

ENGLISH MEDIA IDIOMS OF US CONFRONTATIONS ACROSS CULTURES: THE CHARLESTON MASSACRE - WHITE SUPREMACY VS AFRICAN AMERICAN DIGNITY

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Difference in hue and hair is old. But the belief in the pre-eminence of hue and hair, the notion that these factors can correctly organize a society and that they signify deeper attributes, which are indelible – this is the new idea at the heart of these new people who have been brought up hopelessly, tragically, deceitfully, to believe that they are white. These new people are, like us, a modern invention. But unlike us, their new name has no real meaning divorced from the machinery of criminal power.

Ta-Neishi Coates *Between the world and me* (2015: 7)

Abstract

The frequent shooting in the US of unarmed black men by white police officers is rooted in the longstanding issue of racial disparities – systemic racism being a persistent major phenomenon in the history of the nation, as the protests organized by the 'Black Lives Matter' movement and other movements have successfully foregrounded, also thanks to the attention of the media.

A specific multimodal lexicon, with accompanying gestures, appears to be unfolding to give voice to nationwide protests, rioting ('Hands up, don't shoot!' 'I can't breathe', etc.) and debates which, through the contemporary media, are also audible abroad.

This continuing racial confrontation, grounded in the unsettled issue of racial profiling, displays an intrinsically cross-cultural confrontation between black consciousness vs. the allegedly unconscious 'white privilege', or, on the illegal side, 'white supremacy', which are starkly opposing visions/cultures within the same nation, both voiced through the same language.

In this volatile contrast, a key event was the 2015 Charleston Church Massacre, which is the focus of this study. On the evening of June 17, 2015, Dylann S. Roof, a white man, killed nine black people at Mother Emanuel Church in that city. Instead of words of hostility and vengeance, the language of forgiveness and healing was immediately spoken in the following media-enhanced conversation.

A new transformative language of racial confrontation, with its own lexicogrammar (Hasan 1987; Berber Sardinha 2012), seems to be developing mainly through the media (van Dijk 1991, 2008; Fairclough 1995, Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011). The present study aims to identify this context-specific, re-semiotized English lexicon and comment on some of its traits from a cross-cultural discourse-historical perspective (Wodak and Reisigl 2015).

1. Introduction

The frequent killings of unarmed black men by white police officers are one of the most dismal effects of the historically problematic relationship between black and white populations in the US. Among the major events in this ongoing violent racial confrontation we find the 2015 Charleston Massacre, as well as the death of the five police officers shot in Dallas (July 2016) by Micah X. Johnson, a 25-year-old black, allegedly in retaliation for those senseless killings. These dire events, the unsolved issue of racial profiling and the ensuing reactions, including nationwide debates, retaliation and rioting, have only recently been foregrounded in the (social) media, and are still resonating beyond national boundaries. These deaths show how in the US race still plays a key role both in hate crime and in law enforcement. The capacity of the contemporary media both for fuelling protests, creating groups and circles, and for promoting sympathetic, thought-provoking conversations cannot easily be overvalued. Real-time communication and hyper-textual links to additional sources make possible an immediate diffusion of news about events that are still ongoing, and the resources of cross-media communication make it possible to engage and bring together all parties involved. Under the media lens, the ever-growing list of unarmed Afro-Americans killed by police¹ is re-semiotized as the outcome of widespread racist attitudes.

Recently, the first death to gain the full attention of the media was the shooting of unarmed Trayvon Martin by the Neighbourhood Watch volunteer George Zimmerman in 2012 in Florida. The ‘police wannabe’ Zimmerman was accused of racially profiling the Afro-American teen, who was wearing a hoodie sweatshirt. The police quickly released Zimmerman, since his behaviour was legally acceptable under Florida’s “stand your ground” law (a controversial self-defense law). The national media soon seized on the shooting, which was initially covered by the Florida media alone, and race was reported as central to the tragedy. After weeks of demonstrations across the nation, a special state prosecutor charged Zimmerman. His 2013 trial became one of the most racially-charged and politically motivated prosecutions in recent US history. Amidst the growing media frenzy and active participation of the public, a new lexicon was emerging. ‘I am Trayvon Martin’ quickly became a popular rallying cry, and, when Zimmerman was acquitted (on July 13, 2013), the now famous ‘Black Lives Matter’ slogan was coined by Alicia Garza, a workers’ rights activist, who posted a missive on Facebook: “Black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.” Then the hashtag was added, and the activists made banners inscribed with *#j4tmla* (justice for trayvon martin l.a.) and, underneath, *#blacklivesmatter*.

Gradually, the BLM slogan helped to shape a structured political movement that has captured media attention by effectively denouncing discrimination and cases of police brutality, as in the recent outbreak of high-profile incidents. The killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson (Missouri) and Eric Garner in New York in 2014² sparked nationwide protests and violent conflicts as well as debates about the use of exces-

¹ Police killed nearly 30 unarmed black men in the year since Michael Brown’s death on August 9, 2014 up to August 2015: statistics available at the following websites: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/08/09/timeline-dozens-unarmed-african-americans-killed-since-ferguson/31375795/>; <http://mappingpoliceviolence.org/>.

² See, among others: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/08/14/michael-brown-fergu->

sive force and racial profiling by officers (in both cases the grand juries declined to charge the officers involved). Increasingly, in our web-wired, audio-visual-verbal arena the phrases ‘Hands up, don’t shoot’, echoing protests in Ferguson, and Garner’s cry ‘I can’t breathe’ became loud rallying cries for the related protests, together with their accompanying iconic gestures. These typical phrases have also been magnified on posters, spray-painted on walls and monuments, and variously reified in gadgets. A kind of multimodal context-dependent lexicogrammar is being developed for relating (or shouting) the protests against the police brutality on black bodies, which also cast light on similar cases from past years, only some of which have led to charges against the police officers involved.

A further complication is the lack of reliable national data on how many people are killed by police officers each year³. Again, the role of the media has been essential for obtaining more reliable data and showing how unarmed black Americans, compared to their white counterparts, are twice as likely to be killed by police⁴, though the interpretation of such data is not void of controversy. To give one example, on its website *The Guardian* has promoted an initiative that is a relevant example of the ability of the media to engage their audiences for the public good with all the paraphernalia of contemporary communication – *Help us document every police killing in America*⁵.

While these much-debated violent deaths of African Americans were causing protests and riots across the nation, and the BLM movement had found its voice and language, growing into a national movement, at the Emanuel Church in Charleston a cold-blooded attack by a self-confessed white supremacist took place (June 17, 2015). Dylann S. Roof, a white man, killed nine black people at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in that city. The two-century-old church has played a significant role in the history of South Carolina, in the slavery era, during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, and currently for the BLM movement. This was a callous attack by a ‘white supremacist’ aiming to provoke a race conflict in the heart of the old Confederacy. Instead of words of war, the language of forgiveness was immediately foregrounded in Charleston, though the families involved were divided over the issues of forgiveness, which deprived them of their narrative about being rightfully hurt and angry. The media coverage of this attack and the following conversation are the major foci of this study. The families of the victims had several possibilities to voice their grief and convey their perception of the events in real time. Thus, increasingly, this shooting – solely grounded on racial hatred – acquired a symbolic significance, amplified through the media lens, which found its highest expression in the immediate removal of the Confederate battle flag that Dylann S. Roof had posed with in several pictures. The removal of the flag, a symbol generally disliked by the African Americans, had been previously debated, but no agreement had been reached until the massacre made this balancing act undelayable.

son-missouri-timeline/14051827/; <http://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/Timeline-Eric-Garner-Chokehold-Death-Arrest-NYPD-Grand-Jury-No-Indictment-284657081.html>.

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/09/08/how-many-police-shootings-a-year-no-one-knows/> (by Wesley Lowery).

⁴ *The Counted* (1 January 2015 - 31 May 2015) <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jun/01/black-americans-killed-by-police-analysis>].

⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2015/jun/01/us-police-killings-tips>.

It is to be noted that while black consciousness and self-awareness are no novelty⁶, a new form of mainstream white self-perception is emerging from these recent events, as is evident in the words of the journalist John Huey:

Since any discussion about the massacre is essentially about race in America, and, more particularly, race in the South, I should present my credentials upfront. I speak *from what is known today as white privilege*. I am also a native Southerner, descended from slave owners who fought and lost (thank God) the Civil War (*Time Magazine*, November 23, 2015. My italics).

In short, ‘white privilege’, which is not to be assimilated to the problematic, crime-prone ‘white supremacy’ ideology, denotes a set of passive advantages, or lack of difficulties, that white persons might not be aware of having. The advantageous effects of ‘white privilege’ can be seen in professional, educational, and personal contexts. This notion has been recently brought into mainstream US culture through a social media campaign, especially promoted by BLM, by contrastively highlighting it against the background of the persistent poverty of many African Americans, and the disparities in education, health and housing⁷.

2. Aims

This study aims to outline this new (or re-semiotized) multimodal English lexicogrammar, as it emerges from the media-enhanced unfolding of debates and protests (*I am Trayvon Martin; Hands up, don't shoot; Black Lives Matter; the narrative of forgiveness...*), to explain some of its features and to contextualize the situation. The main focus is on the coverage of the Charleston church massacre from a comparative perspective: excerpts from a local and an international journal will be comparatively analysed. From an applied linguistics perspective, an interesting aspect is how the English language is treading a brittle line between black consciousness and what is now commonly defined as ‘white privilege’. Two contrasting cultural frames with their emerging narratives are voiced via English – a powerful *trait d'union* within one nation, which is now increasingly referred to as the ‘Disunited States of America’.

⁶ Black consciousness, which intrinsically entails embodied responses to the material contexts and prescribed identities, as well as the Black Consciousness Movement, have a long history and have been the object of many studies.

⁷ Interestingly, there is a new field of study, Critical Whiteness Studies “whose aim is to reveal the invisible structures that produce and reproduce white supremacy and privilege. CWS presumes a certain conception of racism that is connected to white supremacy. In advancing the importance of vigilance among white people, CWS examines the meaning of white privilege and white privilege pedagogy, as well as how white privilege is connected to complicity in racism” (Barbara Applebaum, 2016, Critical Whiteness Studies, *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia - Education*: <http://education.oxfordre.com/view>). Dealing with these multifaceted issues, and their gradation, is well beyond the scope of this article. Yet, the data of this study from the media coverage of the Charleston massacre show an overarching attitude of general solidarity and empathy with the black victims, though the strongest expressions of contempt for the Confederate battle flag come from the Afro-American writers.

3. Integrated methodology

We are moving within the domain of *qualitative linguistic analysis*, applied to media realizations of this highly contextualized English lexicogrammar that requires, in Hasan's (1987) terms, a special delicacy of focus. These multifaceted issues require an interdisciplinary methodology such as the discourse historical approach, which can integrate a plurality of tools, as is appropriate when dealing with sensitive, multilayered issues (Abbamonte 2012).

The discourse historical approach (DHA) combines historical, socio-political and linguistic perspectives, and focuses on identity construction and any form of discrimination from an intrinsically cross-cultural perspective. The DHA posits within the broad domain of critical discourse analysis (Reisigl and Wodak 2015 a; Wodak 2013; Fairclough 2011), whose operational tools mainly originate from Halliday's approach to language as a social semiotic system (systemic functional linguistics – SFL). Both CDA and DHA aim to 'de-naturalize' the ideologies expressed through language, and disclose how power structures are shaped in and through discourse. In brief, these approaches show what is omitted and what is included in discourse, and attempt to explain why, or what, is made explicit or left implicit, what is foregrounded and what is backgrounded, what is thematized and what is unthematized, and, additionally, what process types and categories are drawn upon to represent people, events, and so on (Fairclough 1995; van Leeuwen 1996; Fairclough, Mulderrig and Wodak 2011)⁸.

Special attention in DHA studies has been devoted to the expression and representation of racism (Reisigl and Wodak 2015b; van Dijk 1991, 2000, 2008)⁹, through an integrative, problem-oriented approach, where

categories and tools are not fixed once and for all. 'Grand theories' often serve as a foundation. In specific analyses, however, 'middle-range theories' frequently supply a better theoretical basis. [...] The concept of context is an inherent part of the DHA and [...] takes into account four levels:

1. the immediate, language, or text-internal co-text;
2. the intertextual and interdiscursive relationship between utterances, texts, genres and discourses;
3. the extralinguistic social variables and institutional frames of a specific context of situation;
4. the broader socio-political and historical context, which discursive practices are embedded in and related to (from Reisigl and Wodak 2009: 95-98).

Wodak (2011, 2015) and Wodak and Reisigl (2015b) also provided a useful classification of how socio-political issues could be dealt with, according to a set of topoi, as follows:

⁸ E.g. the political and ideological views of newspapers can be expressed in the choice of different vocabularies: 'resistance fighters' vs. 'rebels', or 'terrorists', and different grammatical structures (e.g. active vs. passive constructions).

⁹ Diachronically, the DHA should be seen as an extension of van Dijk's (1991) socio-cognitive model, which linked the generation of prejudice to units larger than the sentence and showed the media's role in reproducing racism and unequal power relations in society. In van Dijk's (2000: 362) words, "racism is a complex system of social and political inequality that is also reproduced by discourse".

TOPOS OF BURDENING
 TOPOS OF REALITY
 TOPOS OF NUMBERS
 TOPOS OF HISTORY
 TOPOS OF AUTHORITY
 TOPOS OF THREAT
 TOPOS OF DEFINITION
 TOPOS OF JUSTICE
 TOPOS OF URGENCY
 TOPOS OF CHALLENGE
 (from Wodak 2011: 44 and passim)

Broadly, the flexible DHA allows the discourse analyst to show how given issues are shaped and/or prioritized in given contexts, not only through verbal language, but also through other forms of meaning-making such as visuals and sound (Reisigl and Wodak 2009), i.e. at multimodal level, and with attention to mediatic communication as well. Hence, many aspects of ongoing racial confrontation in the US can be better understood in its light.

Furthermore, the multi-layered DHA perceives discourse as a form of social practice, i.e. as a complex of interrelated context-dependent semiotic acts that are situated within specific fields of social practice (Wodak and Reisigl 2015a). Influenced by SFL with its attention to the context of situation, the DHA can also encompass functional linguistic analyses aimed at outlining context-dependent lexicogrammars. An effective definition of lexicogrammar can be found in the following excerpt from Berber Sardinha (2012: 1-2)¹⁰:

Together with semantics, lexicogrammar forms part of the content plane of language. The development of the notion of lexicogrammar in SFL is linked to the pursuit of the so-called ‘grammarians’ dream’, which entails treating lexis as final selections in grammatical systems: “the grammarians’ dream . . . is to turn the whole of linguistic form into grammar, hoping to show that lexis can be defined as ‘most delicate grammar’” (Halliday 1961/2002: 54). Lexis is seen as “grammar extended to the point of maximum delicacy” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 46) or that point “where further uniqueness cannot be postulated” (Hasan 1987/1996: 76).

In this light, thinking about language relationally, and considering lexis as a kind of delicate grammar (see also Martin 2017: 22-23), the indicative mood of ‘matter’ in Black Lives Matter, in relation to its historical and socio-cultural context, strongly conveys the objective need to reconsider the relevance of ‘Black Lives’. In the rallying cry ‘I am Trayvon Martin/We are Trayvon Martin’ the stative ‘I am/we are’, which realize an identification process, convey analogous meanings (see Section 6).

3.1. *Corpus*

Our small, specialized corpus was drawn from the online versions of both *Time Magazine* (Time)¹¹, which has the world’s largest circulation among the news magazines,

¹⁰ Online version: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781405198431.wbeal0698>.

¹¹ See [http://time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting- / etc.](http://time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting-/)

and the more locally oriented *Charleston Gazette* (ChG), a weekly news magazine founded as far back as 1873¹². More specifically, ten articles were sorted by relevance from each (*Time*: 21,771 total words, time span June 18, 2015 - June 17, 2016; ChG: 7,767 total words, June 18, 2015 - January 10, 2017), then re-arranged chronologically for clarity's sake¹³. From a DHA perspective, the key notions and phrases foregrounded in the two media will be comparatively considered, in order to reach a more complete understanding of the interplay of the various cultural frames and their linguistic realizations in operation. For brevity's sake, only excerpts from six articles from each subcorpus are shown.

4. The DHA framing of the data from the *Charleston Gazette*

Let us briefly remember the facts. On the night of June 17, 2015, in Charleston, South Carolina (SC), a gunman opened fire at the oldest AME Church in the South, and the symbol of the earliest expressions of African American dignity and vision. Nine people died and five survived, as the result of this brutal attack by Roof, a 'white supremacist'. His aim to raise race conflicts in the heart of the old Confederacy was not achieved, since the language of redemption, reconciliation and forgiveness was immediately spoken in Charleston by members of the families of the victims, and the whole community mourned and displayed solidarity. In the background, however, there was the issue of the controversial Confederate legacy, revolving around the Confederate flag and symbols, as we can read in the table below, where the key notions debated in the ChG articles and the phrases typically used to foreground such issues are reported.

ARTICLES	The removal of the Flag, iconicity TOPOS OF URGENCY + HISTORY	White supremacists, no remorse, debated heritage TOPOS OF BURDENING+ HISTORY+ THREAT	Unifying effect + healing vs. race wars TOPOS OF REALITY + JUSTICE	Black grace + Black forgiveness TOPOS OF REALITY + CHALLENGE
1. SUSPECT UNEMOTIONAL IN COURT AS VICTIMS' FAMILIES EXPRESS GRIEF, CALL ON HIM TO REPENT June 18, 2015	NAACP President condemned state officials for continuing to fly the <i>Confederate flag</i> , an ongoing <i>issue</i> that has worsened race relations in the South [...] It has become a <i>symbol</i> for some <i>white supremacist</i> groups.	he appears to be a " <i>disaffected white supremacist</i> ," based on his Facebook page, said Richard Cohen a roommate of Roof's, said that Roof "was big	The racial issue has remained a gnawing presence during the debate after the shooting. [...] NAACP President Cornell William Brooks condemned the shooting as "an act of <i>racial terrorism</i> " and a <i>hate crime</i> that goes	"Every fiber in my <i>body hurts</i> , and I will never be the same," said Felicia Sanders, the mother of victim Tywanza Sanders. "May God have <i>mercy</i> on you" "Charleston is <i>like one family</i> . We all

¹² See <http://www.wvgazettemail.com/>; <http://www.wvgazettemail.com/news-national-news/20170110/shooter-in-south-carolina-black-church-massacre-sentenced-to-death-etc>.

¹³ Online versions of dailies and magazines commonly utilize systems to refine research results, such as 'Search Results' + 'Sort by: Relevance'.

		into segregation [...] I think he wanted something big like <i>Trayvon Martin</i> ," [...] Meek said [...that Roof] began complaining that "blacks were taking over the world" and that "someone needed to do something about it for the white race"	against the "conscience and soul of the country" "And now the whole community is torn apart. It's everybody hurting. <i>All races are hurting</i> "	talk to each other, all <i>hug each other</i> " said April Cox, 29, of North Charleston
2. SOLIDARITY IN CHARLESTON BEFORE CHURCH VICTIMS' FUNERALS June 22, 2015	The slayings have renewed calls for the <i>flag to be removed</i> from the S.C. Statehouse grounds, in part because photographs of Roof [...] showed him holding Confederate flags	the hate embodied in the slayings at Emanuel AME	displays of <i>unity</i> as Charleston heals from a church massacre 2 miles from Emanuel, someone vandalized a Confederate monument, spray-painting "Black Lives Matter" on the statue [...] along with the message "This is the problem # RACIST"	Area residents repeated messages of <i>solidarity, love and even defiance of evil</i> at the remembrances, hopeful their expressions would drown out the hate
3. ON LOWERING THE FLAG June 29, 2015	the psychic national need post-Charleston to do something took a remarkable direction: <i>banishment of the Confederate flag</i> [...]	Logically, <i>the connection is tenuous</i> [...T] here's a deeper reason for this rush to banish Confederate symbols [...]	<i>The flag was not material to the crime</i> itself [...] does anyone imagine that if the South Carolina flag had been relegated to a museum, the massacre would not have occurred? Within 48 hours of the <i>murder</i> of their loved ones, they spoke of <i>redemption and reconciliation</i> and even <i>forgiveness of the killer himself</i>	the breath taking <i>display of nobility</i> and spiritual <i>generosity</i> by the victims' relatives. It was an astonishingly <i>moving expression of Christian charity</i> . Such <i>grace</i> demands a response
4. S.C. GOVERNOR SIGNS BILL TO REMOVE CONFEDERATE	Nikki Haley signed a bill [...to] <i>bring down the Confederate flag</i> outside the	The flag first flew over the Statehouse dome in 1961 to mark	by posing with the Confederate flag before the shootings, Dylann	Rep. Jenny Horne, a white Republican [...] descendent of

<p>FLAG FROM CAPITOL GROUNDS July 9, 2015</p>	<p>Statehouse [...] "We will bring it down <i>with dignity</i> and we will make sure it is stored in its rightful place" Nikki Haley said</p>	<p>the 100th anniversary of the Civil War and was kept there <i>as a symbol of official opposition to the civil rights movement [...a] historic but divisive symbol</i></p>	<p>Roof <i>re-ignited a debate over the flag's history as a symbol of white superiority and racial oppression</i></p> <p>Supporters of the flag [...] <i>lamented that the flag had been "hijacked" or "abducted" by racists</i></p>	<p>Confederate President Jefferson Davis, scolded her party members for stalling. "I cannot believe that we do not have the heart in this body to do something meaningful such as take a symbol of hate off these grounds on Friday</p>
<p>5. REBEL FLAG DOWN IN SOUTH CAROLINA, BUT OTHERS REMAIN July 11, 2015</p>	<p>Chad Haden said [...]one of his ancestors fought for the Confederacy, and he does not want to see [...] the battle flag in South Carolina to come down. "It's like they're trying to take one bad thing from us, slavery, and they ignore the progress that was made before the war. They try to make us the villain. I've got a question: <i>Is it just a hatred of Southerners?"</i></p>	<p>[Haley said] it was crucial to <i>remove a symbol considered an emblem of slavery</i> by many, "no one should ever drive by the Statehouse and feel pain"</p>	<p>Derrick Johnson, president of the Mississippi NAACP, has called on Bryant to bring about change. "It's time to write the next chapter of our history"</p>	<p>The tragedy was a tragedy. But now we see a lot of positives coming out," said Denise Quarles, whose mother, Myra Thompson, was among those killed June 17. "Maybe people will <i>change their hearts</i>"</p>
<p>6. OF FLAGS, FOIBLES AND FALSE BELIEFS November 1, 2015</p>	<p><i>A few white boys have attached a Confederate flag to their cars.</i> One says [...] in defiance of authority, others usually quote heritage. We didn't hear them define what exactly the <i>heritage</i> is. Have they asked fellow black students what they think?</p>	<p>The most dominant <i>Confederate heritage</i> is people who were <i>enslaved</i> and helped build American agriculture.</p> <p>After the flag was removed from the South Carolina statehouse, the Ku -Klux- Klan protested that it was part of <i>white people's culture</i>.</p>	<p>In 1863, the creator of the Confederate flag, W. T. Thompson, wrote, "we are fighting to maintain the Heaven-ordained supremacy of the white man over the inferior colored race . . . it would . . . be hailed by the civilized world as THE WHITE MAN'S FLAG."</p> <p>"Heritage Not Hate" shirts defy the fact that the flag's heritage IS racism</p>	

Table 1. ChG articles – foregrounded issues and words – the shaping of iconic notions

4.1. Discussion

The issues of the flag as the foremost among the Confederate icons and symbols has been very strongly felt at the local level, and could not be easily dismissed. From our corpus we gather that, although the historic value of the flag is mentioned, it mainly appears as a ‘divisive symbol’ to be ‘removed’ or ‘taken down’. Predictably, the flag would eventually have come down. Yet, the massacre, and above all the moving reaction of the black community to it, demanded its immediate removal (TOPOS OF URGENCY + HISTORY) as a sign of reciprocity and reconciliation. This act of anti-racist diplomacy was performed thanks to the passionate speeches of Nikki R. Haley (the conservative governor of South Carolina and a former supporter of the Confederate flag), who immediately perceived this need and persuaded the conservative State legislature to remove the flag. Her attitude attracted international attention, and President Donald Trump named her as his choice to become ambassador to the United Nations (November 23, 2016)¹⁴.

However, across the ChG corpus, a lingering sensitivity to the notion of the Southerners’ historical legacy is tangible, even in the short excerpts of Table 2, ranging from varying degrees of respect and appreciation from the white community perspective (excerpts 3, 4, 5), to its thorough repudiation (1,6) from the black perspective, also enhanced by the BLM vision. In more detail, on the one hand, the flag is to be taken down “with dignity”(4), since it was not material to the crime itself and had been “hijacked” or “abducted” by racists (4) – TOPOS OF REALITY + CHALLENGE. On the other hand, from the black perspective, the flag is a “foible”, and its “heritage IS racism” (6) – TOPOS OF REALITY + JUSTICE. Hence, though both communities agreed on its removal, their different cultural frames display varying attitudes to that symbolic act. Such frames, however, find a substantial, if not fully perceived, common ground in sharing the language and common phrases: “mercy”, “display of nobility/forgiveness/solidarity/redemption”, “take down/removal of a symbol of hate”, “divisive symbol”, etc., which are generally utilized, differences in opinion notwithstanding. These shared expressions are increasingly common across the media coverage of these and similar events (e.g. the flag is to be removed “with dignity”, and *Mother Emanuel* is the symbol of the earliest expressions of “African-American dignity”), including the general representation of President Obama’s persona. To some extent, such phrases steer the lexicogrammar of the local and national discourse towards a representation of the US as a progressively more historical- and civil-rights-aware nation. Paradoxically enough, Roof himself utilized popular protest phrases, e.g. when he wished for “something big like Trayvon Martin” (1), supposedly hoping for the opposite result, i.e. a race war instead of national solidarity (TOPOS OF BURDENING + HISTORY + THREAT). We can see how, in this media-enhanced chain of events, names like *Trayvon Martin* have come to be part of the special lexicon of contemporary racial protest, which eventually will be taught in schools.

5. The DHA framing of the data from *Time Magazine*

Overall, the *Time* articles are less focused on the iconicity of the Confederate flag, and more on the meaning of forgiveness, against the background of the history of race relations in the US. As we will see, wider and more multifaceted perspectives are outlined.

¹⁴ Richard Fausset and Somini Sengupta 2016. Nikki Haley’s path: from daughter of immigrants to Trump’s pick for U.N. *The New York Times*, November 23: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/23/us/nikki-haley-donald-trump-un-ambassador.html>.

ARTICLES	Controversial mediatic forgiveness TOPOS OF CHALLENGE	Stories matter, different mind frames TOPOS OF HISTORY + THREAT	Icons – Emanuel AME Church v. the confederate Flag – and transformative actions TOPOS OF REALITY + HISTORY	Re-emerging troublesome memories, evolving racial attitudes TOPOS OF HISTORY + CHALLENGE
1. EVERYTHING WE KNOW ABOUT THE CHARLESTON SHOOTING June 18, 2015			The shooting occurred at Emanuel AME Church, which has a <i>deep history</i> .	Police are treating the shooting as a <i>hate crime</i> . The Dep. of Justice has launched a <i>federal civil rights investigation</i> into the incident.
2. READ PRESIDENT OBAMA'S SPEECH ON THE CHARLESTON CHURCH SHOOTING June 18, 2015	The Attorney General has announced plans for the FBI to open a hate crime investigation [...] and] <i>to make sure that justice is served</i> . [...]he outpouring of <i>unity and strength and fellowship and love across Charleston</i> today, from all races, from all faiths [...] indicates [...] how] the degree to which those old vestiges of hatred can be overcome.	We as a country will have to reckon with the fact that this type of mass violence does not happen in other advanced countries [...]we need to] be able to <i>shift how we think about the issue of gun violence</i> collectively.	Mother Emanuel is, in fact, <i>more than a church</i> , [...] some of our brightest leaders <i>spoke and led marches from this church's steps</i> . This is a <i>sacred place</i> in the history of Charleston and [...] America.	This is a place of worship <i>founded by African Americans seeking liberty</i> [...] was burned to the ground because its worshipers worked to end slavery. When there were laws banning all-black church gatherings, they conducted services in secret.
3. HERE'S WHY THE CONFEDERATE FLAG IS STILL	Howard, a Democrat, [...] thinks the	Because of the <i>strong support for the</i>	So why is the Dixie Flag still flying?	The flag [...] has had a fraught history in the South since the

<p>FLYING IN SOUTH CAROLINA June 19, 2015</p>	<p>massacre in Charleston has brought the legislature “closer to moving it than ever before.”</p>	<p>Confederate flag among many South Carolina voters, some political scientists said that <i>advocating for flag removal</i> is [...] political suicide</p>	<p>Part of the answer is political.</p>	<p>Civil War, but supporters say it represents a symbol of <i>Southern heritage</i>, a history they associate with <i>honor and valor, not racism.</i></p>
<p>4. CHARLESTON CHURCH HOLDS FIRST WORSHIP SERVICE SINCE MASSACRE June 21, 2015</p>	<p>the Rev. Norvel Goff [...] said the aftermath of the massacre has “been tough” but that the community will “<i>pursue justice</i> [...] and] hold our elected officials accountable to <i>do the right thing.</i>”</p>		<p>The <i>historic black church in Charleston, S.C.,</i> [...] held its first <i>post-massacre worship service</i> Sunday, <i>bringing a sense of unity</i> to the shattered city.</p>	
<p>5. FIVE LESSONS CHARLESTON CAN TEACH US ABOUT RACE, GUNS AND HEALING June 23, 2015</p>	<p>The most important message to come out of this tragedy is, sadly, the lesson that <i>we will likely forget</i> soonest: <i>forgiveness.</i></p>	<p>So what was with the burst of momentary morality that had certain talk show hosts <i>refusing to show</i> the killer's face? [...] not to show <i>Roof's face</i> seemed <i>not only disingenuous, but racial.</i> Partisan politicians and the chattering class started <i>manufacturing excuses</i> about this tragedy.</p>	<p>today saw South Carolina Governor Nikki Haley call for the immediate removal of the Confederate flag. To quote King about the “beloved community” and not get serious about gun violence in America is [...] mangling of his message.</p>	<p><i>Never in my media career</i> have I seen <i>media outlets refuse to show the face of any adult black murderer.</i> [...]they loop it. All day, all night. When is a <i>terrorist not a terrorist?</i> Apparently when he's a 21-year-old white male in America</p>
<p>6. How Do You Forgive A Killer?</p>	<p>Instead of war, <i>Charleston erupted in grace,</i></p>	<p>The rev. Anthony Thompson [a victim's widow]</p>	<p>within days the most contentious</p>	<p>The murders at Emanuel must be fitted into the long</p>

November 23, 2015	<p>led by the survivors of the Emanuel [victims]. It happened suddenly, but not every survivor was on board. For some it was too soon, too simple. Even so, within 36 hours of the killings, and with pain racking their voices, family members stood in a small county courtroom to speak the language of forgiveness.</p>	<p>tells this calmly, but with intensity [...] what he chooses to remember [...] is Myra radiant just beyond his helpless reach.</p>	<p>public symbol of South Carolina's Civil War past, <i>the Confederate battle flag</i>, was removed from the state capitol grounds with relatively little of the controversy that had surrounded it for decades.</p>	<p>and tangled history of race relations, racial violence and oppression that stem from America's original sin.</p>
	<p>President Obama's eulogy [...] shifted into song: "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound ..."</p>	<p>But a story so freighted with shock and pain doesn't end like a Hollywood movie, with the President singing and a divisive symbol coming down [...] <i>Anger abides, even if</i> the frank acknowledgment of it is now <i>off script</i></p>	<p>[In 1822] Emanuel Church was burned to the ground [...], reopened after the Civil War, [...but] church members continued to be segregated, intimidated and oppressed.</p>	<p>The past is Charleston's constant companion [...] slave quarters are repurposed as part of an upscale restaurant [...] there is <i>much in the city's past that needs forgiveness</i>.</p>
	<p>"I forgive you." Those three words reverberated through the courtroom and across the cable wires, down the fiber-optic lines, carried by invisible storms of ones and zeros that fill the air from cell</p>	<p>Many of those themes [...fear black freedom] were on the mind of the killer as he posted his manifesto on June 17</p>	<p>"I [Roof] chose <i>Charleston</i> because it is [the] most <i>historic</i> city in my state."</p>	<p>This real and symbolic oppression, maintained for generations, suggests that whites in Charleston and elsewhere continued to fear black freedom and did not expect forgiveness.</p>
		<p>[...Roof] said he would let her live <i>to tell the story of his deeds</i></p>		<p><i>The forgivers of Charleston trace their beliefs [...and cultural heritage] to a communion of [enslaved and degraded] forebears stripped of all liberty—except its essence [choose their own reaction]. This culture [...] promises, someday, [...] the liberation of the captive and the</i></p>
		<p>M. Graham suspects that <i>forgiving was far from the minds of most families</i>. "During [...] that bond hearing two</p>		

	<p>tower to cell tower and magically cohere in the palms of our hands. They took the world by surprise.</p> <p>[B. Powers: “For] Black Americans] the language of forgiveness can actually reflect a <i>resignation to certain brutal realities.</i></p>	<p>families out of nine made that statement [...] and the media kind of blanketed it across all of the families.</p>		<p>exaltation of the downtrodden. <i>They worship a teacher who forgave those who were crucifying him.</i></p>
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Table 2. Time articles – foregrounded issues and words – the shaping of iconic notions

5.1. Discussion

By far the most exhaustive coverage of the massacre in our corpus is to be found in (6), HOW DO YOU FORGIVE A KILLER?, which accounts for the issues at stake from an integrative perspective. In brief, the article highlights how to tell stories, face sorrowful memories, unveil attitudes and re-frame the notion of forgiveness in a way that can help promote change. However, the way survivors and families told their stories of faith and forgiveness may also be read as a significant example of the self-perception of blacks as acting ‘under white eyes’, or as their “resignation to certain brutal realities” (6) – TOPOS OF CHALLENGE + THREAT. Indeed, families were divided over the issues of forgiveness, which was also regarded as an excuse to avoid difficult action (furthermore, the accused killer did not publicly display remorse). Here follows an excerpt from the interview of Reverend Waltrina Middleton, a relative of one of the victims, who tried to clarify the possible reasons why so many African Americans adhered to the narrative of forgiveness:

The trouble with *focusing on forgiveness* in this story is that it might *make white society more complacent while denying black victims a measure of their humanity.* [...Although] the statements [of faith and forgiveness] at the bond hearing were genuine [...however] the way the statements were immediately seized on as the true meaning of what happened *took away our narrative to be rightfully hurt.* I can’t turn off my pain. [...] You have *people who already look at black people as being uncivilized* [...Thus, when the world suddenly looks at a community like Mother Emanuel] there’s *this great pressure to perform. Behave yourself!* Don’t do this, don’t do that—*because white people are watching.* Look at how the media portrayed the anger of the people of *Ferguson.* [...Or] right here in Cleveland, a 12-year-old child, Tamir Rice, is shot to death by police. We’re not allowed to be angry? [...] Now you have the spotlight on Charleston and *people are watching to see how these black folks are going to respond. Create this image of civility. We don’t want white people*

uncomfortable. For that matter, where's the talk of forgiveness when mass killers strike white communities? We have to tell the truth: the *racism is real* [my italics]¹⁵.

It cannot be overlooked that the issue of the Confederate flag also occurs in the *Time* corpus, with Governor Nikki Haley calling for its immediate removal (TOPOS OF REALITY + HISTORY), and is mentioned “as symbolic of Southern heritage, a history they associate with honor and valor, not racism” (3) – TOPOS OF HISTORY + CHALLENGE. Yet, in the conclusions of David Von Drehle (editor-at-large for *Time*, and author of article 1, “HOW DO YOU FORGIVE A KILLER?”) we read that forgiveness at Charleston

was not born of a need to reassure white people, even if it may have had that effect. Nor was it simply the product of oppression, though the past can't be separated from the present. It was an expression of genuine hearts. The nine lost lives belonged to church folk, Wednesday people, true believers. And their family members – for all their anger and shock and loss – all in their own ways seek to honor that and give them a victory despite the killer's hatred.

What we are dealing with in the *Time* corpus is an interplay of complex black-perspective beliefs (5), also entailing volcanic reactions of pain and distress, and the struggle with the self-conscious feeling of being observed by the white Other – TOPOS OF HISTORY + CHALLENGE. Also, the chagrin at the choice of some media not to show Roof's face seemed “not only disingenuous, but racial” (5) – TOPOS OF HISTORY + THREAT. The question ‘When is a terrorist not a terrorist?’ unveils controversial questions of identity construction, which are an overarching issue in racial discrimination (TOPOS OF HISTORY + CHALLENGE).

Yet, in many narratives powerful emotions are neutralized – “he tells this calmly, but with intensity [...] what he chooses to remember” (6) – according to some as a way of avoiding both a display of ‘uncivilized’ behaviour (anger is “off script”) and the dreadful implications of racist violence. Overall, however, the Charleston religious community and the city showed a very different societal reaction from Ferguson, where violent protests took place. The mainstream narrative immediately foregrounded the lexicogrammar of forgiveness, as highlighted in the table above (“Charleston erupted in grace”, “I forgive you” etc.) and, dissident opinions notwithstanding, the “dignity” and “grace” of such forgiveness became salient.

6. Concluding remarks

In an interesting article (April 17, 2016) from the ChG, ‘*Black Lives Matter*’ a teachable moment, or too touchy for school?¹⁶, we are informed of the angry reactions to an assignment by a seventh-grade teacher on a national movement to support racial equality – that is, BLM. If we focus on naming strategies, we notice that, interestingly, the teacher asked students, among other things, about the difference between the

¹⁵ David Von Drehle 2015. How do you forgive a murder? <http://time.com/time-magazine-charleston-shooting-cover-story/> November 23, 2015.

¹⁶ Erin Beck, at <http://www.wvgazette.com/news/20160417/black-lives-matter-a-teachable-moment-or-too-touchy-for-school>, April 17, 2016.

treatment of Dylann Roof and Michael Brown. Briefly, for Roof, who is white, the media did not use the word ‘terrorism’, whereas the *New York Times* referred to Brown, who was black and unarmed, as ‘no angel’ in a story.

The role of lexicogrammar choices can be considered as central to the shaping of the transformative narratives that are expected to promote new awareness and change. The increasingly controversial ‘white privilege’ is also to be included in the set of this fast-evolving, context-connoted lexicogrammar of contemporary racial protest/discussion, which is here (provisionally) listed:

- *We are/ I am Trayvon Martin*¹⁷
- *Justice for Trayvon Martin*
- *Hoodie march*
- *Hands up, don't shoot!*
- *Justice for Michael Brown*
- *I can't breathe*
- *National debate/discussion about race*
- *Black lives Matter. Our black lives matter*
- *Blue Lives Matter*
- *All Lives Matter*¹⁸
- *Dignity/grace*
- *Mercy/forgiveness*
- White privilege
- Confederate flag/symbols
- No angel
- When is a terrorist not a terrorist?

The grammatical dimension of these phrases ranges from the force of the imperative mood (*Hands up, don't shoot!*) and the factuality of the indicative (*I can't breathe*) to the naked essence of the verbless phrase (*Justice for Trayvon Martin/Michael Brown*). Fine-tuned, highly contextualized lexis is here enhanced by essential, vivid grammar patterns, which are highly compatible with the spontaneity of rallying cries.

Such iconic phrases are quickly becoming a kind of g/localized hypostasis, which resonate across the media, realizing transformative narratives, comments, etc. Unfortunately, space constraints did not allow reporting the context and journalistic instantiations of each of the above-mentioned phrases. From an applied linguistic perspective, future research could monitor the evolution and the spread of such patterns across wider corpora. However, qualitative linguistic analysis will be needed so as not to lose the necessary delicacy of focus. Special attention should be given to how American English is providing a common lexical terrain for the contrasting cultural frames realized along the intrinsically cross-cultural black consciousness vs. ‘white privilege’ and ‘white

¹⁷ We can speak of a proper Trayvon Martin movement, which also created a proactive Foundation “committed to ending senseless gun violence, strengthening families through holistic support, education for women and minorities and mentoring. Our strategy is to move from intervention to reform”: <http://trayvonmartinfoundation.org/>.

¹⁸ Both police officers, who tried to affirm that also ‘blue lives matter’, and people adopting also other perspectives (‘All lives matter’) tried to make their voices heard, but the specificities of the African American condition is still getting the full attention of the media.

supremacy' spectrum. Such differing frames, with their emerging narratives, are all voiced via English – a possible bridge within one 'disunited' nation.

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