

Revisiting the welfare state through the decades

Investigating the discursive construction of the welfare state in the *Times* from 1940 to 2009

Isabelle van der Bom and Laura L. Paterson

3.1 Introduction

The concept of a ‘welfare state’ became established in the UK following the publication of the famous *Beveridge Report* in 1942. As a notion, the welfare state was established to tackle social inequality through a series of government policies that provided (among other things) a safety net for the unemployed, access to education and nationalized health care. Today, however, the term ‘welfare state’ is often discussed in terms of rising costs, austerity measures and a system under strain. This chapter traces whether and how policy and attitudinal changes to the welfare state are evident in newspaper discourse. To ascertain whether and when attitudes have fluctuated, we use seven-decade-long corpora of the *Times* held in CQPweb (Hardie 2012) to investigate how the newspaper reported on the welfare state from its initiation in the 1940s to the end of the 2000s. Acknowledging that we only have data from a single source which covers this seventy-year time span, we use the *Times* as a case study of how discourses surrounding the welfare state (as indexed through language) have developed over time. Our corpus-based discourse analysis of the *Times* begins with collocation analysis and expands to include an analysis of co-text and wider social contexts. We address the following:

1. (How) do reports about the welfare state change over time?
2. Is the welfare state associated with any core concepts which remain unchanged over time?
3. How does the language used to report on the welfare state index wider discourses about the UK welfare state from the 1940s to ~~the~~ 2009?

AQ: Per CMS 8.168, when newspapers and periodicals are mentioned in text, an initial *the*, even if part of the official title, is lowercased (unless it begins a sentence) and not italicized. The same rule has been applied and authors’ predominant usage of ‘*the*’ in roman has been retained. Please confirm if this is okay.



3.2 The changing welfare state

Political arguments surrounding the unsustainability of the welfare state, the dismantling of welfare state policies and austerity have been ongoing in the UK for decades. Taylor and Powell (2017: 191) note that from the 1970s onwards, the modern British welfare state was called into question and subject to a number of invasive reforms that were very much led by a surge in neoliberalism (see also Toolan 2018). Since its formation, the British welfare state has undergone a number of changes, implemented by both Conservative and Labour governments. In the 1960s and 1970s, reforms were made to allow the Treasury to plan and control public expenditure; in the 1980s and 1990s, the civil service and administration of welfare were restructured, which led to the creation of separate administrative agencies (e.g. NHS Trusts), the adoption of an economic market-like model and the introduction of a management layer in public service (Taylor and Powell 2017: 194). These reforms, meant to cut costs, maintain budget and planning control and improve administrative efficiency, have continued in this vein since the 1990s, with a perceived need for cost-cutting and marketization invigorated by the 2008 financial crash (Winckler 2012: 213, 218). The most recent, large-scale change is the Welfare Reform Act (2012). Our data, which runs to 2009, does not extend far enough past the financial crash to facilitate the analysis of newspaper reports on the impacts of 2008 or the implementation of Welfare Reform. However, the analysis we present stands as a foundation for future work comparing newspaper discourses before and after the financial crash.

To analyse attitudes towards the welfare state throughout its history, we take the stance that newspaper discourse, as a constituent of public mass media discourse, both reflects ongoing sociopolitical issues in society and has the capacity to shape and construct these issues and attitudes towards them (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fowler 1991; van Dijk 1988, 1998). Discourses represent ideologies, and the 'naturalizing tendencies' of newspapers (Gómez-Jiménez 2018: 101), where certain attitudes are represented as common sense and particular policy changes as inevitable, may, ~~for example,~~ lead readers to be more accepting of such changes (c.f. Toolan 2018). Our hypothesis is that a right-of-centre newspaper such as the *Times* will display a somewhat critical attitude to the welfare state. However, we do not expect the newspaper's position to hold constant. At the inception of the modern welfare state in the 1940s we expect more positive evaluation, given that it was initiated relatively soon after the economic hardship and rationing associated with the world wars. Following the structural changes to the welfare state starting in the 1970s (and the surge of neoliberalism in the 1980s) we expect more negative evaluation as significant welfare reforms were introduced (mainly by the *Times*-backed Conservatives).

3.3 Data and methodology

Our primary data consist of seven-decade-long corpora of the *Times* newspaper articles held in CQPweb (Hardie 2012). Each corpus contains a decade's worth of material from the *Times Digital Archive*, which runs from 1785 to 2013 (Gale n.d.). For this paper we

focus on the seven corpora which include data from the 1940s through to the 2000s (1940–2009). While the later corpora can be interrogated rather unproblematically, given that they comprise texts which were ‘born digital’, the earlier corpora need to be treated with more caution as they contain texts which were originally printed and have been digitized using optical character recognition (OCR). Common errors in OCR are well documented, and the accuracy of OCR when scanning old newspaper texts has been questioned (see Gregory et al. 2016 on nineteenth-century newspapers). As such, it is possible that OCR errors meant our corpus query did not return all relevant hits.¹

We adopt an integrated corpus linguistics and discourse analysis approach to our data. The combination of these two methodologies is now well established and has been used successfully to interrogate the discursive construction of issues closely related to the (modern) UK welfare state, such as poverty (Paterson and Gregory 2019, Gregory and Paterson 2020), welfare receipt (Baker and McEnery 2015a; van der Bom et al. 2018), housing (Toolan 2018) and state-backed maternity leave policies (Gómez-Jiménez 2018). For example, Gregory and Paterson (forthcoming) investigated how the term ‘poverty’ is located in geographical space by the *Times* between the 1940s and 2000s (drawing on the same corpora we use here). Baker and McEnery, on the other hand, used a corpus of tweets about UK benefits debates to identify several overarching discourses about benefits recipients used repeatedly by members of the public. They found ‘scrounger’ and ‘idle poor’ discourses (with van der Bom et al. 2018 finding similar discourses expressed in their own Twitter corpus). This paper builds on these studies, and similar works, to take a historical slant on the discursive construction of the welfare state. As such, it has the potential to shine a light on how the discourses identified in contemporary work developed into their modern realizations. Corpus-based discourse analysis helped us to establish key themes in our corpus and contextualize our qualitative findings on the use of the *welfare state* over time.

We searched each of the seven corpora using the query <*welfare* state> and downloaded all the concordance lines within a span of +/- 50 words to facilitate close analysis. The corpus wildcard (*) was used to ensure we included any alternative forms of welfare state that occurred in the corpora. For example, there are occasions where welfare is encased in quotation marks, as in ‘the so-called “welfare” state’. The queries returned a total of 7,553 hits (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Hits of <*Welfare* State> in the Times 1940s–2000s

	Hits	Texts	Normalized frequency (pmw)	No. of collocates
1940s	114	64	0.39	5
1950s	1350	858	3.21	41
1960s	978	725	1.88	28
1970s	685	482	1.43	19
1980s	1,402	797	2.61	58
1990s	2,034	1,020	2.65	109
2000s	991	675	1.2	38
Total	7,554	4,621		298

Our analysis took two forms: (i) the computationally aided analysis of the collocational patterns of *welfare state* in each decade and (ii) the close reading and manual coding of 10 per cent samples of all concordance lines returned by the query (we took four 10 per cent samples in all, meaning that we manually analysed 40 per cent of the hits returned by the query). The analysis of collocates is useful for discourse analysis as collocates can shine a light on wider trends in a dataset. Furthermore, semantic groupings of collocates can suggest that particular topics/semantic fields are particularly relevant to the query node. In the present case, the semantic groupings were determined on an ad hoc basis rather than relying on semantic tagging software, which was due largely to the format of our data. To expand upon the collocate analysis, we took four 10 per cent samples of all 7,553 hits across our corpora. Each author was given a different 10 per cent sample (755 concordance lines each) for initial analysis. Concordance lines present all occurrences of the query node within their wider co-text left and right (see Figure 3.1). They allow for the systematic interrogation of all the hits of a given search term and facilitate the identification of language patterns (these can be grammatical, lexical, semantic and/or discursive).

To analyse the concordances, the authors worked independently before reconvening to discuss their findings. There was considerable overlap and, as a result, the following analysis highlights the key macropropositions (see below) repeated in the concordance lines. To ensure that the conclusions made here are robust, each author took a second 10 per cent sample of concordance lines to ensure that no major patterns in the data had been missed. This method is similar to that used by Baker (2006) who suggests taking samples of fifty concordance lines for close analysis, identifying any patterns, repeating the analysis with an additional fifty concordance lines, testing the patterns and finding new ones, repeating this process until no further patterns can be found. As we are working across a relatively large time scale, it was important that we do not restrict our analysis to small numbers of concordance lines, as such, due to our use of 10 per cent samples, we closely analysed a total of 3,020 concordance lines (40 per cent of the hits across all corpora). This is a larger proportion than would be expected in most corpus-based discourse analysis, but gave us the advantage of being familiar with a large proportion of our data.

Our data was categorized using van Dijk's (1988, 1995b) discourse approach to media analysis. Van Dijk's approach is particularly suitable for our data because, together with our quantitative analysis, it allowed us to capture relevant themes within the data and examine the ideology/ies which underpin them. In his 1988 work, van Dijk proposed a way of analysing the thematic structure of the organization of news discourse. He suggests that a text can be analysed in terms of a hierarchy of propositions which represent linguistic meaning. Propositions capture, in other words, what utterances,

reality greater than myself) . And I have never regarded the **welfare state** as anything but a threat to this . Not only is Gray
of the " Virginia school " , which tell us that the **welfare state** will in time become a colony of " rent seeking " bureaucrats
den has , of course , risen since 1979 ; the **welfare state** has to be financed . The main difference is over the balance
affluent to make their traditional fair contribution to the costs of a **welfare state** . Until Nigel Lawson 's tax giveaway in 1988 , the top
Health Service was set out in three paragraphs , as was the **welfare state** . Churchill forbore to mention apple pie , but was unabashed in
Iron Curtain and the end of the Nordic model of the socialist **welfare state** has overtaken M Delors 's game plan , however , and the

Figure 3.1 Sample of concordance lines for *welfare state* in the *Times* 1990s.

sentences or discourses ‘are about’. A text is made up of individual propositions, which form the lowest hierarchical level of van Dijk’s thematic analysis. Through the use of, for example, modality and the description of social actors, the linguistic structure of propositions may reveal underlying ideologies (van Dijk 1995b: 258). These individual propositions may then be grouped under several distinct macropropositions. Van Dijk typifies macropropositions as ‘organized sets of propositions’, which ‘unlike the propositions expressed by clauses or sentences, ... are only expressed, indirectly, by larger stretches of talk or text’ (1988: 32). Macropropositions capture the ‘theme’ or ‘topic’ of a text, and may also be hierarchically structured, with one macroproposition on top of the entire hierarchical structure, summarizing the whole text.

In our use of van Dijk’s methodology, we approach our entire dataset as the ‘text’, rather than, for example, treating each query hit as a separate text. We thus grouped out concordance lines into macropropositions following van Dijk’s (1988: 32) three steps: (i) delete irrelevant information, (ii) generalize a group of propositions into one macroproposition and (iii) replacing sequences of propositions that denote part of an act or an event by a macroproposition that represents the act or event as a whole. While these steps are somewhat subjective (i.e. deciding what information is ‘irrelevant’) our decision to independently analyse samples of concordance lines before sharing our findings with each other minimized individual researcher bias, as we only include here the clear trends identified by both authors. Our analysis led us to identify three macropropositions: the welfare state is ripe for reconfiguration, the welfare state breeds immorality and the welfare state facilitates the creation of a social underclass. Each macroproposition is discussed in detail below, but first we present an overview of the collocate analysis.

3.4 Trends in the data

Table 3.1 shows the number of hits for the query in each corpus, as well as the number of texts which included the search term. As each corpus was of a different size, the penultimate column in the table shows the normalized frequencies for each corpus (the number of query hits per million words (pmw)). The normalized frequencies indicate that, overall, references to the welfare state increase throughout the decades from 0.39 hits per million in the 1940s to 2.65 hits per million in the 1990s.

The lower number of hits in the 1940s is somewhat expected given that the major policies which led to the welfare state – particularly the National Health Service Act (1946) and the National Assistance Act (1948) – were not made law until late in the decade. These Acts could potentially account for the fact that the 1950s corpus bucks the general trend, as it has the highest normalized frequency at 3.17 hits per million words. This decade is thus a potential case study for extensive discourse analysis. In a similar vein, in the 2000s references to the welfare state decrease to 1.2 occurrences per million words. By considering the co-text and the social context of the texts produced in the 2000s, it may be possible to determine why this decrease occurred. For example, it could be that another term has arisen to take the place of *welfare state*, discourse has shifted away from conceptualizing particular issues (education, benefits receipt, health care, etc.) as part of the welfare state or (in a somewhat unlikely scenario given the global financial crash in 2008) the newsworthiness of the welfare state has decreased.²

3.4.1 Thematic collocate analysis

To move beyond raw numbers and start to identify trends in the co-text surrounding the welfare state, we generated collocates of <welfare* state> for each corpus. There are a total of 298 collocates (see Table 3.1) calculated using log ratio, 'a collocation measure very similar to Mutual Information', but results are filtered through log likelihood to measure statistical significance (Hardie 2014). We chose log ratio because it avoids the potential for overemphasis on high-frequency words (as with the cubed version of the MI statistic (MI3) or log likelihood) or low-frequency words (as with mutual information (MI)). ~~In the present case it~~ returned markedly frequent lexical collocates, facilitating our analysis of the discourses associated with the welfare state. (We were not, for example, interested in the function words which collocated with *welfare state*.) Collocates were calculated using a span of +/-5, minimum frequency = 5, minimum collocation = 5. All collocates in the analysis have log-likelihood values above 16.04 ($p < 0.0001$) – we chose a high level of statistical significance to make the number of collocates manageable – and we used a threshold of 3.0 (c.f. Baker 2006: 101 for a discussion of cut-off points). Thus, while our scope for collocates, in a statistical sense, is quite narrow, these parameters ensure that our analysis focuses on those words most strongly associated with the welfare state in each decade.

Using the established cut-off points, in the 1940s, there are only five collocates of *welfare state* (*employment, social, full, could* and *what*). However, despite being so few in number, the collocates can still tell us something about the discourse surrounding the welfare state; there is clearly a relationship between the welfare state and employment, and the occurrence of *could* supports the idea that, as the 1940s was the decade where the welfare state was initiated, the co-text for the search term relates to how the concept of a welfare state *could* or *could not* be realized in the future, as shown in example (1).

- (1) All these extravagances and follies were coming home to roost and at the end of the argument when the taly [*sic*] was struck the welfare state could guarantee its citizens everything except the two things that really mattered. The only things with which they could not provide them were food or work. (1949)

There are forty-one collocates meeting the thresholds set out above for the 1950s. To identify patterns in the collocates they have been grouped semantically as shown in Table 3.2. The collocates were grouped on an ad hoc basis, with semantic categories being data driven. As such, some semantic categories differ between decades while others are relatively stable (see Table 3.2).

To determine the appropriate categorizations for each collocate, concordance lines were manually analysed. The grouped collocates suggest some initial trends in how the *Times* characterizes the welfare state. There is conflict between the welfare state's potential social good – providing security and benefits to all – and its perceived social ills. For example, the collocation of *welfare state* and *dangers* clusters in one text in particular (2), where Conservative MP David Gammans claimed there would be negative moral/spiritual ramifications of the welfare state.

Table 3.2 Collocates of <*Welfare* State> in the *Times* 1950s

Benefits: welfare state	<i>benefits, welfare, provisions, pensions, employment</i>	5
Destruction/Opposition	<i>attack</i>	1
Economic	<i>economy, economic, maintain</i>	3
Idea/notion/concept	<i>concept, so-called, idea, principles, true, whole</i>	6
Initialization/building	<i>advent, foundations, fabric, creating, structure, depends, existence, become,</i>	8
Letter sign off	<i>faithfully, yours</i>	2
People	<i>citizen, nation,</i>	2
Politics	<i>Socialism, democratic, Socialist</i>	3
Social good	<i>survival, social, voluntary, luxury, security</i>	5
Social ill	<i>dangers, demands, needs, danger</i>	4
Other	<i>Sweden, itself</i>	—

- (2) Possible dangers in the welfare state were suggested by Mr. L. D. Gammans, M.P., when he spoke in London yesterday at the founder's day meeting of the Church Army [...] not merely the danger of malingering or abuse of the national health service, but the danger of attending to people's physical wants and forgetting they had souls. (1950)

Given the proximity of the 1950s to the creation of the welfare state, there is debate about its intentions at its origin, as well as references to the ideas that underpin it (3). These ideas are also associated with building metaphors, linking the *foundations* of the welfare state to the *structure* of society.

- (3) The fact that the whole economic programme of the Labour Party is pivoted upon Keynesian economics is not, perhaps, generally appreciated. It is, however, the foundation of the whole Socialist concept of the welfare State. (1952)

Moving into the 1960s, there are twenty-eight collocates, many of which are shared with the 1950s (*benefits, depends, welfare, voluntary, social, structure, employment, needs*). Of those collocates that are different, many relate to the same semantic groups used in Table 3.1: *creation, create* and *developed* fit into the initialization/building category, and *Conservatives* and *unions* fit in the political category. However, it is interesting that the Conservative Party is not strongly associated with (opposition to) the welfare state in the late 1960s, given that they lost power to a Labour government in 1964. One additional semantic group which occurs in the 1960s collocates includes references to *casualties* and *health*, which initially may appear to suggest links between the welfare state and the NHS. While in the latter case this is a fair representation, *casualties* is used in a more metaphorical sense, as shown in the headline in (4).

- (4) CASUALTIES OF THE WELFARE STATE 'WHERE POVERTY STILL PINCHES' (1960)

In (4) reference is also made to *poverty* (another collocate) and this is one of the earlier indications of claims that the welfare state does not work for all, but rather it is

overworked and *cannot keep pace with the growing need* (a phrase which is associated with the welfare state eight times in the 1960s corpus).

The 1970s only have nineteen collocates meeting our criteria and, again, many are shared with previous decades: *fabric, poverty, welfare, burden, benefits, created, social, employment, economy, health, towards*. This repetition of collocates across decades suggests that by the 1970s the core components of and issues associated with the welfare state (as presented in the *Times*) have become established. Indeed *benefits* is a collocate for every decade bar the 1940s, although the meaning of this collocate shifts between *benefits* in its generic sense and the use of the term more specifically to refer to welfare payments given to benefits recipients (5):

- (5) Jack Cooper, the Chesterfield man who discovered that he could draw more money in welfare state benefits than he could by working, was sentenced to seven months' imprisonment by Chesterfield county magistrates on Saturday. (1960)

Although there is no indication that Jack Cooper committed benefits fraud – a topic which is prominent in twenty-first-century press coverage of welfare receipt (see Lundström 2013) – an implicit association is made between claiming benefits and the deviant criminal behaviour for which Cooper was sentenced (stealing copper and non-payment of fines).

Moving on to the 1980s, there were fifty-eight collocates, which may suggest that the welfare state had come to be associated with multiple different issues. However, when grouping the collocates semantically, it became clear that most collocates fit neatly into a smaller number of semantic fields (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 shows how, in comparison to Table 3.2, there are some semantic fields which now seem relatively stable in terms of their association with the welfare state, particularly the use of a building metaphor. The most salient change between the 1950s and the 1980s collocates, however, is the marked increase in collocates relating to the destruction and/or opposition to the welfare state. Changes are framed using

Table 3.3 Collocates of <*Welfare* State> in the *Times* 1980s

Benefits: welfare state	<i>beneficiaries, welfare, benefits</i>	3
Destruction/opposition	<i>dismantle, dismantling, overhaul, destroy, reform, attack</i>	6
Economic	<i>financing, funding, privatization, economy, socialist, Conservatives, spending, expenditure, employment</i>	9
Idea/notion/concept	<i>mentality, consensus, attitudes, radical, concept, principles, thinking, principle</i>	8
Initialization/building	<i>rebuild, founding, foundations, creation, created, existence, shape, structure, basis</i>	9
People	<i>Beveridge, Fowler</i>	2
Politics	<i>Tories</i>	1
Social good	<i>compassion, social, provision</i>	3
Social ill	<i>undermining, burden, crisis</i>	3
Temporal	<i>post-war, future, modern, towards</i>	4
Other	<i>hidden, mixed, NHS, scope, debate, review, aspects, effects, health</i>	—

negatively loaded terms such as *dismantle*, *attack* and *destroy* (6), which are associated with government policies:

- (6) Mr Leon Brittan's audacious admission that the Cabinet is indeed contemplating a wholesale dismantling of the welfare state. (1982)

The 1990s has the highest number of collocates (109) but they are mostly all associated with the same semantic fields as were found in the 1980s (compare Table 3.4 and Table 3.3). The number of collocates shows an increase in the semantic field of destruction/opposition and the role of economics in debates about the welfare state, but still the building metaphor remains. Only one additional semantic field was needed to categorize all the collocates – that of scope – and, thus, it seems that there was a trend in the 1990s data to refer to the welfare state in terms of its size (7):

- (7) The British tax burden is greater than in America and Japan, but less than the European average because of variations in the scope of the welfare state. (1992)

Overall, however, it seems that by the 1990s the language the *Times* uses to talk about the welfare state has become relatively fixed in terms of the semantic fields drawn upon. The destruction/opposition category is more heterogeneous than in other decades and not all words in this category carry the negative semantic prosody associated with 'destruction' – *reform*, for example could be interpreted positively – but nevertheless, the notion of reconfiguration holds constant for many of these collocates.

Table 3.4 Collocates of <*Welfare* State> in the *Times* 1990s

Benefits: welfare state	<i>welfare, benefits</i>	2
Destruction/opposition	<i>dismantling, reforming, dismantle, redesign, overhaul, reform, shake-up, reforms, axe, reformed, transform, shake, restructuring, assault, replace, review, changes</i>	17
Economic	<i>privatizing, nationalization, privatize, affordable, financing, poverty, taxes, privatization, reducing, taxation, pensions, spending, cuts, afford, economy, budget, costs</i>	17
Idea/notion/concept	<i>rethinking, mentality, radical, consensus, fundamental, principles, argues, principle, proposals, existence, commitment, promised, culture</i>	13
Initialization/building	<i>foundations, blueprint, creation, preserve, establishing, architects, founded, creating, created, structure, foundation, parts, built, create, basis</i>	15
People	<i>Beveridge, Lilley, Portillo, Blair</i>	4
Politics	<i>right-wing, Tories, voters, Labour, Tory, government</i>	6
Scope	<i>far-reaching, wide-ranging, broadly, sweeping, universal, wholesale, scope, comprehensive</i>	8
Social good	<i>generous, social, encourage, safety, security</i>	5
Social ill	<i>dependency, burden, crisis</i>	3
Temporal	<i>cradle-to-grave,³ modernize, modernization, cradle, post-war, post-war, modern, 1945, 21st, future</i>	10
Other	<i>Swedes, middle-class, unemployment, defend, functions, NHS, Sweden, speech</i>	—

The number of collocates for the 2000s drops to just thirty-eight, and the same semantic fields can account for most collocates.

As a final point, the collocates and indeed the  analysis of the concordance lines (discussed in section 3.4.2) also included numerous references to welfare states in other countries, such as Sweden. We have not examined these references in any detail; although it would be interesting to examine the depiction of the welfare states of other countries in the *Times* and compare these to representations of the British welfare state, this goes beyond the scope of this paper. What the collocate analysis has shown is that, while individual collocates vary across decades, the semantic fields these collocates are drawn from begin to stabilize in the 1970s and are continued in differing proportions into the 2000s. This warrants further qualitative analysis, but suggests that the core elements of the *Times*' reporting of the welfare state are relatively static. We thus interrogated our data further to determine how these core components were realized as macropropositions.

3.4.2 Macropropositions

3.4.2.1 Macroproposition I: *The welfare state is ripe for reconfiguration*

Despite the relatively small number of hits in the 1940s corpus, there are some minor trends evident in this decade that continue throughout the data. First, the welfare state is used to advance political arguments in the run up to the 1951 UK general election (a trend which continues for subsequent elections). Secondly, even at its beginnings, the welfare state is categorized as underfunded and ripe for reconfiguration:

- (8) It is not a question of dismantling the welfare state but of building it upon rock instead of sand. (1949)

The examples clearly depict the welfare state metaphorically, with (8) drawing upon the building metaphor found in the collocate analysis. It is useful to examine these with the help of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), which is based on the premise that metaphor is not just a feature of language, but that thought itself is inherently metaphorical. Unpicking the metaphors in our dataset allows us to examine how one thing (X) is conceptualized in terms of another (Y). In (8) the welfare state is conceptualized as a structure that has been built on unsteady ground, revealing the underlying conceptual metaphor COMPLEX SYSTEMS ARE BUILDINGS (Gibbs 2017: 26). Example (8) suggests the welfare state should not be taken apart, but rather built on different grounds. However, it is very difficult to move a building onto different foundations without dismantling it, despite the author's claim that 'it is not a question of dismantling the welfare state'.

In addition to the use of metaphor, examples (9–10) show how policies of different political parties are either made explicit (10) or are criticized (9). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the welfare state continues to be at the centre of political argument and policy debate throughout the decades (11–14):

- (9) Continuance of the present course can only mean that the Labour Government's experiment in the welfare state will come down with a crash. (1949)

- (10) The Conservative Party accepts the welfare State with all its implications. It will try to keep wages at their present level and to maintain – or even to increase – the social services. (1949)
- (11) Conservatives believe the time has come to make the individual worker see the truth that [t]his welfare state cannot be maintained merely by Acts of Parliament. (1950)
- (12) We make jokes about Government guidance from womb-to-tomb, but nobody sane would dismantle the Welfare State. (1967)
- (13) The party conferences have drawn the battle lines for the coming general election. The future of the welfare state will be at the centre of the argument. (1977)
- (14) Blair, who has been almost silent since last weekend, will argue the need to reshape the welfare state. (1994)

In the 1950s, the Conservatives and Labour favoured different models of the welfare state, with different conceptions of the extent and purpose of government welfare expenses. Example (11) provides one example of how political parties – in this case the Conservatives – used the welfare state in their political messages. Here, the ‘individual worker’ is addressed to see the ‘truth’ that the welfare state ‘cannot be maintained merely by Acts of Parliament’. The emphasis on the ‘individual’ worker can be seen as the Conservative’s attempt to emphasize individual liberty (as opposed to state responsibility) or address the non-unionized worker.⁴ The negation ‘cannot be maintained merely by Acts of Parliament’ further suggests that the welfare state is currently solely maintained by Acts of Parliament and that this is unsustainable (cf. Gómez-Jiménez 2018: 105).

The discussion about restructuring the welfare state seems to be less active in the 1960s and 1970s. This could suggest that in (relatively) more prosperous times, there was greater acceptance of the welfare state, although there are examples from each decade which mention the need for reform (see 13). In the 1980s however, the debate around reforms seems to pick up again, with more concordance lines referring to change. This is not surprising given the 1980s was associated with Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the rise of neoliberalism. Thatcher favoured reduced state intervention, free markets and entrepreneurship (Apple 1983). It is also clear, however, that the welfare state was established enough by the 1980s that people did not want to get rid of it. This is evident in the increased reporting of opposition to government plans (15), despite the Conservative government positioning itself as ‘not intending’ to ‘dismantle the welfare state’ (16). Yet, the welfare state is deemed ‘incompatible’ with government-endorsed ideologies (17).

- (15) Mrs Anne Spencer, National Union of Tailors and Garment Workers, said during a debate on the welfare state. She proposed a motion, carried unanimously, condemning repeated and damaging attacks by the Government. (1987)
- (16) Foot’s question, said the Government was not intending, as he knew full well, to dismantle the welfare state. It was determined to give individuals and families more choice and freedom to exercise it. (1983)



- (17) So if there is one central truth in this campaign it is that the survival of the welfare state is incompatible with Mrs Thatcher's grand design. (1983)

Discussion of welfare reform continues in the 1990s and 2000s, where – in line with New Labour's discourse (Fairclough 2000: 38) – the role of the individual is foregrounded and the welfare state is reframed as an enterprise (18):

- (18) Malcolm Wicks, the Pensions Minister, said that the project would enable the welfare state to adopt a more 'customer-focused approach'. (2004)
- (19) He [Tony Blair] will lay out a 'new Labour vision' of the welfare state. This is one in which people do not wait to be helped but become 'active citizens'. (2005)

In (19), Blair is said to announce a new vision of the welfare state, in which people 'do not wait to be helped', but become 'active citizens.' The implication here is that responsibility for one's welfare is shifted from the state to individual citizens; in this reformulation of the welfare state, people 'do not wait to be helped' because they help themselves. Furthermore, the marketization of the welfare state – where public services are increasingly made to function more as businesses – is evident in the nomenclature in (18) where people accessing the benefits of the welfare state are labelled as 'customers.'

Although the examples given above have different linguistic realizations, they all point towards a wider overarching idea that links the welfare state with restructuring, reformulation and change. Thus we identified our first macroproposition – that the welfare state is ripe for reconfiguration – which is found throughout the seventy-year time span of our corpora. This was somewhat surprising given that there appears to have been no 'bedding in' time for the welfare state's inaugural policies. This early push for reformulation may be accounted for by the fact that the welfare state was primarily a Labour Party initiative, but the Conservatives held power from 1951 to 1964. Similarly, the neoliberal stance of the 1979–97 Conservative governments is also incompatible with a welfare state founded on ultimately socialist principles. But it is important to note that the Labour government of 1997 also proposed changes to the welfare state (see 19) in line with a neoliberal ideology. In the examples given so far (including the collocates), there is little indication of the justification for why the welfare state is so closely linked with reconfiguration. While some objections to the welfare state were based on economic grounds, by far the more prominent argument relates to our second macroproposition.

3.4.2.2 Macroproposition II: *The welfare state breeds immorality*

In addition to references to the affordability of the welfare state, we found moral talk featured very prominently in our data. Moral talk, or language which is 'oriented towards making moral judgements' (Bennett 2014: 73), is repeatedly used to negatively evaluate the welfare state and the effects it (allegedly) has on wider society (20–1, also 22–3):

- (20) The comprehensive social planning of the modern welfare state may have produced in some people the feeling that responsibility towards their fellow-

men has been in large measure removed, and no doubt in some particulars this is true. (1949)

- (21) The political economic philosophy of the welfare State is not only bad economically but it is also morally bad. (1953)

Throughout the decades, the welfare state tends to be characterized as an agent or social actor which has the potential to alter people's behaviour. In the first instance (20), this takes the form of laments about declining rates of charity and people's unwillingness to look after or take responsibility towards others. The naming of the value 'responsibility' points to morality here (Bennett 2018). The argument is that the welfare state breeds a form of individualism where no one cares about anyone but themselves and, furthermore, they expect the state to take care of other people. This argument is particularly prominent in earlier decades.

A related position occurs in (predominantly later) examples where the welfare state is positioned as stifling individuality and independence, creating 'idle', morally weak people that show little initiative or personal responsibility (22–3). Beyond expecting the state to care for others, the 'idlers' now expect the state to take care of them.

- (22) The Welfare State has gone too far. It is breeding a nation of idlers. Families and individuals should stand upon their own feet. (1962)
- (23) She [Thatcher] told Mr Major to tackle the 'dependency culture' which was becoming an increasing burden on the State. The welfare state was initially set up to help the genuinely poor and ill, she said. Some people were now abusing the welfare state by claiming benefit when they should be working. (1995)

To return to the wider co-text of (21) the welfare state is both 'economically' and 'morally' bad, because it is based on 'spite', 'envy' and 'sentimental altruism' and because the 'foundation of dependence on the State' it creates is unsustainable. The author of (21) argues that 'a man worth his salt' would not favour 'safety and security' at the 'expense of opportunity and independence'. Rather, the author argues that what is needed is 'freedom to think for ourselves, to act for ourselves and to live our own lives' and that these latter two values are incompatible with 'frustration, regulations, and restrictions or with class-conscious war or any kind of dictatorship'. This 1953 example – in particular, the reference to freedom and the wish for no regulation – is an early argument for neoliberalism. Examples such as those given above also construct and help feed into the now-established stereotype that those benefiting from the welfare state are 'the idle, or undeserving poor who are morally suspect' (van der Bom et al. 2018: 40).

As established, despite being an abstract concept, the welfare state is often represented as an active agent. However, the agency of those accessing its services is also evident (see 22). Quoted directly in this example, Thatcher suggests some people are abusing the welfare state, and claims that there is a 'dependency culture'. Although *dependence* first appears in our data in 1956, it only occurs fourteen times. *Dependency*, however, appears fifty times, but is not used until 1987. It is also one of the

collocates in the 1990s corpus (Table 3.4). The introduction of the term ‘dependency’ reflects the rise of neoliberalism and with it a neoliberalist discourse, which allowed for the discursive reframing of the welfare state. There is a move away from representing the welfare state as collective protection for those in need towards a welfare state where benefits receipt (in particular) is framed in terms of personal, social and moral failure, linked to state dependency (cf. Farnsworth and Irving 2017; Wiggan 2012). At the same time, however, it seems such a reframing is visible in our data decades before neoliberal policies were put into practice by Thatcher in the 1980s (Dados and Connell 2018: 29). The difference lies both in the frequency of reference to and in the type of terms used to characterize those who make use of (particular) welfare state services. There is no overt judgement, for example, of people who use the NHS or free education, and the majority of references to the ‘idle’ implicitly refer to people who are unemployed and who receive out-of-work or incapacity benefits payments. Whereas in earlier decades, emphasis is placed on people’s responsibility to take care of both themselves and others despite the security net of the welfare state, in later decades the emphasis shifts to the government’s (apparent) need to tackle people’s dependency on state benefits. We take a closer look at the representation of these individuals under our final macroproposition.

3.4.2.3 Macroproposition III: *The welfare state facilitates the creation of an underclass*

Our third macroproposition relates to social class; it sums up how the welfare state is depicted as being at least partly responsible for the creation of a ‘slovenly, vicious [and] idle’ underclass (24) that ‘sponge[s]’ on the welfare system:

- (24) We must get rid of the slovenly, vicious, idle wasters of the community. Unfortunately, the welfare State is only too likely to encourage their increase. (1949)
- (25) The welfare state has not just an underclass of those trapped in the cycle of dependency. It has an underclass of workers. (2000)

Negative ‘explicitly evaluative nominal labels’ (Paterson, Coffey-Glover and Peplow 2016: 201) are used to depict a group of people who are seen to have benefitted from the welfare system or whose existence is portrayed as having been facilitated by the welfare state. Throughout our concordance lines, even as early as the 1940s (see 24), the welfare state is blamed for facilitating the proliferation of ‘parasite[s]’, the ‘idle poor’, and ‘underclass[es]’ of both ‘workers’ and ‘those trapped in the cycle of dependency’ (25). Many of these representations condemn those on welfare, although the fact that they are benefit claimants is rarely explicitly stated; rather, it is implied, as in 28 (see below). Some of the examples are also gendered (26–7):

- (26) The mother of four children on social security was described by a magistrate yesterday as a typical product of the modern welfare state. Mrs JENNIFER ROBINSON, 31, of Stowell Avenue, New Addington, was a parasite. (1978)

- (27) The only difference is the Welfare State instead of the workhouse, and most divorced and single mothers live on social security. (1991)

One mother, while being sentenced for theft, is described as a 'typical product of the modern welfare state' (27) and 'divorced and single mothers' are generalized as not being able to support themselves, with the (highly questionable) claim that most are living 'on social security' (20); see also Toolan (this volume). Such negative descriptions and generalizations about those seen to benefit from the welfare state function to construct and perpetuate the existence and 'othering' of an immoral, passive and lazy 'underclass'. Example 28 is an exemplar of this position:

- (28) While the upper classes slowly wind down, there is emerging, at the other end of the social spectrum, a replacement layabout class. Not so much the idle rich as the idle poor, these are the sons and daughters of an indulgent welfare state, people whose idea of a useful qualification is knowing how to fill in a claim form. Nevertheless, they have high expectations. They harbour desires not just beyond their own pockets, but beyond most other people's, too. ... They want to dress like their idols, David Beckham and Wayne Rooney, whose fortunes are based on their ability to do a job that resembles nothing like work: football. ... The Chav (for it is he) looks on and thinks: 'I'll have some of that'. The money doesn't matter – it's not his anyway. It's all about priorities. Chavs would happily live in a tent if it meant their kids could wear Burberry baby-gross. (2005)

This article, written by Sarah Vine, is a review of a television documentary about a designer clothes shop in Middlesbrough. Here, the welfare state is blamed for the 'idle poor', a replacement 'layabout class' for the 'upper classes', but 'at the other side of the social spectrum'. Whereas the 'upper classes' are thus construed relatively neutrally (there is one negative depiction of them as the 'idle rich', and elsewhere they are depicted as living in 'a high-handed style of squalor'), the use of the attributive adjective 'layabout' negatively modifies 'class' when the term is used to refer to other socioeconomic groups. The attitudes of this 'layabout class' are negatively evaluated; they have 'high expectations' but the implicature is that they should not, and they 'harbour desires not just beyond their own pockets, but beyond most other people's, too'. The group are labelled as 'chavs' and the example is gendered – referring explicitly to men. In line with Bennett's (2013b) findings on the use of 'chav' in British media, example (28) is characterized by boulomaic modality (Simpson 1993); Vine includes with epistemic certainty descriptions of this group's wishes, desires and fantasies, as well as *verba sentiendi* – words denoting thoughts, feelings and perceptions (Simpson 1993: 39, 48, 56). All of these descriptions serve to index the 'chav lifestyle' and link it to the provisions of the 'indulgent' welfare state, which Vine (implicitly) blames for the chavs' existence; they are the welfare state's 'sons and daughters'.

Indexicality here refers to the 'inherently dialectical character' (Silverstein 2003: 197) of language. Silverstein (2003) distinguishes between different orders of indexicality. First-order indexical items may be defined as those relatively 'value-free'

(linguistic) items which may be associated with particular groups. When these items become recontextualized and ideologically imbued with meaning, a second-order indexical link is formed. Within linguistics, a large body of research has focused on how certain linguistic features index culturally salient stereotypes of particular groups of people (e.g. van Dijk 1991; see also van der Bom et al. 2018). In (28), Vine constructs a harmful stereotype of those growing up in the welfare state, presupposing certain attitudes, desires and behaviours. In doing so, she takes an all-knowing point of view despite not being part of this apparent social group. Our findings echo those of Bennett (2013b: 160), in that ‘class-based inequality’ is recast here as an aggregate of poor ‘personal choice’ and blame for one’s circumstances is placed on the individual.

There are several similar examples in our corpora, many of which draw on the indices of social class identified in van der Bom et al.’s (2018) analysis of a corpus of tweets about the programme *Benefits Street*. Those in the programme were associated with ‘deviant’ behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol and spending money on high-value electrical items (such as *iPhones*), designer clothing (see 28) and spray tans. We found similar examples in our data, including (29–30) which, perhaps surprisingly, date from the 1950s.

- (29) Perhaps the popularity of bottled beer is itself a manifestation of the welfare state at any rate, there is no sign that it is diminishing. (1950)
- (30) My gambling is provided by the welfare state, a social service for which I am grateful. (1952)

Here, the popularity of a particular alcohol (‘bottled beer’) and addiction (‘gambling’) are represented as being facilitated by the welfare state. These preferences/behaviours are linked to a certain group of people who (unfairly) benefit from the welfare state. However, there are also examples in our corpora where such stereotypes are rejected.

- (31) The great majority of them came here to get work and not to ‘sponge’ on the welfare state. (1958)
- (32) None of my colleagues would have endorsed Dr. Friedman’s wild simplistic statements about the lazy British worker and our welfare state being the major causes of the present difficulties here. (1976)
- (33) A favourite target in the stern climate of the 1980s, caricatured as privileged leeches on the body of the welfare state who guzzled the taxpayers’ millions and then demanded more. (1992)
- (34) Well-educated young adults, keen for legal work. Far from being ‘parasites’ on the welfare state, most want nothing so much as to be prosperous tax-paying citizens. (2000)

Closer examination of those examples reveals, however, that they refer to ‘coloured people’ whom have immigrated to Britain (31), students (33) or potential immigrants who are ‘well-educated young adults’ (34). None of these examples relate to the ‘irresponsible’ and ‘immoral’ social class negatively characterized elsewhere in our data. Only example (32), in which Economics Nobel Prize winner Dr Friedman’s depiction

of the 'lazy British worker' is criticized, directly negates the stereotype established above. However, it is notable that this example comes from a letter to the *Times* editor and was not content produced by an employee of the newspaper.

3.5 Discussion and conclusions

In this chapter we have contributed to research on economic inequality in the British media by examining how the welfare state is represented in the *Times* from 1940 to 2009. Our findings show that contrary to our expectations, the modern welfare state is consistently linked to a number of key concepts over time. (RQ2: Is the welfare state associated with any core concepts which remain unchanged over time?) Our thematic collocate analysis showed that while there is variation in the individual collocates connected with the welfare state across decades, the semantic fields these collocates are drawn from begin to stabilize in the 1970s, and are then continued to different extents into the 2000s. This trend is particularly clear with the semantic fields of *destruction/opposition*, *economic*, *idea/notion/concept* and *initialization/building*.

Although individual collocates vary across decades, there is also considerable overlap. ~~Many collocates, such as~~ *benefits*, *depends*, *welfare*, *social*, *structure*, occur across decades. Collocates particularly prevalent are those related to building metaphors – linked to the *foundations* or the *structure* of the welfare state – and *benefits*. While *benefits* is a collocate for nearly every decade, the meaning of this collocate shifts between *benefits* in its generic sense and the use of the term more specifically to refer to welfare payments given to *benefits* recipients. Thus, the answer to RQ1 '(How) do reports about the welfare state change over time?' is that key elements of the *Times*' reporting on the welfare state remain relatively static. Any changes that do occur relate mostly to an increased use of certain collocates. There is, for example, a marked increase in negatively loaded collocates relating to the destruction and/or opposition to the welfare state in the 1980s compared to earlier decades, ~~which index neoliberalism.~~

Further examination of our data revealed a number of macropropositions that were present throughout the decades: (i) *the welfare state is ripe for reconfiguration*, (ii) *the welfare state breeds immorality* and (iii) *the welfare state facilitates the creation of an underclass*. These also reveal that the language used to report on the welfare state indexes wider discourses on neoliberalism as well as on morality and class specifically. (RQ3: How does the language used to report on the welfare state index wider discourses about the UK welfare state from the 1940s to ~~the~~ 2009s?) The macroproposition analysis foregrounds how the welfare state is continuously depicted as in need of restructuring. There is a relatively consistent narrative which holds that the welfare state is responsible for the economic and moral shortcomings at the time of reporting. This is present not only from the 1970s onwards, as reported by some others, but right from the welfare state's inception. Moral discourse, at times linked to an underclass, also featured particularly prominently in our data. As others have noted, this is a key feature of neoliberal discourse (e.g. Bennett 2013b; Fairclough 2000; Levitas 2005). What is especially surprising, however, is that some trends indicative of neoliberal discourse are present early in the seventy-year span covered by our dataset.

Our findings also indicate that the *Times* takes a narrow view on what the welfare state actually is. There are no trends in our data which indicate that the NHS or free education was a core component of the *Times*' coverage of the welfare state. It is highly likely that the NHS and educational policies are referenced elsewhere in the newspaper, but – significantly for this paper – they do not appear to be addressed under the umbrella of the welfare state. This is despite the fact that the National Health Service Act (1946) is directly associated with the formation of the welfare state. By reducing the welfare state to merely the receipt of benefits (however implicitly expressed), it becomes possible to blame the apparent shortcomings and expense of the welfare state on a stereotypical, morally bankrupt social underclass. This apportioning of blame – moving from the collective to the individual – maps closely with the rise and promotion of neoliberalism from the 1980s onwards. This could perhaps be predicated by the fact that the *Times* is a right-leaning newspaper which has consistently supported the Conservative Party, but nevertheless serves as a foundation for future research contrasting the *Times* with alternative, left-leaning source material.

Another avenue for future work is for the UK welfare state to be compared to welfare states elsewhere. It was already noted above that the *Times* often made reference to Sweden's welfare state, for example. Additionally, one could look to welfare states elsewhere: in 2013, the newly ascended King of the Netherlands Willem-Alexander gave his first major Speech from the Throne. In it, he declared that the 'traditional welfare state is slowly but surely changing into a participation society'⁵ and he outlined the government's plans to 'ask from everyone able to do so, to take responsibility for his or her own life and environment.'⁶ The coinage of the term 'participation society' was picked up widely in the media and was made Dutch word of the year (NRC 2013). It represents both a political ideology and an austerity policy, and, significantly for the present paper, is said to have inspired David Cameron's reforms of the welfare state (Waterfield 2013). Thus there is scope to investigate how European welfare states are connected to each other, both economically and ideologically.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Professor Toolan and Dr Gómez-Jiménez for being so encouraging. This chapter is dedicated to Manuel Villagrasa van der Bom.

Notes

- 1 Proposals for how to deal with OCR errors are beyond the scope of this paper. However, they are problematic for historical research that draws on the methods of corpus linguistics, and we encourage further discussion of how such errors may be computationally and manually accounted for.
- 2 As the analysis will show, the welfare state is newsworthy insofar as it meets Potts et al.'s (2015: 151) criteria for the news value of 'impact' as it is 'discursively constructed as having significant effects or consequences'.

- 3 There is some overlap between the temporal and the scope categories (i.e. *cradle-to-grave* and *comprehensive*) due to wider notions about the conceptual relationship between time and space.
- 4 It is interesting that similar rhetoric was used by Conservative MP George Osbourne in his conference speech in 2012: 'Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits?' (Osbourne 2012).
- 5 Translation our own. Original: '... leidt dit ertoe dat de klassieke verzorgingsstaat langzaam maar zeker verandert in een participatiesamenleving' (NRC 2013).
- 6 Translation our own. Original: 'Van iedereen die dat kan, wordt gevraagd verantwoordelijkheid te nemen voor zijn of haar eigen leven en omgeving' (NRC 2013).

