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50 years of Belgian federalism

A longitudinal analysis of political discourse across six State reforms

François Randour[1], Julien Perrez[2], Min Reuchamps[3], Audrey Vandeleene[4]

There is an on-going attention among scholars on the analysis of conflicts in divided societies. They highlight an interesting paradox at the heart of linguistically divided democracies and especially of federal countries. Federalism is often seen as a solution to reduce tensions and reach compromises, yet it also fosters additional tensions (e.g. demands for self-rule). While studies of federalism have discussed the institutional and political nature of federalising reforms, one main question remains: how do elites sell these reforms to the public? Belgium provides a case in point to study such dynamics, with a long-started opposition between two linguistic groups (Flemish and Francophones) that led to six State reforms in forty-five years.

Building on an interdisciplinary approach bringing together political science and linguistics, this paper investigates the discourses of Belgian politicians on federalism through the six Belgian State reforms. We analyse discourses of Belgian politicians during television debates from the time of the first State reforms in the 1970's until present time. We rely on an original longitudinal corpus of 81 television debates covering 50 years from the francophone public broadcaster, RTBF, in Belgium featuring French-speaking and Dutch-speaking politicians as well as representatives from the civil society and experts. The selected television debates relate to the progressive – albeit not without political tensions – transformation of Belgium's federal system. Our corpus is thus a solid indicator of this political transformation and allows identifying, for the different State reforms, how Belgian political elites framed their standpoints on this critical issue.

A quantitative and qualitative content analysis will be used to identify the selling points used by elites to defend or criticise the State reforms. As a State reform is quite complex and technical, it is crucial to identify how elites present this to the public to make it more or less desirable. Our analysis covers the evolution of discourses on Belgian federalism and State reforms longitudinally starting from 1967 until 2016. It thus allows questioning if and how elite discourses evolved alongside State reforms. So doing, the paper offers an original approach to analyse how political elites communicate on and perceive evolutions of federalism.

Keywords: Communication, Comparative perspective, Elites, Federalism, Television

[1] Université catholique de Louvain, UCL, Belgium
[2] Université de Liège, ULiège, Belgium
[3] Université catholique de Louvain, UCL, Belgium
[4] Lund University, Sweden

1. Introduction

Explaining institutional changes remains one of the daunting tasks for political scientists. In this endeavour, discourse matters much. Indeed, discourse is "the interactive process of conveying ideas" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 304), which are the substantive content of discourse. Works on discursive institutionalism have shown that the study of discourse is key to understand political changes (Schmidt, 2010). This emphasis on discourse may however lead to a catch 22, that is what comes first between discourse and change. This question finds a strong resonance when looking at conflicts, and in particular their resolution through federalism, in divided societies (Burgess, 2012). In such places, one often finds an interesting paradox (Erk & Anderson, 2009). Federalism is regularly seen as a solution to reduce tensions and reach compromises, yet it also fosters additional tensions (e.g. demands for self-rule).

While studies of federalism have discussed the institutional and political nature of federalising reforms (Erk, 2008; Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2009), one question remains: how does discourse influence change and vice-versa? Belgium provides a case in point to study such dynamics, with a long-started opposition between two linguistic groups (Flemish and Francophones) that led to six State reforms in 45 years. In this paper, we build on an interdisciplinary approach bringing together political science and linguistics. We investigate the discourses of Belgian politicians on federalism through the six Belgian State reforms. More specifically, we analyse discourses of Belgian politicians during television debates from the time of the first State reforms in the 1970's until present time.

We rely on an original longitudinal corpus of 81 television debates covering 50 years from the francophone public broadcaster in Belgium, RTBF, featuring French-speaking and Dutch-speaking politicians as well as representatives from the civil society and experts. The selected television debates relate to the progressive – albeit not without political tensions – transformation of Belgium's federal system. Our corpus is thus a solid indicator of this political transformation and allows identifying, for the different State reforms, how Belgian political elites framed their standpoints on this critical issue. More specifically, the study is inductive and aims primarily at describing the discourses that were used along the six State reforms. To do so, the corpus is analysed using the software 'Iramuteq' which allows to conduct quantitative analysis of large corpus. Secondly, the paper also reflects on how to measure the impact of discourses on political changes.

The rest of the article is organised as follows. Next section discusses the role of discourses in the analysis of political changes but also highlights the paradox of federalism. Section 3 describes the six State reforms that took place in Belgium in the last 50 years. Section 4

presents in greater details the corpus of the study and the software (Iramuteq) used for the analysis. Section 5 presents first findings related to the exploration of our corpus when analysing the latter at the level of debates (i.e. a case is the entire debate). Section 6 introduces first findings related to the exploration of the corpus with a more fine-grained analysis (i.e. a case is a speaker intervention). The paper ends with a short discussion of the results.

2. Discourse and political changes in the paradox of federalism

A long tradition in political science has emphasized the role of institutions – that is institutional structures, rules, norms and cultures – as a key dimension of any political dynamics (March & Olsen, 1984). This tradition has given way to three distinct approaches based on different methodologies: rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism. In these views, the actors' actions are shaped by the institutions respectively as "the product of agents' rationally calculated, path-dependent, or norm-appropriate rule-following" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 314). Yet, all three fail to grasp political changes. A fourth approach seeks to explain political changes via the analysis of ideas and discourse, namely discursive institutionalism (Schmidt, 2006). To do it "simultaneously treats institutions as given (as the context within which agents think, speak, and act) and as contingent (as the results of agents' thoughts, words, and actions). These institutions are therefore internal to the actors, serving both as structures that constrain actors and as constructs created and changed by those actors" (Schmidt, 2008, p. 314). Discourse is the missing link between the actors and their actions, on the one hand, and the institutions and in particular institutional changes, on the other hand.

Once the role of discourse has been explicitly spelled out, it remains to understand how discourse and political change interact and above all whether one comes first. In order to investigate change, a longitudinal analysis is obviously needed. Such analysis is even more relevant in a political context where there are institutional changes. In this light, divided societies that have adopted federal solutions are a fertile ground of investigation as they typically provide actors with diverging institutional demands that may lead to institutional reforms. Yet, these reforms may foster new institutional demands, and here comes the paradox of federalism:

> [t]erritorial recognition of minorities through the adoption (or strengthening) of federalism may intuitively seem to be the best way to manage ethno-linguistic conflict but, in the long run, such recognition perpetuates and strengthens the differences between groups and provides minority nationalists with the institutional tools for eventual secession. Further, federalism provides opportunities for conflict

> between regions and centres that might otherwise not exist. The fundamental question, then, is whether federalism provides a stable, long-lasting solution to the management of conflict in divided societies or is, instead, a temporary stop on a continuum leading to secession and independence. A federal arrangement that formally recognizes ethno-linguistic diversity to help manage the political system can also set this newly—or increasingly—federal State on a path to eventual disintegration. Here, in a nutshell, is the paradox: federalism has features that are both secession inducing and secession preventing (Erk & Anderson, 2009, pp. 191-192).

Other scholars posit similar arguments although some highlight more the benefits of the federal solution while others emphasize its drawbacks and risks. In his book, Ethnic Groups in Conflict, Donald Horowitz (1985) suggests that a well-defined division between sub-states and the federal State offers the potential to reduce conflicts, even if the risk of implosion would still exist. In this wake, Ted Robert Gurr (2000, p. 366) observes that "negotiated autonomy has proved to be an effective antidote for ethnonational wars of secession in Western and Third World States". Yet, Yash Ghai (2000, p. 501) sees federalism as a "springboard to secession". Indeed, a federal solution freezes the division between groups and identities, which makes more difficult a possible positive evolution. Because of this, Jack Snyder writes: "[w]hile ethnofederalism does not always produce ethnic violence in late-developing, transitional societies, it does create strong incentives for their elites to mobilize mass support around ethnic themes. When other factors are favorable for intense nationalist mobilization, the legacy of ethnofederalism heightens the likelihood of conflict" (Snyder, 2000, p. 202). Finally, while she started off with a similar hypothesis a comparison between unitary and federal states, Nancy Bermeo (2002, p. 97) finds that "federal institutions promote successful accommodation".

Such political background, where demands for more self-rule meet demands for more shared-rule across actors and above all time, offers an interesting empirical ground to explores how discourse shapes or is shaped by institutional changes in divided societies. Because of its internal divisions that have however been peacefully accommodated through several State reforms, Belgium is often cited as a textbook example of such society (Lijphart, 1981).

3. Federalism in Belgium: many reforms and many discourses

Belgium has already known six State reforms, all occurring in her recent history. In the last 50 years, four main reform phases can be distinguished. The first phase encompasses the first

three reforms which concern the creation of the main institutions while the next phases all refer to a single reform, establishing and strengthening the federal structure of the country.

The first phase relates to the State reforms of 1970, 1980 and 1988-89. The 1970 reform corresponds to the first breakdown of the centralised State structure in Belgium. Flemings wanted more cultural autonomy and as a consequence, the three language-based Communities were created. Flemish, Francophone and German-speaking Communities were transferred some language-based competences, i.e. the use of language and cultural policy. The reform impacted the national tier as well, by establishing a parity rule in the federal cabinet and a consensus rule between both language groups. There was however no agreement on the creation of regional structures that would enjoy legislative powers.

This happened a decade later with the second State reform in 1980 that gave birth to the Flemish and Walloon Regions with legislative powers. French-speakers aspired at that time to more economical autonomy and the creation of Regions shaped the decentralised entities as not only culture-based institutions. Regions were competent for e.g. employment policy, public investment, economic development, housing policy and structural planning. Communities on the other hand were granted the so-called 'personalised' matters such as health policy and assistance to individuals. Flemings decided to merge the Flemish Community and the Flemish Region, what their francophone counterparts did not do so as to prevent Brussels French-speakers to be drown in the large number of Francophones in Wallonia. At the institutional level, small Community executives were set up, that were no longer answerable to the national executive and could thus be considered as real governments. Regional executives were also erected and were answerable to the Regional Council, composed of Flemish and Walloon MPs sitting in the national Parliament.

Yet not everything was clean after the second reform as the Brussels region issue remained unsolved. A solution emerged in 1988-89 with the third State reform that granted more autonomy for Brussels. A Brussels Capital Region, with a directly elected council, was created but remained somehow under the control of the federal government. The Regions could draw on a limited fiscal autonomy and received more competences (scientific research, transport policy, …) while Communities were from the late eighties on responsible for education. Some argue that this third reform generated some financial imbalance between Francophones and Flemings.

The second phase in Belgian State reforms takes place in 1992-1993 with the Saint-Michel agreement, i.e. the fourth State reform. This reform shaped Belgium as a federal State, as the Belgian Constitution recognised Belgium as a federal State, made up of Regions and

Communities, and no longer mainly provinces. This growing importance of the federated entities showed through the replacement of provincial Senators with Community senators. The links between Regions and Communities became stronger, e.g. via the agreement on the indirect election of Community Councils on the basis of directly elected regional parliaments. Some legislative powers could also be transferred from the Community to the Region. Communities' power on social assistance policies were expanded and Regions received the power on transport, road construction and waterways, some aspects of foreign trade, energy and most of agricultural policy, as well as inter-municipal cooperation for provision of utilities. Importantly, both Communities and Regions could organise foreign policy (including treaties) in all spheres of domestic competence. Regions also raise their own taxes, e.g. TV and radio taxes or eco-taxes. This fourth reform is considered as the completion of the federal reform launched in 1970 and was able to clean the reforms initiated during the first phase.

A decade later, the third reform phase materialised into the fifth State reform, the Lambermont – Lombard agreements of 2001. This phase refers to a strengthening of federalism and an attempt to re-establish the financial equilibrium between Francophones and Flemings. The former had famously any demand (cf. "Nous ne sommes demandeurs de rien." claimed by a francophone leader) while the latter received some guarantees in this new institutional structure, such as a guaranteed minimum representation in the Brussels Regional Parliament and the fact that Brussels MPs in the Flemish Parliament were now directly elected. Regions extended their range of competences with the full mastering of agricultural policy, foreign trade, sea fishing and development aid, and intensified their fiscal autonomy whereas Communities remained without fiscal autonomy. In terms of public spending, from this third phase onwards, the federated entities' level started to spend more than the federal government (excluding public debt). This was also the first time, in 2003, that the regional elections were uncoupled from the federal elections.

Interestingly, the fourth phase and the sixth State reform, recoupled again the schedule of the legislative elections by extending the federal term to 5 years to match the Regional and EP elections rhythm. The so-called Butterfly Agreement of 2014 (with intense negotiations that already started in 2011 as a consequence of the worldwide know government crisis that lasted 541 days in 2010-2011) organised a large transfer of competencies to the federated entities. Communities obtained a long list of new competencies in terms of health care and prevention, e.g. policies for elderlies, mental health care, handicapped persons while Regions acquired environment and agriculture, health care, mobility (e.g. highway code), social policies among which the emblematic child benefit, urban policy and spatial planning, housing, energy, economy, employment, ... A thorough reform of the federated entities' funding was initiated

and more funding was granted for the Brussels Capital Region. Regarding institutions, important and symbolic changes occurred, with for instance the split of the “BHV constituency” for judicial and electoral matters, making clearer the distinction between Brussels and some Flemish municipalities around the Capital. The Senate has also known a deep reform to becomes a Senate of the federated entities with no directly elected Senator anymore (Dandoy et al. 2015). The sixth State reform also contained an agreement on measures aiming at strengthening democracy and political credibility (for instance the double mandates ban). This reform was the result of an increase of Flemish demand for autonomy and is considered to be the heaviest State reform in terms of competencies. Yet this reform is probably not the last State reform.

These four reform phases incrementally shaped the Belgian State as a federal State. New institutions have been created and strengthened, old institutions had been remodelled and large arrays of competencies were transferred from the national level to the Regions and Communities. Along the way of these six State reforms negotiated approximately every 10 years, politicians kept debating and informally negotiating on the directions to be given to the Belgian federal State and the terms and conditions of every major change.

This paper attempts to overview these debates through an analysis of politicians’ discourse from the late sixties, so just before everything started, until 2016, so after the latest State reform.

4. Data and method

A quantitative and qualitative content analysis will be used to identify the selling points used by elites to defend or criticise the State reforms. As a State reform is quite complex and technical, it is crucial to identify how elites present this to the public to make it more or less desirable. Our analysis covers the evolution of discourses on Belgian federalism and State reforms longitudinally starting from 1967 until 2016. It thus allows questioning if and how elite discourses evolved alongside State reforms.

Our corpus consists of 79 political television debates from the Belgian francophone public broadcaster, RTBF, and amounts to about 22 hours of video data. All debates occurred live on television on Sundays at lunch time. This weekly show has traditionally hosted the most important debate among politicians on major current issues and is known to have had consequences in the political debate in general, as excerpts from this television debate are often broadly relayed in the mass media. What politicians say during these debates thus matters beyond it. The debate usually lasts for maximum an hour, gathers about six debaters

and they were all held in French despite the fact that some debaters were native Dutch-speakers. Selected debates feature both French-speaking and Dutch-speaking politicians[5] as well as representatives from the civil society and experts – although not all kinds of debaters are present in all debates. One journalist acts as debate moderator and watches out debaters' speaking time.

From the plethora of available debates (i.e. the show was on TV almost every week for 50 years in a similar format albeit its name changed four times[6]), we selected only a sample of them, that were in line with our research interests. The selection was first based on keywords provided by the public broadcaster archives for every debate. Debates referring to the following keywords were considered: federalism, reform, institutional, region, Belgian State, Belgian community problem, constitution and separatism. Abstracts of the preselected debates were thoroughly read to find out whether the debate at hand was relevant to our corpus. Short excerpts from the video debate could also be watched to help specify the selection. In order to allow for a consistent longitudinal analysis, years of the preselected debates were also considered so as to target missing periods. Underrepresented years in our preselection were specially researched by means of a systematic reading of the abstracts of all year's debates. Finally, debates to which no single politician participated, but only civil society representatives and/or experts, were deselected from our corpus, since this research focuses chiefly on politicians' discourse.

We transcribed[7] the video tapes of all 79 debates in extenso, referring every time to the name of the debater or journalist who held the floor. After a first rough transcription process, we carefully reviewed the texts in order to withdraw spelling mistakes and help solving issues related to inaudible speech. In total, these debates amount to a corpus of 862 141 words. To analyse this corpus, we used the software Iramuteq which allows statistical analysis on text corpus and is based on R software. Before being analysed, the corpus must be further prepared. Following Iramuteq terminology, a corpus is defined as a group of texts (i.e. In this

[5] Politicians from all political parties represented in the elected assemblies in Belgium at both the federal and the regional levels are present in our corpus, that even sometimes contains input from politicians whose party is not represented in a parliament, but that could enjoy some visibility during an election campaign. Yet, no politician from extreme right parties (Vlaams Blok, then Vlaams Belang and Front national) is present in our corpus since a *cordon sanitaire* applies in Belgian French-speaking public broadcaster's shows, implying that these are never invited to participate in a debate – despite the popularity of the Flemish far right party (VB) in the polls that may influence the stances of politicians from other parties.

[6] From the beginning of our corpus until 1992, the show was called "Faire le point" [Taking stock], then "Mise au point" [Clarification] until 2015, "Les décodeurs" [The decoders] in 2015-2016 and "A votre avis" [In your opinion] at the end of our corpus.

[7] Hereby we would like to thank our team of students who helped us with the transcription of these debates: Adjoua Aka, Alizé Carême, Arnaud Taymans, Camille François, Carla Lips, Céline Graas, Charles de Pierpont de Burnot, Dilay Karakadioglu, Edouard Francq, Elisa Minsart, Joachim Stassart, Léonore Collinet, Lucas Crupi, Marion Jacques, Océane Crabbé, Simon Maes and Vincent Vande Water. The quality of these transcriptions has been supervised by Thomas Legein and Laura Pascolo, which we warmly thank for their research assistance.

study, a group of debates) with each text being composed of text segments (Corpus → Text → Text segments). The researchers can either conduct an analysis of a monothematic corpus or can decide to enhance complexity and conduct an analysis on a thematic corpus (i.e. allowing to introduce in the script a theme for each text segment in a broader text).

In this paper, we present preliminary analysis of our corpus based on a monothematic approach. Yet, two types of analysis have been conducted. On the one hand, we have analysed our corpus at the level of the debates. This means that at this stage, we do not differentiate between political parties, mother tongue of speakers, or role of the speakers (i.e. journalist, politician and civil society actors). These results are presented in section 5 of the paper. On the other hand, we also conducted a more fine-grained analysis. In practice, it means that we have coded every speaker's intervention to be able to differentiate between the function of the speaker (i.e. a journalist, a politician, an actor from civil society), his mother tongue (i.e. French or English) as well as his political party. These results are presented in section 6 of the paper.

Once the corpus is ready, Iramuteq offers 5 different types of analysis, going from basic lexicography to multivariate analysis (Maria Justo, 2016). (1) The lexicographical analysis reduces the words to their primary lexical units and identifies word frequencies. It also allows for distinguishing between active and supplementary forms of vocabulary. (2) The second type of analysis is the 'Word cloud', a technique which organises words graphically according to their frequency in the corpus analysed. (3) The third form of analysis is called 'similarity analysis', a technique that identifies the words co-occurrences. This type of analysis is particularly useful to identify the types and intensity of connections between the words of the corpus, an analytical step that allows identifying the structure of text corpus. (4) The fourth analytical method is the 'Descending Hierarchical analysis' (DHA). With this type of analysis, the text segments are '*TS are clustered according to their vocabularies and distributed according to the reduced forms frequencies'* (Maria Justo, 2016:11). This clusters can be interpreted as lexical fields or social representation about a certain object (i.e. in this study, federalism). The results of this type of analysis must be cautiously assessed and qualitatively interpreted by the research in light of his research objectives. (5) The last type of analysis is the 'Specificities and correspondence factor analysis' and allows to associate text with variables (i.e. the year of the debate, by debates, by State reforms phases, by stage in the negotiation process etc.). In this paper, we mainly present preliminary findings using lexicographical and word cloud analyses, and only discusses briefly the results of the similarity, DHA and correspondence factor analysis.

5. Analysis at the level of debate

In the following section, we present preliminary results of the first exploration round of our corpus. Section 5.1 presents results at the level of the entire corpus (all 79 debates taken together) and gives a first idea of the words used and their connections across the debates. Section 5.2 goes one step further and compares the debates according to the four reform phases identified in section 3. This step allows to identify whether different words are used at the different reform stages. In section 5.3, the paper proposes a first attempts at measuring the relation between discourse and change. To do so, we have identified if the debates were taking place before the agreement of a State reform (ex-ante), during the negotiations of a State reform (ad locum) and finally, after an agreement is reached within the government.

5.1 Exploration of the corpus

To have an overview of the corpus, we started by conducting a basic lexicographical analysis of the entire corpus. Table 1 presents the top 35 of the most used words in the entire corpus (i.e. 79 debates), and focuses only on so called active forms of words (i.e. adverb, adjective, verbs and noun). Focusing only on active forms allows for a greater parsimony of the results. Based on the lexicographical analysis, three preliminary comments must be highlighted.

A first group of words (in grey in the table) can be distinguished. These are 'flamand' (Flemish), 'francophone' (French-speaking) and to a lesser extent 'Bruxellois' (from Brussels), hence words making a clear reference to the linguistic and or territorial identities of the speakers. This first result is not surprising as such, as Belgium can be considered as a form of ethno-federalism. In addition, the presence of the word 'Bruxellois' is also somewhat explain by the recurrence of the 'Brussels questions' across State reforms. A second group of words also deserve attention, these are the words 'problem', 'agreement' and solution (in green). Indeed, as indicated in section 2, federalism is both seen as a way to manage ethno-linguistic conflict as well as providing a fertile ground for conflict between regions/communities that may have not existed otherwise. In a way, the presence of these three words in the top 35 of the most frequently used words in the corpus goes in the direction that federalism comes with a paradox, it is both a solution but it can also foster addition problems. Third, there are also numerous words that are related to federal structure, such as 'Region', 'Community' and 'Federal' as well as more encompassing ones such as Belgium, country and State. The complete list of words, their English translation, frequency and the form of the words is available in the following table.

Word	*Translation*	*Frequency*	*Form of word*
flamand	*Flemish*	2447	adj
francophone	*Francophone*	2259	adj

accord	*Agreement*	2015	nom
partir	*To leave*	1870	ver
parler	*To speak*	1835	ver
problème	*Problem*	1794	nom
penser	*To think*	1772	ver
gouvernement	*Government*	1698	nom
politique	*Politics*	1692	nom
question	*Question*	1564	nom
Région	*Region*	1274	nom
Belgique	*Belgium*	1220	nom
prendre	*To take*	1157	ver
entendre	*To listen to*	1131	ver
Pays	*Country*	1121	nom
donner	*To give*	1119	ver
trouver	*To find*	1103	ver
Fédéral	*Federal*	1098	adj
venir	*To come*	1055	ver
demander	*To ask*	1033	ver
débat	*Devate*	962	nom
moment	*A moment*	957	nom
communauté	*Community*	916	nom
niveau	*Level*	896	nom
passer		858	ver
social	*Social*	847	adj
réforme	*Reform*	839	nom
commun	*Common*	800	adj
comprendre	*To understdand*	786	ver
état	*State*	680	nom
bruxellois	*(from) Brussels*	665	adj
loi	*Law*	646	nom
négociation	*Negociation*	638	nom
solution	*Solution*	583	nom

Table 1: Most frequently used words in the entire corpus

As a second step, we conducted a similarity analysis to highlight the co-occurrences between the most used words of the corpus. By doing so, the connections between the words and the strength of their relations are outlined. Figure 1 introduces the findings under the form of a co-occurrence tree. Based on this tree, the preliminary analysis can be refined to some extent. Logically, the centre of the tree is taken by the most frequent words discussed previously, such as ‘francophone’, ‘flamand’, ‘gouvernement’ and ‘problème’.

First, the use of the words francophone and Flemish are strongly related to each other, yet they are associated with different constellations of words. Indeed, the verbs associated with the ‘francophone’ and ‘flamand’ are of different nature. Indeed, when the word ‘Flemish’ is associated with verbs such as ‘discuter’ (to talk), ‘constater’ (to notice) and more importantly

‘donner’ (to give), the word ‘francophone’ is linked with ‘entendre’ (to hear), ‘comprendre’ (to understand), ‘accepter’ (to accept) and ‘demander’ (to ask for something). The most striking finding (but not illogical) is the opposition between ‘to give’ and ‘to ask for’, a result that indicate that in the political speeches taking place during French-speaking television debates, participants are making references to the ‘financial’ transfer from the Flemish region to the French speaking Walloon region.

Second, it is also interesting to note that the word ‘region’ is associated with ‘Bruxellois’, but not with the words Walloon or Flemish. This situation could be explained by the particular place of Brussels across the six State reforms, and most precisely during the third, fifth and sixth State reforms. Finally, the word ‘politique’ (politics) is associated with the word ‘problème’ (problems), when the latter goes hand in hand with the word ‘communautaire’ (problème communautaire – problems between the communities). The following figure proposes a graphical representation of the co-occurrences between the most used words in the corpus.

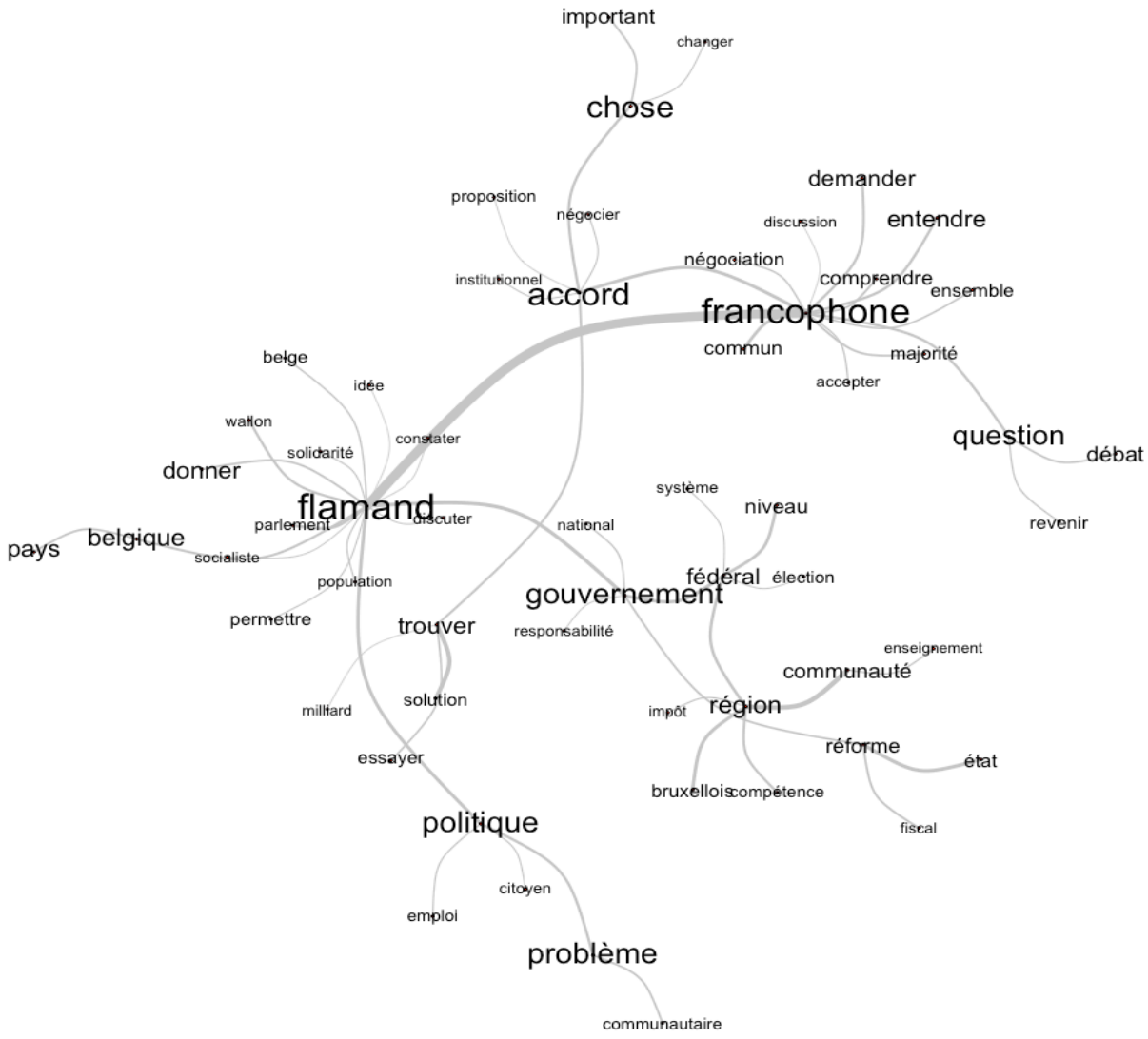


Figure 1: Co-occurrences tree

5.2 Exploration of the corpus according to the four State reform phases

After having explored the corpus, section 5.2 goes one step deeper and proposes a comparison of the main speeches used during the four State reform phases. Can we observe a change in the most frequent used words across the four stages? Does it reflect the main evolutions of these four phases? In order to analyse the four phases consistently, all debates taking place 2 years before the agreement of a Sate reform and 2 years after the agreement are taken into consideration. For example, for the fourth phase and the sixth State reform (2011-2014), the analytical period covers the years 2009-2016 (a total of 33 debates). As for the previous section, we started by conducting a lexicographical analysis of the word

frequencies. Table 2 presents the 20 most frequent used word in the corpus for each of the four phases analysed.

SR Phase 1 (SR1-3)		SR Phase 2 (SR4)		SR Phase 3 (SR5)		SR Phase 4 (SR6)	
Problem	426	Question	95	Agreement	400	Agreement	856
Politics	312	Referendum	87	Flemish	354	French-speaking	785
Common	296	Problem	83	French-speaking	333	Flemish	740
Government	292	Level	69	To leave	267	To leave	718
Brussels	289	Teacher	66	To speak	240	To speak	707
Flemish	275	Consultation	59	Politics	235	Government	707
Region	269	People	53	chose	235	Brussels	601
French-speaking	263	Politics	52	Problem	224	Question	584
To leave	252	To give	51	Government	218	To put	525
To speak	240	Debate	48	Question	203	To hear	508
Community	208	Teaching	47	Community	199	Region	480
(From) Brussels	199	To marry	44	Brussels	195	Problem	477
Question	190	State	44	Social	180	To take	475
Teaching	186	Country	43	To give	166	Federal	475
Agreement	181	Community	43	Flanders	160	Politics	473
To find	157	To take	42	Reform	158	Belgium	466
To put	148	To speak	41	Important	153	Country	464
Important	148	Organization	41	Majority	152	To give	383
First	145	To ask	41	To come	150	Moment	381
To take	143	Chose	41	**Fiscal**	143	Reform	373

Table 2: Most frequently used words per State reform stage

A first observation is that the most different phase in terms of frequency of word used is the second phase (the fourth State reform). Surprisingly, the word ‘federal’ does not appears in the analysis even though this reform officially shaped Belgium as a federal State. These results may be in part explained by the limited number of debates covering this stage (4 debates) and needs further analysis. As for section 5.1, the table also highlights the frequent use, across all stages, of words referring to identities (i.e. Flemish, Brussels, French-speaking) or to the major institutional changes (i.e. Region, Community). Yet, some minor differences are also observed across the different phases, especially when looking at the words referring to specific policy fields. For example, the transfer of competences related to education is well represented in the ranking (i.e. Teaching, teacher) and stick to some extent to the reform stages. This is also true regarding the third stage and the fifth State reform that was an attempt to re-establish a financial equilibrium between Francophones and Flemings (i.e. See the word fiscal). Still,

overall, the analysis of the most frequent used words does not allow to identify major differences across the four stages of State reforms. As the next paragraphs will show, it does not mean that the political speeches were similar.

Indeed, by extending the analysis to the entire sub-corpus of each phases (i.e. not only the 20 most frequent words used) and conducting a correspondence factor analysis on the variable 'phases', the findings show important differences in terms of political speeches. Figure 2 presents the results of the correspondence factor analysis. The colour purple refers to the fourth reform phases, the blue to the third reform phase, the green to the second reform phase and finally, the red to the first reform phase.

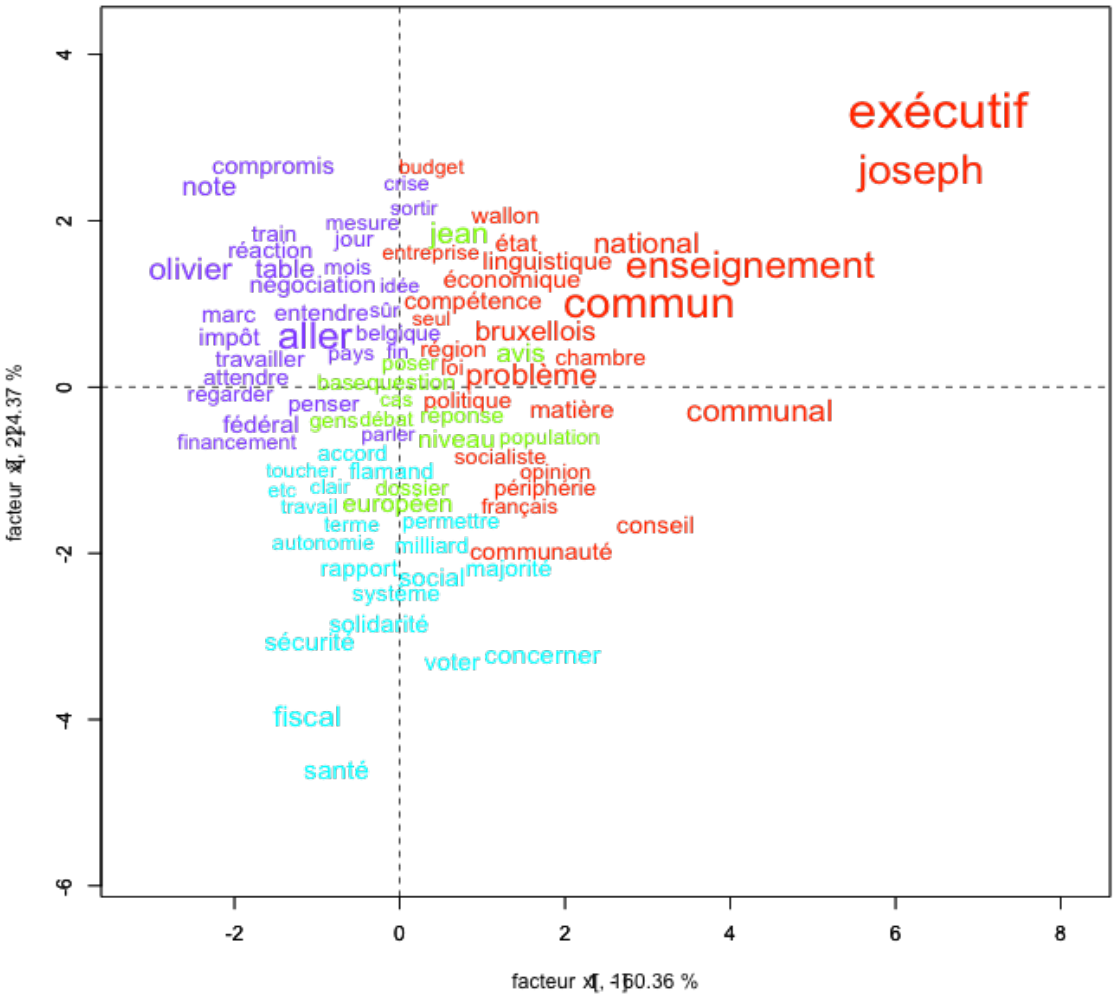


Figure 2: correspondence factor analysis with the variable 'phases'.

5.3 Exploration of the corpus according to the negotiation stages of the state reforms

The last section aims at measuring the relation between discourse and change. To do so, we have identified if the debates were taking place before the agreement of a State reform (ex-

ante, - 2 years before the elections), during the negotiations of a State reform (ad locum) and finally, after an agreement is reached within the government (+ 2 years).

As for the previous sections, we have run a lexicographical analysis as well as an analysis on the co-occurrences for each of the stages (ex-ante, ad locum, ex post). In this paper, we present shortly the findings regarding the sixth State reform (phase 4), as this is the reform phase for which we have the more debates. The objective of this section is thus to analyse how political discourse change before, during and after an agreement is reached. Graphical representations of co-occurrences are ***available in the annexes of this paper.***

The most interesting finding at this stage is the different framing of the debates that are outlined by the co-occurrence's analysis. Indeed, at the ex-stage (hence before elections took place), the central words of political actors during the debates were 'francophones' and 'Flemish' and 'agreement'. This is not the case anymore during the negotiation of the State reform. Indeed, during the negotiations (and the government crisis that lasted 541 days), the central word of this stage is 'government'. Finally, once an agreement was reached, the central word becomes 'federal'.

6. (Really first) Analysis at the level of speakers

In the following section, we present preliminary results of the first exploration round of our corpus when analysing each speakers' interventions separately. For this section, we focus only on the debates covering the latest State reform (i.e. a total of 31 debates). Section 6.1 presents the differences of words used between Dutch and French speaking. Section 6.2 goes one step further and unpack the differences among politicians (i.e. political parties).

6.1 The sixth state reform: differences between French and Dutch speaking as well as between journalist, politicians and actors from civil society

To have an overview of the corpus, we started by conducting a basic lexicographical analysis of the entire corpus. The next two tables present the most used words when discussing the sixth state reform and focuses only on active forms of words (i.e. adverb, adjective, verbs and noun). When looking at the words the most used by Dutch and French speaking, there are no major differences to be observed.

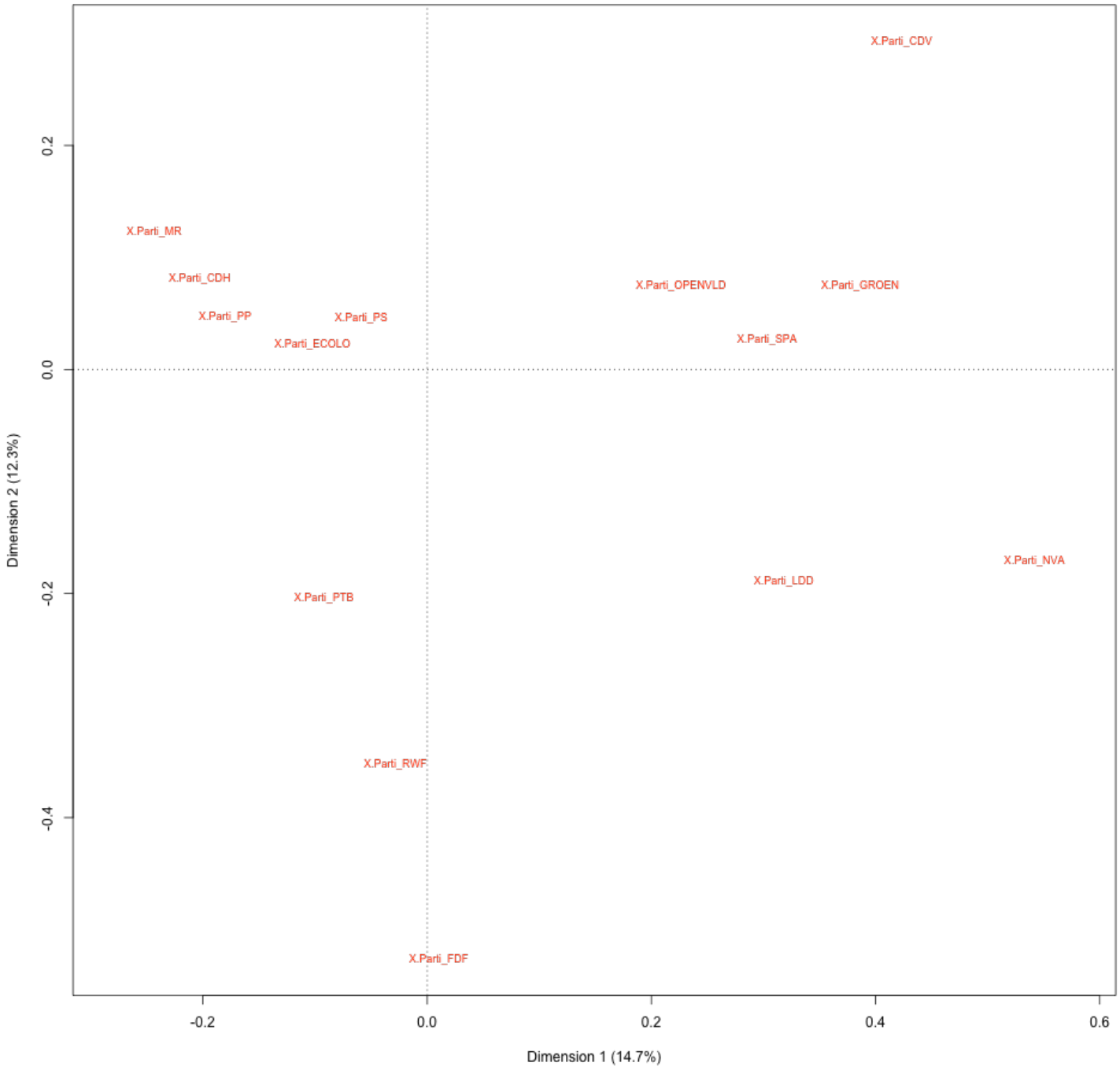
Dutch Speaking			French Speaking		
Flamand	173	adj	Accord	398	nom
Gouvernement	154	nom	Francophone	382	adj
Accord	148	nom	Partir	360	ver
Problème	144	nom	Gouvernement	356	nom
Partir	143	ver	Flamand	338	adj
Parler	134	ver	Parler	327	ver
Bruxelles	126	nr	Bruxelles	316	nr
Francophone	119	adj	Mettre	300	ver
Flandre	115	nr	Prendre	292	ver
Trouver	114	ver	Région	286	nom
Pays	101	nom	Entendre	262	ver
Fédéral	96	adj	Table	261	nom
Réforme	92	nom	Fédéral	260	adj
Mettre	92	ver	Politique	259	nom
Politique	89	adj	Pays	251	nom
Gens	89	nom	Problème	250	nom
Monde	87	nom	Moment	250	nom
Région	86	nom	Venir	242	ver
Important	85	adj	Donner	238	ver
Question	81	nom	Belgique	237	nom

6.2 The sixth state reform: how do political parties "talk" the reform

The following figures presents the results of a 'specificities and correspondence factor analysis', which allows to associate text with specific variables. In this case, we asked Iramuteq to classify political parties in function of the words they use in their speeches. The results are interesting for several reasons.

First, there is a natural organisation of political parties based on their linguistic communities. Indeed, all French-speaking parties are situated at the left of the figure when Dutch-speaking parties are all situated at the right. Interestingly, (but it is probably anecdotic), the FDF – is situated in the middle of the figure (as brussels?). Second, and probably most stinking, there is also a natural organisation depending on whether they can be considered as 'traditional' political party vs. political parties situated at the 'extreme' of the political spectrum (at the exception of 'PP' Parti populaire). Indeed, when the CD&V, Groen, SP.a, Open VLD, PS, MR, Ecolo, CdH (and PP) are all situated in the above section of the figure, the NVA, LDD, PTB, RWF (rassemblement Wallonie France) and the FDF are all situated at the bottom of the figure. This suggest that they can be distinguished from other political parties based on the vocabulary they used when discussing Belgian federalism in French speaking television debates. Last but

not least, one can also look at the 'distance' between the political parties in the figure. Interestingly, most of the French-speaking parties are quite close to each other, meaning that they share to a large extent a common vocabulary. This is less the case for Dutch-speaking parties.



7. Conclusion

The paper presented preliminary findings on the political discourse used by Belgian politicians and civil society experts across six State reforms during television debates. Using the software Iramuteq, we conducted a first round of statistical analysis by looking at the frequency of words used by debaters, as well as the co-occurrences between the words. The corpus was analysed at four different levels: (1) by looking at the entire corpus composed of 79 debates; (2) by looking and comparing the four stages previously identified in the evolution of Belgian federalism and (3) by focusing on the evolution of discourses before, during and after a State reform. Unfortunately, we were unable (so far) to answer our main research question aiming at measuring the impact of political discourse on institutional change and finally, (4) by focusing in more details on the differences between the type of speakers and pollical parties.

Our descriptive analysis still allows to draw (really first) preliminary observations: (a) the most frequently used words in the corpus refer to the linguistic and or territorial identities of the speakers; (b) the words solutions, problem and agreements are also well represented. As discussed in section 5, this could illustrate what Erk and Anderson (2009) called the 'paradox of federalism'. Finally, (c) the analysis also outlined that the political discourse evolved not only across the state reforms, but also depending on the stage of negotiation, whether before, during the negotiations or after an agreement is reached.

Despite these first results, a lot still needs to be done in the future to dig deeper in our corpus. Despite the fact that all selected debates touched upon federalism and the State reforms, the corpus needs further cleaning as to delete sections that only indirectly deals with Belgian federalism. In addition, we also have a similar corpus for debates that took place on the VRT (Flemish television) that still is unexploited at the moment.

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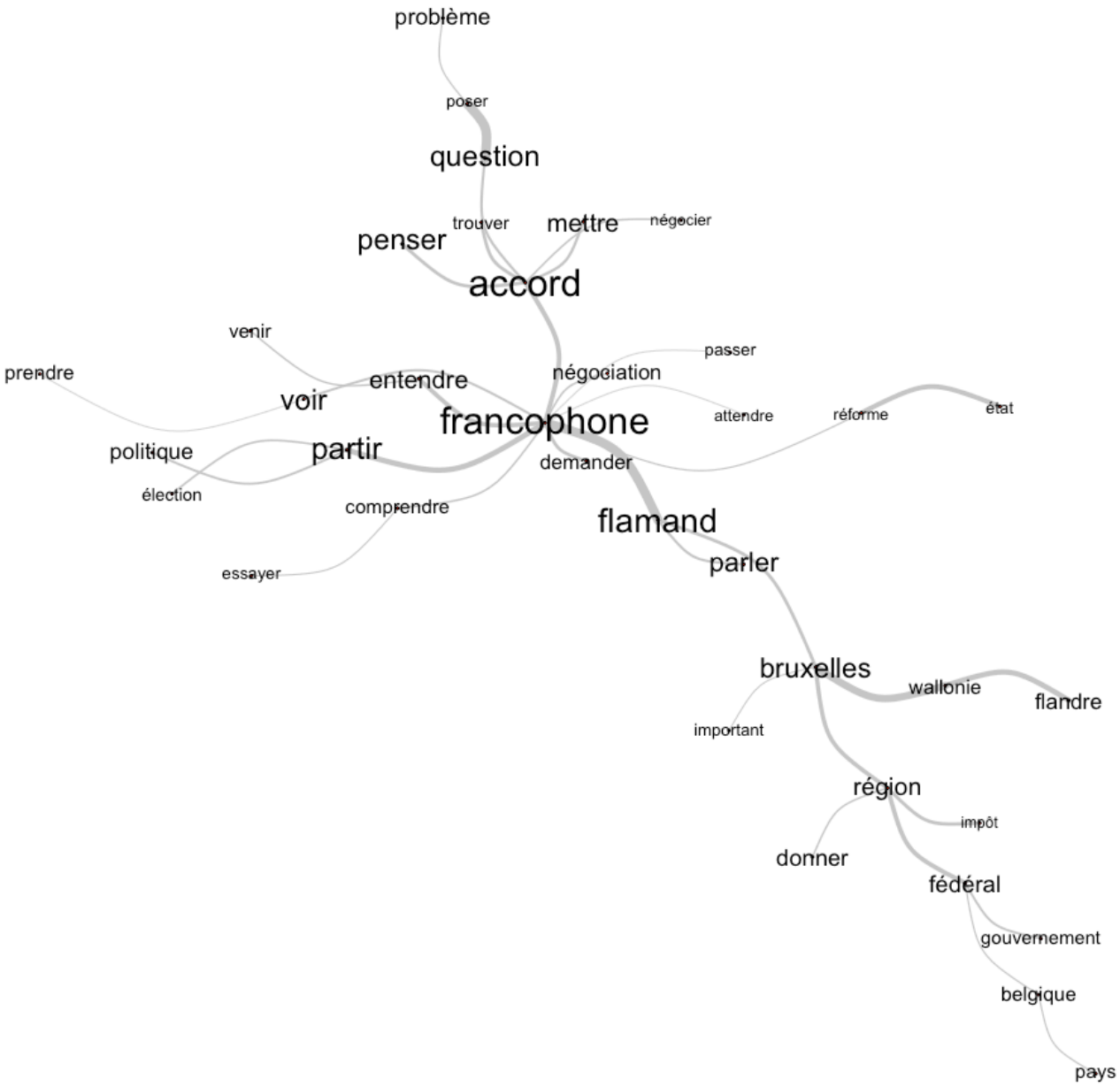
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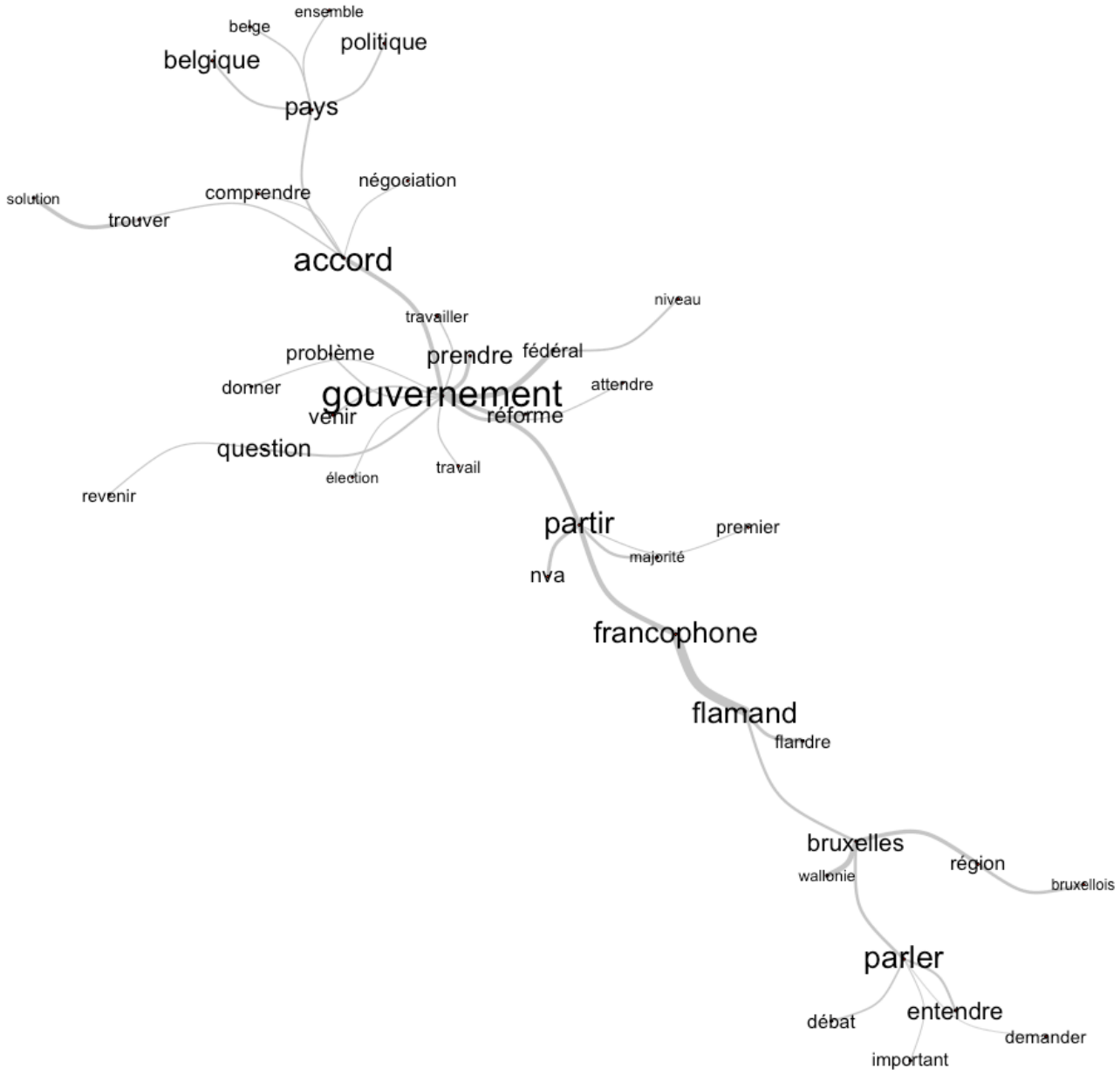
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Annexes

Co-occurrences before the start of the negotiations



Co-occurrences during the negotiations


ensemble
belge
politique
belgique
pays
négociation
solution
comprendre
trouver
accord
niveau
travailler
problème
prendre
fédéral
donner
gouvernement
attendre
venir
réforme
question
travail
élection
revenir
partir
premier
majorité
nva
francophone
flamand
flandre
bruxelles
région
wallonie
bruxellois
parler
débat
entendre
demander
important

Co-occurrences after an agreement is reached

