a more comprehensive analysis, especially regarding the influence of the media on participants' attitudes towards multilingualism.

One issue with the method of distribution of the questionnaire is the potential occurrence of the phenomenon known as an 'echo chamber', where users associate with other users that share similar ideologies which consequently creates an environment that reinforces their existing beliefs (Grimes, 2017). Because the questionnaire was shared on personal social media, this poses the risk of creating confirmation bias. Hence, due to misrepresentation in our audience or inaccuracies in responses, there may be statistical miscalculation and bias in the data collection. Promotion of the questionnaire on social media may have led to specific groups of people to produce very similar results. Hence, the questionnaire may not be representative of society as a whole, but mostly a social media echo chamber.

### **3 Study of Media content**

#### **Findings**

As mentioned before, we divided our analysis into the two main branches of the media. The findings will be presented in three parts: the representation of multilingualism by the liberal and the conservative media; and the way they are affected by the Brexit process. In general, the liberal media supports the concept of multilingualism as all of the collected liberal articles show positive attitudes towards it. It is believed that multilingualism brings diversity into the UK as well as it has beneficial factors for the human psyche ("Just speaking English", 2017; cf. *Appendix 1*). Many also claimed that multilingualism brings new perspective and ideas into the life in general, as well as the working atmosphere. This, according to the journalists, improves the economic aspect of the British society ("Just speaking English", 2017; cf. *Appendix 1*). Most of these claims were supported by citations of professionals from prestigious institutions to increase the credibility of their comments, as can be seen in *Appendix 1*.

Contrarily, conservative articles have negatively connotated expressions such as "killing off" (Knapton, 2016; cf. *Appendix 1*) and "daily nightmare" (Pemberton, 2016; cf. *Appendix 1*), which shows their disdain towards multilingualism. The example of such can be found in *Appendix 1*. The journalists also put a lot of emphasis on the importance of the English language to further perpetuate a uniform nationalist identity through societal monolingualism. We also observed that in the last 5 years the conservative media play an

active role in creating negative attitudes towards migrants, migrant languages and perceive a problem of migration in general (Pemberton, 2016; cf. *Appendix 1*).

Regarding the ongoing Brexit process, liberal media argues that Brexit would act as a changing point and that multilingualism would be needed even more due to diplomatic and economic aspects. The journalists used positively connotated words such as “enrich” and “advantages” to describe multilingualism and its benefits (Cannadine, 2019; cf. *Appendix 1*). However, conservative media sees little importance for multilingualism. When talking about language acquisition, they use a rhetoric of force, expressing that students and schools would be “ordered” and “expected” to learn new languages (Dathan, 2019; cf. *Appendix 1*). As this analysis shows, the coverage of multilingualism by liberal and conservative media remains consistent throughout the process of Brexit.

### **Discussion**

After analysing the newspaper articles thoroughly, it is now possible for us to, at least to some extent, answer all of our research questions. In regard to our first research question, we found that the way in which conservative and liberal media cover multilingualism does indeed differ. To sum up, we can say that conservative media presents multilingualism as a danger to the in-group, in this case the English people, as well as to the country itself. When describing multilingualism, conservative journalists show the tendency to use negatively connotated words. Liberal media, however, sees potential in multilingualism. It is being described as “mind-opening” and is said to “benefit[...]” the country in many ways (“Just speaking English”, 2017). In contrast to conservative journalists, liberals use affirmative language when discussing multilingualism.

The findings, with respect to the conservative press, barely came as a surprise, as it had been analysed by scholars before who came to the same conclusions. Wright and Brookes (2019) conducted a high-quantity analysis of right-leaning newspaper articles and found that a generalisation of non-native English speakers was taking place by portraying them as a burden and danger on England (p.60). “Linguistic xenophobia” (p.79) is a term they coined in order to describe this phenomenon. Almost a decade before that, Shuck (2006) already described how big parts of the media, without specifically mentioning the topic of race, succeed at creating a hierarchical social order simply by talking about language (p.273). This comes in handy for conservative media, whose ideology is based on the creation of an in- and an out-group, with the latter being displayed as a danger.

There had been no research done on the coverage of multilingualism by liberal (or left-leaning media). Hence, we had found a niche and regarded it to be important to analyse this in order to get a full picture of how ideology and the news coverage of multilingualism correlate. Despite the fact that we had no further academic reading we could use as inspiration, we still had an expectation of what the results are going to represent. Unlike conservative policies, liberal policies do not rely as much on the notion of “one language,

one nation” (Piller, 2001, p.261). Therefore, when regarding the connection between language and immigration, it makes sense that liberal media is marked by a positive representation of multilingualism. This can be explained by the fact that liberal policies are intrinsically more immigration-friendly than conservative ones.

What we found in the context of our second research question further reinforces the ideological cleavage between conservative and liberal media. However, we can sum up that the Brexit process did not influence either of the views. While conservative media still represented multilingualism in a negative light, liberal media simply marked the importance of multilingualism even more in case of the Brexit.

#### **4 Study of readers’ attitudes**

##### **Findings**

The purpose of this questionnaire was to examine the attitudes of the participants towards multilingualism and the extent to which the press influences them. In order to investigate this, one of our questions has a direct link to this issue: “Do you think that multilingualism has a positive effect on the British community?” (*Appendix 5*), where 89.8% answered “yes” and 10.2% answered “no”, with 2 missing responses out of a 100. While most people said that multilingualism has a positive effect, they still had their conditions (a total of 75 responses in the text box specifying their condition, out of a 100). With further analysis, we divided these conditions into 4 categories: positive (56), negative (3), neutral (5) and not applicable (11). The reason why there are so many “not applicable” responses is because some participants had difficulties giving a relevant explanation to their chosen answer and wanted to give their opinion on languages instead. The total number of positive responses proves that our audience was open-minded towards multilingualism, mentioning that it has cultural, learning and economic benefits. As well as these, diversity was one of the key topics in the explanation box.

Since most participants read online articles (94.9%, *Appendix 6*), it explains the high number of different online media resources that they consume. We then went onto the question of the political orientation of the media that they consume (*Appendix 7*), which has shown to be 53% “liberal”, 17% “conservative”, 22% “neither” and 18% “other”. Taking the explanation box in consideration, 8% out of 18% that said “other”, said that they support and consume both conservative and liberal media.

We decided to put focus to the data given in the questionnaire that was specific to the attitudes towards multilingualism from our audience and the media outlets that were consumed in order to satisfy our third research question. We noticed from the questionnaire in questions 9 (*Appendix 7*) and 6 (*Appendix 5*) that the percentage of those who identified with liberal oriented media and simultaneously had a positive perspective of multilingualism

was 96.15% (50 responses) (*Appendix 9*). 3.85% (2 responses) of liberal individuals did not believe that multilingualism represents a benefit to the British community. Liberal inclined individuals en masse consumed online articles which amounted to 96.23% (51 individuals) (*Appendix 10*). 35.85% consumed newspapers (19 individuals), and magazines 20.75% (11 individuals). The specific media outlets that our audience consumed can be viewed in *Appendix 3* and *Appendix 4*. Those individuals who affiliated with conservative media outlets positively responded to multilingualism at a percentage of 62.5% (10 responses) while negative responses from conservative oriented individuals were 37.5% (6 responses), (*Appendix 12*). The conservative aligned responses consumed online articles at 100% (17 individuals), newspapers at 52.94% (9 individuals), and magazines at 11.76% (2 individuals), (*Appendix 13*).

## **Discussion**

With further analysis of the readers' attitudes, it is clear that their opinions match their media choice. Most people's choice of the media that they consume matched their personal opinions on multilingualism. This is proven by questions 6 (*Appendix 5*) and 9 (*Appendix 7*) where we see similarities in opinion, for example where one of the participants chose that they read The Guardian (liberal media) and then had a rather positive attitude towards multilingualism, immigrants and languages themselves. Similarly, the number of people that have chosen The Telegraph or The Daily Mail (conservative media) had a restricted attitude or strictly negative opinion towards the same.

As well as this, there are some key observations which lead us to the conclusion that there is a potential answer to our second research question: "How does Brexit influence each of these views?". In question 10 (*Appendix 8*), during our research, we came across a few mentions of Brexit in the provided explanation boxes. As well as the liberal media sees the benefits of multilingualism in the UK, so do the people that consume it (18.66%).

Finally, the findings of our questionnaire can then be linked to our primary research question: "How do conservative and liberal media differ in views on multilingualism?" We see the potential answer to this question from our collected data in both our study of media content and our questionnaire as there is a clear pattern shown from the analysis of the questionnaire as mentioned above. Similarly, there is a noticeable pattern in the study of media content as mentioned in the discussion section (3.2.).

## **5 Conclusion**

As mentioned previously, based on our findings we see a potential for the possible answer to our research questions. The findings from the media content study suggest that there is a clear pattern of associative attitudes towards multilingualism that the media represents. This is visualised in the table in *Appendix 1*. This means that there is a clear media bias and



differences in how liberal and conservative media report on multilingualism, but with the lack of previous research, we wanted to support our claims with a personalised questionnaire.

Comparably, the results from our questionnaire suggest that there is also a pattern in respondents' opinions with the correspondent media attitudes towards multilingualism. This proves that our findings on media bias and that their presentation of multilingualism have a potential impact on their readers' opinions; i.e. liberal media's readers' are more likely to have a positive opinion on multilingualism whereas the conservative media's readers' are more likely to have a negative or a conditional opinion on multilingualism; which is how we can answer our third question.

Despite our findings in regard to Brexit that no differences can be detected compared to times prior to 2015, where the Brexit discussion had its start, we are not sure we can fully assess this as the process is still ongoing. This would be a good and interesting question for further analysis in the future.

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## 7 Appendix

**Appendix 1.** The table represents our sampled media content that which we analysed for themes and rhetoric devices, as well as their political alignment. (sorted alphabetically by the title)

<b>Title</b>	<b>Political ideology</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Main themes</b>	<b>Main rhetorical devices</b>
“All kids will have to study a foreign language GCSE in a bid to boost Britain’s bilingual skills post-Brexit”	conservative	The Sun	-quoting Nick Gibb (School Minister) on benefits of learning another language after Brexit	-rhetoric of force connected to learning another language (“will have to study”, “will be expected”, “will be ordered”)
“Brexit Britain cannot afford to be laissez-faire about its language crisis”	liberal	Guardian	-Brexit as changing point -psychological, economic, political benefits of multilingualism before that	-showing numbers/statistics -many positively connotated words (“advantages”, “essential”, “vital”, “benefits”, “improves”, “enrich”, “enhance”)
“Forcing Muslim women to speak English isn’t cruel - it could save their lives”	conservative	Daily Mail	-“speaking out” for Muslim women who are being oppressed by husbands -native/ immigrant language apparently used as oppression -supports deportation of people that can’t speak English (paradox? How is that saving them?)	-oppressive, patriarchal Muslim men preventing wives from using English -“daily nightmare” -“wasting time”

“How can we be cohesive if we can’t converse?”	conservative	Daily Telegraph	-English portrayed as good and orderly language or culture - overdramatization of the 2011 census	-“same tired multicultural nonsense” -multilingualism hinders “building [of] one nation”
“Just speaking English won’t get us very far in the world”	liberal	The Guardian	-debating an opinion piece by Simon Jenkins claiming that modern language classes in schools are irrelevant	-Listing the benefits of language across several different domains, stressing the importance of multilingualism -Cites credible institutions -All the authors are varying academics from prestigious institutions
“Mind your language”	conservative	The Sun	-Brits should learn to speak immigrants’ languages to help them integrate into communities; as well as they should learn English→ two-way effort in understanding	-using academics for examples (Cambridge University professor) -the author does not comment on the professor’s statements
“Now you’re talking: how language skills can boost your career - live chat”	liberal	The Guardian	-languages give you an advantage in career and employment	-positive view on multilingualism -mentions researchers but doesn’t provide the names -examples of real people and jobs
“Preserve rare languages to spread the benefits of	liberal	The Guardian		-citing academics from prestigious institutions to increase credibility

multilingualism, says expert”				-Health benefits -direct quotation from sources
“The importance of English”	conservative	The Telegraph	-‘multilingualism is silly!’ -immigrants should speak English -English= ‘a passport to freedom and success’	-providing definitions without any reference -negative view on multilingualism
“Why being bilingual works wonders for the brain”	liberal	The Guardian	-The benefits of being bilingual/multilingual	-notes language as being beneficial across different domains. -citing academics from prestigious institutions to increase credibility -listing studies to support claims -addresses the opposing argument and critiques
“Why language skills are great for business”	liberal	The Guardian	-The benefits of multilingualism in business	-use of personal anecdotes and direct quotation to support claims -citing studies prestigious institutions to increase credibility
“You heard it, immigration is killing off the Queen’s English”	conservative	Daily Telegraph	-influence of migrant languages is changing English	-negatively connotated words (“killing off”, “‘th’ sound will vanish”)

**Appendix 2.**

Questionnaire

1.What do you identify as?

Male / Female / non-binary / other

2.How old are you?

choice ranging from 18-90

3.Are you fluent in more than one language?

Yes / No

4.Are you a native English speaker?

Yes / No

5.*Multilingualism is the presence of two or more languages in the same place and at the same time.*

Do you understand the concept of Multilingualism?

Yes / No

Explain:

6. Do you think that Multilingualism has a positive effect on the British community?

Yes / No / Maybe

Explain:

7. Do you consider immigrants, that aren't fluent in English, to be part of the British community?

Yes / No / Maybe

Explain:

8. Which of these media outlets do you consume?

Newspapers / Magazines / Online articles

Please specify:

9. *Liberalism is an ideology that supports the freedom of an individual.*  
*Conservatism is an ideology that supports the upholding of traditional values and ideas.*  
 Which one of these types of media do you support?  
 Liberal/Conservative/Other/None

Explain:

**Appendix 3.**

Question 8 liberal responses: The Guardian, BBC, The Telegraph, Sky News, The Times, The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Economist, The Independent, Daily Mirror, New York Times, Le Monde, Carmarthen Journal

**Appendix 4.**

Question 8 conservative responses: Daily Mail, BBC, Sky News, Wales Online, The Telegraph, The Times, The Guardian

**Appendix 5.**

Question 6 results from questionnaire

6. Do you think that multilingualism has a positive effect on the British community?



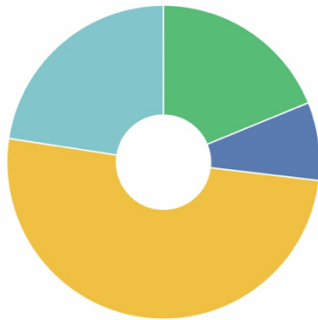
Answered: 98 Skipped: 2

Yes	89.8%	88
No	10.2%	10
Please explain		75

**Appendix 6.**

Question 8 results from questionnaire

8. Which of these media outlets do you consume?



Answered: 99 Skipped: 1

Newspapers	35.35%	35
Magazines	15.15%	15
Online articles	94.95%	94
Please specify further, including names of specific outlets		42

**Appendix 7.**

Question 9 results from questionnaire

9. "Liberalism is an ideology that supports the freedom of an individual. Conservatism is an ideology that supports the upholding of traditional values and ideas."

What type of media do you personally follow?



Answered: 100 Skipped: 0

Liberal	53%	53
Conservative	17%	17
None	22%	22
Other (please specify)	18%	18



## Appendix 8.

### Question 10 results from questionnaire

10. Do you think that your attitudes on language are being represented or published in the British press?



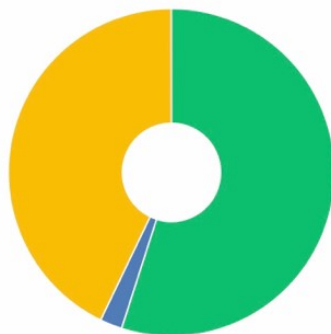
Answered: 98 Skipped: 2

Yes	12.24%	12
No	55.1%	54
Maybe	32.65%	32
Please explain		47

## Appendix 9.

### Liberal individuals' responses to questionnaire question 6

6. Do you think that multilingualism has a positive effect on the British community?



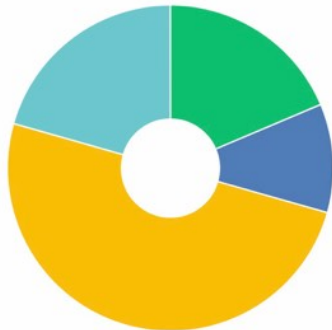
Answered: 52 Skipped: 1

Yes	96.15%	50
No	3.85%	2
Please explain		39

**Appendix 10.**

Liberal individuals' responses to questionnaire question 8

8. Which of these media outlets do you consume?



Answered: 53 Skipped: 0

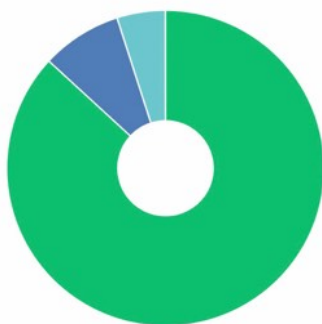
Newspapers	35.85%	19
Magazines	20.75%	11
Online articles	96.23%	51
Please specify further, including names of specific outlets		21

**Appendix 11.**

Liberal individuals' responses to questionnaire question 9.

9. "Liberalism is an ideology that supports the freedom of an individual. Conservatism is an ideology that supports the upholding of traditional values and ideas."

What type of media do you personally follow?



Answered: 53 Skipped: 0

Liberal	100%	53
Conservative	9.43%	5
None	0%	0
Other (please specify)	5.66%	3

### Appendix 12.

#### Conservative individuals' responses to questionnaire question 6

6. Do you think that multilingualism has a positive effect on the British community?



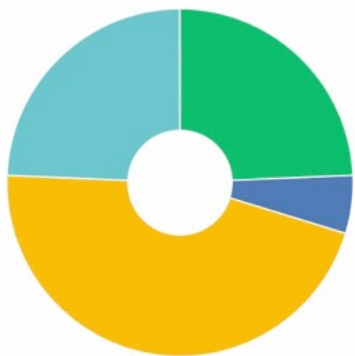
Answered: 16 Skipped: 1

Yes	62.5%	10
No	37.5%	6
Please explain		15

### Appendix 13.

#### Conservative individuals' responses to questionnaire question 8

8. Which of these media outlets do you consume?



Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

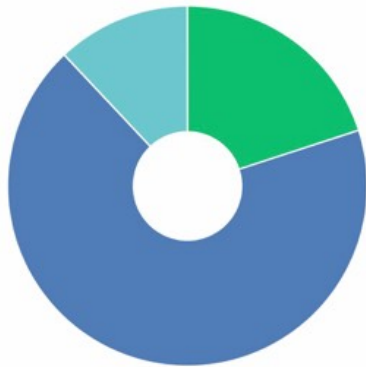
Newspapers	52.94%	9
Magazines	11.76%	2
Online articles	100%	17
Please specify further, including names of specific outlets		9

**Appendix 14.**

Conservative individuals' responses to questionnaire question 9

9. "Liberalism is an ideology that supports the freedom of an individual.  
Conservatism is an ideology that supports the upholding of traditional values and ideas."

What type of media do you personally follow?



Answered: 17 Skipped: 0

Liberal	29.41%	5
Conservative	100%	17
None	0%	0
Other (please specify)	17.65%	3

**Appendix 15.**

A table shows age group data from questionnaire

age	number of participants
18-25	51
26-35	9
36-55	28
56-78	12

**Appendix 16.**

The table presents native English participants from the questionnaire, and non-native English participants

Native English speakers	92
Foreign/Non-native English speakers	8

**Appendix 17.**

Table shows the number of positive opinions by audience regarding question 6 of the questionnaire

positive opinion	number of participants
OPPORTUNITIES	2
DIVERSITY	14
MULTICULTURAL	2
LEARNING BENEFITS	10
WORK/SOCIAL BENEFITS	5
CULTURAL BENEFITS	20
INCLUSIVITY	3

Total: 75