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Jenni Riihimäki: At the heart and in the margins : Discursive construction of
British national identity in relation to the EU in British parliamentary debates
from 1973 to 2015

Abstract

The study focuses on the discursive construction of the UK's identity in the EU in the debates of the British House of Commons. The data come from the *Hansard*, and the time period analysed is from the start of the UK's membership in the European Community in 1973 up to the general election of 2015, in which Brexit, i.e. the national referendum on leaving the EU, was one of the main themes. Methods of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) were adopted in the analysis of the debates. The findings suggest that even though the identity of a "leader" in the EU has been frequently constructed in parliamentary discourse, a competing representation of the UK as an outsider and as a nation insecure of its role in the EU has been strongly present throughout the membership.

Keywords: national identity, critical discourse analysis, corpus-assisted discourse studies, CADS, parliamentary debates, national deixis, the European Union, the UK, Brexit, Hansard

**At the Heart and in the Margins: Discursive construction of British national identity in relation to the
EU in British parliamentary debates from 1973 to 2015**

Introduction

In this paper, I examine the discursive construction of the United Kingdom's national identity in relation to the European Union (EU) in the debates of the British House of Commons. The focus is on how Members of Parliament (MPs) have represented the UK's role in the EU since the start of the membership in 1973 up to the general election of 2015 in which Prime Minister Cameron promised a vote on EU membership if the Conservatives win the election. A more explicit campaigning for Leave and Remain began after the election of 2015, and therefore that period is not included in the analysis. I am interested in how the representations of the UK's role as a member of the EU changed during the membership and how the membership was seen as affecting the country's identity. The study is part of a larger diachronic study in which changes in the discursive construction of the EU, and the UK's role in it, are examined in British parliamentary debates and press.¹

The UK had a role in increasing co-operation between European countries after the Second World War, but it did not take part in founding the European Economic Community in 1957. According to Young (1993: 14, 32), the UK did not want to be treated as "just another European country", but instead preferred being "associated" with the EEC, without any loss of sovereignty. The country joined the European Communities (EC) in 1973 after two vetoed membership applications, but the debates over membership continued (Kavanagh et al., 2006: 107, 114–115). The Labour Party arranged the first referendum on continued membership of the EC already in 1975, and the country has negotiated five opt-outs in different areas of legislation and treaties in the Union.² In June 2016, the Conservative Party organised the second referendum on the membership, in which a small majority (51.9 %) voted for leaving the Union (turnout 72.2 %).

Many of the previous linguistic studies on the UK's identity in the EU have concentrated on small selections of texts about the EU, whereas studies using quantitative methods and systematically analysing changes in texts from a long time period are scarce, and the present study aims at filling that gap. Unlike previous studies, which have tended to focus on well-known speeches and debates, this study examines "everyday" parliamentary debates. By using methods of corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS), I analyse what types of identities have been constructed for the UK as a member of the EU and what differences there are in the ways different political parties represent the UK's role.

The article is divided into four main sections. I start by giving an overview of the discursive construction of national identities. This is followed by the introduction of the data and methods used in the study. I present the results of the analysis in the fourth section, and discussion on the results is included in the concluding section.

Discursive construction of national identity

According to *social identity theory* (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which was developed further for linguistic studies by Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identities are relational in that they are always constituted in relation to others (Bucholtz and Hall, 2005: 585). When talking about national identities, this means that by comparing the characteristics of *our country* to those of other countries, we construe the sense of who *we* are in relation to others. National identities, as well as identities in general, are not stable but constantly in the process of change, and they are produced and reproduced discursively (Hall, 1996: 4; Wodak et al., 2009: 4). Thus, diachronic analysis of data from a long time period is necessary to reveal the changes in identity constructions and how they are connected to the changes in the context in which they are constructed. Also, as Reicher and Hopkins point out (2001: 56), a self-definition provides "a guide to action", as it determines our values and beliefs and how we see the world in which we live. In the case of the UK, the way the

British people see themselves and the country's relation to the EU has an effect on whether they see leaving the EU as being in their interests (Wenzl, 2018).

Pronoun use, in particular, has been considered as deserving special attention in the field of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989: 127–128; Meyer, 2001: 16), especially in political rhetoric, as strategic use of pronouns is an important technique in making the separation between ingroup and outgroup (Wodak, 2011). According to Billig (2010: 99), small deictic words such as *we*, *here* and the definite article *the* function as “flags” with which to refer to the national context in a habitual way. As a result, *our* national identity is constructed by separating *us* from *them*, since *we* implies that there is *they*, and *here* implies *there* (Billig, 2010: 99). The words of national deixis are characteristic for *banal nationalism*, in which the sense of community is implied without the need to name the country explicitly (Billig, 2010: 98). For instance, in a London-based newspaper “the Prime Minister” normally refers to the Prime Minister of the UK, unless another country is mentioned.

Different aspects of national identity have been studied by analysing national deixis and especially the use of pronouns. In particular, Scottish devolution, which led to the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999, has encouraged researchers to study the construction of Scottish identity versus British identity in the Scottish press (e.g. Higgins, 2004; Ichijo, 2012; Law, 2001; Petersoo, 2007). Previous literature on the UK's identity in the EU has found two opposing types of representation of the UK: the first represents the country as an important member of the EU that leads others (Gibbins, 2014), while the second type represents the UK as somehow separate from the Union (Wodak, 2016). Both Gibbins (2014) and Wodak (2016) analysed discourses on the European Union, Gibbins concentrating on predication, presupposition and subject positioning, while Wodak used methods of discourse-historical analysis and argumentation analysis. Gibbins (2014) analysed the discursive construction of the UK's national identity in a selection of parliamentary debates, political speeches, memoirs and diaries produced in relation to three major

events in the history of the UK in the EU: the European Communities Membership Referendum in 1975, the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007. Gibbins (2014: 180) concluded that the most pervasive identity that is visible over all three events is that the UK is seen as a “power that matters”, and that the “characteristic of leadership is frequently referenced”. Wodak (2016) analysed Prime Minister David Cameron’s “Bloomberg Speech” on the EU delivered in 2013 and examined the discursive construction of *us* and *them*, the UK and the Europeans. Wodak (2016: 9–10) noted that, in his speech, Cameron placed the UK outside Europe and described Europe in a positive way as the “geographical neighbourhood” of which the UK is not part. Also, by describing the country as an “island nation”, Cameron strengthened the image of the UK as separate from the European continent, while he also stated that the UK is at “the heart of Europe” (Wodak, 2016: 18; see also Musolff, 2017).

The present study focuses on the use of national deixis, more specifically on the use of *we* and *us* referring to the UK in the context of the EU, and I look at the topic from a wider perspective than has been done in previous studies. In the next section, I describe the methodology in more detail.

Data and Methods

The primary data for the study consist of all the debates of the British House of Commons from the start of the UK’s membership of the EC in January 1973 to May 2015, the end of the parliamentary session before the general election of 2015, in which Brexit was one of the main themes. The data come from the *Hansard*, which is the name used for the official transcripts of the parliamentary debates in the UK and in many Commonwealth countries. For the debates from 1973 to 2004 I used a local copy of the *Hansard Corpus* (Alexander and Davies, 2015–),³ and the debates from 2005 to 2015 I collected from the *Commons Hansard archives* and compiled them into an unannotated corpus for this study. The size of the two corpora combined is circa 450 million words. A local

copy of the *Hansard Corpus* enabled me to study longer excerpts of text, and even complete speeches if needed, which is not possible with the online version of the corpus.

As discussed by Mollin (2007) and Slembrouck (1992), using the transcripts of the debates provided by the *Hansard* as data in studying the language spoken in the British parliament has its restrictions, as the transcriptions differ in many ways from the language actually used by the speakers represented in the record. However, since the editing of the *Hansard* mostly concerns certain characteristics of spoken language, such as hesitations and inconsistencies, it does not affect the way the UK is represented in the speeches.

I adopted methods of CADS (Baker, 2006; Partington et al., 2013). Corpus linguistic methods were utilised to find relevant parts of text for a closer analysis. For this, I used CasualConc (version 2.0.7), a concordance program that can read text in XML files. Using the concordancer, I searched for excerpts in which the first-person plural pronoun *we* or *us* co-occurred with *the European Community* or *Communities* (from 1973 to 1993) or *the European Union* (from 1994 to 2015)⁴ in a span of nine words to the left and right. The span usually used when analysing collocation, for instance, is five words to the left and right (Baker et al., 2008: 278). Using a wider span returned more data to analyse, and as I analysed each instance manually, the strength of the connection between the pronoun and the search term is not as relevant in this study as in studies analysing collocation.

The search was case-insensitive and clause boundaries were ignored. It retrieved 12,187 hits in total, and Figure 1 presents the normalised frequencies of the hits per year.

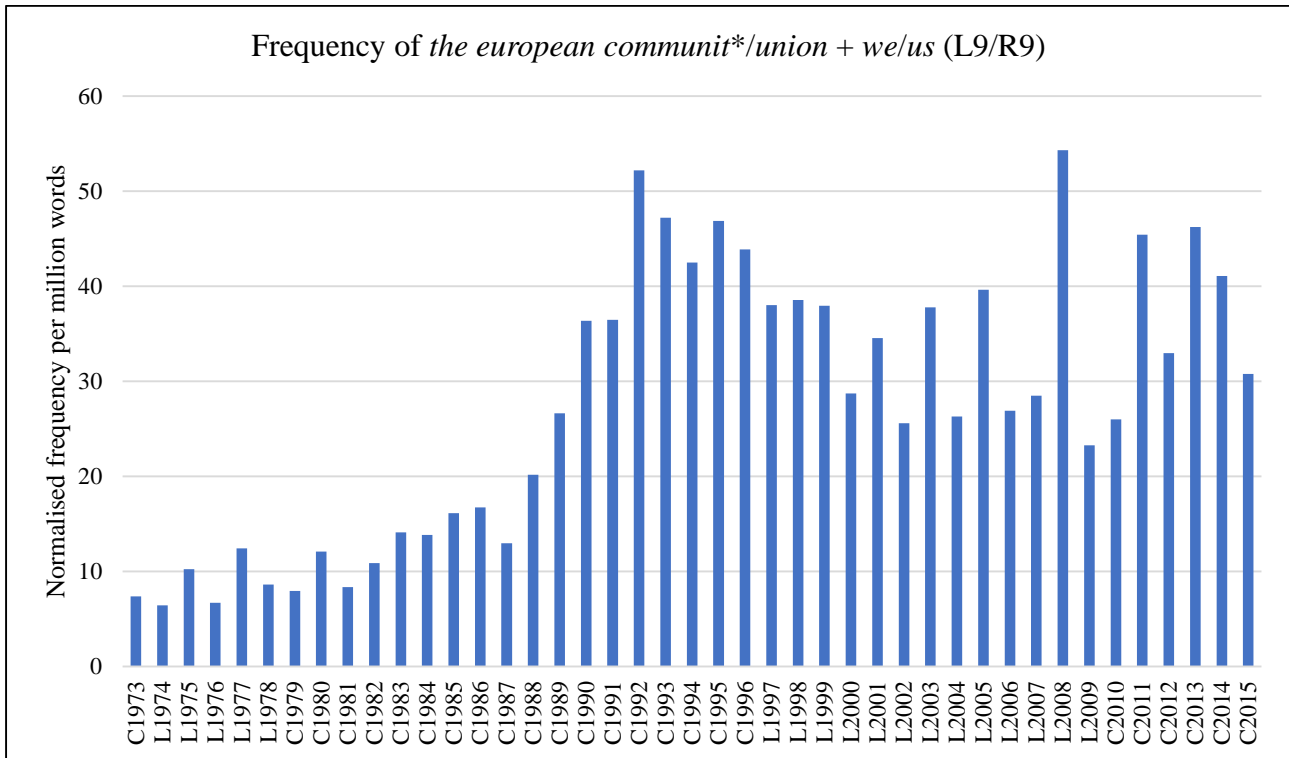


Figure 1 Normalised frequencies of *the european communit*/union + we/us* (L9/R9). The letters “C” and “L” stand for the party in government (Conservative or Labour).

Figures 2 and 3 show the development of the frequencies of the search words individually. Figure 2 shows that the frequencies of the pronouns *we* and *us* are fairly stable, with a steady increase of the pronoun *we* from 1985 onwards. In Figure 3, we can see that in 1994 the term used in the parliament (or at least in the *Hansard*) changed and *the European Union* became more frequent than *the European Community*. For this reason, I used the search term *the European Communit** until 1993 and *the European Union* from 1994 onwards.

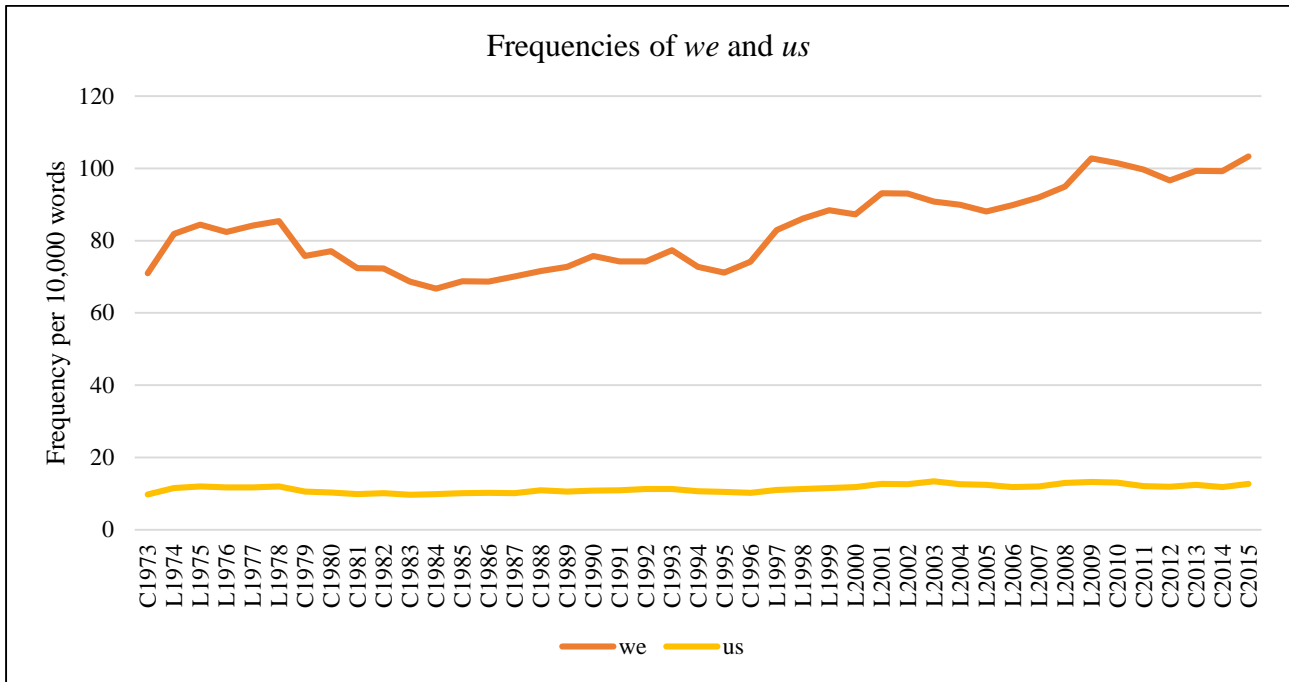


Figure 2 Frequencies of the pronouns *we* and *us* in the *Hansard*.

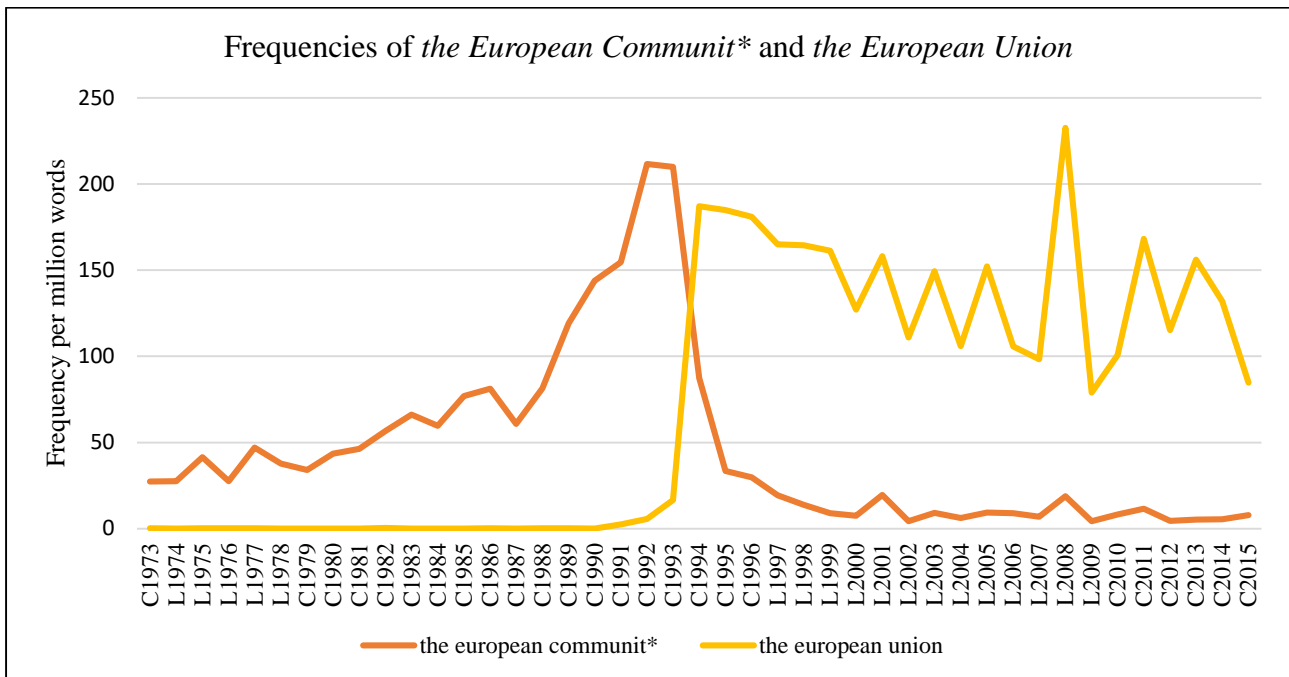


Figure 3 Frequencies of *the European Community* and *the European Union* in the *Hansard*.

I analysed all the hits retrieved by the query in two stages. First, I manually identified the referents of the first-person plural pronouns (*we* or *us*). This was done either by finding a clearly identifiable referent to the pronoun in the surrounding text (anaphora or cataphora) or, if there was none, on the basis of extralinguistic information (exophora). The pronouns whose referent could be categorised

as ‘the UK’ – the country or the British people – were included in the second stage of the study. I ignored all the instances in which the pronoun was inside a quote (141 hits) or the search term was included in another term (such as “Treaty of the European Union”) (499). There were also instances in which the pronoun did not occur in a span that was set (762), and these were naturally ignored as well. Overall, the excluded hits accounted for 12 per cent of all the hits that were retrieved.

In the second stage, I read through the hits and searched for the ones in which the character or actions of the UK in the EU were somehow described, i.e. descriptions of how *we are* and *act* in the EU, and how the membership *affects us*. This was followed by a closer analysis of these excerpts, in which I divided the instances heuristically into identity categories on the basis of what type of a role or identity was constructed in them.

Table 1 shows how many of the hits retrieved by the original query were included in the closer analysis after excluding all the irrelevant instances. The first column shows the number of hits retrieved by the query, the second column the number of hits in which the referent of the pronoun was put in the category ‘the UK’, and the third the number of hits in which the role or identity of the UK was described.

Table 1 The number of hits that were included in the closer analysis after excluding the irrelevant instances.

Query	Hits retrieved	‘the UK’ as referent	Representation of identity
the EC/EU + <i>we</i> (L9/R9)	10,503	4,786 (46 %)	805 (8 %)
the EC/EU + <i>us</i> (L9/R9)	1684	596 (35 %)	82 (5 %)
Total	12,187	5,382 (44 %)	887 (7 %)

In the next section, I introduce the identity categories that were found and discuss each of them separately.

The UK’s identities in the EU

The representations of the UK’s identities in the EU that were repeatedly constructed in the parliamentary debates were grouped into the following five categories:

The UK as:

1. a *Leader*
2. a *Willing Member*
3. *Insecure of its Role*
4. a *Reluctant Member*
5. an *Isolated Member*

Instances that could not be put into any coherent category in this way were put in the category *Miscellaneous* (96/887). In these, no clear patterns emerged, or there were only a few instances that could be put into a common category. Below are two examples of instances in the *Miscellaneous* category (emphases in all of the examples are mine).

- 1) She told him, and through him **the European Community** and the rest of this country, that *we* would not be a soft touch. (Iain Sproat, Con, 21 May 1979)
- 2) *We* are not functioning only in **the European Union** or the European continent. (Jacqui Lait, Con, 17 Jun 1994)

The representations of the UK's identity in the *Miscellaneous* category are also interesting, but I will not discuss them further in the present study, as I want to focus on the more coherent categories.

Table 2 shows the distribution of the identity categories between political parties across the entire timeline. The numbers represent the raw number of instances in which the identity was found.

Table 2 Identities constructed by the political parties.

Category	Conservative	Labour	LD/Lib	Lab/Co-op	Others*	Total
Insecure	147	66	17	5	1	236
Leader	159	61	11	2	2	235
Willing	89	55	4	5	0	153
Isolated	48	38	9	4	1	100
Reluctant	42	21	3	1	0	67
Misc	55	32	3	3	3	96
Total	540	273	47	20	7	887

*Alliance (1), DUP (1), PC (1), SDLP (1), SDP (1), SNP (1), UUP (1)

As can be seen in Table 2, the largest categories overall are the *Insecure* and *Leader* categories. The speeches by different political parties are not distributed evenly, which is why the raw numbers cannot be directly compared but the ranks can. In the case of the Conservative Party, the *Leader* and *Insecure* categories are clearly the most frequent ones. For the Labour Party, the sizes of the categories are more even, with the *Insecure*, *Leader* and *Willing Member* identities being the most frequently constructed ones.⁵

There was a long period of Conservative government from 1979 to 1997, which was followed by an almost as long period of Labour government from 1997 to 2010. During the Conservative administration, the *Leader* identity was clearly the most frequently constructed identity in the speeches of Conservative MPs (124/344 instances), while Labour MPs represented the UK mostly as an *Insecure* member (25/68) and as an *Isolated Member* (20/68). During the Labour government, these were the other way around: Labour MPs represented the UK as a *Leader* (51/153), while the *Insecure* identity was the most frequent in the speeches of Conservative speakers in the opposition (38/84). This suggests that government want to show confidence in the UK's international role, because that helps them build public trust. Opposition, on the other hand, want to challenge the government and offer alternative solutions, because in order to be successful at the next election, the opposition need to show that the government's actions are not making the country stronger.

Next, I will present each identity category in more detail. I start with the more “pro-EU” identities, in which the UK is represented as working for and with the EU (*Leader* and *Willing Member*). Then I introduce the *Insecure* identity, and the last two are more “anti-EU” identity categories: *Reluctant Member* and *Isolated Member*.

The UK as a Leader

The *Leader* role is one of the most common roles assigned to the UK in the parliamentary debates. This identity category is also the clearest one, since words such as *leader*, *lead* or *leadership* are explicitly used, as in example 3, where Mr Vaz speaks about immigration.

- 3) The new members of **the European Union** treat our country with such respect.

They know that *we* have shown *leadership* on this issue. (Keith Vaz, Lab, 1 Nov 2005)

When the UK is represented as a *Leader*, it is described as being at the forefront of developments in the EU. Phrases such as “playing a major role” (Hague, Con, 2011), “exercise our leading role” (Arnold, Con, 1992), “taking the lead” (Major, Con, 2011) and “shaping the debate” (Hoban, Con, 2012) are used to construct a picture of a dynamic country. There are also other types of ‘leading’, in which the role is more implicit. The most common of these is the type in which the UK is represented as being *ahead* or *above* the other member states. When the UK is compared to other EU countries, comparative and superlative adjectives, such as in *higher standards*, *better placed*, *lowest employment rates*, *highest growth*, *best practice* and *most attractive*, are also used to construct the leader role.

The *Leader* identity is also constructed by highlighting the great influence that the UK has in the EU. Words such as *central*, *core*, *heart* and *pivotal* are used to highlight the country’s importance in the EU, and the UK is described as having a *significant* or *prominent role* and being a

major player. The *Leader* identity can also be seen in the way the UK is represented as an example to others in the EU (see Alasuutari et al., forthcoming), as in example 4.

- 4) It is important not only that we have the right approach, policy and scrutiny as regards the handling of imports, but that *we encourage others* elsewhere in **the European Union** to *learn from our experiences* and take their own precautions.

(Margaret Jackson, Lab, 28 Jun 2001)

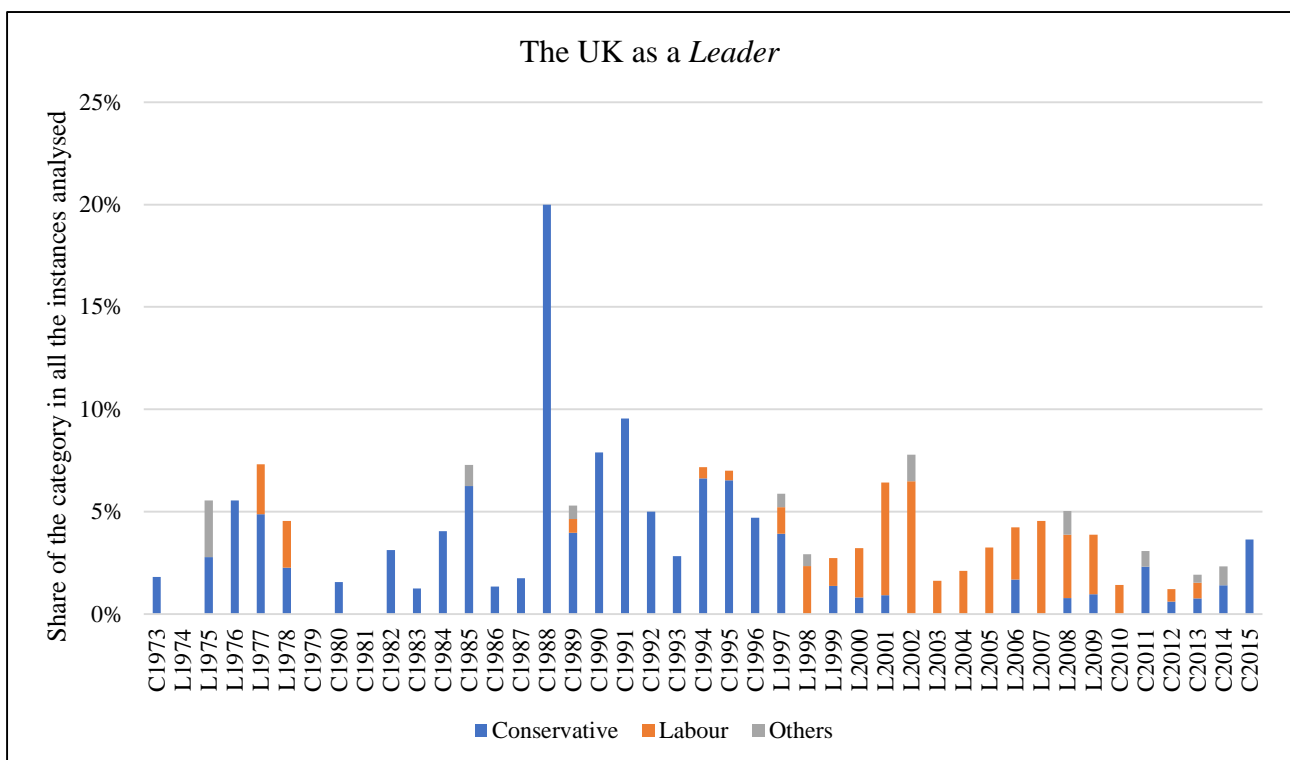


Figure 4 Shares of the instances where *Leader* identity was found. The number is counted against all the instances where ‘the UK’ was the referent of the first-person pronoun.

Figure 4 shows that, overall, the Conservatives represent the country as a *Leader* most often, but, when in government, the Labour also constructs this identity. There are few years in which the *Leader* identity did not come up in the data and they are all in the first decade of the membership (1974, 1979 and 1981). However, there are examples of the *Leader* role already in the first years of the membership. Example 5 contains the first instance of the word *lead* in the data, which is from 1973, the year the UK joined the EC.

5) One hopes that *we can lead the European Community in hallmarking* in future.

(Jerry Wiggin, Con, 6 Apr 1973)

In example 5, the language is more modest than later during the membership in that there is *hope* that the UK can lead on a very specific issue, namely hallmarking. Mr Wiggin continues by saying that “it is to be *hoped* that on some date *in the long-term future*” the UK will get other countries to agree to the same system. Thus, British leadership is not portrayed as being strong at the beginning, even though the identity is visible throughout the membership. However, from 1985 onwards the tone changes. Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, and the government’s economic policies were often discussed and evaluated in the parliamentary debates. Consequently, in the period from 1985 to 1996 the *Leader* identity is mostly constructed by talking about the economic success. Especially in this period, the UK is described as being *ahead* or *above* the other EC countries. Also, the use of the word *lead* becomes more common from 1985 onwards, and it is used in wider contexts than before, meaning that it is not only single issues on which the UK takes the lead. For instance, in example 6 the UK is said to be the leader in the EC’s foreign policy.

6) ...if we take the initiative in the economic area of **the European Community**,
we can also continue and strengthen our role as the leader in foreign policy. (Ian Taylor, Con, 11 Jul 1988)

The peak in 1988 (see Figure 4), however, largely comes from the Junior Health Minister and the Minister of Roads and Transport describing the UK as the leader in the areas of health care and traffic safety.

After the Conservatives had been in the government for almost two decades, the Labour party won the general election of 1997 and Tony Blair began his first term as PM. From 1997 onwards, comparing the UK’s economic success to that of the other EU countries becomes

less frequent. In this period, the *Leader* role is constructed in more implicit ways. In example 7, the metaphor of the UK being “at the heart” of the EU (see Musolff, 2017) appears for the first time in this data.

- 7) *We are very much at the heart of **the European Union**, and are driving forward the changes.* (Elliot Morley, Lab, 16 Oct 2002)

Closer to the Brexit vote, the *Leader* identity becomes less visible and there are constructions such as “*still* a hugely influential voice” (Vaz, Lab, 2008), “*it should not be forgotten* that we are valuable members” (Wilson, DUP, 2008) and “we *still* have a massive part to play” (Buckland, Con, 2014) which suggest that the *Leader* role is more forced and not as evident as it was before.

The UK as a Willing Member

When the UK is represented as a *Willing Member*, it is described as being a *positive* and *active* member that works together with other member states. In example 8, Mr Trippier uses exactly those words in describing the UK in the EC.

- 8) My hon. Friend places me in a difficult position. As he knows, *we are a keen, active and positive member of **the European Community*** and we participate actively at European Council meetings of Ministers. (David Trippier, Con, 27 Jun 1990)

As can be seen in Figure 5, similarly to the *Leader* identity, the *Willing Member* identity is mostly constructed by the party in government. However, in the 2010s the Labour continue to construct this identity in opposition, as well, which suggests that promoting this type of an identity was not only in the interests of the party in government but became more a cross-party issue.

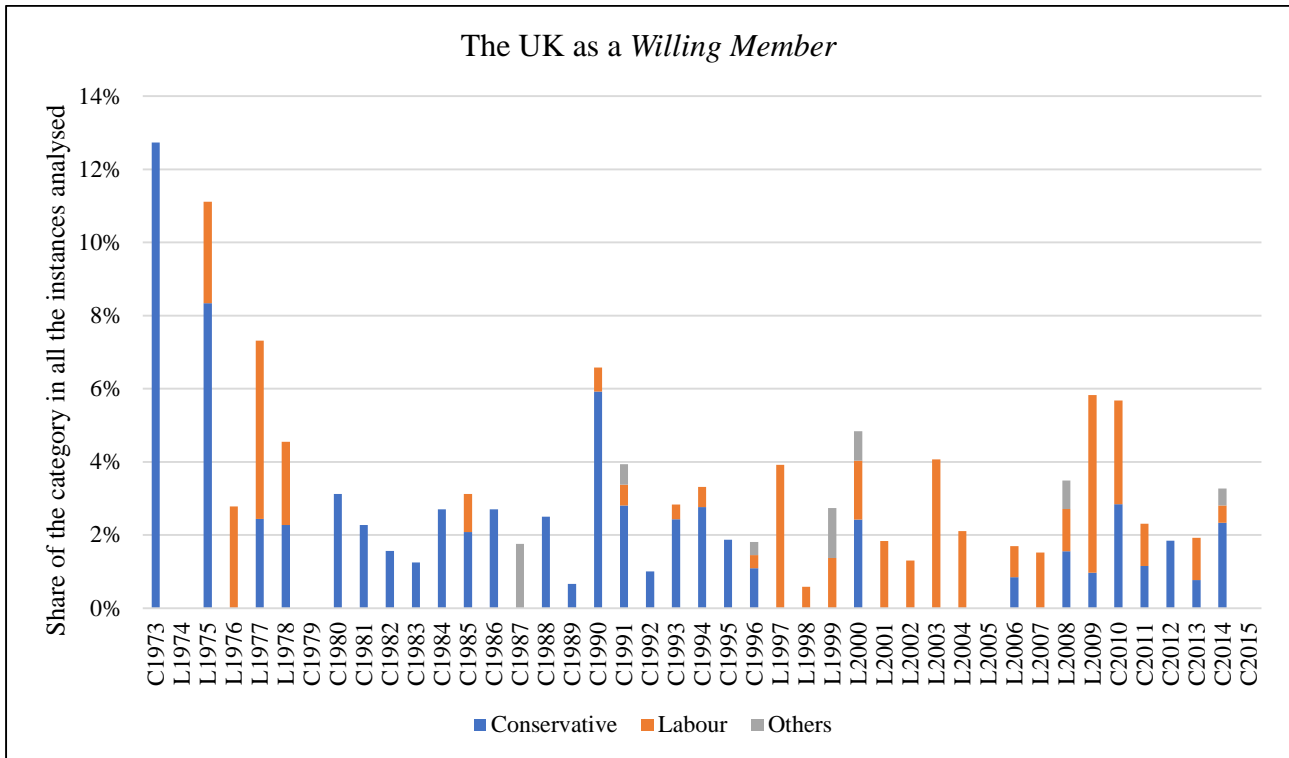


Figure 5 Shares of the instances where *Willing Member* identity was found. The number is counted against all the instances where ‘the UK’ was the referent of the first-person pronoun.

In the first years of the membership, the *Willing Member* identity is brought up fairly often, and in 1973 and 1975 it is the largest identity category in the data. In this category, the speakers bring up the benefits of membership, one of which is said to be that the UK has more influence through the EU. After the referendum on continuing membership of the EC in 1975, the speakers highlight that *now* the UK is a committed member and will play a constructive part in the EC, as in example 9, where the topic is the EC’s agricultural policy.

- 9) We hold this debate today in the knowledge that, as a nation, *we are now a fully committed member of the European Community*. The shadows of renegotiation are over. (Robert Hicks, Con, 17 Oct 1975)

In the 1980s, there are not many examples of the *Willing Member* identity, but in the 1990s this identity becomes more visible again, and the pattern *we play a(n) ADJ part/role* is used, highlighting how active the UK is in the EU. Examples of the adjectives used in this pattern are:

full, major, constructive, positive, active and *significant*. Other similar constructions are also used, as in “we are *full players*” (Devlin, Con, 1996) and “highly valued by our partners in the European Union for *the role we play* in that debate” (Brown, Lab, 1999).

As debates on EU membership become more common in the parliament towards the EU referendum, pro-EU MPs try to convince the parliament that the country is *better off* in the EU than outside it, which is why the share of this identity does not decrease. However, while the UK is still described as being active and playing a full part, words such as *remain* and *maintain* are used, which give the impression that this type of role is not self-evident anymore. In example 10, Mr Lidington asserts that even though the UK does not use euro, is not part of the Schengen area, and co-operates with countries outside the EU, the country’s role in the EU has not changed.

- 10) That does not mean, as some have said, pulling back from our relationship with **the European Union**. *We remain a full member* of the European Union, and that membership is vital to our national interest. (David Lidington, Con, 13 Dec 2011)

Thus, the tendency is similar to that discussed in relation to the *Leader* identity.

The UK as Insecure of its Role

Leaving the EU has been discussed in the British parliament ever since the UK joined the EC. At the same time, the UK has tried to establish a prominent role in the Union from which to lead and influence others. In the debates, the UK is often raised *above* other countries, where it is separate from the Union, but at the same time at the *centre* of it (in the *Leader* category). MPs try to find a balance between more and less involvement, without losing too much sovereignty, and because of this, the country’s role is often unclear; the country does not want to sacrifice sovereignty to be at the centre, even though that would be the place where the UK would have the most influence. This

is an important part of the identity here called *Insecure of its Role*. Example 11 from Mr Cash's speech brings up many characteristics of this identity.

11) There is a huge problem as to *whether or not we can exert an influence within the European Community*, as evidenced by the fact that, when the former Chancellor of the Exchequer went to Copenhagen to try to convince the rest of the Community that there were fault lines in the exchange rate mechanism— which *was supposed to reflect the fact that we were at the heart of Europe and could influence what went on— the other member states turned round and told us to go away*. (William Cash, Con, 23 Jul 1993)

Mr Cash states that it is not certain that we have the influence in the EC that we were supposed to have. The last words also create an image of a hostile environment in the EC where the UK is left alone.

As can be seen in Figure 6, this identity is fairly prominent across the entire timeline, but becomes less visible from 2009 onwards.

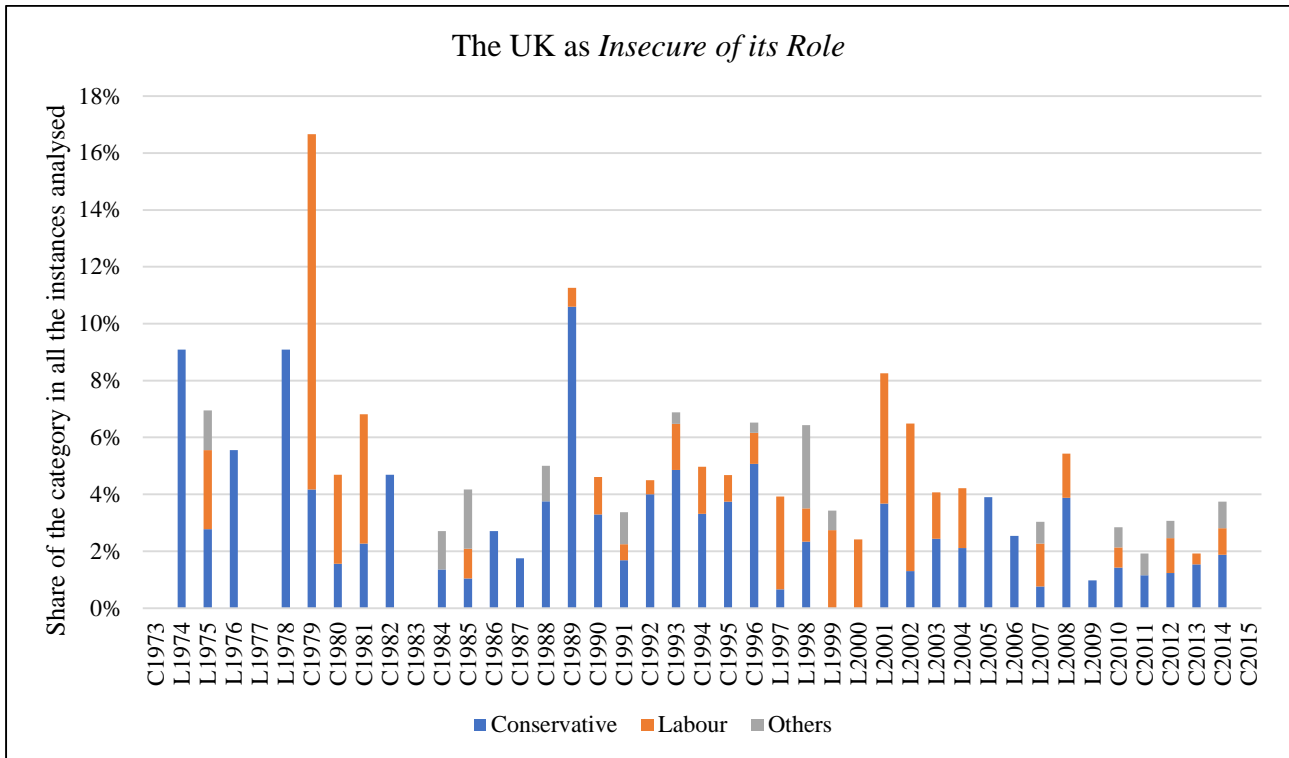


Figure 6 Shares of the instances where *Insecure* identity was found. The number is counted against all the instances where ‘the UK’ was the referent of the first-person pronoun.

Before the mid-1990s, some speakers express worry about the UK’s reputation in the EC. There are instances, such as “we simply fail as a country to make any useful contribution” (Clarke, Con, 1979), “our partners may lose patience” (Forman, Con, 1989) and “getting us a bad reputation” in the EC (Monro, Con, 1993), which represent the UK as a country that does not do enough for the community and is a disappointment to the others. In example 12, Mr Meyer speaks about the relationship between national parliaments and the European Parliament, and how the UK was expected to set an example to other members on this issue, but the country failed to meet those expectations.

- 12) In this respect Britain has been *a great disappointment* to the other members of **the European Community**, who looked to us, in this matter above all, to set them a good example. (Anthony Meyer, Con, 26 Jun 1986)

From the end of the 1980s onwards, speeches in which MPs challenge the representation of the UK as a leader or as an influential member start to appear more frequently. Especially in 1989 the country's attitude towards and commitment to the EC are discussed: if the country is not *wholeheartedly* in the Community, it cannot have influence. In example 13, Mr Haselhurst argues that the UK needs to do more for the EC and work with the partners, or else the country is in danger of being *marginalised*.

13) We stand in *danger of being sidelined or marginalised* if our commitment to **the European Community** is not *wholehearted*. (Alan Haselhurst, Con, 21 Nov 1989)

The *Insecure* identity often comes up in debates concerning the EU. In those, the UK's role in the Union is discussed explicitly and so are the risks of not being a "full member". Mostly, the speakers worry about how the country is perceived by the others. For instance, the UK opted out of the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty, which was signed in February 1992. The Labour Party was against the opt-out (Young, 1993: 163), and the Conservative Party did not agree on the treaty itself, as a number of Conservative MPs did not support it (Heppell, 2002). In the debates about the Treaty, the role is represented as unclear and speakers are worried about the implications on the country's international influence of not taking part in the developments in the Union, as in example 14.

14) If we accepted amendments that meant that the Government could not ratify the treaty, *we would end up outside **the European Community** or, at best, we would become a second-class member of the Community*. (Clive Betts, Lab, 24 Mar 1993)

Some MPs state that British influence in the world exists only because of the EU and not because of the country's own history or actions. Consequently, towards the Brexit vote, the possibility of leaving the EU raises concerns of what happens to the British influence. In example 15, Mr Green says that the UK would not be taken seriously outside the EU.

15) It is not credible that an American President, a Chinese leader or an Indian business person would take *Britain as seriously if we pulled out of the European Union* as they would if we stayed in and played a leading and constructive role in it. (Damian Green, Con, 17 Oct 2014)

Thus, balancing between less and more involvement in the EU is closely connected to the UK's identity and international role. In the debates, the country is seen as an important actor inside and outside Europe, but that role might be endangered if the country left the EU.

The UK as a Reluctant Member

The *Reluctant member* identity is the smallest identity category in my data. This category includes two types of construction: the first is a more "anti-EU" identity, in that the EU is seen as preventing the UK from achieving its full potential, and in the second type the speakers are more concerned with how the country is seen from the outside if the UK is too reluctant to work with others.

In this category, 24 per cent of all the instances are metaphors that represent the EU as holding the UK back or restricting the UK's freedom, as in: "constrained by the EU" (Johnston, Lib, 1980), "we are locked into the European Union" (Nicholls, Con, 1996), and "we would be freed from [the European Union's] shackles" (Hollobone, Con, 2011). The metaphors are used evaluatively (see Partington et al., 2013: 131), and they simplify the issues related to the EU and make such an abstract object appear more tangible for a wider audience (see Charteris-Black, 2011: 33). Furthermore, in the first type it is argued that the UK does not need the EU but would succeed outside it. The speakers talk about how the EU *lectures* the UK or "tell[s] us how we should order

our priorities” (Moate, Con, 1988), even though the UK “should not need the European Union to require” (Walker, Con, 2013) anything of it.

The constructions in the second type in this category are more concerned with how the UK’s reluctance is seen by the other members. In this type especially, and in most of the constructions in *Reluctant* category, the UK is represented as a passive member that does not want to work with other member states. There is a concern that such reluctance and passivity would diminish the country’s influence in the EU. In example 16, the topic of the debate is Scottish fishing industry, and Mr Kirkwood warns against being too reluctant to follow EU’s regulations.

16) Such schemes will not be countenanced with any sort of good will by **the European Community** if *we drag our feet*, or appear to drag our feet, on a decommissioning scheme... (Archy Kirkwood, LD, 21 Nov 1989)

As Figure 7 shows, the *Reluctant Member* identity was not found in many instances in the data. This sounds counter-intuitive, as Euroscepticism has a long history in the British parliament (see e.g. Forster, 2002). However, this identity becomes more visible as the debates on the membership become more common, and in the 2010s, the *Reluctant Member* identity is mostly constructed by the more “anti-EU” speakers.

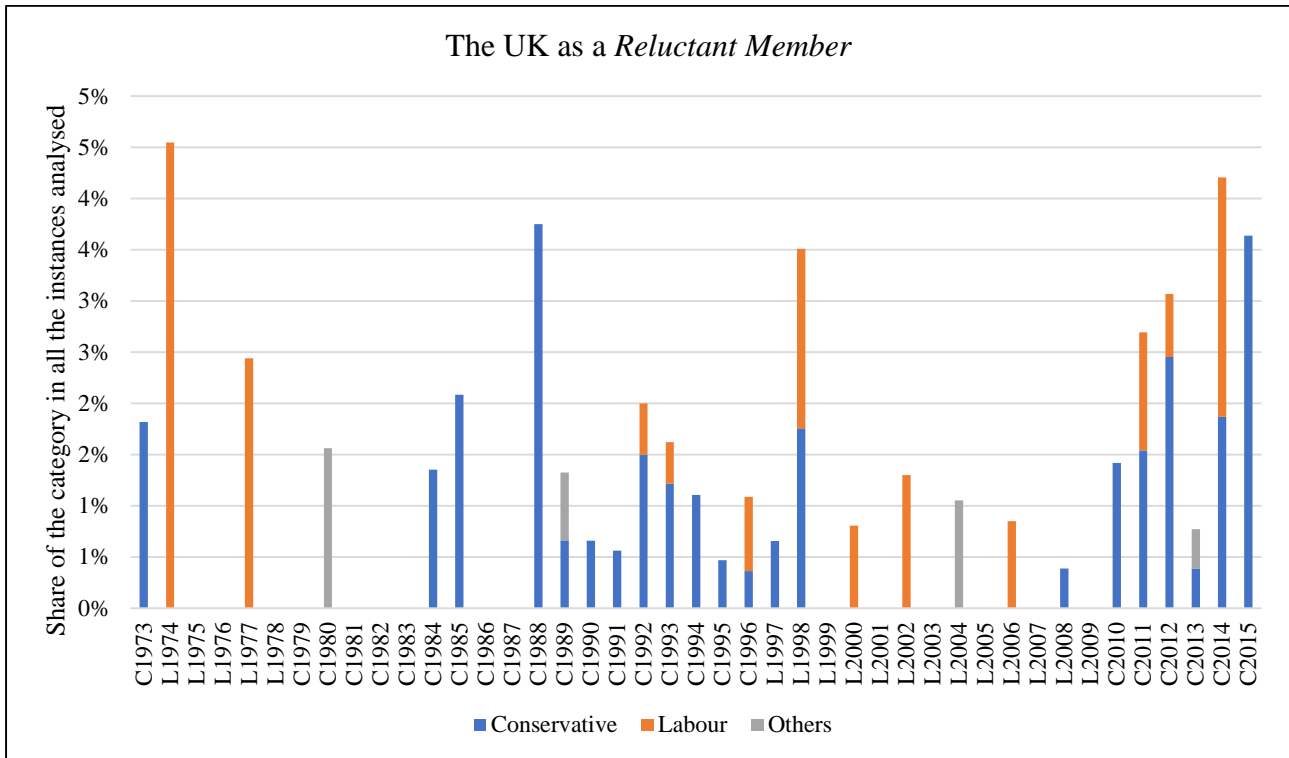


Figure 7 Shares of the instances where *Reluctant Member* identity was found. The number is counted against all the instances where ‘the UK’ was the referent of the first-person pronoun.

A possible reason for there not being more instances of this identity is that when anti-EU attitudes are expressed, the first-person pronoun referring to the UK is probably not usually present, because that would entail that the actions of the UK were also brought up, not just those of the EU. Also, it is perhaps rhetorically more effective if the speakers can mention specific areas where the EU membership is harmful (such as fishing industry) than just saying generally that “we” suffer from the membership.

The UK as an Isolated Member

While the UK is placed at the centre of the EU when representing it as the *Leader*, in the *Isolated Member* identity it is described as being in the margins of the Union or lagging behind other members. In these representations, speakers usually argue that being in the margins is not beneficial for the country. Figure 8 shows that this identity is quite evenly constructed by the major parties, but, in relative terms, the Labour Party constructs the UK as an *Isolated Member* more often than

the Conservatives (see Table 2). Also, other parties (mostly Liberal Democratic Party and Labour and Co-operative Party) take a visible share of the instances.

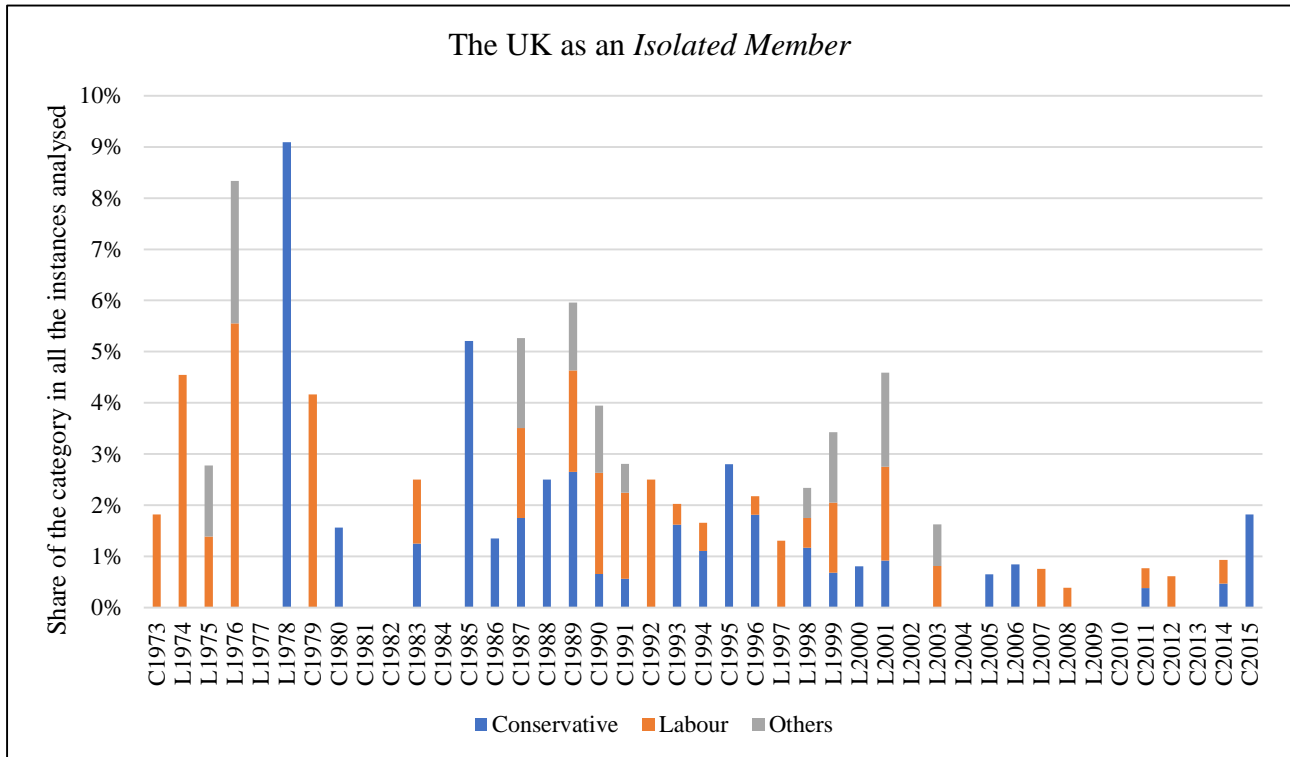


Figure 8 Shares of the instances where *Isolated Member* identity was found. The number is counted against all the instances where ‘the UK’ was the referent of the first-person pronoun.

In the first years of the membership in 1970s and in the 1980s, some MPs say that the UK is an outsider in the EC because the country joined the EC too late. The UK applied for membership two times, in 1961 and 1967, before they were accepted in 1973. Consequently, it is argued that the UK is an outsider in the Community, because the country did not take part in building the EC. Also, other members are said to be *ahead* of and progressing faster than the UK. For instance, in example 17, Mr Warren says that the other members were able to make use of the EC before the UK joined, which puts the UK in a disadvantageous position.

- 17) From 1957 to 1973 we manoeuvred [sic] around the outside of **the European Community** and let others get *ahead of us* in exploiting it. (Kenneth Warren, Con, 29 Jun 1983)

The UK is also described as acting differently from the rest or being the only member to do something, as in example 18, where Mr Evans talks about food and drink regulations being different in the UK than in elsewhere in the EC.

18) It is quite crazy that *we* are going down one route while *the rest of the European Community* seems to be going down another. (Nigel Evans, Con, 9 Jul 1993)

In contrast to the *Leader* identity, in which the UK was represented as an exceptional member in the EU in a positive sense, the *Isolated Member* identity is constructed by talking about the issues that are worse in the UK than in the rest of the EU. Also, in the first half of the 1990s, words such as *isolated* and *marginal* are used when talking about policies that the country is taking in relation to the EC. Isolation is said to be the price of not taking part in developments towards further integration, such as the monetary union or, as in example 19, the social dimension of the Maastricht Treaty.

19) In **the European Community**, *we stand totally isolated* against the social dimension of the single European market of 1992. (George Robertson, Lab, 14 Jul 1989)

As can be seen in Figure 8, the *Isolated Member* identity almost disappears in the data in the 2000s and there are only a few examples in the 2010s. It could be that in the early 2000s the UK became more integrated into the EU and was seen as more strongly part of it. Some language external evidence could be seen to support this. For instance, for several EU countries, the first half of the 2000s was a time of economic growth (Balcerowicz et al., 2013: 11), which probably increased interest in the EU. Furthermore, Tony Blair's close relations with President Bush and participation in joint military actions with the USA could have erased the feeling of isolation, as the UK was seen as an interlocutor between the US and the EU (see e.g. Blair, 1997; Gibbins, 2014: 25). Closer to

the Brexit vote, a probable reason for the absence of the *Isolated Member* identity is that as the membership itself was so much discussed, maintaining the central role was perhaps not considered crucial.

Discussion and Conclusion

In line with previous studies on the UK's identity in the EU, the analysis showed that the UK is represented as being both at the centre and in the margins of the EU. When at the centre or "heart" of the EU, the country is an important member of the Union that leads others, whereas in the margins, the country cannot influence what happens in the EU, as the power is somewhere else. Constructing the UK as a *Leader* can have two types of implications: while it draws an appealing image of an arena where the UK can influence, it also creates a representation of the rest of the EU as something to be dragged along. On the other hand, the outcome of representing the UK as being isolated in the EU could be that the British people feel detached from the EU, and consequently do not see the benefits of staying part of it.

The image of the UK as somehow separate from the rest was a common discursive construct in the parliamentary debates. The "outsidedness" was seen most clearly in the constructions of the *Isolated Member* category, in which the country was compared to the other members and described as being different from the rest in different ways. However, the UK was seen as separate from the rest in other identity categories, as well. In the representations in the *Leader* category, the UK was placed "above" others and it was seen as an exceptional country that leads others by example. Also, in the *Reluctant Member* category, the UK was represented as an outsider in that it did not want to take part in the developments in the EU. Finally, in the *Insecure* identity category, the speakers warned against being marginalised in the EU, as being isolated and unable to influence what happens in the EU was seen as a threat to the UK.

Because such an extensive dataset was used, the analysis revealed that politicians' views on the UK's international role and identity are not as clear as it has seemed to be in studies

using smaller datasets. The largest identity category in my data represented the country as insecure of its international role and, in the instances, the Union was represented as offering the UK a place in the world. It was also said, that the UK has international influence only because the country is a member of the EU. When methods of CADS are used, only a few rules need to be set when searching for relevant bits of text from a large dataset for analysis, which means that only a few things are expected before the analysis. Because of this, CADS offers a means to find representations that are not specifically searched for but are so common that they attract the researcher's attention and can be analysed closer. Even though not every instance of identity representation was necessarily found because concordances instead of complete speeches were analysed, the instances in the present study showed enough variation to offer a balanced look at how the UK's role in the EU has been described in the British parliament. The results showed that MPs are not always certain what the country's identity and international role is – an “independent island” or a leader “at the centre” – and, consequently, that there is uncertainty of whether it is in the country's interests to belong to a community such as the European Union.

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Notes

1. My PhD dissertation on the representations of the EU, and the UK's role in it, in British parliamentary and media discourses. The work is expected to be ready by 2021.
2. The UK opted in to the Social Chapter of the Maastricht Treaty in 1997 under Labour government.
3. I would like to thank the SAMUELS project at the University of Glasgow, especially Marc Alexander and Fraser Dallachy, for providing me with the local copy of the corpus, and also Jukka Tyrkkö at Linnaeus University for preparing the copy for my use.
4. There are other search words that could have been used, such as *the EC / EU*, *the Common Market* and *the Community / Union*, but adding these search words to the analysis was out of the scope of this paper. They could bring different results, as they are used in different types of contexts, and for that reason provide an interesting topic for further research.
5. The data is aggregated in the sense that there are differences inside parties in how individual MPs represent the UK's role. Individual variation is not discussed in detail in this paper, but I am interested in investigating the issue further.

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