

THE FUDGE & THE FURY: THE DISTINCTIVE & NOT-SO-DISTINGUISHING LANGUAGE OF IRISH OPPOSITION PARTIES

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With most parties on a quasi-election footing, it is an interesting time to be writing about political communications in Ireland, particularly those of opposition parties.

This is an article about the language used by Irish political parties on twitter, particularly opposition parties. That political parties choose to use twitter suggests that what they communicate and how they do so is meaningful. So, it seems reasonable to presume that we can learn something meaningful about them from the tweets (and retweets) they share with their followers.

I took around 3000 of the most recent tweets, including retweets but not replies, from each of the twitter accounts of the following Irish political parties: Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, Green Party, Labour, Renua, Sinn Féin, Social Democrats, and Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 split between the two accounts). I also constructed a reference dataset of 2400 political tweets by taking a random sample of 300 from each of the individual accounts.

The ambitions of the analysis were fairly modest. While I was interested in the vocabulary used by each party as a collection of language in its own right, I also wanted to see to what degree it was distinctive from the reference corpus of tweets, overall, and the vocabularies of other parties. And once you start seeing the presence of certain words in one collection of language, you begin to notice their absence in others. At which point, the relative emphasis of particular language and topics amongst the parties becomes clear.

This highlights the finite possibilities there are to talk about policy positions and to communicate a party's identity: not every issue can be a priority. So, when a party tweets about certain issues a lot, other issues are necessarily backgrounded (relatively), whether deliberately or accidentally.

For example, we will see that Labour tweet about *gender* a lot, but *austerity* does not get a mention from them, that Sinn Féin devote a lot of tweets to *brexit*, but very few to the *economy*, while Fine Gael just want to talk about the *economy*. *Abortion* was mostly avoided by every party except Labour, Solidarity/People Before Profit and Renua. And, even in opposition, Fianna Fáil don't use the word *alternative*.

For the parties at the margins of political representation with a clear ideological basis, such as Solidarity/People Before Profit, the Green Party and Renua, there appeared to be a greater strength of correspondence between the vocabulary they used and their political identity.

By contrast, the parties closer to the centre - Fianna Fáil, Labour, Sinn Féin and Social Democrats - were less successful in distinguishing their principles or priorities from each other through their language (by tone or topic). However, it is not clear if this lack of distinction is a reflection of their ideological proximity, a failure of communication or a deliberate strategy of political obfuscation.

For Fine Gael, the communications challenge (and opportunity) is a qualitatively different one.

Overview of the Process

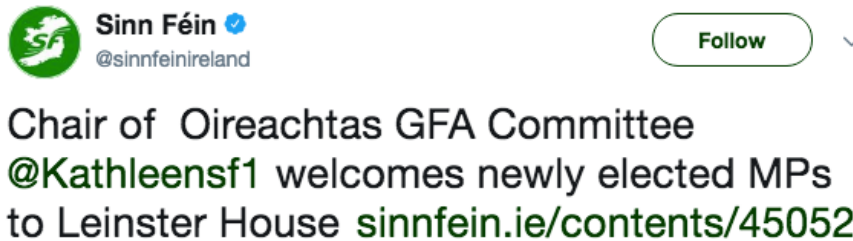
For each of the party datasets, and the reference dataset, I did some basic data cleaning, before splitting each collection into parts of speech (i.e. nouns, adjectives, verbs, etc.) and extracting, separately, a variety of n-grams, or multi-word phrases. For each party dataset, I then compared the frequency of each term in the dataset against its frequency in the reference dataset to see if it was significantly over-represented or significantly under-represented in that party's language.

Below is a more detailed walk-through of some of the data but this still merely scratches the surface of the topic, the data and its possibilities. I hope this article represents an introduction to discussion rather than a final analysis. As ever, anyone interested in fuller discussion of the data and methodology or doing something more structured can get in touch at: emmet@quiddity.ie

Overview of the Data

Once you start reading through tens of thousands of tweets by political parties, you quickly realise that they do not talk about politics that same way you or I might. In fact, most talk by political parties on twitter is **the discourse of professional politics**. What this means is that there is a distinct technical - and impersonal - vocabulary and way of speaking that makes up the majority of communications by political parties.

The most frequently-occurring words in the political communications sampled here describe technical institutions, instruments and events (e.g. *Dáil, minister, party, debate, leader, motion, bill, etc*) that are distinct from **a discourse of personal politics**. There are exceptions, but the bulk of communications by political parties is **the discourse of professional politics**:



The language we use to communicate reflects the way in which we want ourselves to be seen and the audience for whom our message is intended. We construct ourselves and others through language by choosing one word over another, one verb over another, one adjective over another, etc. So, if most political communications are wrapped up in a technical professional discourse, rather than the personal language of everyday life, this raises the question as to whom (most) parties are intending to communicate with in their daily communications...

Look fwd to final passage of **@labour**
competition amendment bill through Dail
tonight **#winningforworkers @NUJofficial**
@IrishEquity @SIPTU

One possibility could be that these are essentially internal communications, intended for party members and other people involved in politics, rather than the general public. The second possibility is that they are intended to be mediated in some way before finding their way to the general public and they are prepared for repackaging by journalists, professional media, etc.

A third is that political parties are just not particularly good at communicating. But, if that is the case, why are those at the margins of politics so much more effective in communicating a distinct identity than those at the centre?

1. Manifestos are temporary, Politics is permanent: You Are What You Tweet.

When it comes to having a distinctive political vocabulary and identity, your manifesto matters a lot less than what you actually spend your time talking about on a day-to-day basis. So, while Labour may list 48 separate policies on their website, it stands to reason that (a) they cannot cover each of those policies equally (nor would it be wise to do so) and (b) that they are not associated equally with each of these 48 different politics by the electorate, or their members. And the same goes for the Green Party's listed 27 policies, or the Social Democrats' 21.

Instead, what is important to parties (and what I see in my timeline) and critical to the construction of their identity is the language and topics that they actually share with their followers by tweeting or retweeting, not the stuff they would love to talk about if only they had the time.

The table below takes 10 terms and shows how many tweets containing that word are in each party's dataset. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset. It is an illustration of how much and how little the various parties choose to talk about these topics, whether deliberately or accidentally.

	Fine Gael (2527 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Green Party (2886 tweets)	Social Democrats (2865 tweets)	Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 tweets)	Renua (2417 tweets)
agriculture	7	6	8	1	16	1	1	1
brexit	202	163	254	42	40	16	5	14
crime	4	9	4	2	1	4	5	59
economy	41	17	4	13	17	19	10	26
gender	3	11	4	78	15	5	5	1
health	45	87	120	70	45	155	64	58
housing	49	99	81	99	47	112	168	42
justice	15	41	6	27	11	7	24	16
rural	25	31	30	11	6	1	2	29
tax	19	28	44	39	8	51	55	166

Table 1. Comparison of frequency of terms between political parties and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets.

So, the Green Party mentions *agriculture* most in their tweets, although for a party concerned with environmental affairs, it is perhaps unusual that the word *rural* only occurs 6 times in a sample of approximately three thousand tweets. Sinn Féin are concerned with *brexit*, but less so with the *economy*; Solidarity/People Before Profit concerned with *housing*, but not with *agriculture* or *brexit*; Renua concerned with *crime* and *tax* but not with *gender* or *housing*, while Labour mention *gender* a lot, but *crime* very little, etc. Fine Gael just want to talk about the *economy* (and not about *tax*).

2. There is freedom of expression at the margins and, with that, comes a distinctive political vocabulary, particularly for Solidarity/ People Before Profit and the Green Party.

The most distinctive political vocabularies come from those parties at the margins, both on the left (Solidarity / People Before Profit) and right (Renua Ireland). The Green Party, specialists in a specific political domain, also have a distinctive vocabulary and identity.

In looking at the lexical profile of the Solidarity / People Before Profit tweets, we see that it is often not what they talk about that makes their language distinctive, but how they talk; that their language is qualitatively different to that of the other (mostly older) parties.

Firstly, their language is less technically or professionally political, in the sense that, a lot of their communications locate political action as happening outside the Houses of the Oireachtas. So, we see *relatively* fewer (and the differences are significant) references to the *Seanad* and *Oireachtas* or to *motions* and *amendments* and more references to action, such as *marches* and *protests*, that occurs in communities (e.g. *Jobstown*, *Tyrellstown*, *Ballyfermot*).

#jobstownnotguilty rally at Smithfield

Secondly, theirs is a discourse of activity and activism; a language which more often locates their politics as actions which occur in personal and public contexts, rather than within the machinery of government. Consider the types of verbs that are over-represented in their language: *fighting*, *building*, *standing*. These construct politics as an active (and often physically active) undertaking. Solidarity / People Before Profit are also significantly more likely to talk about *boycotts* or *occupations*.

	Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)
march	41	7	11	4
protest	138	8	15	2
street	20	8	10	4
fighting	30	3	0	2
standing	25	5	17	3

Table 2. Comparison of frequency of terms between Solidarity/People Before Profit, Labour, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

Thirdly, it is not simply a question of differing emphasis, but a difference in the degree of emotion and expression (particularly negative sentiment) in their political talk. The adjectives over-represented in their vocabulary - e.g. *disgusting*, *disgraceful*, *racist*, *criminal* - indicate not just political opposition, but emotional and moral opposition to politics.

Disgusting. Garda abuse driving activists to suicide. The problem with the Gardaí is structural - this is the norm.

Finally, Solidarity / People Before Profit use identifiers of political ideology significantly more often than other parties. Terms like *socialist* and *neoliberal* appear in their communications, yet barely feature in any of the other collections of language.

The Renua Ireland lexical profile is also a distinctive one, which again indicates the degree of communicative idiosyncrasy that the political margins afford. Their preferred vocabulary indicates a clear ideological space which they wish to claim (albeit one that has proven to be aggressively uncontested). This distinctiveness is mostly achieved by virtue of what they talk about, rather than any departure from the style of standard professional political discourse (as is the case with People Before Profit and Solidarity).

More economically liberal and more socially conservative than any other party at the last election, their vocabulary reflects this pro-business, pro-life stance. Thus, the words over-represented in their language include: *self-employed, owners, flat-tax, indigenous, pro-life, vulnerable*. Not only do they talk about *abortion* more than any other party, they are the only party to use the term *unborn* in the 25,000 tweets collected.

Thanks @AliveNewsPaper Renua sees keeping Eighth as important human rights issue for unborn child & protects mother

And even when Renua talk about more general political topics, such as *crime*, they tend to highlight criminal activity that is more anti-business than anti-social e.g. *white-collar* crime. The verbs that are over-represented in their language also reflect their entrepreneurial emphasis (e.g. *reward, create*). *Abortion, unborn, crime* (and *white-collar crime*) and *tax* are the most distinctive (most over-represented) terms in Renua's vocabulary.

	Renua (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 tweets)
abortion	50	13	0	1	32
unborn	20	0	0	0	0
crime	59	2	9	4	5
white-collar crime	24	2	3	0	0
reward	11	2	0	0	2
tax	166	39	28	44	55

Table 3. Comparison of frequency of terms between Renua, Labour, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Solidarity/People Before Profit and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

The Green Party’s distinctiveness lies in what they talk about as much as how they talk about their politics. And their distinctive vocabulary is exactly as you might expect; over-represented words in their language relate to our natural and built environment: *biodiversity*, *sustainable*, *environmental*, *derelict*, *vacant*. In terms of verbs, they do more *loving* and talk about *think-ins* more too, perhaps suggesting a warmer and more cerebral approach to politics!

Green Party Chairperson and local Cllr
@rodericogorman welcomes everyone to
 Blanchardstown to our think-in **#dubw**
#thinkgreen

Their identity is placed in greater relief when we look at the words under-represented in the party’s language (i.e. the words that appear less in their vocabulary than other parties). The under-represented words in their vocabulary suggests a party - consciously or unconsciously - apart from the political mainstream. We saw earlier that topical issues like *crime*, *health*, and *tax* all appear significantly less frequently than in the reference dataset, but also (shown below) *finance* and *cuts*.

	Green Party (2886 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)
environmental	20	0	1	0
sustainable	18	6	6	4
derelict	28	0	0	1
love	25	1	0	5
think-in	35	7	3	16
finance	1	45	8	18
cuts	2	10	38	19

Table 4. Comparison of frequency of terms between Green Party, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Labour and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party’s dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

In each of the three cases detailed above (People Before Profit/Solidarity, Renua, Green Party), the parties have a distinct lexicon that reflects a readily observable political identity. However, when we look at the language of other opposition parties, particularly those who wish to lead the opposition, there is less distinctiveness and less clarity than is found at the margins, and a more tentative picture of party identity emerges.

3. The Muddle in the Middle Part 1: Neither Fianna Fáil nor Sinn Féin distinguish themselves in owning the language of opposition - but Sinn Féin carry it better

In marketing, it is generally considered easier to build a brand identity when you do not have a large market share. For Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, this raises an interesting political communications problem in terms of the best strategy to present themselves as a distinctive opposition to Fine Gael, while maintaining or increasing their vote share.

Looking at the vocabulary they use most often, it appears that, beyond their nationalism, Sinn Féin are on the whole not clearly distinctive from the rest of the parties in a tightly-contested (in lexical terms) centre that also covers Fianna Fáil, Labour and the Social Democrats. Their vocabulary is not distinct to the same extent as the language of Solidarity/People Before Profit, Renua or the Green Party is.

Sinn Féin are distinct in one aspect of their lexicon; a "politics of place" which is, more than any other collection of language, replete with external geographical references, such as *Catalonia*, *Strasbourg*, *Brussels*, and also *British* and *Brexit*.

From the Bogside to Barcelona - solidarity with the Catalan people

However, in terms of domestic issues, there is no single issue that Sinn Féin talks about significantly more than any other opposition parties. In that sense, they do not appear to 'own' any one issue (other than internationalism and the issue of a united Ireland). However, what Sinn Féin appear to be doing effectively (and considerably more effectively than Fianna Fáil) is borrowing from the language of other opposition parties.

What this means is that, when compared against the reference corpus, Sinn Féin talk about *alternatives*, *opposition*, *fighting*, etc significantly less than Solidarity/People Before Profit, and (on occasion) Labour, but significantly more than Fianna Fáil. But then they talk about political symbolism, such as *anniversaries*, *history* and *commemorations* more than any other party except Fianna Fáil. In some respects, Sinn Féin appear to be attempting to navigate a middle-ground between Solidarity/People Before Profit's active opposition and and Fianna Fáil's passive statesmanship.

While Fianna Fáil are understandably a little hamstrung by their own balancing-act involving the confidence-and-supply arrangement with Fine Gael, their political vocabulary is nonetheless impressively conservative, with very few distinctive terms. As shown below, it seems a little perverse that the word *alternative* is under-represented in a corpus of language from the party leading the opposition.

If we examine some words that you might expect the main opposition party to have as the foundations of their communications: *alternative*, *protest*, *opposition*, *fighting*, *demand*, many are under-represented, compared to the reference dataset, in the Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and Labour tweets. Some of these are the terms we saw previously massively over-represented in the Solidarity/People Before Profit dataset.

	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Social Democrats (2865 tweets)
alternative	2	17	18	21
protest	2	15	8	6
opposition	7	16	17	6
fighting	2	0	3	5
demand	4	12	4	7

Table 5. Comparison of frequency of terms between Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Labour, Social Democrats and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

Overall, Fianna Fáil appear to have decided that not differentiating themselves too much from Fine Gael may be their best strategy. Indeed, when we compare the Fine Gael collection of language directly with each of the other collections, the lexicon that they are most similar to turns out to be that of Fianna Fáil (followed by Sinn Féin!). This should not be too surprising, given Fianna Fáil's history as a governing party. And, unlike Sinn Féin, they are still seen by other opposition parties (along with Labour too) as an "establishment" party:



People Before Profit

@pb4p

Follow



Cancer patients are having their surgery cancelled in large numbers in our hospitals- this is the Fine Gael, Fianna Fail, Labour legacy

4. The Muddle in the Middle Part 2: Labour and Social Democrats are still trying to find room for a distinctive identity and vocabulary too.

Labour do not have the size or momentum of Fianna Fáil or Sinn Féin to present themselves as credible leaders of any government-in-waiting (or opposition). Like Fianna Fáil, they are still licking their electoral wounds from their previous stints in government. But if it is easier to shape a political identity when you do not have much share of the vote to lose, then both Labour and the Social Democrats are in a great position to do so. Labour have been hovering around 4%-5% in the last year, a long way from their 2011 General Election high of 20%, while the Social Democrats have been consistently around 1-2% in recent months, dipping below the Green Party in the polls.

Based on this analysis of language, it seems that certain distinct priorities are emerging for Labour, in place of their traditional identity. They are no longer the main party speaking for or on behalf of labour: Solidarity/People Before Profit mention *workers* in 121 of their 3000 tweets, compared to Labour's 63 times (although both mention workers significantly more than the reference dataset); *class* is mentioned 20 times by Solidarity/People Before Profit, compared to Labour's 8 times.

Perhaps due to the perceptions of their involvement in harsh budgets of the previous coalition government, there are some words that are simply disappearing from their lexicon. For example, *austerity* is mentioned 107 times by Solidarity/People Before Profit but not at all by Labour.

	Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)
oppose	17	4	8
workers	121	63	37
class	20	8	6
austerity	107	0	16
freelance	0	20	0
gig economy	0	8	0
pay	93	125	8
pay gap	2	64	0

Table 6. Comparison of frequency of terms between Solidarity/People Before Profit, Labour, Sinn Féin, and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

As the table above shows, Labour are nonetheless talking a lot about work, mainly in the context of their **Future of Work** policy (they are the only party talking about *freelance / freelancers* and the *gig economy*). This is a clear area of distinctiveness for them.

Even more significant and more distinctive, however, is their emphasis on gender, generally. So, for example, while both Labour and Solidarity/People Before Profit talk about *pay*. Labour are talking about *pay*, primarily as a gender issue, in terms of a *pay gap*.

And when we compare Labour and other opposition parties, such as Sinn Féin, on terms relating to gender and women's issues, we see that this is a significantly more distinctive area of conversation for Labour, than it is for Sinn Féin and the Social Democrats. For example, while the term *equality* occurs 54 times in Sinn Féin's collection of tweets (significantly more than the reference dataset), the term *gender* only occurs 4 times and *women* 20 times. By comparison, Labour use the term *gender* 78 times and *women* 63 times in a comparable sample of tweets. The hashtag *#repealthe8th* occurs 62 times in the Labour dataset, but only once in the Sinn Féin dataset.

	Labour (2979 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Social Democrats (2865 tweets)
equality	36	54	13	25
gender	78	4	11	5
women	63	20	22	42
#repealthe8th	62	1	0	23
abortion	13	1	0	1
reproductive rights	4	0	0	1

Table 7. Comparison of frequency of terms between Labour, Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil, Social Democrats and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

Just as Labour are attempting to find some political space and some political issues to commandeer in the space between Solidarity/People Before Profit and Sinn Féin, the Social Democrats appear to be struggling somewhere between Labour's emphases and others' fudges. The table above shows that, while Social Democrats talk about gender issues more than Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil, it is not an area of emphasis for them as it is for Labour.

Illustrated below are some of the terms that Social Democrats use more than any of Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and Labour. However, there are a number of caveats. Firstly, most are not significantly over-represented compared to the reference dataset. In fact, Solidarity/People Before Profit talk about *housing* and *homelessness* more than the Social Democrats. Secondly, no other party really uses the term *healthcare* and, thirdly, while *health* is over-represented in the Social Democrats' language compared to the reference dataset, the same is also true of Sinn Féin's use of *health*. So, while distinctive for the Social Democrats, neither of these areas is unique to them.

	Social Democrats (2865 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)
housing	112	99	81	99
homelessness	21	18	14	7
homeless	24	11	22	9
health	155	87	120	70
healthcare	64	2	2	9
patients	11	5	8	2

Table 8. Comparison of frequency of terms between Social Democrats, Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin, Labour and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. A figure in a black square indicates that this term is significantly over-represented in that party's dataset compared to the reference dataset, whereas a figure in a red square indicates that it is significantly under-represented compared to the reference dataset.

Beyond those two topics, however, there is little distinctive about their language.

5. The vocabulary of Government is distinguishing and, therefore, an opportunity for Fine Gael

Having looked at the opposition parties' language, it is worth examining briefly in what respects Fine Gael's vocabulary differs from that of the opposition. Below I have picked out some terms that are significantly over-represented in the Fine Gael corpus, compared to the reference dataset.

	Fine Gael (2527 tweets)	Fianna Fáil (2983 tweets)	Sinn Féin (2844 tweets)	Labour (2979 tweets)	Green Party (2886 tweets)	Social Democrats (2865 tweets)	Solidarity / People Before Profit (3000 tweets)	Renua (2417 tweets)
actions	11	4	2	2	6	4	1	3
opportunities	17	10	2	1	1	6	1	8
negotiations	17	11	15	0	4	1	3	0
economy	41	17	4	13	17	19	10	26
jobs	77	22	8	12	9	4	11	15
growth	23	2	2	1	2	3	2	13
increase	35	14	22	10	15	8	23	10
best	40	17	9	33	26	22	9	27
more	157	64	43	88	108	107	57	77
helping	11	2	3	5	6	2	1	3
created	13	1	2	1	3	1	2	3
ensure	39	22	16	10	13	20	3	20

Table 9. Comparison of frequency of terms between political parties and reference dataset. Figures refer to absolute frequency of each word in the respective datasets. The black squares indicate the party with the most number of tweets containing that term and the red squares indicate the party with the fewest. A plus sign (+) beside a number indicates that it is significantly over-represented, compared to the reference dataset, whereas a minus sign (-) indicates that it is significantly under-represented.

There are two aspects of Fine Gael's distinctive vocabulary that are worth highlighting. The first is that, for the most part, the opposition parties, collectively, use these terms significantly less than Fine Gael, with the exception of perhaps Renua for certain economic terms. However, as we saw earlier, there is a large degree of overlap above between the opposition parties, with regard to the frequency of usage of various terms.

As we saw earlier, there is a large degree of overlap above between the opposition parties, with regard to the frequency of usage of various terms. For some terms, Sinn Féin and Fianna Fáil both used particular terms a lot, others were used by Social Democrats and Labour, or Green Party and Labour, etc, but, with the exception of Solidarity/People Before Profit, there was no consistent distinction between most of the opposition parties.

However, within Fine Gael's over-represented language is a distinct set of nouns, adjectives and verbs, partially illustrated above, that opposition parties do not really have the same opportunity to use: this is the language of government, the language used to describe delivery of policy commitments and promises, and a vocabulary that is (mostly) unavailable to those outside government.

Secondly, Fine Gael's language is considerably more positive than that of opposition parties, including the adjectives over-represented like *best* and *more*. Just as opposition parties are required to hold the government to account, so too should governments be able to articulate coherently the logic and benefits of the policies and courses of actions that they have undertaken.

Where a party creates a distinctive vocabulary and identity, as is the case with the more marginal opposition parties, it creates a stable linguistic framework through which political action, both theirs and others, can be described and interpreted. It makes it easier to make sense of those actions.

The unique opportunity that government parties have, unlike a fragmented opposition, is the chance to create a similarly coherent narrative around their achievements and actions within a stable linguistic framework and vocabulary, and to shape the discourses through which that narrative is communicated..

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