

A corpus-based study of metaphors in Brexit discourse of Theresa May and Boris Johnson

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As Prime Ministers over the Brexit era, both Theresa May and Boris Johnson have contributed a large amount of political discourse on the theme of Brexit. This paper focuses on the metaphors that are used in the two PMs' Brexit-related political discourse, what the entailments of these metaphors are, and what ideologies appear to be conveyed through the metaphors.

Two target corpora were built, respectively including two PMs' Brexit-related social media posts, political speeches, and parliamentary debates. The central terms determined through wordlists and keywords lists were categorised into target-domain-related, source domain-related, and general central terms. Metaphors which occurred in the context of the central terms were identified using MIP (Pragglejaz Group, 2007). Through the pilot study, 45 vehicle grouping candidates (Cameron, Maslen & Low, 2010) were determined and co-rating agreement tests were done using SPSS.

The analysis took a dynamic system perspective (Cameron et al, 2009), and within the systems identified, attempted to further identify metaphor scenarios and stories (Musolff, 2006). This provided a tool for the consideration of evaluation and ideology.

The data indicates that systematic connections have been established between certain topics and metaphor vehicles. Brexit is figuratively projected as *PERSON*, *PHYSICAL OBJECTS*, *AREA/PLACE*, and *DISASTER* through different metaphors, directing to the topics of the government's impractical and poorly organized approach to Brexit, as well as the significant economic and societal risks posed by a no-deal Brexit. Hard/soft Brexit uses the texture of objects to symbolise two different approaches of withdrawal. The negative semantic prosody of Hard Brexit is constructed through a series of metaphors of *DISASTER*, *PHYSICAL DAMAGE/INJURY*, *ACCIDENT*, and *VIOLENT ACTION*. In contrast, Theresa May's narrative aims to refuse the simplistic labelling of Brexit through metaphors, leading to a discussion towards binary metaphors in this paper. Regarding backstop, various metaphors are used in two corpora to shape it as a physical object and machine. A specific scenario - *BACKSTOP IS A DANGEROUS BUILDING*, is threaded up by a cluster of semantically correlated metaphors. Some specific narratives conveyed through metaphors that are shared by both PMs are also discussed, such as *take back control* of the borders/laws/money and *Brexit dividend* for the domestic priorities.

This paper demonstrates how the dynamic analysis of systematic metaphors can be combined with corpus techniques to generate insights into metaphor as an important vehicle for constructing and communicating ideology.

References

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