The discursive construction of the people in European political discourse: Semantics and pragmatics of a contested concept in German, French, and British parliamentary debates

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HAL Id: halshs-02376399
https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02376399v2

Submitted on 16 Sep 2023

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Who are the people? As a semantically underspecified noun, the lexeme "people" and related terms such as "citizen(s)" or "constituent(s)" lead to various representations and are filled with competing meanings. By undertaking a cross-linguistic analysis of the semantic value of nouns denoting human referents in France, Germany, and the United Kingdom, this paper investigates how the "people" (*people* in English, *Volk* in German, *peuple* in French) and related linguistic expressions (notably *Mensch, Bürger, citoyen*) are discursively staged in national parliamentary debates on Europe.

The people represent the entity Members of Parliament (MPs) speak *to, about,* and *on behalf of*. In political sciences, mentioning the people immediately raises concerns about a populist message or stance. To which extent, then, does the reference to "the people" or "a people" pertain to a populist stance?

Based on an annotated corpus of forty-four national parliamentary debates between 1998 and 2015, this paper uses mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to assess how the "people" are referred to across the political spectrum in the British House of Commons, the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée nationale. By taking into account a large amount of speakers across different times and cultures, the analysis shows that the reference to "the people" – partly in opposition to "a people" – is a basic component of political discourse, thus indicating that the mere mention of the "people" cannot be regarded as a feature of populist rhetoric.

Keywords: people, citizen, constituent, populism, political discourse, parliament, comparison, Germany, France, United Kingdom

Introduction: Referring to the "people": A cross-linguistic perspective

Who are the people? In the political realm specifically, the reference to the people leads to various representations and is filled with competing meanings. By undertaking a cross-linguistic analysis of the semantic value of nouns denoting human referents in three European countries (France, Germany, and the United Kingdom), this paper investigates how the "people" (*people* in English, *Volk* in German, *peuple* in French) and related linguistic expressions (notably *Mensch, Bürger, citoyen*) are discursively staged in national parliamentary debates on Europe.

The people represent the entity Members of Parliament (MPs) speak *to, about,* and *on behalf of*. In political sciences, mentioning the people immediately raises concerns about a populist message or stance. To what extent, then, does the reference to "the people" or "a people" pertain to a populist stance? To put it briefly, populism can be defined as an appeal to the people, seeking to establish and maintain an immediate (i.e. without mediation) relationship between politicians and citizens. Is that to say that the relationship between a populist stance and the mention of the people is univocal? Can the frequency and the distribution of the noun "people" be regarded as a sign of populism? As Hubé and Truan (2016: 187) state: "But this question is more intricate than it seems, because it actually casts doubt on representative democracy." Should the common appeal to the people not be viewed as a sign of democracy? Is not the attempt to include a vast majority of the population precisely the essence of democracy?

The paper is structured as follows. I begin by presenting the link between populism and the people from a theoretical point of view. After discussing the semantic properties of the "people", I proceed with a contrastive corpus-based analysis of the noun "people" revolving around the lexemes *people* in English, *Volk* in German, and *peuple* in French.[1] I present two specificities concerning the use of *Volk* and *peuple* in German and French contemporary politics, respectively. In light of the polysemy of English *people* compared to German *Volk* and French *peuple*, other nouns such as *gens* in French or *Menschen* and *Leute* in German are also taken into account, although they do not build the core of the present chapter. The necessity to include more lexemes in French and German pertains to the broader semantic scope of English *people* compared to its French and German counterparts. As will be accounted for in this paper, it is necessary to add the

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1. In an effort to smooth the transitions between three different languages and parliamentary cultures, I will follow this rule: when referring to the forms in their general discursive representation (which might be encoded differently in the three languages considered, English, German, and French), inverted commas will be used, e.g. "people". When referring to *people* as an English lexeme, italics will be used.

lexemes *Leute* or *Menschen* in German and *gens* in French to adequately refer to the semantic scope of English *people.*[2]

On the assumed relationship between people and populism

Populism: The impossible definition?

Despite the difficulty of providing a rigorous definition (Hubé and Truan 2016),[3] populism relies on at least one feature: the "appeal to the people without any mediation" (Touraine et al. 1997: 227).[4] The apparent neutrality of this definition obscures the fact that the term often has negative connotations (Ihl, Chêne and Vial 2003: 11; Taguieff 2002: 21, 25). In this sense, the concept of populism plays a normative role.

By asking whether there is only one populism or whether it comes in many forms, Dezé (2004: 179) takes into account the fact that populism is a phenomenon with various expressions across time and space. Is there a populist core enabling a cross-linguistic perspective? Laclau (1977: 166) emphasises "the continued potential of populism across the political spectrum" and "sees no necessary correspondence between a populist mindset and any given political ideology, provided a project can convincingly be articulated with 'popular tradition'" (Higgins 2013: 59). Taguieff (2002: 84) goes a step further, stating that populism can adapt to any kind of ideology, suggesting a definition of populism in terms of adaptability (see also Higgins 2013: 58).

Applied to the parliamentary debates under investigation (that will be presented later), this definition enables us to analyse the corpus without any prior hypothesis on which party or parliamentary group is "populist" or "more populist" than another. Contrary to Chapters 7 and 11 (this volume), this contribution does not take into account political movements often regarded as populist such as Pegida or Alternative für Deutschland since they were not represented in Parliament in the period covered by the corpus (1998–2015). The UKIP is represented by only

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2. This list could also be extended to encompass the noun "population" (*Bevölkerung* in German, as suggested in Chapter 11 of this volume, and Retterath 2016, see below). Given the scope of the present paper, it nevertheless appears reasonable to focus on a limited set of lexemes cross-linguistically.

3. This contribution is not a theoretical attempt to (re)define the concept of populism, but a corpus-based linguistic analysis relying on criteria commonly mentioned by scholars in political science. For a theoretical approach, see Chapter 1 of this volume.

4. Original quote: "l'appel à un peuple dépouillé de toutes ses médiations".

one speaker at the British House of Commons, Bob Spink, who has been elected as a member of the UKIP[5] and utters only one question during the debate of 29 March 2010. Even if Spink's utterance contains two occurrences of *people* ("Did the Prime Minister discuss referendums at the summit so that *British people* could vote on the Lisbon treaty, which all three main parties promised them they would be able to do? Or does he think that *the British people* have simply got it wrong?"), highlighting from me, a single utterance cannot be regarded as representative of a whole political movement (for a detailed contribution on the UKIP, see Chapter 9 of this volume).

Minimum requirements to be a populist

A common thread runs through the work of several scholars, that of the reference to the people in contrast to the (corrupted) elite: "populism is the appeal of a leader to a people against politicians and intellectuals who betray them"[6] (Touraine et al. 1997: 239). Mediation is judged as useless, unnecessary, limiting and/or harmful (Taguieff 2002: 84). Populist stances "unify in their desire for ways to express alignment with the ordinary people, or of granting the enunciator warrant to speak on the people's behalf" (Higgins 2013: 58).

But the dilemma of populism appears when the speaker stands in parliament: as representatives, Members of Parliament embody the very mediation deemed undesirable. Parliamentary debates necessarily imply elected politicians currently in a position of power, which means that there is inevitably a gap between speakers (MPs) and listeners ("the people"). MPs may enunciate their proximity to the citizens, but they face a paradoxical situation, since they precisely belong to the representative system that prevents people from voicing their opinions directly.

Populists in the parliament: An oxymoron?

The corpus of parliamentary debates in the present study offers an interesting perspective from the point of view of elected speakers only. Based on an annotated[7] corpus of forty-four national parliamentary debates on Europe between 1998 and

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5. Spink is considered to be from the UKIP only in 2008, see his official affiliations on the website of the House of Commons: https://www.parliament.uk/biographies/Commons/member/1214 (accessed on 12.11.2018).

6. Original quote: "Le populisme est l'appel d'un leader à un peuple contre les politiques et les intellectuels qui le trahissent".

7. The corpus is encoded according to the guidelines of the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) for the following variables: speaker, sex, party, party type, opposition/majority, constituency. On a text level, micro segments are encoded as well (for instance, reported speech).

2015,[8] this paper uses mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative) to assess how "the people" are referred to across the political spectrum in the British House of Commons, the German Bundestag and the French Assemblée nationale.

By taking into account a large number of speakers (225 MPs in the German corpus, 302 in the British corpus and 159 in the French corpus), the analysis shows that the reference to the "people" is a basic component of political discourse. This finding suggests that despite national specificities, the need to discursively represent the "appeal to the people" by mentioning "the people" cannot be linked with any parliamentary group. In other words, the mere use of the noun "people" or related terms is not a sufficient criterion to gauge whether a speech or a speaker is populist (also see De Cleen for a theoretical contribution in this regard, this volume). Before exploring in greater detail how the noun "people" is distributed amongst the MPs and how it is used, minimal features of the idea of "the people" regardless of party and partisanship are examined.

Semantic properties of the "people"

Shared semantic properties in English, German, and French

The lexeme "people" refers to a group including many individuals, more specifically humans [+ Animate, + Human], as opposed to animals and other creatures. When building a noun phrase or being the head of a noun phrase, the noun "people" usually activates a generic reference as defined by Lyons (1999: 179): generic noun phrases "are used to express generalizations about a class as a whole".[9] This is specifically the case when used as a bare plural (*people, Menschen, Leute*), but also in some definite plural NPs (*the British people, les gens, die Menschen, die Leute*).

Morphologically, *Volk* and *peuple* trigger singular agreement. They are thus collective nouns, which have been defined as a noun in the singular denoting an entity consisting of a grouping of elements belonging to the same category (Lecolle

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8. The three corpora are described and freely available in open access under a CC BY-SA 4.0 license on the ORTOLANG platform:

    https://hdl.handle.net/11403/fr-parl for the French corpus (Truan 2016a);
    https://hdl.handle.net/11403/de-parl for the German corpus (Truan 2016b);
    https://hdl.handle.net/11403/uk-parl for the British corpus (Truan 2016c).

9. Exclusionary uses of "people" whereby "people" refers solely to a specific category of the population or to a nationality are also quantitatively well represented. In these cases, it could be argued that the generic reference does not fully hold true. Yet, I consider that this relates more to the adjective that redefines and narrows the scope of reference of "people" than to the lexeme "people" as such.

2007). Grouping heterogeneous humans by neutralising the category of gender [±MASCULINE/FEMININE] (Dubois and Dubois Charlier 1996: 131) is a choice lexically, but also argumentatively motivated. By contrast, nouns such as *Bürger* in German and *citoyen* in French ("citizen") can display both masculine and feminine forms. In German political discourse specifically, it has become usual – or politically correct – to use both forms: among 261 occurrences of *Bürger* as a lemma in the corpus, 152 are feminine. This means that in 58% of the cases, the NP becomes *die Bürgerinnen und Bürger*, almost systematically in this word order (plural feminine form followed by the plural masculine form).

Cognitively speaking, the singular form of *Volk* and *peuple* in German and French, respectively – and of *public* in English, which cannot be addressed in detail here due to space constraints – contributes to a conceptual process of meaning construction resulting in a unique and simplified categorisation of the multiple entities included in the reference to human referents.

According to the basic definitions of the Oxford English Dictionary, the Duden, and Le Grand Robert de la langue française, some semantic features remain unchanged (invariants) in the three languages (also see Chapter 11 of this volume, for a comparison of the Duden and the DWDS for German *Volk*). First, the lexemes *people, Volk* and *peuple* refer to a group [+ GROUP], possibly with a sense of belonging [+ UNITY]. The second semantic characteristic relates to nationality [+ NATION], which seems to be an extension of the first feature in the socio-political field: it is assumed that living in the same country might create a feeling of community.[10] Finally, a third possible shared semantic feature relies on the opposition between the people and the elite which has fuelled many studies on populism.

Whom do the lexemes people, Volk, and peuple refer to?

The various layers of representation encapsulated in the lexemes *people*, *Volk*, and *peuple* is consistent with the German semantic tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* (i.e. conceptual history). In line with Kämper (2005: 102), I propose to consider the noun "people" as a concept or *Begriff* (i.e. as a lexical unity which exhibits the properties of relevance and complexity). By the term "relevance", Kämper understands the social meaning of a concept for political and social situations;

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10. This is particularly true for English, where nationality is usually expressed by means of a nationality adjective + *people* (*the British people*), whereas French and German have nationality nouns where the reference to "people" disappears (*les Français·e·s, die Deutschen*). It is nevertheless also possible to refer to ethnic groups without the reference to "people" in English as well (*the French, the Germans, the Spaniards*).

by "complexity", she refers to the fact that a concept brings together two aspects: it puts together various components into one lexeme, but also shows a relative openness in meaning.

The semantic instability of the lexemes *people*, *Volk*, and *people* – and, to a certain extent, of related terms such as *citizen(s), Bürger*innen, citoyen·ne·s*, etc. – in political discourse is subject to a wide range of interpretations concerning the identification of their potential referents. But this is not to say that the broad scope of reference of these linguistic expressions denoting humans cannot be restricted in context – in fact, I will discuss several examples that show the contrary.

Against this background, I suggest the notion of "fluidity of reference" to account for these various layers of meaning. The notion of "fluidity of reference" renders the idea of a continuum of possible interpretations in cases where the identification of the potential referents of the lexemes *people*, *Volk*, and *peuple* remains open to multiple, sometimes even contradictory meanings.

Frequency and distribution of *people*, *Volk*, and *peuple* in the three corpora

Based on a contrastive corpus of parliamentary debates on Europe held in different national contexts, i.e. at the British House of Commons, at the German Bundestag and at the French Assemblée nationale between 1998 and 2015, Table 1 shows the frequency and distribution of the lemmas *people, Volk* and *peuple*[11] in the three corpora in comparison with reference corpora for the given languages.[12] By normalising the results per 10,000 tokens, it becomes possible to see whether a linguistic expression is more or less used in parliamentary debates than in

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11. A lemma is "[t]he canonical form of a word" (Baker et al. 2006: 104). Thus, it includes the plural form *Völker* in the nominative, dative, and genitive, the dative plural form *Völkern,* the genitive singular *Volkes*. The same holds true for French *peuple*.

12. In his book chapter "Well-known and influential corpora", Xiao (2008) presents the British National Corpus "which is designed to represent as wide a range of modern British English as possible" (2008: 384). BNC Baby – which I use for this study because it enables me to make the queries in the software TXM – was "originally developed as a manageable sub-corpus from the BNC" (2008: 385) balanced according to the same rules. For German, the DWDS corpus, which is a product of the DWDS (Digital Dictionary of the 20th Century German Language) project, is "roughly comparable to the British National Corpus, covering the whole 20th century (1900–2000)" (2008: 391). Correspondingly, the Frantext database is the equivalent for French, even though the project is less advanced than its British and German counterparts and relies primarily on literary works and essays (90%).

"standard" discourse.[13] The requests based on the lemmas were performed with the software TXM.[14]

Table 1. Frequency of the lemmas *people, Volk*, and *peuple* in the British, German, and French parliamentary corpora (in tokens)

	UK-PARL	BNC Baby	DE-PARL	DWDS[*]	FR-PARL	Frantext[**]
Raw frequency	440	4181	73	44,389	170	1093
Corpus size	188,913	4,624,620	417,095	1,521,837,787[*]	137,620	3,728,144
Normalized frequency (per 10,000 tokens)	23.3	9	1.7	0.3	12.3	2.9

* One of the main difficulties regarding the DWDS is its constant evolution: depending on the day of the query, the number of "searchable tokens" (*recherchierbare Tokens*) differs. The numbers indicated are based on the date on which I performed the query (16.03.2017).

** The queries were conducted on "Frantext démonstration", which is based on literary texts only. The numbers presented here are thus merely indicative since they are not based on an adequate, sufficiently well-balanced corpus for comparison.

Table 1 yields extremely varied results: whereas *people* and *peuple* are both relatively common, the results show a significant underuse of the lexeme *Volk* in contemporary German political discourse. The number of occurrences of *people* in parliamentary debates markedly outranks those of *peuple* in French and *Volk* in German: English *people* is almost twice as frequent as French *peuple*, which already occurs seven times more often than German *Volk*. Admittedly, this gap can be explained by historical reasons for German *Volk*,[15] but not only. The German lexeme *Mensch* (in the plural in 427 instances out of 435) – not represented in Table 1 – occurs 10 times per 10,000 tokens, which brings it closer to French *people* (12.3 times per 10,000 tokens). In other words, while English *people* is widely used, French *peuple* and German *Mensch(en)* occur half as often. Finally, the lexeme *Volk* is noticeably underused.

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13. Even though I am fully aware of the problems raised by the notion of "reference corpus" or "standard discourse", especially given recurrent discussions balance and on representativeness of reference corpora, I find these tools useful for purposes of comparison (see Teubert and Cermáková 2004: 118).

14. The TXM Desktop Software, freely accessible at http://textometrie.ens-lyon.fr/ (accessed on 16.03.2017), is an open-source platform for text statistical analysis (Heiden 2010).

15. On the particular status of the German lexeme *Volk* in a historical perspective, see Hoffmann (1991) and Koselleck (1992).

National specificities: German *Volk* and French *peuple*

Based on these numbers, I will provide elements of explanation for the specific uses of the lexemes *Volk* in German and *peuple* in French. In a second step, I will show that "the people" are mentioned in order to stage the people's assumed expectations, thus stressing the common ground uniting the reference to "the people" across languages in political discourse.

Defending the use of the noun Volk *in German contemporary political discourse: A strong stance*

Let us first have a closer look at the German specificity. As the following examples will show, the controversial use of *Volk* comes from the prevalence of the seme [+ NATION], which is totally absent from other nouns such as *Mensch* or *Leute* in German and from *gens* in French. The cautious use of *Volk* in German contemporary politics goes along with Retterath's (2016) reflection:

> The word *Volk* is rarely used in contemporary political debates in the Federal Republic of Germany. Instead, in parliamentary talks or in talk shows, politicians speak of "fellow citizens", "the people all over the country", dodge the issue, most of the time with "ungendered" figures of speech such as "the ordinary person" or use (pseudo-) individualised phrases such as "the Swabian housewife", the "nurse" or the "nanny", when the "simple people" are at stake. Another strategy consists in using the word "population", which sounds more (social and) academic, instead of "people".[16] (Retterath 2016: 3)

Interestingly, the cautious use of *Volk* is equally distributed amongst all the political parties at the Bundestag, which indicates the same unease.[17] Nevertheless, one of the rare uses of the concept (in the sense of *Begriff,* see Kämper (2005: 102)

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16. Original quote: "Im gegenwärtigen politischen Sprachgebrauch der Bundesrepublik wird das Wort „Volk" selten verwendet. Stattdessen sprechen Politiker[*innen] in Parlamentsreden oder Talksendungen lieber von „Mitbürgerinnen und Mitbürger", „den Menschen draußen im Land", flüchten sich in – zumeist „ungegenderte"– Sprachbilder wie jenes von dem „kleinen Mann" oder bedienen sich (pseudo-) individualisierter Floskeln wie der von der „schwäbische[n] Hausfrau", der „Krankenschwester" oder der „Kindergärtnerin", wenn es um das „einfache Volk" geht. Eine weitere Strategie besteht darin, statt „Volk" das stärker (sozial-)wissenschaftlich klingende Wort „Bevölkerung" zu gebrauchen."

17. The specificity indicator ("indice de spécificité") is comprised between −0.0097 and 3.28 (for "no affiliation" (*fraktionslos*) with only four occurrences), which is not statistically relevant. The specificity method ("calcul des spécificités") used in the software TXM is briefly presented below and in more detailed manner in Lafon (1980).

above) during a particularly heated debate on EU enlargement, European identity, and borders shows that it is prone to metalinguistic comments and is not taken for granted:

(1)   Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: This is why I would like to remind you of what characterises Europe. Europe is characterised by overcoming divisions
Dr. Friedbert Pflüger (CDU) [opposition]: Exactly!
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: that are related to religious reasons
Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: But there are differences!
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: or divisions that are caused by the shifting of boundaries by the military forces, and finally [by overcoming] divisions because of the tragic mistake of European history, which is that **nationalist [*völkisch*], racist, ethnic criteria could in any way be a natural boundary between people [*Menschen*]**. Overcoming that is the idea of Europe. *Applause from the SPD and BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN and MPs from the FDP* **I'm sensitive when I hear the word "people" [*Volk*]. It relates to "nationalist" [*völkisch*].** *Agitation among MPs from the CDU*
Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: **So "people" relates to "nationalist"? Really? Unbelievable!**
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: Dear Colleague Müller, I see it this way. I know that you don't. I hold what you say as dangerous in Europe. You have to cope with it.   (DE 2003.06.26)
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: Deshalb möchte ich noch einmal daran erinnern, was Europa ausmacht. Europa macht aus, zu überwinden, dass es Trennungen
Dr. Friedbert Pflüger (CDU) [opposition]: Richtig!
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: aufgrund religiöser Gegensätze gibt,
Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: Es gibt aber Unterschiede!
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: dass es Trennungen aufgrund von Grenzverschiebungen durch Militärerfolge gibt, und schließlich, und schließlich, dass es Trennungen durch den tragischsten Irrtum der europäischen Geschichte gibt, nämlich dass **völkische, rassistische, ethnische Kriterien in irgendeiner Weise natürliche Grenzen zwischen Menschen sein könnten**. Dies zu überwinden ist die Idee Europas. *Beifall bei der SPD und dem BÜNDNIS 90/ DIE GRÜNEN sowie bei Abgeordneten der FDP* **Ich bin schon sensibel, wenn ich das Wort Volk höre. Es hat seine Assoziation zu „völkisch".** *Widerspruch bei der CDU/CSU*
Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: **„Volk" zu „völkisch"? Unglaublich!**
Christoph Zöpel (SPD) [majority]: Herr Kollege Müller, ich sehe es so. Dass Sie es anders sehen, weiß ich. Ich halte das, was Sie sagen, im europäischen Sinne in der Tat für gefährlich. Damit müssen Sie leben.   (DE 2003.06.26)

Even though the etymological association between *Volk* and *völkisch* can hardly be contested (see Chapter 11, this volume),[18] the conservative MP Müller considers this view to be "unbelievable", interrupting his colleague even though the strictly regulated turn-taking system of the parliament normally does not allow him to.[19] The perceived incongruity of this remark triggers a direct reaction of Zöpel through a direct form of address ("Dear Colleague Müller"), even though the majority of interruptions at the Bundestag ordinarily remain unnoticed or uncommented.[20] Even after this interruption, the Conservative MPs Pflüger in (2) and Müller in (3) still feel the need to respond to Zöpel through a short intervention (*Kurzintervention*). Silberhorn comments on this terminological matter at the beginning of his speech in (4):

(2)   Dr. Friedbert Pflüger (CDU) [opposition]: Dear Colleague Zöpel, a short
      remark first: **If you can't go ahead with the expression "German people"**
      [*Volk*] **without thinking right away about "nationalist" [*völkisch*], then**
      it's your problem. We don't share this view. *Applause from the CDU/CSU*
      There is a German people and we commit to it. This has nothing to do with
      nationalist traditions. There is a big difference.   (DE 2003.06.26)
      Dr. Friedbert Pflüger (CDU) [opposition]: Herr Kollege Zöpel, zuerst
      eine kurze Vorbemerkung: **Wenn Sie mit dem Ausdruck „deutsches Volk**
      "nichts anfangen können und dabei sofort an „völkisch "denken, dann
      ist das Ihr Problem. Wir teilen diese Sichtweise nicht. *Beifall bei der CDU/*
      CSU **Es gibt ein deutsches Volk und zu ihm bekennen wir uns. Das hat mit**
      völkischen Traditionen nichts zu tun. Da gibt es einen großen Unterschied.
                                                                        (DE 2003.06.26)

(3)   Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: Madam President! Ladies and
      Gentlemen! Colleague Pflüger has presented his perspective regarding
      Turkey. […] Colleague Zöpel, it also shows that those who are against
      Turkey's accession to the EU cannot be totally wrong, if you, Colleague

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18. See the DWDS (http://www.dwds.de/wb/Volk#et-1, accessed on 21.10.2016), which shows that the adjective *völkisch* appeared in the 16th century as a derivation from *Volk* (Old High German *folc*), which has been attested since the 8th century A.D.

19. See: "A Member of the Bundestag can talk only when the president has given them the floor." ("Ein Mitglied des Bundestages darf nur sprechen, wenn ihm der Präsident das Wort erteilt hat.") (§27 "Tagesordnung, Einberufung, Leitung der Sitzung und Ordnungsmaßnahmen", http://www.bundestag.de/parlament/aufgaben/rechtsgrundlagen/go_btg/go06/245164) accessed on 21.10.2016).

20. Only 215 out 1251 interruptions in the corpus trigger a reaction from the legitimate interrupted speaker, i.e. 17,19% of the (unauthorised) interruptions (Truan 2017: 132).

Zöpel, alert about **nationalistic or national dangers**. I belong to those who say No to Turkey's accession to the EU right now.   (DE 2003.06.26)

Dr. Gerd Müller (CDU) [opposition]: Frau Präsidentin! Meine Damen und Herren! Der Kollege Pflüger hat unsere Position zur Türkei dargelegt. […] Herr Zöpel, das zeigt aber doch auch, dass diejenigen, die gegen den Beitritt der Türkei sind, nicht ganz falsch liegen können, wenn Sie, Herr Zöpel, vor **völkischen oder nationalen Gefahren** warnen. Ich gehöre zu denjenigen, die zum Beitritt der Türkei zu diesem Zeitpunkt Nein sagen.   (DE 2003.06.26)

(4) Thomas Silberhorn (CSU) [opposition]: Madam President! Ladies and Gentlemen! The virtually ridiculous contribution of Colleague Zöpel – **he has problems with the word "people" [*Volk*] because he manifestly associates it with nationalistic [*völkisch*] traditions** – shows that we must endeavour to make more distinctions more in this debate.   (DE 2003.06.26)

Thomas Silberhorn (CSU) [opposition]: Frau Präsidentin! Werte Kolleginnen und Kollegen! Der geradezu irrwitzige Beitrag des Kollegen Zöpel – **er hat mit dem Wort Volk schon deshalb Probleme, weil er es offenbar mit völkischen Traditionen in Verbindung bringt** – zeigt, dass wir uns um etwas mehr Differenzierung in der Debatte bemühen müssen.

(DE 2003.06.26)

It is interesting to note that the recognition that there is "a German people" to which the CDU-CSU would "commit" as in (2) is not linked with the willingness to make the German people participate in the political arena: the Conservatives are against a referendum on the European constitution.[21] Thus invoking the German people in this debate is not directly linked with political representation.

Since none of the interventions fuels the thesis of the CDU-CSU being discussed in this particular debate, the repetitive argument in favour of a "people" actually occurs mainly as a sign of solidarity towards party members as well as a clear signal towards voters. Apart from this debate, which happens to be rather the exception than the rule, the substantive *Volk* is mainly associated with nationalities: *palästinensisch* (i.e. "Palestinian") is the first co-occurrent of *Volk*, which is narrowly related with the fact that the State of Palestine is not recognised. Other uses of the controversial lexeme *Volk*, and especially of the definite noun phrase "the German people" (*das deutsche Volk*, 4 occurrences out of 73 occurrences of the lemma *Volk*) are restricted to the mention of past events (revolutions, the former currency, the D-Mark, the EU construction in the 50s), or to other geographic contexts such as the American constitution. These findings are an indication of the

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21. See for instance: "Die CDU ist als einzige Partei deutlich gegen eine Volksabstimmung zum Entwurf einer EU-Verfassung", Spiegel online (https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/positionen-europa-in-guter-verfassung-a-303434.html, accessed on 11.08.2018).

loaded component of the lexeme *Volk* that is never used innocuously. As Ayerbe Linares (this volume) shows, even political parties traditionally labelled "populist" such as the AfD make a cautious use of the noun *Volk*, which is used almost interchangeably with *Bevölkerung* ("population") or *Bürger* ("citizens").

Representing le peuple *in the context of the 2005 French referendum*

The French corpus presents a peculiarity closely linked to the context of the 2005 referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.[22] An indication of this can be observed through the lens of the specificity indicator, a statistical tool provided in the software TXM to assess whether a lexeme occurs more or less than expected given the size of a sample (the corpus can be sampled according to different variables such as speakers, date of the debate, gender, constituency, etc.).[23] The specificity indicator according to the parliamentary group is very high for the left-wing parliamentary groups "Communistes et Républicains" (+16.3 for *peuple* and + 4.1 for *peuples*) and for "Gauche Démocrate et Républicaine" (+5.7 for *peuple*, but only +1.6 for *peuples*). Related to the political category "Far Left",[24] the over-specificity of *people* is even more striking: +23.9 for *peuple* and + 5.3 for *peuples*.

   The occurrences of the lemma *peuple* are distributed among a relatively small amount of speakers (31 out of 159, that is approximately 19.5%). Moreover, 38 occurrences out of 170 (22.3%) are used by one single MP, Jean-Paul Lecoq (Far Left), who massively relies on the perceived bad experience of the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon held on 29 May 2005 (see Hainsworth 2006):

   (5)   Jean-Paul Lecoq (Gauche Démocrate et Républicaine) [opposition]: Let
         us remember: after the serious setback inflicted by the rejection of the
         European Constitution by **the French and Dutch peoples** in 2005, it took

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22. Here it could also be noted that the French corpus consists of eight plenary debates whereas the German and the British corpora consist of eighteen debates, respectively. The relatively small corpus in the French case could have an impact on the distribution of the lemma *peuple*. More specifically, the smaller range of parliamentary debates taken into account makes an overrepresentation of a specific term in one specific debate more plausible. For more information on the data collection, see Truan (2016a, 2016b, 2016c).

23. For a presentation of the specificity method ("calcul des spécificités") used for the software TXM, see Lafon (1980).

24. The TEI tag <trait type = "party"> was used in this corpus to create ideological categories from a cross-national perspective according to the political affiliations. "Far Left" has been used for following affiliations: DIE LINKE (Germany), PDS (Germany), Communistes et Républicains (France), Gauche Démocrate et Républicaine (France).

European leaders two years of hard thinking to elaborate an avatar of the previous constitutional treaty. […] The heads of state and government had agreed to **dodge the people**, by ensuring that parliamentary ratification is used instead of **popular consultation**, so that the use of representative democracy here serves **to avoid the direct expression of the people**.

(FR 2009.10.14)

Jean-Paul Lecoq (Gauche Démocrate et Républicaine) [opposition]: Souvenons-nous: après le revers cinglant infligé par le rejet de la Constitution européenne par les **peuples français et néerlandais** en 2005, il aura fallu deux ans de cogitation aux dirigeants européens pour élaborer un avatar de l'ex-traité constitutionnel. […] Les chefs d'État et de Gouvernement s'étaient alors entendus pour **contourner les peuples**, en s'assurant que les ratifications parlementaires soient préférées aux **consultations populaires**, l'utilisation de la démocratie représentative ayant ici pour finalité d'**échapper à l'expression directe du peuple**.

(FR 2009.10.14)

This restricted use of the noun *peuple* goes along with the collocational analysis: the terms "nation" (*nation*), "sovereignity" (*souveraineté*), "reject/rejection" (*rejeter/ rejet*), "fear" (*peur*) and "massively" (*massivement*), which are frequent collocates of *peuple*, all point to the specific context of the French referendum. The lexical field around *peuple* only centres on the referendum, which has been looked upon as a betrayal by the French socialist and communist parties: although a majority (54.67%) of French voters raised their political voice against the referendum, the perspective of a renegotiation quickly appeared illusory. In the four debates in which Lecoq uses the concept of the *peuple* (FR 2007.12.11, FR 2008.12.10, FR 2009.10.14, FR 2011.12.06), the recurrent use of "people" reinforces Lecoq's opposition to the Treaty, on the basis of its rejection by the French and Dutch peoples:

(6) Jean-Paul Lecoq (Communistes et Républicains) [opposition]: Because in the end, if there is a new treaty it is precisely because the **French and Dutch peoples** massively rejected the Constitutional Treaty.   (FR 2007.12.11)
Jean-Paul Lecoq (Communistes et Républicains) [opposition]: Car enfin, s'il y a nouveau traité, c'est bien parce que **les peuples français et néerlandais** ont rejeté majoritairement le traité constitutionnel.   (FR 2007.12.11)

In the context of the referendum, the noun *peuples* is used in the plural; it does not refer to the French people specifically but to the endeavour to call upon European citizens to cast their votes. Using the French lexeme *peuples* is here noteworthy, since it would have been possible to refer to the referendums in Holland and France by using the nationality adjectives *Hollandais* and *Français* rather than the term "people".

By accusing politicians of being "afraid of the people", the speaker depicts himself as the only one capable of engaging in an authentic dialogue with the people, whom he is able to listen to:

(7)   Jean-Paul Lecoq (Communistes et Républicains) [opposition]: One has to listen to **what peoples say, to what their worries and expectations are**.

(FR 2007.12.11)

Jean-Paul Lecoq (Communistes et Républicains) [opposition]: Il faut entendre **ce que disent les peuples, leurs inquiétudes et leurs attentes**.

(FR 2007.12.11)

This strategy echoes the German and British speakers claiming to endorse the people's point of view by depicting their fears, expectations, and desires, as we will further see in Examples (9) to (16).

Although the attempt to give the power back to the people should not be underestimated, the overuse of the lemma *peuple* by the Far Left in the French corpus remains restricted to a "discursive moment" (*moment discursif*) that has first been defined as the "outburst in the media of an intense and diversified discursive production on the same event" (Moirand 2004: 73).[25]

The significance of the debate preceding and following the referendum for French politics has already been abundantly addressed (see Mange and Marchand 2007: 121–122 for an overview). Against this background, my goal is not to stress the importance of the referendum as a media event and a discursive moment. Rather, I argue that the overuse of the noun *peuple* by the French Far Left cannot be reduced to a sign of populism but must be understood as a particular moment in French politics. Whether the appeal to the people on this occasion may be regarded as populist or not goes beyond the scope of this paper. My contribution is that apart from this discursive moment, all parliamentary groups and all MPs equally refer to the people, as Excerpt (8) shows:

(8)   Gilles Artigues (UDF) [majority]: Recreating trust was, for the UDF, responding to the concerns voiced by the French in front of a technocratic way of making Europe without the people, which they sanctioned. Our fellow citizens no longer intend to approve important decisions *a posteriori*, they want to be associated with them. More democracy, more transparency is a matter of imperative that no one will be able to avoid.   (FR 2006.12.12)

Gilles Artigues (UDF) [majority]: Recréer la confiance, c'était, pour l'UDF, répondre aux inquiétudes exprimées par les Français devant une façon technocratique de faire l'Europe sans le peuple, qu'ils ont

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25. Original quote: "surgissement dans les médias d'une production discursive intense et diversifiée à propos d'un même fait".

> sanctionnée. Nos concitoyens n'entendent plus approuver a posteriori
> les décisions importantes, ils veulent y être associés. Plus de démocratie,
> plus de transparence, c'est un impératif auquel personne n'échappera.
>
> (FR 2006.12.12)

As Artigues observes, the ideal of "more democracy, more transparency" *([p]lus de démocratie, plus de transparence*) outlined in (8) should be shared by all parliamentary groups with no distinction, "no one" (*personne*) can stop this evolution.

Responding to people's (assumed) expectations

Now that both specificities of German *Volk* and French *peuple* have been addressed, I turn to the common reference to "the people" in political discourse. By doing so, one goes a step back from the concepts *Volk* and *peuple* that are typically associated with strong connotations to investigate other related lexemes such as "citizens" or "constituents".

Appealing to the people *in English: Searching for French and German "equivalents"*

In comparison with German *Volk* and French *peuple*, the referential scope of English *people* is broader. It indicates that *Volk* and *peuple* are not the only equivalent to *people*, but have to be regarded in association with *Mensch* ("human being"), as one of the translations in (1) shows. (I have translated both *Volk* and *Menschen* as people). It has been said earlier that the lemma *Mensch* yields 427 occurrences in the plural, 8 in the singular, i.e. 10.43 occurrences per 10,000 tokens in my corpus of parliamentary debates, whereas the DWDS manifests 0.54 lemmas of *Mensch* per 10,000 tokens. This shows that while the use of the lexeme *Volk* remains limited, the noun *Mensch* knows an overuse in the specialised corpus of parliamentary debates compared to the reference corpus. Similar findings are visible for the French corpus: the lemma *peuple* occurs 4.2 times more at the Assemblée nationale than in the reference corpus. Such occurrences suggest that French *peuple* – like German *Volk* – has a narrower lexical span than its English counterparts.

Thus, Members of Parliament do not avoid the reference to the people. Rather, they avoid the reference to *a* people. There is a clear overrepresentation of nouns referring to humans in political discourse: in English, French, and German, the mention of human referents dominates political discourse.

What brings *people, peuple*, and *Volk* together, and what makes them different? A collocational analysis reveals that *people, Volk*, and *peuple* present strong similarities by being primarily associated with nationalities (*British, Serbia, Afghan, palästinensisch, deutsch, irlandais, algérien*). In such cases, the reference to the people is linked with the geopolitical context and cannot be put in relation with a populist stance. There is, however, a common denominator in the uses of the nouns denoting human referents in political discourse, which is closely related to cognitive verbs such as "think", verbs of speech such as "say", and verbs expressing a will such as "want".

Formulating questions and claims through the lens of the people

A common thread running through the three corpora is the fact that the people are often mentioned in the plural as a collective entity. They occupy the syntactic position of the subject and fulfil the semantic role of the agent. Specifically, the question of representation brings *people* and *Mensch* together (the first collocates are *understand* and *vermitteln*, which could be translated as "mediate", "share", "relay").

In the British, French, and German corpora, the "people" – lexically expressed mostly with the nouns *people* or *public* in English,[26] *citoyen* in French, and *Menschen* in German – become an instrument of mediation and legitimation of the MPs' questions. An example is (9), where the noun *people*, which automatically encompasses the addresser as well, is used as a proof that the speaker is not standing alone in their beliefs:

> (9) Mr. David Cameron (Tories) [majority]: I agree with my hon. Friend about many things, but on this one we do not agree. The problem with an in/out referendum is that it would put two options to **the British people**, which I do not think really complies with what **people** *want*. **Many people, me included,** *are not satisfied with the status quo,* which is why the in option is not acceptable; but **many people – also like me –** *do not want* us to leave altogether, because of the importance of the single market to Britain, a trading nation, so they do not want to be out. That is why I think that an in/out referendum is not the right answer. (UK 2012.10.22)

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26. Interestingly, in the British corpus, the lexeme *constituents* (mostly in the plural) performs similar functions by being associated with the lexical field of expectations expressed through the verbs *want, expect*.

The NP *many people* is indicated twice as inclusive of the addresser[27] (*me included, also like me*). Given the scope of reference of the quantifier *many*, however, it would have been probably interpreted along the same lines without the specific allusion to the fact that the noun phrase *many people* encompasses the addresser as well. Despite the irony of the conclusion from today's point of view (*I think that an in/ out referendum is not the right answer*), what is interesting regarding the functions performed by the NP is that the referents encoded in *many* justify the speaker's perspective. This is patent in (9) with the repetition of *which is why, [t]hat is why* that introduces the idea of a consequence: the fact that Cameron does not want an in/out referendum (event B) relies on the fact that many people do not want such a binary solution (event A).

Mentioning what the majority assumingly thinks enables the speaker to bond with the people who "do not want to be out". By mentioning them, the speaker also tells them: "You are not alone, I am here with you". In other words, the mention of "the British people" serves two complementary communicative goals: giving sub-stance to the addresser (the "I"), and, conversely, conferring weight and authority to the ones who think like him. The discursive nature of such constructs is all the more justified in the light of the recent events – there were not so many people "[not wanting] us [the UK] to leave altogether", after all.

The role of the people can be symbolised as the one of a buffer, as (10) shows:

(10)   Mr. David Curry (Tories) [opposition]: **People ask**, "Where does it end?". The forthcoming intergovernmental conference gives **them** a chance to ***answer*** that. Will the right hon. Gentleman start work now to ensure that the answer is a convincing one?   (UK 2000.12.11)

Instead of uttering "Where does it end?" in his own name, the speaker introduces discourse participants he can relate to and rely on. The entity that the "people" represent functions as a multiplication of what the speaker stands for. Yet instead of uttering the question in their own name, Members of Parliament mitigate the potentially Face Threatening Act consisting in undermining the co-interlocutor's credibility by asking their questions through the voices of the people.

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27. I use the term of *addresser* to refer to a speech role or discursive representation, while the term *speaker* refers to the physical person engaging in interaction. When referring to the semantic scope of a linguistic expression, the addresser is involved, not necessarily the speaker, although both may correspond on a number of occasions.

Making the people speak: Ventriloquizing as a resource in political discourse

One can legitimately ask, however, where do the people's expectations come from? Do parliamentarians rely on statistics (for instance, polls indicating what a – representative – majority of people think)? Retracing the "text trajectory" (Ehrlich, 2012) of extract (11) may provide some elements of answer:

> (11)   Jürgen Trittin (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN) [opposition]: When <u>you</u> say
>   that Europe is an answer to globalisation, then **people expect an *answer*** that
>   will give them more security, more social security.   (DE 2006.12.14)
>   Jürgen Trittin (BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN) [opposition]: Wenn <u>Sie</u> sagen,
>   Europa sei eine Antwort auf Globalisierung, dann **erwarten die Menschen**
>   **zunächst eine *Antwort,*** die ihnen mehr Sicherheit, mehr soziale Sicherheit
>   verspricht.   (DE 2006.12.14)

In (11), reported speech is indicated as free indirect speech. Instead of performing the people's words as quotes, they are summarized as what people "expect". This is a way for the speaker to express their opinion while representing (or claiming to represent) public opinion.

   The occurrence in (11) displays a double level of reported speech that can also be referred to as an act of ventriloquizing through which "[s]omeone – the ventriloquist – is able to speak in such a way that his or her voice seems to come from the dummy or figure that he or she is manipulating" (Cooren and Sandler 2014: 230). Not only is the need for an answer expressed through the lens of the people, the deictic *you* ("Sie") in "When you say that…" links Trittin's statement with the current situation of utterance and with the direct co-interlocutors. Westerwelle already addressed the same question with the same words earlier during the session:

> (12)   Dr. Guido Westerwelle (FDP) [opposition]: **The best answer to globalisation**
>   is the creation of a big European Single Market and coordinated European
>   foreign and economic policies.   (DE 2006.12.14)
>   Dr. Guido Westerwelle (FDP) [opposition]: **Die beste Antwort auf die**
>   **Globalisierung** ist die Schaffung eines großen europäischen Binnenmarktes
>   und eine koordinierte europäische Außen- und Wirtschaftspolitik.
>   (DE 2006.12.14)

Interestingly enough, the utterance in (12) indirectly echoes previous statements, which were not only uttered at the time of the debate, but circulate as a shared representation amongst partisans of a deeper European integration, independently of the party:

(13)   Gerhard Schröder (SPD) [majority]: It [the euro] is **Europe's answer to**
       increased globalisation […]   (DE 1998.12.10)
       Gerhard Schröder (SPD) [majority]: Er [der Euro] ist **Europas Antwort auf**
       die zunehmende Globalisierung […]   (DE 1998.12.10)

(14)   Dr. Angela Merkel (CDU) [opposition]: This big Europe is of course **an**
       answer to globalisation.   (DE 2002.12.19)
       Dr. Angela Merkel (CDU) [opposition]: Dieses vergrößerte Europa ist
       natürlich **eine Antwort der Europäer auf die Globalisierung**.
                                                                        (DE 2002.12.19)

(15)   Dr. Werner Hoyer (FDP) [opposition]: The answer to globalisation's
       challenges is the European integration.   (DE 2005.12.15)
       Dr. Werner Hoyer (FDP) [opposition]: **Die Antwort auf die**
       Herausforderungen der Globalisierung ist die europäische Integration.
                                                                        (DE 2005.12.15)

In this regard, people's assumed expectations ("die Menschen erwarten") in (11) do not only (or not really) rely on the current debate, but also constitute a discursive space of shared representations within the "community of practice" formed by parliamentarians (Harris 2001: 453–454). By doing so, the citizens are reintroduced into politics – their voice is given back to them through the mediation of their representatives.

Related to the definition of populism introduced earlier, one can say that these occurrences only partially relate to the need to connect with the people. Through reported speech, Members of Parliament make people speak, but at the same time, they stress the necessary mediation it implies: parliamentarians speak *for* the people, but also *instead* of them. Yet the tendency to address the people's issues cannot be regarded as a mere populist trend, especially given the fact that the specificity indicator of German *Volk* and British *people* does not reveal any difference related to political affiliation.[28] To put it simply: the use of the lexeme "people" cannot be associated with any specific Member of Parliament or with any parliamentary group at the House of Commons or at the Bundestag.

In the UK, France, and Germany, the human referents enacted in parliamentary debates fulfil the role of the speaker of a fictitious dialogue, and, therefore, contribute to redefining the roles of the MPs. Both the plurality of referents (i.e. many) and the semantic indeterminacy associated with such lexemes (i.e. anyone) make the "people" effective enunciators in political discourse. In those

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28. But the lemma *Mensch* appears slightly less within utterances of the Conservatives (CDU/CSU): −5,4 and slightly more within utterances of the socialist and left-wing parliamentary groups: +3,4 for the SPD and + 4,1 for Die Linke, respectively.

cases, I argue that "people" as a "category of speakers" "representing a whole" (Maingueneau 2000: 124),[29] and compared with other possible enunciative sources like "someone", activates [+ Plurality] more than [+ Indeterminacy]. When speaking on behalf of the "people", speakers do not intend to identify the referents, but to use them as a strategic argument: from a rhetorical point of view, it is of no interest to know exactly *who* said it – or, in other terms, whom the "people" refer to – but rather to know that it has been said by an important amount of people, therefore legitimising the MP's words. This may be why modality is absent in the occurrences of the corpus; the speaker usually does not mitigate their claims (for instance by saying *people may want* or *what people probably expect*). In fact, MPs are usually pretty confident about what they have to say about the people.

Throughout the examples where what people want, feel, need, or fear is presented, the binary opposition between "the ordinary people" and the politicians sometimes appears between the lines:

(16)   Mr Tony Blair (Labour) [majority]: I think that **many members of the public** *understand* exactly what is going on. **They** *want* **us** to present the facts calmly, which is what we try to do – it is the best antidote to scare stories of any kind.   (UK 1998.12.14)

In such occurrences, the people are represented as an entity distinct from the parliamentarians – a pattern particularly visible in the construction *they want us* in (16), where the people correlate with the syntactic position of the subject and the semantic role of the agent while the Members of Parliament are put in the position of the object of the demand.

Picking the noun denoting human referents: "Citizens" and "people" in contrast

Although the focus on specific examples for a close-reading analysis does not render justice to the multiplicity and the complexity of the linguistic expressions involved in the representation of human referents, an overview of the competing linguistic expressions denoting humans is finally offered. In German, the forms *Bürger* and *Mensch* occur in similar contexts and apart from semi-fixed NPs such as "people with disabilities" (*Menschen mit Behinderung*, 2 occurrences in the corpus), or "young people" (*junge Menschen*, 6 occurrences), there is no significant difference in their contexts of use. The lexeme *Mensch* that corresponds to "people" is semantically less precise, shows a relative openness, and is accordingly

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29. Original quote: "classe de locuteurs", enunciator "représentant d'un ensemble".

used almost twice more often (435 occurrences vs. 261 occurrences of "citizen"). Although one could have expected that the noun "citizen", with a focus on civil rights, would have been used in a more restricted fashion, this is not the case and both terms often seem to be used interchangeably. Since French does not have an all-encompassing noun such as "people", the representation of human referents is divided between *citoyen, concitoyen*, and *compatriote*, the former being oriented towards Europe and the last ones towards the national level.

A first explanation is semantic. Since English *people* has a broader scope of reference, it is proportionally used in a broader range of contexts. The frequent co-occurrence of *people* and the relative pronoun *who* also confirms this claim: the wide semantic range of *people*, associated with its extensive use, goes along with a need for specification through a relative clause:

(17)   Mr. Tony Blair (Labour) [majority]: However, there is a growing view that a successor regime is not properly in place and, to safeguard our interests and those of **many people who work in companies** connected with the trade, it is important to get an extension.   (UK 1998.12.14)

(18)   Mr. Tony Blair (Labour) [majority]: My hon. Friend is absolutely correct that the Serbs continue to act as she says toward **people who are fleeing from Kosovo**.   (UK 2003.06.23)

In these examples, the referential scope of *people* is restricted through the determinative relative clause, which applies the propositional content only to some extent, i.e. to an identifiable category of referents, which encompasses categories of population whose characteristics (like working in companies, fleeing from Kosovo) are clearly detectable. Out of 53 occurrences where *people* immediately co-occurs with *who* in the British corpus (*people who*), 32 occurrences refer to specific categories of population in a given context as in (17) and (18).

Yet 21 do not refer to people with specific attributes, but to a certain class of individuals who turn out to be problematic for political discourse: sceptics. In these cases, the relative clause does not enable to identify *who* exactly those people are (where they come from, what they do…), but builds a class of opponents:

(19)   Mr. Tony Blair (Labour) [majority]: There are **people who see the future of Europe as a federal superstate**. I do not believe that they are in the majority; I think that they are in the minority.   (UK 2000.12.11)

(20)   Mr. Gordon Brown (Labour) [majority]: Unlike the Conservative party, however, I am prepared for Britain to be part of a taskforce to look at how we can improve the management of the EU; **only people who are blinded by Euroscepticism** would oppose any form of co-operation in Europe.
                                                                                               (UK 2010.03.29)

These occurrences play an important part in depicting the heterogeneity of voices in political discourse. Mentioning their opponents' views enables the speaker to reaffirm their own position. Contrary to what one might think at first glance, the "people" are easily identifiable through their linguistic co-text. In (20), the NP *people who are blinded by Euroscepticism* unambiguously refers to the Conservative Party mentioned earlier in the same plenary session. As I have stated earlier, "people" cognitively activates [+ PLURALITY]. In this example, the seme [+ INDETERMINACY] is not aroused at all. The reference to *people who are blinded by Euroscepticism* instead of the "Conservative people" serves two main argumentative goals: on the one hand, it extends the reference to people who are not affiliated with the Conservative party, but would share the same views on this matter; on the other hand, it describes the Conservative party, associating it with pejorative terms.

From these examples, we can see that English *people* consequently exhibits a certain plasticity. The term "plasticity" is used for lexical units that are as likely to occur in contexts where out-group members are referred to as in contexts where in-group members are instantiated. Borrowing from the general understanding of the term, I retain the idea that some lexical units have the property of being easily shaped by their linguistic co-text and can adapt to changes in their environment. The lexeme *people* is used both in contexts involving out-group and in-group members, while German *Mensch* only serves communicative goals associated with in-group members. Note, however, that *some people*, by restricting the number of discourse participants involved in the class "people", is more likely to be associated with out-group members.

French has no real equivalent for *people* and *Menschen*. The term *personnes* (exclusively in the plural, as opposed to the singular form *personne*, which means "nobody"), is first very infrequent (11 occurrences), second limited to semi-fixed expressions or to the mention of events and facts (for instance, *11 000 personnes furent arrêtées par la police française*). The nouns *gens*, which is colloquial, and *individu*, which has a legal connotation (like English *persons* in the plural), both occur only once. The quasi-absence of the *plurale tantum gens* confirms Cappeau and Schnedecker's findings on the more frequent occurrence of *gens* in oral corpora (Cappeau and Schnedecker 2014: 3033), and conversely, tends to show that parliamentary debates function more as written genres than oral ones (see De Cock 2006). To speak about people, French thus has to – has lexically no other choice – mobilise categories that relate to civil rights ('(fellow) citizen', i.e. *citoyen*, *concitoyen*, *compatriote*).

Conclusion: The reference to the people, a property of political discourse

The quantitative and qualitative analyses have shown that the linguistic behaviours of *Volk* and *peuple* in the German and French corpora are associated with more restricted scopes than the English noun *people*. This contrastive discursive analysis of parliamentary debates has demonstrated that *people, Volk,* and *peuple* can hardly be considered as equivalents in contemporary political discourse on Europe. One of the major findings relies on the activation of [+ PLURALITY] rather than [+ INDETERMINACY] for the pragmatic uses of "people" in parliamentary debates.

The English lexeme *people* is the least restricted term and applies to various co-texts. This makes it suitable for neutral expressions, where an attribute is added in order to point to a specific category, for instance based on nationality (*British people*). It can also be used for argumentative purposes such as denigrating political opponents. Whereas German *Volk* is barely used in parliament for obvious historical reasons, its counterpart *Mensch* takes on some of the features of *people*, especially the need to speak on the people's behalf. The French lexeme *peuple* remains limited to a specific discursive event in our corpus, the referendum on the constitution of Europe. The fact that French MPs draw less heavily on the features [+ PLURALITY] and [+ INDETERMINACY] of "people" does not necessarily mean that the strategic use of argumentation, intended to create a common ground upon which they can then develop their political views, is not activated in French political discourse. Rather, it suggests that communicative goals are expressed through a mosaic of linguistic expressions in the respective languages. Instead of resorting to "the people", French parliamentarians may for instance resort to the third-person pronoun *on* (that can be translated as "one" or generic "you") (Truan 2018).

The various, sometimes even contradictory meanings of *people, Volk*, and *peuple* can be accounted for with the notion of concept or *Begriff* drawn from Kämper (2005: 102) and with the idea of "fluidity of reference". These lexemes are "concepts" insofar as they are both socially relevant and semantically complex, thus making them key linguistic items for diverging interpretations. The fact that English *people* is as likely to occur in context where it refers to the doxa and in contexts where it refers to out-group members is an indication of its plasticity, which I have defined as the ability to activate different semes – and thus to arouse different meanings – according to the context.

Recalling the link with populism, one might ask: given the wide distribution of the lemmas *people, Mensch,* and, to a certain extent, *Bürger* and *citoyen* in the corpus under investigation, should all or none of the speakers be considered to be populist? In the same vein, one has to ask whether the will of the French Far Left to connect to the people by emphasising the importance of referendums is a populist stance.

For many authors (Laclau 1977: 166; Taguieff 2002: 21, 25; Ihl, Chêne and Vial 2003: 11; Dezé 2004: 179; Higgins 2013: 59), populism fits into the essence of democracy itself and can be understood as a common feature of many political actors in traditional representative democracies. Bouillaud (2001: 300) for instance wonders: "Do not we run a risk seeing populism in every rallying that is not restricted to an elite?". Hermet (2001: 46) similarly refuses to describe populism based on the idea that it addressees the people since "this symbolic appeal to popular sovereignty characterises also democracy." The quantitative findings do not enable us to extrapolate on the "appeal to the people" being a special feature of a specific parliamentary group.[30] This might be related to the fact that Members of Parliament are already in a position of power, whereas parties traditionally viewed as populist such as the AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) did not sit in parliament in the period (1998–2015) considered.

By refusing to describe some political parties or parliamentary groups as "populist" prior to analysis, this project presents findings without ideological bias. In line with van Leeuwen (this volume), I argue that the mere mention of the people is not a sufficient criterion to distinguish a populist discourse from other types of discourse. Indeed, all parliamentary groups refer to the people in approximately the same frequency. Nevertheless, there are differences in terms of contexts of apparition. The qualitative analyses have shown that German Conservatives are less reluctant to acknowledge the existence of a German people. Similarly, French Communists are more willing to put the spotlight on the importance of the people in decision-making processes.

These findings do not allow for the extrapolation of a recurrent link between specific parliamentary groups and so-called populist stances. Yet, they demonstrate that the "people" is a discursive construct subject to controversy and meta-discourse. Even though parliamentary debates are not explicitly addressed to the citizens, they are nevertheless designed with this mass of unspecified targets in mind, with all their different, if not contradictory political views. In this sense, the reference to "the people" or "a people" enables the speakers to subsume this complex patchwork of individuals while conveying an impression of unity by means of the symbolic and semantic reduction to a single lexeme. This makes "people" an extremely productive and malleable concept. While speakers do not utter the same reservations or hesitations towards other similar lexemes such as "citizen(s)", the need for an inclusive stance in which "the people" are actively involved through cognitive verbs ("want", "expect") and verbs of speech ("ask") remains constant throughout the political spectrum and across countries.

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30. The results for the French corpus are still restricted to a specific debate on a particular theme.

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