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Rebranding the Scottish Executive: a discourse-historical analysis

Abstract

This paper examines the change in name of the devolved governing body of Scotland from the Scottish Executive (1999-2007) to the Scottish Government (2007-present) following the majority result for the Scottish National Party in the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections. In the wider European political landscape this is unusual: while ministries, departments and even political parties change their names relatively frequently, the same cannot be said for top-level political institutions. This paper investigates this discursive act of 'rebranding' from a discourse-historical perspective (see Wodak 2001). In addition to critical analysis of various texts about the act of rebranding itself (media reports, political speeches and parliamentary debates, policy documents), the historical, cultural and political contexts are examined in relation to the wider significance of this move for top-down Scottish national identity construction.

Key words

discourse-historical approach, national identity, political branding, Scottish Government, Scottish National Party, Scottish Parliament

1. Introduction

This paper sets out to examine a seemingly simple discursive act that occurred in 2007: the change in the name of the governing body of Scotland from *The Scottish Executive* to *The Scottish Government*. It may not be immediately obvious why such an apparently minor lexical change should form the basis of a scholarly article. However, I would argue that this topic is highly relevant in the context of the politics not just of Scotland but of the United Kingdom, with Scotland seemingly edging ever closer to full independence at the time of writing. Furthermore, while it is common for political institutions such as ministries or government departments to rebrand themselves (or be rebranded “from above” by governments), rebranding it is less common at or near the top tiers of national governmental institutions, making this an interesting case to examine.

There are a number of other possible “entry points” (see e.g. Jessop 2004) to the research area of identity in Scottish politics. For instance, the idea of a corporate identity for public institutions is discussed by Koller (2008) and in fact this article appears in a special issue of the JLP on branding for political entities more generally (see Mitsikopoulou 2008). A different entry point could involve an ethnographic approach – for instance examining what the name change meant in the daily lives of MSPs (Wodak 2009a: conducts this kind of research into the “backstage” of politics). Another approach would be to look at the role of national and political identity in the media (such as e.g. Higgins 2004), or to look at the idea of transition, which has taken centre-stage in many recent studies in the field of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough 2006; Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2010), which have typically focussed on the transitional economies of Central and Eastern Europe. However, although Scotland could certainly be described as a transitional society in political terms, the same cannot be said in economic terms of the birth country of Adam Smith. All of these possible entry points and approaches have informed my thinking about this problem, but in the end the entry point of the name change itself, leading to an examination of its impact in different parts of the public sphere, seemed the most apposite.

Inherently, a name-change is a discursive act, and a discursive approach is thus an appropriate way to investigate it. After setting out the socio-political background in the next section, I will introduce a version of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to critical discourse analysis (CDA) that I have previously employed in an examination of Scottish politics (Unger 2009). Following this, in section 4 I describe the texts, genres and social fields under analysis, putting them in their institutional contexts, and section 5 contains a description of the topics, macro-strategies and constructions I identify in the texts. The final section before the conclusion comprises detailed analysis of specific texts from my data, which I also attempt to relate to the socio-political context.

2. Socio-political background

The name *The Scottish Executive* was first conceived during the devolution process, by which political power (both legislative and executive) was devolved from the UK Parliament in London to elected bodies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see Wilson and Stapleton 2007). Scotland was without its own parliament from 1707 to 1999, but maintained its own distinct legal and educational systems. From the late 19th Century onwards, the Scottish Office, under the auspices of the Secretary of State for Scotland (a cabinet minister in the UK government) functioned as the governing body of Scotland. Following a referendum on devolution in 1997 and the reestablishment of the Scottish Parliament, a coalition of Labour and Liberal Democrat Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) governed Scotland, and hence made policy decision in all devolved areas, from 1999 to 2007.

On gaining a higher proportion of votes than any other party in the Scottish Parliamentary elections in 2007 (though not an absolute majority), the Scottish National Party (SNP) formed a minority government after failing to find a coalition partner, and instigated the name change to *The Scottish Government* later in 2007. While the remit and powers of the new Scottish Government remained exactly the same as those of the Scottish Executive, the Scottish National Party differs from the three other major parties active in Scotland in several key areas. First, they campaigned (and continue to campaign) for full national political independence for Scotland. Labour and the Liberal Democrats supported devolution and a certain degree of increased autonomy, but not full independence, and the Scottish Conservative and Unionist party (note the name) actively opposed devolution in the 1997, though they support further devolution measures in 2011. Second, the SNP has been the only party in any of the four Scottish parliament elections so far, namely in 2011, to gain an absolute majority, and hence to be able to form a majority government without entering into a coalition. The reasons for this remarkable result in a proportional representation system, which was apparently specifically designed to prevent a result such as this from occurring (Keating 2010: 55) are complex and are still being discussed by political scientists and commentators. However, some of the major factors seem to be the disaffection of the Scottish electorate with Westminster politics in general, the unpopularity of the ruling UK coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Democrats, and the subsequent collapse of the Liberal Democrat vote in Scotland. While the SNP are “nationalists” by name, they should not be equated with extremist parties in the UK or other European countries, such as the British National Party, the Belgian Vlaams Blok, or the Austrian Freedom Party. For instance, while these parties tend to be Eurosceptic (De Vries and Edwards 2009), the SNP has espoused a pro-European stance in the past few decades (Spiering 2004: 132). Unlike many other nationalist parties, the SNP is also broadly pro-immigration (Hepburn 2011) and pro-environment (Keating 2010: 122).

While the name change was initially not ‘official’, in that the formal acts and treaties connected to devolution still refer to the Scottish Executive, the Scotland Bill (2010-2011) being debated in the Westminster Parliament at the time writing refers to ‘The Scottish Government’. It is also worth noting that the Gaelic

name for the Scottish Executive from devolution and more recently of the Scottish Government, *Riaghaltas na h-Alba*, is best translated as “Government of Scotland”. The discontinuity in naming is thus confined to English

3. The discourse-historical approach

Regular readers of the *Journal of Language and Politics* should not need an extensive introduction to the discourse-historical approach (DHA), which was first developed by Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl and their colleagues at the University of Vienna (see, for instance Wodak et al. 1998; Wodak et al. 1999; Reisigl and Wodak 2001; Wodak and Meyer 2001), and has also been adopted in a number of studies published in the journal (see e.g. Chilton, Tian, and Wodak 2010; Oberhuber et al. 2005). In this study, my approach draws heavily on this type of critical discourse analysis (CDA), and in particular on the version of the DHA I developed in my investigation into the discursive construction of the Scots language (Unger 2009, 2010). The key innovations in my approach relevant to this study are the integration of Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1991) and also a distinctive diagrammatic representation of which discourse topics are included in different texts, and how texts relate to each other intertextually and interdiscursively (see section 4 below).

I follow Lemke (1995: 7f) in defining discourse as “the social activity of making meanings with language and other symbolic systems in some particular kind of situation or setting” (see also Wodak 2008: 6). The DHA emphasizes the historical and present contextual dimensions of discourse, where context can be seen as the environment or surrounding conditions of discourse (see also van Dijk 2008). It also focuses on the linguistic aspects of texts, by drawing on ‘linguistic theories, for example, theories of argumentation, of grammar, of rhetoric, [to] try to describe and explain the pattern specific to language systems and verbal communication’ (Meyer 2001: 20-21). An analysis from a DHA perspective will thus include detailed examination of texts in their context, from the *macro* level comprising culture, society, history, to the *micro* textual level. Between these two poles lie the intertextual level, i.e. the relationship between this text and other texts, and the ‘context’ of situation, or institutional context, which determines the genre features of a text (Wodak 2009b).

Although there is something to be said about the semantic values of the two names themselves, i.e. of the words *Executive* and *Government*, the most interesting aspects of the name change from a discourse-historical perspective relate to discourse *about* the name change, i.e. the text and talk that took up the name change as a topic, and the resulting discussions, arguments, and negotiations about its possible meanings and significance. Discourse is seen as a social practice within CDA (Fairclough 1992), and it is thus important to examine how utterances or texts are repeated, reformulated, and recontextualised in a particular social context. Discourse can also lead to “real” effects, i.e. effects outside texts themselves; they are a form of social action, which can lead to the creation, maintenance or subversion of hegemonic power structures. This is what makes discourse-historical analysis such as this study relevant to other fields and disciplines apart from linguistics and discourse analysis: by examining

a discursive act in context, we can investigate the impact of a discursive act on attitudes, ideologies, and ultimately social action.

With regard to the text itself, DHA scholars suggests a number of linguistic phenomena that typically form suitable objects for analysis. I have listed below those discursive strategies and textual phenomena I found to be particularly salient in discourse on the name change. An overview is given in Wodak (2009b), and I give further elucidation where my use of the terms might differ from other DHA scholars.

- a. Argumentation strategies, particularly
 - *topoi*: Following Unger (2009), broadly in the tradition of Kienpointer (1992) and other DHA scholars, I define these as “argumentative shortcuts” or “commonplaces”, which are frequently used in arguments [and] allow speakers to get from a premise to a conclusion without explaining the warrant underlying the argument’
 - Legitimation/de-legitimation strategies
 - Ad hominem attacks
- b. Positive self and negative other presentation, including (Negative) predication
- c. Framing
- d. Passivisation and agent deletion, including use of non-personal social actors
- e. Metonymy

Though much of the discourse-historical work being done of late has had some ethnographic elements, for example interviewing the social actors who produce or receive a particular kind of text, or are affected or responsible for a particular social wrong (see e.g. Wodak 2009a; Unger 2009), this study does not employ this kind of methodology. Also, although it would certainly be interesting and relevant to examine the “backstage” (Wodak 2009a) events that led to the name change, that is not the focus of the present article. Instead, by examining a number of different publicly available texts (debates in parliament, media texts, and press releases), and by situating these texts within their institutional and socio-political contexts, I hope to go some small way towards including the kind of triangulation that discourse-historical analysis demands (Wodak 2007).

4. Texts, fields and genres

The analytical focus of this study is texts that fall into three key genres in the public sphere. These are all “top-down” text types, which are produced by elite individuals or institutions, in other words powerful entities in the political and journalistic fields who are policy-makers and legislators, decision-makers, journalists and opinion-shapers. I selected the texts on the basis of their salience to the topic of the name-change (they all contain the terms *Scottish Executive* and *Scottish Government*) and their date (they all date from the week within which the name change was announced). The texts are shown in relation to their fields and genres in Figure 1 (for further discussion of fields and genres in discourse-historical analysis, see Unger 2009).

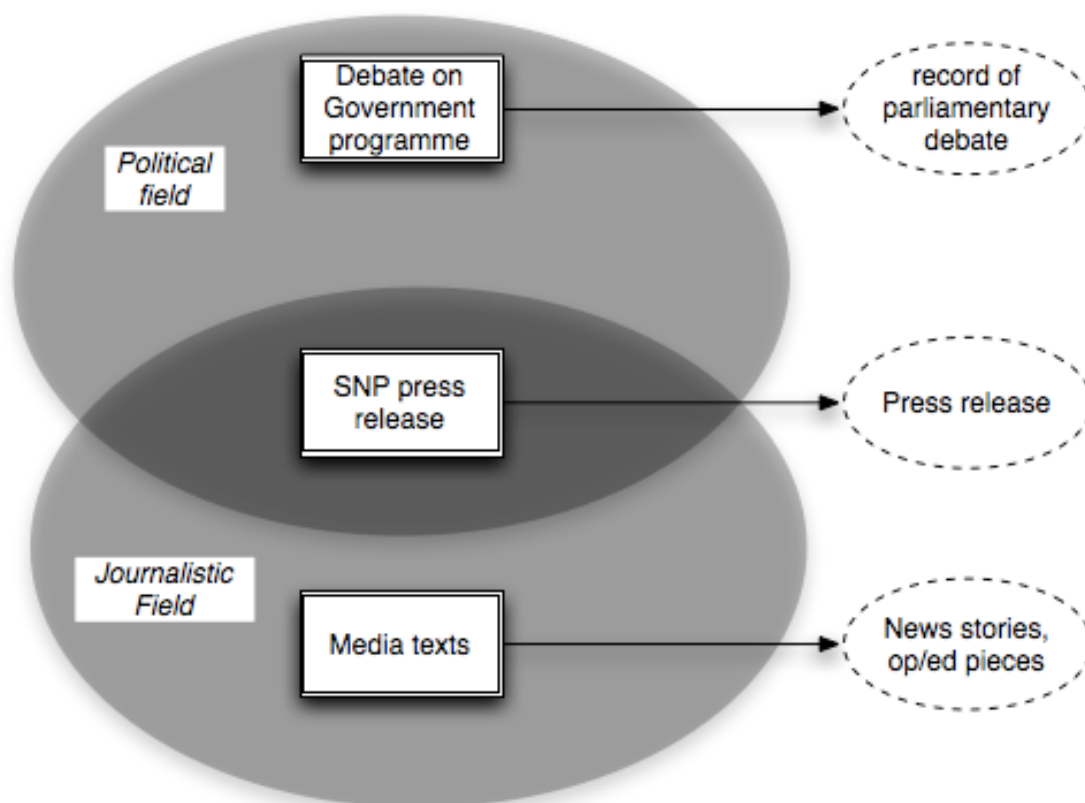


Figure 1: Texts (in boxes) in relation to fields (grey ovals) and genres (broken lines)

The details of the texts I selected for closer analysis and the rationale for choosing them are as follows:

- (1) A press release by the Scottish National Party announcing the name change (3rd September, 2007).
- (2) Extracts from a debate on the newly-named Scottish Government's legislative programme, retrieved from the Official Record of the Scottish Parliament (5th September)
- (3) A BBC news story on the topic (3rd September). This was selected because of the BBC's influential role as the national broadcaster and news organization, and because the news content on its website relates to its TV and radio coverage, thus perhaps giving some insight into the content of broadcast media.
- (4) Texts published in newspapers. I retrieved these from the Nexis database using the following parameters: a) All UK newspapers; b) the search terms *Scottish Executive* and *Scottish Parliament* both had to appear; c) the date range 1st-5th October (i.e. from two days before to two days after the SNP press release). This resulted in 44 texts, from which I manually removed any texts that were not primarily about the name change (for instance, one text about oil revenues referred to the Scottish Executive but quoted people who used the term Scottish Government). Table 1 shows the sources and news genres of the remaining 23 texts.

Table 1: Distribution of articles about the name change in UK newspapers

Newspaper	News/ Features	Opinion/ Editorial	Letters
Aberdeen Evening Express	1		
Aberdeen Press and Journal	2	1	
Daily Mail/Mail on Sunday	2	1	
Daily Record	1	1	1
Daily Star	1	1	
Evening Times (Glasgow)	1		
Morning Star	1		
The Scotsman/Scotland on Sunday	3		
The Express/Sunday Express	2		
The Herald (Glasgow)	1		1
The News of the World (England)	1		
The Times (London)	1		

A variety of methods for the selection and analysis of texts in news media has been proposed for discourse-historical studies (e.g. Wodak et al. 1999; Mautner 2008; Baker et al. 2008). Many discourse-historical analyses of news media have dealt with issues that are repeatedly covered by media over an extended period, which is rather different from the present case. Thus, though a corpus analysis would undoubtedly yield some interesting results, the small number of articles that covered the name-change makes it less of a priority to conduct large-scale quantitative research.

Instead, in this study I employ qualitative text analysis methods to examine discourse on the name-change in the selected texts. Following the methodology developed in Unger (2009), after detailed examination of the different context levels, I first identify the topics in the various texts and their interrelationships. I then examine the language of the texts, looking for discursive strategies (e.g. predication, legitimation, etc.) and finally identify “macro-strategies”, which I define as relatively wide-spread ways of constructing the object of investigation found in texts of various genres across the whole field (or across several fields).

5. Topics, macro-strategies and constructions

As discussed in the previous section, the first step in this type of discourse-historical analysis is to establish *what* the texts are about. While the overall topic, the name-change from *Scottish Executive* to *Scottish Government* served as the basis for selection, and is thus to be found in every text, the three types of texts included three groups of discourse topics, as shown in Figure 2. The first of these, shown near the top of the figure, are topics that are included in the press release, and are then also taken up in both the parliamentary debate and many of the media texts. The second, bottom centre of the figure, are topics found in the debate and media texts, and the third bottom right, are found only in the media texts.

In part, this asymmetrical relationship can be ascribed to the intertextual relationship between the texts. The press release is quoted or alluded to in the

debate and the media texts. Some of the media texts additionally make reference to the debate. Thus, the press release may be seen as the “primary” text in textual chain. Naturally, many other texts will have preceded the press release, but most of these are only to be found “backstage”, and thus not directly part of the public sphere. Some of the media texts preceded the press release chronologically, but refer to an announcement that the SNP is about to make, thus suggesting that the details of the press release were leaked to the media.

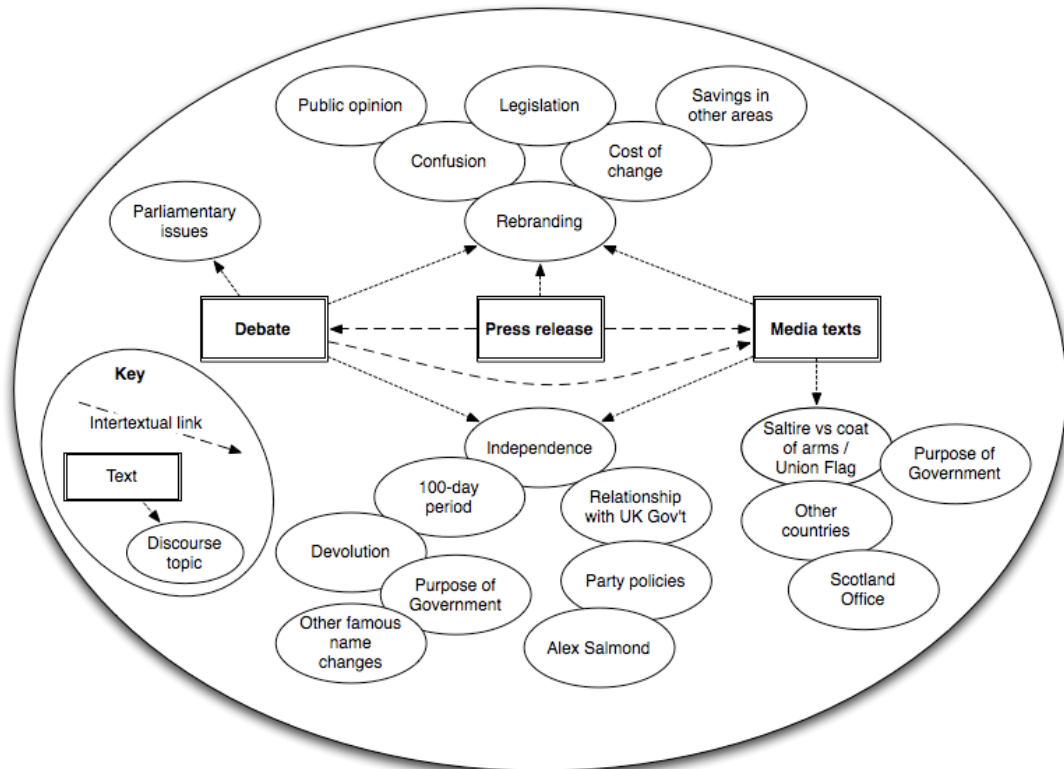


Figure 2: Discourse topics in the discourse on the name-change

There are a number of “macro-strategies” employed in the texts. First, the name-change is subjected to legitimation and de-legitimation strategies. This is realised particularly through arguments drawing on the topos of number, by citing the £100,000 cost of the operation, and claims about being “not worth the money” (or the opposite). Second, the authors of the various texts engage in positive self and negative other-representation (e.g. talking about “ten years of Labour/Lib-Dem inaction”). Finally, the name-change is instrumentalised in arguments about other topics (e.g. around independence, the economy, etc.). In the following section, I will give examples of how each of these macro-strategies is realised in some of the texts under investigation.

6. Text analysis

6.1. 'The Scottish Government: It's Official'

(1) Press release by the Scottish Government, 3rd September 2007

News Release



The Scottish Government - it's official

[Listen](#)

03/09/2007

Scottish Ministers have formally adopted the title Scottish Government to replace the term Scottish Executive as an expression of corporate identity.

The change is intended to help the public more clearly understand the role and functions of the devolved Government in Scotland.

The rebranding has immediate effect. Signs at the six main Government buildings in Edinburgh and Glasgow have already been changed but other material such as stationery will only be changed gradually to be as cost effective as possible in the transition.

The decision was taken to adopt the new identity because research showed that the term Scottish Executive was confusing or meaningless to many members of the public.

The [Scottish Social Attitudes survey](#) and a [Citizens' Jury](#) examining Executive communications have both indicated limited understanding of what the Executive does and some confusion with other government bodies, notably the Scottish Parliament but also the UK Government.

The Government believes that £1.1 million savings made from having fewer Cabinet Ministers than the previous administration, fewer private office staff and fewer special advisers more than covers the cost of rebranding.

The cost of creating the new logo and changing the main signage on the buildings has been £100,000.

The term Scottish Executive, as defined by the Scotland Act 1998, will continue to be used in formal legal documents such as legislation and contracts.

As I suggest in the previous section, this text is the primary text in this particular string of discursive events – not necessarily chronologically, but in terms of importance and how frequently it is taken up and recontextualised in subsequent texts. The name-change is lexicalised as a “rebranding”, which together with the term “corporate identity” suggests a “business” or “marketing” frame for this debate. Indeed, this frame is also taken up in the news texts and to a certain extent also in the parliamentary debates (see following sections).

The authors of the press release employ a number of argumentation strategies to attempt to legitimate the change. They draw on several common topoi, namely:

- a. The appeal to common good, by expressing the wish to reduce confusion for the public. This is combined with:
- b. The appeal to authority, by citing (and linking to) the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, and the “Citizens’ Jury”.

- c. The topos of number, by comparing £1.1 savings with the £100,000 costs. Unsurprisingly, while the second figure is widely quoted in critical media texts (and also in some supportive ones), the savings are not mentioned. What the media appear to have missed, however, is that the £100,000 refers only to the cost of changing signs and design of the new logo. The cost for new stationery, etc., is counted separately, but this is not explicitly addressed by the media. The topos of number is also employed in comparing the number of ministers under the Scottish Government with the “previous administration”, i.e. the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition that formed the Scottish Executive until 2007.

The text also contains many instances of passivation and non-personal social actors. Part of the SNP’s positive self-presentation strategy means decisions (or political actions) are attributed, but the actual specific work (of changing signs, etc.) is anonymous. This is different in some media articles, where the physical effects of the name-change (taking down and putting up signs) are foregrounded. This press release forms the basis of many media articles - often taken word-for-word, as is often the case with press releases, with the addition of critical or supportive quotes.

6.2. Debate in the Scottish Parliament, 5th September, 2007

The debate two days after the press release on the “Scottish Government’s Programme” (col. 1362 of the Official Record of the Scottish Parliament) was comprised of a statement by the First Minister, Alex Salmond, and responses by a number of MSPs. Excerpts of these are reproduced below as texts (2a)-(2c), with the name and party of each contributor, and are then discussed in turn.

(2a) Cathy Jamieson (Labour):

However, today, we have moved from the big promises to the broken promises. The students who thought that their debt would vanish under the SNP will get no consolation from the fact that it now calls itself a Government rather than an Executive.

...

Those are some of the issues that matter most to the people of Scotland. They are the problems that people want their Executive or Government—call it what we like—to tackle through the Parliament.

The Labour MSP Cathy Jamieson here is instrumentalising the name-change in a much longer contribution in which she evaluates the Government’s planned programme. She draws here on the topos of common good by claiming that Labour speaks for the “people of Scotland” – the same topos used by the SNP in the press release. She also attempts to trivialise the name-change by interjecting “call it what we like”. In example (2b), by contrast, Sarah Boyack uses the flag (she is referring to the Saltire flag in the new Scottish Government logo versus the Union flag) both literally and metonymically, to refer to the name-change. In so doing, she obscures the agent in this passage: she uses a nominalisation (“unspecific proposals”) and backgrounds the social actors (i.e. the SNP).

(2b) Sarah Boyack (Labour):

There will be lots of things on which the Labour Party will work constructively over the next four years in the Parliament. However, we will not support ill-worked-out, unspecific proposals, nor rhetoric about what flag is flown above this building instead of debate about the laws that are passed here.

(2c) Murdo Fraser (Conservative):

This is the first debate in the Parliament with a new rebranded Scottish Executive. There are numerous examples of significant name changes in recent times: Harry Webb became Cliff Richard, Maurice Micklewhite became Michael Caine, Cat Stevens became Yusuf Islam, Windscale became Sellafield, and now the Scottish Executive has become the Scottish Government.

Of course, people and institutions are entitled to change their names if they wish, and I have no particular difficulty with the rebranding of the Scottish Executive. The only pity is that, unlike in the cases of private individuals such as Mr Richard, in the case of the Scottish Executive it is the poor taxpayer who has to foot the bill. Now £100,000 for a rebranding exercise may not seem like a great deal of money to ministers, but it is an unnecessary extravagance that they may well come to regret during the budget process when they start to run out of money for all their pet projects and finally start having to say no to those who are clamouring for additional cash.

...

Above all, we reject the proposal for independence. The option of cutting us off from our neighbours in the other parts of these islands is persistently opposed by a substantial majority of our fellow Scots. What a pity that the SNP Government is wasting time on an unwanted national conversation when it should be tackling the real issues. Whatever it calls itself, if this Government wants to be a success, we will be happy to point it in the right direction.

While Labour is part of the opposition in the parliament at that time, the Conservative party is arguably even further removed from the SNP in the political spectrum. Thus, it is not surprising to find a number of criticisms and negative other-representation in a contribution by the Conservative MSP Murdo Fraser. Here, Fraser trivialises the name change, through the use of humour and by including singers and actors in his list of “significant name changes in recent times”. He engages in negative predication by comparison with Windscale/Sellafield, which had its name changed after Britain’s worst nuclear accident. He draws on the topos of number by quoting the £100,000 figure, and the topos of threat and appeal to common good are employed in the last part of the extract, as well as negative predication (“wasting time”).

These examples show that in this debate the MSPs draw on a wide range of discursive strategies to advance their and their parties’ aims, and chiefly instrumentalise the name-change in other arguments, rather than arguing about the name change per se. This is not surprising, given that the name-change

coincided roughly with the SNP's first 100 days in office, and its announcement of its legislative programme in parliament, thus giving the MSPs plenty to talk about.

6.3. "Scottish Executive renames itself".

Shortly after the press release, the BBC News website published the article shown in example (3). The story was also widely reported in broadcast media in Scotland, and in UK-wide news programmes.

(3) BBC News article, 3rd September, 2007

Scottish Executive renames itself

The Scottish Executive has been rebranded as the Scottish Government, it has been confirmed.

The new name will be used on all documents, letters, publicity material and signs outside government buildings.

The move came after research suggested the term "executive" was meaningless to many people.

First Minister Alex Salmond said the time was right for a change, but Labour said the SNP had acted "unilaterally and without consultation".

The administration's legal name will still be the Scottish Executive.

[Text box] "The overwhelming majority of people had no idea what the term 'executive' meant". Alex Salmond First Minister [End of text box]

The first document to feature the new title will be the SNP's legislative programme, which is due to be unveiled on Wednesday.

A new Scottish government sign has been put in place outside its Victoria Quay building in Leith, replacing the existing Scottish Executive sign.

A saltire will replace the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom on the Scottish government's official documents.

The rebranding is expected to cost about £100,000.

Politicians from the Lib Dems and Labour have already begun to use the term Scottish government in recent months.

A poll held after then-Labour chief whip Tom McCabe said he was open to suggestions for a name change in 2001 showed that only 29% of people wanted the title Scottish Executive to remain.

Mr Salmond said Northern Ireland was the only other country in the world where the word 'executive' was used to describe a layer of government.

He added: "The overwhelming majority of people had no idea what the term 'executive' meant.

"Obviously the Scottish administration is the government. It is regarded as the government across a range of issues, and it should act like a government."

Mr Salmond said he believed the time was right to make the "common sense change".

[Text box] "What an administration does and what it achieves in office is far more important than what it is called " Conservative spokesman [End of text box]

His spokesman defended the cost, arguing that it was just 0.2% of the £50m savings identified by the SNP administration.

Labour leader-elect Wendy Alexander said: "I am open-minded on the name change and recognise the possible advantages.

"However, it is inconsistent with a professed desire for consensus, conversation and co-operation to act unilaterally and without consultation.

"It is another sign that the trappings of office risk getting a higher priority than improving the lives of Scots."

Minimum cost

A Conservative Party spokesman said: "What an administration does and what it achieves in office is far more important than what it is called.

"If there is to be any change then it's got to be done at a minimum cost to the taxpayer."

A Scottish Liberal Democrat spokesman said: "Changing the name of the Scottish Executive was first proposed by the Steel Commission, set up by the Liberal Democrats last year.

"However, spending £100,000 to achieve this is both unnecessary and profligate."

One of the main ways of framing this event in the BBC News article is as a conflict between the Westminster Parliament (i.e. Scotland Office, the department with responsibility for non-devolved matters in Scotland) and the Scottish Government. Many of the topics in the press release are adopted or recontextualised: for instance, the topos of number and common good are invoked repeatedly. The typical "neutral" stance of the BBC is maintained by giving voice first to one "side", the SNP, and then the various opposition voices. The three main other parties in Scottish politics, and the UK Government are all represented by various social actors. While at this point it still seemed that the UK Government would take a hard-line approach (the Secretary of State for Scotland, Des Browne, initially refused to use the term *Scottish Government*, but later softened his position).

6.4. Newspaper texts

The newspapers captured by the Nexis search consisted of three broad genres, namely news reporting (sometimes also included in the features section of the newspapers), opinion/editorial, and letters. The news reports tended to include voices speaking from a variety of political and ideological positions, but unsurprisingly the op/ed pieces and letters took a clear stance on the name-change: ranging from broadly supportive (Aberdeen Press and Journal (4a)) to highly critical (Daily Mail (4b)), which are reproduced here.

(4a) "For executive read government". Aberdeen Press and Journal, September 3rd, 2007

This week, the Scottish National Party's minority administration will right what many believe was a fundamental wrong when devolution was finally delivered to Scotland.

The name "Scottish Executive" is to be replaced by "Scottish Government".

Following the election in 1999, many criticised the term "executive" as being confusing and an attempt to peg the work of Scottish ministers one rung below that of a full-blown government.

Few will be able to criticise the SNP's decision, except, perhaps, for the reported £100,000 cost of the re-branding exercise.

The Lib Dem/Labour coalition toyed with the idea of introducing the term government.

The Scottish Executive is the government of Scotland. It legislates on huge areas of national life and is seen by most voters as the leading civic body. What harm can it do to call it a government?

Polls suggest that the public has always been confused by the term "executive" and are unclear about the level of power, and with that accountability, the body has.

The word "government" is clear. It is a government's job to lead a country and, above all else, get it right.

With a simple change of name, Scottish ministers have set themselves a higher standard in the eyes of the voters.

Governments are there to be scrutinised, criticised and demonised. Executives are there to . . . execute?

The SNP's name change will mean nothing if the administration does not act like a government and deliver like one.

Their problem could be living up to the expectation that this change of name will bring.

The Aberdeen Press and Journal editorial draws a number of topoi to argue in support of the name-change and evaluate it positively. While the topos of number is widely employed in the news reportage and other less supportive texts, in the Press and Journal editorial the £100,000 figure is quoted, but is

strongly mitigated (*perhaps, reported*) and framed by an *argumentum ad populum* fallacy (“Few will be able to criticise...”). Much of the argumentation of the SNP press release is recontextualised in this text, including the appeal to common good and appeal to authority.

The Daily Mail opinion piece by Katie Grant suggests a very different stance:

(4b) “An exercise in vanity... and the whiff of sleaze; AS THE SNP SPENDS £100,000 TO REBRAND THE EXECUTIVE” Daily Mail, September 3rd, 2007, by Katie Grant

VANITY is an unattractive trait and political vanity is as big a turnoff as political sleaze. It is a pity, then, that only four months after Alex Salmond took up the reins of office, both vanity and sleaze are the words of the moment.

What else, at bottom, but vanity, is behind the rebranding of the Scottish Executive as the Scottish Government?

First of all, it is putting the cart before the horse. If Mr Salmond’s administration really wants to be known as the Scottish Government, it should earn the title. Spending £100,000 of our money on new logos and a new corporate image is more a slick PR stunt than a scheme to improve our standard of living.

And £100,000 is an extremely conservative estimate. Instigating new designs and logos is a bit like moving house the full cost is always much more than you could ever imagine.

I don’t expect this rebranding will run to the £10million spent renaming Marathon bars Snickers, but I would not be surprised if it was nearer the £2million spent disastrously by the Post Office on the now abandoned Consignia label.

We will never know, of course, because the real figure will be lost in obfuscation. We have already seen some of that, with a source declaring that the new branding will be rolled out on a cost-effective basis and funded from existing marketing and facilities and estates budgets.

If marketing and facilities and estates have enough for such an exercise, then clearly their budget is too large. Mr Salmond could have earned respect pointing that out, if only vanity had not prevailed.

I am disappointed. I can see why the term government appeals, but I thought Mr Salmond’s administration was going to be a serious one.

[...]

Thus we have needless controversy about the Union Flag, the removal of the Royal Coat of Arms of the United Kingdom from official papers and other distractions designed not for the benefit of Scotland but for the benefit of Mr Salmond’s ego.

This puffed-up rather than professional politics may work in the short term. Our First Ministers popularity ratings may rise, the Queen may find him amusing company and he may have a lovely time hobnobbing with the Prince of Wales. In the long term, however, he is indulging in just the kind of politics that turns everybody off, apart from those SNP fanatics who bray so unpleasantly all over the Internet.

The First Minister needs to remember that they speak for a tiny minority and, though he may consider him-self cock of the walk, he was not actually elected on a landslide with a mandate to pursue a personal manifesto.

We elected Mr Salmond as our First Minister cautiously, to see if he could make a better fist of running a devolved Scotland than his predecessor. He has not proved that yet, not at all.

We also elected him because though there may have been an element of luck in the SNPs triggering off the cash-for-honours revelations that so tarnished the last days of Tony Blair, the party seemed as genuinely shocked as the rest of us by what was uncovered.

[...]

It is also unfortunate we now know that when, on his election, Mr Salmond told us his administration would act wholly and exclusively in the Scottish national interest, he was modelling himself more on Tony Blair in I would never do anything to harm the country or anything improper mode than once might have seemed possible.

If Mr Salmond wishes to avoid any further unfortunate resemblances to a man whose legacy of vanity and sleaze he will certainly not wish to copy, he should forget about rebranding and commercial opportunities and get down to the serious business for which he was elected.

One strategy that is immediately apparent in this piece are the frequent ad-hominem attacks on Alex Salmond and the negative predication of the SNP and the name-change. The topos of number is extensively used. Grant also seems to place particular importance on those icons of banal nationalism (Billig 1995), the Union Flag and Saltire.

7. Concluding remarks

By examining various top-down texts from the political and journalistic fields, I have examined the discursive construction of this name change: I have identified particular ways of talking and writing about these, and have attempted to link them to the wider socio-political context.

Clearly, the Scottish Government's decision to rename itself is linked to the SNPs aspiration for full independence for Scotland. As shown by the opinions of many of the MSPs taking part in the debate, and also in news texts, the word *Government* is perceived to sound more independent, serious and tangible than

Executive. Without having done detailed ethnographic work it would be impossible to say with a high degree of confidence what the motivations of behind this decision were. However, one argument might be that the SNP's lack of a majority in parliament meant they felt a strong urge to tinker with these icons of banal nationalism – a powerful symbolic act that can be executed unilaterally, even by a minority government.

A second explanation relates to relationships between Scottish politics and UK politics. By changing the name to *Government*, the Scottish Government put itself on a par, at least lexically, with the UK Government. It would thus be an important step in self-presentation for the Scottish Government, not only to their domestic electorate, and the Westminster Parliament, but also in the context of the EU. As outlined in section 2, the SNP has long expressed a very pro-European stance, and like many of the administrations of small countries, looks to the EU to be a balancing force against the power of a much larger neighbour.

Third, this very visible, public, high-profile change, which takes place not just in the interior of the parliamentary debating chamber, but even on the signage outside prominent public buildings, was probably designed to generate a maximum possible level of media debate and controversy. The SNP wishes to portray itself as a party that will bring (and has brought) change to Scotland. It also treads a very fine line between a broadly social-democratic ideological alignment, and a pro-business libertarian alignment. Thus, framing this event as a “rebranding” and using the language of marketing may be designed to appeal to the latter segment of voters and funders.

Some years after the event, it is possible to say that the name-change did the SNP no harm in the short to medium term, as in the 2011 Scottish Parliament elections, the SNP gained an absolute majority. The SNP was also successful in persuading MSPs in other parties, and eventually also members of the UK Government, to use the new name. It might be argued that the conditions had to be right for this to be the case. The fact that the Liberal Democrats and Labour had already discussed the name change in the past gave made it easier for the SNP to argue for it persuasively, while the Conservatives were at the time a practically negligible force in Scottish politics.

This paper has thus attempted to move from the entry-point of a seemingly simple discursive act, to a set of conclusions relating to Scottish party and national politics, and the political identity of the Scottish National Party. In so doing, I hope I have demonstrated that the discourse-historical approach can be gainfully employed to examine not just monumental and of course important social wrongs such as racism or discrimination, but also relatively minor discursive acts, that may nevertheless have a big impact in particular polities. This is not to say that this analysis was as exhaustive as it might be, nor was the range of texts analysed as extensive as would have been possible given more time and resources. Nevertheless, this study represents a first step in the investigation of an interesting discursive phenomenon, and will hopefully lead to future complementary studies of a quantitative or ethnographic nature.

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