Austerity and *Fairness* in UK Parliamentary Discourse of the 2008 Economic Crisis. Inequality Revisited?

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ABSTRACT

Economic inequality has steadily increased in the UK since the 1980s. This tendency has been heavily influenced by a style of governance, namely neoliberalism, that prioritises narrow economic imperatives and downgrades the importance of pursuing polices that enhance wellbeing and social justice. The 2008 economic crisis and the establishment of austerity as the solution to the crisis exacerbated this situation. Within this context, this thesis analyses the use of the words *austerity* and *fairness* as legitimisation tools in UK Budget parliamentary debates in the House of Commons. Using corpus linguistic methods, I compared two different corpora: a crisis corpus (2008-2012) and a separate corpus covering a period of economic growth (2002-2006). This allowed me to highlight the patterns of use of *austerity* and *fairness* and establish the semantic links between the two concepts, contextualising them in terms of economic inequality.

The results show that the crisis marked a clear change in the frequency and the semantic contexts of both *austerity* and *fairness*. During the crisis, *austerity* was related to debt morality, textured in ambivalent phraseological constructions. Firstly, the narrative of the *age of austerity* emerges, where connotation in terms of urgency and epochal change were prevalent. Secondly, *austerity* becomes a label for business as usual, embedding deficit reduction in policy-making. Moreover, in the growth corpus, *fairness* appears surrounded by key neoliberal concepts such as *enterprise*. This pattern, however, is absent in the crisis corpus. Instead, there is a clear tendency to associate *fairness* with taxation, limiting the moral semantic scope of this word to that of reciprocity understood as an economic transaction or as responsibility to contribute. With these results, I argue that the government's role was limited to that of an accountant, concerned mainly with promoting the conservative values of sacrifice and reward, within which increases in economic inequality could be more easily tolerated.

‘There’s more to work than employment, and more to wealth than money’

(Sayer 2015: 45)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Tables

Graphs

Concordances

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TYPOGRAPHY

Abbreviations

CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CL	Corpus Linguistics
Collins	Collins Online Dictionary
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
HM	Her Majesty
LL	Log-Likelihood
MI	Mutual Information
MP	Member of Parliament
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
SNP	Scottish National Party

Typography

FAIRNESS	Lemma (referring to the collection of morphological or word forms permutations, fair, fairness, unfair)
fair	Search syntax (including all prefixes and suffixes)
fairness	Referring to words or concepts, keywords and examples in the data
‘fairness’	Examples and definitions from a dictionary, emphasis

1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis investigates elite political discourse during the onset of the 2008 financial crisis in the UK. It aims to achieve an understanding of the particularities of this period, specifically the years 2008-2012. It was then that austerity governance was cemented as the dominant paradigm for policy-making, which still persists to this day. The study considers economic crises to be paramount in political and social developments (Hay 1999a). Furthermore, understanding the discourse within which crises are managed and legitimised is vital in the process of selecting solutions. In other words, 'the most important instrument of crisis management is language [and that] those who are able to define what the crisis is all about also hold the key to defining the appropriate strategies for [its] resolutions' ('t Hart 1993: 41 cited in Hay 1996b: 255).

One of the most obvious consequences of austerity governance has been an increase in economic inequality. Without doubt, hardship and suffering – particularly for people on lower incomes – have been two of the most devastating effects of austerity governance. Economic inequality is a particularly difficult social matter to investigate discursively. As I discuss later, this is because it is very often disregarded as an endemic problem, which undermines the perceived value of the very resource for its improvement: wealth re-distribution. Therefore, it follows that discriminatory practices are commonly associated with economic inequality. This thesis focuses on the discursive crystallisation of such practices. In doing so, it relies on the theoretical framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This approach to critical social research aims to find the links between discrimination and the naturalisation of discourses that sustain it. In view of this, this thesis has a normative stance: economic inequality is discriminatory and, most importantly, it hinders human flourishing.

The study focuses on the semantic paths that link two particular words of great importance for the period covered in the study, *austerity* and *fairness*, with the discursive manifestations of economic inequality. The research began from the assumption that these ideas were undoubtedly linked in the context of the crisis. Austerity governance implies an inegalitarian outcome in terms of a decrease of social protection and investment. In this context, *fairness* becomes a particularly important concept as a legitimisation gatekeeper of what is possible policy-wise. Austerity was seen as the stick, fairness as the carrot, and inequality as the underpinning struggle.

This particular linguistic entry point is inspired by the concept of cultural keywords, within the tradition of Raymond Williams (1983) and, more recently, Michael Stubbs (1996). This lexico-semantic perspective encapsulates the idea that the particular meaning and uses of words are important to how we conceptualise social issues. As such, I engage analytically with the ambiguity that surrounds *fairness* and *austerity*, trying to make sense of how their semantic potential is politicised in the data in terms of economic inequality and austerity governance. Considering this, I also engage with the legitimisation strategies surrounding these concepts in terms of morality. Both concepts, I argue, have a moral semantic component, which played specific roles in the discourse of the 2008 economic crisis and has had particular consequences for perceptions of inequality.

This aspect of the analysis, together with the particular links between the two lemmas[1] investigated and economic inequality, also yields important insights into the role of morality in political legitimisation strategies. Equality, even if not explicitly represented as such, is fundamentally a question of morality and the dilemma of social difference (Mulderrig 2007: 5). However, moral evaluation has been acknowledged to be particularly difficult to identify linguistically. Moral values are rarely made explicit or debatable, since they are usually part of cultural common sense (van Leeuwen 2007: 97-98; 2008: 110). This study attempts to overcome this difficulty by approaching the research from an interdisciplinary perspective. It considers the causes and roots of established explanations for economic inequality. Using this

1 Lemmas are collections of word forms, that is, they are the sum of morphological alternatives. For example, the lemma RUN would include the word forms run, runs, running, runner, etc. I will be distinguishing lemmas by using capital letters, such as FAIRNESS. Specific word forms that appear in the data will be distinguished by using *italics* such as *fairness* or *fair*.

information, it then explains the most common lexico-semantic patterns surrounding the keywords in the data and in the context of austerity governance.

Having provided a brief introduction, I now discuss the motivation for this study; namely, why economic inequality is important and why it is such a difficult matter to investigate. After that, I present an overview of the study, including the conceptual and methodological frameworks that it brings together. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis and explain what the reader can expect to find in each chapter.

1.1 Economic inequality in the UK

Economic inequality is one of the greatest problems that the UK faces; income polarisation has steadily increased since the 1980s. Furthermore, the UK ranks consistently as one of the developed countries with stubbornly high levels of economic inequality. Danny Dorling (2018) goes so far as to claim that levels of inequality in the UK are the worst in Europe. The UK is amongst the countries where the richest 20% receive about seven times more income than the poorest 20% (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010: 17). This ratio comes close to levels of inequality in the US (1:8), and contrasts starkly with a much more modest income gap of around 1:4 in Nordic countries.

These levels are becoming comparable to those experienced in the early twentieth century. More specifically, Dorling (2018) claims that the UK has reached the same degree of inequality as in 1913, the last year when the level peaked. As we reach this high level, we understand more about the social repercussions. Winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics Joseph Stiglitz (2013) and Wilkinson and Pickett (2010; 2018) make compelling arguments about these repercussions in the USA and the UK respectively. Their work presents a formidable array of evidence that reducing inequality is the best way to improve quality of life for all, including those who are better off (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010: 29), be that in terms of health (physical and mental), crime, education, life expectancy, social mobility, community spirit, democratic values or even environmental sustainability. The more inequality, the less wellbeing there is in a society.

In spite of these grim statistics and the evidence of undesirable outcomes, big income gaps have become naturalised. This naturalisation has not been gratuitous, however. It has gone hand in hand with a reluctance to accept wealth re-distribution as a normal mechanism of governance through which to reduce the gaps that market economies are naturally prone to. There is a widespread acceptance of policies which undermine egalitarianism. A noticeable correlation exists between the widening levels of unequal incomes and the marked reluctance to accept redistributive policies that would make British society more equal by reducing levels of insecurity and poverty (see, for example, Taylor-Gooby's 2013 analysis of the British social attitudes survey).

Finding an explanation for this situation is not straightforward. Inequality is an incredibly complex matter. It can be a social issue (a matter of social status), an economic one (wealth re-distribution), or a moral one (our relative worth as human beings) (White 2007). Some equalities enjoy more widespread acceptance than others. For example, legal equality (the fact that the law should protect everybody equally) and political equality (we should have the same access to democratic rights) are nowadays widely accepted as a given (White 2007). In fact, it is reasonable to argue that in general, equality is considered a desirable goal. Most people believe in the idea that, as human beings, we should all be treated as equals, which is the basis for egalitarian beliefs (Swift 2006). Even those who reject certain forms of social equality would concede the ultimate importance of advancing human wellbeing (Swift 2006: 94). The idea of equality has been behind important social developments, such as the abolition of slavery, universal suffrage and the declaration of human rights (Mulderrig 2007). In fact, a wide range of social concerns related to equality are legally protected. In the UK there is an extensive legal framework that protects certain equalities. This framework includes the Human Rights Act 1998, the Equality Acts of 2006 and 2010, and certain conventions that the UK has ratified (even if they are not considered legally binding), such as the Convention on the Elimination of

Discrimination against Women, the Convention against Torture, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (see Equality and Human Rights Commission 2015 for an overview of the legal framework for equality in the UK).

Within this extensive legal framework, however, economic inequality is rarely addressed. In the Human Rights Act 1998, for example, economic and social rights (health, housing, education, food, etc.) are largely unprotected; 'There is no human right to material equality' (Just Fair 2017: 4). Economic inequality is particularly problematic because it is an intrinsic part of capitalism, where there is always the possibility of exploitation (having the fruits of one's labour appropriated for the benefit of others), economic marginalisation (being confined to undesirable or poorly paid work or being denied access to labour altogether) or deprivation (being denied adequate material standards of living) (Fraser 1995: 70-71). As such, the complete eradication of economic inequality will always be a constrained endeavour.

Nevertheless, the main problem regarding economic inequality lies in the fact that it is also politically contingent. That is, political decision-making determines the level of inequality in any given society in any period in time. In other words, there is no agreement on how to deal with economic inequality; instead, equality is 'a perpetually moving target' (Mulderrig 2007: 2). It is constantly influenced by the social conditions that surround it, and it reflects humanity's infinite diversity, which requires us to balance competing claims, values and needs (Sen 1980; 1992 cited in Mulderrig 2007: 5). This complexity is influenced by several aspects of the social and political spheres. For example, Nancy Fraser (1995; 2001) explains that a more generalised emphasis on the 'politics of difference', where injustice is more focused on discrimination in terms of cultural misrecognition, has eclipsed the 'politics of equality', those problems arising from socioeconomic maldistribution. In reality, both types of discrimination are interlinked. For example, one could argue that discrimination against women is rooted in cultural misrecognition that stems from a particular dominant view of the world (patriarchy). However, this discrimination translates into economic inequalities, such as women earning lower wages than men (Fraser, 1995) or the assumption that providing unpaid domestic work is a female role.

Considering these complexities, this thesis is admittedly simplistic, as I isolate economic inequality for analytical purposes. Moreover, I focus on its links to political economic paradigms (Hall 1993). More precisely, I argue that the naturalisation of high levels of inequality is directly linked to the normalisation of neoliberalism as a mainstream economic paradigm since the late 1970s. This paradigm is a complex one, upon which I shed some light in chapter 3. However, it can be briefly summarised as a blind trust in a free market economy as the best way to organise societies, considering social justice and its moral aspects as secondary when competing with (assumed desirable) economic outcomes, such as competitiveness or growth. This naturalisation has promoted a view of neoliberalism as a normal science (Hay 2004a), where morality has no place in policy decision-making. Admittedly, this paradigm does have values, as we will see in this thesis, but they are values which are not conducive to social solidarity and re-distribution (Levitas 2005: 234). To challenge the limits that the markets impose on equality is, ultimately, to challenge the legitimacy of the market itself (Levitas 2005: 187).

1.2 The study

At the beginning of this introduction I stated that my main objective in this project was to analyse the linguistic features, and their political economic significance, of elite political discourse during the onset of the 2008 economic crisis and the consolidation of austerity governance in the UK. In order to achieve this, I compiled two distinct corpora. On the one hand, the crisis corpus, covered the years 2008-2012. On the other hand, the growth corpus, covered the years 2002-2006, representing a period of sustained growth in the UK. This data allowed me to introduce a contrastive and diachronic component to the study. I considered that by comparing these two periods, I could more fully appreciate the unique linguistic features of austerity politics. Following this analytical stance, I was able to observe particularities of the crisis discourse; by seeing what was only present in the growth corpus, I was also able to observe linguistic absences from the crisis discourse. Moreover, I analysed yearly differences in the crisis corpus in order to observe patterns as austerity governance emerged and developed into a mainstream narrative.

In the analysis, the main focus of attention was language. I considered that discourse has a particularly important role to play in social and political developments. A wide range of genres could have provided insights into these links; as I explained in the previous section, inequality is a political matter and, as such, it is widely present in most political genres. However, I decided to concentrate on Budget parliamentary debates in the House of Commons. I chose this genre for several reasons, which I develop fully in chapter 4. Briefly, the aim was to maximise genre consistency in order to aid diachronic comparability, so I needed to be able to compare the same genre and discourse practice across time. Moreover, this approach allowed me to capture cross-party discursive patterns (potentially pointing to consensus) in relation to crisis management and austerity governance, rather than focusing on party political differences. Thus, parliamentary debates were a standardised genre through which I could achieve this plurality. Most importantly, budget discussions are at the heart of how elite politicians legitimise their positions regarding wealth re-distribution, which is key for economic inequality; as such, they were highly relevant for this study.

I used a variety of quantitative and qualitative approaches to discursive analysis. The main focus was to identify the most repetitive contextualisations of the two keywords analysed, *austerity* and *fairness*, based on the assumption that discursive frequency can often point to sociologically significant phenomena. The context in which a word appears builds on its connotative profile and manipulates its meaning (Stubbs 1996). Thus, studying common combinations of words can point the researcher to the ways in which discourses can be maintained (Baker 2006). Considering the complexity of the semantic features of the two keywords, part of my endeavour was to compile a semantic frame, comprising the general and common meanings and connotations for each word, for which I used lexicographic and specialised sources. However, the main methodological approach was corpus linguistics

(CL), which was used to guide a multi-layered form of analysis. Corpus tools thus provided me with quantitative soundness (in terms of frequency and statistical relevance), while serving as a basis for probing more intensively and qualitatively into the data (concordance lines, longer strings of text). Furthermore, my research procedure was partly driven by an interdisciplinary framework. It allowed theoretical insights into the politics of neoliberal governance and austerity to guide the different steps in the analysis, this being an active part of my decision-making and my critical interpretation of the findings as they were unfolding. Considering this, the thesis embraces the abductive approach that is typical of CDA, where cross-pollination beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries and methodologies takes place (Mulderrig 2011: 46). For example, the choice of *austerity* and *fairness* as my primary search words stemmed from such dialogue and the preliminary findings.

The results of this research process aimed to contribute to the understanding of how the two keywords, *austerity* and *fairness*, were used as legitimisation tools. More specifically, I was particularly interested to see how the results could be related to neoliberal governance and the views of inequality to which they are linked. Stemming from this, the study also aimed to interpret the contradictions between the severity of the crisis (and the questions this raises about the feasibility of neoliberalism as an economic system) and the lack of transformation in terms of political economic thinking (cf., Schmidt 2016).

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is divided into two main parts. Chapters 2 to 4 crystallise and develop the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis that I have introduced in this chapter. Chapter 2 focuses on the discursive theory that informs the conceptualisation of the study. I describe how I understand the concept of discourse and its links to social practices. In addition, I define how I interpret the task of doing critique, providing more details about the interdisciplinary, diachronic and lexico-semantic features of the study. Chapter 3 presents an overview of how the main political economic developments in the UK have evolved since the post-war period. I focus on neoliberalism, which has been the main paradigm in the UK for the last 40 years, paying particular attention to its rationalities and governance regarding economic inequality. After giving a brief overview of the causes of the 2008 economic crisis, I relate them to austerity governance. I end the chapter with the positioning, aims and research questions of the study, highlighting the particular historical relevance of the keywords *austerity* and *fairness* within the context presented. Finally, in chapter 4, I present the methodology that was used. I provide a fuller description of what CL is, explain how it was used in the analysis, and point out why it is useful from the perspective of CDA, the approach that was followed in this study. I also describe the data rationale, how it was gathered and processed before the analysis, and the specific quantitative and qualitative search strategies that were used.

The second part of the thesis explores the findings. Chapter 5 provides a frame for the rest of the results, focusing on lexicographical analysis and frequency. The results show that both words, *austerity* and *fairness*, have clear semantic links to ethics. However, their potential applications in political discourse vary, the former being much more associated with conservatism and the latter being much more adaptable. The two concepts seem to mirror each other in terms of frequency, pointing to the crisis as a clear catalyst for the increase in their use. However, they show different distributions of patterns in the establishment and consolidation of austerity narratives. Chapter 6 focuses on the results of the analysis of *austerity*. The findings point to a clear development in the semantic contextualisation of this particular keyword. It develops from being a much more ambiguous and normative concept in the initial years of the crisis corpus, to being discursively normalised within specific phraseological patterns (such as *austerity measures*) where the continuity of neoliberal affordability discourses could be kept intact.

Chapters 7 and 8 present the findings of the analysis of *fairness*. Chapter 7 focuses on the most common patterns found for this keyword, highlighting relevant differences between the growth and crisis periods, particularly after 2010. During the growth period and the initial years of the crisis, *fairness* appeared linked to the words of *enterprise*, *opportunities* and *competitiveness*. However, after 2010, and as austerity established itself as mainstream governance, the semantic contextualisation of the keyword was around taxation. It focused the attention on the more palatable side of austerity: revenue rather than cuts in public investment. I consider this finding in terms of neoliberal rationalities, stating that government agency is reduced to that of an accountant in charge of controlling taxpayer responsibilities, rather than being concerned more generally with citizens wellbeing and their rights. Chapter 8 has a slightly different focus. Here, I draw from wider sections of text (in addition to using other words, such as *share*) to point to specific meanings attached to the idea of fairness and the consequences of these associations for austerity and inequality. I show how *fairness* was commonly contextualised as reciprocity, a matter of merit or desert, and as a sacrifice presented as a shared endeavour for an unexplained future reward. The ambiguity of fairness was also exploited; it was used both as a catalyst to confront different groups of citizens and to equalise them, relativising the effects of economic differences. Finally, I point to the use of fairness as an aim for the future in both corpora: the only case in which this keyword was semantically linked to a vaguely collective perspective.

Finally, in chapter 9, I present some conclusions and final thoughts on the study and the research process. After summarising the results, I discuss some general ideas on the links between austerity governance and inequality. I argue that the results not only point to a continuity of neoliberal perspectives on inequality but also indicate an increase in the normative and conservative components of such views. The debt morality implied in the semantic scope of *austerity* is transferred to the semantic scope of *fairness*, leaving no space for egalitarianism, collectivism or solidarity within its meaning. I then argue that the resilience of neoliberalism within the context of the 2008 economic crisis is a testament to the importance of the malleability of word-meaning in the process of relativising the contradictions of neoliberalism, particularly in terms of how debt and taxation are used and conceptualised within this model. Finally, I engage in a discussion on some of the issues regarding the use of CL and CDA, particularly in terms of how much serendipity they require. I end the thesis by advocating for a more widespread and multidisciplinary engagement with analysing the mechanisms by which economic inequality is tolerated.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> 'we must keep emphasising this: the way things are does not exhaust the possibilities for the way things could be' (Fairclough 2000a: 160)

In this chapter I present the theoretical foundations that determined the overall approach and conceptualisation of this study. I provide some relevant definitions and explain some of the key methodological and theoretical concepts. Firstly, I align the project with the field of CDA, an approach to social research that has its origins in linguistics and that combines social theory with discursive analytical techniques. The approach has two main objectives. Firstly, it aims to further our understanding of problematic social phenomena that are obfuscated by multiple uneven power relations. Secondly, it aims to identify the role that language plays in the generation and persistence of practices that promote certain world views that favour discrimination. Therefore, it has an emancipatory objective. Indeed, social change is at the heart of CDA, since it engages with how and why these linguistic and social processes emerge and develop over time.

Best described as a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research movement (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak 2011), CDA comprises a variety of approaches, linguistic interests and agendas (see, for example, Wodak & Meyer 2016 for an overview). I subscribe to Fairclough's approach to CDA (see, for example, Fairclough 1989; 1992; 2003). This form of CDA is concerned with the processes of democracy and governance, and it is characterised by a belief in the dialectical relation between discourse and other aspects of social life (Harvey 1996). Moreover, it understands critique as a research process that not only describes why certain discourses might be problematic but also strives to understand the social conditions from which those discourses arise. This is the approach I am referring to when I mention CDA in this chapter.

Within the following sections I flesh out this theoretical background and put it in context within this particular study. First, in section 2.1, I engage with the ontological assumptions that underpin the research process and reflect on what it means to do critique. In section 2.2 I provide an account of the overall methodological framework for the analytical process, paying particular attention to the diachronic nature of this study and the lexico-semantic approach that was followed.

2.1 Discourse and inequality

This thesis was not conceived with a theoretical contribution in mind. However, the analysis and the conclusions drawn from the results are underpinned by a particular perspective on the links between language and social life, which, in turn, are linked to a set of particular assumptions about how social values and ways of thinking work. In this section, I discuss the theory of discourse that lies behind these assumptions.

The first concept that is useful in understanding the theoretical background of the thesis is that of 'social practices'. These can be defined as the articulation of particular areas of social life (Fairclough 2003). This articulation can include, for example, actions and interactions, certain activities, relations, and values and attitudes. Discourse is one element of social practice that is dialectically related to all the others (Harvey 1996). This means that 'discourse', understood here as semiosis, or more broadly the process of meaning-making (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer 2002), is inseparable from any social activity, and vice versa. In other words, all aspects of social life are discursively mediated, unavoidably linked to how we make sense of them linguistically. At the same time, discursive practices are influenced by other aspects of social practice. This does not mean that they are completely dependent on, or reducible to, each other; rather, they are irrevocably influenced by each other, different but not discrete (Fairclough 2005).

The crystallisation of these embedded relations between social and discourse practices can be conceived as a social event, as a particular materialisation of these relationships in, for example, a specific text. However, there are other aspects of the social world that influence social events. Social practices are the intermediate organisational entities that mediate social structures and social events (Fairclough 2003: 23). Social structures are difficult to define, but they can be understood as social, economic or linguistic systems that define the set of possibilities in a particular society (Fairclough 2003: 23). As such, the relationship between what could happen and what actually happens is mediated by the influences of structure and practices, in addition to that of agents. Nothing is completely abstract or concrete, determined or free-flowing; everything results from a feeding process of social practices, social structure and semiosis (that is, meaning-making). What is more relevant for this thesis when considering these complex relations is the fact that discourse interacts with these different aspects of the social, being at the same time 'socially-structuring and socially-structured' (Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer 2002: 4).

In essence, this discourse-dialectical theory seeks to articulate the fact that we relate to our everyday reality mostly by conceptualising the world with language (Mulderrig 2009), which, in turn, is influenced by a myriad of social aspects. Discourse is embedded in everything we do. This can take different forms, such as how we act and interact with each other, how we construct our identity, and how we represent things. This thesis is most concerned with the latter. As Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak (2011: 358) put it, 'we do not simply name things but we conceptualise them'. To give an example of this theoretical framework in the context of this study, this thesis considers that values surrounding economic inequality influence certain everyday practices, such as policy-making. At the same time, inequality is shaped by how this policy-making is linguistically framed via discursive legitimisation practices, including how the word *fairness* is utilised. The policies and the values that inform them (which are limited by social structure) also shape the discourse that surrounds them, each providing a particular take on inequality that is construed with language and political activity.

When considering the social from this perspective, discourse has clear ideological potential within this theory. In other words, not all conceptualisations are equally relevant, because the mediating possibilities of certain discourses and ideas are influenced by structural relations of power.

This is difficult to observe, because those discourses that are privileged in one way or another tend to appear as neutral or almost invisible. As Mulderrig (2009: 22) puts it, discourse works as a ‘mechanism of sociocultural reproduction when it is the most invisible and naturalised’. This entails a complex process where some discourses are preferred over others; where agents, structures, values and other social practices are entangled in a constant process of creation, assimilation and retention of discourse choices regarding what is considered the norm. For example, in elite political discourse, behavioural explanations of poverty are preferred over structural ones, as we will see in chapter 3. This is partly due to the influence of certain values and modes of governance (within a neoliberal framework) that are privileged in contemporary British politics.

To summarise thus far, the theoretical backbone of this thesis lies in the idea that discourse is social practice, which is constantly influenced by and influencing all aspects of how the social world works. I engage with the idea that some discourses are ‘privileged’ when describing events, as one of my objectives is to uncover prominent linguistic choices in order to find out how a society represents a particular aspect of the world (Fairclough 2003). However, what is also important for CDA is the fact that the apparent neutrality and homogeneity of those preferred discourses is precisely that: a mirage that is maintained and reinforced by daily social and discursive practice. Discursive and social practices are constantly borrowing and adapting processes that add to the appearance of complete discursive coherence.

This monolithic appearance of discourse is precisely what CDA aims to break down. By pointing to the contradictions and interconnectivity of such processes, CDA can shed light upon the rough edges in this apparent smoothness, making it possible to highlight their privileged and unjust nature. With this in mind, social change is also an important concept. CDA considers that language plays an essential role in processes of social transformation (Fairclough 1992). The dialectical processes that I explained at the beginning of this section are permanently engaged in a complex flux of variability and adaptability. Selectivity and preference are always attached to these processes; as such, they play an essential role in sustaining specific power relations (Mulderrig 2009: 16). By pointing to the complexities of this flux, which is constantly influenced by structural relationships, CDA engages in normative and transformatory critique. This critique points out that changes in (problematic) established discourses and practices are not only possible, but a necessary and natural expression of the contingent nature of the social. Indeed, for a critical analyst change is the very core of her inquiry, since she is primarily motivated by the desire for social transformation (Hay 2002: 138). It is to this concept of critique that I turn in the following section.

2.1.1 Critique

In the preceding section I outlined the discourse theory that underpins this thesis. However, at the core of CDA lies its emancipatory agenda, stemming logically from its dialectical theory of the social world. CDA points to the contradictions in, and interdiscursive elements of, hegemonic discourses in order to expose their unstable and contingent nature. In doing so, it aims to give a voice to those who are not represented fairly by these discourses and uncover the injustice that this lack of representation entails. This is the essence of critical social science as it is understood in this thesis.

Two aspects of this study's critical engagement need to be highlighted. Firstly, 'critiquing' means taking a normative standpoint. This translates into engaging in considerations of what is desirable or not desirable, particularly in terms of morality as an intrinsic part of critiquing (see, for example, Sayer 2005b; 2011)[2]. In the introduction to this thesis, I stated that inequality has harmful consequences in society. In chapter 3 I develop this idea further and present other normative political and social attitudes that do not agree with this moral judgement. The linguistic entry point of this study facilitates our awareness of this aspect of critical research: morality is, as we will see in chapter 5, an intrinsic part of the words *austerity* and *fairness*. Moreover, the normative stance of this thesis is mainly that of engaging with, and exposing,

2 For some interesting proposals about the role of normativity and morality in CDA, see Graham 2018.

those discourses (seeking to legitimise austerity) that hinder human flourishing and increase suffering (Sayer 2011; Herzog 2018). My belief that the debate about what constitutes wellbeing in society needs to find space for public discussion (Sayer 2011: 7) was one of the main motivations for this study.

Secondly, critique in this thesis is not only normative but also 'explanatory'. In addition to offering an interpretation of the data in terms of what is morally correct and what constitutes a decent society where suffering is minimised, the thesis aims to identify the social, economic and political conditions – and their discursive mediation – that facilitated and consolidated these forms of injustice. In other words, the thesis is explanatory in the sense that it not only says that inequality reduces social wellbeing but also attempts to find out how the current social realities (namely, neoliberalism, as we will see in chapter 3) endure in spite of their damaging effects. It tries to create a picture of why these particular social and discursive choices work and are sustained, so that the paths for transforming them can be revealed (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012: 79).

2.1.2 A note on objectivity

I have now laid down the theoretical skeleton of this thesis. I have shown that engaging in discursive critique in the manner detailed here, combined with using systematic methodological approaches (which I explain in the next section and in chapter 4), seems to be a productive way to engage in social research from a responsible perspective: a standpoint that makes clear that observing what is wrong with the world is not enough. In this section, I comment on questions of objectivity and other criticisms that have been levelled at CDA.

Objectivity is somehow a contentious concept when it comes to CDA. This is so because CDA is part of an ideational shift in political studies (see, for example, Fairclough, Jessop, & Sayer 2002; Sayer 2005b; Hay 2008; Schmidt 2008). It is an approach that opposes the exclusivity of positivist analytical positions as sources of reliable explanations. Despite the momentum behind this shift, positivist and empiricist ethos and practice still have some weight. Political and, more broadly, sociological research is developed from the standpoint of scientific inquiry in the positivist tradition, which is understood as ‘the ability to generate neutral, dispassionate and objective knowledge claims’ (Hay 2002: 87). However, achieving this objectivity is an impossible task, because neutrality simply cannot be applied to the social. As a social scientist, one cannot ignore the relations one has to social life, as if objectivity could be achieved by disregarding part of one’s knowledge about the object one is studying (Sayer 2011: 6). Furthermore, being subjective and being critical are not the same. CDA is not an empiricist but is nevertheless an empirical approach to social research (Hay 2002: 251). It takes a sound systematic approach to discourse and social analysis thanks to the theoretical background it adopts and the linguistic resources it utilises. Moreover, I consider that CDA enhances linguistic inquiry, since it is able to shed light upon a much more vivid and complete tapestry of the complexities of social and linguistic reality.

It is true that critical analysis focuses on the idea of problematisation (Fairclough 2003). Through CDA, one unavoidably engages with the concept of ‘social wrongs’ that need to be addressed, identifying their sources, their causes and the possibilities for alternative scenarios (Fairclough 2009: 163). However, this is not nit-picking for the sake of it (for which CDA is also criticised; see, for example, Luke 2002: 106-107; Martin 2004: 183-184 cited in Breeze 2011: 494)[3]. Rather, an analysis based on problematisation aims to highlight the problems that are usually obscured by dominant narratives and, as such, remain unchallenged and continue to obstruct wellbeing.

2.2 Overall methodological framework

So far in this chapter I have engaged with theoretical assumptions about the role of discourse and critique and how these assumptions link to CDA’s emancipatory agenda. I now present a few considerations that are integral to

3 See Breeze (2011) for an overview of the criticisms of CDA.

the CDA approach followed by this thesis and which connect with the overall methodological framework. Two main concepts are explained in this section: ‘abduction’ and a ‘transdisciplinary’ approach. The focus then turns to the diachronic and lexico-semantic aspects of the study design.

The study operated by taking a degree of abductive engagement with the analysis. This is common in CDA, as data can be collected at any stage of the study and new indicators for particular concepts (or foci on new categories) can constantly feed into the design and the steps followed (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 27). In my approach to the research process, I began by identifying and formulating the topic or problem to be investigated (which I present in chapter 3). I then established questions about this problem from a socio-political and linguistic perspective, and defined the object of study (in my case texts) that would most logically ensure that the questions were answered. Subsequently, I defined the categories of analysis (specific linguistic entry points to the text) and systematically analysed them. Finally, I interpreted the results and related them to the sociological background that I had defined to begin with (see Fairclough 2009 for a detailed guide to this methodological process).

The research process was not only abductive but also required a constant dialogue between the components of the analysis. The social theory utilised was put to work and related to the method and the data, allowing me to link macro social processes with micro discursive events in texts (Mulderrig, Montesano Montessori, & Farrelly, 2019). With this in mind, it is also worth mentioning that this thesis is interdisciplinary, drawing in particular on political economic accounts of neoliberalism and of (in)equality. As I explain in chapters 3 and 4, although the primary text analytical method was corpus-aided, I drew from a variety of fields – inside and outside linguistics – to contextualise and interpret my results more fully. Different levels of analysis were complemented with a dialogue between the theory behind the problem and the empirical data. This is what Fairclough describes as transdisciplinary (2005), since different disciplines are not only engaged with each other but also actively adapted and moulded in order to build a better analytical framework. For example, as I explain in the next section, the political theory used in this study was paradigmatic: it considered that economic policy moves around in times of paradigm stability and paradigm change. This theory was translated into the data structure, within which a period of stability and a period of change (due to the economic crisis) were compared. Moreover, adopting a fully transdisciplinary perspective seemed to be unavoidable when the object of study was power 'understood as the capacity of actors to redefine the parameters of what is socially, politically and economically possible for others' (Hay 1997: 50 cited in Hay 2002: 74). The arbitrary limitations associated with (single) disciplines (Hay 2002: 4-5) would present CDA with a rigidity that would undermine it.

Finally, it is also useful to highlight that just as the research process moved constantly between different levels of abstraction, so does the concept of discourse itself. I have already presented the most abstract level: discourse as semiosis, meaning-making that is part of any social process. However, at the least abstract level, discourse can also refer to language in use (Brown and Yule 1983) or language above the sentence or clause (Stubbs 1983: 1 cited in Baker 2006: 4). At the intermediate level of abstraction, discourse also refers to a way of constructing aspects of the world that is associated with a particular social perspective, such as *neoliberal discourse* (Fairclough 2009: 163). At the same level, it can also refer to the language used in a particular social practice (ways of doing things in a particular setting or activity); for example, *political discourse* (Fairclough 2009: 162). Although the overall conceptualisation of the study revolves around a theory of discourse at the most abstract level, when I openly refer to discourse, I am mostly referring to the intermediate level of abstraction.

2.2.1 Diachronic inquiry

This project aims to capture the discursive patterns that were present in the conceptualisation of the keywords *fairness* and *austerity* during the four years immediately after the 2008 economic crisis, when austerity governance was being established as the UK's main policy response. Considering the negative impacts of austerity on economic equality, the thesis aims to find out how these discursive choices were related to austerity governance. It also aims to observe how these choices represented, and might have influenced, established neoliberal values relating to economic inequality. In order to achieve these aims, the research design was diachronic in two different ways. Firstly, to highlight how the two lemmas were used as a legitimisation strategy after the economic crisis, I adopted a diachronic methodological structure, comparing the period immediately following the crisis (2008-2012) with a period of growth just before the crisis (2002-2006)[4] of the same length. This methodological framework was based on a corpus-assisted model that aimed to observe how political changes across time could be mapped onto linguistic changes (Mulderrig 2009; 2011; 2012).

Secondly, the project was diachronic in its theoretical conceptualisation. As I explained in the previous section, I was aided by several disciplines when determining the theoretical framework of the study. One of the most important of these was political economic theory. In a way, this was unavoidable for a piece of research that aimed to contribute to knowledge about representations of inequality. After all, political economic perspectives shape what is tolerated and legitimised around this social issue. More specifically, I drew from sources that have a paradigmatic conceptualisation of the political economy. This widely accepted (although with some contention) theory was originated by Peter Hall (1993). This theory considers that political progression is determined by the emergence of punctuated revolutionary moments of paradigmatic change; this is followed by an institutionalisation of such paradigms for more or less enduring periods, during which the internalisation of such paradigms determine the limits of what is possible and what is not in policy-making (Hay 2004a: 504-505). The revolutionary moments in time when paradigmatic change takes place are usually associated with economic crises, which is where this area of literature was particularly useful for this project.

Crisis, like discourse, is a contentious concept. It can refer to economic failure that produces an economic downturn. It can also be considered, more importantly perhaps, to refer to moments in economic history when decisive

4 I explain in chapter 4 why 2007 was left out of the analysis.

interventions are required and, as such, they are likely to culminate in a process of paradigm shifting and institutional change (Hay 1999a). Of course, this process is not straightforward; the consolidation of paradigms is often difficult to observe because political economic theory usually lacks the contextualisation and historicity of its claims to knowledge (Jessop 2010). However, language plays an important part. This is so because it is the narratives of the crisis, not the actual economic problems that cause it, which determine the strategy to resolve the crisis (Hay 1999a). These narratives are ideologically filtered and contextually selected, favouring certain interests as well as reducing the complex reality of economic crisis (Hay 1996b; 1999a). This paradigmatic view of political economy is developed further in chapter 3, where it is applied to the UK context.

2.2.2 Words and meanings

This study focuses on the meaning of keywords. I interpret the idea of 'keyness' within the tradition of Raymond Williams (1983)[5]. He defined these analytical units as 'significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation' and as 'significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought' (1983: 15). He considered that one cannot separate how an issue or topic is viewed from how the words that refer to the issue or topic are used. Indeed, he argues 'that most of the social and intellectual issues […] cannot be thought through […] unless we are conscious of the words as elements of the problems' (1983: 16).

Keywords are also determined by their ambiguity (Stubbs 1996: 188). Ambiguity is not only a natural semantic feature, but something that can be exploited and adapted to specific world views. Words have many-to-one relationships with meaning and vice versa, so they have a flexible scope for variation in meaning (Fairclough 1992: 185-186). The use of particular words and their specific meanings is best described as a matter of choice, which is informed by individuality and by how these lexical units are socially adapted

5 For the latest updates on his work see Bennett, Grossberg and Morris 2005 and Macabe and Yanacek 2018.

and contested (Fairclough 1992: 185-186). As such, there is room to consider that the particular meanings assigned to keywords have the potential to become lexical projections of hegemonic and contested discourses (Fairclough 1992: 236-237)[6]. The study is particularly interested in seeing how keywords are used in elite political discourse. As such, I aim to observe how they are politicised, what this tells us about the boundaries established for their semantic repertoire, and if (and how) this changes across time. For example, Williams (1983: 334) and Stubbs (1996: 177) concluded that *work* has moved semantically from simply meaning *doing something* to refer solely to the specialised meaning of a social and economic relationship of paid employment. Hence, the rise of *working woman* understood as having a paid job, underestimating the work involved in caring for a household (Stubbs 1996: 177). This semantic process tells us something about the social value that is attached to employment and to childcare. In a similar way, changes in the ambiguity surrounding *austerity* and *fairness* relate to the power of political paradigms, because changes in the semantic scope of the words are part of the process of making sense of and interpreting the 2008 crisis (Hay 2012: 529).

2.3 Summary

In this chapter I explained the theoretical background of this thesis. I subscribed to the critical social approach that is offered by CDA and developed a conceptualisation of discourse as semiosis, considering language as dialectically related to all aspects of social life. I also made clear the emancipatory nature of the study by characterising critique as normative and explanatory and by developing a standpoint of economic inequality as a source of social suffering. This thesis aims not only to consider the price we pay as a society in terms of the impact on human flourishing, but also to engage in the justifications and causes that allow this malaise to continue to

6 The interest in and complexity of the semantic disentanglement of keywords can also be found in other notions, such as *floating* or *empty signifiers*, 'vague, highly variable, unspecifiable concepts that might refer to multiple or non-existent signified and whose meaning depends on interpretations' (Chandler 2017: 89).

exist in political and economic paradigms. My approach to this task was to concentrate on the discursive practices that surround economic inequality, specifically within the context of austerity governance. I aimed to point out contradictions and interconnectivities that can make it possible to challenge neoliberal views on inequality, which are otherwise perceived as perpetual, and to find the cracks that may provide room for new developments in social change. I also pointed out some of the overarching methodological aspects of the study; namely, its diachronic and comparative nature and its lexico-semantic approach. I now move on to define the political contextualisations more concisely (chapter 3) and provide more detail about the research methodology (chapter 4).

3 POLITICAL ECONOMY AND INEQUALITY

'To tackle social exclusion without making serious inroads into inequality is to fight the battle with both hands tied behind our backs'
(Levitas 2005: 234)

As I explained in the previous chapter, this thesis relies on a paradigmatic view of how political economic thinking and governance evolve. It considers that economic crises are the specific context in which change occurs and paradigms are substituted. In this chapter I apply this theoretical perspective to the UK context by presenting an overview of how political economic paradigms have evolved since the Second World War. This outline focuses on one specific evolution: from the welfare state, which dominated the political arena between the end of the Second World War and the 1970s, to neoliberalism, which can almost be described as its exact opposite. The neoliberal paradigm has dominated political economic thinking since the 1980s until today, although not always with the same justifications or in the same style.

The intention here is not to develop an in-depth analysis of the decades that preceded the 2008 crisis (the main period analysed in this thesis). Rather, the aim is to provide a concise overview of how different paradigms, and the evolution of such paradigms, are intrinsically attached to different views of inequality. I describe these paradigms in section 3.1, where I focus on the welfare state, and in sections 3.2 to 3.5, where I evaluate the developments in the current paradigm: neoliberalism. These explanations provide a point of reference which is required in order to interpret the results. Moreover, I frame the political and social developments that had been taking place during the onset of the crisis (section 3.6) and relate this context to the fact that crises are moments in a country's political economic history when paradigm re-assessments occur. However, as I explain in section 3.7, such a re-assessment did not happen during the 2008 crisis.

This lack of engagement with the flaws of the neoliberal system, despite being surrounded by paradoxes and contradictions with regard to inequality, led me to develop the specific aims and research questions of this thesis, which I present in section 3.8. In this section, I also summarise the main ideas found in the crisis management discourse literature. I end the section by giving an overview of the main methodological approaches found in this literature and the main contributions provided by this thesis.

3.1 The welfare state in the UK

After the trauma of the Second World War, the UK extended social and citizenship rights to reward the population for the sacrifices they had made during the war (Hay 1994: 39). From then until the 1970s, the principles of 'statism' and 'collectivism' were widely accepted in mainstream economic and social thinking. Indeed, public entities and powers were considered to be suitable agents for both the economy and the demands and aspirations of civil society (Hay 1996a: 54). The private market was just one actor in the economy, and its potential power to change social structures needed to be monitored and limited by the state (Coates 2000: 9). It was acknowledged that markets were prone to failure; in particular, they tended to undersupply public or collective goods such as security, health or welfare more generally (Hay 2007: 95-96). As such, welfare and the collectivist idea behind it were natural parts of the economy, deemed as necessities for the good of society and the economy itself. Even though the welfare state in the UK cannot be considered on the left-hand side of the spectrum, as were the social democratic practices in other European countries, it commonly adhered to these rationalities, elevating the principles of equality of opportunity, universality, cooperation, conciliation and consensus, and a comprehensive 'cradle to grave' welfare for all (Hay 1996a: 62). Guided by these rationalities, policy-makers prioritised the aims of full employment, a universal national insurance scheme, a comprehensive national health service, free and compulsory education, extended state housing, and institutional frameworks for labour conciliation by means of strong trade unions (Hay 1996a: 55-56).

Considering this definition of the welfare paradigm, the links between economic equality and the welfare state are undeniable. A strong welfare state in the shape I have described above implies wealth re-distribution by means of social services and universal benefits. Indeed, social equality is the prime value associated with a social democratic view of the welfare state (Hay & Wincott 2012: 44). The welfare state in the UK was by no means perfect, but yet afforded protection and social security for working people (Levitas 1986: 14).

These policy priorities and rationalities experienced a great reshaping in the 1970s, particularly towards the end of that decade and into the 1980s, as neoliberalism established itself as the new mainstream political economic thinking. From then on, the welfare state became an 'elephant in the room'; it did not go away, but its de-legitimisation became one of the main features of neoliberalism. The welfare state is still deeply embedded and institutionalised in the UK's political economy (Hay & Wincott 2012: 1). However, with the rise of neoliberalism, economic pragmatism has become entrenched in the legitimisation of any welfare-related decision-making, and the moral commitments that were originally attached to the welfare state are gradually dissipating as explained in the following section.

3.2 Neoliberalism: a working definition

Neoliberalism is an integral part of the contextualisation of the study, since austerity governance is compared and contrasted with neoliberal ideas and practices. As such, it is necessary to define exactly what neoliberalism is. However, this is not an easy task. This political economic paradigm has taken on different manifestations in different parts of the world, and any attempt to provide a unified definition is doomed to failure (for an engaging overview of the history of neoliberalism, see Harvey 2005). In fact, the inclusion of different ideologies, normative interpretations, political projects and policy applications is a defining aspect of this nebulous paradigm (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013). Therefore, my objective here is to sketch its main rationalities and their translations into policy, taking into account that I am specifically interested in the shape that this paradigm has taken in the UK[7].

The rationality that most accurately defines the UK's strand of neoliberalism can be best understood as a balance between four main concepts: the state, the markets, society and individuals. Of these four, neoliberalism considers that the interests of markets and individuals are the ones that need to be protected and nurtured. On the one hand, neoliberalism considers that the markets should be privileged over state intervention. It claims that markets are the most efficient way to organise the economy (Hay 2004a). As such, the state is relegated to being a 'custodian of the market' (Hay 2004a: 508), rather than being an actor in the economy. The government's sole purpose is to protect and promote the market setting, which it does by making sure that the rule of law, private property rights and the free market are protected (Harvey 2005). On the other hand, state intervention is seen as an imposition of collective judgements on the individual's freedom to choose (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013: 7). Consequently, neoliberalism is not only a political economic paradigm but also a philosophy of political democracy with regard to the role of the state, privileging the individual over the needs of the social (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013: 7). Consequently, there is a lack of engagement with society and social endeavours within neoliberalism. This view has important implications for social equality, as I argue in the next few sections. More generally, however, it is accurate to describe neoliberalism as a paradigm that disregards any thought about the long-term consequences of actions and any ethical considerations other than those of individualism and freedom (Sen 1987; Hay 2004b).

These rationalities have been translated into policy approaches that are very different from those of the welfare state. In general, neoliberal governance prioritises the aim of providing the market with the best possible setting for it to function, regardless of the social consequences. This includes, for example, defending labour-market flexibility and promoting and nurturing cost

7 For a deeper understanding of these rationalities, read Hayek's (1944) *The Road to Serfdom* and Milton Friedman's (1962) *Capitalism and Freedom*, two of the main inspirations for the birth of neoliberalism in the UK.

competitiveness (Hay 2007: 97). Neoliberal governance is committed to the need for a substantial ‘subordination of the principles of social justice to those of perceived economic imperatives’ (Hay 2007: 97). In general, this translates into removing those welfare benefits that might be seen to act as disincentives to market participation (Hay 2004a). In addition, the ideal of freedom and the disengagement with state intervention are also represented in neoliberal governance. Specifically, neoliberalism promotes the desirability of a global regime of free trade and free capital mobility (Hay 2004a). Moreover, it promotes the infiltration of private finance into public projects and, more generally, the allocative efficiency of market and quasi-market mechanisms in the provision of public goods (Hay 2004a: 508).

In this section, I presented an overview of what neoliberalism means and I gave some examples of its policy-making tendencies. However, this paradigm has undergone transformations over the decades, particularly in terms of how it is legitimised. I turn to this process in the next two sections and explain in detail the consequences of this evolution for levels, perceptions and governance of economic inequality.

3.3 Thatcherism: normative neoliberalism

The rise of neoliberalism as a mainstream political economic paradigm was connected with an economic crisis. By the end of the 1970s, ‘stagflation’ (high unemployment and high inflation), which was caused by an increase in the price of oil, had taken hold in Europe. Neoliberal ideas, led by Margaret Thatcher and the New Right movement in the UK, became the antidote to this economic malaise, which was blamed on the previous paradigm. Indeed, the 1980s marked a point of rupture in the UK’s broad political economic consensus, which moved away from welfare capitalism and towards neoliberal capitalism. One can observe two main phases within the evolution of this paradigm. I focus on the first of these, normative neoliberalism, in this section before turning to the second phase, normalised neoliberalism, in the following section.

Initially, neoliberalism was normative (Hay 2004a). In other words, neoliberalism in the UK was first characterised by its endorsement, not only from an economic point of view, but also within a justification made in ethical terms. As outlined in the previous section, the ideal of individual freedom was framed as a catalyst for justifying neoliberal premises as opposed to collective initiatives (Levitas 1986). It relied on the idea that the markets and their private actors were not just more efficient than public ones but even morally superior to them. This superiority lay in the fact that the markets were constricted by the rules of competition (Gamble 1994: 60). The markets themselves became the ethical framework (Harvey, 2005). Indeed, they were considered superior to all other ways of organising human societies (Gamble 1994).

This ethical background to the initial establishment of neoliberalism is, however, more complex than the moral status of the markets alone. Indeed, Thatcherism is characterised by being ‘primarily a neo-liberal project camouflaged in the rhetoric of moral conservatism’ (Hay 1996a: 17). This period of the UK’s political history was characterised by a contradiction; namely, the simultaneous promotion of a free economy and a strong state (Gamble 1994). That is, the shrinking of the state that is implied in neoliberal policies was actually pursued from a rhetoric of a strong and competent government (Gamble 1994: 171). However, this apparent contradiction very rarely surfaced, working instead as a ‘flexible synthesis’ (Hay 1996a: 135). The neoliberal rationality that market competition is superior to social justice (as we saw when defining neoliberalism) was asserted in terms of the conservative moral imperatives of individual duty and responsibility. The idea of discipline was attached to the markets in order to portray those who were operating outside them as feckless (Edgar 1986: 75). Individual rights were recalibrated to accommodate the idea of social discipline. There was a general imposition of the acceptance of hierarchical authority using language of law and order, rather than pointing at human rights and liberties in terms of egalitarian (economic or otherwise) pursuits (Hall 1979; Edgar 1986; Gamble 1994).

Behind such an association lies the conservative moralism of a society that is based on the principles of effort and reward (Hall 1979: 17), rather than the principles of collectivism and social endeavour. Once these associations were made, the welfare state was gradually delegitimised. It was constantly associated with the idea of a 'dependency culture' (Hay 1996a: 135). Poverty and welfare benefits began to be described as a consequence of irresponsible demands for unacceptable rights (Edgar 1986: 74). British society has since been observed from a moralistic, simplistic and conservative perspective in a constant effort to differentiate and classify good versus evil and civilised versus uncivilised (Hall, 1979: 19). Within this conceptualisation of the social there was also an orchestrated attempt to delegitimise the social democratic values that had governed the welfare state paradigm. Margaret Thatcher openly opposed any form of social solidarity (Harvey 2005) and very famously doubted the existence of society. She made no secret of her wish to see socialism destroyed (Gamble 1994: 225).

This conservative perspective on society has endured, and it has played an important role in the legitimisation of ever-increasing levels of inequality. It is within this normative framework that we find the origins of the moral arguments against the pursuit of policies that aim to reduce economic inequality – arguments that have since become mainstream. Policies that aimed to redistribute wealth were discarded on the grounds that they were not only economically inefficient but also morally wrong, since they opposed economic growth and individual liberty (Mulderrig 2007: 5). Thatcher revived the moral arguments against equality (Gamble 1994: 60). In doing so, she ended the post-war consensus that one function of government was to combat poverty and reduce social and economic inequality (Walker 2014: 284). The thesis of the New Right relied on the idea that the markets had an integrating force in society, 'producing order, justice, economic growth and constantly rising incomes, including those of the poorest; inequality is the inevitable (and beneficial) outcome of individual freedom and initiative' (Levitas 1986: 2). Social justice understood as an egalitarian pursuit outside the markets was irrelevant. Thus, the rules of the market were fair, even if the actual patterns of reward and income that were the outcomes of the market were not (Gamble 1994: 60-61)[8].

3.4 New Labour: normalised neoliberalism

The 1990s brought new patterns of legitimisation to mainstream neoliberalism. Neoliberal rationalities persisted but the basis on which the paradigm was endorsed and justified was transformed. From the 1990s onwards, the justification was made purely on economic grounds; more specifically, that neoliberalism was the only way to achieve growth and competitiveness (Hay 2004a). In other words, neoliberalism was normalised and institutionalised from then on (Hay 2004a). This development translated into a wide range of policies and arrangements. For example, within a week of New Labour coming to power in 1997, Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer at the time, institutionalised neoliberalism by making the Bank of England operationally independent; that is, outside government control. This was a clear sign that the government was committed to the idea that important decision-making (such as the control of interest rates and inflation) was best made outside the realms of the state, as a purely market-driven and technical policy and without formal political deliberation (Hay 2007: 117-118). Another clear example was the progressive transformation from welfare to 'workfare', where state aid became increasingly conditional (Fairclough 2000b). This is a clear institutionalisation of the neoliberal rationality, which considers that welfare and social justice issues should be subordinate to economic imperatives (Hay 1999b: 121). I come back to this idea of workfare in the next section, since it is a key concept for economic inequality within neoliberal governance.

The role of the Labour Party, particularly under Tony Blair, was important in this process of normalising neoliberal rationalities and governance. Rebranded as *New* Labour with its manifesto *New Labour, New Life for*

8 This view of the world is very much illustrated in Thatcher's famous phrase 'Don't cut down the tall poppies'. People had the right to be unequal (Walker 2014: 283).

Britain (The Labour Party 1997), the party won with a big majority in 1997 after 18 years of Conservative rule under Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The manifesto overtly presented the party as centrist and aimed to find a new positioning, away from what was seen as the old left tradition of the party and away from the New Right. The old left was by then associated with the image of the incapable government that had brought about the 1970s crisis. The narrative of that crisis was simplified (with no hard evidence presented or sought) into the idea of an ‘overloaded state’, the only solution to which was to reduce the state by means of fiscal austerity and tight monetary control, upon which neoliberal rationalities could be legitimised (Hay 1996b; 2004a; 2009). New Labour distanced itself from this associations by exploiting the idea of ‘renewal’ (Fairclough, 2000a: 18-19).

At the same time, New Labour only identified the New Right with neoliberalism (particularly market rigidity), which enabled them to avoid any direct criticism of their own social and moral authoritarian positions (Levitas 2005: 113). In fact, New Labour adopted some conservative discourses (Fairclough 2000b: 166). They accepted that the markets could be socially damaging; as such, they were able to distinguish themselves from Thatcherite extreme neoliberalism (Levitas 2005: 113). However, they replaced the naturalisation of the markets with the inevitability of globalisation as the legitimisation for neoliberal policies (Hay 1999b; 2006a; Levitas 2005; Fairclough 2006; Mulderrig 2009; 2012). This, together with the lack of contradictory engagement with the moral conservative and authoritarian views of the New Right, translated into the inevitable association between the rise of centrist or Third Way politics represented by New Labour (not right, not left but a ‘Third Way’) and a de facto post-Thatcher settlement (Hay 1996a: 18)[9]. This settlement has had enormous repercussions for British politics and society; chiefly, a seemingly permanent shift to the right (Hall 1979).

9 The implicit and explicit endorsement of the neoliberal agenda by New Labour has been key to the sustainability of neoliberalism. However, it is also fair to observe that a consensus of such large dimensions could not have taken place without the contribution of elite actors, such as the media and business organisations, or without freezing the input from unions in policy-making (Gamble 1994: 222).

Thatcherism (and the subsequent post-Thatcher settlement) represented a substantial change in the nexus between citizen and state (Hay & Farrall 2014: 6). One of the most important legacies of the changes I have discussed in this chapter so far is the creation of an increasingly divided and polarised society (Marwick 2003: 337 cited in Hay & Farrall 2014: 5), within which rising levels of economic inequality have played a very important role. I turn to this aspect of neoliberalism in the next section.

3.5 Neoliberalism and the 1980s inequality turn

We have seen so far that the post-Thatcher settlement in the UK normalised neoliberal rationalities, which are fixated on individual (rather than collective and institutional) responsibility and have a constant focus on economic growth and competitiveness in the context of globalisation, systematically subordinating social justice to these premises. Consequently, subsequent governments have developed a much more ‘contractual’ and ‘enabling’ relationship with citizens, rather than a ‘providing’ one (Mulderrig 2011; 2012). These rationalities have been translated into policy, which, in general terms, has constantly moved towards minimising wealth re-distribution. Instead, growth has become a perfectly suitable substitute. This is known as ‘trickle-down economics’: as long as the whole ‘pie’ keeps getting bigger, there is no need to ‘mind the gap’ between rich and poor because everybody’s piece is getting larger (Swift 2006). As such, a more sensitive approach to real differences in access to resources would seem to be pointless (Callinicos 2001).

In terms of specific policies, the neoliberal mistrust of institutional responsibility in favour of individual responsibility has promoted the construction of taxation as a burden, this being one of the main legacies of the Thatcher years (Walker 2014). The tax system followed has been a regressive one; in other words, income tax has been reduced, and national insurance contributions and VAT have been increased. This system has exacerbated economic inequality[10]. However, the most profound consequences of the legacy of the post-Thatcher settlement have been seen in the reform of the welfare system: the system whose main purpose is to alleviate economic inequality.

One of the main axes of reform has been the permanent link between welfare provision and employability. That is, welfare has morphed into 'workfare'. Welfare has often been described as unaffordable and ineffective in dealing with poverty (because it encourages dependency), and work has been framed as the only solution (Fairclough 2000b: 173). In theory, working needs to be more (economically) attractive than receiving benefits, and this has translated into a progressive increase in the restriction and conditionality of welfare benefits over the years (Hay 1999b; Walker 2014). By the 1990s the idea of universal benefits was only a distant memory, and means-tested access to public support became the new normal. Moreover, welfare policy was progressively restricted to a focus on alleviating poverty. John Major, for example, lifted the freeze on child benefit that had been imposed by Thatcher (Walker 2014: 296). New Labour had a very proactive anti-poverty agenda (Walker 2014: 296). For example, they introduced the minimum wage and they set themselves the target of halving child poverty by 2010 (which they did not meet) and to eradicate it by 2020 (Walker 2014: 297).

This view of welfare provision is a de facto acceptance of the New Right's construction of welfare as 'morally objectionable'. Instead of focusing on the division between the employed and the unemployed, this view of welfare highlights the division between those who can and those who cannot (or will not) work (Fairclough 2000b: 184). Moreover, it ignores other aspects of the labour market and the social fabric, such as the quality of the work (having a

10 This is so because a reduction in income tax, even if small, translates into a big chunk of money saved for top earners; therefore, top earners benefit much more than those on low incomes, since the latter would qualify for tax allowances anyway (Pile & O'Donnell 1997: 39 cited in Walker 2014: 294). In terms of increases in national insurance contributions, an increase does not greatly affect those at the top, since there is an upper limit above which no contributions are paid (Walker 2014: 296). Finally, VAT is unavoidable, and because people with less money spend a higher proportion of their income on buying things, they spend a higher proportion of their income on VAT (see Walker 2014, for a full review of the influence of policy on economic inequality since Thatcher).

job is morally better, regardless of how much one is paid) and unpaid labour (such as caring responsibilities), with great consequences for gender equality (Levitas 2005). The legitimisation of this seemingly lacking system of welfare provision and, by extension, mainstream views of equality, has been greatly aided by the concept of ‘meritocracy’. A meritocratic view of inequality focuses on opportunity rather than outcomes. The belief is that fair and greater equality is achieved by making sure that all individuals and groups have the same opportunities to succeed (Mulderrig 2007), rather than focusing on who gets what (which implies wealth re-distribution). In a meritocracy, unspecified levels of inequality are present, but they are tolerated because there is equal opportunity to compete for advantageous positions (Levitas 2005: 229). Equality of opportunity is at the same time the goal and the means by which inequality is reduced, which eliminates any need for wealth re-distribution (Levitas 2005: 229). The tension between equality of outcome and equality of opportunity is at the core of current levels of economic polarisation. There is an array of positionings regarding the relationship between the two[11]. However, the fact is that without consciously nurturing equality of outcome (that is, wealth re-distribution) there can be no equality, because the transmission of unfair advantage is always possible if there is inequality of outcome (Atkinson 2015)[12].

With the absence of wealth re-distribution, and by individualising responsibility for one’s own wellbeing, the only explanations for wealth or poverty can be behavioural ones. As such, mainstream views of inequality are linked to the idea of ‘individual merit’ and not causational structures. The link between equality and merit was one of the New Right’s main moral premises and it persists as a strong ideological feature of British policy-making (Sayer 2005a; 2015; Swift 2006; Sinfield 2014). Success or failure depends on entrepreneurial virtues and personal choices (such as investment in personal capital), rather than a systemic problem (Harvey 2005). The people who are

11 See White (2007) for an overview of different positionings on inequality.

12 This limitation of equality of opportunity is one of the points made by Michael Young, author of *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958), in which he coined the concept *meritocracy* as a satire of the exaggerated trust in this idea.

at the top feel comfortable with thinking that people on low incomes are choosing to be poor and that wealth re-distribution is unfair or a consequence of envy. The ones who are at the bottom feel bad because they lack the resources to live in ways that are valued by society; furthermore, they believe that this is their own fault (Sayer 2005a), because there are opportunities to get out of poverty.

Without the wealth re-distribution required to reduce levels of inequality, those levels have remained stubbornly high. Atkinson (2015) calls this shift the '1980s inequality turn', because the observable increase in this decade has never changed direction. Research published in the last decade makes this inequality turn evident (see, for example, the most cited source in this respect, Piketty 2014). Of course, many different factors have played a part in this tendency. For example, the decline in inequality between 1945 and the 1970s was influenced by the Second World War (Atkinson 2015). However, it is now well-established that this decline was also aided by several conscious policy decisions (regarding the welfare state) that worked as an equalising mechanism; these decisions were reversed by neoliberal policy-making in the 1980s (Atkinson 2015). In other words, even if other factors played a part, the resurgence of inequality after the 1980s is largely due to political shifts over the past few decades, especially with regard to taxation and finance (Piketty 2014: 20).

It is important to remember that inequality is a relative concept, which means it is something that happens when there are differences between people (Wilkinson & Pickett 2012). In other words, 'one can't be rich if other people are not poor' (Dorling 2012: 13). It is not some abstract, self-contained number; it is the relation between the degrees of wealth and poverty that matters. Increases in material living standards[13] or reductions in poverty are only valuable until a certain economic level is reached. Once a country is affluent, this correlation ceases to exist (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). In other words, once a country's general living standards reach a certain level,

13 This is normally the standard that neoliberal accounts consider when debating inequality (see, for example, Sala i Martí 2002).

economic growth (and the average income) does very little for the wellbeing of its population (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010). This is why policies that target poverty and growth alone will never reduce inequality and its negative consequences.

Ignoring outcomes and focusing solely on merit is also unproductive. Piketty (2014: 22) acknowledges that the strongest force for greater equality has been the diffusion of knowledge and skills capital. Indeed, education is one of the pillars of a meritocracy. However, Piketty (2014: 24) claims that the effect of access to good education is undermined by two factors. Firstly, it is still fairly easy for the top earners to separate themselves from the rest of society by a wide margin. Because of their position and the social and fiscal norms in their country (in the USA in particular, but also in the UK), they have the freedom to set their own salaries without necessarily matching them to productivity (Piketty 2014: 24). Secondly, inherited wealth is not related to growth levels (Piketty 2014). In other words, capital does not necessarily come from labour but can come from accumulated wealth (investments, profits, dividends, rent, interest, etc.), and these returns are now unrelated to levels of economic growth (Piketty 2014). Not only this, and contrary to the idea of 'deserving' that underpins a meritocracy, large amounts of accumulated wealth are largely unearned (Sayer 2015). Moreover, concentration of wealth has steadily increased. Sayer (2015: 3) points out that the UK is returning to early twentieth century levels of inequality: the richest top 1% in the country concentrate 13% of the total income before tax. This figure was 5.9-9% in the early 1950s through to 1978 during the welfare state period.

The contradictions between the neoliberal take on inequality and the information presented in the last few paragraphs reveal that there has been more rhetoric than substance in normalised neoliberalism, which emerged in the 1990s (see section 3.4). The rupture rhetoric that surrounds New Labour – regarding many aspects of the political economy but especially economic inequality – contradicts any substantial epochal change that is more realistically represented by the New Right (Hay 1999b: 9). It was precisely New Labour who was in government when levels of inequality were approaching a peak and the biggest financial and economic crisis since the 1970s was unfolding.

3.6 The 2008 financial crisis: a brief history

It is always a challenge to contextualise a fairly contemporary period with accuracy. However, the years 2008-2010 will most likely have a deserved stardom in the history books. This was the period when the Anglo-liberal growth model, established in the UK in the early 1990s, ceased to work as an economic model (Hay 2010). Growth since 2008 has been hard to come by, in spite of constant attempts by successive governments to reinvigorate the model. Paradoxically, it was precisely the characteristics of this model that paved the way for the 2008 financial crisis. The reliance on finance for economic growth is one of the key factors that has characterised neoliberal policy-making. From the 1970s, the importance of the financial sector overtook that of the production sector (Harvey 2005). Neoliberalism is based on private consumption, an expansive housing market, and a private asset-based welfare system fuelled by financial innovation and deregulation (Finlayson 2009; Prabhakar 2009; Watson 2009; Hay 2012). The Anglo-liberal growth model that was brought to its knees in 2008 relied heavily on the purchase of assets as investments, not only to increase consumption but also as a substitute for a publicly funded welfare system, which became instead 'asset-based welfare' (Hay 2011: 7). This was a conscious social strategy, which was actively promoted by successive New Labour governments (Hay 2011: 7). The dependence on private debt relied on there being easy access to credit and a constant increase in the value of assets, housing in particular. A housing bubble was actually nurtured, because it supported the growth model that was being followed.

It is now widely known, of course, that the UK's housing bubble burst in 2008. Hay (2011) presents an overview of the causes and timeline. He explains that the initial trigger was a hike in oil prices, which increased inflation. The Bank of England then increased interest rates to match the level of inflation, which meant that credit was no longer easy to access. Mortgage payments started to default, and because people were trying to repay their debt, they had less disposable income and consumption decreased. The crisis was upon us. The contagious aspect of the crisis, however, was down to the securitisation of mortgage debt, a financial innovation that was brought to London by US banks after the British sector was liberalised in 1986 (Hay 2011). This invention meant that mortgage lenders were able to repackage new loans as mortgage-backed securities for other investment purposes. The idea was that these investments would be secure: if the mortgages were to default, the problem would be in the hands of those who held the securities, not the banks that issued the mortgages. It was a way of diversifying risk. However, we now know that in financial institutions this method did not diversify risk but concentrated it, particularly considering their leveraged nature[14]. In the end it was the public sector, which had always been denied in the neoliberal model, that had to rescue a significant number of global financial institutions from collapse.

3.7 Neoliberal resilience

Aside from saving the banks, the immediate response to this situation from Gordon Brown's Labour government was to follow a stimulus programme (that is, to increase public investment and spending). In 2009, this was in tune with the responses from most of Europe and the rest of the world, except for Germany and the European Central Bank (Blyth 2013). In other words, there was a brief opposition to the neoliberal standard of public retrenchment. For decades, the possibility of a crisis of this magnitude had been denied; in this situation, publicly defending the logic of the self-correcting markets was difficult (Blyth 2013). The 2008 financial crisis was severe enough for us to expect at least a re-thinking of the system that created it. However, in the end, this did not happen. Therefore, even if the crisis is comparable to the 1970s

14 When a bank is leveraged, it relies on debt as a source of expansion. This means that the bank's debt is perpetually bigger than its assets.

crisis[15] in terms of its effects and failures, it is certainly not comparable in terms of the transformations that have taken place since (Gamble 2009).

In reality, by 2010 and the general election that brought the Coalition (Conservatives and Liberal Democrats) government to power, cross-party agreement had been reached on the need to reduce the deficit (Hay 2012)[16] and, as a method of doing so, the need for (neoliberal) austerity. The Conservatives became the party of the 'Tory cuts', while Labour was 'the party of irresponsible debt' that had created the crisis and the austerity measures that had to be endured because of it (Hay 2012: 2). However, no substantial alternative to neoliberal model was presented. In other words, the 2008 economic crisis was paradigm-reinforcing rather than paradigm-threatening (Hay 2009; 2012). The political elite concentrated their efforts on reviving the old model while introducing policies to improve lending (Hay 2012)[17]. In spite of the severity of the crisis and the fact that it highlighted clear problems in the system (in particular, its perspective on growth), neoliberalism has proved to be incredibly resilient, at least for now (Schmidt & Thatcher 2014). In other words, there was a clear mismatch between the expectation of paradigm re-assessment and the reality of neoliberalism's continuation.[18]

Austerity has exacerbated both the neoliberal legacy of the reluctance to redistribute wealth and the behavioural and meritocratic explanations of poverty and inequality. The main inspiration for the Coalition government's

15 The 1970s crisis gave rise to the neoliberal paradigm, as we saw in section 3.3. The 2008 crisis is also comparable to the crisis of the 1930s, which eventually led to welfare capitalism (Gamble 2009; see section 3.1).

16 As Blyth argues (2013: 72-73), it is worth noting the timing of this agreement. In spring 2010, opposition to stimulus policies intensified as the Greek crisis moved into the centre of the deficit-reduction storm. The situation in Greece was translated into a metaphor for the dangers of increasing public investment. This was regularly exploited to justify austerity in the UK, especially by George Osborne.

17 This is very well represented by one of the main Coalition (and subsequently Conservative) government schemes to help people access credit to buy a house, the Help to Buy scheme (see HM Government 2019).

18 These are not the only interesting links between neoliberalism and resilience. Other discursive aspects, away from paradigm re-assessment and expectations, have also been noted. Joseph (2013), for example, argues that resilience is part of the rhetoric repertoire that emphasises individual responsibility within neoliberal rationalities and governance.

welfare policy was the think tank *The Centre for Social Justice*[19], set up by Ian Duncan Smith (amongst others) in 2004, who would become the secretary for work and pensions under the Coalition government. The think tank was mainly concerned with how to deal with 'family breakdown, educational failure, worklessness and dependency, addiction, and serious personal debt'[20]. All of these issues were considered to lead to poverty, while ignoring the fact that they can also be 'caused by' poverty (and the structural causes behind it). Moreover, worklessness has continued to be the main emphasis of welfare provision, and many policies have increased conditionality and decreased eligibility for benefits amongst people who need financial support (Walker 2014: 299; Pantazis 2016; Reeve 2017)[21]. Due to the harshness of these restrictions, parallels have been drawn between them and the nineteenth century Poor Law (Pantazis 2016).

The consequences of austerity for levels of equality were not limited to welfare. Many other restrictions in public provision were made indirectly through cuts in central and local government budgets (Levitas 2012: 323). These included, amongst other things, higher tuition fees due to cuts in funding for higher education; cuts in music education in schools; the sale of public property and goods (for example, works of art in public galleries) to private buyers; cuts in legal aid and policing; and cuts in (or the disappearance of) services provided by local authorities, such as domiciliary care for older people and disabled people, youth clubs and other leisure services, and rubbish collections (Levitas 2012: 323). This reduction in welfare and other social provision has mostly affected people on lower incomes: they are the

19 See *The Centre for Social Justice* 2019a.

20 This is explained in detail as the 'the 5 pathways to poverty' in *The Centre for Social Justice* 2019b.

21 These policies were mainly shaped by the Welfare reform act (HM Government 2012) and the Work Programme launched in 2011. See Pantazis (2016) for more details.

main users of these services because they lack the resources to pay for private alternatives (Levitas 2012; Walker 2014: 295; Pantazis 2016)[22].

Unsurprisingly, these policies have led to higher levels of inequality. For example, Levitas (2012: 327) points out that the *Sunday Times* Rich List for 2010 revealed that in 2009 there was an unprecedented rise in the wealth of the richest 1,000 individuals in Britain – by about 30% (£77 billion). Their combined wealth then came to over £335 billion[23], more than one-third of the national debt that year[24]. According to Sayer (2015: 5-6) the richest 1% of the population in the UK had each £2.8 million or more in the period 2008-2010. Conversely, half the population had wealth of less than £232,400, and the poorest 10% had less than £12,600. Indeed, an increasing amount of evidence links austerity governance to rising levels of inequality and poverty and the faster erosion of human rights (Reeve 2017; Alston 2018). This evidence has also started to prove the link between austerity and a wide range of social issues, such as lower levels of wellbeing (Jones 2018). It even proves the effects of cuts on non-economic equalities, including well-established rights; for example, the right to legal equality has been eroded by cuts in legal aid (Doward 2018).

22 These reductions were also disproportionally likely to affect women. Focusing on worklessness and restricting welfare provision fails to acknowledge essential unpaid work, such as caring for children or elderly relatives, which disproportionally falls on women (Levitas 2004; 2005). Reducing local government funding is also likely to affect women more: women rely more on local services and on social security in general; women have to mop up the lack of services by providing even more unpaid work, which is rebranded as volunteering; and most of the jobs that once provided these services were filled by women, so they are more likely to lose their jobs (Levitas 2012: 331). However, this problem goes beyond neoliberalism and is rooted in capitalism in general: even during the years of the welfare state, the system was patriarchal and caring responsibilities, which were mostly fulfilled by women, were also ignored then (Hay 1996a).

23 Since the 2008 economic crisis the public has become very used to hearing exorbitant figures in terms of millions, billions and trillions. As Sayer points out (2015: 11), it is difficult to conceptualise these numbers. We have a sense that £1 billion (£1,000 million) is a huge sum, but it is hard to imagine how big it is exactly. If you were given £1 every second until you had £1 billion, you might think that this amount would be quickly reached, as in one hour you would already have £3,600. In fact, one would need to wait for 31 years and 8 months to have the full amount (Sayer 2015: 11).

24 Also see Sayer 2015 for an in-depth account of how wealth concentration and the crisis are related.

3.8 Aims and research questions: *austerity* and *fairness* in the 2008 crisis discourse

We have seen in this chapter that over the last 40 years, the welfare state in the UK that was built after the Second World War has been replaced by a neoliberal paradigm. This paradigm was first legitimised normatively and then naturalised as a necessity for economic growth and globalisation. We have also seen that this change in paradigm has had the clear consequence of increasing levels of economic inequality since the 1980s. The following things have contributed greatly to higher inequality: the construction of taxation as a burden; the reluctance to distribute wealth; and the retrenchment of welfare provision (which is now based on workfare, meritocracy, behavioural explanations of poverty and conditionality, rather than on a holistic view of the structural and endemic causes of poverty). We have also seen that the accepted solution to the 2008 crisis – austerity – is a continuation and, indeed, an exacerbation of these neoliberal views on inequality which have further increased levels of wealth concentration. Rather than representing a threat to the neoliberal paradigm, the solution represents a more generalised reinforcement of it.

The aim of this thesis is to highlight the discursive aspects of this complex relationship between economic inequality, austerity governance and neoliberal resilience. As I pointed out in section 1.1, inequality is a particularly complex social malaise to analyse discursively. This is due to the multiple social, political and economic aspects that influence different perspectives on inequality, in addition to its backgrounding in neoliberal rationalities and governance over the last 40 years. I decided to focus on two keywords – *austerity* and *fairness* – which I consider to have had the most discursive relevance during the years covered by the study (2008-2012). As such, they can contribute greatly to understanding how the discursive features of crisis management have dealt with the fact that inequality was a clear outcome of austerity governance (as discussed in the previous section).

First of all, the study analyses the most important semantic and discursive features of the keyword *austerity*. This keyword is in the DNA of neoliberalism – reductions in public spending are always a constant feature of neoliberal governance as a logical consequence of the regression in state intervention its policies are based on (see section 3.2). As such, the issue of affordability has been embedded in the neoliberal discourse of policies on welfare reform for a long time, in both UK and EU legislation (Levitas 2005: 25; Blyth 2013). For example, the European Union document *Growth, Competitiveness Employment*, published in 1994 (European Commission 1994: 54) states that:

> Current levels of public expenditure, particularly in the social field, have become unsustainable and have used up resources which could have been channelled into productive investment.

More recently, *austerity* as a concept has played a major role in managing the crisis. The mainstream sense-making about the crisis was its discursive construction as a crisis of debt (Hay 2012). As we saw in sections 3.6 and 3.7, it would have been much more appropriate to frame it as a crisis of growth. However, that would have entailed seriously rethinking the growth model that is inscribed in the neoliberal paradigm, rather than insisting on the comeback of the debt-financed growth model that had determined the paradigm for the previous 20 years and making that a political goal (Hay 2011; 2012). Instead of this rethinking, the focus has been on austerity as a means to reduce (public) debt[25] in order to return to a (private) debt model, which, paradoxically, was the real cause of the crisis (Blyth 2013; Hay 2012).

However, this keyword also implies negative outcomes in terms of increased hardship and inegalitarian prospects. Austerity is a way of managing debt, but it can also influence the role that the state is expected to play in social provision. As such, there are moral implications related to the word's use.

25 I refer here to debt as the general focus of austerity rather than policies to incentivise growth. However, austerity governance in the UK needs to be more precisely defined as deficit reduction, not debt reduction. That is, the point was to reduce the difference between revenue and spending, but not the actual debt, which has not been reduced. This semantic uncertainty about the two terms, debt and deficit, which have been used interchangeably by many members of the government and the opposition, has been pointed out as confusing and misleading (Johnson 2012). This has had discursive implications, particularly in terms of the association between public and private debt, as I discuss in chapter 6.

Taking this into account, I also analysed the keyword *fairness*. I considered that this concept played an important role in legitimating what was possible or not in austerity governance, by acting as a gatekeeper for how far the policies could go. This role has traditionally been assigned to this concept. In fact, as Hall and O'Shea argue (2013: 7), what is fair has been pivotal to political history. *Fairness* has been particularly important as a discursive tool for neoliberal normalisation. Firstly, *fairness* has been a de facto substitute for the term *equality*, which symbolises the lack of commitment to the level of state intervention required for the re-distribution of wealth (Fairclough 2000a; 2000b; Levitas 2005; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012). Indeed, in a discourse driven by neoliberalism, *equality* seems to be an outdated and far too committed concept to be expressed openly as a political goal; other, less committed concepts, such as *fairness* (but also *community* and *social exclusion*) are much more commonly used (Swift 2006: 91). Moreover, *fairness* has been a key feature of the well-known Third Way tendency to promote inclusive discourses (Fairclough 2000a; Mulderrig 2012). Naturalised inequalities are endemic in a neoliberal paradigm. However, the conflicts of interests that are bound to surface because of these inequalities can be dealt with discursively and denied, if concepts such as *fairness* (but also *sensibility* and *responsibility*) are utilised (Levitas 2005: 115; Sayer 2005b: 48).

However, even if economic asymmetries and conflicts are always present in capitalist societies, they are particularly noticeable during a crisis. The 2008 crisis is no exception. The *Occupy* movement or the *Indignados* in Spain, the image of the greedy banker, the proliferation of the slogan '99% versus the 1%' and even the 2011 riots in London are testaments to this increasing concern about wealth inequality and its worsening within austerity governance (Bennett 2013; Kelsey 2015). This inequality has been generated (and obfuscated by easy credit) over the past 20 years (Blyth 2013: 2). It is not surprising, then, to find that some of the paradigm-reinforcing sense-making approaches to the 2008 economic crisis were partly engaged in the rhetorical mitigation of these conflicts of interest and asymmetries. We have seen, for example, a re-invigoration of a normalised neoliberalism or Third

Way approach (Jessop 2013). This conceded that there were some problems with neoliberalism regarding greed, distorted incentives and polarised distribution effects, and presented the comeback of neoliberalism as the solution. It was hoped that it would take a re-moralised form (Jessop 2013). This re-moralisation could take the rhetorical shape of compensation for the excesses of the past or focus on corporate social responsibility (Jessop 2013), which could even contribute to a greener approach to growth (Sum 2009).

This semantic evolution of these two keywords links them to the development of the paradigmatic political economic history in the UK. Discourses on affordability (on the one hand) and the legitimisation of income differences and its relations to economic imperatives (on the other) are at the heart of neoliberalism and its contradictions as a political system, as we saw earlier in this chapter. The inequality turn (presented in section 3.5) is a testament to the problematic nature of the relationship between neoliberalism and economic equality. My aim with this thesis is to contribute to knowledge on how this problematisation and contradiction was discursively framed in the context of the economic crisis, deficit-management governance and increased hardship in elite political discourse in the UK. I aimed to do this by focusing on the semantic scope of *austerity* and *fairness*. To observe the evolution of patterns in how these words were used, I compared the onset of the 2008 economic crisis with an equivalent period of economic growth during which normalised neoliberalism (as I described in section 3.4) was well established. This makes it possible to explore the intersection between the semantic evolution of the two keywords and the links between austerity governance and the underlying problem of income polarisation.

The thesis aims to answer the following research questions:

- In the context of a crisis, increasing inequality and social hardship, what was the role of the concepts *austerity* and *fairness* in elite political discourse in the UK during the period 2008-2012?
- Were these concepts used more prominently in the context of crisis and austerity since 2008 than in the previous period of economic growth?

- What were the main discursive contextualisations and prosodies used for these concepts during the crisis period? Are there any significant differences between these and the contextualisation of the same concepts before the onset of the crisis?
- How can these results be interpreted considering the political, social and economic background seen in this chapter? What does this tell us about perceptions of the role of the state as an active agent in providing wellbeing and reducing economic inequality?

The 2008 financial crisis has had deep impacts on the political, economic and social spheres in the UK and beyond, and it has been populated by paradoxes and contradictions. Not surprisingly then, this discourse around the crisis has gathered a lot of attention from a wide range of perspectives. From a critical social research perspective (which this study adopts, as explained in chapter 2), the literature has tried to ascertain how the hardship that is unavoidably associated with austerity governance has been legitimised and consented to. This study aims to contribute to this wider objective. It does so from the perspective that both *austerity* and *fairness* have substantial encapsulating potential. That is, they can be implemented within a wide range of polysemic associations, so they can resonate easily with many different contexts (be they decision-making on welfare policy, legitimisation of that policy, or personal experiences), since they can be understood in many different ways. This is why I describe them in this thesis as keywords (see chapter 2 for a description of this concept). Resonant and flexible concepts are essential for political legitimisation, in particular the 'spin' that has been an integral part of politics since the 1990s (Levitas 2004). Considering this, it is paramount to gain a deep understanding of these concepts and their role in the process of paradigm continuation. Consequently, these more general concerns are present in the chapters to come.

There is a general consensus in the literature that morality has been relevant in managing the 2008 crisis and legitimising austerity governance (Bennett 2014; Forkert 2014; Jensen 2015; for an overview see Kelsey and others 2016). Many studies have focused their attention on the Eurocrisis. 'Greece bashing' (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014) and the more general cliché of comparing the frugal North with the slothful South (Kelsey and others 2016: 7) have been exploited and constructed as moral tales that exemplify the negative effects of irresponsible attitudes towards debt. Moreover, some research has linked these discursive patterns to an authoritarian turn in EU governance (Lux 2018) and to the shift towards extremism and more general political polarisation (Angouri & Wodak 2014; Boukala 2014; Mylonas 2014).

Within the UK context, a few discursive aspects of the legitimisation of austerity governance have been highlighted. For example, studies have pinpointed the 'household' metaphor as a common discursive feature; using this metaphor, private and public debt are equated as a means to obscure and simplify the possibilities of state intervention in deficit management (see, for example, Stanley 2014; Cameron, Smith, & Tepe-Belfrage 2016; Fairclough 2016; Hopkin & Rosamond 2017). Grundmann, Kreischer, and Scott (2017) analysed the use of the word *austerity* in the British media. They found that it was commonly related to not only government action but also time abstraction, being defined by its relations to welfare, shortages and investment. The discourse of think tanks has also been explored. Anstead (2018) traced *austerity* during the period 2003-2013. He found that the contextual influence of the crisis was a catalyst for changes in its use. He also concluded that the word was linked to the past or to other countries; after 2008 it was used as a discursive resource, firstly by the right to attack the Labour government, and then by the left to redefine the causes of the crisis and criticise the opposition. Pautz (2018), on the other hand, found that right-wing think tanks were heavily involved in the testing and subsequent adoption of a strict austerity agenda by the Conservative Party.

Considering the links between inequality and austerity governance discussed thus far, it is also not surprising to find that another important pocket of the literature has focused on the role of the economic elites in the crisis discourse. For example, some studies have considered patterns within the banking sector and the wider corporate world in relation to attributing blame for the crisis (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish 2010; Lischinsky 2011; Whittle & Mueller

2016). More relevant to this thesis are the studies that have focused on the elites' role in the political management of the crisis and the legitimisation of austerity governance. Walsh (2016), for example, analysed the Budget statements of the Chancellors of the Exchequer from 1976 to 2013. Alistair Darling was found to talk a lot about the financial system but very little about taxes, opting for increases in income rather than in corporate or capital-gain taxes (Walsh 2016). He appropriated some of the anti-elite critique that was emerging at the time, but limited the policy consequences to superficial aspects of the financial and corporate spheres. Anti-elite moralising critique was also found by Stanley (2016b), who investigated the acceptability of fiscal consolidation at the individual level. Using focus groups, Stanley (2016b) found that the participants often alluded to the 'undeserving rich' (as well as the 'underserving poor') as a target of stigmatisation during austerity governance, contrasting them with the de-contextualised figure of the 'taxpayer'.

This new discursive development of the anti-elite critique has been accompanied by traditional neoliberal explanations of wealth polarisation, which give only behavioural and individual reasons for economic inequality (Wiggan 2012; Harkins & Lugo-Ocando 2016). It has also been accompanied by the banalisation of poverty from a mass media perspective (Mooney & Hancock 2010; Jensen 2014). Episodes of social unrest that took place during the first few years of the crisis have also been analysed in terms of economic inequality. Bennett (2013) looked into the discursive responses of David Cameron and Ed Miliband (the leaders of the main UK parties at the time) to the riots and the *Occupy* protests that took place in 2011, and found that their responses were very similar. Both politicians recontextualised the events from a neoliberal moralising perspective of inequality, pointing to a defective moral system that was defined as not in line with neoliberal values (Bennett 2013). Both then denied the existence of class-based material differences and their endemic nature within the economic system itself and austerity governance (Bennett 2013). Kelsey (2015) found that the riots were contextualised in a similar way in the right-wing media.

In spite of fairness's links with austerity governance and inequality, and its relevance to the morality discourse that I have developed in this chapter, less attention has been paid to its analysis, or indeed to its relation to austerity. However, some authors have highlighted the importance of the word *fairness* for neoliberal resilience, both within austerity governance and more widely as a hegemonic discourse and paradigm (Clarke & Newman 2012; Hall & O'Shea 2013; Bunyan & Diamond 2016). These studies attempted to discern what it is about *fairness* that makes this concept so appealing. They considered its vernacular and polysemic nature (Hall & O'Shea 2013) and the emptiness of its semantic potential, which make it too vague to work as a resource for hegemonic change (Bunyan & Diamond 2016). Clarke and Newman (2012) also make this final point, but they consider that the proliferation of political discourses on fairness is simultaneously a sign of both the highlighting of neoliberal contradictions and the failure to construct precise and unconditional narratives that are worthy of being counter-hegemonic.

Finally, some research, even if it did not focus on *fairness* as an object of study, found the concept to be a relevant feature of their analysis, providing wider proof of the moral turn in political discourse. Bennett (2014) analysed a speech made by Gordon Brown in 2008 following the onset of the economic crisis. He found that Brown overused the concept of *fairness*, semantically framing it mostly as a metadiscursive comment on his actions; this foregrounded its use as a marker of subjectivity and personal evaluation, and backgrounded its links to justice. As such, taking a quintessential Third Way approach to discourse, Brown made room for traditional conservative concerns while disguising them as personalised and vernacular discursive choices. Isabela and Norman Fairclough also pointed to the relevance of *fairness* in the discourse of the crisis in the UK (Fairclough & Fairclough 2011; 2012; Fairclough 2016). They found that the use of *fairness* was used in the sense of '(just)-deserts' and was commonly associated with other (conservative) values, such as responsibility and toughness (Fairclough & Fairclough 2011; Fairclough 2016). They also considered the limited worth of *fairness* in legitimising policy, arguing that it is commonly used to provide a façade of change within crisis management when in reality they are pursuing an agenda of neoliberal continuation (Fairclough & Fairclough 2011: 261).

These findings in the literature also reveal a network of methodological approaches to the analysis of the discourse of austerity governance and crisis management. Indeed, the understanding of the discourse of the 2008 crisis is an interdisciplinary concern (Kelsey and others 2016). Some efforts came from cultural approaches (Hall & O'Shea 2013; Forkert 2014; Macabe & Yanacek 2018), psychology (Jensen 2015) and political analysis (Stanley 2014; 2016; Cameron, Smith, & Tepe-Belfrage 2016; Hopkin & Rosamond 2017). Interestingly, there was also a concern with non-elite discourse in an effort to understand the top-down effect of hegemonic ideas and everyday explanations of the crisis, focusing on interviews (Carney and others 2014; Nikolopoulou & Cantera 2016, Pautz 2017; 2018), social media interactions (Georgakopoulou 2014), focus groups (Stanley 2014; 2016) and comments on newspaper articles (Angouri & Wodak 2014; Forkert 2014).

However, I found elite genres to be more prolific, particularly media discourse (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Breeze 2014; Kutter 2014; Lampropoulou 2014; Mylonas 2014; Vaara 2014; Kelsey 2015; Fairclough 2016; Harkins & Lugo-Ocando 2016; Soares da Silva 2016; Grundmann, Kreischer, and Scott 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017; Lux 2018). Political discourse was, comparatively, less well represented, finding only a few analyses of speeches (Bennett 2014; Boukala 2014; Fonseca & Ferreira 2015; Borriello 2017), policy documents and parliamentary debates (Fairclough and Fairclough 2011; Clarke & Newman 2012; Wiggan 2012; Bunyan & Diamond 2016; Walsh 2016; Lux 2018). This thesis makes a particularly relevant contribution to this literature, enhancing our understanding of the role of parliamentary debates in the crisis discourse.

Metaphors were found to be relevant in the contextualisation of *austerity* and *fairness*. This thesis therefore builds on existing work in this area (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Soares da Silva 2016; Borriello 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017). These studies, which focused mainly on media within the Eurozone, found the most common metaphors used around *austerity* and crisis management were those related to health and natural disasters, framing austerity as inevitable. They also found *austerity* associated with metaphors related to action and movement (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Soares da Silva 2016) or machinery (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Borriello 2017). *Austerity* was also often linked to human attributes or, more widely, to living organisms (Soares da Silva 2016; Borriello 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017).

A few quantitative studies were also found where frequency, keywords and collocations were analysed. Walsh (2016) analysed annual UK Budget statements between 1976 and 2013 to compare the lexical items most commonly used by different chancellors, particularly focusing on Alistair Darling, the Labour Chancellor at the onset of the crisis. Only a few studies focused on the search word *austerity* (Soares da Silva 2016; Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017; Anstead 2018) and none were found using *fairness* as a lexical entry point. This thesis fills this gap in the literature too, as well as introducing a genre that has not been looked at from this perspective, that of parliamentary debates. Moreover, the literature also presents some studies in which qualitative lexicographic and etymological analysis were followed, particularly of *fairness* (Hall & O'Shea 2013; Macabe & Yanacek 2018). This type of approach was also part of my analytical framework (see section 4.6.1) and as such I also aim to enhance this particular line of inquiry.

Considering that all the literature engaged in one way or another with crisis management, I also found analytical tools that pointed to patterns in terms of legitimisation and blaming strategies in political discourse. For example, Norman and Isabella Fairclough (2011; 2012) developed a framework for using argumentation analysis to do exactly that. A few studies focus on agency, social actors and evaluation. Whittle and Mueller (2016) used agency to analyse blame attribution in the Treasury committee report into the banking crisis in 2008 in the UK. Bennett on the other hand (2013; 2014) focused on political moral talk and evaluation to analyse the speeches of UK political leaders. Further afield, Lux (2018) analysed implicitness, social actors and connotation in European Union internal documents and EU leaders' interviews in mainstream media. Finally, Boukala (2014) also analysed social actors in Greek elite political statements. Even if this thesis has a different methodological perspective to these studies, both social actors (see section 4.6.4) and evaluation (specifically connotation in terms of discourse prosody see section 4.6.3) were also found to be relevant discursive devices.

3.9 Summary

In this chapter I presented the political and economic theoretical background to the study. Starting from a paradigmatic view of political economic evolution, I firstly engaged in a description of economic paradigms in the UK. I argued that neoliberalism has dominated policy-making in the UK for the last 40 years, marking a steady movement away from a collectivist and welfare-focused perspective (where state interventions were levelled at market dynamics) and towards an individualised, market-oriented approach to governance, through which economic needs have been privileged over social justice. I also pointed to the complexity of the legitimisation patterns of such governance. At first, during the Thatcher years, a normative hybridity between conservative morality and neoliberal economics dominated the justifications and implementations of this paradigm. From the 1990s onwards, particularly under the influence of New Labour and the post-Thatcher settlement that the party represented, the legitimisation of neoliberalism was much more normalised and entrenched in policy-making. Policies prioritised the markets purely in economic terms, especially growth, competitiveness and globalisation. I then argued that these neoliberal tendencies in policy have had a dramatic effect on equality by encouraging a steady increase in income polarity in the UK since the 1980s. This can be explained by the specific governance and rationalities that reduced the role of the welfare state to that of a simple provider of workability (workfare), together with the reluctance to distribute wealth and the meritocratic explanations of inequality.

I then argued that although the 2008 economic crisis was an important economic event, it marked a continuation and, in fact, the exacerbation of neoliberal policies, given that prolonging the neoliberalism paradigm was counterintuitive. I contextualised this resilience in terms of how the crisis was described and managed. I argued that the crisis was mainly explained as a crisis of debt rather than (more accurately) a crisis of growth rooted in the financial system, and that this focus triggered the imposition of austerity governance as the main solution to the crisis. I then singled out the concepts of *austerity* and *fairness* as two of the most important keywords in the discourse of this particular crisis. I argued that both of these concepts are relevant for two reasons. Firstly, they both have historical relevance in the discursive legacy of neoliberal legitimisation: *austerity* in terms of affordability and the retrenchment of public investment; *fairness* as a tool for disguising more overt discussions around wealth re-distribution. Secondly, within the context of the crisis, austerity (governance) is linked to increased hardship and inegalitarian outcomes, and fairness can be discursively constructed as limiting how far these negative consequences can go. In setting out my research questions, I considered that my specific contribution is to identify the most common uses of these two keywords in the period 2008-2012 and make comparisons with a period of normalised neoliberal growth (2002-2006). My aim is placing the findings in the context of austerity governance (and the inequality consequences linked to them) and neoliberal resilience more widely.

Finally, I considered the main ideas that have been highlighted by the literature on the discourse of the crisis and the main methodological approaches used. This review showed a general engagement in moral discursive content. However, *austerity* and *fairness* were not often used as lexical entry points. Moreover, media genres have been more commonly analysed than elite political discourses. This thesis aims to contribute to these gaps in the literature. In the next chapter, I explain the methodological steps and decisions involved in the data selection and in the analysis of these two keywords, and I provide a more in-depth description of the diachronic and comparative nature of this study.

4 METHODOLOGY

‘You shall know a word by the company it keeps’ (Firth, 1957: 179)

4.1 Corpus-assisted CDA

As we saw in chapter 2, there were three overarching features in the study design: it had a clear lexical entry point to the analysis (*austerity* and *fairness*); it aimed to focus on diachronic comparison; and it lent itself to being methodologically eclectic, considering quantitative and qualitative insights, in addition to linguistic and theoretical backgrounds, as relevant. Corpus linguistics (CL), as presented in this chapter, was an appropriate methodological choice for a study with these peculiarities. CL involves a collection of texts that are stored electronically, which enables us to bring together a vast number of naturally occurring language samples. It also provides tools to simultaneously interact with the different samples in a quantitative manner (frequency and statistical calculations) and in a qualitative manner (since one can look into longer strings of texts in which the relevant linguistic item appears, and even view its location in the original source). This particular study followed a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach (Stubbs 1996; 2001; Partington 2004a; 2006; Baker 2006; Mautner 2009a; 2009b; Partington, Duguid, & Taylor 2013), employing corpus techniques as part of a wider methodological framework. In this approach, the results are informed both by ‘a statistical methodological philosophy, the search for – and the belief in the importance of – recurring patterns’ (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor 2013: 8) and by any external source of information that is deemed to be productive in understanding the results (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor 2013: 10).

CL has revolutionised how researchers from very different angles can access language in use. Using CL for CDA is now a well-established methodological choice (see for example Fairclough 2000a; Piper 2000a; 2000b; Mautner 2007 and more recently Mulderrig 2011; 2012; Ayers 2013; Brindle 2016; Hobbs

2020). CL provides access to a wider volume of data spanning longer stretches of time, thereby offering the researcher a means of tracking and exploring potentially hegemonic discourses as they emerge and bed into particular social contexts. In what Baker calls the 'cumulative effect of discourse' (Baker 2008: 102-103; Baker 2006: 13), CL allows us to observe what the most prominent and recurrent features of the lexical items analysed are, tapping into possible underlying hegemonic discourses happening across a wider range of texts. In other words, CL provides a general 'pattern map' of the data (Baker and others 2008: 295) adding an explicit quantitative dimension to CDA using frequency and statistical analysis (Baker and others 2008: 296; Gabrielatos & Baker 2008: 7).

This quantitative advantage that CL offers CDA, goes some way to address the concerns of CDA's critics who accuse it of lacking analytical soundness. CDA has been challenged for intentionally 'cherry-picking' data or linguistic features to prove pre-established points, even if those might not be representative of what is typical (Mautner 2009b: 34; Orpin 2005: 38; Baker & Levon 2015: 222). This line of criticism is most notably associated with Widdowson (2000; 1995) who claimed that CDA lacks impartiality (Widdowson 1995:169), specifically accusing the field of selecting data and textual features in a way that supports the (political or ideological) perspective of the researcher, hence lacking systematicity and objectivity in the analysis.

I have already discussed some of the issues normally associated with CDA's ideological positioning, claiming that no sociological piece of research can claim to have total objectivity (narrowly understood as a positivist endeavour) as there is always a certain amount of researcher input taking place in most steps of any project (see section 2.1.2). Considering analytical procedures more specifically, Fairclough (1996) claims that any analytical process is always done from a particular perspective, and it rarely involves approaching the data from all possible angles. As he puts it, analysis consists of 'a reasonable systematic application of reasonably well-defined procedures to a reasonably well-defined body of data' (Fairclough 1996: 51-52). Not only this, but as he points out (Fairclough 1996: 51), CDA, precisely because of its ideological commitment (see section 2.1.1) might in fact be in a privileged position to actually recognise the assumption that there are indeed a wide range of possible explanations to linguistic analysis. Moreover, it is worth bearing in mind that confirming hypotheses is in fact an essential part of research. As Baker argues (2008: 102), finding texts that might confirm hypotheses is not necessarily impartial, but one of the many contributions that can be made to consider how certain linguistic features have social impact.

Besides this line of argument, it is also important to note that it is difficult to predict the real impact specific texts might have in society. Repetition only, of course, does not necessarily guarantee certainty; one sole text can have a wide impact, whereas a repetitive linguistic feature might not, depending on their reception, representativeness and context (Baker 2006: 19-22). As such, using CL and its wider textual scope does not necessarily entail ownership of knowledge of what has a social impact. Any critical sociological work always strives to access what is meaningful in this respect. However, CDA research is also determined by the complexity of the object of study and the search for systematic analytical models that can move between macro socio-political phenomena and micro discursive examples (Mulderrig, Montesano Montessori, & Farrelly 2019). As such, engaging explicitly in such a quest is also an intrinsic part of doing critical analysis. Corpus-assisted CDA is no different from any other CDA analytical framework in this respect, regardless of the undoubtedly positive quantitative enhancement that CL offers.

Nevertheless, and moving on from the wider access to data, CL also offers a great deal of flexibility to CDA. CL studies tend to be guided by the general aim of finding recurrent patterns without preconceptions as to what type of pattern, thereby freeing the researcher (to a certain degree) from bias (Baker and others 2008: 277). This is particularly useful for CDA in two ways. Firstly, unexpected patterns can be established that can then be fed into CDA analytical categories and provide opportunities for new types of research questions and analytical avenues (Mautner 2009b: 44). Secondly, observing several examples of the same phenomenon at the same time allows for patterns which are not always obvious to be more accessible (Mautner 2009a: 128). For example, seemingly neutral words such as *cause* can become clearly negative if seen repetitively in context and observing patterns (Stubbs 2001: 45).

In spite of these advantages, it is also important to note that CL has no ideological commitment (Partington, Duguid, & Taylor 2013: 10). Consequently, it has limitations when it comes to explaining the value of the findings. In other words, CL has a tendency to provide ‘so what?’ results, confirming expectations or interesting patterns but without any layer of meaningful explanation (Baker & Levon 2015: 232). This limitation of CL as a methodology is also exacerbated by the fact that, when looking at a vast amount of texts at the same time, decontextualisation in the analysis is always unavoidable (Mautner 2009b: 33-34; Baker 2006: 181). It is CDA that can provide the means to make full sense of the findings. CDA makes you ‘step out of the data’ (Baker and others 2008: 296) providing a thorough contextualisation into which to subscribe the findings. Moreover, CDA also provides a more explicit analytical framework on which to rely (Baker and others 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker 2008). This is particularly important when considering that CL is still mostly a lexical tool, since more complex grammatical or semantic linguistic features outside lexical items are much more difficult to access (Baker 2006: 174; Mautner 2009a: 124; Hunston 2011: 92).

In this introductory section I grounded the methodological approach used in the thesis, corpus-assisted CDA, highlighting the pros and cons of this combination. I explained in this section that this approach relies on the computerised and quantitative nature of CL to provide a greater degree of access to data analysis. However, it is CDA analytical frameworks that allow one to fully make sense of the results. Moreover, as in any other type of methodology, there is always interpretative work. In the case of CL, computer and human interpretation are always working together. As Mike Scott puts it (2010: 45), computers do not understand but they are constant; one cannot switch them off. Humans, on the other hand, cannot see words without seeing patterns of meaning (hence, we so easily miss typos, since we tend to focus on meaning). As such, computers and humans are a good analytical combination. Human input is an essential component of, for example, selecting texts and statistical cut-off points (Stubbs 2001; Baker 2010a).

To make it easier to replicate the study and to be clear about its aims, it is important to be explicit about the steps followed and to apply a great deal of reflexivity on the researcher's part (Hunston 2003; Watt 2007 cited in Baker 2012: 255). With this in mind, in section 4.2, I develop the main principles regarding corpus design and how this was applied to this particular study. After that, in section 4.3 and 4.4 I guide the reader through the specific steps followed and rationale in terms of data processing and search strategies. In the last two sections I describe the main tools used in the analysis, both quantitative ones (section 4.5) and qualitative ones (section 4.6).

4.2 Corpus design and data

4.2.1 Principles of corpus design

The expansive use of CL in linguistics has given rise to a vast amount of options in terms of corpus typology and structures. Nevertheless, there are a few basic considerations that guide any decision-making process in the design of a corpus. These can be summarised as representativeness, corpora size and sampling, scope of the data (general corpus versus specialised corpus) and variables to be compared.

The most important principle to take into account for CL design is that any corpus needs to aim to be representative and use a balanced source of the specific language or variety that the study wants to build knowledge about (Baker 2010b; McEnery & Hardie 2012). Representativeness is what makes a corpus a corpus and not an archive. CL always involves careful consideration of what needs to be included rather than adding as much data as possible (Baker 2006: 26, McEnery, Xiao, & Tono 2006: 13). There is no point, for example, in using the speech of one person, no matter how much data we have, if we want to achieve some generalisations of spoken British English as that would not be representative (McEnery & Hardie 2012: 6). In other words, representativeness does not necessarily mean high volumes of data.

In CL there is no certainty or rule regarding what size the corpus should be in order to be representative (Baker 2010b: 95). As Lindquist points out (2009: 43), no matter how much data we include in a corpus, there will always be texts which are left behind and as such representativeness is always relative not absolute. However, certain principles regarding the scope and structure can help the researcher create an appropriate corpus for the research questions at hand.

One of the first things to consider is sampling – compiling extracts from different sources in order to achieve a balanced composition of different samples from different sections and sources which are as equally-sized as possible (Baker 2006: 27). This prevents the corpus from being skewed to, for example, one particularly long source or a particular section (Baker 2006: 27; Baker 2010b: 96). Sampling of different genres is the way in which general corpora achieve representativeness (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono 2006: 13). General corpora tend to be very big precisely because they aim to analyse a wide range of texts in order to achieve a generalised understanding of linguistic use and tendencies (Baker 2010b). The British National Corpus (BNC Consortium 2007) is one of the most well-known examples of this type of corpus. However, using full texts is also common practice in CL. For example, monitor corpora (Sinclair 1991: 24-6) such as the Collins WordBanks (Collins WordBanks Online 2019) do not follow any sampling measures, choosing instead to continually add new sources to the data, making increasing length its way to achieve representativeness (McEnery & Hardie 2012:6-7).

The use of full text is not exclusive to general corpus. Indeed, using full texts is the preferred way to collect data for discourse analysis studies (Meyer 2002: 30; Baker 2006: 27). This is because not being able to access the beginning, middle and end of texts would add limitations to the study (Baker 2006: 27); with discourse analysis we are more interested in being able to contextualise the results as much as possible and to have the option of tracking variation within texts as well as in different texts at the same time (Baker 2006: 27). In other words, having full texts allows a more flexible and expanded discursive analysis.

In term of specialisation, big general corpora have been used for CDA research (Orpin 2005; Mautner 2007; Baker 2010c). However, specialised corpora tend to be more common (Baker 2006: 26). Specialised corpora are generally much smaller corpora which 'aim to study aspects of a particular variety or genre of language' (Baker 2006: 26). Specialisation can come in different shapes and forms in CDA. Some studies choose to concentrate on several genres with something in common, such as belonging to a political party (L'Hôte 2010); others might focus on very specific genres. For example, CDA studies can use speeches of certain political leaders (Saraceni 2003) or government documents and sources (Piper 2000a; 2000b; Mulderrig 2011; 2012; Brookes & Baker 2017). Another common approach is to combine a specific genre with a search term, narrowing down the texts by only including the ones that contain certain expressions or lexical items. For example, several researchers used specific media genres to analyse words related to political correctness (Johnson, Culpeper, & Suhr 2003), North Korea (Kim 2014) or vocabulary related to migrants (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008).

Finally, another main principle to consider when building a corpus is the inclusion of a comparative element. CL is at its core a comparative tool: it is useful partly because it allows the researcher to establish salience and consistency by comparing different variables (Hunston 2011: 166-167). What these variables are can change greatly from study to study. For example, one can compare the language of parties or party members (Saraceni 2003; L'Hôte 2010; Walsh 2016) or types of newspapers (Gabrielatos & Baker 2008). Diachronic corpora are also often exploited in CDA. This is a corpus 'which has been built in order to be representative of a language or language variety over a particular period of time, making it possible for researchers to track linguistic changes within it' (Baker 2006: 29). This is very useful from a CDA perspective. Looking into language change over time provides the study with a window into overt socio-linguistic change (Baker and others 2008: 297). This is a widely used feature of CL researchers doing CDA, in order to observe the evolution of privileged discourses and see how they link to sociological contexts (see for example Gabrielatos & Baker 2008; Mulderrig 2011; 2012; Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017).

4.2.2 Design and rationale

This project aimed to analyse British contemporary elite political discourse. As such, multiple genres could have proved useful in being representative of this type of language. A world of data can now be accessed with relative ease online (including speeches, interviews, policy documents, press conferences, etc.). I chose to focus on the UK House of Commons parliamentary debates. I was interested in identifying the viewpoints of both the government and the opposition in order to observe general linguistic trends in how austerity measures were framed in the elite political arena. Parliamentary debates provided this wider perspective.

I specifically chose to concentrate on Budget parliamentary debates. These are the most directly related to the role of the state in distributing wealth; therefore, they are highly relevant to inequality. Hence, this specific genre provided a high level of representativeness in terms of the aims and research questions of this thesis. Budget debates are held annually, and a very similar range of topics is discussed each year. Because of this, this genre offered the possibility of having evenly distributed yearly data. This facilitated the creation of a diachronic corpus. This type of design was best suited for the aims and research questions of the study, that is, comparing a crisis period to a non-crisis period. As explained in the previous section, from a CDA perspective, this choice of design allowed me to witness the evolution of discourse across the period of time analysed.

This particular research design also meant that the corpus used is a genre-specific specialised corpus. Focusing on a single genre, parliamentary debates, is at the same time necessary and limiting. It is necessary because if one needs to observe linguistic change, it is important to base the analysis on the most consistent data across the years (Mulderrig 2009). However, this very specificity limits the ground covered by the study. That is, the fact that I concentrated on the parliamentary debates solely meant that I would miss information that could have been relevant and that other genres, such as speeches or policy documents that appeared at the time, might have provided. Nevertheless, I maximised the contextualisation of the data by keeping the full debates in the corpus rather than sampling them. This, as we saw in the previous section, is common practice in corpus-assisted discourse analysis in order to increase the analytical potential of the data.

Focusing on a single genre resulted in a relatively small corpus (growth corpus 910,363 tokens, crisis corpus 1,149,553 tokens, see appendix 1). This is, as we also saw in the previous section, common in specialised corpora. However, I found at times that this can lead to lower frequency than expected (as was the case for the lemma AUSTERITY; see chapters 5 and 6), which limits the inference one can make from such findings without falling into overgeneralisations or overstating claims (Baker 2006: 178). Nevertheless, focusing on a consistent genre across time ensured that the results were representative and homogenic within the limits of the data used in this study.

The corpus is composed by two sub-corpora. The most relevant of the two sub-corpora is the crisis corpus, which includes the years 2008-2012. The aims of this thesis revolve around crisis discourse; as such, this was always the main focus of my attention. The rationale for this chronological choice is that, due to the fact that the texts were contemporary with the research process, it was necessary to limit the data included in the study. This allowed space for reflexivity and hindsight, so the analysis could be properly contextualised in terms of political and economic theory. Moreover, the year that followed this period, 2013, marked a change in how deficit reduction was discursively constructed, losing its direct link to crisis management. For example, it was in 2013 that David Cameron announced at the annual Lord Mayor’s Banquet speech in the Guildhall that cuts were not just about public spending but a more profound consideration in terms of state efficiency (Morris 2013), reverting clearly to traditional neoliberal arguments outside the contextual imposition of crisis management. Interesting as this might be in terms of neoliberal resilience, it is outside the realms of crisis discourse; as such, it is less relevant for the purposes of this study. Furthermore, the period 2008-2012 was determined by a political environment in which fiscal consolidation was no more than a promise, since most of the cuts had not yet been implemented and were only being projected for the near future (Stanley 2014: 896). As such, legitimisation strategies in this period are particularly relevant, since this was precisely when the acceptance of austerity governance was being built, regardless of its lack of implementation.

The second sub-corpus was designed to work as a reference corpus against which the crisis corpus could be compared and assessed to highlight differences and similarities, providing insight from a diachronic perspective. This reference corpus was formed by an equivalent length of time (for normalising purposes) immediately before the onset of the crisis, covering the years 2002-2006, the growth corpus. I purposely left the year 2007 out of the analysis because the crisis had started to manifest by then, particularly in the USA, although Europe was not fully affected until 2008 (Blyth 2013: 51). Moreover, in 2007 there was widespread resistance to accepting the recession 'officially', especially on the political front. For example, the official report for the 2007 Budget stated in its economic forecast that 'the economy was stable and growing' (HM Treasury 2007), in spite of the fact that only a few months later (in September that year) the Bank of England had to give liquidity support to Northern Rock, which subsequently translated into full public ownership at the beginning of 2008 (Press Association 2008). Given these considerations, it was not possible to include this year neatly in the growth or the crisis period.

After looking at the specific features of the corpus design, I want to end this section by pointing to some general problems associated with parliamentary debates. In this genre meaning is constructed by several contributors at the same time in one unified context which is, as I explained at the beginning of this section, an advantage for this study. Paradoxically, this benefit was also a limitation at times. My focus on general trends meant that I missed patterns regarding particular speakers or parties, even though I pointed to specific concordances and excerpts from parties and speakers. That is, I highlighted instances where the speaker was relevant, but I did not access this information systematically, since my main concern was with overall semantic patterns. This is certainly something towards which this study could be developed further in the future.

Secondly, this genre was particularly suited to this research because it allowed me to observe political legitimisation in a pure state. Parliamentary debates require the government and the opposition to provide clear justification for their actions, which makes such debates relevant from a democratic point of view (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012). Furthermore, the legitimisation strategies that are employed within this genre are aimed at a wide range of audiences. MPs' arguments are always made in a contrastive context, since the opposition's disputes must be acknowledged and debated (van Dijk 2000). Policy justifications are also aimed at the media and the general public. This combination of audiences gives parliamentary debates an important contextual relevance (van Dijk 2000). Moreover, parliamentary debates are highly comparable and accessible. Most countries have an extensive archive of the transcripts of these debates, which in most cases can be easily accessed online and for free. This makes comparing different periods a standardised and straightforward process.

Admittedly, there are some limitations in the use of this genre. For example, paralinguistic features, such as gestures and other non-verbal interactions, are lost during the transcription (Chilton & Schäffner 2002; Mollin 2007: 208 cited in McEnery & Hardie 2012: 4). There are also certain genre conventions, such as formal address, controlled turn-taking and interaction, and macro structures in greetings, openings and conclusions (van Dijk 2000: 89). At times, these aspects could influence the results. Therefore, in the next section I discuss the steps I took to minimise this impact. However, the lexical focus of this study makes these particularities mostly irrelevant.

4.3 Processing the data

The text was compiled from the House of Commons Hansard archives[26]. This is a full verbatim report of parliamentary activity[27]. The Budget debates usually run for five days. During the first day, the Chancellor of the Exchequer presents the main ideas regarding the Budget (or highlights the ones that he or she wants to present) in the financial statement. The Chancellor also usually summarises the economic situation of the country and gives forecasts, also as a way of justifying policy decision-making. After that, the leader of the opposition traditionally responds to this statement before the debate starts. On some of the days that follow, the debate concentrates on specific questions that were raised beforehand.

I copied and pasted the debate transcripts individually into *Microsoft Word*, labelling them according to their year and adding them to the growth or crisis corpus respectively. I only collected discussions about the Budget[28]. I included all the information: from the title ‘Financial statement’ to the end, which states ‘Debate adjourned’, ‘Debate to be resumed’ or (on the last day of the debate) ‘Questions put and agreed to’ or ‘Resolved’. I did not include the text that referred to the voting process, as I considered that this was not part of the actual content of the debate. At this stage, the texts were left intact in order to capture the integrity of the text for the analysis. The documents were then stripped of any formatting and converted into plain text (*.txt). At this stage, some technical changes were deemed necessary. Firstly, some inconsistences in the formatting of the texts were found. As such it was necessary to standardise the use of apostrophes, quotation marks and hyphens. Across the data I also found the Unicode symbol � which is commonly used to point to a difficulty with finding an appropriate character. It seemed to

26 http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/hansard/commons.

27 The transcriptions of the debates even if being accurate are at times altered, which can be an issue in terms of reliability for linguistic analysis (see for example Mollin 2007).

28 There are other topics in the order of each day. However, these were all ignored, even the ones that might be related to inequality (for example, child poverty on 17 March 2008) because I wanted to concentrate exclusively on the budget debates as a particularly salient sub-genre and for the sake of consistency.

appear in the original source around numbers and percentages. The text was still fully understandable without this character, because a written version of the symbol (such as *percent*) usually appeared next to it. Therefore, I deleted all the occurrences of this symbol. In addition, for standardisation proposes, I substituted the £ symbol for the # symbol[29]. Finally, repetitive expressions giving contextual and referential information (such as time, date and names of speakers) were left in the text but were enclosed in angled brackets < >. This allows whatever is inside the brackets to be ignored when analysed in the corpus while remaining visible in the text, acting as metadata information. This metadata was used at times, particularly to identify who was speaking (even if, as mentioned in the previous section, this information was not accessed systematically). This was done to avoid non-relevant repetitions appearing in the analysis and to avoid the conventions of the genre affecting the findings. Other discontinuities were left as in the original source. For example, there were some references to speakers' gestures, such as *rise*. There were also other unexplained breaks in some speeches where no clear interruptions could be seen. I decided to leave these inconsistencies to limit the amount of tampering with the original data, particularly since the inconsistencies were unlikely to skew the findings to any significant degree. Appendix 1 presents a summary of the data and the size of each file and each corpus in tokens, which refer to the number of running words only (I also ignored numbers in the count), eliminating spaces. I chose to consider hyphenated words as two different words (for example, *self-care* would be counted as two words) and apostrophised words as one word (for example, *father's* would be counted as one word). Once the data had been cleaned and converted into plain text, it was uploaded into *WordSmith* software (Scott 2012; 2016), which allows the user to carry out a variety of quantitative and qualitative tests. I then created a *wordlist* for each corpus. This is a list of all the words that appear in the corpus. This file was used in the calculation of the quantitative analysis.

29 See Rayson 2019 for more information.

4.4 Search strategy

As I have established previously, the lexical entry point for the analysis was the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS. The former was searched for with the syntax *auster** [30], which returned only two word forms: *austere* and *austerity*. The process of searching for the lemma FAIRNESS, however, was slightly more complicated. I started with a preliminary inspection of the concordance lines of **fair** in general (including all possible permutations) in the growth corpus and in the crisis corpus. The aim was to refine my search strategy to obtain results that were as relevant as possible. By taking this step, I wanted to focus the analysis on *fairness* as a moral concept, which would be more relevant for legitimisation strategies.

I went through both corpora and attached a label (using the *set* function[31] in *WordSmith*) to all the examples according to their meaning. This process was repeated several times, using a different order of concordances each time, in an attempt to minimise human error. Once I was happy with the classifications, I decided which sets to keep and which to exclude from the analysis. Considering this, the search words that were eventually taken into account were ***fair***, ***unfair***, ***fairness***, ***unfairness***, ***fairly***, ***unfairly***, ***fairer*** and ***fairest***. As such, words that were not related to FAIRNESS (*affair**, *Mayfair*, *laissez-faire*, *fairgrounds*, *fairy**) were automatically excluded when restricting the search words to the ones above. The homonyms *jobs fair*, *fairs* (gatherings or events) and *fair wind* (a nautical reference, often used as a metaphor) were also omitted from the search.

I also found polysemic relations that were not pertinent for the analysis. For instance, there were examples where *fair* was used as a synonym of *large* (*fair amount of time*) and *fairly* was used as a synonym of *quite* (*fairly*

30 The asterisks are used in a search strategy that includes all possible prefixes and suffixes in the search, from *un-fair* to *fair-ness*, for example.

31 This is a category within the concordance application, which allows you to classify the entries according to user-determined categories so that you can re-sort the concordances according to these categories. For more information, see Scott 2019a.

dramatic).[32] These two non-moral uses of FAIRNESS were also excluded from the analysis. This exclusion (in addition to that of *jobs fair* and *fair wind*)[33] was achieved by going back to the original data and bracketing all the phrases to be excluded using the symbols < >. This was done by using the search and replace function in the application *Notepad++*, which allows you to automatically search and replace in several documents at the same time. Next, I uploaded the newly revised corpora into *WordSmith*, making sure that the 'mark-up to ignore <*>' option in the advanced settings was selected. This step revealed some neologisms, such as *Fairtrade* and *FairfuelUK*, which I did not include in the analysis.[34] Finally, FAIRNESS was also commonly used as a discourse marker in expressions such as *it is fair to say*, *in all fairness*, *fair enough* or *he fairly pointed*. I decided to include such use of FAIRNESS in the analysis. At a glance, the semantic link might seem remote. However, this category was the most difficult to disambiguate semantically. Take, for instance, the following two examples:

> *to be fair to the Chancellor*
>
> *to be fair to families*

Looking at these two noun phrases, it is impossible to say if they are referring to *fair* as *justice* or if they are acting as a discursive device to comment on or correct something that has been said before. It is only by looking at the wider context that the semantic specifications become apparent. In this case, the first excerpt is being used as a discursive device and the second is referring to *justice*:

> *to raise much more revenue. However, to be fair to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, he did not pretend that the rises were to do with binge drinking and pleasing the Daily Mail, as I thought he would*

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32 A full list of all the expressions eliminated from the search strategy can be found in appendix 2.

33 *Fairs* was also automatically eliminated by the restricted word forms in the search syntax.

34 However, they were included when they appeared as two separate words: *Fair Trade* or *Fair Fuel*.

> *growth must come in order to be fair to families, and again with this Budget, the rhetoric matches the detail. The increases in personal allowances, taking the lowest income earners out of paying tax altogether*

Considering this intertwining phraseological and semantic relation between the two, I reasoned that leaving the discourse markers in the analysis was a better option, since they could bring valuable information to the analysis. A summary of the search strategy followed is provided in table 1.

Table 1 Search strategy for FAIRNESS

Included in Search	
Word Forms Included	*fair, unfair, fairness, unfairness, fairly, unfairly, fairer, fairest*
Polysemic Relations	Discourse markers, such as *to be fair to the chancellor*, *fairly pointed* and *fair enough*
Excluded from Search	
Automatically Excluded with Search Strategy	*affair(s), Mayfair, laissez-faire, fairground(s), fairy/ies*
Eliminated in Source Data using < >	*jobs fair*, *fairly simple* (quite) or *fair number* (large)
Neologisms	*FairfuelUK*, *Fairtrade*

4.5 Quantitative tools

4.5.1 Frequency and dispersion

Frequency simply refers to the number of times the lemmas appear in the corpus. I looked at both raw frequency (the number of occurrences) and relative (or normalised) frequency, which is calculated as the number of occurrences per 1,000 words. This made it possible to observe the contribution of the words to the total number of tokens in the corpus (Baker

2006). These statistics allowed me to make comparisons between the growth and the crisis corpus, and to observe yearly diachronic changes in frequency, in a standardised manner. These quantitative findings are presented in chapter 5. In addition, I utilised the dispersion plot tool in *WordSmith*. This showed me where the search words occurred in the different files in each corpus. This allowed me to look into when AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS were first used in each corpus and in each debate (see chapters 6 and 7).

4.5.2 Collocates

A collocate is a word that occurs in close proximity to another (Sinclair 1991: 170), and the conjunction of the two forms a collocation. The semantic implications of co-occurrences are considered to be very important in this study. Meaning is not a stable concept, and it cannot be 'seen'. It changes over time and from place to place. Most importantly, meaning is also dependent on linguistic context. The semantic permutations of words are constantly being negotiated through the lexical and phraseological contexts in which they appear (Stubbs 1996; 2001). Collocates provide us with 'a way of understanding meanings and associations between words' (Baker 2006: 96).

This semantic potential of collocates is further exploited within a CL approach, since collocations are the result of inferential statistics. That is, in CL, collocates are usually calculated using significance tests to assess how likely it is that results are due to chance (McEnery & Hardie 2012). In other words, collocates indicate the significance of co-occurrences (McEnery & Hardie 2012). The higher the score for statistical relevance, the stronger the bond of the collocation. As such, collocates are very useful for identifying what is usual and typical, which is one the primordial tasks of CL as a methodology (Stubbs 2001: 221). In other words, collocates are used as entry points to the data in order to observe the most common contextualisations of words.

Many different calculations are available in *WordSmith* to decide on the cut-off point for what is considered more or less statistically relevant. It is important to mention what calculations were taken into account, but it is also important to take this selection with a pinch of salt – on most occasions, there are no striking differences between calculations, only certain nuances in the results (Baker 2006: 102)[35]. I decided to combine two different calculations: mutual information score (MI) and log-likelihood (LL). MI is widely used as a measure for collocates, particularly when the aim is to focus on content words, as is the case in this study. This measure calculates the expected probability of the two words occurring near to each other, based on their relative frequency and the overall size of the corpus, and then compares this expected figure with the actual co-occurrence of the two (Baker 2006: 101-102). However, it typically fails to account for sampling variation and is prone to low-frequency bias (Evert 2008). Moreover, it does not take into account how much evidence is provided by the observed data (Evert 2008). LL, on the other hand, is a measure of statistical significance. This means that it focuses on how much evidence we have of a relationship. LL does not depend on the assumption about normality that lies behind other calculations. This assumption becomes a problem when we are not dealing with an enormous corpus (Dunning 1993), as is the case in this study. LL is standard in computational linguistics (Evert 2008). By combining MI and LL, I aimed to get a more accurate picture of the collocate profiles of the two lemmas.

There are no objective thresholds for either calculation, only conventions. For MI, a value of 3 or above is considered to indicate a strong collocation. LL thresholds are determined by p values (which indicate the level of confidence in the fact that the results are not due to chance; the lower the value, the less likely). In social science $p < 0.05$ is commonly considered acceptable (Scott 2019b). This means that one is 95% sure that the results are not random[36]. This equates to an LL value of 3.84 or higher. However, due to the fact that randomness can be more significant in linguistics than in other fields, a more stringent value, around 99%, has been suggested (McEnery & Hardie 2012). Rayson, Berridge and Francis (2004) recommend $p < 0.0001$, which equates

35 This was certainly the case in this study.

36 For more information of p value see Scott 2019b.

to an LL value of 15.13 or higher. Appendices 3 to 5 contain the tables with the full list of collocates for AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS according to these thresholds. Table 2 (chapter 6), 4 and 5 (chapter 7) present a concise list of the most relevant collocates of AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS respectively. In the case of FAIRNESS, these were the collocates where $p < 0.0001$ (with an LL value of 15.13 or higher) and an MI of at least 5. In the case of AUSTERITY, these were the collocates where $p < 0.05$ (LL value of 3.84 or higher) and an MI of at least 3. This difference was due to the fact that AUSTERITY is used much less than FAIRNESS in the data. As such, a less stringent set of values was required.

A few more considerations were necessary regarding collocate calculations. Firstly, the span or horizon (the number of word forms on each side of the node, the word being investigated) was 4 on the left and 4 on the right. There is some consensus that this setting is the most suitable for finding the most relevant collocates (Stubbs 2001: 29). Secondly, only collocates that appeared in the same sentence as the node were included. Finally, a minimum raw frequency of co-occurrence was also considered. The inferential statistics that I used to select the collocates had a normalising effect; that is, collocates with a low frequency might still have been proved statistically relevant. Nevertheless, I also established a minimum co-occurrence frequency for a reasonably relevant collocation in terms of repetition. This was 10 co-occurrences for FAIRNESS and 5 for AUSTERITY. Again, the difference was due to the difference in the overall frequency of the two lemmas in the data. However, I did not set a minimum number of debates in which the collocations needed to appear. In other words, and as was the case for AUSTERITY, some of the collocates might appear in one year only.

4.6 Qualitative tools

4.6.1 Reference sources

In my view, the complexity of the two concepts analysed in this thesis required a deep understanding of their semantic ramifications. As such, reference sources were used to map out the different meanings and associations that were linked to AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS[37]. Two lexicographic sources were used in the first instance: *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) (2019a) and *Collins dictionary* (2019a). This was complemented with the lexical database *WordNet* (WordNet 2019a). Combining these three sources was very productive. On the one hand, the two dictionaries provided a detailed and updated insight into the semantic permutations of the two lemmas[38]. On the other hand, *WordNet* was useful for finding less obvious links between words, because it is a thesaurus that connects not only word forms but also senses of words[39]. However, since my main interest was placed on the semantic behaviour of the two lemmas in political discourse, I also used other specialised sources that have tried to define these concepts in this particular context.

4.6.2 Concordances

Concordances are the main analytical tool in CL. A concordance analysis entails bringing together many instances of the use of a word (the node) in different sentences from different parts and sources of the corpus at the same time. This allows the researcher to observe regularities that would not be apparent if the words in question were encountered in separate contexts (Hunston 2003). They are normally organised as 'key words in context' (KWIC), where the node word (or search word)[40] appears in the middle of the concordances and the context of the occurrence expands on either side (Sinclair 2003: 176). The approach I took in this linguistic analysis was mostly abductive, as this was the best fit for answering the research questions

37 In fact, an etymological analysis has been considered useful as an initial contextual analytical stage in CDA by, for example, Baker and others (2008: 295).

38 For more information on how these dictionaries are compiled and updated, see Collins 2019b and OED 2019b.

39 For more information on how *WordNet* works, see WordNet 2019a.

40 *KWIC*, *node word* and *search word* are all ways of referring to the particular word being analysed. *Search word* refers to the word that is being selected for the query. *KWIC* and *node word* refer to the positioning of the word; that is, they refer to the fact that when organising concordances the search word is usually located at the centre of every instance and the rest of the text is aligned on either side of it (Sinclair 2003: 176-177).

I proposed. It was precisely the findings and patterns I came across that guided the next step in the analysis. As summarised by Partington, Duguid and Taylor (2013: 9-11), there is always a certain degree of serendipity in corpus-assisted discourse analysis; because it is mostly evidence-driven, the process can lead to unexpected paths and build up new knowledge and unexpected meanings around suspected patterns.

Having said that, there were a few steps that were consistently followed. Firstly, I analysed the concordances of the most statistically relevant collocations. These provided 'focus' for the qualitative analysis, since the most relevant lexical patterns are associated with the collocates (Baker 2006). Moreover, I mostly stayed within the analysis of content words. These are the words that appear less frequently, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs that generally allow inflection (Stubbs 2003) and that provide more semantic information (Baker 2006: 123). I did occasionally divert from these analytical steps; at times I looked into some less statistically relevant collocates in order to confirm or deny patterns or to search for less frequent synonyms of certain collocates; I also paid attention to some grammatical words that seemed to be particularly interesting or relevant. These are the words that are used more frequently and that do not allow inflection; they are also much more semantically hybrid because of their multiple uses (Stubbs 2003). Finally, on one occasion I also abandoned the collocate route, and even the lemmas, to focus on the lexical item *share* since this particular word appeared frequently in the analysis of the concordances of the collocations of *fairness* (see section 8.1.2).

The analysis of the concordance lines was mainly characterised by the combination of CL techniques and more detailed discourse analysis, which were 'deliberately intertwined and […] carefully exploited' (Marchi & Taylor 2009: 5), moving from specific words to concordances to wider strings of text. As will become clear in the next few chapters, a unique analytical approach was taken for each pattern, as the examples in front of me pointed me to particular linguistic explanations. However, the analysis has an overriding constructivist nature, where meaning is derived from the 'internal relations to other words in a span that moves from lexical to phrases to texts' (Stubbs 2010: 27).

This abductive analysis was informed by a systemic functional linguistics perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). This take on language is one of the most prolifically used and adapted in CDA (Fairclough 2003). This is so because this approach to language description is premised on a theory of language as a social semiotic and is thus deeply engaged with establishing links between language and social life (Chouliaraki & Fairclough 1999; Fairclough 2003). The overriding principle behind this linguistic perspective is the fact that semantics and grammar cannot be separated. It views language as a system of choices, where different meanings, interpretations and resonance possibilities emerge (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 43).

Within this socially grounded discourse theoretical framework, and following an iterative procedure of progressive methodological refinement, I selected those specific analytical categories and concepts which best enabled me to interpret and contextualise the preliminary corpus results. The overall feature that gives coherence to this part of the methodology (notwithstanding the necessary selectivity arising from a corpus-aided approach) is the fact that all the analytical categories aim to establish meaning relations around the node words and to link these back to their wider social context. Semantic relations operate at different levels of abstraction, ranging from relations between clauses (grammatical relations) to lexical relations between words and concepts (Fairclough 2003: 92). I give an account of the analytical categories used in the study in the following sections.

First, at the lexical level, I describe one of the main tools present in the analysis, namely 'discourse prosody' (section 4.6.3), a concept originally derived from corpus linguistics, but which can usefully be extended to a critical, contextually grounded analysis of the semantic relations and sociocultural resonance of prominent textual patterns. Extending analysis to the wider co-textual environments of node words, and in specific relation to transitivity, I also drew on van Leeuwen's (1996; 2008) framework for the analysis of 'social actors', in order to critically probe questions of agency, responsibility, and accountability in relation to the discourses of *austerity* and *fairness*. I outline this approach in section 4.6.4. An examination of grammatical relations particularly at the clause level (especially ‘parataxis’ and ‘contrastive structures’), was also useful in identifying the rhetorical and argumentative patterns in which the concepts of *austerity* and *fairness* were used (section 4.6.5). Additional discourse analytical frameworks from semantics and pragmatics enabled me to critically interpret the corpus findings, in particular the important concept of ‘assumptions’ (section 4.6.6), ‘tautology’ (section 4.6.7) and ‘metaphor’ (section 4.6.8).

4.6.3 Discourse prosody

The concept of prosody is intimately intertwined with collocation analysis (see section 4.5.2 for a definition of collocation). Overall, prosody implies a strong link between form and overall meaning (McEnery, Xiao, & Tono 2006: 83). There have been several definitions of prosody and the differences between them are not clear cut (Baker 2006: 87). Some authors refer to semantic prosody (Louw 1993) whereas others refer to semantic preference and discourse prosody (Stubbs 2001). Some of the CL literature on this concept has acknowledged the complexity of its definition (a full discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis but see for example Partington 2004b and Hunston 2007).

However, broadly, prosody refers to two main ideas: firstly, the word tendency to collocate to semantically related lexical units (Stubbs 2001). Secondly, that this tendency can manipulate meaning, giving words a certain connotative load and tapping into specific social attitudes (Stubbs 1996). The concept of discourse prosody is particularly useful (Stubbs 2001: 88). It refers specifically to collocates as ‘a class of words which share some semantic feature’ (Stubbs 2001: 88). This class can be very ‘open-ended and typically have great lexical variability’ (Stubbs 2001: 88). For example, Baker (2006: 87) uses discourse prosody to describe the collocation pattern of associating refugees with quantification. This prosody can have the effect of narrowing down the attention around the idea of how many refugees there are and if this is a good or a bad thing (rather than, for example, focusing on the specific situations that brought them to be refugees).

As I explained in section 2.2.2 and 3.8, this thesis aims to investigate how the semantic ambiguity of *austerity* and *fairness* is exploited. Discourse prosody was a useful tool in this regard. Observing how semantic links are made around these node words provided a window into how austerity governance and the economic crisis at large were linguistically framed. As Mulderrig points out (2009: 41), by analysing prosody one can potentially observe patterns that point to why certain ideas seem to be resonant. As such, discourse prosody was an integral part of the collocation analysis, which I develop in chapters 6 and 7 (although also see section 8.1.2).

4.6.4 Social actors

The analysis of agency is without a doubt one of the most prolific in CDA (van Leeuwen 2008: 23). Finding out exactly who does what to whom and how has traditionally been a good gauge of how particular social events and particular groups of people are linguistically framed and how relations of power are set around these choices. The concept of social actors (van Leeuwen 1996; 2008) expands the notion of agency beyond transitivity. He considers that sociological agency does not neatly fit into grammatically bound explanations around agents and patients (van Leeuwen 2008: 23). Instead there is a non-binary network of linguistic possibilities of how agency is performed. These possibilities are conceptualised from a sociosemantic approach – the representation of social actors have explicit social meaning. Van Leeuwen specifically argues (2008: 28) that how actors appear in text fit the purposes of the writer or speakers regarding their audience. In other words, with a few exceptions, choices around actors are not accidental and follow specific interests (van Leeuwen 2008: 28).

Van Leeuwen (2008) provides a very comprehensive list of linguistic realisations of agency, taking into account a wide range of grammatical and semantic options. The two overarching possibilities are, however, whether the actors are 'excluded' in the text or 'included'. When they are excluded, they can either be totally ‘suppressed’ or they can be ‘backgrounded’. That is, actors can have no presence whatsoever in the text or they can be deemphasised (van Leeuwen 2008: 29). One of the most common ways of excluding actors is via passive agent deletion (van Leeuwen 2008: 29). That is, hiding the agent of an action within a passive structure that seemingly has no actor. For example, in the expression ‘workers were let go’ there is no specific agent, making redundancy something that happens to people rather than something done by someone (Fairclough 2003: 149).

A wide classification is drawn out by van Leeuwen between backgrounding and inclusion (see van Leeuwen 2008: 52 for a visual summary). Each type provides a different degree of assertiveness or obfuscation of actors, moving between different levels of specificity and personalisation. Fairclough (2003: 145) summarises this network of possibilities into word class (is the actor referred to with a noun or a pronoun?) and what grammatical role the actor fulfils (is it actually a participant in the action or a circumstance, as in ‘towards John’ or a possessive structure as in ‘our friend’?). Moreover, actors can be named, as in ‘John Smith’; or referred to generically, as in ‘the bankers’. They can also be referred to impersonally, as an abstraction (for example associating immigrants and quantification as we saw in Baker’s examples in the previous section) or as an object – for example referring to a country when in reality we are referring to their population, as in ‘Australia’ instead of ‘Australian citizens’ (van Leeuwen 2008: 46).

The analysis of the concordances of *fairness* in the crisis corpus highlighted an overt inclusion of social actors according to their level of wealth and their relationship to the tax system and business. As such, in chapters 7 and 8 (particularly sections 7.5.1 and 8.1.1), I draw from this conceptualisation of social actors, making then a link between what the different inclusions and exclusions mean in terms of austerity governance.

4.6.5 Parataxis: contrastive structures, equivalence and difference

The concept of taxis refers to the interdependence between clauses. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004: 373) all clauses are linked semantically and as such depend on each other to make sense of the overall structure. There are, however, different levels of dependency: ‘paratactic’ and ‘hypotactic’ relations. Clauses are paratactically related when they have equal grammatical status and are not subordinated to each other (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 374-375). For example, ‘I was happy and the sun was out’. Clauses are most commonly paratactically linked with the conjunctions *and*, *or* and *but* (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 386). Consequently, parataxis not only responds to coordination (*and*) but also opposition and contrast (*or*, *but*) (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 440). In other words, there are several types of semantic relations that can be linguistically performed with parataxis. Conversely, clauses are hypotactically related when one clause is dependent on the other because it is subordinated, as in, ‘I was sad because she left’ (Fairclough 2003: 220); or when one clause is actually an element of the other, embedded, as in ‘the man who came to dinner’ (Fairclough 2003: 220).

The concordance analysis of *fairness* showed a tendency to find clauses paratactically related with a semantic relation of addition where different seemingly unrelated elements were listed without any clear explanation of the relation between them (see specifically sections 7.4, 8.1.1 and 8.1.2). This pattern is what Fairclough (2003: 95-96) calls the ‘logic of appearance’ rather than an ‘explanatory logic’. According to Fairclough (2003), logic of appearance refers to a drive in contemporary political discourse to linguistically chain facts and ideas in a report-like style as in the following example from the growth corpus:

> *my priorities are: the needs of enterprise; ensuring fairness to families and pensioners; and the environment.*
>
> Gordon Brown, Labour, Government, 2002

This inclination avoids engaging in explanations, causalities or expositions, limiting its analytical content and muting open debates surrounding an issue (Fairclough 2003) – statements are then presented as unquestionable and inevitable (Fairclough 2003).

On the other hand, parataxis was also found in parallel 'contrastive structures' (see sections 6.3, 8.1.1 and 8.1.2). In these results, clauses were semantically related in terms of equivalence and difference, concepts borrowed by CDA from Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Fairclough (2003: 88) defines 'equivalence and difference' as the social tendency to classify objects, entities and people as simultaneously contrasted, where differences are highlighted, but at the same time classify them as equivalent, where the differences between them are diminished. In the data, equivalence and differences were performed using contrastive structure that related groups of citizens according to their wealth. For example, there were recurrent statements that made rich and poor people equivalent in terms of their responsibility to pay for the crisis. However, these same groups were differentiated by highlighting the fact that poor people are in contrast with those who create jobs and work, assuming that poverty is an issue intrinsically related to unemployment.

4.6.6 Implicitness: assumptions

Implicitness is also a key concept in CDA. This is so because, as Fairclough observes (2003: 55), implicitness is an integral part of ideology and as such pervasive. How we communicate is partly sustained by our shared knowledge which is implicitly assumed by a community of speakers. This implicit shared knowledge is mostly determined by relations of powers – those with the power can shape what this shared knowledge is and what alternatives are feasible and which are out of the question (Fairclough 2003: 55).

Implicitness is a complex discursive feature that touches upon a wide range of linguistic phenomena such as deixis or anaphora. However, one of the main concepts related to implicitness is 'assumption' (which I consider here a synonym of presupposition following Fairclough 2003 and 1992). Defining assumptions has traditionally been determined by the fact that they are partly a semantic feature and partly a pragmatic one (see Saeed 2003 and Polyzou 2015 for a discussion). On the one hand, assumptions can be considered a purely semantic relation between sentences (Saeed 2003). For example, in the sentence ‘her husband is a fool’ we can comfortably assume that the sentence ‘she has a husband’ is also true (Saeed 2003: 101).

On the other hand, and most relevant from a CDA perspective, assumptions are also determined by (pragmatic) contextual information – assumptions are part of how the outside world is brought into the text by the speaker (Fairclough 2003: 17). Fairclough (1992: 120) defines assumptions as something that is ‘taken for the producer of the text as already established or “given”’. What producers say explicitly is always ‘said against what is left unsaid’ (Fairclough 2003:17), the latter being expected to be understood as common sense by the hearers. With this in mind, assumptions play an important part in naturalising discourses (Polyzou 2015). In other words, assumptions are not free-floating implicit ideas but are discourse relative (Fairclough 2003). For example, the assumption that globalisation is inevitable only works within a neoliberal discourse (Fairclough 2003: 132).

Assumptions are, by definition, implicit. However, they are explicitly activated with linguistic cues or triggers (Levinson 1983). These triggers are what prompt readers or listeners to try to tap into their shared knowledge in order to understand the implicitness of what is being said. The qualitative analysis of *fairness* in chapters 7 and 8 highlights linguistic triggers which implicitly assume well-established neoliberal ideas and discourses regarding economic inequality and austerity governance (see chapter 3 especially sections 3.5 and 3.6). Specifically, I found paratactic relations and contrastive structures working in this way (see sections 7.5.2, 8.1.1 and 8.1.2). Moreover, vague concepts such as *burden* or *reward* (see section 8.1.2) were also deployed within certain prosodies to imply the inevitability of austerity governance. Finally, the use of certain verbs and of definite articles also triggered certain assumptions regarding the role of government in providing fairness (see section 8.2).

4.6.7 Tautology

Tautology is somehow a less established concept in CDA. It has only been recently that Theresa May's famous 'Brexit means Brexit' line put tautology on the CDA map (see Koller 2019 and Charteris-Black 2019). Previously it has also been associated with far-right and racist discourses in a few studies (see Richardson and Wodak 2009 and Dal Lago 2009). Tautologies also tap into the concept of implicitness but from a reversed perspective: a tautology, instead of implicitly assuming what is not being said (as was the case with an assumption), it explicitly overstates what is obvious but at the same time 'informationally empty' (Saeed 2003: 87).

Tautologies also have a semantic and pragmatics intersection in common with assumptions (see Okamoto 1993 and Kwon 2009 for a discussion). On the one hand tautologies can be understood from a purely semantic view, being only a product of the lexical and grammatical particular characteristics of different languages (Wierzbicka 1987). From this perspective, the intrinsic meaning of the components of tautologies make them void semantically (Kwon 2009: 212). However, pragmatics is also an important lens through which to analyse tautologies, since even if they might appear semantically empty, tautologies are not void from a communication point of view (Fraser 1988).

From a CDA perspective, tautologies are interesting because they can trigger certain extralinguistic information and/or shared knowledge that the producer wants the receiver to take into account when decoding the seemingly void construction (Vilinbakhova & Escandell-Vidal 2020). From a purely pragmatic point of view, this trigger is performed by flouting the maxim of quantity (Grice 1991: 33). In other words, the speaker is choosing not to be cooperative in terms of just giving as much information as required, but choosing instead to be 'informative at the level of what is implicated' (Grice 1991: 33), relying on the hearer's ability to decode why that particular tautology has been chosen (Grice 1991: 33). In other words, the speaker expects the hearer to recognise her particular view on what is referred to by the components of the tautology (Fraser 1988: 217-218).

Considering this, the speaker might have two main aims when using a tautology according to Sonnenhauser (2017: 34): reinforcement, that is working as an understatement, or justification, that is working as hedging. For example, the tautologies ‘a lie is a lie’ or ‘a promise is a promise’ aim to work as an understatement because they imply that things are what they are, what Emmet (1962: 18) calls the ‘shut up tautologies’. However other tautologies such as ‘it is right to do what is right’ work as hedging, because they imply, in this particular case, that a moral problem should be approached from a moral perspective (Emmet 1962: 20), functioning as a justification for action.

The qualitative analysis of *fairness* highlighted two tautological structures that semantically equated this node word to reciprocity, specifically in terms of wealth re-distribution (see section 8.1.1). This type of discursive device provided a legitimisation strategy that reiterated the ethical component of austerity governance, even if regressive taxation policies were actually being followed (see section 3.7).

4.6.8 Metaphor

As I pointed out in the literature review (see section 3.8), metaphors were an important rhetorical device in austerity discourses, particularly the household metaphor (government finances equal domestic finances). As I show in the results chapters, this specific metaphor was also widely present in the data (see sections 6.4 and 8.1.2). Moreover, other metaphors were a common rhetorical device in the uses of *austerity* in particular (see sections 6.3, 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6.2) as well as the tax system (section 8.1.1) and *fairness* (sections 8.1 and 8.2.2).

This prolific use of metaphors is not surprising. Metaphors are not only a linguistic feature but they are also part of our cognition. According to the seminal work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphors not only determine the way we talk but also the way we act and think. Consequently, metaphors are perverse – they represent particular ways in which we construct our reality and our systems of knowledge and belief (Fairclough 1992: 194).

Metaphors are rhetorical devices where language is used in a non-literal way (Saeed 2003: 15). In this usage, the semantic properties of one concept is transferred to another (Saeed 2003: 346) and consequently ‘one part of the world is extended to another’ (Fairclough 2003: 131). Not only this, but according to Lakoff and Johnson (1980) metaphors also operate systematically. That is, there is a coherent system of metaphorical associations which relate to each other. This necessarily constrains how we understand concepts: this systematicity highlights certain semantic aspects but at the same time, inevitably hides others (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10). For example, the metaphor ‘arguments are war’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4) focuses on the contrastive and aggressive aspect of argumentation, downplaying, at the same time, the cooperative nature that is also present in any argument (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 10).

Moreover, this semantic limitation operates at the level of discourse. Metaphor systems narrow the possible perspectives from which social, political and economic issues are considered (Fairclough 1992: 196). For example, education is often metaphorically conceptualised from a market economy point of view, where there are ‘customers’ instead of ‘students’. This perspective influences not only how we talk about education but also the things we do in this particular social context (Fairclough 1992: 195, 208).

Finally, it is also important to note that metaphors are culturally bounded and become naturalised in particular linguistic communities. As previously stated, metaphors are non-literal uses of language. However, this figurative aspect of metaphors becomes unnoticed as it fossilises and stops being perceived as an actual metaphor and is seen as a literal use of language instead (Saeed 2003: 15). This fossilisation, however, is culturally determined. For example, the metaphor ‘time is money’ is a very entrenched one in many cultures where expressions such as ‘give time’, ‘running out of time’ or ‘spend time’ are fossilised (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 8). This metaphorical structure is linked to the fact that time is considered a valuable commodity and as such we tend to pay for work and effort in terms of time, so weekly or monthly for example (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 8). However, this is a frame that only works in industrialised societies (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 8).

4.7 Summary

In this chapter I outlined the overall methodological approach that was followed in the study and the specific tools that were exploited. I started by presenting the overall methodological approach to the analysis, corpus-assisted CDA, summarising the usefulness of CL for CDA research. I argued that the quantitative aspect of CL partly addresses some of the criticisms levelled at CDA as a field. I pointed out, however, that CL lacks the resources to make a meaningful interpretation of the results. Furthermore, I also argued that CL's quantitative nature does not exempt it from having to engage in the same CDA processes when it comes to the complexity of the object being studied and the systematicity a study of this nature requires.

I then covered some of the main corpus design principles relevant for this study and how these fitted into the analysis structure. I also outlined the steps followed in the data selection and handling, providing the rationale and some reflections on their advantages and limitations. Finally, I presented the quantitative and qualitative tools used in the study and how they were woven together to reveal the most common discursive features in the use of *austerity* and *fairness* in the data.

The findings of the analysis are developed in the next four chapters with a different degree of engagement with the tools depicted in this chapter. The following chapter focuses on the lexicographic and frequency analysis. Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the collocate, dispersion and concordances of the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS, comparing the differences between them. Finally, in chapter 8, I continue to focus on the findings for *fairness* but concentrate more on the continuation and adaptation of discourses rather than on comparing differences.

5 FRAMING THE USE OF AUSTERITY AND FAIRNESS

In the previous chapters I presented the theoretical and methodological framework of the thesis, considering the interactions of linguistic and political theory on the one hand, and the quantitative and qualitative approaches to the data on the other. In the next four chapters I present the findings of the thesis. This chapter aims to offer a wide perspective on the uses of the keywords *austerity* and *fairness*. It does so in two ways: by considering their general uses and their frequency of use. In sections 5.1 and 5.2, I provide a detailed semantic analysis of the general uses of the two keywords, drawing from lexicographic sources (see section 4.6.1) and expanding on the characterisation of the two keywords that I presented in section 3.8. Firstly, I develop a sense of the main strands of meaning of the keywords in order to link them to their relevance in political discourse. Section 5.1 focuses on *austerity* and its links to the ideas of frugality and debt morality, in addition to the precise meaning of this keyword within fiscal policy. Drawing these findings together, I discuss the relevance of these semantic features in terms of elite political discourse. Section 5.2 follows the same structure to develop a characterisation of *fairness*. Firstly, I develop a sense of its complex semantic scope. I then attempt to divide this into two main strands: *fairness* as an everyday judgement and *fairness* as a more abstract principle. As in the case of *austerity*, I then discuss the relevance of these findings in political discourse. Providing this semantic description of the two keywords allowed me to disentangle their complex semantic permutations, functioning as a preliminary exercise before carrying out the qualitative analysis (presented in the following chapters).

In section 5.3, I present the frequency results. First, I discuss the patterns of use for each lemma (AUSTERITY and then FAIRNESS), comparing the growth corpus with the crisis corpus and assessing correlations between the frequency of the two. I also analyse patterns of frequency for specific word forms, considering what these results can tell us about the semantic and phraseological tendencies of the two keywords. This analysis allowed me to observe how patterns of frequency explained and reflected the political economic ideas I presented in chapter 3. It allowed me to make comparisons between growth and crisis, and to highlight any development within the crisis period, which is our main point of concern.

5.1 A definition of *austerity*

Austerity has a long history in the English language. It is amongst the earliest 12% of entries recorded in the OED. It was originally borrowed from the French 'austerité', whose first usage is evidenced from around 1425. I identified three main semantic strands in the common uses of *austerity* in the sources consulted. Two of them are directly linked to morality, frugality and debt morality, which I explain in sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2. The most modern semantic associations are to do with governance – fiscal policy – and I set out this strand in section 5.1.3. Finally, in section 5.1.4 I bring these three different yet linked semantic permutations together within the context of political discourse.

5.1.1 *Austerity* as frugality

The original meaning of *austerity* was akin to that of harshness. The OED defines its first uses as 'Sternness of manner, appearance, or disposition; severity in judgement; (esp. of a law or judgement) harshness, severity' (OED 2019c). This use then developed religious connotations: those of 'severe self-denial or self-restraint; moral strictness; rigorous abstinence, asceticism' (OED 2019c). After that, these associations were expanded to more generalised contexts, such as 'severe simplicity, lack of luxury or adornment' (OED 2019c). These applied to more descriptive uses (such as architecture or literature, for example) but also referred to a more general 'habit, practice or act' (Collins 2019c), as something simple that demarks a particular way of life and attitude. The thesaurus of the same dictionary points to the synonyms ‘economy, simplicity, severity, rigidity, strictness, gravity, seriousness, rigour, hardness, restrain, sobriety or frugality’ (Collins 2019d). *WordNet* also adds the interesting synonym of ‘nonindulgence’, defined as ‘the trait of great self-denial (especially refraining from worldly pleasures)’ (WordNet 2019b).

This first semantic profile of *austerity* tells us that this word has an unequivocal moral component. The idea of moral strength is implied in the necessity for strictness, which, in turn, is necessary to achieve frugality. To be austere, one requires willpower and self-control in order to achieve self-restraint; having willpower implies having moral strength and discipline. In addition, there is a semantic link to be made here between *austerity* and being environmentally conscious, since the concept can also be contextualised as a reduction in consumption. As such, austerity can be considered beneficial in terms of reducing environmental degradation (Levitas 2012)[41].

5.1.2 *Austerity* as debt morality

The moral strictness described in the previous section is semantically bound up with the idea of debt. At the simplest level, the frugality that is latent in the meaning of *austerity* easily lends itself to an association with thriftiness particularly in the context of scarcity. In other words, *austerity* also means taking care of your possessions, as it is implied that if you do this you are not being wasteful and, as such, you have the self-discipline that is required for moral strength. Extrapolating this logic, debt becomes semantically entangled with the morality play between ‘good austerity’ and ‘bad spending’ (Blyth 2013: 12) and other permutations around this dichotomy; that is, necessary austerity and profligacy. In the semantic context, we have swiftly moved from a moral judgement to an economic one, which can be traced back to Adam Smith (Smith 1991, cited in Blyth 2013: 109 and in Lakoff 2002: 94). Smith was one of the first thinkers to associate the pursuit of one’s own interests

41 This has gained some momentum in the UK and worldwide with various ‘minimalist’ movements that present reduced consumption and possession as a key to happiness and a more eco-friendly and peaceful life.

with morality, as he argued that by maximising our own wealth, the general wealth will increase (Lakoff 2002: 94)[42]. As such, it is moral to want to save money, to treasure your wealth. On the other side of the coin, public wealth deters such endeavours, since, as Blyth puts it (2013: 114) 'government debt perverts savers, distracts merchants, and ruins accumulated wealth'. This economic judgement has very deep consequences for how we see debt as a society, with deep moral implications: 'Saving is a virtue, spending is a vice' (Blyth 2013: 114-115). Paying your debts is moral; not paying your debts is immoral. Consequently, trying to cut your debts through austerity is also moral, and the opposite is immoral[43].

However, this deeply ingrained conceptualisation of debt is very simplistic. As Sayer (2015: 60) argues, there does not seem to be any immorality associated with the word *debt* when it is magically transformed into *credit*. If focusing the emphasis on the lender, debt becomes a positive thing; it is not a sign of weakness, but an 'index of social inclusion' (Sayer 2015: 61). For example, owning a house is seen as more respectable than renting it – because this implies, not that one has the money to pay for it, but that one has the right to access credit. The morality of 'those that acquire unearned income on the basis of the control of the assets that others need' (Sayer 2015: 64) is, comparatively, rarely called into question, politically or linguistically. This is

42 This is, of course, reminiscent of 'trickle-down economics' (see section 3.5).

43 Although it is outside the limits of this thesis, it is interesting to point out that Lakoff (2002) goes even further with this association between morality and finance and argues that actually, morality is conceptualised in general in terms of debt, where the nonmoral domain (finance) is extrapolated to a moral domain in expressions such as 'I owe you' (Lakoff 2002: 5). Lakoff calls this relationship between the language of finance and the language of morality 'moral accounting', which is used to divide what we consider to be rights and what we consider to be duties (Lakoff 2002: 46). The more rights we have, the more duties we should acquire. In other words, there cannot be 'something for nothing'. This is exactly how the welfare state is considered from a neoliberal perspective (see chapter 3), and how hard work is understood within this sphere of meaning. Again, this is reminiscent to the metaphor of moral strength.

because, as we saw in section 3.6, for the last few decades lenders have been the focus of credit-based economic growth[44].

5.1.3 *Austerity* as fiscal policy

Austerity is also closely linked with fiscal policy. In particular, it is associated with the affordability of social programmes as a prime concern, to a lesser or greater extent, of any neoliberal project (see section 3.8). However, there are two strands of meaning regarding the semantic contextualisation of *austerity* in fiscal policy. On the one hand, we find what we have most recently come to associate *austerity* with. This definition refers to *austerity* within crisis management, considering that *austerity* is the best option to bring about economic recovery. The premise is that a reduction in national debt boosts economic confidence and, in turn, can increase private investment and consumption, which ultimately create economic growth. Thus, this fiscal definition of *austerity* supposes that public investment is nothing more than a way of increasing the national debt and, consequently, it is not a good option for economic recovery (Stiglitz 2013: 288)[45].

Austerity viewed from this angle is a (voluntary) political (and economic) choice that is mostly concerned with the effects of the policy (reducing public debt, increasing competitiveness, achieving or maintaining growth). However, the original semantic links between *austerity* and government policy differed from this perspective. The OED shows that ‘the term entered common use in 1942, and was frequently used in the context of rationing and other measures introduced by governments in the period during and after the

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44 Moreover, the idea of credit assumes the lender’s economic soundness. In reality, money is created in the process of lending itself. Therefore, the moral authority of those lenders to determine access to credit and the levels of debt in society should at least called into question, particularly since the 2008 financial crisis provided a clear example of this lack of economic soundness and reliability (see Sayer 2015 and also Jackson & Dyson 2012 for good explanations on this particular contradiction).

45 There are, of course, problems with this definition of austerity. Most importantly, it assumes a one-to-one relation between public investment and increases in debt, without considering the positive effects: increases in demand and employment. I will return to these considerations in chapter 6, since this is a key issue in the frequently used comparison between public and private debt, as discussed in the literature (see section 3.8). Also, see Blyth 2013 for a full account of the fiscal considerations of austerity.

Second World War (1939-45)' (OED 2019c). This semantic development associates *austerity* with 'Restraint in public spending; especially a programme of government measures designed to reduce public spending and conserve resources, during a time of economic hardship' (OED 2019c) but also, at the same time, 'the conditions resulting from such measures' (OED 2019c).

It seems, then, that a specific historical resonance is associated with the word. *Austerity* is a harsh word, and, when applied to fiscal policy, it was originally solely associated with war. Moreover, the idea of scarcity or difficult times is implied in all its semantic permutations. There is a negative materiality associated with it. Being austere does not just mean being frugal and morally righteous (as we saw in sections 5.1.1 and 5.1.2). It can also entail being poorer, having reduced living standards, and 'lacking comfort, or lacking the ability to enjoy life' (McArthur 1981: 751).

The Collins dictionary also considers this meaning of *austerity*, defining it as 'a situation in which people's living standards are reduced because of economic difficulties' (Collins 2019c). Considering these semantic attachments between *austerity* and fiscal policy, we are confronted with complex patterns of cause and effect. *Austerity* can be a set of measures that are caused by a war or other economic hardship. The aims of such measures are usually to reduce public spending and conserve resources. However, *austerity* can also be the effects of such measures, mainly a reduction of living standards.

5.1.4 The meaning of *austerity* revisited

So far in this chapter we have seen how the concept of *austerity* has many different connotative associations and a varied polysemy. Firstly, this sematic ambiguity lies in the fact that *austerity* has both positive and negative connotations. It can have positive connotations when it is associated with moral virtue and strength; for example, when one exercises self-discipline to achieve some (undetermined) state of simplicity or frugality (or even environmental awareness). It also has positive connotations (and creates an irremediable link between austerity and debt) when this moral virtue is exercised in the aspiration to live a debt-free life, without being wasteful or spending money on what one does not need or cannot afford (even if this is in complete opposition to the idea of credit, in many ways a synonym of debt and on which the current British economic system relies).

However, it is clear that *austerity* also has negative connotations, especially in the context of fiscal policy, where it can be associated with harshness, economic hardship, reduced living standards and war. Considering this, it is not surprising that Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor and one of the main advocates of austerity, famously refused to use the word itself because, as she defined it, it made the political process of reducing public spending 'sound evil' (Trotman 2013). However, this negativity was somehow downplayed in the UK. Perhaps, as Lakoff puts it from an outsider's point of view, 'in the country of stiff upper lip 'austerity' sounds like a virtue' (Lakoff 2013: 52). Moreover, the literature on austerity narratives has observed that the Second World War as a collective experience had semantic implications that influenced the national psyche (Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017: 28).

This combination of positivity and negativity, combined with the cause-and-effect dichotomy we saw at the end of the previous section, poses an interesting question about the UK's position in terms of agency and austerity governance. In the UK, deficit reduction was in the UK largely anticipatory in nature. In other words, austerity governance was framed in terms of a pre-emptory policy to save the country's future from an irreversible situation of overspending and debt (Stanley 2016a). This contrasted with the disciplinary approach that was imposed in the Eurozone, where the damage had already been done and there was an obligation to follow austerity in order to mend that damage (Stanley 2016a). Considering this, it would be logical to expect that an austerity which is pre-emptory, as it was in the UK, would be more prone to being positively evaluated and less prone to being associated with reduced living standards (since it implies an action that aims to prevent bigger problems).

Moreover, *austerity* can be absorbed as a positive concept by both neoliberal and neoconservative thinking. Neoliberal rationality, as we saw in chapter 3, is akin to thriftiness when it comes to fiscal policy, so *austerity* is a perfect semantic fit. Moreover, the neoliberal perspective can accommodate the reduction of consumption as an environmental concern, even if it is counterintuitive to economic growth, if this reduction is discursively managed so it has very specific foci of attention. For example, it could concentrate on pollution but not on water or land scarcity, or it could ignore the implications of inequality for access to this consumption and, as such, who should be reducing it more (see Levitas 2012). In conservative discourse, on the other hand, moral strength is perhaps its main feature, which explains its preference for words such as toughness, responsibility and authority (Lakoff 2002: 74).

Overall, this analysis shows that the semantics of *austerity* neatly represent in a positive light the ideological hybridity of neoconservative and neoliberal rationalities. This hybridity was one of the (often overlooked) key features of the New Right and the subsequent post-Thatcher settlement (see section 3.3 and, for example, Levitas 1986; Hay 1996a; Farrall & Hay 2014).

This section laid out a detailed lexicographic analysis of *austerity*. The findings shed some light into austerity governance legitimisation strategies, particularly in terms of the semantic origins of the success of the household metaphor, where public finances are equated to domestic ones (see section 3.8). The analysis showed that *austerity* means being frugal at the personal level, which is often transferred to the semantic sphere of debt. This particular side of its meaning has very strong moral connotations in terms of self-discipline. However, *austerity* as fiscal policy does not contain moral connotations, being instead a purely economic and political decision that aims to control situations of scarcity such as a war. The household metaphor exploits these two meanings of *austerity*, transferring the personal moral semantic sphere to fiscal decision-making. The public and the private relation to debt can then be misleadingly confused as a unique required action to reduce such debt. Moreover, this allows the contradiction of aiming to reduce public debt while, at the same time, failing to reduce debt dependency in the private sphere, to exist unscrutinised.

5.2 A definition of *fairness*

To say that *fairness* is a semantically complex term is quite the understatement. As in the case of *austerity*, *fairness* is an old word in the English language. The first written evidence of its use dates back to 1450, according to the OED. It was absorbed from the Germanic equivalent ‘fagarnessī’, which meant ‘splendour’ or ‘glory’. The OED finds 13 different senses of the noun *fairness* alone, which gives credit to the historical semantic complexity of the word. *Fair* shows an even more varied usage, since it can be found as an adverb, as a noun, as an adjective and as a verb with each having several senses. In the case of *fair* as a noun and as an adjective only, this comes to a whopping 115 senses. Furthermore, and as we saw in the methodology section, *fair* is commonly used as a discourse marker. Not surprisingly, the aim of this section is not to account for every single meaning of *fairness*; on the contrary, it tries to establish what overriding features unite most of these meanings. It aims to find the essence of these features that make *fairness* such an appealing concept in political discourse. This gives me a sound semantic framework to use when analysing the particular examples of this keyword in my data.

In my view, the main semantic strength of *fairness*, which makes it such a creative and productive word in the English language (let alone in political discourse) is the fact that there are three clear connotations attached to it. Firstly, *fairness* is universally recognised as desirable, so it tends to be evaluated as positive. For example, in the OED we find definitions of *fairness* and *fair* that are akin to ‘good-looking’, ‘being eloquent’, ‘having courtesy’, ‘being respectful’, ‘pleasant weather’, ‘being peaceful’, ‘being smooth’, ‘indicative of good fortune’, ‘being on target’ and ‘neatness’. All of these are positive features of objects or people. Secondly, *fairness* is inseparably associated with everyday experiences. It is highly integrated in everyday talk and it is a common linguistic resource, even in childhood, for evaluating everyday behaviour patterns. However, *fairness* is also a hyponym of *justice*. As such, it is not just part of how we consider particular actions in our everyday experiences; it also plays an important semantic role in how we establish important moral principles as a society. To give an illustrative example, my daughter, who is four and already has her particular understanding of *fairness*, might consider that the fact that she needs to stop using a particular toy in a park so another child can have a go is unfair, because she was there first. However, we as a society consider that sharing resources is a fair/just principle, and as such it is an important value to practise early on in life. The action of sharing as experienced by my daughter and the value of sharing are both fair (or unfair, in her eyes), but they engage with the concept of *fairness* on two different levels of abstraction. Consequently, *fairness* moves from simplistic views to complex associations, which, in turn, characterises its polysemy. I paint a more precise picture of these two levels of abstraction in the next two sections. Then, in section 5.2.3, I consider how they play a part in political discourse.

5.2.1 *Fairness* as an everyday judgement

There are two main strands of meaning that relate *fairness* more directly to everyday actions and behaviours. On the one hand, it can mean being adequate, reasonable, moderate, performing an action with the right amount of care so as not to do something excessively or to have an unreasonably negative impact[46]. According to *WordNet fairness* is akin to 'candour' and considered a hyponym of 'impartiality' or 'non-partisanship', an inclination to weigh different views or opinions equally. This also extends to *fairness* as a semantic benchmark for behaviour, either related to truthfulness or in terms of accordance with some set of rules or standards. This sense of *fairness* is related, again by *WordNet*, to 'non-discrimination', as 'lack of bias', or 'self-interest', or 'dishonesty'.

Collins (2019e) presents a few good examples of this type of conceptualisation of *fair*:

46 This semantic feature is latent in some of the categories mentioned in section 4.4, such as when *fairly* is used as a synonym of *quite* (as in *fairly tall fellow*) or when *fair* is used as a synonym of *reasonably large* (as in *fair amount of times*). These categories, however, were eliminated from the analysis because the examples found in the data were pure synonyms of *quite* and *large* and, as such, not relevant for our purposes.

> It didn't seem fair to leave out her father.
>
> I wanted them to get a fair deal.
>
> He claims that he would not get a fair trial.

The use of *fair* in these examples (in spite of being a judgement itself, since we are evaluating certain action in moral terms) equates to being (contradictorily) non-judgemental, objective and inclusive of all views, and implies that all interests are being taken into account. Here lies one of the main semantic complexities of *fairness*. As I argued in the previous section, there is an inherited duality in its meaning between being an everyday judgement, but at the same time a principle related to justice. I turn to this more abstract semantic scope in the following section.

5.2.2 *Fairness* as a principle

Beyond the more inclusive uses of *fairness* that we saw in the previous section, *fairness* semantically ‘encapsulates key divisions over questions of social justice, equity and equality’ (Macabe & Yanacek 2018: 148). These division are at the core of what we consider to be moral or immoral. As Lakoff argues (2002), one of the most basic moral conceptualisations we have is that fair distribution is moral and unfair distribution is immoral. However, we can all disagree on what this distribution entails (Lakoff 2002: 60-61). One definition of *fairness* in the OED (2019d) exemplifies this ambiguity:

> (fairness) of remuneration, reward, or recompense, that adequately reflects the work done, service rendered or injury received, also of punishment, commensurate with the crime, injury, etc.

Fairness needs to *reflect adequately* some kind of compensation, but what this *adequately* means is uncertain. The linguistic definition of *fairness*, I find at this point, is impossible to disentangle from philosophical and moral positionings to do with egalitarianism. On the one hand, *fairness* can include egalitarian views akin to equality, considering that what is fair is the pursuit of a society in which there are fewer rich and fewer poor as well (Levitas 2005: 136). On the other hand, and just as easily, *fairness* can refute this perception. The mainstream rationalities of meritocracy, 'deserving' and opposition to wealth re-distribution that I presented in section 3.5 are commonly referred to as *fair*. In fact, some studies have shown that British citizens are particularly willing to consider the concepts of *fairness* or *equality* in terms of merit and opportunity (see, for example, Taylor-Gooby & Martin 2010).

Another highly influential definition of *fairness*, that of John Rawls (1971; 1993), also presents an ambiguous relation to egalitarianism. Rawls' theory is based upon the assumption that if we were all ignorant of what position we held, we would choose social principles that are equally fair to everybody, which do not privilege anyone in particular (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 193). If you did not know where you were going to end up in society, you would want that society to be as fair as possible because you would have no way of knowing if any kind of privilege would benefit you or go against you (Lakoff 2002: 20). Furthermore, Rawls considers that the only exception to this equal treatment is the maximisation of wellbeing amongst the least advantaged (Atkinson 2015: 13). However, this view of *fairness* does not entail equality or an egalitarian view of society, since it says nothing about the distance between rich and poor: how big or small the difference between them should be. Conversely, for equality, this is precisely what matters (Atkinson 2015).

5.2.3 The meaning of *fairness* revisited

The semantic complexity and connotation patterns that I have discussed have clear consequences in terms of political discourse. As I argued in the previous section, *fairness* can certainly refer to egalitarian perspectives and just as easily refer to meritocratic non-egalitarian conceptualisations of justice. As Fairclough and Fairclough argue (2018: 174), no single way of talking about *equality* or *fairness* is more valid. Egalitarian and non-egalitarian conceptualisation (and everything that goes in between) of these concepts are valid simply because they are within the semantic scope of these words. However, it is undeniable that there are semantic connections between *equality* and *fairness* and that they are underpinned by different political positionings. *Equality* belongs to a social democratic discourse, because it implies egalitarianism and wealth re-distribution (minding the gap), and because it implies a connectivity between different sections of society (it is a relative term), as we have seen in this chapter. Conversely, *fairness* lacks this connectivity, so it can more easily be adapted to both social democracy and neoliberalism, in addition to conservativism (Fairclough 2000a: 44). Thus, when using *fairness* there is the semantic possibility for ambivalence, which *equality* does not provide. The following two examples illustrate this ambivalence of *fairness* further. On the one hand, we can observe David Cameron overtly defining *fairness* as solely a question of merit (Cameron 2010):

> *Fairness means giving people what they deserve – and what people deserve depends on how they behave.*

On the other hand, in the following example from the crisis corpus (the 2011 debate), John McDonnell (the future shadow Chancellor of the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn) more subtly tries to adhere the semantic purpose of *taxation* to that of *sharing wealth*, making the link between *fairness* and egalitarianism understood as wealth re-distribution:

> *believe that one of the alternatives they will expect us to implement in the House is* <u>*a fair taxation*</u> *system allowing investment in public services so that* <u>*we can all share in that wealth*</u>*.*[47]
>
> John McDonnell, Labour, Opposition, 2011

The preference for the use of the lemmas FAIRNESS over EQUALITY was evident in a pilot study carried out at the beginning of this project. In this initial approach to the data, I compared one debate from each period: 2012 in the crisis corpus and 2006 in the growth corpus. The intention was to find out which were the most productive and relevant avenues for further research. In this preliminary analysis, the results showed that FAIRNESS was used much more frequently than EQUALITY. For example, in 2012, 165 occurrences of

47 I have underlined words or phrases in the excerpts in this thesis to draw attention to the discursive aspects I discuss.

FAIRNESS were found, compared with only 13 occurrences of EQUALITY. This correlation of results was replicated, admittedly to a lesser degree, in the growth sample, with 62 occurrences of FAIRNESS and 18 of EQUALITY. This big difference in frequency is what prompted me to concentrate my analytical efforts on FAIRNESS rather than EQUALITY, as it seemed to be a preferred and more relevant discursive device.

However, the ambivalence of *fairness* cannot be explained solely in terms of how well it can accommodate egalitarian and non-egalitarian perspectives. It is also greatly aided by the fact that *fairness* is a highly inclusive word. Being fair implies being non-partisan and being mindful of all interests, regardless of the inclusion or exclusion of egalitarianism. This semantic feature also explains the usefulness of *fairness* in neoliberal discourse, since any conflicts of interest that surface are semantically minimised under this cloak of inclusiveness. A clear example of this specific side of the conceptualisation of *fairness* is the expression *fair-minded*, which appears on several occasions in the data (four times in the growth corpus and once in the crisis corpus). For example:

> *and not as a partisan punch ball. Any <u>fair-minded</u> or neutral person would recognise my description of the background when the Government came to power*
>
> Graham Stuart, Conservative, Opposition, 2006

This aspect of its semantic structure not only positions *fairness* as a moral concept but also associates it with the possibility of being non-moral, in the sense that there is semantic scope to consider it a bearer of objectivity. This aspect of its meaning makes *fairness* a perfect candidate for neoliberal discourse. In the same way that the markets do not operate on the basis of ethics but only economic imperatives (as we saw in section 3.2), *fairness* is almost an overriding principle above morality which guides reciprocal relations and gives consistency and coherence to our moral spectrum (Sayer 2005b: 48). It is precisely this impartiality, regardless of what political principle or policy is being legitimised, that gives *fairness* 'unquestionable legitimacy' (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 166) as well as 'public recognition as an external constraint on government action' (Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 167).

Moreover, its legitimacy also arises from the fact that *fairness* is a vernacular word and as such useful in elite political discourse. This is an important semantic point. Contemporary politics is strongly influenced by the degree of acceptance of leaders, not only as politicians but also as individuals (Fairclough 2000a). This is relevant not only to how well-liked politicians are, but also to what degree they are identified as being with 'the people' as opposed to solely with their party or the state. Two prime examples of politicians who approached this popularity contest with success are Margaret Thatcher (Hall 1979) and Tony Blair (Fairclough 2000a). Vernacular words are bound to be important in political popuplar acceptance. One of the clearest expressions with a direct relation to this meaning of *fairness* is *fair deal* (Fairclough 2000a). The crisis data provides us with an example:

> *to ensure that customers get a fair deal, we will closely follow developments in the energy sector*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2011

In this example, the contractual parts are the energy companies (experiencing an increase in carbon tax)[48] and their customers (whose energy bills may increase because of this tax). The government is discursively presented as the broker between the two interest groups, promising to ensure that the companies[49] do not increase bills disproportionally. The companies need to pay for the damage they do to the environment, but the customers cannot be charged excessively (although it is assumed that some price increases will take place) for the reduction in profits that these new taxes represent. This type of contractual discourse has a long history in politics. It can be traced back to Theodore Roosevelt's 'New Deal' and it has repeatedly re-appeared

48 See Hirst 2018 for more details.

49 It is interesting to note here, however, the use of the actor *energy sector* in the actual example, not *companies*, which are largely backgrounded in the text. This seems to be a common pattern when dealing with the justification of the privatisation of energy supply in political discourse (for more on this topic see Farrelly 2019).

in, for example, New Labour's discursive strategies (Fairclough 2000a; 2000b)[50].

The findings of this section presented a detailed analysis of the semantic complexity of *fairness* in British English. The findings allow us to understand how the semantic scope of *fairness* can be exploited to undermine the structural nature of economic inequality which is a key feature of neoliberal governance (see section 3.5). The results prove the undeniable importance of *fairness* as a moral concept, being a centre piece in our everyday understanding of morality, in how we see ethical principles as a society as well as being an unquestionable source for political legitimicy. However, the analysis points to the important fact that regardless of this relevance of *fairness* in terms of value systems, this concept is semantically empty when it comes to economic inequality. *Fairness* is an ambivalent but very effective moral concept when it comes to the legitimisation of economic inequality, the analysis shows. As such, *fairness* presents a very viable semantic avenue for neoliberal discourse to justify the expanding naturalisation of increasing wealth inequality.

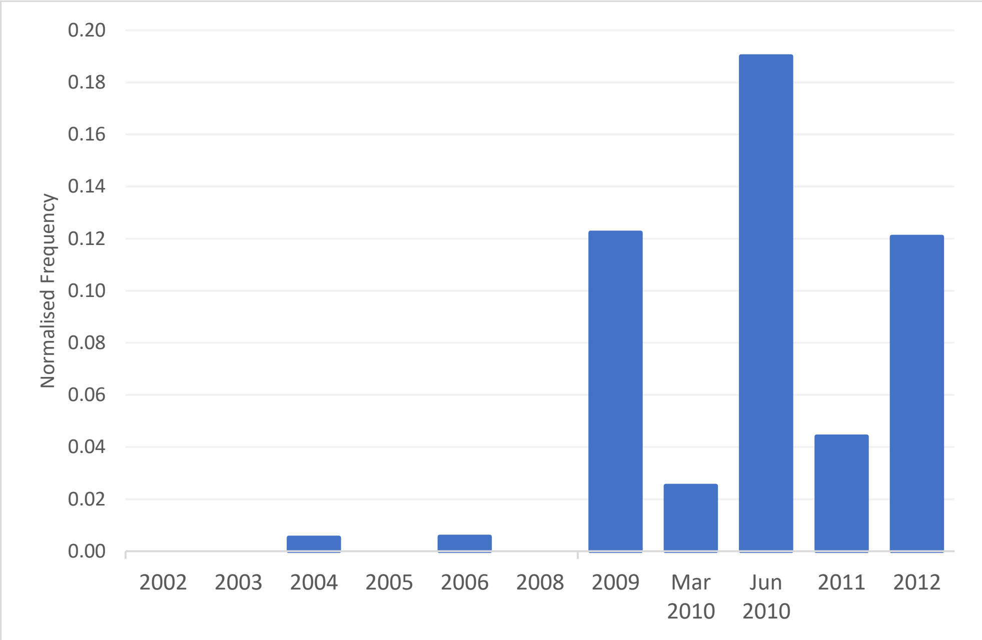
5.3 Frequency findings

This section explains the findings regarding the frequency of use of the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS. To see how common (or uncommon) the two were, the analysis compares the two corpora – growth and crisis – as two blocks. Moreover, to observe any tendencies across the years covered by the analysis it looks into specific developments, mostly within the crisis corpus, which is our focus of attention. I also draw some conclusions on the general uses of the lemmas that this initial analysis allowed me to see; namely, in terms of word forms. Finally, I relate these findings to the context that was outlined in chapter 3.

50 This is the only example from the crisis data of *fair deal*. In the growth data it is used on seven occasions, which shows that it was not often used in the period covered by the growth corpus (2002-2006) and was mostly abandoned after 2008.

5.3.1 Frequency findings: AUSTERITY

It is no surprise that AUSTERITY is a much more frequent lemma in the crisis corpus than in the growth corpus[51], as graph 1[52] shows. AUSTERITY appears only twice in the growth corpus compared with 97 appearances in the crisis corpus. The importance of this finding is partly that it confirms what seemed to be a logical assumption: that *austerity* was used as an overt discursive tool in the crisis period.



Graph 1 Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words) of AUSTERITY 2002-2012

However, this finding also tells us that AUSTERITY was not wholly absent from parliamentary debates before the crisis, as there are two examples in the growth corpus[53]. The preoccupation with affordability (as a prescription for low public spending) is an unavoidable aspect of neoliberal rationality and policy-making. Therefore, the idea of *austerity*, with its links to thriftiness (see section 5.1), could have been a plausible word to legitimise neoliberal

51 As I explained in section 4.2, the year 2007 was excluded from the analysis. Therefore, the graphs in this chapter do not represent a real description of the use of the KWs in that year.

52 The table containing the raw data for this graph can be found in appendix 6.

53 I will reflect on the content of these two examples in the growth corpus in the next chapter (section 6.3).

governance. However, this only happened after the crisis. It seems that it is only in a context of accepted economic hardship that the use of this word is possible, even though other latent semantic associations with thriftiness, for example, might have appeared in the period in the data representing normalised neoliberalism, 2002-2006. If one is going to make an economic case for reducing public spending (in terms of efficiency or sustainability, for example), that might work regardless of an accepted context of scarcity. However, *austerity* is not only an economic argument but a moral one, as we saw in section 5.1. As such, these moral imperatives necessitate strong semantic links to scarcity. The crisis provided this context. It permitted stronger discursive devices on public debt and social spending that had not been possible in the 1990s and 2000s (Farnsworth & Irving 2018).

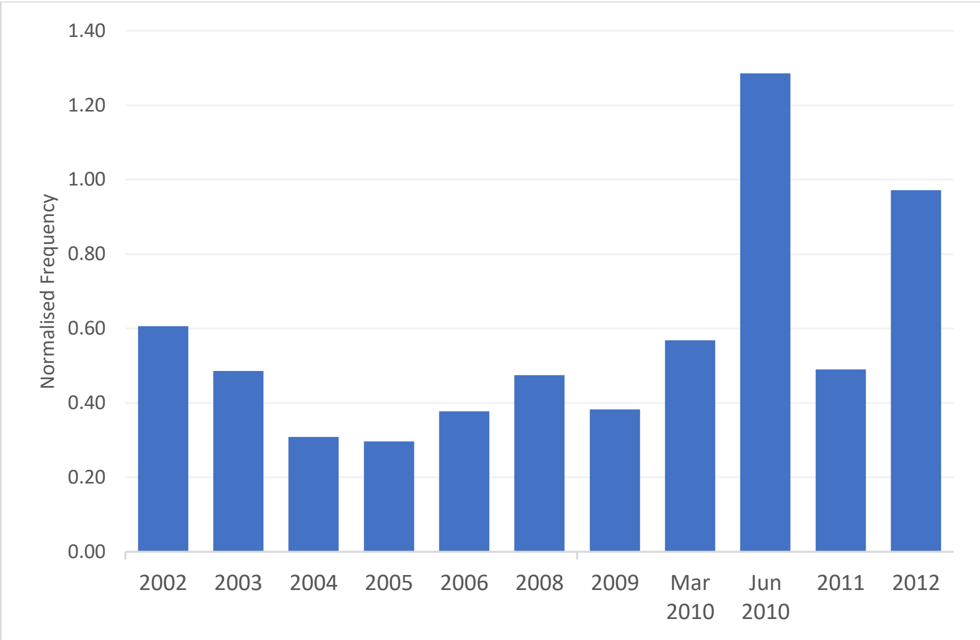
Furthermore, the initial fluctuating patterns shown by the data in the crisis corpus adheres to this correlation between *austerity* and dramaticism. The lemma was not used at all in the 2008 debate, even though by then the crisis was already taking shape: Northern Rock had been rescued just a month before the debate was held. It was not until the end of that year, however, that it became clear that the banking system at large was collapsing (Gamble 2009). By the 2009 debate, as we saw in section 3.7, there was a general appetite for a stimulus programme (Blyth 2013). It was at this point that the neoliberal principle of ever-diminishing public investment (amongst other principles) was scrutinised. It is precisely in this debate that we see AUSTERITY used for the first time in the crisis corpus, providing a new moral perspective to neoliberalism. The data suggests that in the following years, its frequency fluctuated but it was always present. After this introduction in 2009, AUSTERITY was much less used in March 2010. It returned in June 2010 (with the highest frequency in all the years analysed), it was again nearly extinguished in 2011, and it resurfaced again in 2012. Most likely, some of this fluctuation can be explained by whether or not policies that were invested in deficit reduction were being discussed. That would certainly explain the spike in June 2010, the first debate after the Coalition government came to power and cuts in public spending became very much part of their Budget narrative (even though some of these cuts were implemented later). It would also explain a higher degree of discussion around *austerity* in 2012, the year when the controversial tax cut (from 50p to 45p) for top earners took place at the same time as the reductions in public spending were starting to become a reality, in particular as a consequence of the controversial Welfare Reform Act (HM Government 2012).

However, the near absence (only five occurrences) of discussion around *austerity* in March 2010 is more difficult to explain. This was a temporary abandonment only, with *austerity* remaining a discursive feature and the most prominent policy point of reference throughout the crisis period. Indeed, as we saw in section 3.7, by 2010 there was a cross-party consensus on the need for deficit reduction and a clear continuation of neoliberal governance. As such, it would be logical to expect discussions around *austerity* to take place in the March 2010 debate, as the parties defend their positions on deficit reduction in view of the election and the democratic discussion it is assumed would entail.

This lack of engagement with the keyword could be interpreted as an acknowledgement that the electorate had little appetite for austerity at that time and neither party wanted to be associated with it due to the potential impact of its negative connotations on their chances in the upcoming general election. With this in mind, one could also argue that in June 2010, immediately after the general election, the government (and indeed opposition) is at its least accountable to the electorate and thus felt freer to beat the austerity drum. Considering that *austerity* was one of the concepts that would guide policy in the years to come, the absence of AUSTERITY from the March 2010 debates could be described as antidemocratic. The qualitative analysis of the occurrences of AUSTERITY provides more clues about the reasons for this fluctuating use. I explore this in the following chapter.

5.3.2 Frequency findings: FAIRNESS

As we saw in the previous sections, *fairness* is a well-established concept in political discourse. As such, it is not surprising to find ample use of the word in both corpora. However, there are clear differences in its relevance, both when comparing periods and when considering yearly patterns. Graph 2[54] shows that there is a much higher usage of the lemma FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus than in the growth corpus: 807 occurrences in the former (0.70 normalised) versus 378 occurrences in the latter (0.42 normalised). The examples of FAIRNESS in the growth corpus tend to decrease each year until 2006, when there is an increase. Conversely, in the crisis corpus (as was the case for AUSTERITY), use of the lemma fluctuates.



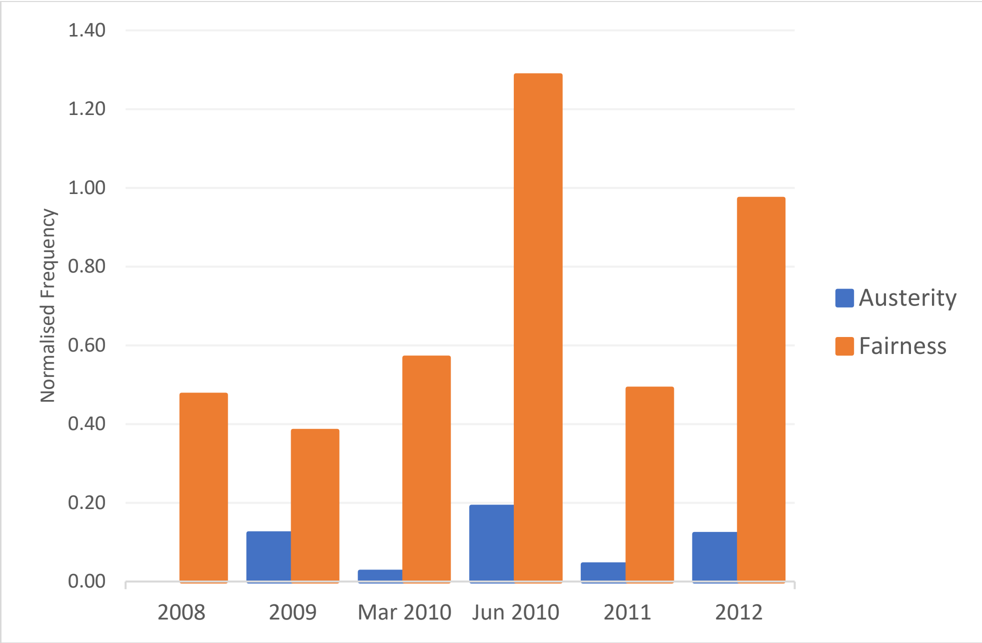
Graph 2 Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words) of FAIRNESS 2002-2012

It begins with a frequency of 92 in 2008: surprisingly, with a normalised frequency (0.47) that is similar to the normalised frequency for the whole growth corpus (0.42). There is a reduction in usage in 2009, followed by a spike in both debates in 2010, especially in June once the Coalition was in power. This latter debate is the one that presents the highest frequency of FAIRNESS overall.

A correlation of patterns starts to emerge in the crisis corpus. On the one hand, while Labour was in government (from 2008 until March 2010) the frequency tendencies of AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS move in opposite directions, as

54 The table with the raw data for this graph can be found in appendix 7.

shown in graph 3. We find that AUSTERITY was not used at all in 2008, appears in 2009 and then decreases (to only five occurrences) in March 2010; conversely, we find that FAIRNESS decreases from 2008 to 2009 and increases from 2009 to March 2010 (a tendency that continues into the June 2010 debate). On the other hand, once the Coalition is in government, the two lemmas follow parallel patterns, increasing from March 2010 to June 2010 (the debate in which both peak), decreasing in 2011, and increasing again in 2012. The parallelism of these tendencies could prove several points. Firstly, it shows that the use of both words is unstable and fluctuating in the crisis corpus. Secondly, this fluctuation seems to marry up with different discursive stages regarding explanations and solutions for the crisis. As we saw in the previous section (and in section 3.7), 2009 was relevant in terms of scrutinising neoliberalism, as stimulus programmes were implemented for a brief period. Within this context, legitimisations around the establishment of austerity (and, consequently, a crisis of debt rather than of growth and the subsequent continuation of neoliberal policy-making) as a predominant narrative were necessary, regardless of their fairness (indeed, 2009 is the year with the lowest frequency of FAIRNESS of all the crisis debates). However, once this narrative had been cemented, which was the case by 2010, when the main parties had agreed on the need for fiscal retrenchment, austerity needed to be far more finely tuned to represent how fairly or unfairly it was going to take place.



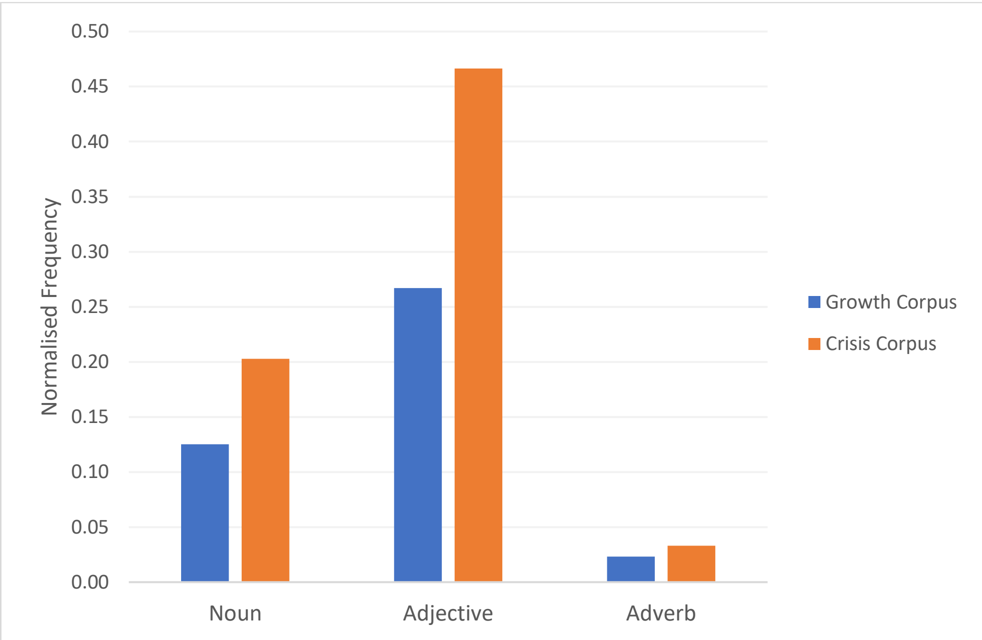
Graph 3 AUSTERITY versus FAIRNESS 2008-2012

5.3.3 Word-form patterns

As explained in chapter 4, in order to identify which uses of a word are predominant, it is necessary to look into the contextualisation of the word. To do so, I used collocates and concordances, and I discuss the findings in chapters 6 to 8. However, it is possible at this point to establish some general usage patterns for the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS by looking at the frequency of word forms. In the case of AUSTERITY, for example, we find far more occurrences of *austerity* (92 times) than *austere* (5 times). This tells us something about how the concept is phraseologically constructed and how this can affect our perception of it. Firstly, it tells us that the concept of *austerity* is more commonly used in a nominalised form, *austerity*, than as an adjective, *austere*. Nominalisation is a common linguistic resource; in fact, it is the most frequently used grammatical metaphor, in which processes (verbs) or properties (adjectives) are reworded metaphorically as nouns (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 656). It is a metaphorical device in the sense that in any nominalisation, there is a tendency to move from specific meanings to more general ones, and in this abstraction some semantic information is always lost (Fairclough 2003: 143-144). For example (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 657):

Technology is getting better → advances in technology

This is both a verbal and an adjectival nominalisation: the verb *is getting* and the adjective *better* are displaced by *advances*. With this grammatical change, the tense and modality of the verb, in addition to the comparative and positive evaluation present in *better*, are lost in *advances*. Moreover, *technology* loses some its meaning as it is transformed into a qualifier of the new head of the noun phrase (*advances*). In the same manner, *austere* loses some of its meaning when it is restricted to its metaphorical counterpart *austerity*, as it is a much more abstract concept when it is used as a noun. Not only this, but this nominalised form projects a focus on outcome, backgrounding the process involved in such outcome (Fairclough 2000a: 54). Conversely, FAIRNESS tends to be nominalised less often. As we can see in graph 4[55], which presents the frequency of FAIRNESS as a proportion of use for parts of speech (POS), adjectives are more common than nouns in both corpora.



Graph 4 Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words) of POS: FAIRNESS

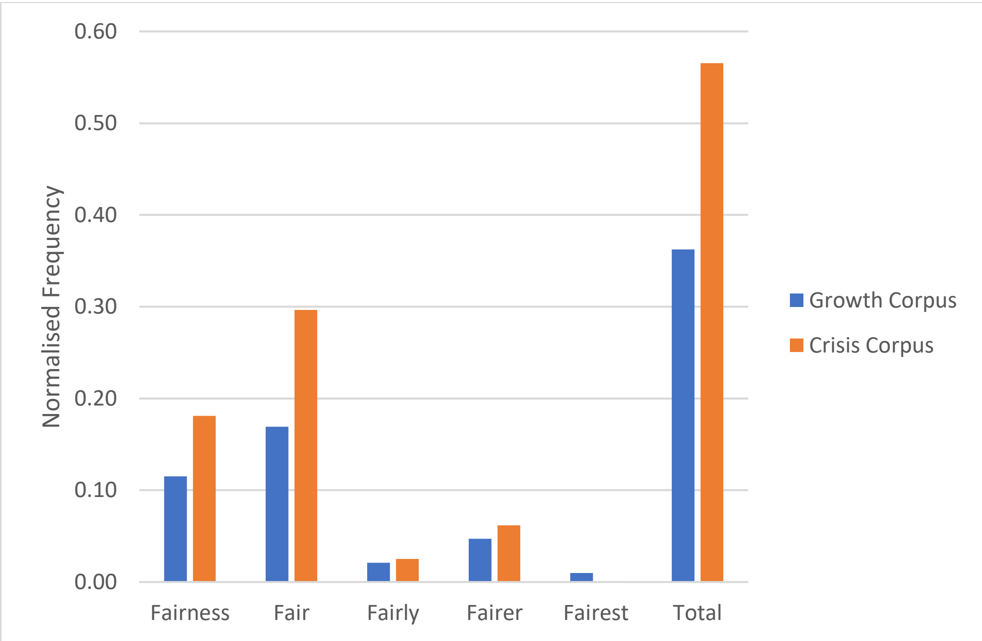
Moreover, adjectives represent the highest increase proportionally: 75%, compared with 63% (nouns) and 43% (adverbs). *Fair* is a less abstract word than *fairness*, and it tends to be more associated with everyday language. This

55 The table containing the raw data for this graph can be found in appendix 8.

points to the fact that the use of *fairness* is much more likely to be exploited for its association with everyday talk than as a principle. In other words, it is more likely to be used as a quality to determine the moral content of certain behaviours or actions (see section 5.2) than as an abstract concept to approach different views on justice. The opposite is true of *austerity*, where abstraction is almost always linguistically sought.

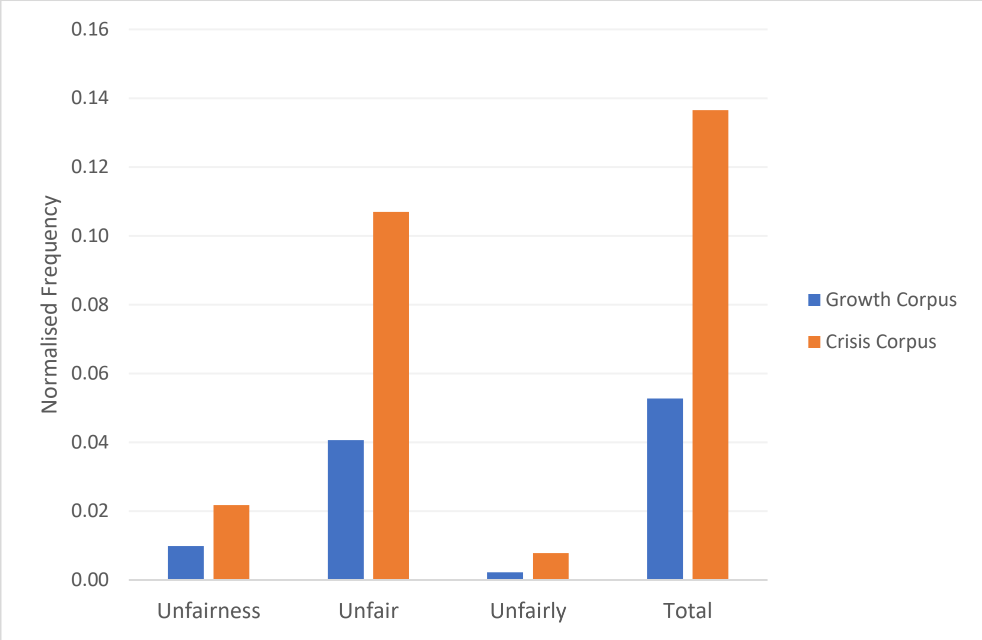
Furthermore, this means that *austerity* is more likely to function as a 'classifier', whereas *fairness* is more prone to appear as an 'epithet'. A classifier is a modifier that indicates a particular subclass, and it is usually fulfilled by a noun; for example, as in *toy trains* (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 319). On the other hand, an epithet modifies a noun to indicate some of its quality and is normally fulfilled by an adjective. An epithet can either indicate an objective property of the noun (*blue sky*), in which case it is called an experiential epithet, or it can indicate a subjective attitude towards a noun (*fantastic meal*), in which case it is called an interpersonal epithet (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 218). For both lemmas, these patterns of use seem to agree with general uses. The OED shows that compound phrases based on *fair* as an epithet are very common and presents a long list of them; for example, 'fair means' and 'fair comment'. However, it is much less likely to list *fairness* in compounds when it is working as a classifier, only mentioning 'fairness doctrine' and 'fairness opinion', both rare uses and specific to broadcasting and financial contexts. The opposite is true for *austerity*. The OED does not mention any common phrases using the adjective *austere* as an epithet, but plenty with the noun *austerity* as a classifier, especially when it refers to fiscal policy (for example, 'austerity budget', 'austerity clothing', 'austerity measures', 'austerity programme'). This is relevant because classifiers have a much stronger bond with the nouns they complement than epithets do. Take the example *austerity budget*. This implies that this is a particular type of *budget* determined by *austerity*, concentrating most of the semantic power in *austerity*, as the classifier has the tonic prominence (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 320). In other words, semantically we are not concentrating on the qualities of this budget (as we would do with the epithet use of *austere budget*) but assuming that *austerity* (in the abstract form) is part of this budget, unavoidably linked to it. On the other hand, when using the phrase *fair budget*, for example, semantically we are concentrating on *the budget*, qualifying it as *fair*. If the phrase *fairness budget* were used, this would represent a much stronger commitment (although abstract) to this value.

Finally, to complete this comparison between the semantic and grammatical effects of using the different word forms of AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS, it is important to note that in terms of morphology, FAIRNESS is a much more flexible lemma than AUSTERITY. For example, FAIRNESS allows for positive and negative polarity to be stated within the morphological structure of the word (*fair* versus *unfair*, for example). This capacity is exploited much more in the crisis corpus than in the growth corpus. As shown in graphs 5 and 6[56], there is an increase in both the positive and negative word forms of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus (when compared with the growth corpus).



Graph 5 Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words) for positive word forms of FAIRNESS

56 The tables containing the raw data for these graphs can be found in appendices 9 and 10.



Graph 6 Normalised frequency (per 1,000 words) for negative word forms of FAIRNESS

In addition, there is a greater proportional increase in the normalised frequency of negative word forms between growth and crisis corpora, compared to that of positive ones; negative polarity increases by 160% while positive polarity increases by 56%. Whilst one needs to exercise caution when dealing with smaller numbers[57], this is nevertheless an interesting finding: the overall increase of the lemma FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus point to an emphasis on moral legitimisation strategies in the crisis debates. However, the particularly noticeable increase of negative word forms of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus, in a context where both main parties had agreed to austerity governance, draws attention to the lack of commitment to fairness as a genuine political motivator (Fairclough & Fairclough 2011: 261). In other words, in a context where no real re-evaluation of neoliberal governance took place, moral disagreements between the parties in terms of the value of fairness can only be contextualised as superficial and disengaged with a profound re-consideration of the moral implications of policy-making.

This section presented the findings of the frequency analysis of AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS. The results add evidence to the literature that claimed that the 2008 crisis was a catalyst for the increase in use of overt invocation of

57 Smaller numbers, by definition, are more susceptible to larger increases in proportion.

moral concepts such as these two keywords, paving a morality and normative turn in neoliberal political legitimisation strategies (Jessop 2013; Bennett 2014; Forkert 2014; Jensen 2015; Kelsey and others 2016; Farnsworth & Irving 2018). These findings also highlight, considering the resilience of neoliberalism in spite of the crisis, the paradox of the non-moral nature of this paradigm (guided only, in theory, by the markets and economic imperatives) and its discursive need for morality to justify its governance, particularly in times of economic turmoil.

Apart from this, these results represent a particularly useful contribution in terms of the comparison of frequencies between AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS. The confirmation of the narrative of a crisis of debt (see section 3.8), was aided by the high frequency of AUSTERITY and lowest frequency of FAIRNESS in 2009 – whether austere policies were fair or not was not a useful discursive perspective to cement the austerity narrative. This initial disassociation between the two keywords points to a lack of discussion in terms of the negative consequences of fiscal retrenchment for economic inequality. Austerity governance scrutinity in terms of FAIRNESS does not come to fruition until after the Coalition was in government in June 2010, when both keywords increased in frequency.

5.4 Conclusions

In this chapter I presented an overview of how the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS are used in the data. Firstly, drawing a lexicographic analysis, I painted as accurate a picture as possible of the semantic complexity of both keywords and how this is relevant to political discourse. This initial analysis revealed a strong semantic ambiguity and clear connotative links to ethics in both lemmas. However, it also hinted at their tendencies to align with different ideological positionings. *Austerity* is more in tune with neoliberal and conservative values, whereas *fairness* is a term that the whole political spectrum struggles to adapt to their own project (Hall & O'Shea 2013: 7). Furthermore, *fairness* has a very complex relation with the concept of egalitarianism.

I then presented the results of the frequency analysis. I compared the growth and the crisis corpora, and compared the years within the crisis corpus. These quantitative findings tell us a story about before and after. Firstly, they clearly present the crisis as a catalyst for integrating *austerity* into the neoliberal discourse of affordability and public spending reduction. Affordability is an important component of neoliberal governance. However, affordability was not lexically represented by the lemma AUSTERITY in the growth corpus (although the lemma was not completely absent). The appearance of AUSTERITY in the 2009 debate, when neoliberalism was (briefly) being questioned, signifies the relevance of this keyword to the survival of this paradigm. Furthermore, the year 2010 may prove to be the one that means the most in terms of political economic change in the UK. In 2010, the conspicuous consumption that had dominated the previous decade was replaced by public and private austerity, which marked the beginning of the end of the welfare state as we know it (Hay 2010: 392). It is also in this year that the frequency patterns for AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS became entangled in a parallel fluctuation of use.

Finally, the morphological patterns of both words also provide clues about moral priorities during the crisis discourse. The nominalised form *austerity* dominates the use of this lemma, whereas adjectives dominate the use of FAIRNESS. The contrastive nature of these linguistic choices is significant. The imposing semantic nature of *austerity* is in stark contrast with the vernacular nature of *fair*. In other words, *austerity* highlights the prescriptive nature of the concept, whereas *fair* feels more like a tool for compromise and inclusion than a moral statement. Moreover, the higher proportion of negative word forms of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus also contributes to the relativisation of fairness as a moral restrictor of policy: there was, in reality, little disagreement in the need for austerity governance.

The next 3 chapters focus on the analysis of the two lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS in detail. I turn my attention to AUSTERITY in the following chapter, and then present the results of the analysis of FAIRNESS in chapters 7 and 8.

6 AUSTERITY GOVERNANCE: NORMATIVITY OR NORMALISATION?

In the previous chapter I presented the general patterns of use for the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS in the two corpora, focusing on their semantic scope, their links to political discourse and their frequency of use. In chapters 6, 7 and 8, I present the qualitative findings on the specific semantic contextualisations of the two keywords in the data. In this chapter I focus on the findings for AUSTERITY. I do this in several steps. Firstly, I look for the most common collocates that co-occur with the search word (see section 4.5.2 for a reminder of what collocates are and how they were calculated). This allows me to introduce the themes and grammatical structures that most commonly appeared in the surroundings of AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus, and what can be inferred from these results. After that, in section 6.2, I look at the introduction of the keyword in the debates. Using the dispersion plot tool, I analyse patterns in how early or late in the debates AUSTERITY is first used. I then look at specific examples of this initial introduction to get a sense of the how the concept emerges in each debate and observe any differences or similarities across the years. Then, in section 6.2, I focus in depth on the two examples of *austerity* in the growth corpus, analysing the discursive patterns that surround them and contextualising them in terms of normalised neoliberal governance (see section 3.4).

In sections 6.4 to 6.6 I deal with the main focus of the analysis: the concordance lines of AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus. I use the collocates as a guide to point to the most common semantic contextualisation of the lemma in the crisis corpus. I present the results in thematic order. In section 6.4, I focus on how *austerity* is linked to time-related collocates. In section 6.5, I explore the progressive decrease in this particular association over the years, finding instead a solid association with government action. Finally, in section 6.6, I explain how *austerity* is commonly evaluated within metadiscursive references and dramatic prosody. I end the chapter, by making sense of the results in the context of the political economic background presented in chapter 3.

6.1 The collocates of AUSTERITY

As we saw in section 4.5.2, collocates (words that frequently co-occur together) allow us to observe how certain words are contextualised and, as such, what kinds of meanings and uses are attached to them most frequently. Table 2 presents a list of the higher-scoring collocates of AUSTERITY according to MI and LL scores, ranked by LL score. It also shows the total number of occurrences of the collocations (see again section 4.5.2 for an explanation of the statistical measures used). A wider correlation of collocates is presented in appendix 3[58].

Table 2 Collocates of AUSTERITY (crisis corpus), ranked by LL

Rank	Word	LL	MI	Occurrences
1	PROGRAMME	50.32	8.41	9
2	AGE	47.14	8.63	8
3	MEASURES	35.11	6.86	10
4	PERIOD	22.30	7.58	5
5	OF	21.96	4.12	45
6	GOVERNMENT'S	14.94	6.46	5
7	TIME	9.39	5.27	6
8	AN	8.95	4.84	8
9	HIS	4.91	4.71	5
10	ABOUT	4.04	4.25	7

The table presents ten collocates of AUSTERITY. We can see three different strands of meaning by looking at these collocates. Firstly, *austerity* is

58 There is no list of collocates for the growth corpus because there were only two instances of AUSTERITY.

contextualised in terms of time, since we find the collocates *age*, *period* and *time*. Secondly, it is also contextualised in terms of government action, since we find generic words (*programme* and *measures*) that seem to point to fiscal policy. Thirdly, there is also the tendency to find possessives: *his* and *government's*. However, apart from these clear semantic avenues, we find mostly grammatical words. This seems to indicate that *austerity* is being used with a high degree of grammaticalisation (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 46-47). Meaning is performed in languages in different ways, moving across different levels of grammaticalisation and lexicalisation. The idea of *negative*, for example, is lexicalised in the word *failed*, but grammaticalised in the structure *didn't succeed* (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 46). Looking at the table of collocates, we can see that AUSTERITY is surrounded by grammatical words (*of*, *an*, *about*, *his*) and nouns. In this contextualisation, *austerity* is most likely working as part of a prepositional phrase or as a pre-modifier of a noun. These limitations are corroborated by the lack of verbs in the list. Even if we expand the collocation list to include seven positions to the right and seven positions to the left, we do not find any collocate that is a content verb and passes both statistical tests. We find only the auxiliary verbs *have* and *are*; both with high MI score but very low LL score. This is relevant because when concepts are highly grammaticalised, pure lexical properties are lost in the process. For example, in the phrase *an age of austerity*, the meaning is shared between *age* and *austerity*; when we find *austerity* in such expressions as *austerity is* or *austerity makes*, there is a grammatical need to define *austerity* more precisely. Finally, and most relevant for our purposes, AUSTERITY does not seem to be directly linked to the lemma FAIRNESS because it does not seem to occur often in its vicinity. We saw in section 5.3.2 that there seems to be a correlation between the frequencies of the two lemmas, particularly after 2010. However, judging by the collocates found here, AUSTERITY is hardly ever semantically related to FAIRNESS.

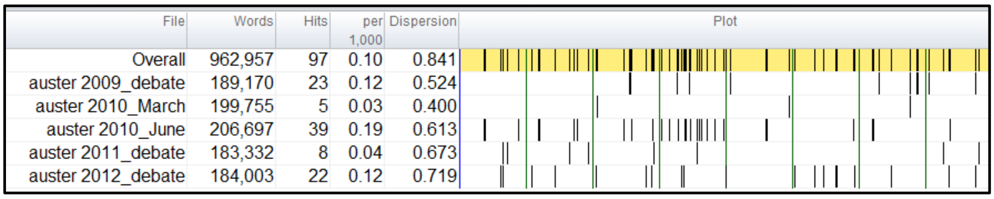
These are decontextualised results; to understand them fully, a concordance analysis is needed. Nevertheless, the findings testify to the ambiguity that determines the semantic scope of *austerity*. As we saw in section 5.1, this keyword can be evaluated as something positive or negative, and it can be presented as cause or effect. The semantic contradictions that are present in the collocates' themes (time versus government action), combined with the lemma's tendency towards abstraction, seem to be geared towards exploiting the ambiguity of this keyword in the crisis corpus. However, this ambiguity does not engage with certain semantic associations identified in the previous chapter. The collocates do not point to a contextualisation of *austerity* in terms of negative effects on living standards. Neither is there a clear connection with morality, in terms of either debt itself or fairness. These semantic associations can appear in more subtle and more complex ways than collocates alone. However, this initial approach to this keyword points to a rather neutral and abstract semantic standpoint. These semantic tendencies, at the very least, indicate an unaccountable representation of austerity governance. That is, neither its negative impact (increased hardship) nor its inadequacy as a solution to the crisis (see section 3.8) are overtly engaged with or evaluated by any of the parties participating in the debates.

These initial findings point again, as we saw in the previous chapter (see section 5.3), to a lack of scrutiny in terms of the negative consequences of austerity governance for economic inequality. The results show a lack of semantic association between AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS or indeed any other collocates related to the negative consequences of austerity governance in terms of living standards. Instead, the analysis provides details of the semantic association of AUSTERITY with time related collocates and with generic words associated with government action. This adds evidence to the relevance of these patterns in the crisis management discourse (Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017; Anstead 2018).

6.2 Introducing AUSTERITY in the debates

As a starting point for the qualitative analysis, I wanted to look into the initial uses of the lemma each year to see how they were introduced in the debate. To do so, I first analysed the dispersion plot (Table 3) for AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus to visualise the initial occurrences. I then made sense of its positioning by looking at the specific examples in the data[59].

Table 3 Dispersion plot: AUSTERITY (crisis corpus) [60]



File	Words	Hits	per 1,000	Dispersion	Plot
Overall	962,957	97	0.10	0.841	
auster 2009_debate	189,170	23	0.12	0.524	
auster 2010_March	199,755	5	0.03	0.400	
auster 2010_June	206,697	39	0.19	0.613	
auster 2011_debate	183,332	8	0.04	0.673	
auster 2012_debate	184,003	22	0.12	0.719	

As shown in table 3, in both 2009 and March 2010, the keyword is introduced in the third section of the debate (each section is separated by a green vertical line). This means that it is not part of the initial speech by the Labour Chancellor. In the 2009 debate, George Osborne, the shadow Chancellor, introduces *austerity* in his initial speech. In fact, Mr Osborne is the first person to use the word *austerity* at all in the crisis corpus:

> *We have moved from the age of prosperity to an age of austerity, but the leadership of the Labour party has been completely left behind by events.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Opposition, 2009

Interestingly, three of the five occurrences of AUSTERITY in March 2010 (see section 5.3.1) do not belong to the main parties, but to the SNP. Moreover, the node word is used to oppose austerity governance. For example:

59 One is able to organise the concordances in any specific debate by order of appearance.

60 As I explained in section 4.5.1, the dispersion plot function allows us to observe where the search word occurs in the files that make up the corpus. The columns represent (from left to right): the file name (the year of the debate in chronological order); the total number of words in the file; the number of occurrences of the search word; the normalised frequency; and a dispersion value (which shows how spread out or concentrated the occurrences are in the file). The plot shows the locations of the uses of the words (represented by vertical lines) from the beginning of the text (the left-hand edge of the plot) to the end (the right-hand edge). As such, the first line that appears in the plot represents the first time the word is used. This allows one to get a sense of how early or how late the search word was introduced in the text. For more information regarding dispersion see Scott 2019c.

> *but it is not austerity that Scotland needs and it is certainly not austerity that the UK economy needs.*
>
> Stewart Hosie, SNP, Opposition, March 2010

The other two examples are from Labour (although not in the initial speech) and use *austerity* in the context of the Second World War:

> *My election to Parliament was a source of pride to my parents, who lived through the war years and the years of <u>austerity</u>. My father was a political animal. He took such a close interest in politics, particularly Labour politics*
>
> David Clelland, Labour, Government, March 2010

> *let us presume that we are in 1951, and a Conservative Government have been elected not on an <u>austerity</u> programme, but on a programme of lifting rationing and bringing hope and aspiration to the 1950s. That is what they were elected on. They were elected on the back of the wartime lend-lease and debt*
>
> David Blunkett, Labour, Government, March 2010

Having introduced *austerity* in 2009, the Conservatives do not use it at all in March 2010. Furthermore, in the June 2010 debate it is Labour that uses *austerity* for the first time. This occurs fairly early on, in the first section of the plot:

> *whom he has chosen to bear the brunt of cutting the deficit. The area most affected by his <u>austerity</u> policy, where people will see the biggest fall in average incomes*
>
> Harriet Harman, Labour, Opposition, June 2010

Labour introduces the topic once again in 2012:

> *The Government's <u>austerity</u> plan has led to lower tax receipts and further downward revisions of growth, which is exactly the opposite of what we need.*
>
> Ann McKechin, Labour, Opposition, 2012

However, it is the Conservatives who introduce it in 2011:

> *Governor of the Bank of England was before the Treasury Committee two weeks ago, he and his team confirmed that without a package of fiscal austerity measures, this country would be borrowing in the international markets at a rate 3% higher than we currently are.*
>
> Jesse Norman, Conservative, Government, 2011

Considering these findings, we can make the following observations. Although the Conservatives were the first to mention *austerity* in the debate (in 2009), and both main parties refused to use it to describe government policy in March 2010, it was Labour who most commonly first engaged with the word in subsequent debates. Incidentally, this was during the years where there is a higher frequency of the node word in the data (June 2010 and 2012, see section 5.3.1). On the other hand, the Conservatives were the first to use it in 2011, when it is clear that the debate was less engaged with its use (see section 5.3.1). Interestingly, it is also clear that the word is purposely left out of Chancellor speeches, which implies that the concept of *austerity* was not pursued as a flagship legitimisation strategy.

This analysis of the first introduction of AUSTERITY in the debates corroborated the findings seen in section 5.3: the use of AUSTERITY across the crisis years was accommodated to cement the narrative of a crisis of debt as a consensus across the two main parties. It shows how it was the Conservatives who first introduced the concept in the crisis discourse in 2009 in order to reiterate the need for deficit reduction. However, both parties completely abandoned its use just before the elections, avoiding scrutiny of the implementation of deficit reduction and its consequences. The analysis also shows that it is actually Labour who introduced the concept more often in the debates, but only once whilst in opposition.

6.3 Pre-crisis AUSTERITY

As we saw in the previous section, the word *austerity* appears only twice in the growth corpus. Although this is a small number statistically, the instances are relevant to how the emergence of austerity discourses is set out in the data.

First of all, the fact that the keyword is present in the growth corpus at all tells us that it was not altogether absent in the years before the crisis. Admittedly, its contextualisation does not seem to be directly linked to morality in terms of self-restraint or debt. However, it is included in traditionally normalised neoliberal narratives. The two examples are as follows:

> *Intriguingly, they show roughly no change in public sector productivity in 1996; a 1 per cent improvement in 1997; and those were years of austerity in public expenditure-another 1 per cent improvement in 1998. As we get into the years in which the Chancellor increased spending, however, productivity fell by 2 per cent in 1999; by 1 per cent in 2000; and by 2 per cent in 2001. It should surprise no one that if money is thrown at a system faster than the system can absorb it, the system will not spend it wisely*
>
> Peter Luff, Conservative, Opposition, 2004

In this example, *austerity* is simply used as a synonym for low public spending. Mr Luff's point is that subsequent increases in public spending have reduced productivity in the public sector. In the first examples that he mentions (1996 and 1997), spending was lower than in the years that followed. In the second example, however, the effect of the use of *austerity* is that of a future threat:

> *The tax burden has increased, but we are not getting value for money out of the huge increases in the spending of taxpayers' money that we have seen in the past few years. In conclusion, I shall return to how The Economist sees matters. It states: Mr Brown's reversion to tax-and-spend, together with the ever-rising burden of regulation, is starting to do increasing damage to work incentives and business interests. The price for past excess, both by consumers and by the chancellor, will be future slower growth. As the feel-good factor fades, the politics of plenty will give way to the politics of austerity.*
>
> Richard Spring, Conservative, Opposition, 2006

The point Mr Spring is making (by paraphrasing an article from *The Economist*) is that the excesses of the past (too much tax and too much public and private spending, metonymically constructed with the figures of the *consumers* and the *Chancellor*) will bring about *future slower growth*. *Austerity* then is used as an antonym of *plenty* in the contrastive parallel structure *the politics of plenty … the politics of austerity.* The semantic association of *austerity* here is not with morality or even debt, but simply with less access to resources as a consequence of smaller economic output. The price to pay (or the punishment) is lower economic input, not austerity itself. The phrase *politics of austerity*, however, could be interpreted as either a reduction in public spending or simply as a situation where there are fewer or scarce resources.

The ideas of affordability and frugality, which have been constant in neoliberal governance, are well represented. It is apparent that negative prosody surrounds both taxation and public spending. In the second example, *tax* is used as a pre-modifier of *burden*; in the first example, public spending is associated with *waste* in the metaphorical expression *if money is thrown at a system faster than the system can absorb it, the system will not spend it.* Moreover, in the second example public spending is characterised as an individualised endeavour, depicting tax as money that is taken away from taxpayers (*huge increases in the spending of taxpayers' money*) instead of portraying taxation as the collective exercise that it more accurately represents. In addition, the expression *value for money* is used explicitly in the second example. Such a representation of taxation and public spending simplifies fiscal policy into an everyday economic transaction, where the contribution of *the taxpayer* is seen as the only provision for the system.

The analysis of these uses of *austerity* in the growth corpus show that this keyword was used within normalising legitimisation strategies (economic imperatives over social needs). *Austerity* was associated with traditional neoliberal concepts such as *taxation as a burden* and the need for public services to be efficient (*value for money*). The keyword, the findings in this section show, was not surrounded by normativity in terms of morality or even debt. Austerity meant instead a simple lack of resources or economic outputs.

6.4 AUSTERITY and time

As we saw in section 6.1, the themes of time and government action both seem to be important in the contextualisation of the lemma AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus. This section engages with the analysis of the concordances of these patterns. However, when looking into these concordances, one of the most interesting metadata features is that there is a clear and dedicated diachronic use of the two themes. The time-related collocates tend to appear towards the beginning of the corpus, and the ones related to government action tend to appear towards the end. The first collocate to appear is *age*. This is the strongest collocate related to time, and it is ranked second overall (after *programme*, although *age* has a higher MI score). *Age* exclusively collocates with *austerity* in the 2009 debate. Conversely, the collocates related to government action (*programme*, *measures*) are used only in the period after the change of government. We find seven examples in June 2010 (three for *programme*[61], four for *measures*), six in 2011 (three for *programme*, three for *measures*) and five in 2012 (two for *programme*, three for *measures*). This correlation between collocates and years points to a progressive reduction in the semantic uncertainty surrounding the lemma AUSTERITY. Although ambiguity seems to be a primary feature of the time-related collocates, it is less present in the action collocates, where fiscal policy is directly linked to AUSTERITY. In concordances 1 we find the collocate *age*:

N	Concordance		
1	have moved from the age of prosperity to an	**age** of	**austerity**, but the leadership of the Labour party
2	be a national debate about how we tackle an	**age** of	**austerity.** We all recognise that the economic
3	is a call for a national debate about the	**age** of	**austerity.** That reflects the fact that Conservative
4	we can deliver quality public services in an	**age** of	**austerity.** The Government, however, continue to
5	on certain things. They say that they want an	**age** of	**austerity.** It is a strange sort of austerity when they
6	that they cannot run away from. That is not an	**age** of	**austerity**: it is just not fair. There is a choice
7	ago. As a means of encouraging his "new	**age** of	**austerity"-his** words, not mine-and to deal with the
8	change of direction" to deal with the new	**"age** of	**austerity"** . We need a plan for economic recovery

Concordances 1 *Age* of *austerity* (crisis corpus)

There is no doubt that in these concordances *austerity* is characterised as being epochal, signifying an important and distinctive era that is probably

61 There is only one occurrence of *programme* in March 2010.

going to last for a long time and be associated with historical change. However, although there is a sense of urgency, we can never get a clear sense of whether *austerity* itself refers to a scarcity of resources or a reduction in public spending (that is, fiscal policy). The inconsistency in meaning, in addition to the transcendentality of *austerity* that is implied in the concordances of *age of austerity*, is well exemplified by the first ever appearance of *austerity* in the crisis corpus. This was used by George Osborne, the then Conservative shadow Chancellor, in 2009:

> *We have moved from the age of prosperity to an age of austerity, but the leadership of the Labour party has been completely left behind by events. There should be a sensible debate in this Parliament, now, about how we can deliver decent public services in a period of tight spending control. We should be discussing how to get better value for money now that the cupboard is bare. We should be deciding – and perhaps have a debate between the parties – on the best way of tackling the long-term drivers of public expenditure, such as unproductive services, welfare dependency and family breakdown*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Opposition, 2009

In terms of semantics, *austerity* moves in this example from being the ambiguous epoch that we have just discussed (*age of austerity*) to being directly associated with *tight spending control*, this being a clear reference to fiscal policy. It is then associated with the idea of a lack of resources by the metaphor *the cupboard is bare*. Finally, the focus returns to *austerity* as fiscal policy, once again referring to *drivers of public expenditure*. The ambiguity that is present in this example is not limited to *austerity* as scarcity or as deficit reduction. In addition, in the expression *the cupboard is bare*, Mr Osborne is overtly establishing a comparison between the difficulties of a government's finances and those of an indebted household, equating public debt with private debt. This is especially important when one considers that this is the first appearance of the lemma AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus. Exploiting such household metaphors to compare the urgency and difficulties of austerity governance with those of a family facing financial hardship has been acknowledged as one of the most common rhetorical devices that have been used to legitimise austerity governance (see section 3.8). The success of this metaphor lies in two factors. Firstly, it simply downsizes the complexities of fiscal policy. A national economy does not work in the same way as a household budget, because in the national economy there are no straightforward relations between income (revenue), spending and debt (as there are in the household setting). As Hopkin and Rosamond put it (2017: 646):

> ill-informed voters struggling with the complexity and abstraction of macroeconomics – difficulties trained economists themselves often fail to grasp – are likely to shun abstract concepts such as aggregate demand and liquidity preference for the 'concrete thinking' of the household budget. In the household, a decline in economic activity is best dealt with by austerity, since deficits will not have any stimulus effect on revenue. An inability to conceptualise and observe the economy as a whole will lead to the erroneous conclusion that economy-wide spending cuts are necessary in a downturn.

Secondly, the metaphor transforms *austerity* into a resonant narrative 'that makes sense or is in some way recognisable at a personal level' (Mulderrig 2009: 41). Moreover, this analogy places Mr Osborne with 'the people'; he is sharing the experiences of many families up and down the country. He is with them, not with the state or with the Party (Hall 1979). This is an important discursive resource because it plays an important part in political legitimisation (as we saw in section 5.2.3).

Furthermore, once this metaphorical link has been established, the evaluation of urgency and epochal importance can be reinforced. In Mr Osborne's previous example, this is represented in the phrase *from the age of prosperity to an age of austerity.* There is a 'then' in the past (*prosperity*) and there is a 'now' in the present (*austerity*), which is neatly framed by the use of the present perfect (*we have moved, has been left*) and the adverb *now*, in addition to the strong deontic modality in the repeated use of *should*. The time-bound parallel structure is reminiscent of the equivalent identified in the growth corpus: *the politics of plenty will give way to the politics of austerity* (see section 6.3 Mr Spring's example). However, this presentation of urgency is riddled with contradictions, as the following two examples show:

> *Britain needs a '<u>complete change of direction</u>' to deal with the <u>new</u> '<u>age of austerity</u>'. We need a plan for economic recovery based on savings and ownership, not borrowing and debt*
>
> Tobias Ellwood, Conservative, Opposition, 2009
> (paraphrasing David Cameron's speech, hence quotation marks)

> *Over the past 10 years, the central argument has been that the Government could always afford these big <u>increases in public spending</u>: increases of 4, 5 or 6 per cent. <u>We have argued against</u> that, and in doing so have been portrayed as slashers and burners of public services. We could not afford those increases then, and we cannot afford them now. The question now is how we can deliver quality public services in an <u>age of austerity</u>. The Government, however, continue to search for the old dividing lines, trying to pretend that we are the party that cuts public spending while they are entirely different*
>
> David Gauke, Conservative, Opposition, 2009

These two examples show the tensions between the old and the new within the Conservative Party as they attempt to reinvent neoliberal values. The excerpts claim that something *new* and drastic is required (*complete change of direction*). However, at the same time, Mr Gauke argues that the Conservatives *have* (always) *argued against increases in public spending*, implying that the right policy was the same before and after the crisis. As Joseph (2013: 43) argues when trying to untangle another complex concept, *resilience*, 'from a policy perspective, all that matters is the idea that we live in a changed world'. If this is established, then what this change is and what it might require can be much more obtuse, and ambivalent concepts such as *austerity* can exist within successful legitimisation strategies.

The parallelisms between austerity governance and other economically challenging situations does not end with the household metaphor discussed above. The austere policies followed at the time of the Second World War are also brought into the discursive comparison, as illustrated in the following example:

> *I mentioned the generation of those who are 80 and over, and I mentioned the* <u>*savings culture.*</u> *There is a culture in the British spirit that says that when we are up against it,* <u>*we will go without certain items*</u> *to make sure that we get things right. We saw that in the wartime spirit in the second world war, and we have seen it on other occasions. The British public are* <u>*intelligent enough and tough enough*</u> *to know that we are going into a period of great* <u>*austerity*</u>*. They want honesty from their politicians and their Government. If there are difficult choices to make, they want to see those choices clearly laid before them.*
> *Yesterday's Budget was dishonest. It deferred until after the general election a lot of tax cuts and swingeing impositions on people who are not the wealthiest in the country*
>
> Angela Browning, Conservative, Opposition, 2009

The evaluation used in this example is quite remarkable. By using value-laden adjectives (*tough*, *honesty*) and using *we* as an inclusive pronoun, it implies that being austere is a desirable thing and that this view is shared amongst the population. However, the Second World War and the 2008 crisis are two very different scenarios. What happened in 2008 was not a sudden lack of resources. The aim was not to preserve resources so that everybody could have a minimum, as was the case in the austerity of the 1930s (see section 5.1.3); instead, there was a political will to reduce the public deficit as a means to return to economic growth. This had quite the opposite effect in terms of resources, poverty and inequality (as explained in section 3.7). However, this discursive strategy works by overtly reiterating the immoral nature of debt and the moral nature of thrift (*savings culture*, *we will go without certain items*). As we saw in section 5.1.2, this is a big part of our common understanding of debt morality (admittedly, with highly problematic contradictions). Moreover, this example also presents a romanticised sense of nostalgia for a simpler and more frugal time in the past where people 'did more with less', where more authentic and virtuous lives were led outside the binge of credit-fuelled consumerism (Forkert 2014; Jensen 2015). The fact that this dependency on credit has been the engine of growth is, of course, left out of the equation.

The findings in this section reveal the importance of the collocation *age of austerity* at the beginning of the crisis period. It provides further evidence to the key role this pattern played in the establishment and consolidation of the narrative of a crisis of debt at the beginning of the crisis years (Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017; Anstead 2018). This collocation, the qualitative analysis of the concordances finds, encapsulates a variety of semantic ambiguities. Firstly, it shows, once again in the analysis (see also section 5.1) the importance of the household metaphor in the consolidation of deficit reduction and the debt-ridden explanation of the crisis. Secondly, the contextualisation of *age of austerity* is very clearly normative: an epochal change is required. However, this normativity is in contrast to the proposed solution: instead of demanding something different, the same neoliberal reduction in public spending is considered necessary. The previous lack of full implementation of the neoliberal deficit efficiency is the actual problem to be tackled (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013; 2014).

6.5 Towards a (phraseological) normalised AUSTERITY

So far in this chapter, I have presented the significant semantic ambivalence that surrounds the lemma AUSTERITY in the concordances of *age of austerity*. I have shown that there is an ambivalent relationship between scarcity and deficit reduction, between private and public debt, and between past and current austerities, which are at the same time contextualised prosodically as epochal and as a matter of urgency. However, the use of *age* disappears after 2009. Indeed, we find a progressive decrease in epochal associations. The next collocate that appears in the chronology of the same time frame is *period*, which collocates with *austerity* twice in 2009, twice in June 2010 and once in 2012. We also find that *time* is used only after the general elections: on three occasions in June 2010 and twice in 2012. It is almost as if the time frame into which *austerity* is contextualised is progressively reduced, since *an age* seems much longer than *a period*, and *time* seems much shorter than *a period*. Moreover, they are all vague references to length. There is plenty of room for ambiguity about how long *an age*, *a period* or *a time* lasts. Indeed, none of the main parties make use of a more specific timeframe. It is only such parties as the DUP and the SNP that do so in expressions such as *three or four years of austerity* or *10 years of austerity*.

How time is managed around *austerity* is also influenced by phraseological patterns. For example, as we saw in concordances 1, *age* and *austerity* are always linked in the same phrase structure. *Austerity* is always used as a post-modifier within a prepositional phrase. This phraseological pattern is repeated in the use of *period*, as shown in concordances 2:

N	Concordance		
1	to know that we are going into a **period** of great	**austerity.**	They want honesty from their politicians
2	in real-terms public expenditure as a **period** of	**austerity?**	My right hon. Friend the Member for
3	of how we get growth emerging from a **period** of	**austerity**,	and I will try to answer that. First,
4	theme is fairness. Of course, we are in a **period** of	**austerity**,	but every part of society must make a
5	we are all in it together in this country in a **period** of	**austerity**,	because after this Budget we clearly are

Concordances 2 *Period* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

The bond between *period* and *austerity* in this structure is very strong. This structure is characterised by complex relations entangled in polysemic interpretations (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 334). This is because the preposition *of* is highly grammaticalised; as such, its lexical meaning and that of the modifier it is linked to (*austerity*, in our case) is very dependent on what precedes it (*age* or *period*, in our case) (Downing & Locke 2006: 547). In other words, the prosody of these concordances is determined by the sense of time, and by the fact that the head of the noun phrases (*age* and *period*) semantically dominate *austerity*. The strength of this bond, however, is reduced in the case of *time*, the collocate that appears in the later debates:

N	Concordance		
1	principles in the Budget even in a **time** of	**austerity-a**	**time** of "We're all in it together"-and
2	Keynes taught us about the dangers of fiscal	**austerity**	at a **time** of global downturn. This Budget
3	of 1909 and if it shows fairness at a **time** of fiscal	**austerity**,	they should by all means vote for it. But if
4	they wish. But I recognise that at a **time** of national	**austerity**,	when public sector workers are
5	to pre-trend levels. At this **time** of stagnation and	**austerity**,	what is the Government's priority? Is it

Concordances 3 *Time* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

Here, the use of *austerity* as a post-modifier is more flexible. Other words that influence the meaning of the overall phrase (such as *fiscal*, *national* or *stagnation*) are included. It is also clear that there is less association with *austerity* as an epoch; it is much more unequivocally linked to a fiscal policy based on deficit reduction for a shorter period. The phrase *at a time of* refers to shorter periods of time, because the preposition *at* is usually used to refer to time references such as hours, whereas *in* (as in the case of *age* and *period*) refers to longer stretches of time, such as months or years.

Moreover, as we saw at the beginning of 6.4, the collocates related to government action and fiscal policy, *measures* and *programme*, are used exclusively after the Coalition took office. The phraseological patterns we have seen so far in the time collocates are largely absent in the use of the collocates *programme* and *measures*. In other words, *austerity* moves from commonly being a prepositional post-modifier of time related collocates to a classifier of government action collocates as we can see in concordances 4 and concordances 5[62]. As we saw in section 5.3.3, classifiers have a very strong bond with their heads as well as concentrating the tonic prominence in the meaning of the phrase. This notes a change in the correlation of semantic weight since as a post-modifier, as we saw earlier, it is time that was semantically more relevant.

N	Concordance
1	Government have been elected not on an **austerity** **programme,** but on a programme of
2	. The Chancellor has adopted a **programme** of **austerity.** After the war, rationing continued
3	war, rationing continued under a **programme** of **austerity.** We really were all in it together, unless
4	myths have been peddled, designed to justify an **austerity** **programme** so severe that it is
5	but is he not concerned about the impact that any **austerity** **programme** might have? Although
6	to stay at the same level, without the fiscal **austerity** **programme** that was introduced by
7	, go-slow Budget. The Chancellor's extreme **austerity** **programme** will suck demand out of
8	in its view that we cannot afford to slow down the **austerity** **programme.** That is what authoritative
9	have never believed the argument that without the **austerity** **programme** Britain was about to

Concordances 4 *Programme* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

62 There is only one exception, where *measures* collocates as *austerity of the measures.*

N	Concordance			
1	demolish the myth that only by putting forward	**austerity**	**measures** will we see growth in the	
2	that is exactly where we will go. We have seen	**austerity**	**measures** introduced not just by the	
3	other countries have faced drastic situations and	**austerity**	**measures.** It is not reasonable to look	
4	Chancellor raised the forerunner of VAT-the	**austerity**	of the **measures** that were	
5	team confirmed that without a package of fiscal	**austerity**	**measures,** this country would be	
6	there, much like here, have refused to back the	**austerity**	**measures** needed to help the country	
7	a couple of weeks ago that without the current	**austerity**	**measures,** our borrowing costs would	
8	rate. Why should public sector workers suffer	**austerity**	**measures** longer because of where	
9	fairness. The impact of the Tory-led Government's	**austerity**	**measures** is plain to see: with rising	
10	are the victims of the Government's reckless	**austerity**	**measures,** which I fear will lead to a	

Concordances 5 *Measures* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

This development in phraseological patterns seems logical in terms of the diachronic changes in the use of collocates. In other words, *age of austerity* sounds more natural than *austerity age* and *austerity measures* sounds more natural than *measures of austerity*. Moreover, it might seem logical to only use collocates that relate to policy-making once the policies are in place or are about to be (that is, once the Coalition government had taken office). However, these phraseological choices, although logical, do affect how austerity governance is discursively portrayed. It is relevant that epochal connotations are linked and foregrounded in early uses of *austerity* in the crisis corpus. These time-related phraseological structures build on the perception of urgency and the perception that austerity is an inevitable part of history, while obfuscating any agents that might have brought about this (apparently unavoidable) period of time determined by austerity. On the other hand, once that urgency and inevitability has been established, austerity becomes a natural part of policy-making, semantically dominating words that would otherwise be neutral, such as *measures* and *programme*. In other words, we see a pattern of austerity governance being progressively naturalised as it is adhered more tightly to the normal business of policy decision-making. Moreover, the chosen collocates, *programme* and *measures*, denote a 'package' of policies in a metaphorical sense. Austerity is not only a particular policy style but also an all-encompassing approach to governing, where alternative views have very little semantic space.

The results in this chapter show the adaptability of the use of *austerity* in the data. This aided the consolidation of a governance dominated by deficit reduction narratives. In the first years of the crisis, as we saw in the previous section, *austerity* was predominantly contextualised as an epochal need for change within a normative legitimisation strategy. This semantic pattern shifts in the latter stages of the crisis corpus, especially after the Coalition was in government from 2010, towards a linguistic framing of *austerity* as business as usual. These results highlight the capacity for adaptation of the neoliberal paradigm, which, it has been argued, is one of the key reasons for its resilience (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013). Normativity was initially required to cement the narrative of the crisis of debt in order to re-establish neoliberal public retrenchment governance when this paradigm was being doubted (see section 3.7). However, the meaning of *austerity* subsequently returned to pre-crisis normalising discursive choices.

6.6 How much AUSTERITY?

In the previous section, we saw that semantic complexity and variation are important features that characterise the use of the main collocations of *austerity*. We have also seen that by 2010, the main political parties had agreed to follow austerity governance if they were elected. Considering these two factors, it is not surprising that many of the remaining collocates of AUSTERITY in addition to other concordances, point to an overt engagement in defining and owning the concept of *austerity* (see section 6.6.1). Moreover, the duplicity of political projects under the same governance is discursively performed in terms of the amount and type of austerity, as illustrated by the appearance of 'dramatic prosody' surrounding the word *austerity*, where metaphorical constructions are used to highlight the severity or pace of austerity instead of discussing austerity itself (see section 6.6.2).

6.6.1 Defining and owning *austerity*

One of the collocates in table 2, *about*, clearly points to a tendency towards metadiscursive commentary on the actual meaning of the word *austerity*. The concordances are shown below:

N	Concordance		
1	Cabinet, want to have debate **about** the politics of	**austerity**	and how to deliver government to the
2	is a call for a national debate **about** the age of	**austerity.**	That reflects the fact that Conservative
3	for what their policies were; he talked **about**	**austerity-means**	cuts in public expenditure on
4	. It was his own party leader who talked **about**	**austerity.**	If we are going to have austerity, the hon.
5	hon. Friends ought to be, **about** what exactly that	**austerity**	means. I come back to the Budget,
6	right last year when he spoke **about** 10 years of	**austerity**	under Labour, but it is not austerity that
7	Chancellor, who-this says a few things **about**	**austerity-was**	rumoured to get up in the morning
8	. I have never believed the argument that without the	**austerity**	programme Britain was **about** to

Concordances 6 *About* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

In all the concordances but one, *about* appears to the left of *austerity*, relating to what other speakers have said about it (*he talked about austerity*) or an attempt to define the concept (*debate about the politics of austerity*, *about the age of austerity*). This pattern is also found in wider uses of the word *austerity*. For example, we find instances of metadiscursive comments in the concordances of two other collocates: *of* and the indefinite article *a*. I have accounted for most of the uses of these two grammatical words in the previous section, because the most common structures refer to either time or policy action. However, other concordances provide further evidence of the attempts to define *austerity*, as shown in the following examples:

> *<u>It is a strange sort of austerity</u> when they will not commit to spending a single penny more on the unemployed, but will commit to spending billions of pounds on those in jobs earning over £150,000 a year. <u>It is a strange sort of austerity</u> when they cannot commit to help young people at all, but they can promise a tax giveaway of £200,000 to the 3,000 richest estates in the country. The Conservatives' priority is clear – no more money for the unemployed, but £200,000 for the 3,000 richest estates.*
>
> James Purnell, Labour, Government, 2009

> *the inclination to spend, and investment confidence were washed away <u>by the talk of austerity</u> and the reckless, breakneck speed at which the cuts were made.*
>
> Geraint Davies, Labour, Opposition, 2011

> *Let us consider the situation in the US, where its leader has explicitly talked about the <u>dangers of the austerity narrative</u> and has specifically said that to cut too far, too fast would be detrimental to the US economy over time.*

Gavin Shuker, Labour, Opposition, 2012

The emergence of this metadiscursive pattern is confirmed in other concordances outside the use of the collocates:

> *The right hon. Gentleman used the word 'austerity'. Would he characterise a freeze in real-terms public expenditure as a period of austerity?*

Philip Hammond, Conservative, Opposition, 2009

> *At a time when we are preaching austerity to people who are bleeding in that many of them cannot pay their heating bills or their rent or buy food, it is bizarre that the Government should choose to prioritise reducing the top rate of tax for the top 2% of earners in this country. That demonstrates a blatant disregard for the very difficult sacrifices that we are asking people to make.*

Sammy Wilson, DUP, Opposition, 2012

> *We should listen to the glee with which the right hon. Gentleman calls for austerity. For whom does he want austerity? He wants austerity for public services and couples on the average wage who get tax credits, but not for the millionaires, whose tax increases he wants reviewed.*

Yvette Cooper, Labour, Government, 2009

Other metadiscursive patterns were found in terms of who 'owns' austerity as a policy choice. This seems to translate into the concordances in several ways. Firstly, it is only Labour that uses the collocates *his* (referring to belonging to the Chancellor, George Osborne) and *government's* with *austerity*. Moreover, out of all the co-occurrences, only one appears when Labour is in government. The rest appear when Labour is in opposition, in June 2010 and in 2012. Concordances 7 and 8 show the use of *his* and *government's*:

N	Concordance			
1	ago. As a means of encouraging	**his** "new age of	**austerity"-his**	words, not mine-and to deal with
2	cutting the deficit. The area most affected by	**his**	**austerity**	policy, where people will see the
3	, is Merseyside; the area least affected by	**his**	**austerity**	policy-least affected by the fall in
4	excuse for ratcheting up the pain levels in	**his**	**austerity**	Budget, the Chancellor has been
5	that was all wrong, and that the only recipe was		**austerity.**	**His** justification for that was the

Concordances 7 *His* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

N	Concordance		
1	the necessary higher growth. The **Government's**	**austerity**	plan has led to lower tax receipts and
2	to pre-trend levels. At this time of stagnation and	**austerity**,	what is the **Government's** priority? Is
3	. The impact of the Tory-led **Government's**	**austerity**	measures is plain to see: with rising
4	are the victims of the **Government's** reckless	**austerity**	measures, which I fear will lead to a
5	if they could see that the **Government's**	**"austerity**	plan" was actually working. However,

Concordances 8 *Government's* with *austerity* (crisis corpus)

By using these collocates, Labour is opening up a discussion about two types of *austerity*: theirs and the one followed by their opposition. This is in spite of the agreement of all main parties regarding austerity governance as the only way forward from 2010.

6.6.2 Dramatic prosody

Apart from the contextualisation of ownership, the political alternatives presented by Labour were made in terms of the severity of austerity and how quickly it needed to be implemented. The concordances provide several examples where the words *race* and *rush* are used to say that the opposition is implementing austerity too fast:

> *<u>The race to austerity</u> that the Government seem determined to follow belongs to a lesser-known branch of economics called ignorance economics*
>
> Angela Smith, Labour, Opposition, June 2010.

> *The prospect of a <u>race to austerity</u> is so worrying that President Obama's Administration in the US have felt it necessary to write to the leaders of the G20 countries urging them to continue with the economic stimulus*
>
> Angela Smith, Labour, Opposition, June 2010

> *That is why President Obama wrote to his fellow G20 leaders this week urging them to turn away from the <u>rush to austerity</u>. Yes, deficits must be reduced, but we must not risk undermining the fragile global recovery.*
>
> Harriet Harman, Labour, Opposition, June 2010

This strategy from Labour is also represented in other concordances with a much more dramatic prosody:

N	Concordance		
1	going rate. Why should public sector workers suffer	**austerity**	measures longer because of where they
2	has been made. At a time when we are preaching	**austerity**	to people who are bleeding in that many of
3	. This time it is different. In this kind of recession,	**austerity**	hurts only those who are on low or middle
4	economists more generally that the severity and the	**austerity**	that the Government have introduced in the
5	leader has explicitly talked about the dangers of the	**austerity**	narrative and has specifically said that to
6	of opinion and recognise the possibility that	**austere**	and harsh public expenditure reductions, as
7	no-growth, go-slow Budget. The Chancellor's extreme	**austerity**	programme will suck demand out of the
8	, but is he not concerned about the impact that any	**austerity**	programme might have? Although there
9	myths have been peddled, designed to justify an	**austerity**	programme so severe that it is positively,
10	strategy for growth, we have been given a strategy for	**austerity**,	cuts and pain for working people-the
11	families are the victims of the Government's reckless	**austerity**	measures, which I fear will lead to a lost
12	confidence were washed away by the talk of	**austerity**	and the reckless, breakneck speed at

Concordances 9 Dramatic prosody of AUSTERITY (crisis corpus)

We find here the words *suffer*, *bleeding*, *hurts*, *severity*, *dangers*, *harsh*, *extreme*, *impact*, *severe*, *pain* and *reckless* (highlighted in yellow). These concordances and the previous excerpts in this section point to a metaphorical contextualisation of *austerity*. Austerity is portrayed as a *race*, along with other examples where it is objectivised (as an object that has impacts or is *harsh*, for example), referred to using health metaphors (for example, *suffer*, *pain*, *hurts*) or even associated with human behaviour (*reckless*). What these dramatic and metaphoric contextualisations of *austerity* achieve is (contradictorily, perhaps) its naturalisation. Austerity in itself is not a bad thing; in fact, it might be necessary. It is a particular manifestation of it that is 'bad'. There is austerity A and austerity B, but the choice is always within the limitations of austerity governance. Consequently, the solutions to the crisis, and its management more widely, remain safely within the parameters of deficit reduction. Alternatives to austerity are left outside the discussion.

The findings in this section provide more evidence of how austerity governance was naturalised as business as usual, particularly in the latter stages of the crisis (see previous section). They highlight how *austerity* was scrutinised only in terms of how quickly or how drastically deficit reduction should take place, focusing on the different paths and options within this governance. As such, the possibility of other policy alternatives was never engaged with discursively. The patterns found in this analysis contributed to the solidification of the permanent presence of deficit reduction narratives in British politics, this being a clear consequence of a cross-party consensus at the time (see section 3.7). Moreover, these findings also add evidence to the body of literature that found *austerity* commonly surrounded by metaphorical contextualisation such as health, human behaviour, and movement in other countries. This is perhaps one of the strongest patterns found across the literature which analysed *austerity* at the onset of the crisis (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Soares da Silva 2016; Borriello 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017).

6.7 Conclusions

The semantic analysis in this chapter has shed some light upon the patterns of ambiguity that characterise how the keyword *austerity* is used in the data. It has done so from a diachronic point of view. Firstly, I showed that *austerity* is present in the growth corpus. In that corpus it is used as a technical concept, an antonym of *plenty*, to refer to the ideas of scarcity and waste within neoliberal discourses of affordability. The crisis was clearly a catalyst for the intensification of normative connotations surrounding *austerity*. The narrative of the *age of austerity* emerges in the 2009 debate, initiated by the Conservative Party. *Austerity* is then semantically characterised by connotations of urgency and epochal change. There is a clear ambivalence between a contextual austerity (as an epoch where there is scarcity) and governance (which implies agency). In other words, there is a complex and unclear relationship between cause and effect. *Austerity* is contextualised as time, as an agentless setting and as a material situation (a lack of resources). On the other hand, *austerity* is also clearly contextualised as fiscal policy. This discursive ambivalence in meaning seems to have intertextual connections: Grundmann, Kreischer, and Scott (2017) also found these strands of meaning in the British media, and Pautz (2018) found them in think-tank documents.

This ambiguity between context and governance, leads us to believe that it is austerity, as a lack of resources, that creates the necessity for austerity measures. This semantic situation of unclear cause and effect has been observed in equally complex concepts, such as globalisation[63] (Fairclough 2006; Hay 2006). Hay (2006: 3) argues that in this case, 'global-isation, is a descriptive and not an explanatory term – it is an outcome of causal processes rather than a causal process in its own right'. Moreover, austerity is seen, similar to globalisation as depicted by Fairclough (2006: 79), as a 'predicted future of risk and dangers that requires urgent present action in the context of changes, errors and failures of the past'. Each of these two concepts provides a semantic vessel into which certain (neoliberal) governance pursuits can be placed, even if that vessel might be, in the case of austerity and the deficit reduction it represents, quite detached from the real causes and the real solutions to the crisis.

There is a second type of ambiguity emerging from the results. A*ge of austerity* is also characterised by the ambivalence in the relation between private and public debt. The household metaphor that is present in these initial uses of *austerity* adds a layer of personal resonance to what inevitably is perceived as the main purpose of government: to avoid unnecessary debt, just as any good household would do. However, the ambiguity of *austerity* is greatly reduced when it is described solely as deficit reduction towards the end of the crisis corpus. *Austerity* simply becomes a label for 'business as usual', where a restricted amount of choice is presented within the overall limits of deficit management. Drastic deficit reduction has proved more difficult to implement that the rhetorical salience of *austerity* might imply (Stanley 2016a; Anstead 2018). Moreover, austerity governance has been openly criticised for not being a realistic solution to the crisis (see sections 3.6 to 3.8). Nevertheless, the neoliberal focus on affordability and efficiency (and its consequences in terms of social justice) has stayed firmly at the centre of policy-making. Austerity rhetoric relies on the preceding nurturing of the neoliberal rationalities of the 'wasteful state' and 'value for money' when it comes to public spending. This discursive continuity backgrounds a long overdue full examination of the links between public spending and social justice.

63 I thank my supervisor, Jane Mulderrig, for pointing to this similarity.

7 FAIRNESS: PAST AND THE PRESENT

In chapter 5 I presented the general semantic trends and frequency findings for the two keywords, before concentrating on the results for the lemma AUSTERITY in chapter 6. In chapters 7 and 8 I turn to the semantic patterns for FAIRNESS, focusing on the crisis period and comparing it with the growth period. This chapter is structured in a similar way to the previous one, moving progressively from a macro and quantitative analysis towards a specific and qualitative analysis. In section 7.1, I present the collocate results for the crisis corpus and the growth corpus; that is, the words that most commonly appear surrounding FAIRNESS in both corpora (see section 4.5.2 for a more detailed explanation of the collocates and how they were calculated). In section 7.2, I analyse the first appearances of the keyword in each debate, using the dispersion plot tool as a starting point, in order to reflect on the role of this initial use of the concept in the parliamentary discussions.

Following these introductory sections, in sections 7.3 to 7.5 I analyse in more detail the specific contextualisation of FAIRNESS in the two corpora. By using the collocates as a guide to the analysis, prioritising content collocates and focusing on different levels of textual expansion (from concordance lines to longer excerpts), I develop a sense of the semantic scope and the prosody most commonly associated with FAIRNESS in the data. This analysis is organised into three main thematic areas, which are presented chronologically. Firstly, in section 7.3, I focus on the most relevant contextualisation of FAIRNESS in the growth corpus: *enterprise*. In section 7.4 I then move on to the crisis corpus, analysing the appearance of the collocate *opportunities* in the first years of the crisis. In section 7.5, I turn to the collocates that form the main findings of this chapter regarding the crisis corpus: the common association between FAIRNESS and quantification. I end the chapter by pointing to some conclusions on the relevance of these results in terms of austerity governance, neoliberal resilience and economic inequality.

7.1 The collocates of FAIRNESS

In this section I give an overview of the most common collocates of FAIRNESS in the data. Contrary to AUSTERITY, the frequency of FAIRNESS in both corpora was high enough to return a list of collocates. Tables 4 and 5 show the most statistically relevant collocates in the crisis corpus and the growth corpus respectively ranked by LL, showing the MI score, the two parts of the collocation and the number of occurrences of the collocations[64].

Table 4 Collocates of FAIRNESS (crisis corpus), ranked by LL

N	Word	With	LL	MI	Occurrences
1	SHARE	fair	159.33	8.43	28
2	STABILISER	fair	126.15	10.92	13
3	A	fairer	116.24	5.53	60
4	IS	unfair	99.98	5.08	71
5	BRITAIN	fairer	72.83	8.42	13
6	SYSTEM	fairer	66.79	8.08	13
7	FUEL	fair	48.95	6.50	16
8	SYSTEM	fair	45.59	6.20	17
9	MORE	fairer	40.38	6.07	16
10	TEST	fairness	37.25	6.97	10
11	AN	unfair	25.90	5.41	15
12	PAY	fair	17.58	5.17	12

64 As I explain in section 4.5.2, tables 4 and 5 present a concise list of the most relevant collocates of the lemma FAIRNESS, where $p < 0.0001$ (LL of 15.13 or higher) and MI of at least 5. See appendices 4 and 5 for a wider account of collocates.

Table 5 Collocates of FAIRNESS (growth corpus), ranked by LL

N	Word	With	LL	MI	Occurrences
1	ENTERPRISE	fairness	118.94	7.62	26
2	SOCIETY	fairer	95.13	10.09	12
3	A	fairer	64.84	5.51	34
4	MORE	fairer	47.51	6.58	15
5	SAY	fair	45.53	6.49	15
6	IT	unfair	15.71	5.01	12

As we saw in chapter 5, FAIRNESS appears much more frequently in the crisis corpus than in the growth corpus. This explains why the number of collocates is much lower in the growth corpus. Although I present the specific findings for the collocations and their concordances in subsequent sections, it is worth noting an interesting point here: one can quite safely infer from these tables that the contextualisations of FAIRNESS in the two periods are very different. We find only two repeated collocates: the indefinite article *a* and the determiner *more*. As such, even though *fairness* is a well-established concept in political discourse in general, its contextualisation may vary dramatically depending on the setting it is subscribed to: in this case, two different chronological settings. The meanings associated with the concept can also be very different. This testifies to the malleability of the concept, which can be adhered to a variety of political positionings (Fairclough 2000a; 2000b; Hall & O'Shea 2013). This contrastive nature of the use of *fairness* is a dominant theme in the sections that follow; however, in chapter 8 I also present some continuations and adaptations of traditional discourses around *fairness* in both periods.

The findings in this section give an overview of what were the most common collocates around the keyword *fairness* in the data. Whilst these are just decontextualised results, they add evidence to the claim made in previous sections: the crisis was a catalyst for change in the discursive features of the two keywords. Firstly, in section 5.3 we saw an important increase in the frequency of both keywords after the crisis. Secondly, in chapter 6 we saw a diachronic evolution of the prosodies of *austerity* in the data (from normalised in the growth corpus, to normative in the pre-austerity years of the crisis to then normalised again in the later years in the corpus). In the following sections of this chapter I present the exact differences between the use of *fairness* in the two periods covered by the study.

7.2 Introducing FAIRNESS in the debates

As in the case of AUSTERITY, the plot analysis of FAIRNESS was utilised to visualise when was this lemma used for the first time in each debate, to see if there were any noticeable differences between them. As it turned out, and as is demonstrated by the truncated dispersion plot shown in table 6[65], the very first use of the lemma highly varied from year to year.

Table 6 Dispersion plot: FAIRNESS (crisis corpus)

N	File	Words	Hits	per 1,000	Disp...ion
1	fair (Overall)	1,157,417	883	0.76	0.927
2	fair 2008_debate	194,460	111	0.57	0.898
3	fair 2009_debate	189,170	83	0.44	0.821
4	fair 2010_March	199,755	130	0.65	0.784
5	fair 2010_June	206,697	273	1.32	0.852
6	fair 2011_debate	183,332	94	0.51	0.855
7	fair 2012_debate	184,003	192	1.04	0.882

FAIRNESS appears in the Chancellor's initial speech in every year covered by the data, regardless of who is in office, which is dramatically different from the patterns of use for AUSTERITY. In 2008 and 2009, when Labour was in government, Alistair Darling, the Chancellor at the time, introduced *fairness* to the debate very early on, within the first sentence (2008) or paragraph (2009):

[65] For the full dispersion plot, see appendix 14.

> *The core purpose of this Budget is stability, now and in the future. Its core values are fairness and opportunity, founded on stability and strength.*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Government, 2008

> *In all of these decisions, we have been guided by our core values of fairness and opportunity, and our determination to invest and grow our way out of recession.*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Government, 2009

In these two examples, there is an overt emphasis on presenting *fairness* as a core value that guides policy-making, together with *opportunity* and *strength*. In 2009, there is also the explicit commitment to investment as a solution to the crisis; this is linked to *fairness* with successive uses of the conjunction *and*. However, the contextualisation of *fairness* changes substantially in March 2010, when austerity governance is presented as the solution to the crisis (*reduce borrowing*, *cuts*). In this case, *fairness* appears much later in the speech:

> *Since the start of the global crisis, I have always been clear that support for the economy now must go hand in hand with a clear plan to reduce borrowing [...] We are set to achieve that goal by a combination of three elements: tax; public spending cuts; and of course, growth in the economy. First on taxes, I have already made difficult decisions, and I have been guided by our values of fairness and the need not to undermine the recovery.*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Government, March 2010

In June 2010, the first debate when the Coalition was in office, *fair* returns to the first paragraph of the Chancellor's initial speech:

> *This emergency Budget deals decisively with our country's record debts. It pays for the past, and it plans for the future. It supports a strong, enterprise-led recovery, it rewards work and it protects the most vulnerable in our society. Yes, it is tough, but it is also fair.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, June 2010

Mr Osborne is aiming to relate *fairness* to austerity governance. He does this not overtly, but by positioning fairness in contrast with debt morality (we need to pay the debts of the past) and moral strength (*decisively, strong* and *tough*). At the same time, this toughness is represented as temporary, since the actions required are taken in order to *plan for the future*. Interestingly, this idea of moral strength is abandoned in subsequent years. We do find, however, repetitions of workfare and 'deserving' (*reward work*) in the 2011 and 2012 debates. Here, *fair* also appears in Mr Osborne's speech, but much further down, especially in 2012:

> *From Adam Smith to Nigel Lawson, people have set out the principles of good taxation, and this Government declare these principles again for the modern age. Our taxes should be efficient and support growth. They should be certain and predictable. They should be simple to understand and easy to comply with, and our tax system should be fair, reward work, support aspiration and ask the most from those who can most afford the most.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2011

> *Two hundred years ago Adam Smith set out the four principles of good taxation, and they remain good principles today: taxes should be simple, predictable, support work and be fair. The rich should pay the most and the poor the least.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2012

These last two examples are almost identical. In both excerpts, the principles of Adam Smith are praised, before the focus shifts to taxation: in particular, its simplicity, meritocracy (*reward work* and *aspiration*) and how much citizens should pay in terms of the amount they earn (*ask the most from those who can afford the most* and *the rich should pay the most and the poor the least*).

Despite the limited sample size, these initial examples provide clues about the discursive intentions behind how *fairness* is used in the debates. Most apparently, they tell us that this value is always important in the initial approach to legitimising the Budget, because it always appears within the

Chancellor's speech, regardless of which party is in power. In other words, all parties consider fairness to be an important value that their polices should be geared towards. However, the exact meaning of *fairness* varies widely, not only from party to party, but also from year to year. For example, we can see that Labour originally linked *fairness* with *opportunity* and *investment* as a flagship legitimisation strategy (Mr Darling uses it within the first paragraph of his speech). However, the switch to austerity governance in 2010 is characterised by this use of *fairness* being abandoned; traditional economic imperatives (*growth*) are chosen instead, and they appear much later in the speeches.

The Coalition's use of *fairness* is much more linked to meritocracy and workfarist ideas, as we see in the three examples from Mr Osborne. However, we can see a clear move from a general conceptualisation of *fairness* and moral strength as a flagship legitimisation strategy in 2010 (when it appears within the first paragraph) to a much narrower conceptualisation of *fairness* as fair taxation in subsequent years (when it appears much later in Mr Osborne's speeches). Therefore, these initial examples point to a comparatively more comfortable use of *fairness* as a principle when it appears early in the speeches (*fairness* with *opportunity* in 2008 and 2009; *fairness* with *strength* in June 2010). However, the lemma is used much further down as a legitimisation tool when it is contextualised as something far more specific (economic imperatives in March 2010; taxation in 2011 and 2012).

The findings in this section amplify one of the main contributions of this study: as shown with *austerity* in the previous chapter, the semantic contextualisation of *fairness* can change dramatically in a short period of time, which is a testament to the adaptability of this moral concept. As this section proves, semantic changes can even appear from year to year and from party to party as well as within parties. *Fairness* is associated with meritocracy but also with economic imperatives and toughness. These results align with the findings of the lexicographic analysis in section 5.2, which highlighted the complex semantic nature of *fairness* as an invaluable source of political legitimisation, particularly in terms of its lack of commitment to wealth re-distribution within neoliberal governance (Fairclough 2000a; 2000b; Levitas 2005; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012; Hall & O'Shea 2013).

Having examined these initial contextualisations of the lemma FAIRNESS, I now present some of the most relevant patterns of collocates in chronological order. I begin with *enterprise*, the most statistically relevant collocate in the growth corpus, in section 7.3. In section 7.4, I focus on *opportunity*, a collocate from the crisis corpus that was not ranked high enough to appear in table 4, but was just below the cut-off point in the extended list of collocates (see appendix 4). This collocate came to my attention after observing its importance in the first uses of FAIRNESS in the 2008 and 2009 debates during the plot analysis. Finally, in section 7.5 I focus on some of the most relevant collocates of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus, where it transpires that one of the most important themes is quantification.

7.3 Pre-crisis *enterprise*

Enterprise is the strongest collocate in the growth corpus. It collocates exclusively with *fairness* on 26 occasions. *Enterprising* also collocates with *fair* on five occasions. In the crisis corpus, *enterprise* is not found near the lemma FAIRNESS at all. Therefore, it is safe to say that this combination of concepts indicates that an important discursive strategy in the growth period was mostly abandoned after the crisis. In the concordances of *enterprise* and *fairness* (see concordances 10), the two words are co-ordinated mostly using the conjunction *and* (with *fairness and enterprise* or *enterprise and fairness*). Other words around this collocation, such as *together* and *synergy* (lines 3, 6, 13, 20, 23, 25 and 26), emphasise the strength of the relationship between these two concepts. We also find some extra concepts combined, with a variety of co-ordination patterns. For example, we can see *flexibility* (lines 7 and 9) or *investment* (line 16).

N	Concordance
1	productivity challenge and thereby to deliver greater fairness. Enterprise and fairness have gone hand
2	thereby to deliver greater fairness. Enterprise and fairness have gone hand in hand under previous
3	Britain a leader for those who see enterprise and fairness advancing together. It is because from
4	. They have now moved on to enterprise and fairness. That is not to say that they have given up
5	we have had his great soundbite "enterprise and fairness". But no one believes him any more. No
6	so far passed by, we will advance enterprise and fairness together. So in 2,000 designated
7	it. This Budget is for a Britain in which flexibility and fairness, enterprise and full employment go hand
8	consensus that we should advance enterprise and fairness, and do so together. I turn first to the
9	of economic stability and enterprise, flexibility and fairness, we can achieve full employment and
10	Budget as a major step forward for enterprise and fairness in Britain. As the TUC said recently, it is "a
11	taken towards stability, to build enterprise and fairness in our country, there is one question right at
12	said that it was a Budget for enterprise and fairness. When we look beneath the surface of the
13	. That is a true example of synergy between fairness and enterprise in my constituency. More
14	point of need, for everyone, in every part of Britain. Fairness and enterprise together. I commend this
15	concerns. The Budget has been about enterprise, fairness and investing in the national health service.
16	investment. This is a Budget for enterprise and for fairness, for investment and for reform. It will be a
17	to speak about the importance of the principles of fairness and enterprise that are enshrined in the
18	building a Britain of greater enterprise and greater fairness, and nothing is more important to an
19	this country will trust our judgment and our belief in fairness and enterprise far more than they are
20	. From the very beginning, the two strands of fairness and enterprise ran together. My right hon.
21	principles of the NHS. It combines enterprise with fairness, and it is supported by the British people. I
22	in Europe, that is essential for enterprise with the fairness, too often undervalued in the USA, that is
23	our NHS the best insurance policy in the world, with fairness and enterprise together, and I commend it
24	my priorities are: the needs of enterprise; ensuring fairness to families and pensioners; and the
25	sets out policies that combine enterprise with fairness, together with the economic dynamism that
26	our NHS the best insurance policy in the world . . . Fairness and enterprise together."-[Official Report,
27	to work during their lifetime. What can the spirit of fairness and enterprise do for this forgotten army?

Concordances 10 *Fairness* and *enterprise* (growth corpus)

The common denominator in the use of such combinations of words and sentences is that apparently unrelated concepts suddenly appear as equivalent. For example, this is how Gordon Brown, the Chancellor at the time, laid down his taxation priorities in 2002:

> *On inheritance tax, I will not only freeze rates but I will exempt more estates from inheritance tax, raising the starting point of tax to £63,000 – 95 per cent. of estates will pay no inheritance tax at all. For this Budget's other tax decisions, <u>my priorities are: the needs of enterprise; ensuring fairness to families and pensioners; and the environment.</u>*
>
> Gordon Brown, Labour, Government, 2002

The economic priorities (*enterprise* as a necessity) are co-ordinated with – and, as such, made equivalent to – the value of *fairness* and concerns about the *environment*. It seems to be just as important a priority to protect enterprise as it is to protect families, pensioners and the environment. At first glance, these policies look to be unrelated (at best) or opposing (at worst), especially when these policies are defending a reduction in tax that is so class-dependent, such as inheritance tax. However, this is a good illustration of

New Labour rhetoric around convergence politics, where both economic imperatives and social justice could co-exist (see section 3.4). Within this 'not only but also' logic, apparently incompatible concepts were at the same time denied and transcended by simply putting them together, with no effort to provide an explanation (Fairclough 2000a: 45). In other words, instead of attempting to explain how these values and economic imperatives relate to each other in a complex system, they simply co-exist. The choice of *enterprise and fairness* is of particular importance for New Labour, because it represents a convergence of the right and left. On the one hand, the word *enterprise* is traditionally associated with Thatcherite politics (Fairclough 2000a: 44) as a social and psychological project that mostly helped to legitimise business-oriented economic policy (Fairclough 1992: 191-192). On the other hand, *fairness* can be adapted to the values of left or right, signalling to the centrist and ambivalent position that New Labour is associated with.

Such a discursive combination, however, exemplifies deep contradictions in centrist political projects. The decision to reduce a tax in order to incentivise investment is clearly a neoliberal policy approach. Nevertheless, this issue is backgrounded by the addition of different concepts: *enterprise*, *fairness* and the *environment*. In the growth corpus, we are witnessing a use of *fairness* that is strongly geared towards convergence politics and normalised neoliberalism. However, this is not the only collocate that taps into this legacy.

The analysis of this particular pattern provides more evidence of one of the main contributions of this thesis: the crisis was a clear catalyst for the change in the semantic uses of *fairness* (as well as for *austerity* as we saw in the previous chapter). It shows *fairness* being a clear linguistic tool in the growth corpus for the legitimisation of the convergence politics that dominated normalised neoliberalism before the crisis, where social justice was always subordinated to economic imperatives (see section 3.4). The particular materialisation of this normalisation in the pattern *fairness and enterprise* is abandoned in the crisis period. In the following two sections I present what other patterns were found instead in the crisis data.

7.4 Opportunities and competitiveness

Opportunity collocates with *fairness* in the crisis corpus on ten occasions with a high statistical relevance, whereas this collocation is absent in the growth corpus **(**see tables 4 and 5 and appendices 4 and 5). This is surprising, because the idea of *opportunity* was a key theme within New Labour discourses of social justice (Mulderrig 2009: 24). However, it is only around 2008 that it seems to collocate with *fairness* at a statistical level of relevance; it is dropped completely after 2009, when the party was adhering to austerity governance. Concordances 11 show the collocation *fairness* and *opportunity*.

N	Concordance
1	stability, now and in the future. Its core values are **fairness** and **opportunity,** founded on stability
2	decisions, not irresponsible, unfunded promises; **fairness** and **opportunity** for everyone in Britain
3	that the values guiding his choice of priorities were **fairness** and **opportunity.** Those are my values
4	principles that he felt underpinned his statement: **fairness** and **opportunity.** The only way in which
5	been for generations with those of social justice, **fairness** and **opportunity** for all. I have raised
6	tax regime that balances sustainability and **fairness** with **opportunity** and competitiveness. In
7	and spending, given the chapter heading: **"Fairness** and **opportunity** for all". I wish we
8	, we have been guided by our core values of **fairness** and **opportunity,** and our determination
9	on a stable path-is based on our values of **fairness** and **opportunity.** Even at this time of
10	forward. The essence of it is the core values of **fairness** and **opportunity.** In considering the

Concordances 11 *Fairness* and *opportunity* (crisis corpus)

When looking at these concordances, it is clear that Labour aimed to establish this collocation as its most important guide for policies, using words such as *core* and *our values* (lines 1, 8-10) and *priorities* (line 3) around them. As was the case for *enterprise*, *fairness* is linked to *opportunity* with the conjunction *and*. However, semantically, this association draws fairness into a particular view of equality, that of equality of opportunity. As we saw in section 3.5, this has been the mainstream view of equality for decades. Labour, in this case, is aiming to 'own' the meaning of *fairness* on those terms. However, we find once again that these core values are mingled with economic imperatives, as shown in the following example:

> *An important objective for any Government at a time of <u>globalisation</u> is to ensure that we remain <u>competitive</u> in world markets. That means being very careful about taxation levels for both businesses and individuals, because we are competing globally in respect of tax regimes. It also means reflecting the modern world in which we live in the overall climate that we create for business,*

> *entrepreneurship and wealth creation. There is a danger that one or two false steps, even if they are well intended, might disrupt the good record that has been established. We must therefore make it absolutely clear that the UK will remain the best place to do business. That means that the Government and the Labour party must become as comfortable with the concepts of aspiration, enterprise and ambition as we have been for generations with those of social justice, fairness and opportunity for all.*
>
> Stephen Byers, Labour, Government, 2008

This is a textbook example of how the narratives of *globalisation* and *competitiveness* permeated the justifications for low taxation, which Labour still seemed to be committed to in 2008[66]. Furthermore, within this parallelism, values that are also associated with *opportunity* (*aspiration, ambition*) are structured with *enterprise* (the premise of the free market economy) to then be associated with *social justice* (a value more akin to left-wing politics), *fairness* (a neutral value) and *opportunity for all* (a specific view of equality that is neutral, as both right and left can claim it). This is a clear example of how such free market economy concepts (*aspiration, enterprise* and *ambition*) are then made equivalent with s*ocial justice, fairness* and *opportunity for all*. The paratactic relations of this parallelism (both within phrases and between phrases) make this mixture of concepts work as co-hyponyms (Fairclough 2003: 101), engulfing *social justice*, the only clear example that draws from a left tradition, into a contextualisation associated with the right. *Social justice, fairness* and *opportunity* are different from each other and from *aspiration, enterprise* and *ambition*. However, the semantic equivalence, arranged here at different levels, discards any explanation of what these differences are (and the relationship that may exist between them).

These findings contribute to the understanding of how economic inequality was associated with *fairness* at the onset of the crisis. They show a clear continuation in the first years of the crisis of normalised neoliberal discursive

66 On the theme of globalisation as an economic imperative, see, for example, Hay 1999b; 2006; Fairclough 2006. For the lack of evidence to support this imperative, see Hay 2005.

tendencies. As we saw in section 3.4 and 3.5, the idea of opportunity is a basic premise of the neoliberal perspective on economic inequality, that is, meritocracy. The strong bond between *fairness* and *opportunity* during the pre-austerity years of the crisis corpus clearly prove the endurance of the neoliberal undermining of the structural nature of economic inequality within the uses of *fairness* in the crisis corpus. Moreover, the findings also show that *fairness* does not collocate with words that hint to a conceptualisation of this keyword in terms of egalitarianism, neither in the growth corpus nor the pre-austerity years of the crisis corpus.

In the last two sections, we have seen that before 2010, FAIRNESS was frequently absorbed into convergent discourses. This is a clear legacy of New Labour's rhetorical repertoire. However, from 2010 onwards, these patterns are eliminated, as we will see in the next section.

7.5 Quantifying FAIRNESS

7.5.1 Fair share

Share is the highest-scoring collocate in the crisis corpus according to LL (see table 4). It appears with *fair* 28 times. In most of these examples, they are joined together in the noun phrase *fair share*. There is only one case in which *share* is used as a verb (see line 13 in concordances 12). This noun phrase was a preferred discursive option during the debates when the Coalition was in government (June 2010-2012). Most of the occurrences (15) are concentrated in the 2012 debate, with the rest being used in 2011 (six) and June 2010 (four). Only three of them appear in the debates that took place in the early years of the crisis, when Labour was in government (one in 2008 and two in March 2010). Concordances 12 shows all the examples of *fair* with *share* in the crisis period.

N	Concordance
1	leaflet shows how super-rich individuals avoid paying their **fair share** of tax and that #3.2 billion is lost by turning earned
2	for the biggest financial crisis of our age take their **fair share.** Cutting free swimming is just mean. It hits the
3	which makes it look as if people at the top end are bearing a **fair share** of the reductions and tax increases, but it shows
4	to collect due tax from those intent on not paying their **fair share.** There were elements of the Budget that must be
5	of the north-east and my constituency suffer more than their **fair share** during economic downturns. We in Hartlepool are
6	growth in incomes in the past years should now pay their **fair share** of tax. I have no further announcements on VAT, on
7	many college Principals I accept the need for FE to bear its **fair share** of the coming squeeze on public sector spending.
8	widespread and some of the wealthiest are not paying their **fair share.** So as well as reviewing revenues from the 50p tax
9	that owners of high value property cannot avoid paying their **fair share.** Help for small businesses, a boost for enterprise,
10	extend to those in our society who seek to avoid paying their **fair share** of taxes. Tax avoidance and evasion mean that we
11	methods are to focus on growth, make the bankers pay their **fair share** and make savings over time. Germany, for
12	we kept the 50p tax rate? I agree that we should all pay our **fair share,** but surely a ceiling of 40% is more than adequate.
13	the most remote parts of the UK; it is on top of introducing a **fair** fuel stabiliser to **share** the burden of high international oil
14	those with the highest incomes, should contribute a **fair share** to the Exchequer. Some reliefs, such as the
15	, to make sure that those on the highest income contribute a **fair share,** I am introducing a new cap on those reliefs that
16	Budget, but we did not. Yes, everyone should pay their **fair share** of tax, but the top 1% in this country already pay
17	bidding to gain from that pot, Northern Ireland will get its **fair share.** I want to share my pleasure at the notion of
18	demand from the wealthiest in our society that they pay their **fair share.** This really is a Budget for millions of ordinary
19	, business should have a social responsibility to pay a **fair share** of taxes. Thirdly, tax avoidance must be dealt with
20	must be dealt with firmly and rules changed to ensure that a **fair share** of tax is paid. Fourthly, the European Union should
21	, and no Government contract should be awarded unless a **fair share** of tax is paid in the UK. These are my specific
22	office rules so that people have a branch and pay a **fair share** of tax in the UK. We should consider tightening up
23	and that people who work for the Government pay a **fair share** of tax to the Government on their fair profits. Finally
24	just residential, but commercial properties should pay their **fair share.** I do not think that any stamp duty land tax or stamp
25	that large commercial property companies do not pay their **fair share** as everyone else does. Everyone should pay a fair
26	fair share as everyone else does. Everyone should pay a **fair share** of tax; that is what corporate social responsibility
27	done well over the previous 10 years or so should bear their **fair share** of it. I do not have a philosophic attachment to that
28	my constituency, speaking to voters. Gillan has more than its **fair share** of millionaires, but the people I met and who

Concordances 12 *Fair share* (crisis corpus)

The most obvious pattern we can see in concordances 12 is the strong thematic link between FAIRNESS and taxation. There are only a few other marginal topics in the concordances. We can find *fair fuel stabiliser* (line 13). This is also an important collocation because it explains two of the collocates in table 4: *fuel* and *stabiliser*. Nevertheless, although this collocation is a specific one, it also refers to taxation. The fair fuel stabiliser was an arrangement passed with the 2011 Budget as a way of dealing with increases in fuel prices. Fuel taxes were to be reduced when petrol prices were high, and increased when prices were low. This tax was portrayed as an amended version of similar attempts that had been made to gain revenue to not only develop green investment but also help reduce living costs when fuel prices were high. In reality, the policy was never fully in place, despite it being widely discussed in the 2011 and 2012 Budget debates: taxes were reduced when oil prices escalated in 2011, but they were never increased again once the prices went down, because they were then frozen for several years[67]. Apart from the *fair fuel stabiliser*, I found in the concordances of *fair share* referring to *cuts* (lines 2 and 7), funding for Northern Ireland (line 17) and the negative consequences of the crisis (line 5).

However, the main topic that is debated around the lemma FAIRNESS is without a doubt taxation. Not only this, but this association is contextualised as an economic transaction. This is discursively constructed by the overwhelming preference for the verb *pay* (highlighted in yellow in concordances 12); the verb *contribute* is used twice as a synonym (also highlighted in yellow). In fact, as shown in table 4, *pay* is also a strong collocate of *fair*, appearing in position 12 in the list of top collocates. *Paying* also collocates with *fair*. Looking at the concordances of these two collocations, we can see that they refer almost exclusively to *paying a fair share* (see appendices 11 and 12).

Within this general contextualisation, we find a few topics that are particularly well represented. Most obviously, there is a general trend of

67 As a matter of fact, it was a continuation of subsidies for the fossil fuel industries. These subsidies continue to stay at the highest rate in the UK, much higher than those for the renewable energy industry (Carrington 2019).

agency in terms of referring to wealthy individuals and people involved in business (highlighted in orange in concordances 12). These actors are mentioned in several ways (*wealthiest, highest incomes, those who have done well*, *who have benefited the most* and even the generic *the bankers*), although we also find two references to *everyone* (lines 16 and 26). This focus on the rich, and economic asymmetries more widely, has been a prominent theme in the discursive management of the crisis (as discussed in section 3.8). However, the prosody found around these actors and *fair share* is not necessarily negative. Stanley (2016b) has argued that those on high incomes were negatively portrayed as 'undeserving rich' as part of the legitimatisation of austerity governance. This is true in the data to the extent that 'undeserving' is simply equated to 'not paying a reasonable amount of tax'. However, I still found cases where people on high incomes appeared within positive prosodies:

> *Yes, everyone should pay their fair share of tax, but the top 1% in this country already pay 28% of all income tax, and the top half pay 90%. <u>Milking them</u> of their <u>rewards</u> for all their <u>hard work</u> and aspiration will hardly encourage <u>endeavour</u>, and spending the money that we take from them on a <u>bloated, runaway</u> welfare state is sheer madness. This is the politics of envy. The Institute for Fiscal Studies estimates that, by the next election, one in four of us will be paying tax at 40%. Not so long ago, that figure was one in 20.*
> *As Tories, we must remember what we stand for: less state, less red tape, less taxation, less government, less public spending, more enterprise, more wealth creation and more support for business.*
>
> Richard Drax, Conservative, Government, 2011

This portrayal of people on a high income is a clear example of equality as meritocratic (represented by the words *rewards*, *hard work* and *endeavour*). Through colourful metaphors, taxing the richest is portrayed as an unfair burden (*milking them*), as is public spending in general and welfare support in particular (*bloated, runaway*). The implication here is that everybody should pay a fair share, but the top earners are already contributing too much. To make this point, Mr Drax argues that those who are on higher incomes have increased the percentage of the total taxation that is paid into the system. However, this is very different from saying that their tax bracket has been increasing. What Mr Drax is stating is that the top earners have been paying a higher proportion of the total tax, not that they have been paying more taxes. This can be directly linked with the fact that there has been an increase in the concentration of wealth. In other words, the top earners are paying more tax because they are increasingly receiving more income than the rest of the population (see section 3.5 and 3.7 for documentation of this concentration of wealth).

The ambivalent relationship between wealth and taxation is also represented in one of the main topics in concordances 12: tax evasion (see for example lines 1, 4, 8, 9, 10, 20 or 25). Here, we find 'undeserving rich' and 'undeserving companies' put under scrutiny. The same word choice is made to talk about tax evasion and to discuss matters of tax contributions in general, which naturalises the fact that the tax evasion exists and presents it as an intrinsic part of the system. Let's expand lines 25 and 26, which are representative of all the concordances referring to tax evasion. These concordances are part of the same speech made by Charlie Elphicke, Conservative MP in 2012:

> *I think it is wrong that large commercial property companies do not pay their fair share as everyone else does. Everyone should pay a fair share of tax; that is what corporate social responsibility should be about. <u>That is social justice</u>. That is the deal in the tax compact: a lower rate of corporation tax, lower business taxes – but no playing the system.*
>
> Charlie Elphicke, Conservative, Government, 2012

We can see here that the expectation that corporations will pay tax corresponds to their legal obligation to do so, which Mr Elphicke explicitly equates with social justice. In other words, social justice is equated solely to following the rules and working within the laws provided. The semantic implication here is that corporations are not contributing enough, rather than that they are involved in tax fraud or evasion[68]. However, this is in a semantic relation of contradiction with the fact that Mr Elphicke agrees with low corporation tax:

> *Large commercial properties don't pay enough*
>
> *Everyone should pay enough*
>
> *Corporations should pay less*
>
> *Corporations should act legally*

The contradiction posed by this example in terms of quantity (are companies not paying enough or should they pay less?) brings us to consider the actual meaning of the phrase *fair share*. The OED (2019e) defines it as:

> an equitable or reasonable portion or share of something, or more generally a good number, a large amount, sometimes implying that the amount is excessive or inordinate

According to this definition, *fair share* is a prime example of the everyday use of *fairness* that equates it to adequacy in judgement (see section 5.2.1). Considering this, it is clear that *fairness* here has been chosen in order to exploit its objectivity and vernacular semantic repertoire. Conversely, this veneer of objectivity is tinged with the fact that *fair share* is an undoubtedly ambivalent and vague quantity, which allows for semantic contradictions to surface (as we saw in the previous example).

The significance of these findings within the crisis corpus is heightened by the comparison with the growth corpus. Firstly, the use of *fair share* is much less common in the growth corpus, since *share* only collocates with *fair* on nine occasions (compared to 28 in the crisis corpus), and it has a lower statistical relevance, since it is not even included in the extended list of collocates (appendix 5). Furthermore, the contextualisation found in these concordances is also very different. As concordances 13 shows, in the growth

68 The difference between the two is legality, evasion being trying to contribute less by working the system, and fraud being illegal so outside the system. However, sometimes the line between the two is not straightforward. See Carr, Goodman, & Jowett 2019 for a discussion.

corpus *fair share* is hardly ever related to taxation and a focus on public spending is present (see for example lines 3, 8 and 9). There is also a complete absence of actors that refer to high earners, only to *companies* (line 6).

N	Concordance
1	My constituency has always had more than its **fair share** of life's trials and tribulations, but it
2	, lobbying to ensure that we obtained a **fair share** of the contracts. Mercifully, there
3	account. Wellingborough should receive its **fair share** of education spending. The most
4	urban areas that have so far not had their **fair share** of Government jobs. I put in a
5	staff get their just rewards and receive their **fair share** of any extra money going to the
6	to it will ensure that companies pay a **fair share** of tax on their profits from exploiting
7	. Hauliers from overseas should pay their **fair share** towards the cost of using our roads
8	State for Wales will fight hard to get Wales its **fair share,** and I shall certainly fight my corner
9	fight my corner to get north-west Wales its **fair share.** There was good news for

Concordances 13 *Fair share* (growth corpus)

Furthermore, the verb *pay* does not collocate with the lemma FAIRNESS at all in the growth corpus, which hints at a much less contractual contextualisation of the concept.

7.5.2 *System*

System is also a main collocate of FAIRNESS in the crisis data. Indeed, it appears twice in the list of the highest-ranking collocates (see table 4) because it collocates with *fairer* and *fair*. As is the case for *share*, when *system* collocates with *fairer* and *fair*, it refers mostly to taxation, as concordances 14 and 15 show (the only exceptions being pensions in line 12 concordances 14, town planning in line 18 concordances 15, and benefits in lines 16 and 17 in concordances 15):

N	Concordance
1	pay little or no tax. I believe that that would be a much **fairer** and more sensible **system** that would be
2	proposed that the council tax should be replaced by a **fairer system.** We could have had a Budget that
3	Budget could have replaced the council tax with a **fairer system** for our constituents, a system that
4	opportunity to evade one's obligations. A simpler and **fairer** tax **system** is what the UK needs, and I am
5	That is our approach to that taxation-we need a much **fairer system.** I am sorry to interrupt the hon.
6	gains tax should increase in order to help create a **fairer** tax **system.** I have listened carefully to
7	. They included political and electoral reform and a **fairer** taxation **system-in** particular, taking people on
8	perfect? Of course it is not. We are trying to create a **fairer system** in which there are real opportunities to
9	to create the conditions in which we can have a **fairer** tax **system** in which there is less churning of
10	, Selly Oak. I wanted to see a move towards a **fairer** taxation **system,** but I did not see one. I find it
11	way? Not yet. It is clear that the British public want a **fairer** tax **system,** but yesterday's Budget did not
12	balanced economy; a better educated work force; a **fairer** pensions **system.** These are our ambitions for
13	the House in gauging progress towards a simpler, **fairer** tax **system.** That is what all our constituents

Concordances 14 *Fairer* with *system* (crisis corpus)

N	Concordance
1	they will expect us to implement in the House is a **fair** taxation **system** allowing investment in public
2	. As well as a competitive tax **system,** we need a **fair** one, as the hon. Member for Central Devon (Mel
3	easy to comply with, and our tax **system** should be **fair,** reward work, support aspiration and ask the most
4	decision making, but it is also about achieving a **fair** and just tax **system** that will fund our expenditure.
5	best way to do that is to give beer a break. We want a **fair** taxation **system** that recognises the importance
6	to keep interest rates low and it needed to develop a **fair** taxation **system.** I believe that the tax policy that
7	in the international markets; and bringing about a **fair** tax **system** that rewards work and enterprise, and
8	three tax changes in this Budget. First, we wanted a **fair** income tax **system** that would lift the low-paid out
9	in this Budget was the failure to make our tax **system** **fair.** Under Labour, the bottom 10 per cent. pay a
10	, but I want to mention it, because we do not have a **fair** and progressive **system.** Fairness was the
11	in the middle of Sutherland. We need a **system** that is **fair.** The long-term answer, which the Chancellor
12	not have been good for tourism, and it was not a **fair** **system,** so I am glad that the Government have
13	in tax than high earners, we cannot say that we have a **fair** tax **system.** I support the Liberal Democrat policy
14	income are paying tax, we cannot say that we have a **fair** tax **system;** while low earners are paying a higher
15	to hide it at all. We then have to ensure that we have a **fair** tax **system** so that people are incentivised to work
16	but it is in excess of #50,000, will not. How can that be **fair?** How can a **system** be simple when it starts to
17	support at those who need it, and the **system** remains **fair** and affordable. I welcome the right hon.
18	that just protects the present is destined to fail, but a **fair** and open planning **system** that involves local

Concordances 15 *Fair* with *system* (crisis corpus)

As is also the case for *share*, *system* is not linked phraseologically to FAIRNESS as often in the growth data as it is in the crisis data (see table 5 and appendix 5). When this link does exist, it also refers to taxation, although it mostly refers specifically to local taxation (which is not common in the crisis corpus). This is shown in concordances 16:

N	Concordance
1	that they will take it on and that when we talk about a **fair** and just **system** for the future that is affordable
2	future. People want a more transparent **system** of **fair** taxation. They want it to be devoted-properly and
3	, though, is a decent pension for pensioners and a **fair** **system** of local taxation. Let me say something
4	tax. If he is saying that he supports that transition to a **fair** local tax **system,** he and I are probably of one
5	a decent income as of right, and we should have a **fair** local tax **system,** under which that #100 would
6	the poll tax, so we know that he is not in favour of a **fair** **system** of local tax. He thinks that, regardless of
7	a private hospital. Does he think that that **system** is **fair?** If he thinks that it is not fair, why does not he
8	fair competition". As the Minister knows, an open and **fair** appointments **system** is important. Next year will
9	costs, which contribute to the problem of achieving a **fair** **system.** As those housing cost difficulties are

Concordances 16 *Fair* with *system* (growth corpus)

There is more evidence in the crisis corpus than in the growth corpus showing that taxation is a concept that is frequently contextualised in terms of *fairness*. For example, *tax* collocates with *fair* with a higher degree of statistical relevance in the crisis corpus (see appendices 4 and 5). Conversely, the collocate analysis of both AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS show no evidence of phraseological links between *fairness* and deficit spending restrictions. In other words, there is an emphasis on only one side of austerity in terms of fairness; namely, increases in revenue.

However, I did find evidence of the words *balance* and *fairness* co-occurring around the Budget, implicitly referring to the tension between the two sides of austerity on the one hand (increase of revenue and cuts) and social justice on the other:

> *I welcome the Government's pledge to ensure that child poverty does not increase in the next two years in these difficult times, but I was dismayed by the previous Government's record, which left so many young people out of employment, education and training. That was terribly sad.*
>
> *I regret that the previous Government thought that they had only to create a project and throw money at it to solve a problem. I come from industry, and I can tell Labour Members that in truth, how projects are managed determines their success or otherwise. Perhaps they can take that lesson on board.*
>
> *I congratulate the Chancellor on his courage in the face of what he had to deal with. I think he produced a fair and balanced Budget, as do many of my electorate in Northampton. […] The success of the Budget is not assured. It depends on achieving the projected growth figures, which means being competitive. How sad that on the World Economic Forum's global competitiveness index, the UK fell from seventh to 13th in the rankings between 1997 and 2010. Sadly, that is another Labour failure.*
>
> *As I said, the Chancellor did a great job in trying to be fair and balanced, not only for this generation, but for our children and grandchildren. Had we not taken that action and set out on that course, they would be left with the burden.*
>
> Brian Binley, Conservative, Government, June 2010

This speech starts by implying that the crisis (*difficult times*) allows for compromises to be made in terms of social justice; in particular, the acceptance of child poverty. *Fair and balanced* is used twice to refer to the Chancellor as representing the appropriate level of moderation. This is in contrast to the profligate previous Labour government, who spent too much money, *throwing money at the system* (as we saw in the growth example for *austerity* in section 6.3) and did not commit enough to managerialism and economic imperatives (*industry*, *projects*, *managed*, *competitive*, *competitiveness*). The contrast in the treatment of social justice (*child* *poverty*) in comparison to economic imperatives (*competitiveness*) is striking. Not only is child poverty tolerated in the context of a crisis, but its reduction is not even described as part of the success of the Budget; only economic imperatives are mentioned. Intergenerational justice is then described narrowly as a lack of *burden*, which, although not explicitly stated, refers to the consequences of the crisis and could easily imply (within profligacy arguments) only public debt.

Once again, as we saw in the use of *austerity* in chapter 6, the analogy between private and public debt is being exploited. The fear of leaving one's children to deal with one's own debt once one passes away is something to which I am sure most parents can relate. However, using this argument to talk about public deficit is simplistic. As Burchardt (2011: 8) explains, the wellbeing of future generations also depends on a public infrastructure and workforce that are publicly funded, such as schools and teachers and doctors and hospitals, and underfunding these sectors can have serious consequences in the future. Moreover, the next generation is not homogeneous. Some young people will already be in a more advantageous situation than their peers because they will be in a position to inherit private wealth, so they are more immune to the effects of underfunding public services. In contrast, young people from more humble backgrounds will be negatively affected by these problems. (Burchardt 2011: 8) In the example above, *fairness* is not only taken away from social justice, or defined narrowly as *balance*, but also made to work against it semantically: what is fair is not to go out of our way to reduce child poverty, but that the governments of the generations to come do not have debts.

7.5.3 *Test*

Test is perhaps the least expected collocate found in the data, especially considering that it appears as prominently as it does (see table 4). Firstly, as shown in concordances 17, in six out of the nine concordances where *test* collocates with *fairness*, it does so in the noun phrase *fairness test*. As we saw in section 5.3.3, the use of *fairness* as a pre-modifier classifier is phraseologically uncommon; as such, *the fairness test* does not sound natural. This is further proved by the fact that the word *test* does not appear in proximity to FAIRNESS at all in the growth corpus. Secondly, *test* brings *fairness* within the semantic connotative context of simple metrics as a 'fail' or 'pass'. Moreover, it also works as a metadiscursive commentary that highlights the importance of the concept within the debates, as it was the case of AUSTERITY (see section 6.6).

N	Concordance
1	and secure jobs in the future. The Budget also fails the **fairness test.** Over the next few weeks and months,
2	to traditional Tory politics. The Budget also fails the **fairness test.** It savages support for the poorest and
3	a Budget that puts economic growth at risk. It fails the **fairness test.** The poorest will suffer the most. The IFS
4	Monday night, the Chancellor's spin doctors made **fairness** his key Budget **test,** and by Tuesday
5	Budget is fair. I do not know what definition or **test** of **fairness** he is using, but the Institute for Fiscal Studies
6	, a massive income tax cut each and every year. The **fairness test** for this Budget was whether the
7	gains across all families". This Budget fails the **test** of **fairness,** it fails the **test** of growing the economy and it
8	make it better for all of us. The Budget not only fails the **fairness test,** but fails to tackle the unemployment
9	by the Opposition. The Budget has failed the **fairness test** and will create a divided Britain. The

Concordances 17 *Fairness* with *test* (crisis corpus)

The collocation *fairness test* creates a categorical prosody, which produces the mirage of reduced semantic ambiguity. Moreover, the complexity that surrounds the reality of the consequences for everyday life of implementing the Coalition Budgets is also greatly reduced. This logic presents the success of the Budget as a simple matter of problem-solving (Fairclough 2000b). The solution, it seems, is not to deal with the problems that caused the crisis in the first instance, but rather to adjust the amount of fairness applied to the Budget. Furthermore, this quantifying prosody moves the keyword away from its semantic associations with justice and equality; indeed, there are only three potential references to this in the concordances (*poorest* in lines 2 and 3 and *divided Britain* in line 9).

These findings represent an important contribution to our understanding of how *fairness* aided the legitimisation of austerity governance. Firstly, it very clearly shows that *fairness* was semantically fixated with taxation, focusing only on the more palatable aspect of austerity, revenues rather than cuts. This adds evidence to one of the main claims of this study: as we already saw in the collocation patterns of both keywords (see sections 6.1 and 7.1), the semantic scope of *fairness* is not directly linked to the semantic scope of *austerity* and the cuts to social provision it represents.

Additionally, these results also show that this collocate fixation with tax is mostly a pattern found after 2010, this year being a catalyst for change in the discursive features of *fairness*. The use of *fairness,* contrary to what we saw in previous sections, is normative, appealing to required actions and behaviours rather than economic imperatives. Walsh (2016) also found a lack a reference to taxation in her study of Budget statements in the pre-austerity years.

The results also tap into the anti-elite rhetoric found in the crisis management literature (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish 2010; Lischinsky 2011; Stanley 2016b; Walsh 2016; Whittle & Mueller 2016). However, the findings in this section show that this rhetoric was only framed within a very narrow semantic scope of *fairness*: the more vernacular meaning of reasonable amount (see section 5.2). *Fairness* as egalitarianism is not present in these findings at all. In other words, big gaps in wealth and their social effects are not referred to but instead the focus is on how reasonable the tax system is. Considering this, the results point to a neoliberal legitimisation strategy that focuses on the idea of non-implementation once again (see section 6.4). The problem was not the unfair levels of wealth re-distribution that a neoliberal paradigm produced, but the tax system not being properly implemented or contributed to.

7.6 Conclusions

The findings in this chapter have shown a clear link between fairness and taxation in the crisis corpus. In fact, looking at the collocates broadly, six (*share, stabiliser, system* (twice), *fuel, pay*) of the twelve top collocates of FAIRNESS are strongly related to taxation. I have also shown other strong links that add to this pattern. It is always difficult to legitimise taxation in policy-making. This is especially the case within a neoliberal framework where, although it is still an implicit necessity, taxation is seen as an overextension of the state and in opposition to a good economic climate for market agents. However, and as the growth results have shown in this chapter, in normal circumstances there is no need to legitimise taxation as such, because it is often taken for granted as a requirement (Stanley 2016b).

The explicit moral focus on the revenue side of austerity governance, rather than on traditional (normalising) neoliberal arguments about efficiency and enterprise (which seem to be more common around FAIRNESS before 2010), points to an awareness of the difficulties in legitimising deficit reduction, particularly in terms of acknowledging the hardship that reducing public spending would bring. When discursively focusing on the fairness of taxation, the debates are not focusing on the fairness of the cuts, the most unpalatable side of austerity governance. Moreover, the contextualisations we have seen, for *fair share* in particular, are vague, vernacular and noncommittal, allowing an explicit demand for higher taxes for higher earners and businesses to co-exist happily with regressive taxation policies (see section 3.7).

More to the point, this politicisation of taxation appears to be a neoliberal concession that was considered to be crucial to legitimising the survival of this paradigm without having to relinquish most of its framework. Austerity governance is still underpinned by the belief in *individual* responsibility, not systemic, social or collective responsibility. In a paradoxical legitimisation strategy, the individual responsibility that neoliberal rationalities treasure ('the rich' need to contribute more) is summoned to promote a policy that the same rationalities despise (paying more taxes). However, this contradiction appears to be crucial as a rhetorical strategy that discursively mitigates inequalities and presents a re-moralised neoliberalism, where taxation is both a stronger act of responsibility and a compensation for the excesses of the past. This rhetorical tendency is certainly in contradiction with neoliberal rationalities and governance. However, this tendency does agree with neoconservative values, which delimit the character of neoliberalism in the UK. More to the point, this discursive strategy allows the crisis to be presented as a crisis *in* neoliberalism rather than a crisis *of* neoliberalism (Jessop 2013). That is, the crisis is presented as a simple violation of neoliberal premises, rather than as a malfunction of the whole framework (Hay 2012: 2).

Austerity governance is still assigning very specific roles to the state, and these are still in the capacity of a custodian or an enabler, rather than that of an activated agent. The contextualisation of *fairness* almost exclusively as *fair tax* is relevant in terms of what the moral duties of government are considered to be, because government is mainly portrayed as a controller of how much is contributed to public finances. In other words, government is in charge of controlling citizens' responsibility for paying taxes. By the same token, the moral role of the state as a controller of citizens' rights in terms of social justice (re-distribution of wealth, reducing inequality, providing services that are needed, etc.) is backgrounded. Government agency is very much limited to that of an accountant.

Fairness is certainly more semantically contextualised in terms of moral responsibility than in terms of moral rights. This moral focus, as we saw in section 3.3, is also a neoconservative characteristic. This seems to represent not only a continuation of neoliberalism, but a step back to normative neoliberalism, because the discursive moral tendencies of the Third Way used to be more centred on striking a balance between rights and responsibilities (Fairclough 2000a: 39). Moreover, the narrow contextualisation of *fairness* we have seen in this chapter clearly associates this keyword with an objective quantification, focusing mainly on contribution, rather than engaging with links to social justice. *Fairness* is much closer to representing a quasi-market relationship (Hall & O'Shea 2013: 8) in which the state is the accountant that oversees a system of contributions, rather than representing a value that has anything to do with being a hyponym of justice or egalitarianism.

More generally, these results point to a semantic association and intertextual relation between the two keywords analysed. This relation was not an overt one. That is, the two concepts, as we have seen in this chapter and chapter 6, do not appear together often. However, the semantic features that determine *austerity*, in particular thriftiness and debt morality, are transferred to *fairness* and to the semantic construction of taxation. The discursive neoliberal legacy of affordability is adhered to the semantic scope of *fairness*. This allows neoliberal rationalities and governance to continue regardless of the contradictions that are present in these legitimisation strategies and which are highlighted by the findings in this chapter. In chapter 8, I consider other patterns in the prosody of FAIRNESS and what these reveal has a direct impact on the way in which wealth re-distribution (and, consequently, inequality) is discursively constructed. I also highlight certain patterns that (in contrast with the ones shown in this chapter) are present in both sub-corpora, pointing to continuations in the discursive use of *fairness* in the data.

8 FAIRNESS: BACK TO THE FUTURE

In the three previous chapters I presented my findings on the lexicographic analysis and frequency (chapter 5), the collocates and concordances of AUSTERITY (chapter 6), and the collocates and concordances of FAIRNESS (chapter 7). In doing so, I focused on the contrasts between the findings in the growth and the crisis corpus. In this chapter, I continue with the analysis of *fairness* but I take a different perspective.

The chapter is divided into two main parts. In section 8.1, I explain that the idea of merit or 'deserving', which is part of normative and normalised neoliberalism, is also present in the contextualisation of *fairness* in the crisis corpus. I argue, however, that there are a few novelties in the discursive choices surrounding this pattern. On the one hand, people on high incomes are commonly included as overt actors and an association is made between merit and reciprocity, which, together, paves the way for a polarising construction of social relations (section 8.1.1). On the other hand, the idea of sacrifice as a source of achievement underlies this reciprocal perspective, which leads to the trivialisation of hardship (section 8.1.2). The presentation of these results pays attention to extended excerpts from the crisis corpus and to the manifestation of these ideas in the use of the node word *share*.

In section 8.2, I focus on the similarities found in the use of FAIRNESS in the two corpora, paying attention to continuations of discursive features. I argue that FAIRNESS is constructed in both corpora as a future outcome in the phrases *a fairer society* (in the growth corpus) and *a fairer Britain* (in the crisis corpus). Finally, in section 8.3, I consider what the results tell us about the evolution of the meaning of *fairness*.

8.1 Sharing the burden: divisions and asymmetries

In section 3.5 I explained that the idea of merit underpins neoliberal rationalities and policies regarding inequality. Put simply, inequality is tolerated because both rich and poor deserve to be where they are; they have arrived there because they have followed different behavioural patterns in terms of the opportunities presented to them (Sayer 2005a; 2015; Swift 2006; Sinfield 2014). I also explained that despite having little resemblance to reality, such explanations have been crucial in maintaining an entrenched lack of wealth re-distribution in neoliberal governance, mainly based on the premises of economic growth and workfare. On the other hand, when defining *fairness* in section 5.2, I explained that one of the most common associations with the understanding of this value is the one presented by John Rawls. In essence, Rawls links *fairness* with reciprocity by viewing it as an ideal of equality as equal treatment (Finkel, Harré, & Rodriguez Lopez 2001). In other words, being equal means being equally fair to everybody.

What these two views of *fairness* – merit and reciprocity – have in common is that they both allow for legitimisation spaces to flourish around resentment towards wealth re-distribution. They might make room for policies that focus on relieving poverty (as has been the case in neoliberal governance), but at the same time they can background the need to mind the gap between rich and poor (and the active wealth re-distribution it requires). The consequences of these rationalities and this governance – high levels of economic inequality – were naturalised in the decades before the crisis by all the main parties in the UK, including New Labour. Peter Mandelson famously stated in 1998 that New Labour was 'intensely relaxed about people getting filthy rich' (Atkinson 2015: 24).

In spite of this acknowledgement, the narratives of merit and reciprocity frequently excluded or backgrounded wealthy people. For example, the well-established discourse of 'social exclusion' considers the rich to be within the mainstream majority, poverty being only a peripheral problem; but, in reality, this would probably be more accurate in reverse, as there are certainly fewer people at the top than at the bottom (Levitas 2005). However, we saw in section 7.5.1 that the 'undeserving rich', who do not pay enough taxes, became prominent in the contextualisations of *fairness* from 2010. In this chapter, I show how this new discursive feature was woven into traditional discursive approaches to inequality (namely, merit and reciprocity) and how they served the legitimisation of austerity governance.

8.1.1 *Fairness* as reciprocity

The discursive combination of merit, reciprocity and the references to people on high incomes was spread throughout the concordances of some of the main collocates of FAIRNESS, especially the ones related to taxation. As such, this section is different from the rest of the results because it focuses on extended examples exclusively, rather than taking concordances as a starting point. However, it was precisely the repetition of this pattern when analysing the collocates of FAIRNESS that brought it to my attention. Moreover, the importance of this combination of discourses for legitimising austerity governance is confirmed by the fact that in his 2011 and 2012 speeches, George Osborne utilises *fairness* for the first time within the frame of referring overtly to the principles of merit and reciprocity:

> *They should be certain and predictable. They should be simple to understand and easy to comply with, and our tax system should be fair, reward work, support aspiration and ask the most from those who can most afford the most.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2011

> *taxes should be simple, predictable, support work and be fair. The rich should pay the most and the poor the least.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2012

Both descriptions of Mr Osborne's ideal taxation system are based on a series of recurrent paratactic relations. On the one hand, we find simplicity (*certain*, *predictable*, *simple*, *easy*). Taxation should also agree with the principles of merit and reward for hard work (*reward work*, *support aspiration*, *support work*). Finally, both quotes end with two sentences that work almost as a tautology: *ask the most from those who can most afford the most* and *the rich pay the most and the poor the least.* These two contrastive structures work as mirror images, using the generic classification of *the rich / the poor* and the superlatives *most/most* and *most/least*. The link between all the concepts to be included in this ideal taxation system is, as expected in paratactic relations, unexplained. However, the final parallel structures in both quotes frame the whole conceptualisation of *fair taxation* with an underlying reciprocity between the two extremes of wealth. This reciprocity is discursively constructed as a perfect distribution of responsibility. It is reciprocally fair for the rich to pay the most and the poor to pay the least. This is a morally powerful argument, as it is difficult to argue the opposite (that the rich should pay the least and the poor should pay the most). Moreover, it presents taxation as fair for everybody in equal measure. Indeed, the pronoun *everybody* is used explicitly in similar arguments, as in another example from George Osborne in 2012:

> *<u>Everyone</u> in this country, and particularly those with the <u>highest incomes</u>, should contribute a <u>fair</u> share to the Exchequer*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2012

Important assumptions are implicit in such constructions. Firstly, they entail that extreme wealth and poverty co-exist but are not necessarily related in terms of how wealth is created or distributed. However, it is precisely the relation between rich and poor that matters for equality understood as egalitarianism. Not only this, but *fair* in this example is solely associated with incomes (*highest incomes*). This discards the role of accumulated wealth (an important consideration for inequality, as we saw in section 3.5) in defining the appropriacy of the system in terms of fairness. Moreover, the examples assume that those who are poor have the same level of responsibility for paying for the crisis. This is fair for everybody in equal measure, and it is tinted with the idea of merit. The thinking that poverty is no reason to shirk fiscal responsibility is not new, and it can be traced back to Thatcher (Walker 2014: 301). However, what the Coalition is pioneering in the example above is to represent this shared responsibility as fair reciprocity. The slogan they repeatedly used – 'we are all in this together' – is a prime example of this. Finally, one other assumption that is present in Mr Osborne's example is the existence of a discursively excluded group: neither rich nor poor, but the rest, the majority, with whom Mr Osborne is clearly siding. The following example presents a related speech from the other Coalition party, the Liberal Democrats, in 2012:

> *restoring our economy to balanced and sustainable growth; restoring and maintaining confidence in the international markets; and bringing about a <u>fair tax system</u> that rewards work and enterprise, and <u>taxes wealth</u>. Labour borrowed us all into the mess that we inherited in 2010, but under the coalition Government, Britain will earn its way back to prosperity.*
>
> Stephen Williams, Liberal Democrats, Government, 2012

This is a clear example of 'extreme listing' (Fairclough 2000a: 28), a discursive propensity to present unrelated items in a list without attempting to make sense of the relations between the items in that list, creating at the same time the assumed relation of equivalence implied in the paratactic grammatical structure. In this example, economic imperatives (*growth*, *market confidence*, *enterprise*) are mixed with meritocracy (*reward work*) and the fact that *wealth* should be *taxed*, as the necessary steps to *earn* (this verb also implying the idea of work and reward) *prosperity*, the final destination for all these (unexplained) rationalities and policies. The idea of the 'undeserving rich' is backgrounded here by the phrase, *taxes wealth*. It is interesting to note, however, that in contrast with the previous excerpt from Mr Osborne, *taxes wealth* implies extending the fairness of taxation beyond the limits of income to include accumulated wealth.

There is, of course, a latent contradiction within this rhetorical repertoire in terms of tax increases for the wealthy and the reality of the policies that were being put in place at the time. As we saw in section 3.7, the tax policy that was generally followed by the Coalition was regressive, and it was in fact the poorest who endured the greatest hardship created by austerity governance. More importantly, what such contextualisations achieve is to ensure that semantically, *fairness* rests within the boundaries of neoliberal rationalities. Taxation is presented as a system of antagonising individualised contributions, where groups of citizens ought to provide in a perfectly reciprocal way, rather than as a complex system where, for example, some taxes (such as VAT) are unavoidable or where other important actors in society (such as those who fulfil caring needs, including parents) who are outside 'traditional' perceptions of taxation are backgrounded.

Moreover, these contextualisations avoid establishing a relationship between tax increases and the idea of wealth re-distribution. This is explicitly stated by Labour in the following examples from Alistair Darling in March 2010 (while in government) and in 2012 (in opposition):

> *Among all the tax rises since the beginning of this global crisis, 60 per cent. of them will be paid for by the top 5 per cent. of earners. We have not raised these taxes out of dogma or ideology; we are determined to ensure that our overall tax regime remains competitive. But I believe that those who have benefited the most from the strong growth in incomes in the past years should now pay their fair share of tax.*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Government, March 2010

> *I want to say a word about the 50p rate of tax, since I introduced it. At the time, I said it was a temporary measure. I did not particularly want to introduce it, but I took the view that, at a time when we were asking many people in this country to share the burden of meeting the increased cost of the downturn, it was right that those who had done well over the previous 10 years or so should bear their fair share of it. I do not have a philosophic attachment to that rate at all, therefore, but this is not a Budget in which I would have returned to the topic, simply because the incomes of many other people in this country are currently being squeezed and they are going to lose out this year*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Opposition, 2012

What is highlighted in this legitimisation of tax increases is their temporality and their exclusive association with crisis management and the reluctant reciprocity it allegedly requires. Thus, Mr Darling is implying that the norm is to pursue a system of low taxation, this being a natural part of neoliberal governance. Moreover, he explicitly states that these measures are not *dogma, ideology* or *philosophical*, but a fair reciprocity in terms of what the rest of society (whose incomes are being *squeezed* and who are having to *share the burden*) is losing out on to aid the recovery. People on high incomes, represented here in direct relation to economic performance (they *benefited from growth* or they *did well where there was not a crisis*) are also required to lose out.

The discursive construction of antagonising groups is also found when comparing high income and benefits. This is shown in this excerpt from Mr Osborne, again in 2012:

> *But, to make sure that <u>those on the highest income</u> contribute a fair share, I am introducing a new cap on those reliefs that are currently uncapped. From next year, anyone seeking to claim more than £50,000 of these reliefs in any one year will have a cap set at 25% of their income. <u>We have capped benefits</u>. Now it is right to cap tax reliefs too.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2012

Two groups of citizens are presented here: people on the highest income and people on benefits, even though the second group is absent as an overt actor in the sentence. Mr Osborne's argument agrees with Rawlsian thinking on equality as reciprocity (Finkel, Harré, & Rodriguez Lopez 2001) only in the sense that superficially, the two groups are (rhetorically) treated equally. However, it does not follow Rawls' principle that those who are worst off should be compensated more, which is the only exception for reciprocity.

Mr Osborne is equating capping surplus income with capping benefits. The implication here is that both are equally good candidates for contributing to this reciprocity. However, this is an argument that can only work when benefits are considered a choice (a life-style, rather than a necessary social support for those who need it) and wealth an earned advantage. Mr Osborne's implication is that both tax reliefs and benefits have been too generous, and now they need to be made less generous. This completely ignores the fact that tax reliefs are not a measure for social protection but benefits are (this is especially true within the logic of workfare, where benefits have become increasingly conditional, as we saw in section 3.5). Consequently, this type of parallelism is perverse. By focusing only on income, Mr Osborne is ignoring the fact that wealth is, to a great extent, not related to work but to the control of assets, which is related to power distribution (Sayer 2015: 45). Wealth is not warranted on the grounds of need (as benefits are), because is not a necessity[69]. In other words, capping wealth and capping benefits do not have the same social and personal consequences.

However, this perverse reciprocity is particularly useful within the logic of austerity governance. From this perspective, crisis management can be presented as a requirement that needs to be contributed to equally by different sectors in society. This idea is present in the following example from the Conservative MP Edward Leigh in June 2010:

> *It is right to speak for <u>the poor</u>, but it is also right to speak for the <u>many people who earn and who are creating jobs.</u> [...] <u>Everybody</u>, all the way up the income tax scale, is having to pay for our difficulties and helping us to climb out of this mess. <u>Everybody</u> in this nation is having to pay, and that is absolutely right. I also like the fact that this Budget is starting to create the conditions in which we can have a <u>fairer tax system</u> in which there is less churning of money and less of a deep <u>unemployment and poverty trap:</u> By all means let us raise personal allowances, and let us then try to move towards <u>a flatter and fairer rate of taxation</u>.*
>
> Edward Leigh, Conservative, Government, June 2010

The idea of *everybody* paying is repeated twice. This time, the generic construction of *the poor* is semantically contrasted (the conjunction used is the contrastive *but*) with a much more specific and activated construction of

69 Moreover, people who need benefits might have contributed to them by paying national insurance in the past or via family support, for example (Sayer 2015: 45). Such distinctions in terms of wealth and poverty have been greatly ignored in discussions about inequality, even though it is unearned wealth that has increased the most in the last 40 years (see chapter 3). See Sayer (2015) for a compelling account of wealth creation and inequality.

the many people who earn and who are creating jobs. This makes the assumption that *the poor* do not earn or create jobs; in other words, that they do not work. This is confirmed later in the example (*unemployment and poverty trap*), an idea that is explicitly embedded in a *fairer tax system*. Finally, this *fairer tax system* is defined further using the metaphor of a journey towards a *flatter rate of taxation*, which, even though it is clearly a regressive proposition in terms of tax[70], is equated with *fairer* by the conjunction *and*.

However, we do find examples of the idea of the worst off being unequally aided (which is ignored in the previous examples of *fairness* as reciprocity), as Rawls (1971; 1993) proposed. They tend to appear when legitimising the retrenchment of welfare, especially greater conditionality for access to benefits. For example, here is Iain Duncan Smith in June 2010:

> *In 2010-11, <u>spending</u> is on track to reach just over £12.1 billion, twice the level of the 1995-96 spending in real terms. That is a significant sum, and we need to make sure, <u>for the taxpayer</u>, that the money is paid to those who <u>desperately need it</u>. That is why we need a proper medical assessment. It is not about cutting support for people who live with serious disability or health problems; it is simply about making sure that we target support at <u>those who need it</u>, and the system remains <u>fair and affordable</u>.*
>
> Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative, Government, June 2010

This example begins and ends with the idea of affordability. It starts by pointing to the amount of *spending* and ends by overtly equating *fairness* with *affordability*. Those who are worst off here, however, are euphemistically referred to as *those who desperately need* (benefits). It is interesting to find that, according to Mr Duncan Smith, welfare needs to be targeted at those

70 Because those on lower incomes would be using a higher proportion of their funds to pay this tax, whereas those on higher incomes would have more funds to cushion their tax expenses. If a person earned £20,000 and paid tax at a rate of 20%, for example, that means that they would pay £4,000 in tax, leaving them £16,000 to live on. If another person earned £50,000 and paid the same rate of tax, 20%, they would pay £10,000 but they would still have £40,000 to live on, more than double that of the first person. As such, even if tax contributions were set at a flat rate, they would affect people on lower incomes more than those on higher incomes.

who are worst off for the sake of taxpayers. Once again, different groups of citizens are discursively confronted. However, in this example, they are not related by reciprocity but by the fact that one group is only at the receiving end (the needy) and the other is at the contributing end (taxpayers). In other words, the fact that some people need more help is used precisely to justify reducing that support so that the system is fair and affordable, in accordance with taxpayers' assumed wishes and the rationalities behind austerity governance.

8.1.2 *Fairness* as sacrifice

We saw in the previous section that *fairness* was repeatedly constructed as reciprocity and merit. This legitimisation strategy resulted in the individualisation and confrontation of different groups of citizens, who were generally differentiated according to their income or by whether they were portrayed as on the giving or the receiving end of public finances. As mentioned previously, these patterns were not lexically performed by specific words; rather, they were scattered around the concordances of the main collocates of the lemma FAIRNESS and were found when analysing the wider context of the collocations. However, this same discursive tendency is also associated with the use of a specific lexical item, *share*. We have already seen that *fair share* is one of the most repeated collocations relating to *fairness* in the crisis corpus. The particular relevance of the word *share* in the data led me to consider how the same word is contextualised as a verb (this being a clear example of serendipity in CL; see section 4.6.2). I considered that *share* could be an important concept in terms of equality and how it relates to semantic constructions of the economy. For example, *share* as a noun is now a well-established concept in the financial sector (as part of the ownership of or investment in a company). Moreover, in *sharing* there is an assumption that equal parts or tasks, for example, are assigned, which semantically connects this word with *equality* and *fairness*. Apart from *fair share*, I also found this association used explicitly in the crisis corpus as *fairly shared* on six occasions:

N	Concordance
1	doing so, we have ensured that the burden is **fairly shared.** Today we have paid the debts
2	determined that growth should be **shared fairly** right across the nations and regions of
3	that the burden of the challenges is **shared fairly;** in other words, whether we get
4	public must know that the burden is being **fairly shared.** That's why I said last year: we
5	The public still want the burden to be **fairly shared,** but far from keeping the top
6	we ensure that the burdens of doing so are **fairly shared.** It is a privilege for me to follow

Concordances 18 *Fairly* with *shared* (crisis corpus)

As the concordances show, the contextualisation of this collocation is very repetitive. On the one hand, only passive structures are utilised. On the other hand, what seems to be *fairly shared* is exclusively *the burden* (with one exception in line 2, where it is *growth* that needs to be shared across different areas). The speakers assume that the audience knows what *burden* refers to, because it is always used with the definite article *the* and, as such, announces that the information about what it represents is accessible and needs no further explanation. Moreover, *burden* carries negative connotations, because it is linked to ideas about difficulty and hard work. Other words that are in the vicinity, such as *challenge*, *tough times* and *painful*, contribute to this negativity. This is shown in the following two examples from John Denham and Rachel Reeves, both from the Labour Party in 2012:

> *The second challenge – even if the Government get the first right, painful times cannot be avoided – is to ensure that <u>the burden of the challenges is shared fairly</u>; in other words, whether we get fairness in tough times.*
>
> John Denham, Labour, Opposition, 2012

> *how we as a country meet the economic challenges we face and how we ensure that the <u>burdens of doing so are fairly shared</u>*
>
> Rachel Reeves, Labour, Opposition, 2012

Burden seems to be used metaphorically to refer collectively to the negative effects of the crisis. However, this *burden* can also be utilised to signify the actions required to get us out of the crisis; in other words, austerity governance. The following example is from George Osborne in June 2010:

> *Sadly, in this <u>unavoidable</u> Budget we have had to <u>increase taxes</u>. We have had to <u>pay the bills</u> of past irresponsibility. We have had to*

> *relearn the virtue of financial prudence. But in doing so, we have ensured that the burden is fairly shared. Today we have paid the debts of a failed past and laid the foundations for a more prosperous future. The richest paying the most and the vulnerable protected: that is our approach. Prosperity for all: that is our goal.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, June 2010

The burden in this example refers to the difficulty represented by increasing taxes, which is described here as an economic imperative (*unavoidable*). *Austerity* is not mentioned explicitly, but austerity governance is constructed as a metaphor by comparing the government Budget with a household budget that was largely irresponsible in the past (we have had to *pay the bills, paid the debts of a failed past*) but is becoming more responsible (*laid the foundations for a more prosperous future).*

Two things are particularly interesting in this example. Firstly, the explicit analogy and simplification of public finances as *paying the bills* or *debts* is paratactically linked to tax increases. However, even if the intention is to associate public budgets with private ones, a private budget would usually focus on reducing costs, because increasing revenue is much more difficult to achieve in the private sphere. It is not always possible to get a better job or increase one's customer base, for example, and both would require some investment in time or money, or both. Mr Osborne is using the household metaphor precisely to legitimise this side of austerity governance, moving attention away from cost-cutting in public spending, which would be a much more realistic comparison in terms of household budgets (even if still a fraudulent one; see section 6.4).

The construction of time is particularly interesting in this example. Mr Osborne is presenting austerity governance, especially tax increases, as something that has already been done, using the perfect aspect (*have had to pay the bill, have had to relearn, have ensured, have paid the debts*). The repetition of the perfect tense gives the speech a parallelism that works as a morality tale where the present government has the moral authority, both in terms of strength (doing what is necessary) and in terms of being fair and reciprocal, as described in the previous section (*the rich pay the most*, *the vulnerable protected*).

Prompted by the relevance of *share* in these examples, I then looked into wider uses of the verb form in the crisis data to see if this negative prosody (represented by the idea of *the burden*) was sustained as a pattern. I found 277 occurrences of *share*, 136 of which were verbs. Most of them (101) referred to sharing *a view, an aim, a sentiment, a concern, a value, a passion, a common interest* etc. Within the rest of the examples, there was, a tendency to find polarised prosody, as concordance 19 illustrates. I found words semantically linked to the idea of difficulty (such as *burden*, *pain*, *effort*) and also positively evaluated words (such as *wealth*, *reward* and *prosperity*). Both semantic groups are highlighted in concordances 19:

N	Concordance
14	a time when we were asking many people in this country to **share** the burden of meeting the increased cost of the
15	wealth and greater national prosperity, in which all can **share.** I therefore welcome the tax-reducing measures in the
16	myself, I know, as will many others in the House, that people **share** clothing and pushchairs. They do what they can to get
17	of the UK; it is on top of introducing a fair fuel stabiliser to **share** the burden of high international oil prices; it is on top of
18	to relocate to Yorkshire, but public sector bodies to cluster, **share** accommodation and facilities and provide shared
19	to make tough choices. This is an area where people can **share.** Having had children myself, I know, as will many
20	because it is the only way that we can have enough wealth to **share** with other people. That vision makes it absolutely
21	and burning would be quite the wrong thing to do. We **share** that view, but there is a difference between my party
22	Secretary is a west midlands MP, too-our constituencies **share** a local newspaper-so he will know all about the big
23	so would impose the pay freeze today. Surely it is better to **share** the work around than to get into a position later where
24	, Birmingham, Bristol, Newcastle, Leeds and Bradford will **share** a #100 million pot to ensure that they are among the
25	and commitment. In the family we learn how to give, how to **share,** how to be kind, how to care, and how to build
26	very hard and did not cause this recession, but they must **share** the burden as we pay to clean it up. The truth is that the
27	will be very tough on wage increases. That will help, as it will **share** the work and mean that we can keep more people
28	office of state. He did not have long to think about how to **share** the proceeds of economic growth. Instead, he had to
29	have to give it greater freedom and the ability to connect and **share** budgets and resources with other government activity
30	allowing investment in public services so that we can all **share** in that wealth. I refer Members to my entry in the
31	. But in return, we make this commitment: everyone will **share** in the rewards when we succeed. When we say that
32	sector should somehow be ring-fenced and not have to **share** some of the economic pain we are experiencing. The
33	. If I can put it this way to him, it is no wonder nobody wants to **share** a platform with him. On the measures in the Budget, I
34	to be allowed to debate those matters properly, we need to **share** information with hon. Members so that we can
35	. The current generation at work should be allowed to **share** their skills in the informal setting of the workplace to
36	for sharing wealth and opportunity fairly is very keen to **share** austerity with everyone. This past month shows that we
37	. So we have to be prudent, and that means that we have to **share** the pain. The whole point is that everybody will suffer,
38	business. Cuts have to happen, and it is important that we all **share** the burden of those cuts. Labour is keen to ask those
39	of the goal of a #10,000 personal allowance that we all **share.** I can tell the country that as a result of our Budgets,
40	action to force countries with banking secrecy to **share** information. That is a favourable climate for the UK to
41	of the last decade. He should have set out how to **share** the proceeds of growth so we could get borrowing and
42	will value those who work. Together, the British people will **share** in the effort and share the rewards. This country
43	reaching for his fountain pen, and if it happens, I am happy to **share** the glory with him. It is a felt tip. That will do. In fact,
44	measures that will allow companies and individuals further to **share** in the benefits of these low interest rates, achieved no
45	work. Together, the British people will share in the effort and **share** the rewards. This country borrowed its way into
46	. Members can work out for themselves whether they will **share** the time or not. I will certainly attempt to share the time,
47	they will share the time or not. I will certainly attempt to **share** the time, Madam Deputy Speaker. Although it is a

Concordances 19 Selection of examples of the verb *share* (crisis corpus)

Wealth, for example, is contextualised positively as an aim to be achieved. However, wealth creation is subscribed to neoliberal governance and rationalities, where low tax is a prerequisite, even though this is in contradiction with austerity governance and deficit reduction. The following example is from David Ruffley, Conservative, in 2012 (line 15 in concordances 19):

> *I believe in low tax. Low tax fosters personal responsibility and generates the incentives that create greater wealth and greater national prosperity, in which all can share.*
>
> David Ruffley, Conservative, Government, 2012

At other times, wealth creation it is directly subscribed to the return to the finance-led growth model as the only option for creating wealth that can then be shared by all. This example is from Ian Taylor, Conservative, in 2011 (line 20):

> *We want to rebuild the financial community, we want London to regain its status as a financial global centre, we want to build up business again to be profitable, and we want the banking community to start lending. That is not because we want to give people back their bonuses or give them the opportunity to make money and have bigger cars, but because it is the only way that we can have enough wealth to share with other people.*
>
> Ian Taylor, Conservative, Government, 2011

The other example of wealth is subscribed to a social democratic rationality, where taxation is portrayed as a means to creating investment and wealth that can be shared by all. The following example is from John McDonnell in 2011(line 30):

> *believe that one of the alternatives they will expect us to implement in the House is a fair taxation system allowing investment in public services so that we can all share in that wealth.*
>
> John McDonnell, Labour, Opposition, 2011

Furthermore, *Burden* is clearly contextualised as a punishment: in this case, to justify a pay freeze in the public sector:

> *I know that there are many dedicated public sector workers who work very hard and did not cause this recession, but they must share the burden as we pay to clean it up: The truth is that the country was living beyond its means when the recession came, and if we do not tackle pay and pensions, more jobs will be lost*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, June 2010

The punishment or *burden* here is to accept a reduction in pay and pension; the reward, as it is implied, is to keep one's job and contribute to the solution to the *recession*. The threat of job loss to force workers to accept the erosion of their rights is nothing new. However, what is a novelty here is that this threat is used as a justification for austerity governance by exploiting the ambivalent relation between public and private debt once again. Even if no clear causal structure is used, the temporal embeddedness of *when the recession came* implies that *living beyond its means* was involved in causing the recession. However, it is not clear who *we* or *the country* are. As such, both private and public debt can be understood here. What is more, if these public workers (despite being exempted from culpability at the beginning of the example) were also living beyond their means, it is morally correct that their living standards are reduced.

A similar idea is repeated by Mr Osborne in 2012. In fact, it appears in the final sentence of his initial speech on the debate that year:

> *Let us be resolved. No people will strive as the British will strive. No country will adapt as the British will adapt. No country will value those who work as we will value those who work. Together, the British people will share in the effort and share the rewards. This country borrowed its way into trouble; now we are going to earn our way out. I commend the Budget to the House.*
>
> George Osborne, Conservative, Government, 2012

We find here what seems to be one of Mr Osborne's favourite discursive features: parallelism and parataxis where the superlative structure *no … as* is repeated three times, and where nationalistic values are the prime argument (*British people*, *British country*). The values of determination and resilience are also repeated (*be resolved, strive*, *adaptability*) alongside workfare and its underpinning principle of meritocracy. This time, what the punishment (or *effort* in this case) and the *rewards* are is unclear, but they are semantically linked by the conjunction *and*. Once again, the ambiguous relationship between public and private debt is present in *this country borrowed its way into trouble* (which is linked to the rest of the sentences by using parataxis) and in the ambivalent pronoun *we*, whose deictic referent is never made clear (Mulderrig 2012) (government, citizens or both). The speech ends with another example of deservedness and workfare: the way out needs to be *earned*.

This presentation of austerity governance as a combined system of effort and reward is consistent with a meritocratic view of equality, but it takes it one step further on the scale of suffering. Not only is *fairness* something that needs to be based on whether people are 'deserving' or 'undeserving', but also it has to be achieved by making sacrifices. The ends justify the means, although whilst the means (austerity governance) are consistent, the ends (the rewards) can be imprecise. The reward is assumed to be good simply because of the positive connotation that it inevitably evokes. Different spheres of meaning are considered rewards: macroeconomics (country's wealth, growth), public finances (deficit reduction), private finances (keeping a job, paying the bills) and abstract concepts (such as prosperity). Within these different contexts, suffering is not only accepted, but it is an unavoidable requirement for achieving the reward. It is a symbol that one is doing the right thing. Much like the semantic associations between *austerity* and self-restraint, it is also associated with moral strength (see section 5.1).

The implication is that a reduction in living standards is both unavoidable in austerity governance and a sign that the right kind of policies are being pursued. This is what is implied by Iain Duncan Smith in the following example from June 2010. Justifying a reduction in cuts to Sure Start budgets, he utilises the idea of *sharing* quite literally as the solution to the inevitable reduction of living standards:

> *This is an area where people can share. Having had children myself, I know, as will many others in the House, that people share clothing and pushchairs. They do what they can to get by. There was a ludicrous idea that every child required the same amount of money, and I am afraid that in these difficult times we have had to take a difficult decision. I say to the hon. Lady that we are not going down the road she suggests.*
>
> Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative, Government, June 2010

He acknowledges the suffering that these cuts will inflict on people (it is a *difficult decision*) in an empathetic tone (*having had children myself*). However, the reduction in living standards that is implied is simply acknowledged (*they do what they can to get by*) and trivialised (can be solved by *sharing clothing and pushchairs*). This verges on the proliferation of 'poverty porn' that became common around that time: a media genre that examines the lives of those in poverty, particularly those on benefits, from a voyeuristic perspective and which has been claimed to be a reiteration of the neoliberal anti-welfarism and meritocratic values (Mooney & Hancock 2010; Jensen 2014).

This section expands the findings discusses in the last chapter. It particularly contributes to the understanding of how the use of *fairness* and also the node word *share* were used in the crisis discourse as a means to negate the structural nature of economic inequality. It provides evidence of how the anti-elite rhetoric we saw in section 7.5 was accommodated within neoliberal rationalities regarding economic inequality. Discussions around gaps in wealth were not present in the data. Instead, a tendency to equalise wealth and poverty was found. The relative relation between them was undermined by a semantic scope of *fairness* and *share* that focused on a reciprocal normative need to contribute. The findings show how gaps in income were not only tolerated but exploited rhetorically using parataxis and tautologies.

Consequently, and as we have already seen in the previous chapter, these finding provide further evidence that the semantic scope of *fairness* did not include egalitarian views in the data. Furthermore, the findings not only show a lack of scrutiny in terms of the lack of wealth re-distribution, but it naturalises the idea of suffering and a reduction of living standards as a logical and almost welcome consequence of deficit reduction, exploiting discourses around moral strength and reward. These normative tendencies were found in discourses that, once again, exploited an ambiguous position between private and public debt, in order to cement the narrative of a crisis of debt.

8.2 From a fairer society to a fairer Britain

In the presentation of the results to this point, I focused mainly on the discontinuity of discursive patterns and on specific patterns within the crisis corpus. Conversely, in this final section of this chapter, I focus on some of the strongest patterns around FAIRNESS that seem to be recurrent in both corpora. I show that there is a clear continuation in the use of comparatives with the indefinite article *a*, in particular as a pre-modifier in the noun phrase *a fairer + noun*. Moreover, I explain that although the head of this noun phrase changes from *society* in the growth corpus to *Britain* in the crisis corpus, similar contextualisations are used in both cases.

8.2.1 Continuation of comparatives and indefinite articles

As I mentioned in the introduction to chapter 7, the strongest collocates of FAIRNESS in each period differ hugely. The only exceptions to this rule are *more* and the indefinite article *a*. *More* appears in position nine in the collocate list for the crisis corpus and in position four in the growth corpus, without much difference in frequency or statistical relevance (see tables 4 and 5 in section 7.1) and always collocating with the comparative *fairer*. The uses of *more* in the crisis corpus appear both before and after 2010, although more of them appear after that year (ten after versus five before). The main pattern observed in the contextualisation of this collocation is the addition of different comparative adjectives, as shown in concordances 20:

N	Concordance
1	need to move steadily and remorselessly towards a simpler, **fairer,** clearer, **more** certain and more reliable tax system.
2	introduced by the previous Government. Single-tier is **fairer** and **more** just, it will deal with pensioner poverty much
3	matters, and the headline title in the Red Book is, "A **fairer, more** efficient and simpler tax system". I should like to
4	an opportunity to make Britain **more** competitive and **fairer,** and to ensure our economy is more balanced and
5	foundations, safeguarding a stable economy, creating a **fairer, more** efficient and simpler tax system, and driving
6	foundation; it safeguards our economic stability; it creates a **fairer, more** efficient and simpler tax system; and it drives
7	learnt lessons from the crisis and are determined to build a **fairer** and **more** sustainable economic future. Britain could
8	, he should have cut VAT on fuel. That would have been a **fairer** and **more** substantial approach. However, the fact is
9	emissions, and that they are not doing **more** to create a **fairer** and **more** sensible tax system, in respect of what is
10	of reforming the planning system has to be to make it **fairer,** faster and **more** efficient. That is as important for
11	were conspicuous by their absence. The first is a vision of a **fairer, more** equitable society in which, in particular, people
12	of our constrained budget, repair our economy and create a **fairer** and **more** responsible society. Will the hon.
13	create a social security system which, although simpler, is **fairer** and provides **more** incentives. I believe that we can
14	, can exploit their full potential. It is about building a **fairer** society, offering **more** opportunity-a fair Britain in
15	who pay little or no tax. I believe that that would be a much **fairer** and **more** sensible system that would be welcomed all

Concordances 20 *Fairer* with *more* (crisis corpus)

Once again, we are confronted with the tendency of listing – and, as such, the proliferation of semantic relations of equivalence. These concordances reiterate some of the most common topics in which *fairness* has been contextualised. For example, we see *taxation* generously represented (lines 1, 3, 5, 6 and 9 for example). We find only two occasions on which the welfare state is represented here, one regarding *pensions* (line 2) and the other about the *social security system* (line 13). We also find three cases in which *fairer* and *more* refers to *society* as a whole, rather than concentrating on particular policy areas (lines 11, 12 and 14). It is interesting that the phraseological structures in all these concordances tend to be repetitive. We even find the same three adjectives used in the same order to refer to taxation, *a fairer, more efficient and simpler tax system* (lines 3, 5 and 6). This idea of simplicity is repeated throughout the concordances. For example, we find it when the issue is social security:

> *I believe that we can create a social security system which, although <u>simpler, is fairer</u> and provides more incentives. I believe that we can strip away whole areas of complexity.*
>
> Edward Leigh, Conservative, Government, June 2010

The first thing to note here is the discursive acknowledgement that a less complex social security system might not be fairer, as the adjectives (*simpler* and *fairer*) are linked by a contrastive conjunction (*although*). This contrast, however, remains unexplained, and it is obfuscated by the idea of *incentives* that is mentioned immediately afterwards. What these incentives are for is not clear: to leave the social security system? To find work? Finally, Mr Leigh confirms that his view actually disagrees with this contradiction (*I believe*), declaring that *complexity* is a bad thing (we *should strip it away*). The same idea of simplicity is repeated when dealing with pensions, this time represented by the word *single-tier* (line 2).

The concordances that refer to *society* are particularly interesting, and represent a development that we saw in section 7.4. So*ciety* is associated with *opportunity* in the following example from 2008:

> *It is about building a fairer society, offering more opportunity – a fair Britain in which everyone can succeed*
>
> Alistair Darling, Labour, Government, 2008

After 2010, it is associated with equality as merit, manifested in the ideas of self-help and responsibility. Firstly, in March 2010, Jeremy Browne, a Liberal Democrat, moulds the values of *fairness* and *equity* as self-reliance (*self-reliant, forge their own way*, *freedom and independence*):

> *The first is a vision of a fairer, more equitable society in which, in particular, people on low incomes are more self-reliant, have more of their own money to spend and can forge their own way in the world with greater freedom and independence.*
>
> Jeremy Browne, Liberal Democrat, Opposition, March 2010

Secondly, in June 2010, Sajid Javid, a Conservative, links responsibility directly to austerity governance (*constrained budget*) and crisis management (*repair our economy*):

> *Because of that, we believe that we can get more out of our constrained budget, repair our economy and create a fairer and more responsible society.*
>
> Sajid Javid, Conservative, Government, June 2010

The concordances of *more* and *fairer* in the growth corpus also show some interesting differences and similarities when compared to the crisis corpus:

N	Concordance
1	. At the very core of creating a **more** enterprising and **fairer** Britain is our policy of moving people from
2	and every council tax payer in the country. That is a **fairer, more** egalitarian approach. With the additional
3	taxes and to introduce measures to make taxation **fairer.** There is much **more** to be done on simplification
4	action, doing what needs to be done to build a strong, **fairer** and **more** enterprising Britain. Last week, the
5	. Economic stability is the foundation for achieving a **fairer** and **more** inclusive society. As my hon. Friend
6	, I believe that we have set out our vision for a **fairer, more** flexible and **more** enterprising Britain. We
7	war. This Government are committed to building a **fairer, more** inclusive society in which everyone can
8	country more economically efficient, but to make it a **fairer** country where **more** people can participate and
9	been said many times, the Budget is about creating a **fairer** and **more** just Britain. It is also about creating a
10	will make a significant contribution to the creation of a **fairer** society and a **more** enterprising country. The
11	an extra #10 for those over 80, that would have been **fairer, more** effective and less complicated. It would
12	#50 but a council tax refund of #200-a measure that is **fairer** and worth **more** to more pensioners than all other
13	#50 but a council tax refund of #200-a measure that is **fairer** and worth **more** to more pensioners than all other
14	to health provision in this country. In my view, it is much **fairer** and **more** equitable to fund health care through
15	the debt and borrowing ratios, it would be much **fairer** and **more** meaningful to have a figure that

Concordances 21 *Fairer* with *more* (growth corpus)

Firstly, we find that taxation has much less presence as a theme (it appears in only two of the examples, lines 2 and 3). Instead, there are far more examples of considering the fairness of society as a whole. Different concepts are used to perform this function (*Britain*, *country* and *society*, highlighted in concordances 21). *Enterprise*, which I have already shown is prominent in the growth corpus (see section 7.3) is frequently represented (lines 1, 4 and 10 in concordances 21). However, what is perhaps more interesting is to find the continuation of certain topics we found in the crisis corpus, such as workfare (see sections 7.2 and 8.1). For example, line 1 refers explicitly to the welfare system as workfare. Slightly expanded, it reads:

> *At the very core of creating a more enterprising and fairer Britain is our policy of moving people from welfare into work*
>
> Gordon Brown, Labour, Government, 2002

Workfare is not only implicitly defining the welfare system, but it is also considered *at the very core of a more enterprising and fairer Britain*. Moreover, the ideas of lack of resources, affordability and austerity are latent in line 14:

> *In my view, it is much fairer and more equitable to fund health care through direct taxation, as the Government have decided to do. We must also be honest enough to tell people that we expect to see changes in the service for the money that we put in. There is no longer a something-for-nothing deal.*
>
> Helen Jones, Labour, Government, 2002

What the Labour MP is defending here is an increase in the conditionality of public services (*no longer a something-for-nothing deal*) applied to the health system. This conditionality seems to be restricted by taxation (*direct taxation*), by an economic constraint in terms of contributions (*for the money that we put in*) and by the need for reform (*expect to see changes*).

Apart from these scattered narrative similarities between these concordances in the two corpora, a very strong convergent pattern is the use of the indefinite article. Looking at concordances 20 and 21, most of the examples include the modifier *a fairer*. This is further supported by the collocate list. The indefinite article *a* appears as the third-strongest collocation with *fairer* in both the growth corpus and the crisis corpus (tables 4 and 5 in section 7.1). Conversely, the bond between the definite article *the* and FAIRNESS does not appear to be as strong (see appendix 4 and 5).

As I explained in section 4.5 and 4.6, the main focus of this thesis lies in content words. Since MI score tends to prioritise these lexical items, I chose to use it as one of my statistical measures. However, in both corpora, *a*, one of the clearest examples of a grammatical word, scores very highly when using this calculation (which is reiterated by the LL score). This certainly tells us something about how the speakers grammaticalise their expectations of the hearer's knowledge about the information they are giving.

Information structure is a very complex grammatical feature due to its dependence on deixis and anaphoric structures. It is also an important feature, since it is a constant part of how the knowledge of speakers and receptors of utterances is accessed, guessed and assumed, how the information is eventually understood, and its contextual background (Saeed 2003: 196).

One of most universally grammaticalised distinctions is the pattern of given and new information: the relation between the information that the speaker assumes the hearer already knows and what is presented as additional or new (Saeed 2003: 196). This distinction is partly made by using articles. When the definite article is used, the speaker assumes that the hearer can identify the referent (Saeed 2003: 197), either somewhere else in the text (by anaphoric relations) or by appealing to knowledge that is shared between the two

(Downing & Locke 2006: 419). On the other hand, when indefinite articles are used, the referent is not identified and nor is it expected to be; it is assumed to be unknown by the hearer. There is also doubt about whether the referent is pointing to something specific or to something generic (Downing & Locke 2006: 418).

Considering this, and the more prominent patterns of using the indefinite article mentioned above, one can infer that there is a more common semantic attachment to the idea of 'newness' in relation to FAIRNESS. This contributes greatly to the characterisation of *fairer* as a future project, as something that is largely unknown precisely because it is in the future. The undefined levels of *fairness* at the present time (backgrounded in the text but assumed to be less fair) are compared with a *fairer* future that the policies being proposed in the present will strive to achieve. The following example illustrates this point:

> *I have made it my business to battle for the people whom I represent in order to ensure that <u>we end up with a fairer Budget</u>, and <u>a fairer Britain</u> as <u>the outcome</u>. The election, the Budget and the next exercise, the spending cuts, must all be judged on whether <u>we end up with a fairer Britain</u>.*
>
> Simon Hughes, Liberal Democrat, Government, June 2010

The use of *end up with* (which is repeated twice) and *the outcome* are clear discursive devices that put the idea of *a fairer Britain* as a destination in the future against which *the election, the Budget, the next exercise* and *the spending cuts* need to be judged. This particular construction of time is, of course, very vague: when this judgement will take place, and any agency patterns (how it will be measured and by whom) are very much backgrounded in the text. Nevertheless, *a fairer Britain* becomes an aim to strive for, regardless of the lack of precision regarding what this future would look like.

In the context of *fairness*, this projection of the future using the indefinite article seems to be exclusively subscribed to *fairer*. We also find the article *an* collocating with *unfair*. This collocation is much more restrained to the present (see appendix 13). However, one example does refer to the future:

> *We must never forget that high levels of debt put <u>an unfair burden on future generations</u>. Our role is to look after the future and make sure that our children and grandchildren are not in hock to debt because we have failed to manage the national finances*
>
> David Evennett, Conservative, Government, June 2010

We encounter here once again the idea of *burden* (see section 8.1.2) this time as a referent for the negative consequences of debt for future generations (also encountered in section 7.5.2).

In the final sub-section of this chapter, I concentrate on two other collocates: *society* and *Britain*. Although they represent a difference between the two corpora (*society* appears far more often in the growth corpus and *Britain* in the crisis corpus), these content words are, in fact, another representation and adaptation of this same discursive construction of *fairness* as a future outcome.

8.2.2 Back to the future: from *society* to *Britain*

Two more content words in the list of the top collocates of FAIRNESS have not yet been analysed: s*ociety* in the growth corpus and *Britain* in the crisis corpus. This section reveals a complex interrelation between these two collocations. Firstly, they both collocate strongly with *fairer* in each corpus. Secondly, whilst there are examples of both collocations in each corpus, there is a clear preference for *society* in the growth corpus and for *Britain* in the crisis corpus. Moreover, both collocations share strong discursive patterns (apart from collocating with *fairer* exclusively, the most common structure found is *a fairer + noun*) and both commonly refer to future outcomes. The past (growth corpus) and the present (crisis corpus) share and adapt a similar pattern of using the future as a legitimisation strategy. In the previous section, we saw how this construction of a future outcome worked in terms of the use of articles. In this section, I turn to the selection of verbs in these patterns. I focus first on the crisis corpus and the collocation *fairer* with *Britain*:

N	Concordance
1	of a Labour Government, **Britain** was a stronger, **fairer,** better country. We have now been given a
2	other words, measures to take us closer to the **fairer,** greener **Britain** that the coalition says it wants
3	Budget sets in train a plan for a **Britain** that is **fairer,** with a stable economy and a low-carbon future.
4	away from any fiscal innovation that might produce a **fairer** **Britain** where all of us are in it together. A
5	have had a Budget that painted a big picture of a **fairer,** greener, better **Britain-a** Budget that really
6	Bill whereby we can improve fairness and make for a **fairer** **Britain,** then we will table amendments to try to
7	environment. It is a Budget that will not make **Britain** **fairer.** It is a Budget that is a green cop-out. The
8	handed back. It is a Budget that will not make **Britain** **fairer.** I congratulate the Chancellor on what he did
9	of the role my party has played in making **Britain** a **fairer** country. My morning newspaper today said that
10	an opportunity to make **Britain** more competitive and **fairer,** and to ensure our economy is more balanced
11	to ensure that we end up with a fairer Budget, and a **fairer** **Britain** as the outcome. The election, the
12	cuts, must all be judged on whether we end up with a **fairer** **Britain.** Let me therefore address the
13	the great centrepiece of a Budget dedicated to a **fairer** and greener **Britain,** but there was no urgency

Concordances 22 *Fairer* with *Britain* (crisis corpus)

The concordances show a clear tendency to present *fairer Britain* as a project for the future. The structure using the verb *make* (as in *make Britain fairer*) is used the most, appearing on five occasions (lines 6-10). We find the verb *end up* again twice (lines 11 and 12), *dedicate* (line 13), *produce* (line 4), *set in train for a plan* (line 3), *take us closer* (line 2). On one occasion (line 1), the contextualisation of *fairer Britain* is in the past. Furthermore, also on only one occasion, the definite article *the* is used (line 2). The rest of the examples use the indefinite article *a*, confirming the pattern I mentioned in the previous section.

If we focus on the verb patterns, all the verbs refer metaphorically to an unfinished item, where *Britain* is objectivised as a product (*produce, make*), as the destination on a journey (*end up*, *take us closer*), as a plan (*set in train for a plan*) or as a picture (*paint a big picture*). Most of these verbs are material. According to Halliday (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 170, 179), material verbs are those in which things are happening or being done, where agency can be highlighted. Only one verb, *end up*, can be classified as relational (verbs which relate to processes of identifying and classifying) (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004: 170). There is a contrast between the materiality and agency highlighted by the choice of verbs and the abstraction provided by the metaphoric nature of the sentences (including the metonymy of *Britain* as an object and *the Budget* as a subject to represent government action). In other words, government agency is highlighted, but the goals of the actions pursued are very much abstractions.

The link between material verbs and *fairer* is consistent in other, less relevant, collocates. For example, we find *create* collocating with this word form five times:

N	Concordance
1	the haves and have-nots, and trying to **create** a **fairer** society, but instead we see the situation
2	, and that they are not doing more to **create** a **fairer** and more sensible tax system, in respect
3	tax should increase in order to help **create** a **fairer** tax system. I have listened carefully to
4	budget, repair our economy and **create** a **fairer** and more responsible society. Will the
5	Of course it is not. We are trying to **create** a **fairer** system in which there are real

Concordances 23 *Fairer* with *create* (crisis corpus)

Make is also used in similar ways, with similar scores:

N	Concordance
1	. It is a Budget that will not **make** Britain **fairer.** It is a Budget that is a green cop-out. The
2	back. It is a Budget that will not **make** Britain **fairer.** I congratulate the Chancellor on what he
3	the planning system has to be to **make** it **fairer,** faster and more efficient. That is as
4	who came into politics to **make** our country **fairer-has** a big decision to make. He is not
5	we can improve fairness and **make** for a **fairer** Britain, then we will table amendments to

Concordances 24 *Fairer* with *make* (crisis corpus)

Moreover, what is most relevant about this combination of material verbs and abstraction is the fact that it is also present in the growth corpus. Concordances 25 shows the collocations of *fairer* with *society* in the growth corpus:

N	Concordance
1	agenda, we must support families and build a **fairer society.** I agreed with the Chancellor 100 per
2	will make a significant contribution to the creation of a **fairer society** and a more enterprising country. The
3	to build a stronger, more enterprising economy and a **fairer society,** extending economic opportunity and
4	war. This Government are committed to building a **fairer,** more inclusive **society** in which everyone can
5	. Economic stability is the foundation for achieving a **fairer** and more inclusive **society.** As my hon. Friend
6	that we are taking to help pensioners and to build a **fairer society** for all. First, however, let me
7	, dynamic economy must go hand in hand with a **fairer society** so that everyone has an opportunity to
8	are elements in the Budget that will make ours a **fairer society** for people with disabilities, which will
9	year's Red Book includes the heading, "Building a **Fairer Society"**, and lists 17 measures, the 15th of
10	the equivalent table. The section headed "Building a **fairer society"** has shrunk to five measures. Perhaps
11	. Perhaps the Chancellor has given up on building a **fairer society.** He has certainly given up on helping
12	objective has been to build a strong economy and a **fairer society** with opportunity and security for all.

Concordances 25 *Fairer* with *society* (growth corpus)

The metaphorical verbs used are different from the ones used in the crisis corpus in some cases (see concordances 22). For example, there is a repetition of the material verb *build* (lines 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11 and 12). We also find, however, as was the case for the crisis concordances, repeated use of the verb *make* (lines 2 and 8). In all the examples we have seen in this section, *fairness* is part of a metaphorical aim where the process or journey (the action of *building* or *creating*, for example) seems to be as important as the destination (*a fairer society*). However, there is an important difference between the two corpora in terms of the contextualisations: the more frequent choice of *Britain* during the crisis points to a clear focus on nationalistic values, more so than in the growth years.

The findings in this section provide an important contribution to our understanding of how *fairness* was used in the crisis discourse to justify austerity governance: in spite of the important discursive differences we have seen in this chapter so far and in previous chapters, there were some persistent discourses in the growth and crisis corpora. The results show that in fact some phrases (comparatives with indefinite articles) were used in very similar ways in both corpora with only slight adaptations.

Considering this, the findings show that some legitimisation strategies used to justify the inadequate relationship between neoliberalism and economic inequality before the crisis (see section 3.5), were also adopted to justify austerity governance and its particularly negative consequences in terms of living standards and increases in income gaps (see section 3.7).

Moreover, the findings also establish that *fairness* was in this particular pattern presented as an ill-defined future project with an abstract semantic scope. Once again, these results also show that metaphorical constructions were key (in both corpora this time) to project this view of *a fairer society* as a perpetual moving target.

8.3 Conclusions

In this chapter I have highlighted a variety of patterns that point to a semantic contextualisation of *fairness* that is closely related to the idea of reciprocity and a meritocratic conception of equality. However, I found specific layers of connotative meaning surrounding these patterns, which were extremely polarising. There is a discursively sought confrontation between different groups of society, where divisions are drawn according to how much they contribute to the public purse. The traditional dichotomy between those who contribute by paying taxes and those who receive social security (Wiggan 2012: 389) is, in the data, expanded to also confront those who are perceived to contribute enough and those who do not. The latent concept of social inclusion seems to be present in the examples we have seen in this chapter. Whereas previously, to be included one had to work (within a very limited view of what work is; see section 3.5), now one also has to contribute proportionately to one's economic possibilities. In the examples we have seen in this chapter, both rich and poor are foregrounded. On the other hand, a less specific third group is backgrounded, this being comprised of people who already contribute enough and whose interests are the priority of austerity governance (Stanley 2016b).

These antagonising connotations are somehow unusual for a concept such as *fairness*, which, is commonly used within inclusive and conflict-free semantic representations. On the other hand, such connotations not only confront these groups but also achieve a sense of equality in terms of the moral responsibility to contribute, denying any differences between them related to income inequality. I presented examples where benefit caps are equated to tax breaks, for example, and where it is explicitly stated that those on low incomes should also contribute (as equal partners to the rich) to the recovery and, as such, take their share of cuts to pay for the deficit reduction (Walker 2014: 301). This disregard for the markedly different scales of personal and social consequences of these policies is perverse. Hardship is certainly worse for those with fewer resources, regardless of the fact that they would contribute less than those on higher incomes. This is, however, never acknowledged, people on low incomes being just one more contributing agent.

I also presented the use of *burden* and other negative connotations associated with the verb *share*, where reciprocity is portrayed as 'equity of sacrifice' (Clarke & Newman 2012: 307). Again, different levels of hardship are trivialised by appealing to the idea that everybody is losing out equally, and that this is not necessarily a bad thing because there is a reward at the end of the suffering. Such normative arguments are well in tune, if we recall section 5.1, with the very meaning of *austerity*, the idea of self-sacrifice being just one step behind that of suffering. This naturalisation of misery (De Melo Resende 2009) as an intrinsic part of achievement clearly taps into the idea of meritocracy. However, it expands its influence. If before the welfare state was considered an indulgent luxury that burdened the economy (Hay 2005: 197), with austerity governance this position has hardened: having enough material resources is not considered a priority.

These discursive choices around *fairness* seem to highlight a more normative than normalising policy legitimisation strategy. Disregard for social justice is tolerated not so much because of economic imperatives (although these are latent in austerity governance), but more because of the need to appeal to a responsibility to suffer in order to achieve the required outcome and reward. This idea of responsibility and suffering is rooted in conservative thinking (see section 3.3). As Lakoff puts it (2004: 8-9), it is considered immoral to give people things they have not earned because then they do not develop the discipline to become moral people. Neoconservative values are defined in terms of a social contract, emphasising responsibilities and duties (Mulderrig 2009: 109). Rights, as we have seen in this chapter and in chapter 7, are backgrounded and *fairness* is semantically unconnected to them, instead being solely adhered to the idea of fair reward and effort (Hall & O'Shea 2013).

The prosodies presented in this chapter link the semantic scope of the keyword *fairness* to that of the keyword *austerity*, revealing the intricate and complex links between the two keywords in the crisis discourse covered by the data. More importantly, the moral normativity found around *fairness* is in fact utilised to justify the hardship with which austerity governance is associated. Not only this, but the role of the state in these semantic associations is disengaged with discussions about the provision of wellbeing. Economic imperatives are still the prime objective of policy-making, and the role of the state is still to ensure that this happens. However, a new normative layer of meaning has been adhered to this legitimisation strategies: the state is also there to ensure (overtly) that the suffering required to achieve such imperatives takes place, even if this implies a reduction in living standards. Income polarity, one of the most problematic issues within neoliberal governance, is not only tolerated but is also used overtly as a discursive strategy to obfuscate and naturalise the very existence of such polarities.

9 CONCLUSIONS

'A society in which no one could afford to travel privately into space, and in which everyone could afford to buy their food from ordinary shops, would be more cohesive and have a greater sense of shared interests' (Atkinson 2015: 16).

9.1 The project revisited

This thesis has aimed to uncover the dominant uses of the lemmas AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS during the onset of the 2008 economic crisis in the UK in order to establish their relevance in the legitimisation of austerity governance and the tolerance of high levels of economic inequality. As such, it has striven not only to understand the meanings of these semantically complex and politically engaged concepts but also to uncover precisely how they were utilised as a legitimisation tool in the establishment of austerity governance during the period 2008-2012.

The study had an emancipatory objective. As I discussed in chapter 2, it followed the critical social research approach of CDA. As such, its primordial emphasis was to highlight the discursive choices that could contribute to narratives that undermine the structural nature of economic inequality and justify deficit reduction measures that are bound to exacerbate this issue. It also engaged in disclosing the contradictory nature of the processes of creating and sustaining hegemonic discourses around inequality. The focus of inequality motivated the selection of the genre included in the analysis: Budget parliamentary debates, where wealth re-distribution is explicitly considered.

The analysis aimed to be diachronic. I compared the crisis period with a growth period, 2002-2006. This choice of data was motivated by a paradigmatic view of political economic thinking, which considers economic crises as triggers for a change in the established policy perspectives and the discourses that surround them. As such, differences and similarities could be translated into continuations and changes in neoliberal discursive practices.

In chapter 3 I presented an overview of the political paradigmatic evolution in the UK. Neoliberalism, defined by a focus on subordinating any public endeavour (including those that aim to fulfil any social justice calling) to private and market imperatives, was the rule of thumb in terms of policy in 2008. We saw that, following an initial timid attempt to rely on public investment to deal with the crisis, a narrative of a crisis of debt and the subsequent austerity governance was established from 2010 onwards. This neoliberal resilience (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013; 2014; Schmidt, 2016) is counterintuitive, because previous crises, particularly those that caused damage on the scale of the 2008 crisis, have resulted in a change in the policy-making paradigm. However, this was not the case this time. This, I argued, was an important problem, especially from the perspective of economic inequality and the suffering it is unavoidably linked to.

We saw in chapter 3 that neoliberalism has been dominated by a disregard for wealth re-distribution and, as such, levels of inequality have increased steadily since the 1980s. This has been exacerbated by a view that considers taxation as a burden and a perspective that considers welfare as morally objectionable. Welfare has been substituted by workfare, where increases in conditionality and a focus on poverty rather than inequality have done very little to improve the situation. This has been surrounded by rhetorical choices that draw on the assumption that meritocracy and individual 'deserving' are the only explanations of inequality.

The neoliberal disregard for social justice was greatly aided by the neoconservative rhetoric that has surrounded inequality since the Thatcher years. The neoliberal prioritisation of the markets over social justice was then blended into prioritising the conservative values of individual responsibility, discipline and authority over those that favoured social rights and solidarity. As such, there has been a constant rhetorical move towards the delegitimisation of the welfare state, whose whole purpose is sustained precisely by social rights and solidarity.

It is at this crossroads that these discourses around inequality were exacerbated even further after the crisis, as levels of inequality increased. Austerity and deficit reduction became a crystallisation of traditional neoliberal affordability discourses, where inegalitarian outcomes are the most logical consequences. Without doubt, this aspect of austerity governance was one of the most problematic in terms of obfuscating the conflicts of interest behind this approach to managing the crisis. It is within this situation that *fairness*, as a neutral but politically overriding concept, became an important rhetorical tool for restricting what was perceived to be possible within the austerity agenda. This study aimed to explore the interjection between these different semantic implications of the two lemmas (AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS) in order to find out what their particular prosodies were, how they fitted in with the legitimisation of austerity, and how those prosodies compared with a period of growth in which neoliberal premises were naturalised.

This brief summary accounts for the complexity of the moral aspects of austerity governance and its consequences in terms of inequality. This thesis aimed to tease out certain aspects of this complexity, contributing to our understanding of their discursive crystallisation. In the rest of this final chapter, I first summarise and wrap up the main results of this study (section 9.2). After that, I draw some general conclusions on the results relating to austerity governance and what they mean for inequality (section 9.3) and neoliberal resilience (section 9.4). In section 9.5, I engage with some thoughts raised by the analytical process on the combined CL and CDA research approach as well the methodological contribution this thesis offers. Finally, in section 9.6, I point to some final thoughts on the positioning of this thesis and suggest general avenues for further research in which this study could make a contribution or be a starting point.

9.2 Summary of results

9.2.1 Semantic repertoire

The lexicographic analysis in sections 5.1 and 5.2 highlighted some important similarities and differences between *austerity* and *fairness*. Firstly, they both presented a complex repertoire of meanings, where morality had an important role to play. In addition, the analysis made clear that these ethical underpinnings are crucial to how we as a society make sense of the world. Indeed, *fairness*, as a hyponym of *justice*, is one of the main concepts in everyday moral evaluation, particularly when one considers its frequent use and its vernacular status. In the case of *austerity*, its meaning is heavily influenced by debt morality (where debt is portrayed as a personal failure), a conceptualisation that is drawn upon in the understanding of economic relations.

Moreover, both concepts have the semantic potential to act as gatekeepers in policy-making. On the one hand, *fairness* is widely recognised as highly effective in limiting what governments can or cannot do. On the other hand, *austerity* is a crystallisation of the complex links between debt and thriftiness. The relationship between these two concepts underpins one of the most obvious contradictions in neoliberal principles and governance: the growth model relies upon debt, but the rationalities and policies advocate financial prudence and value for money. Indeed, one of the main contributions of this thesis is the confirmation of the importance of the household metaphor as an effective rhetorical device to hide this contradiction. The lexicographic analysis of *austerity* provided clues in terms of what this metaphor is semantically built upon. *Austerity* can refer to both the private sphere, with clear moral connotations in terms of discipline. It can also refer to public/fiscal policy, which is not moral in any way but simply an economic and political decision to preserve resources in situations of scarcity such as wars. These two strands of meaning can be superimposed to justify deficit reduction in moral and normative terms. At the same time, this confusion can leave the neoliberal contradiction of 'public debt bad' but 'private debt good' unscrutinised.

However, *austerity* and *fairness* have different evaluative semantic scopes. Firstly, *fairness* is always evaluated positively. One cannot argue against the fact that something that is fair is a good thing. This is, of course, not the same as stating that something that is perceived as fair is necessarily considered just. Indeed, other layers of meaning can surround *fairness*, influencing its semantic potential, which have little to do with social justice and might even represent a barrier to human flourishing. Nevertheless, a positive evaluation is enforced in the case of *fairness*. Therefore, saying that something is fair can literally mean nothing in ethical terms, but can still be portrayed as a good thing. This is greatly aided by two more connotations that *fairness* always carries with it: its vernacular nature; and that of inclusiveness and impartiality, which, at times, can almost translate as pure objectivity. This complex semantic repertoire makes *fairness* an ambivalent but yet very effective concept to be utilised to justify the ill-informed nature of neoliberal approaches to economic inequality. *Fairness* is, in other words, semantically empty when it comes to equality and as such a very useful concept to justify the neoliberal reluctance towards wealth re-distribution.

On the other hand, *austerity* does not necessarily enjoy this imposed positivity. This keyword can certainly be associated with positive moral behaviours that are related to moral strength. But this is a partisan perspective, as it veers much further towards neoliberal and neoconservative associations than towards social democratic ones. Thriftiness and self-restraint, intrinsically associated with *austerity*, are values that are far more in tune with the former than with the latter. However, there is semantic scope for associating this keyword with negative connotations, since it is always linked to a reduction in living standards, to suffering, which has semantic scope for left-leaning anti-austerity discursive strategies. What is clear, though, unlike the case of *fairness*, is that neutrality is not a semantic feature of this word. The positivity or negativity associated with it needs to be worked at, semantically and prosodically.

9.2.2 Growth corpus patterns and overall trends

AUSTERITY appeared only twice in the growth corpus. Here, this lemma was used as a synonym of low public spending and as an antonym of plenty. It was not directly linked to the idea of debt, but it was surrounded by neoliberal discourses to do with affordability, low taxation, waste and value for money. On the other hand, FAIRNESS in the growth corpus was associated with traditional discourses around convergence politics. Most importantly, it collocated with *enterprise*. This was a flagship collocation for New Labour, and it is one of the clearest examples of the subordination of social justice to economic imperatives in neoliberal governance.

Considering this, the findings show that both AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS gravitated towards normalising legitimacy strategies in the growth corpus. AUSTERITY appears fully integrated in neoliberal affordability discourses. FAIRNESS is contextualised in terms of the subordination of social justice to economic imperatives (Hay 1999b). These tendencies, however, as we saw in sections 6.4 to 6.6 and 7.5, change dramatically after the crisis, particularly after 2010 in the case of *fairness*. We find then much more normative and morally driven patterns.

The frequency results for both lemmas also confirm this normative tendency in the crisis corpus showing that the crisis was a catalyst for an increase in the use of both keywords. AUSTERITY appeared only twice in the growth corpus, but its use was intensified in the crisis corpus. FAIRNESS, as a common word in political discourse, was used with a much higher frequency than AUSTERITY in both periods, but especially in the crisis period. These results tell us that although *austerity* displayed some continuity in both discourses, it was the crisis that presented it as a common discursive resource. The increased use of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus also tells us that morality was a legitimisation strategy that was drawn upon far more at that time than in the growth period. The increase of both keywords in the crisis period also point to the clear turn, after the normalising tendencies before the crisis, towards moral and normative legitimisation strategies during the crisis years to establish neoliberal continuity (Jessop 2013; Bennett 2014; Forkert 2014; Jensen 2015; Kelsey and others 2016; Farnsworth & Irving 2018).

In spite of the crisis being a clear catalyst for change in the uses of the two keywords, some interesting discursive continuations were also present. For example, listing, parataxis, contrastive structures and equivalences were persistent in the use of the lemmas in both corpora. This was especially noticeable in the growth corpus and the first years of the crisis corpus, when these discursive features were used as a way of representing convergence and inclusive politics (social justice *and* economic imperatives). Conversely, comparisons between different groups of citizens, as discussed in sections 7.5 and 8.1 in particular, were more common in the crisis period, especially after 2010. However, examples referring to workfare were found across the board, although they were more prominent from 2010 onwards.

It is also important to note in terms of consistent patterns that negative connotations around *austerity* in relation to reduced living standards were rare. In fact, as we saw in section 8.1 suffering was, at times, discursively constructed as a sign that the right policies were being pursued. *Fairness*, on the other hand, was semantically portrayed as a projected future, as a constantly moving target that appeared in both the growth corpus and the crisis corpus. This was deployed by the use of the phrases *a fairer society* in the growth corpus and *a fairer Britain* in the crisis corpus. The choice of *Britain* in the crisis corpus, emphasises on an appeal towards a national culture, where the necessary government action in the present (highlighted by the choice of material verbs) was to lead to fairness, which was metaphorically constructed as a journey or an object to be built.

The overall patterns also show that none of the main parties utilised *austerity* as a flagship legitimisation strategy in the crisis data, as it did not appear in the Chancellor's speech in any of the years analysed. Conversely, *fairness* appeared in the initial speech each year without fail, regardless of the party in charge. This testifies to the recurrent use of this keyword in the debates, regardless of political positioning. Moreover, the initial use of *fairness* seemed to determine its meaning for the rest of the debate which were then confirmed by the qualitative analysis: in the case of the Labour governments in the pre-austerity period of the crisis, this was more around normalising aspects of economic imperatives, while during the Coalition years it was much more related to merit and taxation.

Finally, the two lemmas seemed to follow opposing patterns of nominalisation as we saw in section 5.3.3. Most of the time, *austerity* appeared in a nominalised form (with only a few occurrences of *austere*), whereas *fair* was much more common than *fairness*. This indicated a tendency to use *fairness* as a vernacular semantic resource rather than as a hyponym of *justice*.

9.2.3 Pre-austerity patterns

We have just seen that overall, both AUSTERITY and FAIRNESS were much more common in the crisis corpus than the growth one, pointing to a more normative tendency in the former compared to the latter. However, the findings also showed differences between the pre-austerity years of the corpus, at the very beginning of the crisis, and after 2010, once austerity governance was well-established.

In fact, the results pointed to parallelisms in frequency fluctuations. The first year in which AUSTERITY appeared in the crisis data was 2009. Conversely, it was precisely that year when FAIRNESS showed a decrease in frequency. This points to the fact that 2009 was a crucial year for establishing *austerity* as a discursive device in which *fairness* had a smaller role to play. Considering this, the results show that the pre-austerity years of the crisis corpus were vital for the establishment of the narrative of a crisis of debt in which the use of the keyword *austerity* was high. Conversely, a clear scrutiny of the negative consequences of deficit reduction in terms of fairness was less present in this period.

As I explained in section 3.7, the first years of the crisis period covered by this study, while Labour was still in government, were characterised by a temporary pursuance of a stimulus programme (2008-2009) and the settlement for austerity government in 2010. In this period, as we saw in chapter 6, *austerity* was used mostly as a post-modifier of time-related words. Most notably, the phrase *age of austerity* appears to have played an important role in the establishment of deficit reduction narratives in 2009. This phrase evokes an epochal contextualisation, where radical action seems to be required due to the urgency it represents. However, ambiguity dominated this initial use of *austerity*. Firstly, it was never clear if *austerity* refers to a cause of policy action, the government action itself, or the actual consequence of policy-making. What seemed to be relevant here was that the idea of the necessity for change was being planted.

Moreover, there was also a moralising criticism of consumerism in the use of *austerity*, particularly during these initial years of the crisis. This criticism was often made by relying on a comparison between household debt and public debt. This not only added personal resonance as a connotative legitimisation strategy but also united the role of families and the role of government within the sole task of avoiding debt. This highlighted the resonance of the semantic associations of the word *austerity* with debt morality, linking it to real personal sensibilities and difficulties. However, once again, this is a clear discursive feature that sheds light upon the inherent contradiction in neoliberal rationalities and governance: a growth model based on debt together with a (public) moral imposition of thriftiness.

However, this normative, epochal and vague use of austerity, is actually in stark contrast with the actual policies being proposed: a continuation of the same deficit reduction that is an intrinsic part of neoliberalism. In other words, rather than acting as a call for change, *austerity* led to a re-commitment to the traditional neoliberal principles of efficiency and affordability, tapping into the idea that it was a failure to adhere to these which had caused the crisis in the first place.

Finally, *opportunity* also appeared as a core value during this period in collocation with *fairness*. Discursive choices pointing to convergence politics were found around this collocation. References to equality and other social justice words were allowed to co-exist with economic imperatives, in particular *competitiveness*. This neoliberal normalising strategy however, was much less prevalent from 2010, when the Coalition was in government and austerity governance was fully engaged in policy-making. More importantly, this pattern is a clear sign of the endurance of the neoliberal undermining of the structural nature of economic inequality in the crisis discourse. Meritocracy was still the main perspectives guiding the semantic scope of *fairness*.

9.2.4 Austerity governance patterns

After following opposite directions in the pre-austerity period of the crisis data, the frequency analysis showed that the two lemmas correlated in a fluctuating pattern after 2010. They both peaked in June 2010, the first year in which the Coalition was in government. They also both decreased in 2011 and increased again in 2012. The consensus around austerity governance that was established in 2010 seemed to trigger the entanglement of both lemmas in parallel frequency patterns. Although this pointed to a correlation between intensifying usage of *austerity* and a corresponding legitimisation strategy of such governance in terms of *fairness*, the relationship seemed to be more subtle and complex as the qualitative analysis showed. The two concepts did not appear together often in collocation patterns. In fact, it was specific aspects of austerity, such as increases in revenue, that were regularly contextualised in terms of *fairness*. However, this lack of direct association between the two keywords found in the collocation pattern, points to a lack of engagement with a direct scrutiny of *austerity* in terms of the moral implication of the negative social consequences of public retrenchment.

After being contextualised as *age of austerity* in the pre-austerity data, the findings showed that *austerity* became progressively more commonly associated with governance from 2010. Its use as a post-modifier was substantially reduced in favour of use as a pre-modifier with the collocates *measures* and *programme*. The epochal connotations faded as *austerity* became naturalised, used simply as a label for ‘business as usual’. This naturalisation was reinforced by the fact that during this period (although there were some examples from before 2010), *austerity* was also encountered in metadiscursive references, particularly in term of its definition and the ownership of the concept. *Austerity* was also metaphorically constructed as a matter of degree or limited choice, leaving no semantic space for other political economic alternatives. As such, the neoliberal focus on affordability that was behind austerity governance was allowed to remain on centre stage in policy debates. These patterns cemented the permanent presence of deficit reduction narratives in British politics, this being highly influenced by a clear lack, these findings show, of discursive opposition to austerity governance.

At the same time, 2010 was also a catalyst for change in the uses of *fairness*. This keyword appeared in prosodies that engulfed this value in quantifications. The primordial focus of attention was taxation, where the aspect of austerity that was less controversial in terms of hardship, increases in revenue, was contextualised in terms of *fairness*, backgrounding the fairness of cuts to public spending. This particular contextualisation of *fairness* was also determined by the discursive presence of people on high incomes, who were generally perceived as not contributing enough. These findings provide evidence of the relevance of anti-elite rhetoric within the crisis management discourses (Hargie, Stapleton, & Tourish 2010; Lischinsky 2011; Stanley 2016b; Walsh 2016; Whittle & Mueller 2016). However, this particular pattern was framed within the very narrow prosody of *fairness* as reasonable amount, showing a lack of engagement with egalitarian views of how gaps in wealth are directly linked to neoliberal governance.

Tax was constructed as an economic transaction that needed to be considered from a moral perspective; hence, it was construed normatively. This is in contrast to traditional normalising neoliberal discourses, in which tax reductions tended to be highlighted as a means for good economic performance. This can be read as a clear sign of the awareness of the difficulty in legitimising austerity governance. The need to focus on the least unpalatable aspect, higher taxation, makes a moral stance necessary, because any economic explanation in terms of neoliberal governance would contradict the need for higher taxes. These legitimisation strategies, however, co-existed with regressive policy decision-making, as we saw in section 3.7. Moreover, these results point to a neoliberal legitimisation strategy focused once again on non-implementation. The focus was not on unfair levels of wealth re-distribution within the neoliberal paradigm, but the tax system not being properly contributed to.

Fairness was also commonly connotated as reciprocity: as a responsibility to contribute. Narratives of meritocracy were exploited in terms of not only workfare but also the need to contribute equally to public finances. Very often, this was discursively performed by polarising different groups of citizens. Rich, poor, tax allowances and benefits were all contrasted and, at the same time, equalised by the underpinning need to contribute, undermining the structural nature of economic inequality and its links to neoliberal governance. This contribution referred not only to the public purse but also to the general suffering that was necessary and towards which all citizens needed to be geared within a system of punishment and reward. This was especially present in the use of the phrase *share a burden*. The semantics of this expression tapped into the idea of reciprocity in addition to the connotation of self-restraint, which is implied in the word *austerity* and neoconservative values more widely.

Overall, the findings presented in this thesis make a few clear points in terms of how austerity governance was legitimised and how this legitimisation affected the acceptance of its consequences regarding increases in economic inequality. Firstly, the findings show that both *austerity* and *fairness* had an adaptable semantic repertoire to be exploited. They were both gatekeepers of austerity governance. This adaptability was very clearly present in the fact that the crisis was a trigger for changes in the uses of both keywords. They both became more normative in the crisis corpus and were much more normalising agents in the growth corpus.

However, the adaptability was slightly different for both keywords. *Austerity* was more normative in the pre-austerity period, then changing to be much more normalised after 2010 once austerity governance was established. On the other hand, *fairness* continued to be normalising for longer until 2010. It was after that that a more normative contextualisation takes place around this keyword, being strongly associated with the conservative values of moral strength, suffering and reward.

Both keywords contributed to the resilience of neoliberal governance and principles in the crisis management discourse. The use of *austerity* greatly aided the cementing of the narrative of a crisis of debt, particularly its association with the household metaphor. Secondly, *fairness* contributed greatly to the perpetuation of the undermining of the structural nature of inequality. The links between increasingly big gaps in wealth and the failings of the neoliberal governance that promote them were not made. Egalitarianism, in other words, found no space in the sematic scope of *fairness*, in spite of its semantic realignment with normativity in the crisis period.

As such, the findings also show that both *fairness* and *austerity* were useful gatekeepers of policy decision making, safeguarding neoliberal governance from real scrutiny, in spite of the problems with this paradigm that the crisis itself highlighted. Consequently, the inadequate relationship between economic inequality and neoliberalism outlived the crisis without any real sense of challenge in the data. In the next two sections I present some final reflections regarding the consequences of this continuation, in terms of inequality and in terms of paradigmatic resilience.

9.3 Austerity governance and inequality

As with any piece of research, the results are limited by necessity. They open only a small window: a particular perspective of the data and on the period it represents. Many other entry points could have been chosen, formulating other avenues for understanding the successful legitimisation (considering the ample support it enjoyed at the time) of austerity governance. However, the results provide clear pointers towards an understanding of the role played by discourse in these processes.

Firstly, the findings acknowledge the fact that neoliberal (and its combined neoconservative aspects, in the case of the UK) values and governance surrounding inequality did not change with the crisis. The prosodies analysed do not point to any contextualisation of the lemmas analysed, particularly relevant in the case of FAIRNESS, in terms of wealth re-distribution. Gaps in income wealth are not only accepted but used as a discursive feature (*the poor* versus *the rich*) within narratives of merit, workfare and sacrifice. However, the analysis seems to point to normative contextualisations. I found, for example, an increase in the use of FAIRNESS in the crisis data, which is a testament to the increase in awareness of the need to highlight the moral aspects of austerity governance. I also found that typically normalising and convergent discourse options, such as collocating *fairness* with *enterprise* or *opportunity*, were abandoned once austerity governance was in place.

As we saw in section 3.3, disentangling neoliberalism from the neoconservative rhetoric that surrounds it is an almost impossible task, since both paradigms are bound in a 'flexible synthesis' which is difficult to unpick (Hay 1996a: 135). However, there were some examples in the analysis where the conservative aspects played a much more dominant role in presenting the legitimisation of austerity as a normative endeavour. For instance, the idea of effort and reward were commonly found. This was particularly the case when *fairness* was conceptualised as shared reciprocity. This semantic contextualisation draws directly from the ideas of personal responsibility, discipline and social order that underpin neoconservative thinking.

Perhaps a more pressing consideration is the overwhelming contextualisation of *fairness* in terms of duties and responsibilities. This is not only what is expected of citizens but also the main consideration in delimiting the role of the state. Taxes, and contributions more generally, were the semantic focus of *fairness*. Rights have always had a difficult place in neoconservative thinking. They have been mostly redefined as not worthy of political endeavour (Belsey 1986). The merit of contributions to the state in the data is not presented in terms of the rights they must help to provide. This view would most likely require a consideration of economic inequality and wealth re-distribution. Rather, fairness, and the contribution it subscribes to, renders social rights as social debt (Lazzarato 2012; Forkert 2014). Here, reciprocity is a moral imperative.

The morality of debt implied in *austerity* resurfaces in the semantic construction of the concept of *fairness*. With this in mind, the trivialisation of hardship, suffering and reduced living standards are not presented in a negative way, but instead as the legitimate outcome of this projection of society and the role of the state. This conceptualisation of citizens as self-disciplinary subjects has become a concern in recent literature in other areas of government, such as health policy in the UK during austerity governance (see, for example, Mulderrig 2018). Considering the consequences of these views in terms of hardship and suffering that have been highlighted by this thesis, more research would certainly be necessary to observe how these social and political changes are discursively managed.

Finally, it is important to reiterate that the semantic scope of *fairness* in the data (particularly after 2010) had little semantic space for egalitarian perspectives. This is relevant for inequality. The naturalisation of suffering that is implied in the conceptualisation I have presented in this section (despite the introduction of the rich as a partner that pays more taxes) can only strengthen the already naturalised views on big gaps in economic equality. This has important social consequences, not only for the suffering of individuals on the lowest incomes but also for the cohesion of society as a whole. As Levitas points out (2005: 188), real society is not a society that includes only the percentage of the population against which the rest are marginalised; it is made up of the whole 100%, and it is a society in which poverty and inequality are (increasingly) endemic.

9.4 Morality and neoliberal resilience

Taking into account the limitation of this study due to its location (it analyses only the political economy in the UK), I want to consider a few ideas regarding how these results can contribute to the debate around neoliberal resilience (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013, 2014; Jessop 2014; Schmidt 2016). The question seemed to be simple: why, given the clear problems within this model that the crisis brought to light, and given the role of previous economic crises as triggers for changes in political economic paradigms, did neoliberalism prevail this time? From a CDA perspective, the answer could be to acknowledge the fact that neoliberalism seemed to be so resilient during the years covered by the study because its discursive practices were still hegemonic and, as such, still surrounded by the veil of inevitability.

However, two contradictions have been highlighted by the crisis. Firstly, the obsession with debt reduction is at odds with the fact that debt is a basic requirement that underpins the neoliberal growth model in the UK. Austerity governance as a solution to the crisis focuses on reducing public debt, leaving unscrutinised the role of private debt in the creation of the crisis and, more generally, in the neoliberal growth model, which is highly dependent on financialisation and private debt (Hay 2012; Blyth 2013). Considering this, we have seen that the logic of this debt problematisation was grounded in moral terms; an economic explanation, considering the role of debt in creating the crisis, would have been much more difficult to present as a logical discursive resource. A second contradiction transpires in the centrality of higher taxation within austerity governance, which clearly contradicts neoliberal rationalities. Once again, morality seems to be at the centre of this contradiction, underpinned by a disciplinary view of human behaviour where social rights have no discursive space. Contradictions, in other words, according to these two examples, seem to be very well hidden by morality.

Furthermore, the results point to a clear example of the adaptability of neoliberal ideas (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013). The same concept, *fairness*, was contextualised within normalising arguments in the growth corpus; that is, in economic terms. However, this evolved into much more normative prosodies, especially after 2010. A clear example of intertextuality was also present, where the semantic connotations of thriftiness associated with *austerity* were transferred to the actual meaning of *fairness* in order to adapt it to fit a neoliberal agenda. Not only this, but the initial use of *age of austerity* in 2009 also exploited the idea of non-implementation (Schmidt & Thatcher 2013; 2014). Austerity represented a continuation of neoliberal premises relating to affordability. However, when presented as an epochal change that required a decisive intervention, *austerity* worked as an anchor for the idea that the problem was actually the previous reluctance to protect the affordability of public finances, leading to the logical demand for a tighter control of the deficit. This, in addition to the demand for higher taxes for the rich (see chapter 7) was another strategy that allowed the crisis to be managed as a crisis within neoliberalism, rather than a crisis of the system as a whole (Hay 2012; Jessop 2013).

The findings have highlighted the malleability of words that have a wide semantic potential and their adaptability to different legitimisation strategies, particularly in terms of hegemonic discourses. *Fairness* can be understood in the data as a divisive discursive tool (*rich* versus *poor*, *taxpayer* versus *benefit claimants*) or a uniting one (*fairer Britain*). Both semantic contextualisations were found within the lexical projection of neoliberalism. However, it is precisely the lack of coherence in the semantic distribution of this keyword that sheds light upon the instability of neoliberal hegemonic discourses. Furthermore, there is a clear overall paradox present in the finding: between neoliberalism – this market-driven, cold-hearted, non-moral paradigm – and its discursive requirement to win the semantic battle for moral concepts. This paradox is, in essence, the crystallisation of the underlying problem with subordinating social justice to free market rationalities. Even if, following neoliberal rationalities and governance, social justice is reconfigured to be less important than the economy, the moral implications of social justice still exist as a legitimisation strategy that needs to be addressed discursively. In other words, neoliberalism, no matter how non-moral its projection, cannot escape the political need for moral scrutiny. In the same way that the lack of democratic control implied in the processes of privatisation and depoliticisation seems to coincide with a tendency to overtly appeal to democratic values (Farrelly 2015), a lack of concern with social justice seems to require, at least within austerity governance, an invocation of morality.

9.5 Methodological reflections

Corpus-assisted discourse analysis is an increasingly popular approach and, as we saw in section 4.1, it has become an important part of CDA research. However, CDA is still a notoriously methodologically eclectic field (Breeze

2014: 243). This is not surprising. One of the main challenges for CDA researchers is always to translate theoretical claims into instruments and methods of analysis. The movement between 'grand theories' and concrete instances of social interaction is the essence of CDA, but it is also one of the most difficult challenges of the approach (Wodak & Meyer 2009: 23). Besides that, how could any one method fully overcome the permeability and almost intractable polymorphic nature of language and meaning?

Nonetheless CDA, as we saw in section 4.1, has been criticised for having a lack of methodological coherence and soundness (Widdowson 1995; 2000). Most notably, CDA has been criticised for 'cherry-picking' those texts and linguistic features that suited preconceived ideas (Mautner 2009b: 34; Orpin 2005: 38; Baker & Levon 2015: 222). This line of argument has at times been based on the divide between quantitative and qualitative methods. That is, quantitative methods such as CL have become popular because they are assumed to provide 'more objective standards' to the methodological process (Breeze 2011: 504).

CL was without a doubt the best option for my research questions. I wanted to see the use of *fairness* and *austerity* in terms of frequency and collocation patterns over time. Using quantitative methods to look into a much wider set of texts gave me some assurance that the patterns I focused on were typical. Not only that, CL allowed me to dip into the data without prior ideas guiding the initial analysis, keeping preconceived expectations at bay to a certain extent (Baker and others 2008: 277). In other words, by using CL, it was a little harder to give into one's impulse to focus on what one expects to find.

Having said that, I did indeed find expected results. For example, I expected to find out that both *austerity* and *fairness* were more widely used in the crisis corpus. However, as we saw in section 4.1, confirming expectations is not a less sound methodological approach and it is still a valuable contribution (Baker 2008: 102). At the same time, CL provided me with unexpected findings. For example, *fairness* collocating so often with taxation, specially to the level that it was in the crisis corpus when compared to the growth one.

I would certainly have found it very hard to access this pattern using only qualitative methods.

However, CL is not objective or more systematic simply because it is quantitative. As Baker puts it (2010a: 11), CL is not Star Trek, and one cannot simply say to the computer, ‘Tell me about this linguistic feature’ and receive an automatic answer. Interpretation and a wide range of decision-making is always part of the process, enhancing the strength of the results if done explicitly and logically but at the same time, and inevitably, leaving other aspects of what the data could have told untouched. CL has flaws and inconsistencies like any other method (Breeze 2011: 505). Most notably, as we saw in section 4.1, CL tends to produce ‘so what?’ results (Baker & Levon 2015: 232). I would have not been able to make sense of the collocation of *fairness* with taxation without the qualitative analysis that took place. CDA provided an enhanced capacity to contextualise and give meaning to what otherwise would have been decontextualised CL results.

Not only that, but it is also a fact that certain patterns would have been missed by quantitative methods alone. As we saw in section 4.1, CL is lexically-biased (Baker 2006: 174; Mautner 2009a: 124; Hunston 2011: 92). Patterns found within the extended qualitative analysis such as parataxis would have been missed using only CL. Moreover, it would also be interesting to see if these and other linguistic features appear in the data beyond the context of *austerity* and *fairness*. For this, an appropriate qualitative approach using a selection of texts within the data would be a logical continuation of this study.

Like in any piece of research, compromise and selectivity are always part of the decision-making. The ins and outs of the consequences of these issues are still very much a part of the debate within the field (see Marchi & Taylor 2009; Baker 2012; Baker & Levon 2015), but they point to a clear and open reflexivity regarding these matters, which can only be a healthy endeavour. However, I think the most important thing to bear in mind is the fact that in the same way that an astronomer does not feel the need to choose between a telescope and the naked eye (Partington 2014: 119-120), the CDA researcher using CL methods does not need to choose between the quantitative and the qualitative. More to the point, as van Leeuwen (2018: 152) so rightly reminds us, CDA 'should also remain focused on its critical aims and not become obsessed with itself, its methods and its problems. So long as suffering continues, there is work to be done'.

9.5.1 Key methodological contributions for CDA

This thesis aimed to collect evidence of how economic inequality is discursively justified and perpetuated within neoliberal governance. The study provided a framework for the analysis of cultural keywords (see section 2.2.2 and 3.8) that combined etymological analysis, quantitative tools and qualitative tools. This combination allowed a detailed semantic profiling of *austerity* and *fairness*, which the literature was missing (see section 3.8). Both *austerity* and *fairness* (but particularly *fairness*) worked at times as a trigger for neoliberal and conservative values in the results. Morality is, as I stated at the beginning of this thesis, a difficult theme to operationalise methodologically. Analysing overt invocations of moral concepts such as *fairness* might be a valuable aspect of the research of moral evaluation from a CDA perspective, enhancing some of the literature that is already concerned with this issue (Bennett 2013; 2014; Graham 2018).

The study also highlighted the importance of metaphors in the contextualisation of *austerity* and *fairness*. As presented in section 3.8, metaphors were one of the most common approaches to the discourse of the 2008 economic crisis within CDA (Bickes, Otten, & Chelsea Weyman 2014; Soares da Silva 2016; Borriello 2017; Soares da Silva, Cuenca, & Romano 2017). As such, a wider analysis of the metaphors used in the data beyond the concordances of the search words might be a useful step forwards for this study and our understanding of the crisis management in general. This development would be particularly useful considering that so far media genres have dominated metaphor analysis.

A particularly important contribution of the thesis in terms of metaphors is the consolidation of the relevance of the household metaphor. This specific metaphor has not yet been widely researched from a CDA perspective so far and as such deserves more attention (apart from this study see Fairclough 2016 and Soares da Silva 2016). I consider that by equating fiscal policies to domestic ones, this metaphor perversely simplifies macroeconomics, providing a straightforward legitimation for cuts to public spending within neoliberal governance.

Two more methodological aspects of the results are important contributions of this study for CDA. On the one hand, anti-elite rhetoric has been present in some studies within the 2008 crisis management (Lampropoulou 2014; Walsh 2016). My study specifically pointed to the links between the concept of *fairness* and a distribution of social actors that paid particular attention to high earners. A more detailed analysis of how class structures were mapped into social actors would be a very interesting avenue to follow and a logical expansion of this study. On the other hand, the study also provides some examples of how tautologies were used to justify economic inequality. As I stated in section 4.6.7, tautologies are not very commonly used for CDA research. A qualitative analysis of other tautologies in the data and indeed other genres within the same period might shed some light in terms of how (and if) economic inequality was justified by exploiting pragmatic loading rather than semantic content.

9.6 Final thoughts

This study has sought to contribute to the understanding of how and why cultural keywords are important for political legitimisation. It is undeniable that both *austerity* and *fairness* are relevant words in the discourse of the crisis and the settlement for austerity governance, which is still, as I write, on the agenda in elite political discourse in the UK. However, my concern with a specific period of time inevitably limited the diachronic scope of the analysis. Analysing contemporary periods is always difficult. On the one hand, the researcher is usually vividly experiencing the context she is analysing. As such, she is bound to be engaged and motivated to make sense of the findings. On the other hand, the theoretical contextualisation of a contemporary analysis will always lack a certain degree of perspective on the ‘big picture’.

The interdisciplinary and theoretical background of the study worked as a strong anchor to make up for these difficulties. However, it would be useful to expand the diachronic axis of analysis further to see, for example, how this crisis compared with previous crises with regard to patterns of use and changes in connotation of the two lemmas. CL would certainly make this task feasible, and there has been some recent interest that points to the importance of research in such approaches to elite discourses (Macabe & Yanacek 2018; Toolan 2018; Jeffries & Walker 2019).

Other limitations of the study also present opportunities for further research. For example, as I explained in section 4.2, the study did not include a systematic analysis of political parties or speakers in the data, since my interests lay mainly in overall semantic patterns. Enhancing the results with a more specific analysis of party discourse and how this relates to previous Third Way tendencies would be a clear candidate for further inquiry. Moreover, although using a single genre was compulsory in order to guarantee consistency for comparison (as mentioned in section 4.2), looking at other political and policy genres from the same periods would help us to understand more fully the context of certain patterns; for example, the emergence of *age of austerity*, which has been proved to be intertextually linked to other genres (Pautz 2017; 2018; Grundmann, Kreischer, & Scott 2017; Anstead 2018).

The study also focused solely on the UK. However, as shown in the literature review (section 3.8), the period covered by the analysis, 2008-2012, is relevant to a wide range of countries. The establishment of austerity governance, in addition to being a sign and carrier of neoliberal resilience, has an importance that cannot be underestimated in the history of the political economy in Europe, and its effects are unlikely to be at an end. Considering the severity of the crisis, this establishment was also, from a paradigmatic perspective, when change should have taken place, but did not. With this in mind, a cross-national analysis of how the two lemmas were used in the same period, taking advantage of the tools for comparability and standardisation that I explained in chapter 4, could be very illuminating. This would not only enable us to understand how austerity governance was managed in other countries, but also deepen our knowledge of the specific characteristics of the UK case.

In spite of the limitations of this project, the results certainly contribute to the understanding of how semantic ambiguity is used in political discourse to promote particular views of the world. It is clear that *austerity* was used firstly as an anchor to establish the need for a shift in focus towards deficit reduction and secondly as a label for the normalisation of such governance. On the other hand, *fairness* was contextualised as a highly normative concept and a vernacular one, especially around taxation, in which reciprocity and suffering were subscribed to a debt morality and, by extension, to *austerity*. What this means for economic inequality, as discussed in this thesis, is certainly not heart-warming. The normalisation of suffering that these results hint at does not promise any alleviation in levels of inequality and the social unease that these bring. With this in mind, it is important to continue to explore and to highlight the moral contingency of inequality. Inequality needs to be seen mainly as a moral issue in its own right, which policy needs to work with, not around. However, this requirement might have to draw from a standardised framework that is publicly recognised as valid. Human rights have been considered one path to standardisation (van Dijk 2009: 63; Fairclough & Fairclough 2012: 60; Fikfak 2016) and this is a research avenue that would be worth exploring further.

Vigilance regarding the specific uses of resonant and politicised keywords might be one of the many ways in which we can start to understand this long-standing issue, in particular the puzzling levels of consent for policies that are counterproductive for equality (Hopkin 2014). The results showed no space for egalitarian views in the semantic scope of *fairness*. The resilience of neoliberalism is not good news for economic equality either: not only in terms of levels of inequality, but also regarding current political tendencies towards the populist right, which can be understood as a direct consequence of the dispossession felt by those who have been ‘left behind’ by neoliberalism (Goodwin & Heath 2016; Inglehart & Norris 2016, Fraser 2017 cited in Hay & Benoît 2018: 4).

The relationship between these complex issues can only be fully understood from an interdisciplinary perspective. As this researcher can confirm, however, this approach is not free of challenges. Different fields have different expectations and idiosyncratic features. Their presence can be felt from the beginning to the end of the research process, from deciding what data to use, to deciding how the results should be presented and explained. Nevertheless, the benefits and value intrinsic in observing a social problem from different perspectives is an incredibly enriching aspect of this thesis and indeed of any CDA project. Economic inequality (as with any other type of oppression) is a complex issue and, as such, understanding it is never going to be a narrow or easy task. As we saw in section 3.5, some economists, such as Atkinson (2015) and Piketty (2014), have engaged in the debate around the politicised and moral nature of inequality. However, the contribution of political analysis has tended to be much more limited in terms of the role of inequality in politics and the contradictory nature of contemporary capitalism (Hopkin 2014: 679). In spite of the links between morality and speech, and in spite of the centrality of moral evaluation in other fields (such as philosophy), linguistics has also tended to pay little attention to such issues and their political repercusions (Bennett 2014: 73). It is time to fully engage with these discussions. The ultimate aim of CDA, even when focusing on a negative aspect of society, is always that of human flourishing. It is important to remember that particular views of the world are not inevitable, and change is in constant flux. For a critical analyst this is daunting but liberating: things, in the end, can be different (Hay 2002: 260).

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of corpora composition

a. Growth Corpus

Year	Governing Party	Debates	No. Tokens
2002 **17th-23rd April**	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	199,668
2003 **9th-14th April**	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	156,406
2004 **17th-23rd March**	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	191,405
2005 **16th-22nd March**	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	185,539
2006 **22nd-28th March**	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	177,345
		Total number of tokens:	**910,363**

b. Crisis Corpus

Year	Governing Party	Debates	No. Tokens
2008 12th-18th March	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	193,866
2009 22nd-28th April	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	187,976
2010 24th-30th March	Labour	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	198,732
2010 22nd-28th June	Coalition Conservatives and Liberal Democrats	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	205,285
2011 23rd-29th March	Coalition Conservatives and Liberal Democrats	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	181,558
2012 21st-26th March	Coalition Conservatives and Liberal Democrats	Financial statement, Budget resolutions and economic situation House of Commons parliamentary debate	182,136
		Total number of tokens:	**1,149,553**

Appendix 2: List of phrases excluded in the FAIRNESS search using < >

Fair as 'Large'	Fairly as 'Quite'	Other
a fair array, fair number, a fair amount of time, debated a fair amount, fair spell, fair degree	*fairly complex, fairly comfortable, fairly easy, fairly dubious, fairly considerably, fairly small, fairly cold, fairly consistently, fairly buoyant, fairly big, fairly affluent, fairly convincing, fairly dramatic, fairly well, fairly similar, fairly simple, fairly widely, fairly soon, fairly stable, fairly spurious, fairly conservative, fairly straightforward, fairly logical, fairly predictable, fairly plentiful, fairly healthy, fairly ordinary, fairly exotic, fairly orthodox, fairly low, fairly flippant, fairly modest, fairly long, fairly minimal, fairly pointed, fairly careful, fairly basic, fairly clear, fairly lively, fairly obscure, fairly obvious, fairly neutral, fairly optimistic, fairly new, fairly quickly, fairly prosperous, fairly "progressive", fairly regularly, fairly rapid, fairly unimpactful, fairly wide, fairly thin, fairly successful, fairly wealthy, fairly threadbare, fairly elementary*	*fair wind, jobs fair*

Appendix 3: Full collocate list of AUSTERITY in the crisis corpus

Rank	Collocate	LL	MI	P Value	Occurrences
1	PROGRAMME	50.32	8.41		9
2	AGE	47.14	8.63		8
3	MEASURES	35.11	6.86		10
4	PERIOD	22.30	7.58		5
5	OF	21.96	4.12	< 0.0001	45
6	GOVERNMENT'S	14.94	6.46		5
7	TIME	9.39	5.27		6
8	AN	8.95	4.84		8
9	HIS	4.91	4.71		5
10	ABOUT	4.04	4.25	< 0.05	7
11	BY	1.63	3.82		6
12	A	1.54	3.43		19
13	BUT	0.98	3.62		6
14	WAS	0.90	3.59		6
15	HAS	0.43	3.44		5
16	NOT	0.37	3.32		8
17	THEY	0.13	3.24		5
18	WILL	0.01	3.05		7

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 4: Full collocate list of FAIRNESS in the crisis corpus

Rank	Collocate	With	LL	MI	P Value	Occurrences
1	SHARE	fair	159.33	8.43		28
2	STABILISER	fair	126.15	10.92		13
3	IS	fair	121.56	4.57		138
4	A	fairer	116.24	5.53		60
5	IS	unfair	99.98	5.08		71
6	BRITAIN	fairer	72.83	8.42		13
7	BE	fair	72.52	4.79		67
8	IT	fair	69.48	4.50		86
9	A	fair	67.83	4.23		117
10	SYSTEM	fairer	66.79	8.08		13
11	FUEL	fair	48.95	6.50		16
12	SYSTEM	fair	45.59	6.20		17
13	BUDGET	fair	44.47	4.75		43
14	MORE	fairer	40.38	6.07		16
15	IT	unfair	38.81	4.76		37
16	TEST	fairness	37.25	6.97		10
17	THAT	fair	26.24	3.70		126
18	AN	unfair	25.90	5.41		15
19	NOT	fair	23.59	4.12		49
20	TAX	fair	19.26	4.41		27
21	AND	fair	19.16	3.65		105
22	PAY	fair	17.58	5.17		12
23	WOULD	unfair	16.20	4.96	< 0.0001	13
24	OPPORTUNITY	fairness	14.47	5.14		10
25	AND	unfair	12.33	3.83		43
26	AND	fairer	11.32	4.01		28
27	TO	fair	10.22	3.44		116
28	THAT	unfair	9.96	3.71		46
29	IN	unfairness	9.34	4.46		12
30	WAY	fair	8.65	4.49		11
31	SHOULD	fair	8.57	4.35		13
32	BUDGET	unfair	8.24	4.38		12
33	AND	fairly	7.10	4.19		13
34	ON	unfair	6.52	3.99		17
35	BUT	fair	6.42	3.81		24
36	AND	unfairness	5.77	4.16		11
37	THEIR	fair	5.37	3.95		15
38	CAN	fair	4.21	3.99		11

39	ONE	fair	3.85	3.90	< 0.05	12
40	OF	unfairness	3.32	3.90		10
41	THE	unfairness	3.05	3.56		21
42	BE	unfair	3.01	3.78		12
43	THIS	fair	2.54	3.53		21
44	ABOUT	fairness	1.23	3.29		30
45	WHO	fair	1.08	3.50		10
46	SYSTEM	fairness	0.57	3.46		43
47	IS	fairer	0.18	3.19		11
48	WAS	fair	0.08	3.10		15
49	BUDGET	fairness	0.03	3.04		31
50	OUR	fair	0.01	3.04		10

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 5: Full collocate list of FAIRNESS in the growth corpus

Rank	Word	With	LL	MI	P Value	Occurrences
1	ENTERPRISE	fairness	118.94	7.62		26
2	SOCIETY	fairer	95.13	10.09		12
3	A	fairer	64.84	5.51		34
4	MORE	fairer	47.51	6.58		15
5	SAY	fair	45.53	6.49		15
6	BE	fair	39.14	4.93		32
7	IS	fair	31.96	4.29		51
8	AND	fairer	24.44	4.63		26
9	IT	fair	23.90	4.41		33
10	A	fair	23.58	4.14		47
11	TO	fair	20.90	3.86		68
12	IT	unfair	15.71	5.01		12
13	IS	unfair	15.66	4.68	< 0.0001	16
14	THE	fairest	11.64	4.45		14
15	AND	unfair	8.12	4.14		16
16	THE	unfairness	7.41	4.23		12
17	AND	fair	6.58	3.58		45
18	THAT	fair	5.82	3.51		50
19	TAX	fair	5.26	4.18	< 0.05	10
20	FOR	fair	2.77	3.54		22
21	IS	fairer	2.54	3.78		10
22	HE	fair	1.91	3.68		10
23	TO	fairer	1.12	3.42		14
24	AS	fair	0.98	3.47		10
25	NOT	fair	0.01	3.04		10

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 6: Raw and normalised frequencies of AUSTERITY (2002-2012)

(NOTE: *Austerity* is used in all occasions apart from 5 occurrences of *austere* all in June 2010)

	Year	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency
Growth Corpus	2002	0	0
	2003	0	0
	2004	1	0.01
	2005	0	0
	2006	1	0.01
	TOTAL	**2**	**0.00**
Crisis Corpus	2008	0	0
	2009	23	0.12
	2010 March	5	0.03
	2010 June	39	0.19
	2011	8	0.04
	2012	22	0.12
	TOTAL	**97**	**0.08**

Normalised frequency is calculated per 1000 words. Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 7: Raw and normalised frequencies of FAIRNESS (2002-2012)

	Year	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency
Growth Corpus	2002	121	0.61
	2003	76	0.49
	2004	59	0.31
	2005	55	0.30
	2006	67	0.38
	TOTAL	**378**	**0.42**
Crisis Corpus	2008	92	0.47
	2009	72	0.38
	2010 March	113	0.57
	2010 June	264	1.29
	2011	89	0.49
	2012	177	0.97
	TOTAL	**807**	**0.70**

Normalised frequency is calculated per 1000 words. Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 8: Frequency and POS of FAIRNESS (growth and crisis corpora)

		Growth Corpus		Crisis Corpus	
	Word Form	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency
Noun	Fairness	105	0.12	208	0.18
	Unfairness	9	0.01	25	0.02
	Total	**114**	**0.13**	**233**	**0.20**
Adjective	Fair	154	0.17	341	0.30
	Unfair	37	0.04	123	0.11
	Fairer	43	0.05	71	0.06
	Fairest	9	0.01	1	0.00
	Total	**243**	**0.27**	**536**	**0.47**
Adverb	Fairly	19	0.02	29	0.03
	Unfairly	2	0.00	9	0.01
	Total	**21**	**0.02**	**38**	**0.03**

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 9: Frequency of positive word forms of FAIRNESS (growth and crisis corpora)

	Growth Corpus		Crisis Corpus	
Word Form	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency
Fairness	105	0.12	208	0.18
Fair	154	0.17	341	0.30
Fairly	19	0.02	29	0.03
Fairer	43	0.05	71	0.06
Fairest	9	0.01	1	0.00
Total	**330**	**0.36**	**650**	**0.57**

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 10: Frequency of negative word forms of FAIRNESS (growth and crisis corpora)

	Growth Corpus		Crisis Corpus	
Word Form	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency	Raw Frequency	Normalised Frequency
Unfairness	9	0.01	25	0.02
Unfair	37	0.04	123	0.11
Unfairly	2	0.00	9	0.01
Total	**48**	**0.05**	**157**	**0.14**

Figures shown to 2 decimal places unless otherwise indicated.

Appendix 11: Concordances of *pay* with *fair* (crisis corpus)

N	Concordance
1	back to the issue of the rich getting richer. The **Fair** **Pay** Network has produced an interesting
2	incomes in the past years should now **pay** their **fair** share of tax. I have no further announcements
3	to focus on growth, make the bankers **pay** their **fair** share and make savings over time. Germany
4	50p tax rate? I agree that we should all **pay** our **fair** share, but surely a ceiling of 40% is more
5	be simple, predictable, support work and be **fair.** The rich should **pay** the most and the poor
6	, but we did not. Yes, everyone should **pay** their **fair** share of tax, but the top 1% in this country
7	the wealthiest in our society that they **pay** their **fair** share. This really is a Budget for millions of
8	should have a social responsibility to **pay** a **fair** share of taxes. Thirdly, tax avoidance must
9	rules so that people have a branch and **pay** a **fair** share of tax in the UK. We should consider
10	that people who work for the Government **pay** a **fair** share of tax to the Government on their fair
11	, but commercial properties should **pay** their **fair** share. I do not think that any stamp duty land
12	property companies do not **pay** their **fair** share as everyone else does. Everyone
13	as everyone else does. Everyone should **pay** a **fair** share of tax; that is what corporate social

Appendix 12: Concordances of *paying* with *fair* (crisis corpus)

N	Concordance
1	how super-rich individuals avoid **paying** their **fair** share of tax and that #3.2 billion is lost by
2	due tax from those intent on not **paying** their **fair** share. There were elements of the Budget
3	some of the wealthiest are not **paying** their **fair** share. So as well as reviewing revenues
4	high value property cannot avoid **paying** their **fair** share. Help for small businesses, a boost
5	in our society who seek to avoid **paying** their **fair** share of taxes. Tax avoidance and evasion

Appendix 13: Concordances of *an* with *unfair* (crisis corpus)

N	Concordance
1	me tell him this: every time in future he tries to justify **an unfair** decision by saying that times are tough, we will
2	Might this uncosted, unfunded pledge to introduce **an unfair** marriage tax break be dropped by the Leader of
3	with tax credits, otherwise many people will have **an unfair** result through no fault of their own. They will be
4	a fair package, as we have done, than to have **an unfair** package imposed on us that no one has had the
5	she is supportive of council tax, but I say that it is **an unfair** tax because it is not related to the ability to pay,
6	in connection with the banding, and the fact that **an unfair** burden is being imposed on premium economy
7	with council tax were appalling because it is such **an unfair** tax-but we must look at the package as a whole.
8	hon. Gentleman will see that as **an** illustration of how **unfair** a society this is, but it struck me that if two of
9	to cause the slump, are being asked to bear **an unfair** share of the burden. Again, one thing we can say
10	. We must never forget that high levels of debt put **an unfair** burden on future generations. Our role is to look
11	who need vital support. It is **an** outrageously **unfair** cut that will leave many disabled people trapped
12	the many-an unfair Budget built on economic failure; **an unfair** Budget from the same old Tories. rose - Order. I
13	It is unfair, out of touch, and for the few, not the many-an **unfair** Budget built on economic failure; an unfair
14	and is destined to fail again. He wants to implement **an unfair** budget that will hit the poorest hardest,
15	Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark knows **an unfair** Budget when he sees one, so he has a decision

Appendix 14: Dispersion plot of FAIRNESS (crisis corpus)

N	File	Words	Hits	per 1,000	Disp...ion	Plot
1	fair (Overall)	1,157,417	883	0.76	0.927	
2	fair 2008_debate	194,460	111	0.57	0.898	
3	fair 2009_debate	189,170	83	0.44	0.821	
4	fair 2010_March	199,755	130	0.65	0.784	
5	fair 2010_June	206,697	273	1.32	0.852	
6	fair 2011_debate	183,332	94	0.51	0.855	
7	fair 2012_debate	184,003	192	1.04	0.882	