

# Social change and discourse-semantic changes in The Times (London)

The 'at risk' construct in historical perspective

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UCREL CRS 2017-18 – 26th October 2017, Lancaster University,  
Management School Lecture Theatre 9, 3-4pm

# Introduction

## Why researching risk?

- Increasing social debates about risk.
- Social change towards *Risk Society* (U. Beck) due to both increased expectations of safety/security and (concerns about) large scale ,disasters‘.
- How to research broader social change without *cherry picking*?
- Take advantage of specific meaning/semantic space of risk.
- The use of ,risk‘ is linked to modernisation and there is a significant increase of risk words after WW2.

# Risk-words as research object

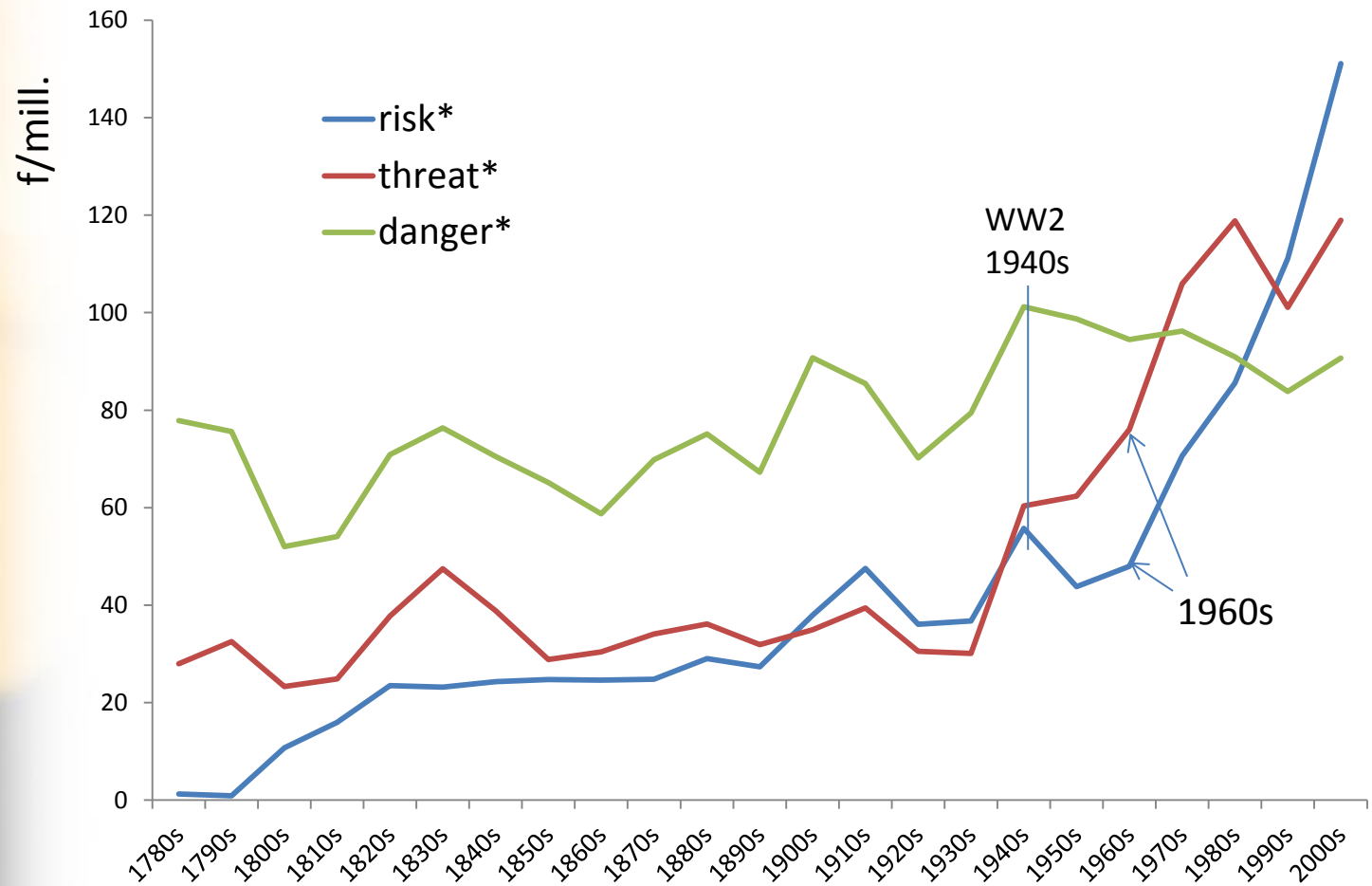


Figure: 'Risk', 'threat' and 'danger' in *The Times* (London) 1780-2009

# The media, the social & language

- The media constitute an important part of the public sphere.
- Shape what we know about the world and reflects what is considered newsworthy in the social realm
- Shaped by the social modes of news production (economic, political).
- Builds on generally available cultural/social knowledge and the available linguistic forms to communicate information.
- Reflects social structure, power, values, norms etc.

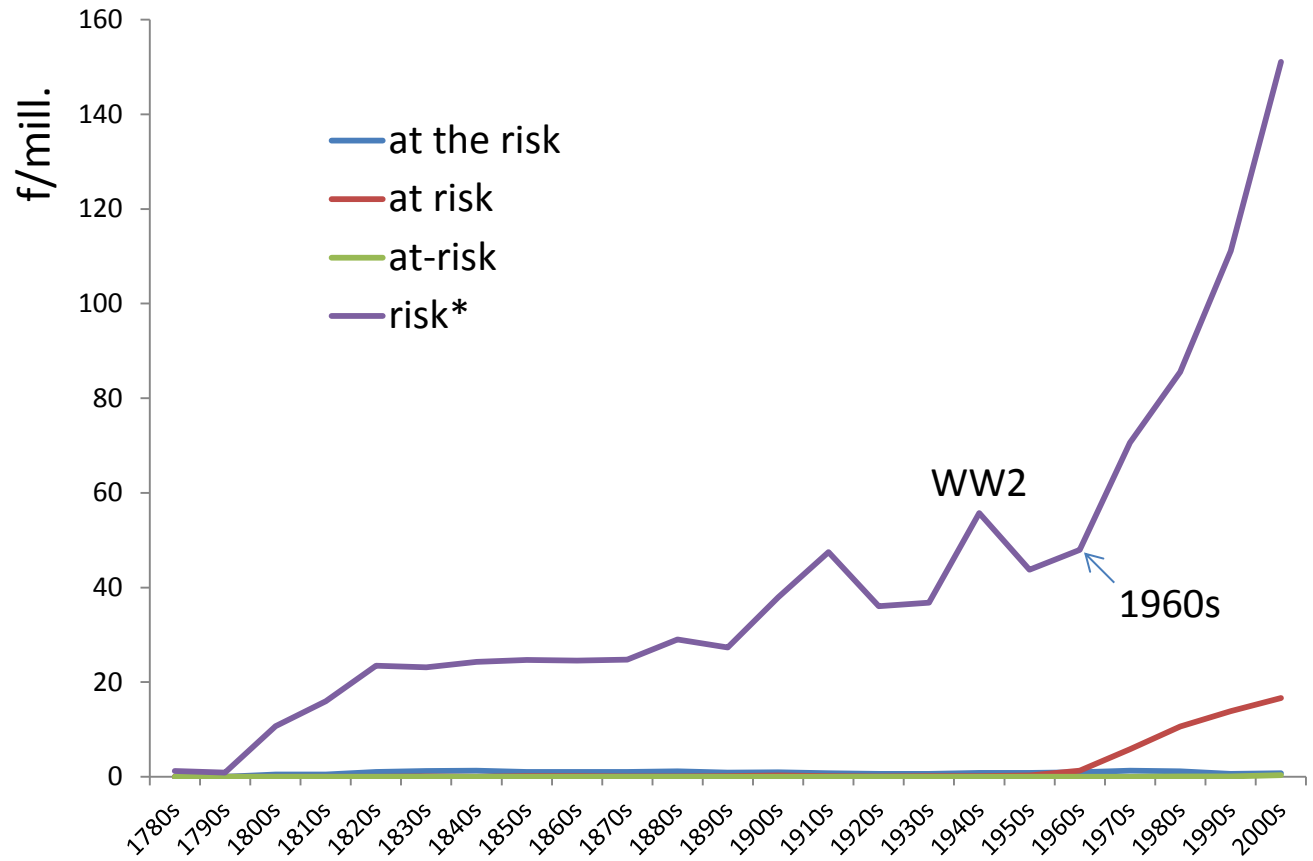
# Corpus Linguistics

- ESRC centre Corpus Approaches to Social Science (Lancaster University) - CQPweb
- Corpus of all articles of *The Times* (London) 1780-2009
  - Corpus contains:
    - 10.049.225.983 words
    - 519.184 „risk“-words
    - 31.645 „at risk“
    - 8.950 „at the risk“
    - 395 „at-risk“.
- Collocations, concordances, word lists etc.
  - Examining the co-text of risk words (+/-) five words before/after a risk word.

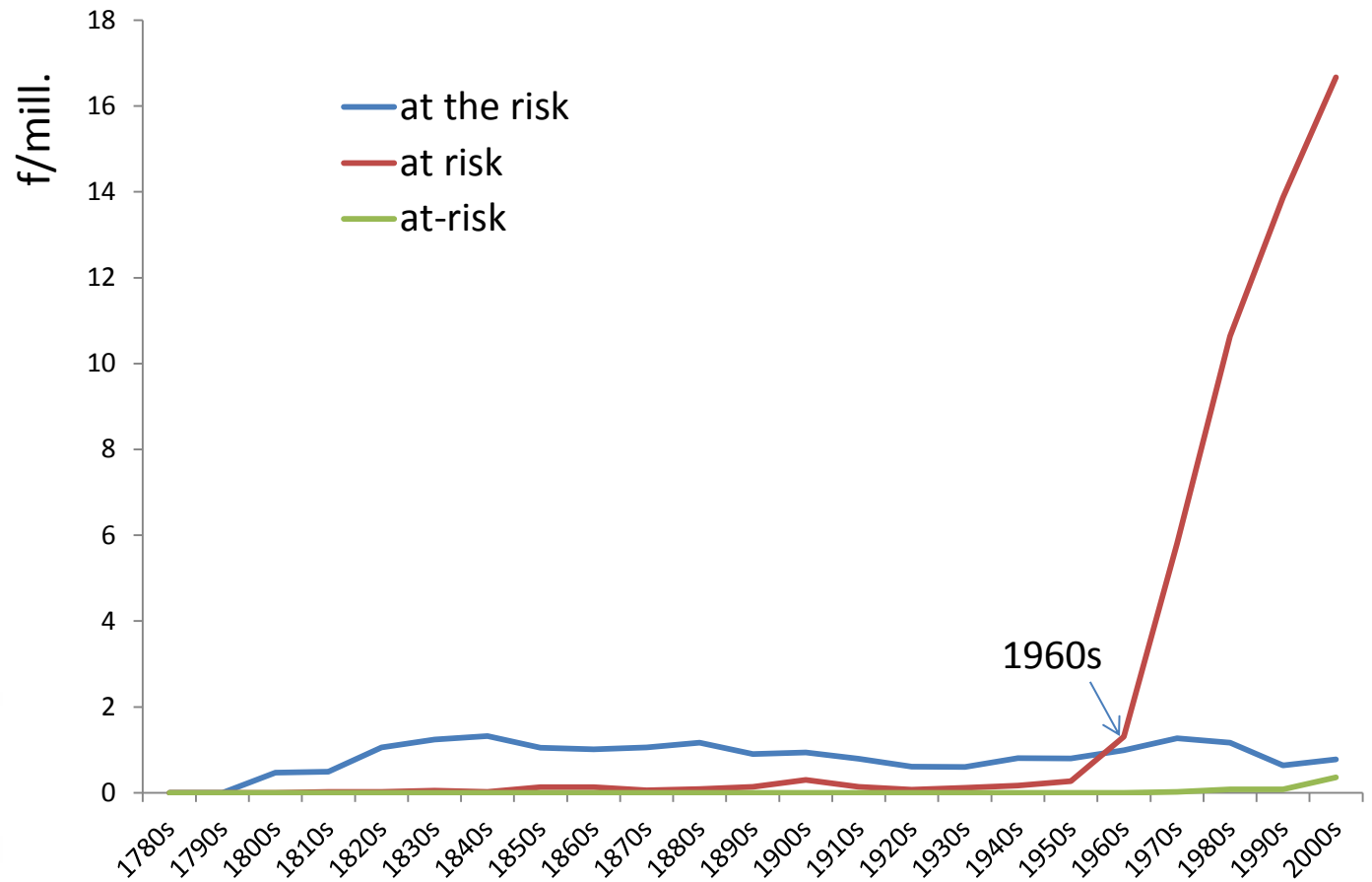
,At' is one of the most outstanding collocates of ,risk'

2000s	1990s	1980s	1970s	1960s
at	at	at	at	the
of	of	of	the	of
the	the	the	of	take
reduce	take	take	take	run
take	management	reduce	run	involved

# Results: Overview



# Results: Overview





# Results: ,at the risk‘ 1810-1909

Table: Ten most common collocations of „at the risk“, 1810s to 1909s

1810s	1820s	1830s	1840s	1850s	1860s	1870s	1880s	1890s	1900s
of	of	of	of	of	of	of	of	of	of
lives	life	even	even	even	even	even	even	even	even
own	even	life	lives	being	being	being	life	life	being
life	lives	lives	life	lives	life	life	lives	lives	lives
their	his	their	being	losing	lives	his	being	being	losing
his	losing	being	his	their	their	lives	his	his	wearying
being	their	incurring	their	life	his	own	their	their	their
and	own	his	losing	own	own	incurring	losing	own	incurring
the	being	losing	own	his	losing	their	own	war	his
to	my	own	incurring	tedious	wearying	repeating	incurring	offending	own

- It was for freedom he had contended, and he would ever continue to do so **even at the risk of his life** (1820\_03\_23)
- ... that Russia is determined to derive from her successes all the advantages of a short-sighted rapacity, even at the risk of incurring a war with Western Europe ... (1829\_09\_26)
- ...men might be necessary to render his crews efficient , though contrary to the inclination of the men, and at the risk of danger to private property... (1835\_11\_21)
- Government to recede from the policy of a few rash men who are endeavoring to avoid a personal humiliation even at the risk of far greater calamities. (1850\_04\_02)
- ... the next moment he fell into the burning mans and disappeared into flames . Mr. Cadby , chymist, **at the risk of his own life, rushed forward** and succeeded in dragging the body from the flames. (1852\_08\_05)
- An Officer 's duty is to do his duty , and , if necessary , to do it at the risk of displeasing his superiors... (1872\_05\_01)
- ... it is agreed that the goods are to be forwarded solely at the risk of the owner, with the exception that the company ... (1878\_12\_14)
- The ancient sculptures in the British Museum show the effects of our London atmosphere. They must be washed, at the risk of being washed out altogether. (1879\_11\_26)

# Results: ‚at the risk‘ 1910-2009

Table: Ten most common collocations of ‚at the risk‘, 1910s to 2009s

1910s	1920s	1930s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
of	of	of	of	of	of	of	of	of
even	even	even	even	ordinary	even	sounding	sounding	sounding
life	being	being	being	even	by	by	being	being
lives	lives	losing	appearing	course	sounding	even	even	even
his	repetition	repetition	losing	being	being	being	seeming	like
their	their	seeming	repetition	by	course	the	lives	offending
repeating	repeating	life	incurring	sounding	seeming	alienating	upsetting	losing
being	own	wearying	offending	offending	ordinary	upsetting	alienating	upsetting
wearying	wearisome	his	straining	the	the	through	losing	alienating
own	wearying	own	lives	provoking	incurring	offending	appearing	stating

- Stretton joins a Royal Opera House management run by the American Michael Kaiser, with another American about to become music director. But that's the way things are going at present. **At the risk of sounding like** Wapping's answer to Jorg Haider, let me compile a little list of who controls what in London. (Richard Morrison: A week in the Arts) 2000\_03\_16
- Some jockeys plainly feel it is a slur on their character, while many see it as a cosmetic measure causing them needless inconvenience. **At the risk of sounding like** a fence-sitter, I can see both sides of this argument I almost feel that I am looking in on it from the outside, as a ban would have a minimal effect on me. (Richard Johnson: Sports) 2003\_02\_01

# Results: ,at the risk' 1910-2009

- **At the risk of stating the obvious** it appears that public finance accountancy has a brand image problem. A poor image is not as funny or accurate as it seems, as there is a knock-on effect that impacts on all of us. (TMZ\_2004\_06\_15)
- The Institute of Health Services Management has also opted to study a range of more radical insurance-based options. **At the risk of alienating** some of its own staunch NHS-supporting members it is now considering a system of social health insurance based on ensuring "adequate" rather than equitable levels of health care. (TMZ\_1988\_01\_20)
- **At the risk of upsetting** Chelsea fans of a sensitive nature, I am struggling to come up with a theory that works any better as to why Roman would really want Ronaldinho for the kind of cash the Brazilian and Barcelona expect. (TMZ\_2007\_08\_31)
- The BBC is to make an unprecedented appeal for support from television viewers for an increase in its licence fee, **at the risk of offending** the Home Office. (TMZ\_1984\_12\_08)
- The Institute of Health Services Management has also opted to study a range of more radical insurance-based options. **At the risk of alienating** some of its own staunch NHS-supporting members it is now considering a system of social health insurance based on ensuring "adequate" rather than equitable levels of health care. (TMZ\_1988\_01\_20)

# Results: ,at the risk‘ 1910-2009

At the risk ...

of being abused by his parents

of being repetitive

of them being mistaken for sandpits by small children

of being criticised for elitist policies

of being accused of scurrilous behaviour

of being annihilated

of being called the White House poodle

of being accused of sexism

of being speedily wiped out from the human species .

of being proved embarrassingly wrong in five months ' time

of being prosaic

of being boring

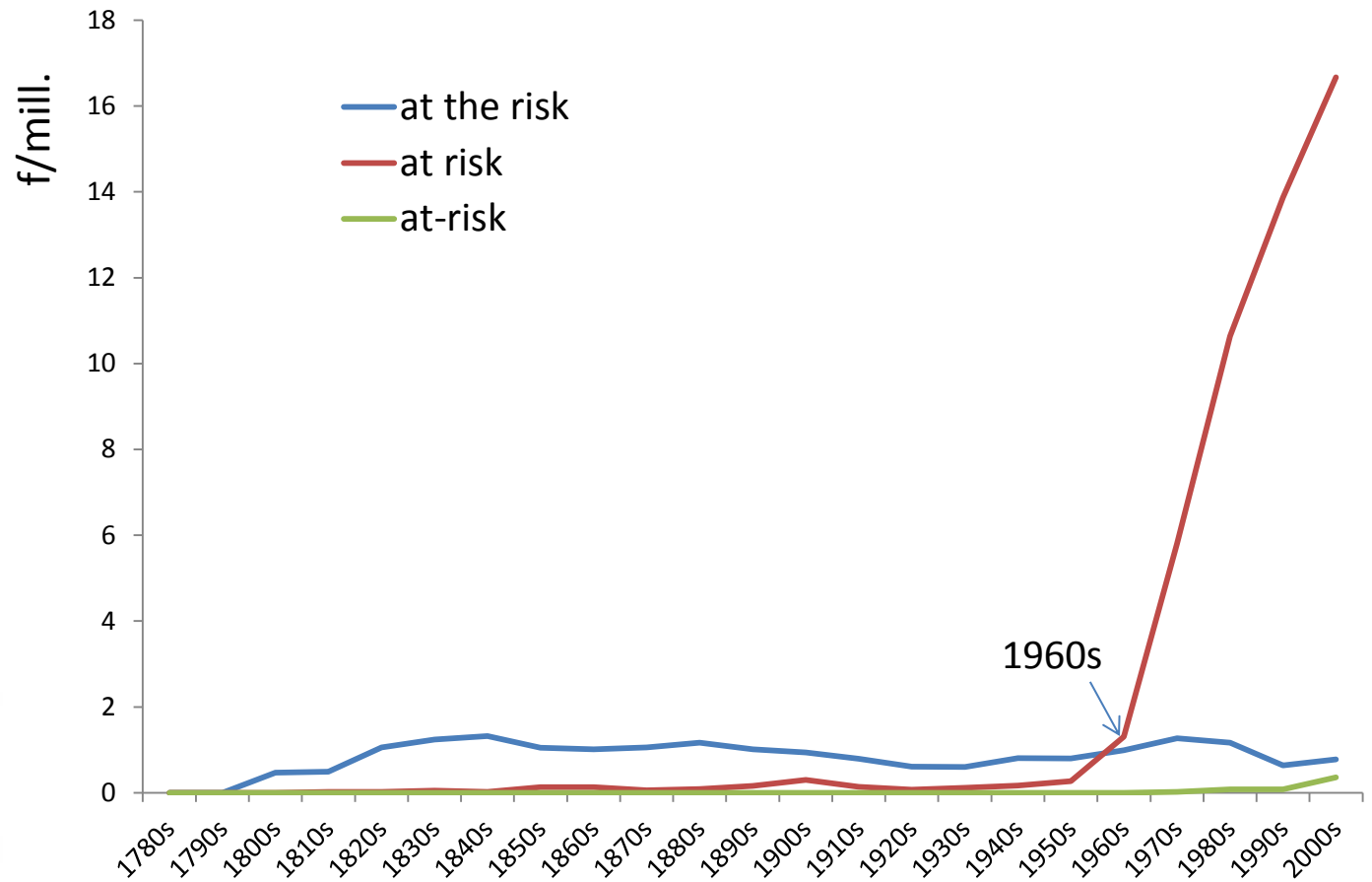
of being accused of complacency

of being branded a communist

# Results: ,at the risk' 1910-2009

- The 20<sup>th</sup> Century is characterized by a slow but ongoing shift from 'at the risk' of *life/lives* to 'at the risk' of *sounding, offending, upsetting, alienating*.
- The emphasis of **substantial issues** has been replaced by issues concerning the **relationship to others**.
- Even though the number of occurrences of 'at the risk' has only slightly decreased, the issues at stake have substantially shifted.
- This change has taken place at a time when a new compound—'at risk'—became quickly much more common in the news coverage of *The Times*.

# Results: Overview



# Results: „at risk“

- Early occurrences, from 1780 onwards: small numbers, variety of different contexts, severity of possible futures varies:
  - ‘Put at risk the nation itself’, ‘at risk of life’,
  - ‘at risk of further costs’, ‘own salvation’,
  - ‘your displeasure’.
- Large numbers of occurrences linked to shipping, trading and insurance in 1850s, 1860s:
  - “Goods to be **at risk** of the consignees from ship’s tackle, and no damage allowed unless pointed out before they leave the ship”
  - “The risks underwritten represent a liability of £22,838,083, of which £2,182,774 remained **at risk** on December 31”

# Results: „at risk“

Table: Ten most common noun collocations of „at risk“, 1900s to 2000s

1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
freight	amount	amount	amount	amount	capital	sums	jobs	jobs	jobs	jobs
amount	property		population		population	lives	children	lives	lives	lives
value			sum		sums	population	lives	children	children	children
amounts			value		values	life	patients	patients	patients	patients
					amount	people	people	people	buildings	people
						women	workers	babies	people	home
						money	babies	women	women	health
						patients	child	safety	health	buildings
						amount	women	funds	life	safety
						capital	life	life	babies	life

- From the 1900s through to 1950s economic expressions are most common collocates of „at risk“.
- With the 1960s a new orthodoxy established with increasingly more reference to humans/social groups and their lives.
- Three issues which indicate important separate developments in at risk occurrences:
  - „**Populations**“ – occurred in the context of the development and institutionalisation of epidemiology.
  - „**Jobs**“ – became a key issue in a society where after the *Golden Age of Welfare Capitalism* job insecurity has become a normal experience of our time.
  - „**Buildings**“ – the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (1984 onwards) has a strong focus on buildings (at risk).



# Results: *Lives at risk*

People **unreasonably put their lives at risk** or are unreasonably **exposed** to risk **by others** or particular circumstances:

- “Members of the Royal Family , successive prime ministers and the world 's most famous entertainers have had their lives put **at risk** by the BBC failing to deal with the threat of potentially lethal asbestos dust , it was claimed last night” (TMZ\_1988\_09\_14).
- “YOUNG people are experimenting with sex and drugs at an earlier age than before, putting their health and even their lives **at risk**, the Government's Chief Medical Officer said yesterday.” (TMZ\_1994\_09\_22).
- “The move comes after a series of cases in which patients have been killed, or had their lives put **at risk** by doctors protected by the medical profession” (TMZ\_2000\_06\_02).
- “Tens of thousands of children are placing their lives **at risk** by not learning to swim properly” (TMZ\_2003\_08\_01).
- “There is also reason to believe that their lives are **at risk** as a result of a request to the Imam for judgement by Muslims in Britain.” (TMZ\_2008\_02\_15).

# Results: *Lives* at risk

Not individual heroic acts but **professionals** (police officers, fire fighters, soldiers) **risking their life for others**. Reporting is about (lacking) recognition and support:

- “On Poppy Day , we all need to reflect that our **soldiers** are putting their lives **at risk** for us” (TMZ\_2007\_10\_29).
- “I didn't think I would ever be free or see my family again, and I can only thank the [ Bulgarian ] **police** who put their own lives **at risk** to save me” (TMZ\_2005\_12\_22).
- “**Servicemen** and **women** are paid to put their lives **at risk** on behalf of the nation and we have a duty to provide them with the best equipment we can afford” (TMZ\_2000\_10\_25).
- Or the reporting about the documentary: “BRAVE MEN OF THE SEA. They are a **special breed of men**, who go out in boats when the seas are angriest, and willingly place their lives **at risk** so that the lives of others, perhaps less worthy , may be saved” (TMZ\_1981\_12\_21)

# Results: *Children* at risk

- Children are in the centre of public debate: addressed by national and international organisations, state institutions, charities and other organisations working in the name of **protecting vulnerable children against neglect and abuse**.
- “At risk” phrase as an expression used by social services, scientific research and the media to **define children as vulnerable**.
- Inquiries / inquiry reports about **child abuse** triggered huge media coverage:
  - “Under the 1989 Children Act , the NSPCC and social services have the power to enter the school uninvited only if they believe that a **child is at risk** of significant harm - not because of the belated emergence of an historical pattern of abuse” (TMZ\_2004\_02\_23)
  - “Without early diagnosis and treatment , a **child is at risk** of developing respiratory problems such as pneumonia and bronchitis and the lungs may become damaged.” (TMZ\_1999\_11\_16)
  - “A second survey , commissioned by the health department and leaked to Public Eye, showed that more than 2,300 critically ill children were cared for in adult intensive-care units in 1991. The shortage of resources is putting **children at risk**, it says.” (TMZ\_1993\_05\_28)

# Results: *Children* at risk

- “Thousands of parents are unwittingly putting their **children's** lives **at risk** by incorrectly fitting child seats , or worse still , not using restraints at all . ” The RAC Foundation reports that an accident at only 5mph can kill an unrestrained child ...” (TMZ\_2005\_08\_19)
- “Reports of abuse and rape in the camps have hastened its urgency. ‘Any unaccompanied **children** are obviously **at risk**, and children after the disaster like this are at greater risk because they have no one to protect them,’ Michael Copeland , a Unicef child protection officer , said...” (TMZ\_2005\_01\_06)
- “The scale of the work has greatly increased . Numbers of **children at risk** are growing and the categories of abuse have been widened by Department of Health guidelines” (TMZ\_1990\_09\_26)
- “A Bill giving social workers greater powers to protect **children at risk** from abuse is planned for the autumn . The Bill has been delayed pending the outcome of the Cleveland inquiry into child abuse, but it is expected to be included in the Queen 's Speech in November.” (TMZ\_1988\_06\_06)
- “A baby died after three months of cruelty at the hands of his mother and her lover although he was on the social services register of **children at risk**, Norwich Crown Court was told yesterday.” (TMZ\_1981\_11\_12)
- “The report says that those most **at risk** from drowning are **children** under four, people over 60 , and males between 15 and 24.” (TMZ\_1977\_10\_27)

# Results: „at-risk“

Hyphenation of “at risk” is used dominantly in two different ways:

- Describing the **quality** of a **particular group** considered vulnerable such as *at-risk immigrants*, *at-risk children*, *at-risk babies*.
- Expression of a particular **institutional practice**, the introduction of *at-risk lists* or *register*.

# Results: quality of a group

- ... none of these has to my knowledge posed as a threat to the livelihood and wellbeing of an **at-risk group** like the migrants ... 1977\_12\_19
- This terrible disease is being tackled on a broad front and with the continuing co-operation of all concerned , particularly those in the **at-risk groups**... 1985\_09\_27
- The report also called for agencies to be more dedicated to following up concerns raised about **at-risk young people**. 1999\_10\_05
- The strategy of culling , supported by , for instance , keeping dairy cattle indoors for a further month after the cull of infected or **at-risk animals**, could help towards the restoration of the UK 's status as a foot - and - mouth - free country 2001\_04\_19
- A Department of Health spokeswoman said: "We recommend that all **at-risk school-leavers** and other young adults who have not received MMR , or only received one dose , should ensure that they take up the offer of MMR vaccination. 2005\_05\_13

# Results: institutional practice

- The names of those babies who fall into these categories are kept in a special list by the medical officer of health to ensure that they are particularly carefully checked for their development . This list is called the **at-risk register** since it is of those babies who are at a greater than average risk of a handicapping condition. 1970\_11\_04
- A case conference put him on an **at-risk register**. "The child was allowed to go home, but within three weeks of that release he was dead, " he said. 1989\_11\_21
- After Sudio was born , she was put on the **at-risk register** and seen by social workers and health visitors , but in the week before her death no one answered the door at the couple 's flat. 1991\_10\_31
- Historic houses once on the at-risk register are being restored. 1998\_12\_02
- Two thirds of children killed or seriously injured by their parents were under the watch of social workers , a study after the death of Baby P has found A fifth were on the **at-risk register**. 2009\_10\_15



# Results: **put** at-risk

- This was having the effect, he said, of **putting at-risk** New York's position as "the No. 1 gateway to the United States" (1976\_12\_17)
- I had promised Gary , Gerard [ Hartmann , my physiotherapist ] , Alex , Bruce [ Hamilton , 'It came down to the fact that my next chance to run well at the Olympics was either in five days or four years ' the Team GB doctor ] and all the medical people that I would not **put** anything **at-risk** if I did not feel right. (2004\_11\_10)



# The scandal to put socially valued „things“ at risk

Table: Ten most common verbal collocations of „at risk“, 1900s to 2000s

1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
being	have		be	is	put	put	put	put	put	put
was	was		was		be	be	be	be	are	are
had	be		had		is	are	are	are	putting	putting
			is			is	putting	putting	be	be
							would	were	puts	puts
							is	could	being	being
							were	would	were	is
							puts	puts	is	were
							being	being	could	could
							could	is	would	losing

- From the 1960s „put“ is the dominant collocate not only among verbal expressions.
- The strong increase of „at risk“ is linked to „put\*“
- The scandal of being **put at risk** by others/conditions seems the driving force behind the huge increase of the „at risk“-construct since the 1950s/1960s.

# Results: put at risk

- “Members of the Royal Family , successive prime ministers and the world 's most famous entertainers have had their lives **put at risk** by the BBC failing to deal with the threat of potentially lethal asbestos dust , it was claimed last night” (1988\_09\_14).
- “The move comes after a series of cases in which patients have been killed, or had their lives **put at risk** by doctors protected by the medical profession” (TMZ\_2000\_06\_02).
- “A second survey , commissioned by the health department and leaked to Public Eye, showed that more than 2,300 critically ill children were cared for in adult intensive-care units in 1991. The shortage of resources is **putting children at risk**, it says.” (1993\_05\_28)
- “Thousands of parents are unwittingly **putting** their **children's** lives **at risk** by incorrectly fitting child seats , or worse still , not using restraints at all . ” The RAC Foundation reports that an accident at only 5mph can kill an unrestrained child ....” (2005\_08\_19)

# Summary and Conclusions

- The compound „at the risk“: from material risk taking to the rhetorical/metaphorical use of risk words for shaping social relationships.
- „At risk“ – institutional and broader social change is reflected in discourse-semantics of the newsmedia: epidemiology, transformation of the economy, protection of heritage, abuse and protection of children.
- „At-risk“ – quality to characterise social groups, characterise an institutionally established practice (e.g. The *at-risk register*).
- Newsworthiness of the scandal of valued things or people being *put at risk*.