

Media and Politics:

Discourses, Cultures, and Practices

Edited by

Bettina Mottura, Letizia Osti
and Giorgia Riboni

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing



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This book first published 2017

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-5275-0022-5

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-0022-8

The book is part of a research project on the language of the Media based at the University of Milan's Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication and Contemporary Asia Research Centre (CARC). It is published with the support of the Department of Language Mediation and Intercultural Communication.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

THE DISCOURSE OF DISABILITY POLICIES: FOCUS ON THE CONVENTION FOR THE RIGHTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE UN- ENABLE WEBSITE NEWS SECTION

FRANCESCA SANTULLI¹

1. Introduction: Aim and Method

In recent years themes relating to disability have been increasingly discussed both in institutional and social contexts. The growing interest in the problems of persons with disabilities is certainly linked to the evolution of the very concept of disability emerging from the WHO's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health, more commonly known as ICF. The ICF, adopted in 2001, is the official international standard for describing and measuring health and disability, which abandons the traditional medical model based on the linear causal relation between impairment, disability, and handicap in favour of a more complex bio-social model including functioning and disability as well as environmental factors (Borgnolo *et al.* 2009).

This new approach to disabilities has been fundamental in the United Nations action aiming to change attitudes and transform persons with disabilities from “objects” of charity and protection to “subjects” with

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rights. In this context, the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has marked a major shift in the way societies view persons with disabilities, with the person being the key decision-maker in his or her own life. The Convention is the first specific global treaty addressing the needs of persons with disabilities (the world's largest minority), a milestone in the development of disability policies all over the world.

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between the principles inspiring UN policies and the way they are communicated, focusing on UN-Enable <<http://www.un.org/disabilities/index.asp>>, which is the official website of the Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SCRPD) in the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) at the United Nations Secretariat. After a brief introduction to the concept and denominations of disability within the context of UN policies (Section 2), the analysis will look at the Enable website, exploring its basic structure and function (Section 3). Attention will then shift to the main document published on the website – the Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Section 4) – and to the News section, with special emphasis on press releases (Section 5). A comparison will be carried out between the text of the Convention and a small corpus of press releases published on the website (Section 6). In the Conclusions (Section 7) the results of the analysis will be commented upon, to highlight the representation of disability that is constructed and disseminated through the texts. In particular, the discussion aims to show to what extent the discourse of the Convention migrates to ancillary texts that have no official value but can have an important impact on social and cultural models.

The approach to the investigation of texts is discourse analytical. In this respect, the perspective typical of the Anglo-Saxon approach is usually characterized by “critical” implications (Wodak and Meyer 2001; Fairclough 2003; Wodak and Chilton 2005), but extends from more ideologically sensitive areas to different genres and modes (Renkema 2009; Bateman 2009; Garzone and Catenaccio 2009). The constructive aspect of discourse and its position in between language and society is more strongly emphasised in the French tradition (Charaudeau and Maingueneau 2002; Antelmi 2012; Maingueneau 2014), which also incorporates argumentative and rhetorical aspects (Amossy 2006). Drawing on Foucault's (1969, 1970) tradition, research focuses on how discourses actively contribute to the creation of societal and interpersonal structures at the intersection between different disciplines (pragmatics,

rhetoric, semiotics, argumentation etc.), which can contribute to the analysis of texts with their theoretical and methodological instruments.

The qualitative approach typical of discourse analysis will be combined with a quantitative methodology (Stubbs 1996), in the conviction that corpus-linguistic tools can usefully be integrated into a discursive framework, provided that the results of automatic queries are interpreted in interaction with those emerging from close-reading procedures (Garzone and Santulli 2004, O'Halloran and Coffin 2004, Baker 2006, Degano 2007, 2012). For this research, the quantitative analysis was carried out with Wordsmith Tools (Scott 2004), first of all producing frequency lists in order to determine the number and the rate of occurrence of crucial content words, as well as their ranking. In addition, concordance lines made it possible to examine words in context, thus giving interesting information about their use and actual meaning. Finally, for the comparison between the Convention and the press releases, the keyness function was used to single out words that display a significant difference in frequency in the two corpora.

2. Contextual Aspects

2.1. The Concept of Disability

The word *disability* is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “want of ability (to discharge any office or function), inability, incapacity, impotence,” while *disabled* is anyone “rendered incapable of action or use, esp. by physical injury.” These definitions imply a very general meaning which has, however, become specialized in social and juridical contexts, to refer to a special condition that deserves legal protection. In a historical perspective, the word *disability* is relatively recent, and has replaced a wide range of alternative denominations (e.g. crippled, impairment, inability, handicap, etc.), which were commonly used in the past and now survive with special meanings or simply with different connotations. Indeed, it should be remembered that the lexical field considered here is highly subject to taboo restrictions: in this context, the perceived appropriateness of a term can quickly become outdated, so that a new euphemistic description is needed.

At the international level the spread of the word *disability* is closely linked to its definition in the context of the system of classification developed by the World Health Organization (WHO), which can be considered the health branch of the UN. The first WHO Classification of Diseases (the ICD) dates back to 1970: it was based on the medical

concept of *disease*, and aimed to single out different pathological conditions and their aetiology, classifying them with a code system. Ten years later, the WHO published an appendix to the ICD manual, the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities, and Handicaps (ICIDH), which implied closer attention to contextual factors, and clearly reflected a linear causal model linking the three fundamental concepts of impairment (as physical or psychological deficit), disability (as incapacity or limitation in functioning caused by the impairment), and handicap (as consequent disadvantage). In this context, both impairment and disability were interpreted as a “difference from the norm”, assuming that human physiology and behaviour is ideally represented by a statistical norm.

In 1997, a new version of the manual was published, the *ICIDH-2, International Classification of Impairments, Activities and Participation. A manual of dimensions of disablement and functioning*, which kept the previous acronym, but re-interpreted the concept of disability in connection with the actual possibilities of the individual, and gave contextual factors a more significant role, considering them essential for the description of the health condition itself. This new approach was further developed in the International Classification of Functioning, Disabilities and Health (ICF), approved in 2001 and now adopted in a large number of countries. The ICF is not based on the concept of disease, but focuses on health, considering the relation of the individual with the environment from a positive perspective with special attention for his or her quality of life. Disability is therefore the result of the interaction of the individual with the environment (to the point that environmental factors are listed in the manual); it is a social rather than a medical concept. Though the ICF is complementary to the ICD-10 (the current version of the WHO diagnostic manual), it reflects a crucial cultural change, rejecting a model based on disease, commitment to treatment and right to exemption from social obligations. Under this new perspective, disability does not result from a comparison with an ideal norm, and it is suggested that society itself, by neglecting individual needs and promoting a standard idea of normal functioning and behaviour, *creates* disability.

2.2. Disability and the United Nations

UN disability policies have evolved parallel to the WHO’s classification principles, at the same time reflecting and promoting changing attitudes in society at large. The first decades after the UN foundation in 1945 were centred on a welfare perspective, aiming to assist people who were perceived as weak and unfortunate and thus deserved a form of social

compensation. During the 70s the focus gradually shifted to human rights, and disability started to be dealt with from this new perspective: in 1975 the UN adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons. The interest in disability grew during the following decades, and numerous initiatives were launched: 1981 was proclaimed International Year of Disabled People, 1983-1992 was the United Nation Decade of Disabled Persons, in 1982 the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled People was started. Furthermore, the UN adopted the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disability (which were not binding for Member States but had an important moral effect), and appointed a Special Rapporteur to monitor the implementation of the Rules.

The work of the UN culminated in the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) which came into force in May 2008 (Melish 2007). As it was evident that persons with disabilities continued to be denied their human rights and were kept at the margins of society in all parts of the world, the Convention was conceived as an instrument which, though not creating new rights, set out the legal obligations of States to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The negotiation process was unique in many respects: the *ad-hoc* Committee of the General Assembly took only 8 sessions to agree on the text, making it the fastest negotiated human rights treaty; moreover, civil society organizations and human rights institutions took an active part in the process, which ended with official adoption on December 13 2006; the Convention was opened for signature on March 30th 2007 and there was a record number of signatories (82) on the opening day. The Convention, now signed and ratified by most UN Member States, can be considered the outcome of a long process of social and cultural evolution, but at the same time it has been a fundamental instrument for triggering further action, stimulating government policies as well as new legislation, and giving new impetus to the work of associations and volunteers all over the world.

For the UN the consequences of the Convention have been twofold: on the one hand, programmes centred on disability have been integrated into the work of all UN agencies, mainly through the efforts of the Inter-agency Support Group on the CRPD; on the other, disability-specific action has gained new momentum thanks to the activity of the Focal Point Disability, created in the realm of the Division for Social Policy and Development (DESP, which is part of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs) and functioning as Secretariat for the convention (SCRPD). The Secretariat, working with mandates stemming from the Convention as

well as from previous programmes and instruments, supports inter-governmental bodies and is committed to promoting, protecting and ensuring general principles and explicit rights relating to disability at the national and international levels, implementing international norms and standards and fostering technical cooperation. The Secretariat has its own official website, the most important UN medium providing public information on topics related to disability and on the work of the United Nations for persons with disabilities.

3. UN Communication Policy: the Enable Website

The United Nations Enable website can easily be reached by a Google search (*disability UN* or similar phrases); it can also be accessed from the page *Disability* in the DSPD section of the UN website.² This page gives essential institutional information about UN action for disability, ending with a suggestion: “For more information about the work of the UN for Persons with Disabilities, please visit: <<http://www.un.org.disabilities>>.” The site is officially recognised as the main source of information about disability issues and UN action in this area. On the one hand, its independent identity is emphasised thanks to a special layout (different from other sections of the UN web space); on the other, it is systematically hyperlinked to other areas within the UN, thus functioning as a sort of hub.

The identity of Enable is reinforced by the adoption of two different payoffs, which appear under the logo, and effectively synthesise the new approach to disability: the first, *Right and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities*, clearly rejects the paradigm of assistance and compensation focusing on rights claimed with the utmost dignity; the second, *Development and human rights for all*, links disability to development issues (which is crucial in the socio-economic context) and at the same time forwards the idea of equal opportunities (*for all*).

The structure of the website is very simple: there are only 5 items in the main menu: *About Us*, *Convention*, *News*, *Priority themes*, *Disability and the UN*. Under the first heading, the surfer can find a description of the mission, as well as basic information about the organization of disability action within the UN and the roles played by different bodies. The *Convention* area hosts a large number of documents concerning the Convention, both from a historical and from an application perspective, and gives detailed information on a series of priority themes, with reference to different geographical areas and to the action of the related

² Last access: December 2015.

UN Agencies. It is definitely the area of the site with the largest number of independent texts and with fewer links to the outside world. On the contrary, both the *Priority themes* and the *Disability and the UN* submenus are good examples of the site's hub function: key areas of the UN'S work are listed, and can be directly accessed; documents, reports, tools and resources available on different sites are also hyperlinked. The *News* section has two important items in its submenu: *News Stories* and *Press Releases*, also working according to the hub rationale. Both subsections display a list of ten items each – the most recent news or press releases – while on the Press Releases page there is a further link to “all UN press releases.” The News Stories items are hyperlinked to the UN News Center, while the Press Releases are available in the UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases section. It is therefore evident that the function of Enable is simply to select news and press releases related to disability issues.

In this respect, there is an important difference between the News Stories and the Press Releases. The former include disability problems, but are often centred on another main point (e.g. the Yemen conflict, measles, etc.), so that they mainly address issues of multiple discrimination (disability and development, disability and women's rights, disability and children, etc.). Press Releases, on the contrary, are more focused on disability proper and on UN action in this area. They are a crucial link between the UN and the outer world, as they reach the media and the general public and are therefore also accessible to people who are not especially interested in disability issues. For these reasons, only Press Releases were considered for this analysis, focusing on a small corpus comprising the 10 texts that were directly accessible from the Enable website in July 2015.

4. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)

4.1. Structure and Textual Features

The full English text of the Convention and Optional Protocol is obviously available on the Enable website, together with 22 unofficial translations into languages as diverse as Korean and Polish, Urdu and Bangla, etc. There are also audio versions, sign language videos as well as other accessible formats, plus a series of “easy read” versions, explaining the fundamentals of the document. Actually, the Convention does not need special comment or clarifications to be understood: the text is linear and

well organised, and the language – despite its legal flavour – is not obscure.

The text opens with a long *Preamble*, followed by 50 articles – some of them sub-divided into numbered paragraphs – whose titles give a clear idea of the different aspects taken into consideration. A close reading of the document makes it possible to single out the main areas of intervention: having stated its Purpose (art. 1) and Definitions (art. 2), the Convention illustrates General Principles and Obligations (4-5); it then tackles special categories (women, children: 6-7), accessibility and social awareness (8-9). The bulk of the text is devoted to rights (10-30), covering all aspects of personal and social life (freedom, justice, integrity, independent life, education, health, political and social life, sport, etc.), while the final part (31-50) deals with implementation and monitoring issues, establishes a Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disability, and regulates the functioning of the Conference of States Parties.

A quantitative analysis of the text shows that it consists of 11,371 tokens for 1,448 types, with a type/token ratio of 12.73. The generic features of the text are confirmed by frequency data: *shall* ranks 7th (after *the, of, and, to, with, in*) with 197 occurrences (or 1.73%) and frequently combines with verbs like *guarantee, ensure, take measures, become effective, be binding, be submitted, apply, etc.*; *may* ranks 49th with 33 occurrences (or 0.29%) to be found mostly in the last part of the text (as shown by the dispersion plot), in collocations like *the Committee/a State Party may invite/denounce/withdraw/exercise, etc.* The normative character of the text is evident in the remarkable frequency of *shall* (Garzone 2013a, 2013b), while the distribution of *may* reflects the structure described above.³

The most frequent content words are (quite obviously) *disabilities, persons, states, parties* (rank 8th-11th), followed by *article, present, Convention* (19th-21st). *Rights* ranks 26th, but considering its 68 occurrences in combination with the 43 occurrences of the singular form *right*, we obtain a total of 111 or 0.98%, corresponding to rank 14. In this respect, *right(s)* qualifies as the most frequent content word not linked to contextual factors, thus confirming that the Convention hinges on persons who have rights to be recognised and protected. Concordance lines show the most frequent combinations: *right to freedom/respect/life etc.* (22); *right of persons/children etc.* (11); *rights of persons with disabilities* (14); *human rights* (28), 12 of which in the phrase *human rights and*

³ For the analysis of legal language in general see, among others, Tiersma 1999 and Williams 2007.

fundamental freedoms. The relatively frequent repetition of this phrase is a symptom of formulaic style, which is often adopted in the Convention, as revealed also by the expression *on an equal basis*, which has 35 occurrences. This stylistic feature is not surprising in a legal text, and the two examples given here are perfectly consistent with its character as a human rights treaty.

The Convention can be considered a special example of human rights discourse: in its normative function it promotes the typical concepts of freedom, respect, participation, dignity etc., and at the same time combats discrimination. Quantitative data confirm these observations and reveal some typical patterns: *free(dom/s)* ranks 44th with 36 occurrences (or 0.32%); *respect* is 68th with 20 occurrences (or 0.18%) in phrases like *respect for rights/dignity/difference* etc.; *participation* ranks 91st with 17 occurrences (0.15%) – a relatively low position, but compensated by the fact that it is considered a general principle, a general obligation, and a right. Indeed, it is necessary to integrate frequency data into the framework of textual analysis, as in some cases words with a limited number of occurrences are still crucial for the context in which they are used and/or because the concept they convey is implied but not explicitly lexicalised. This is the case of *inclusion*, which has only 6 occurrences (or 0.05%), but is listed as a general principle and connected to rights on numerous occasions (education, community life, etc.).

Discrimination combines high frequency with textual relevance: with 27 occurrences (or 0.24%) and rank 62 (preceded by 31 grammar words and other mostly technical content words), it qualifies as a remarkable word from the quantitative point of view; among the collocates: *discrimination on the basis of disability* with 8 occurrences is a fairly typical formula; *discrimination against persons with disabilities* is in comparison less frequent than might be expected (4 occurrences). Qualitative analysis shows that *discrimination* is explicitly defined, listed as a general principle (obviously as *non-discrimination*), and mentioned among general obligations (with reference to legislation and practices that should be abolished). This is particularly relevant if we consider that article 2 comprises only 5 definitions (*communication* and *language*, which have only technical implications, *discrimination on the basis of disability*, *reasonable accommodation*, *universal design*) and article 3 lists only 8 general principles (*non-discrimination* is second only to *respect* “for inherent dignity, individual autonomy, including the freedom to make one’s own choices, and independence of persons”). *Discrimination* is defined as follows:

Discrimination on the basis of disability means any distinction, exclusion or restriction on the basis of disability, which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal basis with others of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. It includes all forms of discrimination, including denial of reasonable accommodation.

This is the longest definition in article 2, covering the whole range of rights and freedoms in all possible contexts, and including a reference to another fundamental concept introduced in the Convention, that of reasonable accommodation. The definition is written in the nominal style typical of norms; the formulas discussed above are recognizable, as well as the use of the indefinite *any* and the disjunctive *or* (Garzone 2003). As a matter of fact, *or* is another form characterizing legal texts, as confirmed by its very high frequency: 124 (or 1.09%), rank 12; *any* also has a relatively high rank (35 with 48 occurrences, or 0.42%).

The words and examples discussed so far are representative of human rights discourse in the generic context of the Convention; one more concept needs to be examined, the very essence of the text: *disability*.

4.2. Disability: Concept and Wording

As we have seen, in article 2 of the Convention there is no definition of disability. In the *Preamble*, paragraph (e) is devoted to disability:

recognising that disability is an evolving concept, and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others;

while the second paragraph of article 1 (*Purpose*) describes *persons with disabilities*:

Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

These are not real definitions. On the one hand, *disability* is presented as an *evolving concept*, not to be defined once and for all, *resulting* from an interaction (and this reflects the social model inspiring ICF) but difficult to describe in positive terms. *Persons with disabilities*, on the other, are not singled out as a well-defined and closed set; rather, they *include* a group of

people, which could be expanded if necessary. In other words, the concept of disability cannot be tied down, either in time or in space: it is subject to significant evolution and changing extension. In its present description, it covers all aspects of the individual (mind, body, etc.), which however cannot be considered per se, but only in interaction with barriers hindering participation and causing disadvantage.

The central role of the individual in his or her integrity and inherent dignity is emphasized by the terminological choice: *persons with disabilities*. This complies with the indications of the American Psychological Association style guide, which recommends that the person's name should always come first (person, woman, child, student, worker, etc.), and the impairment should be identified and described without modifying the identity of the person. This is the reason why *disabled* has been abandoned, not only as a noun but also as an adjective (which would in any case pre-modify the person's name). This choice is consistently applied in the Convention, which also carefully avoids *people*, to emphasize the individuality of the person and preserve it in the plural form as well.

The documents available in the Convention section of the website discuss these language problems, explaining and supporting the form adopted in the Convention. It is however to be remembered that there are local traditions that must be respected, as it may happen that in certain communities persons with disabilities themselves prefer a different denomination which, albeit not in accordance with the international standard, deserves recognition and respect.

5. Press Releases

For this research, a small corpus was assembled including the 10 Press Releases directly accessible from the News section of the Enable website in July 2015. The topics are the following: the Conference of the States Parties (3 releases: opening, Secretary-General's address, conclusion); report of the Special Rapporteur to the Commission for Social Development; appointment of the Special Envoy on Disability; the Secretary-General's message for the International Day of *persons with disabilities*; the Secretary-General's message for International Observance; the annual Treaty Event (limited reference to disability); the high-level Meeting on Disability and Development (2 releases: opening and Deputy Secretary-General's address).

From this list it emerges that 4 out of 10 releases consist of an address or message (by the Secretary-General or the Deputy Secretary-General), i.e. a verbatim report of an officially pronounced speech. The importance

of reported voices is further stressed by the high proportion of quotations present in all the press releases, both as direct and as indirect speech. In this respect, press releases seem to be functional to propagating the words of top-level UN personalities, representing the official point of view of the institution as a whole.

The corpus comprises 6,016 tokens for 1,374 types, with a type/token ratio of 22.84, almost double in comparison to the Convention, apparently due to the more varied range of topics dealt with in the texts. The frequency list shows a series of verb forms typical of narrative text types ranking remarkably high: *said*, 26th with 30 occurrences (0.50%); *had* and *were*, both with 24 occurrences (rank 29, 0.40%); *was*, 36th with 21 occurrences (0.35%); *would*, 49th with 17 occurrences (0.28%). The anaphoric pronoun *he* is also quite frequent, ranking 31st with 23 occurrences (0.38%). These data suggest that in the releases there is a marked preference for a narrative approach.

As for the generic structure, the texts do not reveal a constant pattern. They differ in length and text structure: most of them do not adopt the news article sequence nor any other metapragmatic traits typical of corporate press releases (Jakobs 1999; Catenaccio 2008).

Only one press release in the corpus has a structure similar to that typical of corporate press releases: the text refers to the appointment of Lenín Voltaire Moreno Garcés of Ecuador as Special Envoy on Disability and Accessibility. In the lead, the crucial item of information is given, while the following paragraphs describe the qualifications of the appointed Envoy, his character and his background. The last paragraph gives a “boilerplate description” (also called Editor’s note in literature: s. for ex., McLaren and Gurău 2005), with a final remark on the role that will be played by the appointed Envoy within this context:

There are more than 1 billion people with disabilities, accounting for 15 per cent of the world population. In spite of remarkable advances towards accessible and disability-inclusive societies, an enormous gap remains between commitments made and the daily experiences of persons with disabilities. As Special Envoy, Mr. Moreno will help promote the rights of persons with disabilities, with a particular emphasis on accessibility for all.

This structure seems to be a consequence of the type of news given here; however, in similar cases the text is differently organized. Suffice it to mention the release announcing a resolution to be adopted by the General Assembly: the text canonically starts as the announcement of a meeting, anticipating the proposed outcome document; it then gives boilerplate information (very similar to that reported above) and links it to

its main points, thus revealing – up to this part – a structure similar to the one we previously analysed. Yet the text is much longer, and in its second part reports the words of the Secretary-General and of the General Assembly President, interspersed with further factual information about the meeting.

A close reading of the Press Releases confirms that the quotation of important people's words is a necessity for the writer: on the one hand, thanks to this approach it is possible to give voice to different people (not exclusively the top UN institutional representatives), who express their opinion adding new details to the overall picture; on the other, the ethos of the enunciator is strongly reinforced through quotation of the official voice of the UN, assumed as a fundamental reference point.

In addition, the Press Releases display the lexicon typical of human rights discourse, often in structures that echo those used in the Convention. The word *rights* ranks 17th with 46 occurrences (0.76%), 10 times in the phrase *human rights*, and 30 times in *rights of persons* (children, women, etc.). As in the text of the Convention, the action of *promoting/ensuring* is frequently performed with reference to *rights/inclusion/participation* etc. There is however more emphasis on *needs* (or *special needs*): 13 occurrences (or 0.22%) against only 6 (or 0.02%) in the Convention.

Despite the similarities between Convention and Press Releases, which extend to the basic lexicon of disability, there are some important differences that deserve further investigation, and will therefore be examined in the following section.

6. Convention and Press Releases: A Quantitative (and Qualitative) Comparison

6.1. The Lexicon of Disability

The expression *persons with disabilities* (occasionally: PwD), now considered politically correct, occurs 168 times (1.47%) in the text of the Convention, 79 times (1.31%) in the Press Releases (PRs) corpus, showing therefore a very similar frequency pattern (*persons* has 178 occurrences, or 1.57%, in the Convention vs. 86, or 1.43%). However, this strong similarity hides some important differences, and further data are needed to highlight them.

Firstly, let's consider the word *people*: only two occurrences in the Convention vs. 18 in PRs. Beyond the quantitative difference, the concordance lines show a radically different pattern of use. In the Convention, *people* occurs in neutral contexts:

1. health services as close as possible to *people's* own communities;
2. programmes and services to be usable by all *people*.

On the contrary, in the PR corpus there are 8 occurrences of the phrase *people with disabilities* and 4 occurrences of the phrase *disabled people*, two of which in denominations (Disabled People International and Disabled People International Arab).

The substitution of *people* for *persons* shows that in PRs the use of the standardly accepted phrase is not totally consistent. In these 8 cases, the writer resorts to a more common expression, as the plural form *people* is considered more appropriate in most contexts, but forgets the special nuance of meaning obtained by using the other form. The case of *disabled* is even more interesting: if the two occurrences in denominations can be considered a form of quotation, in two further cases, the condition of disability is mentioned before the person:

1. employment opportunities for *disabled young people*;
2. the unique challenges facing *disabled young people*.

In both occurrences *disabled* actually modifies *young people*, which is a phrase with its own modifier. From a purely grammatical point of view, it is inconsistent to accept pre-modification to refer to age and refuse it in the case of disability: it is even probable that the writer has been influenced by the structure of the standard expression *young people* in the selection of the other modifier. Grammar, however, is not sufficient for grasping and constructing meanings in discourse and values cannot be neglected. As disability is not a positive condition, it has to be kept at a distance from the subject as it could threaten his/her integrity. Adjectives normally express an inherent quality of the modified noun, while a phrase adds something to an already defined identity; moreover, it allows for post-modification even in a left-branching language such as English.

A systematic exploration of the use of *disabled* reveals that it occurs only once in the Convention, as a quotation (the denomination of a programme: *The World Program of Action concerning Disabled People*), which confirms the highly consistent use of the politically correct expression in the text. Vice versa, in the PR corpus there are 11 occurrences of *disabled* (including the 4 already examined):

- 2 denominations (see above),
- 2 disabled young people (see above),
- 2 disabled youth,

- 2 the disabled (programmes for *the disabled*, the rights of *the disabled*),
- 2 disabled persons (the perspectives of *disabled persons* must be integrated.../ *disabled persons* must also have access...),
- 1 (referring to a girl with disability) “she did not think of herself as ‘*disabled*’.”

On the whole, there are 6 cases in which the person-first rule is ignored, plus two cases in which the identification of the subjects with the condition is total (*the disabled*). Even Press Releases, which should propagate the point of view of the UN, are not free from stigmatized language forms.

6.2. The Keyness Index

Wordsmith Tool’s keyness function makes it possible to compare two corpora, to single out words that have significantly different frequency. When considering the Convention and the Press Releases, this procedure brings out differences, already discussed above, stemming from text genre; it also signals a disproportion in the use of obvious content words (*states* and *parties*, for example, are much more frequent in the Convention) as well as the case of *people* we have already examined. Furthermore, there are a few words whose imbalance is in some way unexpected, which will now be analysed in detail.

We shall first consider three words that are more frequent in the PR corpus: *disability* (sing.), *inclusive*, and *development*.

Disability: 28 occurrences (or 0.25%) in the Convention vs. 53 (or 0.88%) in PRs. In the Convention most occurrences (17) are in the phrase *on the basis of disability*, a further instance of formulaic style; 6 times the word is used as a modifier (*disability issues/awareness, disability-related/sensitive/specific...*), and twice as a subject (in the descriptions analysed in 4.2). Among the occurrences in the PR corpus there are two remarkable clusters: *disability-inclusive* (9 occurrences), and 19 occurrences in connection with the concept of development.

Inclusive: 4 occurrences (or 0.04%) in the Convention vs. 21 (or 0.35%) in Press Releases. Like the already mentioned noun *inclusion*, the adjective *inclusive* is rare in the text of the Convention: the 4 occurrences refer to the education system (2), to the work environment, and to international development programmes. On the contrary, in PRs *inclusive* is fairly frequent, and occurs in different contexts: 9 *disability-inclusive*; 12 *inclusive development*, 5 *inclusive societies*, plus other combinations

occurring only once (*inclusive environment/world/education/programme*). Related verbs are: *support/realize/build/strive/create* etc.

Development: 16 occurrences in the Convention (or 0.14%) vs. 63 (or 1.05%) in PRs. This is the greatest difference, which appears even more significant if we examine the contexts of occurrence. In the Convention the word *development* occurs mostly in connection with instruments for guaranteeing rights and freedoms (*the development of standards/new technologies /guidelines/legislation*, etc.), or in relation to persons (*the development of women/of human potential...*). In PRs, on the contrary, there are different clusters: *development goals/targets/ plans/strategies* (25 occurrences, on the whole); 11 occurrences of *development agenda* and 4 of *development framework*; (*disability*)-*inclusive development* (12), *sustainable development* (3). The concordance lines clearly show that in the PR corpus *development* is an economic concept.

Among the words with a higher frequency in the text of the Convention, *equal* deserves a brief comment: 4 occurrences (0.07%) in the PR corpus vs. 61 (or 0.54%) in the Convention. This datum is complementary to the previous one, confirming that the Convention lays a stronger emphasis on rights and uses a larger proportion of human rights lexicon (also *respect* shows significant difference in frequency: 20 occurrences in the Convention and none in PR). The concordance lines in the PR corpus show the following combinations: *equal access/employment opportunities/participation/recognition before the law*. In the Convention there are 35 occurrences of the phrase *on an equal basis* (a further example of formulaic style); 22 more times *equal* is used as an attribute (*equal access/rights/opportunities/enjoyment/protection...*) in connection with verbs like *support/realize/build/strive/create*; there are 3 occurrences of *equal to*, (in the explanation of the voting system); finally, in one – crucial – occurrence it is used as a predicate: “State Parties recognise that all persons are *equal* before and under the law.”

7. Conclusions

The analysis of the Enable website has shown that this official communication instrument of UN disability policies has actually been conceived as a hub, the virtual area where surfers interested in disability issues find a few fundamental documents and a wide range of links directing them to other sections of the UN web space. The essential structure of the website has the advantage of being easy to access and quick and direct to surf; however, in the *News* section the number of texts directly accessible is

very limited, and to find other news relating to disability it is necessary to scroll the UN general sections.

The *Convention* section of the website is certainly the richest and the most interesting, highlighting the crucial role of the treaty in UN disability policy. The analysis of the text has shed light on some interesting linguistic features, emphasising the presence of the human rights discourse and monitoring the use of politically correct lexicon. The comparison with the Press Releases corpus has shown obvious differences due to genre and, in some respect, to specific content. There are also obvious similarities in the use of the disability and human rights discourse but close reading combined with quantitative analysis have revealed important differences.

Though the Convention is conceived (and introduced on the Enable website) as an instrument for guaranteeing rights and freedoms on the one hand, and social and economic development on the other, this second aspect is not explicitly dealt with in the text, the word *development* is not used in its economic meaning, and the concept is not lexicalized. Press Releases, on the contrary, frequently focus on development issues, and thus emphasise the societal impact of the Convention in its actual application.

Vice versa, the Convention more consistently focuses on rights and freedoms (above all in the first part), as shown by the more frequent lexical items (*rights, discrimination, respect*, etc.). Press Releases, on the other hand, dealing with a wider range of topics, show higher lexical dispersion and a more limited use (or even absence) of words like *equal, dignity*, etc. One exception is the lexical item *inclusion/inclusive*, almost absent in the Convention: though the concept is implied in the treaty, only rarely is it explicitly lexicalised, while it frequently occurs in the PR corpus.

The other interesting result concerns the use of politically-correct denominations: in the Convention the phrase *persons with disabilities* is systematically and consistently used without exception; the PR corpus, on the contrary, shows some inconsistencies, displaying *people* and, above all, *disabled* (both as a noun and as a modifier). Though the number of incorrect forms is limited, it is clear that the precise and constant application of the new standard is difficult and meets with resistance, even within UN institutional departments. This circumstance confirms that language change is slow and difficult to stabilize, especially in those discourse areas that have ideological and taboo implications. If this is true for new language use, we can only imagine how difficult it is to change and spread the new concepts that lie behind the words.

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