

Semantics of Ideological Terms in English, German, Russian and Latvian Lexicography, Textual Use and Translation

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Abstract. Political and ideological terms have been widely used in languages for centuries, their denotational and connotational meaning though fluctuates, reflecting the changing ideological trends. Ideology becomes part of the meaning of these lexemes. It is also compounded into mental structures, which naturally may vary across different ideological groups. Broad uncertainty and ambiguity can be seen in texts: people have varying understandings and ascribe different meanings to political terms on the basis of their experience, political preferences, and the swinging impact of mainstream media. The paper investigates the semantics of the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* by analyzing their co-occurrence patterns in corpora of four languages: English, German, Russian, and Latvian. The co-occurrence analysis of corpora reveals that while there are core similarities in the semantics of *liberal* and *liberalism* across languages, each language also imbues these terms with unique cultural and historical connotations. This information is contrasted with the dictionary lemmas of the terms which mostly seem to reflect the old meanings. While dictionary definitions provide a baseline understanding, co-occurrence patterns in language use offer deeper insights into how these terms are perceived and interpreted across different societies. This, in its turn, affects the possible translation strategies.

Key words: ideological terms, corpora, dictionaries, liberal, liberalism, translation

Ideologinių terminų semantika anglų, vokiečių, rusų ir latvių kalbų leksikografijoje, tekstuose ir vertime

Santrauka. Politiniai ir ideologiniai terminai jau šimtmečius plačiai vartojami kalbose, tačiau jų denotacinė ir konotacinė reikšmė kinta, atspindėdama besikeičiančias ideologines tendencijas. Ideologija tampa šių leksemų reikšmės dalimi. Ji taip pat sudedama į mentalines struktūras, kurios, savaime suprantama, gali skirtis skirtingose ideologinėse grupėse. Tekstuose galima išvelti platų neapibrėžtumą ir dviprasmiškumą: žmonės skirtingai supranta ir priskiria skirtingas politinių terminų reikšmes, remdamiesi savo patirtimi, politinėmis preferencijomis ir kintančiu pagrindinės žiniasklaidos poveikiu. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama terminų *liberal* ir *liberalism* semantika, analizuojant jų bendrinio pasikartojimo modelius keturių kalbų (anglų, vokiečių, rusų ir latvių) tekstynuose. Terminų pasikartojimo šių kalbų tekstynuose analizė atskleidžia, kad nors terminų *liberal* ir *liberalism* semantika skirtingose kalbose

turi esminių panašumų, kiekviena kalba šiems terminams suteikia unikalių kultūrinių ir istorinių konotacijų. Ši informacija kontrastuoja su terminų žodyno lemomis, kurios, atrodo, dažniausiai atspindi senąsias reikšmes. Nors žodyno apibrėžtys suteikia pagrindinį supratimą, pasikartojančios vartosenos dėsningumai kalbose suteikia gilesnių įžvalgų apie tai, kaip šie terminai suvokiami ir interpretuojami skirtingose visuomenėse. Tai savo ruožtu daro įtaką galimoms jų vertimo strategijoms.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: ideologiniai terminai, tekstynai, žodynai, liberalus, liberalizmas, vertimas

1. Introduction

This study examines the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* across various corpora in four languages and dictionaries. It begins with a discussion of key terms that describe political and ideological concepts. There is a notable disparity between the denotational and connotational meanings of ideological terms as presented in dictionaries and their actual usage in language corpora. We aim to bring greater clarity to the vague and often contradictory political rhetoric of today, where the same ideological terms are used with differing meanings and agendas, leading to confusion and semantic distortion. For a meaningful debate or dialogue participants must share at least some common understanding or agreement on the denotational meaning of ideological terms they use. Without this shared understanding, insidious processes can undermine the integrity of public discourse, deepen social divisions and degrade terms into contradictory pejorative slurs or swearwords. The primary semantic contention surrounding these terms lies in differing attitudes toward the state and government involvement in economic and social life. Descriptive lexicography requires that evidence from corpora be reflected in the dictionaries since they are used for understanding as well as translation purposes.

2. The concepts: political and ideological terms, ideologemes

All language is essentially political (Joseph 2006: 4). Even in seemingly unpolitical utterances the words people choose reveal their thoughts and positions, they encode their beliefs and biases in words (Simpson 1993). Political activity, in turn, is principally linguistic (Condren 2017), it is deeply embedded in language. This aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power highlighting how language and definitions can reinforce social hierarchies and power structures. For Bourdieu political action consists mainly of symbolic action: speeches, writings and other symbolic interventions. Bourdieu does not speak of the illocutionary force of speech as Austin or Searle, nor of the political rhetoric (Beard 2001) or propaganda (Chomsky 1992), but of the symbolic power of words and terms which reveal or obscure certain aspects of reality. Once a symbolic construction gains credibility and acceptance, it becomes real (Bourdieu 1991).

Political and ideological terms are often used interchangeably. However, strictly speaking, there is a subtle difference between them. The first refers more specifically to governance practices and procedures, such as *government*, *parliament*, *democracy*, *monarchy*. A political term is a lexical item that would be recognised by users as typically used to refer to entities within the narrative concerned with politics. Politics in this context is understood to involve activities associated primarily with the public institutions of the state (Chilton 2008: 226). Political terms should not be confused with political discourse, although the latter often employs both political and ideological terminology. On the other hand, ideological terms pertain more to ideas, principles, values and beliefs – they are more abstract and often philosophical, their use also tends to be more partisan, e.g. *liberalism*, *conservatism*, *communism*, *fascism*. Ideological terms, in a way, underpin, justify and shape political ones.

Ideology itself, as a term was created by the French aristocrat Antoine Destutt de Tracy in 1796, initially meant the science of the human mind, aimed at developing a rational system of ideas to counter the irrational impulses of the mob. Ideology was supposed to enlighten people on what is right and wrong (Tracy was horrified by the barbarity of the French Revolution). However, the term soon degenerated into a pejorative word, a connotation it still carries to some extent in everyday usage, ‘synonymous with the dogmatic or fanatical’ (Eatwell 1993: xii). Its use was spread by Marxists, who, however, considered it secondary to social and economic processes. Ideologies are comprehensive systems of beliefs and thoughts about humans, history, and social processes. Unlike religions which are often seen as timeless and absolute, ideologies are temporal.

Apart from these two terms, there is the term and concept of ideologeme. The concept was introduced in the first half of the 20th century by the Russian scholar Bakhtin (1981: 429), adopted by French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser and later developed by other theorists, mostly Marxists, including Fredric Jameson, a prominent American literary critic (Jameson, 1981: 60-61), with rather diffuse interpretation. Ideologemes are fundamental units of ideology (Rieger-Ladich, 2022: 235), thus, an ideological term might encompass several specific ideologemes. ‘An ideologeme is a unit of ideology and its explication. It can not only form an individual’s attitude to reality, but primarily it can construct this reality on axiological level and even replace it’ (Lylo 2017: 19). Thus, ideologemes can carry either a positive or negative axiological modus. Ideologemes are socially conditioned, meaning their value core directly depends on the political or ideological affiliation of those who use them. Ideologemes can be words, phrases, metaphoric expressions, e.g. *dictatorship of the proletariat*, *free world*, *American dream*, *living space*, *free market*, *revolution*, *cold war*, *golodomor*, *Fuhrer*, *progress*, *political correctness*, but for the general public in a general sense ideologemes can be also basic long-established ideological and political terms, like *democracy*, *lib-*

eralism, conservatism, monarchy that have been widely used in languages for centuries. Thus, there is an overlap of ideologemes as subconcepts and subterms – granular units of ideological meaning – with their superordinate ideological terms. For instance, the term *democracy* can be viewed both as an ideologeme and as a political term designating a governance principle. The same applies to terms like *revolution, humanism, racism, and Islamofascism*. The overlap is most evident in colloquial and connotationally charged (usually negatively) words that designate political trends, often symbolized by colour words: *the reds, the blues, the greens, pinkos*. In Latvian, examples include *sarkanais* (the red), *baltais* (the white – meaning anti-red), and *sociķis* (a derogatory term for *socialist*). *Parliament* can be considered a political term, *parliamentarism*, like other -isms, functions as both an ideological term and an ideologeme.

Like any domain in language, ideological terms are under a constant change and flux, exemplified by the evolving superordinate term of ideology itself. ‘During the nineteenth century, ideological language was mostly expressed through -isms such as *liberalism, socialism* or *conservatism*’, (Marjanen 2019: 21) which entered the lexicon of most European languages. These terms carried rather clear messages, they were and are emotionally evocative. ‘Words ending in the suffix -ism are terms that reduce complex figures of thought under one simple heading’ (Marjanen 2019: 21), often setting up binary oppositions. However, ‘in fact the relationship between isms and notions of ideology changed historically and has varied depending on cultural context’ (Kurunmäki 2018).

New terms constantly emerge, such as *perestroika, revisionism, green, Greens, fundamentalists, antivaxxers, and Putinism*. Another avenue of change involves the semantic evolution of old terms, which acquire new meanings or connotations. Today there are hundreds of new ideologies, ideological terms or -isms describing various ideological and political strains and trends. Their multiplication has been increasing rapidly since World War II (Höpfl 1983). To mention a few new ones in this avalanche: *extropianism, immortalism, post-genderism, post-politicism, singularitarianism, technogaianism, techno-progressivism*. But also old and stable terms, like *liberalism* can boast hundreds of new derivatives: ‘*agonistic liberalism, classical liberalism, conservative liberalism, constitutional liberalism, cultural liberalism, democratic liberalism, economic liberalism, green liberalism, muscular liberalism, national liberalism, neoclassical liberalism, neo-liberalism, Ordoliberalism, secular liberalism, social liberalism, technoliberalism*’ *a.o.* (Veisbergs 2024: 162) This certainly challenges the traditional concept of liberalism, where the fundamental tenets were centred on maximizing personal freedom and considering liberty and choice as the highest good (Beiner 1992: 28-32).

Most standard ideological terms are international, built on classical roots. However, this may be deceptive as their meanings often vary significantly across languages (see

further). In addition to these variations, the denotational and connotational meanings of ideological terms also fluctuate diachronically, reflecting shifting ideological trends (Finlayson, 2013: 199). Furthermore, individuals imbue these terms with subjective meanings based on their own ideological stances introducing further ambiguity.

Ideology becomes integrated into the meanings of lexemes, it is also compounded into mental structures, which can differ greatly among ideological groups and individuals. More havoc is wreaked by deliberately misuse of terms, as exemplified by Zhirinovskiy's *Liberal democratic party* of Russia (established in 1989/1991), which is neither liberal nor democratic, but rather ultranationalist, right-wing, statist and authoritarian – the opposite of its name.

Therefore, the interpretation of ideological terms is shaped by several factors: the prevailing narratives of the ruling elites, media trends and individual affiliations. The latter reflects a general postmodernist tendency to acknowledge that the user's perspective largely determines their understanding of the concept and term. It is well-known that individual political alignment affects the understanding of ideological terms (Castaño 2023). Also, since ideological terms are frequently employed in rhetorical argumentation and emotionally charged contexts, this results in 'diverse meanings assigned to the same political terms' (Freedon, 2013: 120). Consequently, there is no longer a universal and unambiguous understanding of these terms. Political activity, being principally linguistic, often involves extensive manipulations of meanings by politicians and the media, partly overlapping with a phenomenon now termed the weaponization of language. Partisan hostility and the polarization of viewpoints wreak havoc with word meanings. Polarization is exacerbated by the usual proclivity towards binary logic that structures political and ideological landscape. These dynamics in language have given rise to a new sub-branch of linguistics known as political linguistics (*Politolinguistik* in German (Girnth, Hofmann 2016: 7)).

3. Ideological terms in dictionaries

Here we come to the dictionaries. Monolingual explanatory dictionaries naturally vary in depth and scope. Therefore, it is unrealistic to expect a comprehensive treatment of ideological terms in a standard desktop-sized dictionary. However, one can expect concise, clear explanations of these concepts rooted in social, political, and cultural theory. It is also reasonable to expect that dictionary definitions correspond to the usage of terms in language corpora. Dictionaries are cultural artifacts created by individuals, larger teams and institutions and they naturally reflect the values and biases of their creators. This refers both to the definitions and decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion of terms. While dictionaries strive for objectivity and neutrality, ideological terms

are inherently interpretive. This interpretative nature can manifest in various ways, such as general interpretations of terms or specific aspects of their meanings being emphasized or obscured to align with dominant views. For example, terms like *nationalism* may be presented with differing attitudes and interpretations based on societal norms and prevailing views, it carries generally positive connotations in Latvian while negative ones in Russian.

Over time dictionaries have adapted definitions to the prevailing view of the term, thus *civilization* and *barbarism*, *imperialism* and *colonialism* had a very Western perception reflecting the dominant elite opinions, e.g. the 1913 Webster's definition of *imperialism* (Online 1):

'The policy, practice, or advocacy of seeking, or acquiescing in, the extension of the control, dominion, or empire of a nation, as by the acquirement of new, esp. distant, territory or dependencies, or by the closer union of parts more or less independent of each other for operations of war, copyright, internal commerce, etc.'

The definition of *imperialism* in Hornby's first edition of *Learner's Dictionary* (Learner's 1948) (aimed very much at the colonial people) ran in a similarly positive manner:

'the policy of maintaining the safety and protecting the welfare of the various parts of an empire (by warlike defence, close trade relations, and other lawful means)'.

Compare these with the *Oxford Learner's* counterpart today which is much more sinister (Online 2): 'a system in which one country controls other countries, often after defeating them in a war'.

The evolution of meanings over time, influenced by social, political, or cultural changes, is the central issue addressed in this paper. Consequently, dictionary definitions must be updated, as they typically lag behind current usage.

Traditional liberalism advocated for minimal state interference in both human and economic affairs, emphasizing individual freedom. This stance has elicited negative reactions, particularly in the economic sphere, as it can lead to significant inequality. Additionally, there is a perspective that gross individual behavioural idiosyncrasies are undesirable. However, contemporary liberalism, especially its modern American variant, is frequently criticized for its strong emphasis on government as the driver of reforms. This approach is contested by traditional liberals and conservatives alike. Corpora co-occurrences illustrate this ambivalence, highlighting the nuanced and evolving nature of *liberalism* in current discourse.

4. Corpora and dictionary meanings

Today, with access to large corpora of texts from various historical periods, it is evident that the use of ideological terms in text has always significantly differed from their dictionary lemmas, which generally adhered to the original, often etymological, meanings. For example, *liberalism* is generally described in dictionaries in its original (etymological) sense as an ideology advocating individual freedom, broad tolerance, and minimal state interference. However, for several decades, corpora have suggested that liberalism has acquired another meaning – a modern left-wing radicalism characterized by a belief in strong state intervention in public affairs (similar to socialism). Additionally, for more than a century, corpora of various languages have indicated that adherents of liberalism have been viewed as egoistic and uncaring towards ordinary people. Meanings do change, and the synchronic perspective of the speaker's community takes precedence over the diachronic perspective since the former is the only reality for a typical language user (Saussure 1959: 141).

Grouping ideologies over an extended period using a data-driven approach presents several methodological challenges that need to be tested and explored. Our study does not involve a large-scale corpus analysis of meanings and their changes over time (Marjanen 2019). However, by examining clusters and co-occurrences one can effectively identify semantic fields and connotations, as 'there is a correlation between distributional similarity and meaning similarity, which allows us to utilize the former in order to estimate the latter' (Sahlgren 2008: 34). See also Miller and Walter 1991, Schütze and Pedersen 1995. In simple terms, this approach could be referenced to Firth's maxim: 'You shall know a word by the company it keeps' (Firth 1957:11). By examining the words surrounding ideological terms in a text, we can draw relevant conclusions about their meanings. Several caveats should be noted. First, we analyse contemporary language corpora. Second, co-occurrences often involve neutral and technical words, like *party*, *member*, or *meeting*. Third, not all ideologically tinged words apply to the terms *liberal* or *liberalism*. There may be non-ideological textual juxtapositions of words, such as *conservatives*, *liberals*, and *socialists*, or *liberal and conservative parties*, which do not actually relate to the characterization of the term under discussion.

4.1. English corpora and dictionaries

We examined several English corpora. *The British National Corpus* (100 million tokens) (Online 3), a balanced earlier corpus, provides 5,385 tokens for *liberal* and 493 tokens for *liberalism*. *Liberal* is problematic in English for semantic analysis due to its numer-

ous meanings, though *liberalism* is less so. Given that the *Liberal Democrats* are one of the leading British political parties, the co-occurrence *liberal* and *democrat* is prevalent. Aside from many technical terms, there is a relatively high number of collocations with *radical* and *traditional*. Collocations for *liberalism* are led by the adjective *new*, followed by traditional terms like *economic*, *bourgeois*, *classical*, and *political*. However, there is also a significant number of value-laden, negatively tinged adjectives like *illiberal*, *apparent*, and *excessive*.

COCA (*Corpus of Contemporary American English*) American 1.1. billion (Online 4) provides 46 625 for *liberal* and 5 034 for *liberalism*. *Liberalism* co-occurs with *tyranny*, *righteousness*, *modern*, *hard-nosed*, *corporate*, etc.

NOW corpus (Online 5) with its 19.1 billion tokens, has a wide representation of variants of English (Canadian, Australian, Indian, etc.), so the ideological mix can be very varied. It provides 663.410 tokens for *liberal* (too many for serious processing) and 25 518 tokens for *liberalism*. The latter are dominated by such attributes as *classical* and *neo*, but also the ideologically tinged *muscular*, *small-l*, *illiberal*, *genocidal*, *big-government*, *bleeding heart*, *wishy-washy*, *tough minded*, *atomizing*.

Larger English dictionaries differentiate the senses. *Oxford English Dictionary* 3. edition (Online 6) provides several meanings for *liberalism*, two are political ones:

‘favouring social reform and a degree of state intervention in matters of economics and social justice; left-wing’

and

‘supporting or advocating individual rights, civil liberties, and political and social reform tending towards individual freedom or democracy with little state intervention’.

American *Merriam Webster* dictionary (Online 7) provides two senses:

‘a theory in economics emphasizing individual freedom from restraint and usually based on free competition, the self-regulating market, and the gold standard’

and

‘a political philosophy based on belief in progress, the essential goodness of the human race, and the autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties *specifically*: such a philosophy that considers government as a crucial instrument for amelioration of social inequities (such as those involving race, gender, or class)’.

However, desktop size dictionaries, like *Cambridge Dictionary* (Online 8) often stay with the old traditional meaning of the term *liberalism*:

‘the political belief that there should be free trade, that people should be allowed more personal freedom, and that changes in society should be made gradually’.

Similarly, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* defines *liberal* as ‘favouring individual liberty, free trade, moderate political and social reforms’ (Concise 2011: 621).

Collins Cobuild Advanced American English Dictionary explains: ‘liberal system allows people and organizations a lot of political and economic freedom’ (Collins 2023: 744). However, next to it *liberalism* has two different senses: ‘belief in gradual social progress by changing laws rather than by revolutions’ and ‘belief that people should have a lot of political an individual freedom’ (Collins 2023: 745).

Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary offers a hybrid definition:

‘believing in or allowing more personal freedom and a development towards a fair sharing of wealth and power within society’ (Cambridge 2013: 891).

Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary, on the other hand, in its definition inclines towards the new sense:

‘tending to emphasize the need to make new laws when necessary because of changing conditions and to depend on the government to provide social services’ (Cambridge 2009: 548).

Thus, corpora suggest *liberalism* in English has developed at least two understandings – the old and the new one, the latter putting much emphasis on state interference in society. This is reflected in the larger dictionaries, but not in many smaller ones.

4.2. German corpus and dictionaries

When examining the German corpus and co-occurrences, the terms do not actually reflect prominently in the *Leipzig Corpora Collection* – German (Online 9), which contains 521 million tokens. The collection provides 383 tokens for *Liberalismus* with preceding co-occurring words such as *western*, *classical*, and *total*. There are also 1,436 tokens for *Liberaler*, with co-occurrences including *progressive and charismatic*.

The general co-occurrence list is led by *Francis Fukuyama*, followed by *democracy*, *western*, *freedom*. Subsequently, terms like *socialism*, *communism*, *Israel-critical*, *compassion ending*, *enemies*, *hypocritical*, *total*, *ideological*, *Islam*, *double-standards*, *fascism*, and names like *Orban*, *Dugin* appear. This mix indicates a blend of traditional associations as well as more contemporary and critical contexts.

The *Duden* German dictionary lemma (Online 10), however, gives only one sense of *Liberalismus* which is the old standard one:

‘World outlook established in the 19th century rooted in individualism which in social and political issues supports free development and autonomy of individual and wants to see state interference reduced to minimum’.

Thus, while corpus shows various meaning shades of the terms, the dictionary sticks to the traditional definition of liberalism.

4.3. Russian corpus and dictionaries

The Russian National Corpus (Online 11) with its collection of either 2 billion or 375 million tokens, demonstrates an intriguing phenomenon: a significant number of very negative and pejorative co-occurrences. This trend is likely influenced by government control of the media and general anti-Western sentiment. In recent times, *liberalism* has frequently been associated with terms like disease, scourge, and deviation, echoing themes explored by Susan Sontag in her 1978 work on illness metaphors (Sontag, 1978). The term *liberalism* appears 2,938 times in the corpus and is often linked with highly negative words, such as: *rotten, knout, poison, fascism, routine, trivial/banal, excessive, tragedy, pernicious*.

The term *liberal* appears 4,532 times and frequently co-occurs with words like: *damned, conservative, westerner, nationalist, terror, notorious, cosmopolite, retrograde, reactionary*. Of which only *cosmopolite* might relate to the old sense, but since Stalin’s time this word has retained a very negative connotation in Russian.

Russian dictionaries reflect politically motivated shifts in language. During the Soviet era, *liberalism* was consistently described in a biased and aggressive Marxist parlance, in late Soviet dictionaries, *liberalism* was framed negatively and pejoratively, aligning the lemma with the state’s ideological stance:

liberal 1. adherent of liberalism; 2. *Dated*. Freethinking person; 3. Lenient, such as allows pernicious lenience’

and

liberalism 1. bourgeois ideological and sociopolitical trend advocating liberty of bourgeoisie in feudal-serfdom and bourgeois revolutions epochs and that has become reactionary with the establishment of its political dominance’ (Slovvarj 1986: 181).

This changed in the 21st century dictionary, which reflected as yet the democratic period about to be finished:

liberalism 1. Ideological and sociopolitical trend that unites adherents of civic, political, economic freedoms and free entrepreneurship; 2. Freethinking; 3. *figur., coll.* Excessive lenience’ (Bolshoi 2007: 179).

Thus, the first meaning is the old, standard Western meaning that was revived in post-Gorbachev Russia. The second meaning is interestingly now marked as *not dated*. And the third meaning definition has substituted the aggressively intolerant *pernicious* with *excessive*. But under Putin, the definition is likely to change again and the above 2007 edition must have been compiled some years earlier.

The data from the *Russian National Corpus* highlights how political influence can shape language and perceptions. The prevalence of negative co-occurrences with terms like *liberalism* and *liberal* suggests a broader societal trend towards viewing these concepts unfavourably, influenced by historical and contemporary political contexts. The *Russian National Corpus* provides a valuable insight into the linguistic and cultural shifts within Russian society, especially concerning politically charged terms. The pejorative associations with liberalism underscore the ongoing impact of state narratives and media control on public perception and language.

4.4. *Latvian corpora and dictionaries*

Latvian balanced corpus (Online 12) (101 million tokens) offers 237 tokens for *liberalism* and 361 for *liberal*. The co-occurrences are a mix of traditional and novel words. A more modern corpus of internet sources (Online 13) (492 million tokens) has a larger offer of these terms: 1490 for *liberalism*, often co-occurring with such words as: *degrades, leftwing, radical, feminism*.

1953 tokens of *liberal* carry many adjectives – numerous *leftwing*, also *radical, gay* and generally tends to reflect *liberals* as *loose, immoral, undercover communists, socialists*.

Latvian dictionary definitions of *liberal* and *liberalism* at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century corresponded to the generally accepted Western meanings. However, following the Soviet occupation in 1940, dictionaries of Latvian, both explanatory and dictionaries of foreign words, practiced direct transfer of political and ideological terms from Soviet Russian dictionaries. Consequently, whatever these Soviet dictionaries stated in specific decades was replicated in Latvian. After regaining independence in 1990, Latvian dictionaries of foreign words returned to the traditional European understanding of *liberals* and *liberalism*.

Today, *Tēzauris* the largest internet dictionary in Latvia, which comprises several dictionaries with some updates (Online 14), provides three senses of liberalism:

- ‘1. A theory and sociopolitical stance advocating representative governance, freedom of the press, speech, and religion, the abolition of class privileges, free international trade, etc.; 2. A belief in maximum individual freedom of individual and minimal state interference in economic life; 3. Excessive lenience’.

A more recent addition *MLVV* (Online 15) gives two senses:

- ‘1. Political view that emphasizes freedom of action of individual in all spheres, supporting noninterference of state in economic life; 2. ‘Excessive tolerance, lack of strictness’.

Thus, we see that the use of the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* in Latvian encompasses a broad spectrum of interpretations. Some align with the traditional meaning, while others incorporate aspects of modern liberalism, which are often viewed negatively. This negative perception may be influenced by Russian media (with its strong presence in Latvian media space) that uses deliberately pejorative language with regard to these terms. Despite these evolving and varied interpretations in common usage, dictionaries have consistently retained the traditional meanings of these terms.

5. Ideological polysemy

Lexicographers and theoreticians have long been aware of the challenges in explaining ideological terms. Moon (1989: 77) states that ‘there is no such thing as a politically neutral definition.’ Bejoint (2000: 131) agrees, noting that ‘for words used to refer to social or political values or systems, objective definitions are simply impossible.’ Additionally, contemporary dictionaries, while generally adhering to descriptive principles, are also influenced by considerations of political correctness (Elsner-Petri 2015). The bias introduced by political correctness is as ideological as the totalitarian mandates given to lexicographers in the past or the historical biases against lower classes, women, and other groups. Naturally, the issue of lemma definition is influenced by the size, and specialization of a dictionary. A general explanatory dictionary tends towards conciseness, while an encyclopaedic dictionary or an academic dictionary of politics can provide much more detailed definitions and clarifications.

No dictionary is likely to encompass the full spectrum of perceptions, but given that many political terms today have conflicting or even completely opposite meanings, this can be understood through the lens of polysemy. Polysemy may take untraditional forms, it is present even in terminology where ambiguity is typically unwelcome. There are Janus words, which have opposite meanings without much controversy (e.g., appropriation, oversight, handicap, bad). Our specific type of polysemy could be called ideological polysemy (Dieckmann 1975; 1989), which raises the question of adding extra meanings in dictionaries. This option must certainly be considered. Lexicographers have already started moving in this direction for some terms. For example, *fascist* in dictionaries often has three senses: Italian fascist, generalized political fascist, and someone viewed as overly strict and imposing (Online 16). Also *political correctness* was described in the dictionary of neologisms of 1997 as ‘the rejection of language and

behaviour considered discriminatory or offensive’, but also noted that ‘by the early nineties use of the term *political correctness* was almost always pejorative’ (The Oxford, 1997: 239). Similarly, as shown above, some dictionaries differentiate between old and new liberalism by assigning two senses to the term.

6. Bilingual dictionaries and translation issues

As mentioned above, the international nature of ideological terms might suggest that their meanings are identical across various languages, which is far from the truth. These meanings have developed, multiplied, and diverged over time, often becoming false friends, even intralinguistically as highlighted by F. F. Kirsakmene (2023). This divergence poses a real challenge in translation and requires careful consideration. If a political party is named *Liberal* in one language, it should be translated as *Liberal* in another (if the term exists). However, in common noun use and different types of texts where the translator can be more creative and explanatory, various strategies can be used to convey the original sense and the author’s intent. For example, in an American modern fiction text with a comment like ‘Alex is liberal to the bone,’ it might be necessary to substitute *liberal* with *socialist* in Latvian, or at least add *American* to *liberal* to convey the distinct American meaning. This would help to differentiate between Latvian and American meanings and ensure the reader understands the intended nuance.

Conclusions

This study examined the terms *liberal* and *liberalism* within various corpora and dictionaries. Analysis of corpora in several languages demonstrates that the term *liberal* is understood in diverse ways. The primary point of contention of semantics of these terms revolves around attitudes towards the state and government.

Dictionaries, both printed and electronic, have tried to establish and lay down the meaning of the ideological terms. While dictionaries strive for objectivity, they are not free from ideological influence, they are affected frequently by the political perspectives of lexicographers, ruling regimes that try to impose advantageous interpretations and etymological considerations. The definitions of ideological terms can reflect current usage but can also lag behind evolving meanings.

The full spectrum of meanings and connotations of these terms is often inadequately represented in standard-size explanatory dictionaries across various languages. This discrepancy underscores the dynamic nature of language and the significant impact of external influences on public perception and discourse.

English dictionaries appear to be more adept at capturing and reflecting contemporary trends and change of meaning through the use of polysemy. This adaptability allows them to document evolving meanings and usages as they emerge in society. This refers, however, mainly to large dictionaries. In contrast, changes in Russian lexicography often mirror shifting political ideologies. Historically, Soviet-era dictionaries were influenced by ideological constructs and propaganda. Latvian and German explanatory dictionaries have largely maintained the foundational meaning of the term *liberal* and have not undergone significant revisions to accommodate contemporary changes.

Descriptive lexicography must adapt to these developments by capturing both the general ambiguity and the emergence of new denotational and connotational meanings. When terms undergo changes, dictionaries may display the current meaning or provide multiple meanings to illustrate their diachronic development. If corpora show that a term is regularly used with diverse meanings and connotations by different communities and political factions concurrently, dictionaries should capture these differences as well. While no dictionary is likely to be able to satisfy all the variety of perceptions, the ideological terms that have evolved to hold highly divergent, or even opposing, meanings can be analysed within the framework of polysemy in lexicography. The study underscores the importance of considering linguistic and cultural contexts when discussing political concepts like *liberal* and *liberalism*. Further research could expand the number of languages and the terms discussed, also explore the influence of media and political discourse on the perception of these terms in various cultures.

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