

Linguists analyse lawmaker speeches

SCOTS linguistic experts are to analyse over 2.3 billion words compiled from speeches made by lawmakers over a 200 year period to measure how Parliamentary language has changed.

Researchers at Glasgow University are aiming to understand when and why certain topics are raised in parliament and how their use evolved over time.

They will examine Parliamentary speeches made between 1803 and 2003 and use them to chart the popularity of topics such as war, honesty, honour, homosexuality and terrorism.

The experts will also try to study how the language of individual MPs changed during their tenure in office.

The 15 month project will use Hansard, the official Westminster records, which contain reports of all Parliamentary speeches, votes, ministerial statements and parliamentary questions given in the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

Researchers will firstly develop a computer programme which is capable of sorting through and aggregating the huge amounts of lexical data.

In the second part of the project, the team will use the software to hone in on key phrases and concepts that recur over time. By measuring the frequency and context of the appearances, they will build what researchers describe as the most detailed analysis yet of

the concerns of Parliament over the past two centuries.

Lead investigator, Dr Marc Alexander said: "Looking at Hansard will hopefully reveal patterns in our society. We will use it to analyse how Parliament anticipates or reacts to major global events and social issues. We can even use it to look at how the language of individuals, such as Thatcher or Churchill, changed over the course of their political careers."

