Brexit: A Loaded Narrative Told Through Metaphor Scenarios and Image Schemas

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Abstract. This paper aims to analyze the discourse on Brexit produced by the pro-leave newspaper *The Daily Telegraph* in the run-up to the June 23, 2016, referendum, with the goal of understanding how this discourse was articulated, through metaphor scenarios and image schemas, to trigger anti-EU sentiment among its readers. The analysis was conducted across two scenarios: (a) what being part of the EU had meant up to that point, represented through three metaphorical scenarios—EU as a prison, EU as a moving vehicle, and EU as a nanny—all based on the blockage schema; and (b) what Brexit could mean instead, illustrated by the metaphors scenarios—Britain as a leader and Taking back control, both grounded in the enablement schema. Hence, the message communicated—delegitimizing the EU in the first scenario and legitimizing the desire of Great Britain to leave in the second—was further reinforced and naturalized through the coherence between metaphor scenarios and the sensory experience of image schemas.

Introduction

This paper is framed within the context of Brexit, the process through which the United Kingdom exited the European Union, finalized on January 31, 2020. The events leading up to Brexit, particularly the 2016 referendum, which is the focus of this paper, were shaped by a combination of social, political, and economic factors that had been evolving since the 1970s.

The referendum came about as a result of a promise which was launched in a crucial speech delivered by David Cameron in 2013 when the Prime Minister was under growing pressure on several fronts: a) the UK Independence Party's rise in popularity (UKIP), driven by its advocacy for the UK's departure from the EU; b) a growing number of Eurosceptic members within the Conservative Party, who were demanding a stronger stance against the EU. Hence, in that speech held at Bloomberg headquarters—where he asserted that British citizens should have a say in determining UK's role within the EU—he promised that, if the Conservatives won the following 2015 general election, they would renegotiate the terms of the UK's membership with the EU and a referendum would be held to decide on UK's membership to the EU.

The Conservatives won the 2015 election. As a result, Cameron initiated a series of negotiations with EU leaders, which culminated in 2020, to obtain concessions on issues such as economic governance, migration sovereignty, and the free movement of people. In February 2016, he achieved an agreement that, as he claimed, would grant the country a "special status" within the EU. A few months later, on June 23, the UK held a national referendum where people voted by a margin of 51.9% to 48.1% and with 72% turnout, in favor of leaving the union. The outcome caught many by surprise, as it had been predicted that the remain party would finally win more votes.

However surprising this result might have been at the moment (Jennings & Fischer 2016, Koegler, Malreddy & Tronicke 2020, Lavery 2019), it shows the Euroscepticism which pervaded the British society. Thus, while in 1973 the UK joined the European Economic Community, with mixed feelings, mainly motivated by the hope to get some economic benefits (*The Economist*, 3 March 2014), it soon became clear that this country was not interested in participating in many of the Union's projects. In fact, the UK chose not to join the Eurozone and keep using their own currency in order to maintain financial independence. Furthermore, the UK did not become a member of the (borderless) Schengen area, although British citizens maintained the right of freedom of movement within the EU when the country was still a member, as claimed by the commentator Hugo Dixon in *The Guardian*:

> […] the argument that we should leave the EU because of the refugee crisis is riddled with flaws. For a start, we never gave up control of our borders in the first place. We didn't sign the Schengen agreement, which removed border controls between 22 EU countries and four other non-EU countries. […] So when asylum seekers or economic migrants get into the EU, they cannot just hop on a bus or a train and come to the UK. They get stopped at our border and can be denied entry if they don't have a visa. (*The Guardian*, Hugo Dixon, 22, Sept, 2015)

Besides, some additional reasons for requesting the UK's withdrawal from the EU were the following: to have the freedom to forge their own trading deals with other nations outside the EU; have control over their government spending; or put a stop to the broad reach of EU regulations and restore the British legal system, among others. Hence, what started as a strategic decision to respond to growing internal political pressure on the part of David Cameron became a very divisive move which gathered momentum as the voting day came nearer.

Against this backdrop of political tension and much persuasive language, particularly on the part of the leave campaigners, who ultimately won the referendum, the research questions guiding this paper are the following:

a) Can the cognitive devices (metaphor scenarios and image schemas) used in the representation of Brexit be said to carry evaluative and affective dimensions which might have worked to the advantage of the leave position?

b) Does the representation of the complex issue of Brexit partly rely upon simple and familiar actions which the British audience could easily run on their minds and identify with?

Therefore, this paper aims to advance research on how emotions, supported by the use of metaphor scenarios and image schemas, can be leveraged for political purposes (Alba-Juez & Larina 2018). Hence, the dual nature of metaphor as being grounded both in physical and in socio-cultural experience" (Koller 2020: 80) is further reinforced by building on image schemas.

Regarding the structure of this paper, it will be divided into the following sections: the theoretical framework will be addressed in the first place, followed by the methodology employed in this paper. Next, the analysis will be divided into two different stages: the first one will examine the option of remaining in the union, by looking into three different metaphor scenarios; the second one will analyze the option of leaving the union by touching on two different metaphor scenarios. Finally, after the discussion section some conclusions will be drawn.

Theoretical framework

This section relies on Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA, henceforth), an approach which has gained much influence in media and political studies over the last twenty years. This method, which lies at the intersection of Critical Discourse Analysis, Metaphor Analysis and Corpus Linguistics, was introduced by Charteris-Black (2004) and further developed by other scholars such as (Hart, 2010, 2011; Musolff 2015, 2016, 2021; Santa Ana 2002) to mention but a few. The role of metaphor in CMA helps us identify and uncover the motivation why speakers/writers may decide to choose one metaphor over another, since that particular choice will shape our thinking connected to a particular issue. This suggests that metaphors are powerful and ideologically-loaded tools with a significant role in various forms of persuasive discourse, particularly in political communication. Exploring the pragmatic dimension of metaphor, the new concept of "metaphor scenario" was coined by Musolff (2006) to account for the persuasive load of metaphors in particular contexts (Breeze 2017: 17). Thus, a more situated, cultural and historical perspective of metaphors is provided by examining their use in the light of a particular situation where certain motivations to liken something to something else may just emerge in the very moment of understanding.

Faced with this more dynamic version of metaphor, which creates and tells stories relying on the information emerging from the consecutive moves in an on-going context, metaphor scenarios create an evolving narrative which have some influence on how readers structure information by projecting value judgements and biases inherited from the popped-up stories (Breeze 2020; Musolff 2006, 2020).

Together with the concept of metaphor scenarios, some attention will also be placed on the concept of image schemas, while at work in real data. Some of the metaphors in those scenarios draw on source domains which are embodied structures; in other words, many of the source domains in those metaphors build on image schemas that refer to memories of bodily actions engaged in when interacting with the environment, which bring to the representation added layers of meaning (Kimmel 2005; Zibin & Solopova 2024). This means that apart from the structural dimension of image schemas (Johnson 1987), "additional strata of meaning, such as the social and affective dimensions", needed to be included in the analysis for a full understanding of the concept. (Johnson 2005:30). Hence, image schemas tend rather to be seen nowadays as "patterns of bodily engagement, feeling, experience, and action" (Forceville 2017: 241), which reinforces the feeling of naturalness behind such representations (Koller 2020).

The application and analysis of metaphor scenarios in political and health issues has gained much visibility over the last few years (Silaški & Đurović 2024; Breeze 2017; Räikkönen 2020; Viola 2020; Likewise, image schemas in political discussions of immigration and multimodal discourse have recently attracted considerable attention, as can be seen in the work of the following scholars (Charteris-Black 2006; Forceville 2017; Hart 2010, 2011; El Refaie 2001; Martín de la Rosa 2023; Porto 2022, Romano 2019). Hence, the purpose of this paper is to continue the exploration of metaphor scenarios and image schemas in media communication.

Text and method

The data was sourced from opinion articles published in *The Daily Telegraph*, a newspaper known for its clear pro-leave position on the Brexit issue. The time period covered by the data spans from May 22 to June 22, 2016. The corpus for the study consisted of 34 opinion articles distributed in two groups of 12 articles in May (11,157 words) and 22 in June (22,939 words) reaching 34,096 words. That timeframe was chosen because, during the four months that the Reuters Institute at Oxford University tracked EU referendum news, the final 30 days made up nearly half of the total coverage (Levy, Asland & Bironzo 2016). Moreover, *The Daily Telegraph* presented this four-week lead-up to the referendum as a unique, one-time opportunity for the audience.

The corpus was compiled by selecting opinion columns that contained either of the following two terms: 'Brexit' (commonly used to refer to Britain's withdrawal from Europe) or 'the EU Referendum' (a pivotal event in the whole process).

For metaphor identification, I followed the procedure suggested by the Pragglejazz Group in 2007, which entailed pursuing a number of steps. This procedure was combined with a more discourse-based approach to the analysis of metaphors (Cameron & Maslen 2010), which claims that deciding on whether some stretch of language is metaphorically used or not depends on the development of discourse in real time. This implies taking a more flexible stance when analyzing metaphoricity: instead of just looking at single lexical items, the focus was placed on longer stretches of discourse. Hence, lexical items or longer stretches of discourse were considered to be metaphorical if they had a more basic contemporary meaning in other contexts than the one in the given context; by more basic, it was implied that these words were more concrete, more related to bodily action, or more precise; however, the contextual meaning—though it differed from this basic meaning—could still be understood in comparison with it. For example, when *The Daily Telegraph* states "The *roadmap* for Brexit must be flexible" (14 June, 2016), the word 'roadmap' originally refers to a physical map used to find one's way when moving from one location to another. This primary meaning is more tangible and linked to physical movement. In contrast, its contextual meaning conveys the idea of 'a plan to achieve something', which can still be understood by drawing a comparison to its literal use.

Analysis

The starting point in this section is the key moment of the referendum, which was held on June 23 (2016), and was seen as a unique chance to "restore democracy in our country", as mentioned by Boris Johnson in an opinion column taken from *The Daily Telegraph* (Johnson, 22 June, 2016). Hence, the concept of a 'window of opportunity' implied in Johnson's words guided the entire analysis. Moreover, drawing on the two-sided situation suggested by the British politician William Hague —outlined in another opinion column published on June 6, 2024— the analysis was structured around two perspectives: looking backwards (remaining in the EU) and looking forwards (leaving the EU):

> "This is an asymmetric campaign in that we all have a lot of experience of what it is like to remain in the EU [looking backwards], but have to imagine what it would be like to leave [looking forward]." (William Hague, 6 June, 2016),

Remaining (looking backwards): This option conveyed a message of continuity, emphasizing the ongoing nature of what had been happening up to that point. It was backed by various metaphorical scenarios representing the challenges and problems already experienced by British citizens under the EU's influence. Staying in the Union was therefore depicted as an undesirable yet familiar situation that would just persist unless the chance to leave was taken. This option will be analyzed in the first stage of the analysis section.
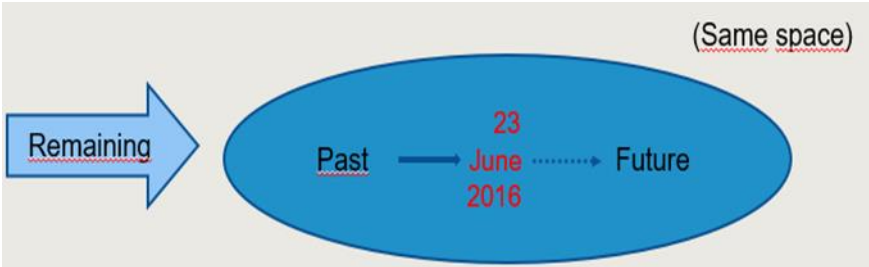

Figure 1. Visual representation of the remaining scenario, where past and future, with no difference between them, are just blended in the same space.

Leaving (looking forwards): This option conveyed a more hopeful and optimistic message of a fresh start, suggesting that venturing into new territory could only bring political, social, and economic benefits to Great Britain. This perspective will be examined in the second part of the analysis.
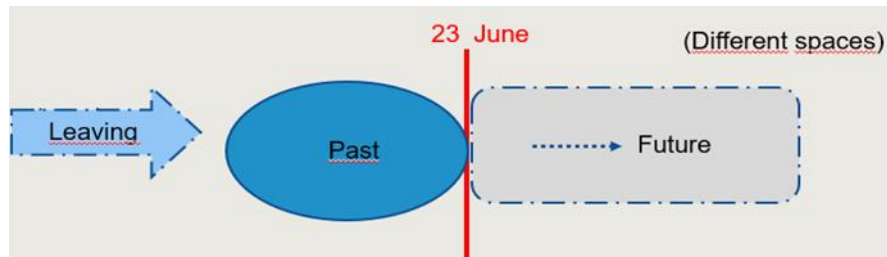

Figure 2. Representation of the leave scenario, where the past and the future, very different from each other, are located in different spaces.

- **First stage**

The three main scenarios relied on to represent the relationship holding between Great Britain and the EU were analyzed in some detail to capture the different layers of meaning which not only permeated this first scenario but also constructed a powerful metaphor-based situation.
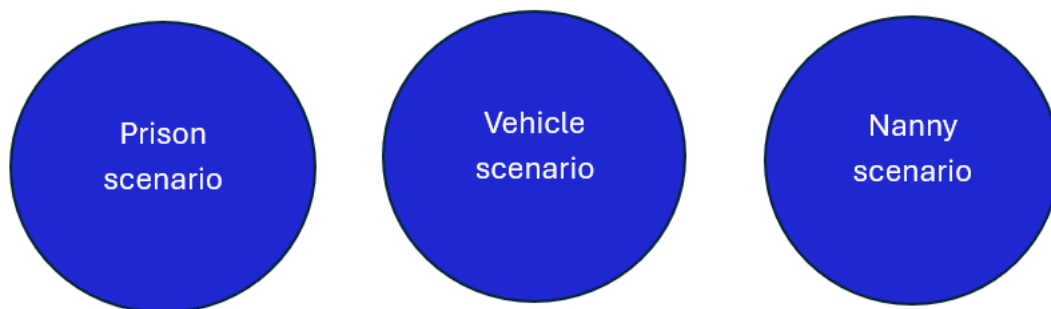

Figure 3. Representation of the three scenarios analyzed in this first stage

a) Prison scenario

(1) "We must *break free of the EU* and take back control of our borders." (Heather Stewart-16 June, 2016)
(2) In the short-term, a Brexit would almost certainly mean the UK remaining in the European Economic Area (EEA), like Norway: we would be *liberated* from much political interference, be allowed to forge our own free-trade […]. (Allister Heath-18 May, 2016)
(3) But we will control our own borders; […] And if the country does not like the way the Government is conducting its immigration policy then it can turf it out. As things stand right now, *manacled to the EU*, there is nothing that can be done. (Philip Johnston- 18 June, 2016)

The examples collected from *The Daily Telegraph* clearly tell the story of the lack of freedom suffered by the UK at the hands of the EU. As an obvious result, the situation evokes feelings of frustration among the citizens, while simultaneously sparking a desire for independence and a drive for empowerment. This frustration arises from dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs, since "being manacled to the EU" touches on the limitations imposed by the EU and the perceived overreach of this institution's influence on the UK policies. Therefore, it only makes sense that British citizens would be longing for autonomy as

reflected in phrases like "take back control" and "be liberated from much interference", as a natural type of reaction to the description of the discriminatory treatment of Britain at the hands of the EU (Zappettini 2021). Furthermore, since this situation is turned into an opportunity to stop the EU's interference and face new challenges, citizens are presented with the option of leaving the EU ("A Brexit") as the path that would allow the UK to regain control of its own borders and immigration policies. This sense of empowerment projected onto a future scenario is closely linked to the belief that the UK would be better off by managing its own affairs and would be more responsive to its citizens' needs, as emphasized by the idea that the government could be held accountable or 'kicked out' if it failed to meet expectations.

In terms of image schemas, the schema of blockage is repeatedly invoked in various expressions, portraying British citizens as being unfairly tied to the EU's dictates. This representation effectively creates tension with the EU that needs to be resolved, generating a strong emotional pull towards breaking away from the institution to reclaim control and self-governance. Consequently, the emotional intensity of disgust and weariness behind this representation highlights the psychological impact image schemas are likely to have on British citizens who, feeling like prisoners, will want to get rid of their oppressors.

b) Vehicle scenario (moving in the wrong direction)

4) *The EU is leading us away* from democratic modernity. There is no evidence that it will *change direction*: indeed, it is so constituted that *it can't*. (Charles Moore-17 June, 2016)

5) We have felt compelled *to go along* with it in order *not to rock the boat*. (14 June/2016 – Philip Johnston)

6) If we miss it [the chance to restore democracy by voting leave] we will be *locked in the back of the minicab, with a driver who barely speaks English, going in a direction we don't want to go* (Boris Johnson-22 June, 2016)

There is a strong sense of disappointment and frustration in all the sentences, as the EU is perceived not only as drifting away from democratic ideals but also as being incapable of changing course. As a result, British citizens —represented by the figure of David Cameron as their Prime Minister— feel trapped in a failing system and pressured to conform "to avoid rocking the boat", driven by fear of potential negative repercussions. This reflects a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency in shaping important decisions, further deepening the dangerous disconnect between British citizens and those in power. It is all captured by the imagery of a driver who "barely speaks English" —which comes across as strongly xenophobic, as it diminishes individuals whose native language is not English— and of being "locked in the back of the minicab", which reinforces the feeling of physical and emotional discomfort.

Aligned with the previous section, this scenario pushes forward and enhances the narrative of imprisonment by British citizens, who portray themselves as unable to make their voices heard. The use of these "hyperbolic" scenarios turned out to be in line with the emotionally charged rhetoric of the Brexit debate, aiming to fully engage the emotions of the readership (Musolff 2021). Moreover, this example displays the creativeness of a mapping which assigns decision-making power to member states depending on the place taken while riding a car. At the same time, the possibility of "missing" the chance to restore democracy by voting to leave on the 26th of June evokes a strong sense of fear and urgency to act to reverse the situation and regain control.

Regarding schemas, it is the force of compulsion what frequently appears in the examples. Consequently, British citizens are represented as being forced, against their will, in the wrong direction, which goes against a basic metaphor: ACTIONS ARE SELF-PROPELLED MOVEMENT (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). This metaphor implies that motion is considered genuine only when individuals rely on their own power for movement and decide which direction they want to go. However, the scenario presented shows citizens who are not in control of their movement, with the direction being decided by other member states. Therefore, this lack of agency is very likely to cause emotional distress and anxiety among readers, underscoring the fact that schemas are experiential and psychologically real.

c) NANNY scenario

7) If we vote to stay that will say we don't think we can hack it on our own. […] we don't think we're strong enough […] that we can't survive without *clinging to the apron strings of nanny in Brussels* […] (Boris Johnson- 22 June, 2016)

8) *We* have become so used to *Nanny in Brussels* that we have become *infantilised*, incapable of imagining an independent future. (Boris Johnson-16 May, 2016)

9) […] all that relentless misery about this country and *its inability to stand on its own two feet*. (Boris Johnson- 5 June, 2016)

A compatible narrative with the scenarios previously discussed is that of the nanny scenario, which obviously implies that if the EU is a NANNY that turns the UK into a child. In this particular context of an upcoming referendum to decide whether to remain in the Union or to exit it (which was implied in the Brexit debate as a simple and familiar movement to everybody), 'remaining' would be an admission of a continued dependency and would reveal Britain's insecurity. Such narrative is constructed through expressions such as being "infantilized" or "clinging to the apron strings of nanny", portraying a version of Britain that is not desirable in their eyes and disconnected from the country's glorious past (Andrews 2021). Hence, against the backdrop of a clear criticism towards this negative portrayal of the UK's ability to stand alone, citizens are urged to seize the opportunity to leave, advocating for a vision of a strong and independent future. These means that while these examples trigger feelings of lack of autonomy and helplessness, they serve to legitimize a desire for independence and self-reliance in order to be in a position to, eventually, take back control.

Regarding image schemas, the schema of blockage runs throughout this scenario's narrative. Great Britain is depicted as lacking the independence needed to develop and become an adult as a result of the EU depriving it of enough freedom to mature. Therefore, it is to be expected that British citizens would look for ways to break free from these constraints to become self-sufficient and mature enough to take care of themselves. This scenario also illustrates how new dimensions of image schemas, psychological and emotional, can be explored by pointing to short-term connections "between sensory experience and short-lived conceptualizations of concrete events", rather than "enduring mental representations" (Gibbs 2005, 113).

- **Second stage**

This stage was explored by analyzing the following two scenarios: 'Reimagining Britain as a leader' and 'Taking back control', which were recreated in the minds of the readership and represented the UK in a very different light.
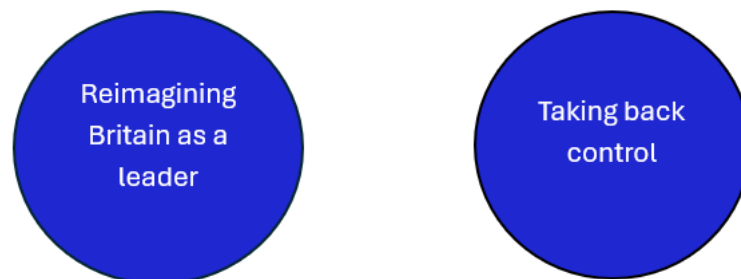

Figure 4. Representation of the two scenarios analyzed in this first stage

a) Reimagining Britain as a leader SCENARIO

10) This was the moment *for Britain to speak for* all the people of Europe – everyone enraged with how Brussels works[...] This was the chance *to fight for* the low-paid in the UK, their incomes compressed […] by the uncontrolled immigration that is a function of EU membership. (Boris Johnson- 5 June, 2016)

11) Over the subsequent few years, […] *Britain will be leading* a new (and growing) group of post-EU European nations. (Allister Heath-18 June, 2016).

12) Isn't this [the fact that the EU has never been submitted to the will of the people] a matter about which *our country's history has something to tell* the world? (Charles Moore- 27 May, 2016)

Through this new scenario the representation of Great Britain is completely different, activating instead feelings of courage to stand up and voice concerns, coupled with a defiance against the perceived injustices of Brussels (as a metonymy for the EU's administrative body, as can be seen in example 11). These feelings of resistance align with optimism about what the future holds and a sense of leadership, calling forth an image of Great Britain which becomes active and self-confident in its own resources as a strong and powerful nation. Furthermore, the decision on whether to leave or remain in the EU is framed in terms of national pride and belief in the historical significance of the moment, suggesting that Britain can be presented as a model of authority and has valuable lessons to offer other nations on the importance of democratic principles.

Therefore, this new version of Great Britain, which becomes fully independent, is built upon and reinforced by the introduction of a new image schema (enablement). Therefore, we come across a Great Britain feeling empowered to act with determination for themselves and for others, as can be seen in the use of verbs such as "speaking on behalf of others", and "leading other nations". Besides, the projection of embodiment onto conceptual structures, by presenting an actor (the UK) with the willpower to break free from another actor (the EU), enhances the psychological reality and strength of schemas. Furthermore, the sensory experience of liberation and leaving behind all the insecurities and ties of dependency with the EU in this new scenario is likely to feel as a welcome move and the right outcome to a situation which has been going on for too long.

b) Take back control scenario

This metaphorical scenario, which is prominently featured in the debate leading up to the referendum among the leave party, revolved around two main issues that served as the foundation for their persuasive argument: electing their own political candidates, which would make them accountable for delivery and, above all, controlling immigration, which became a central element of the discussion. The issue of immigration became increasingly present as the date of the referendum approached, which is the reason why this topic was chosen to examine the relevance of the slogan "taking back control".

13) The British were traditionally welcoming, but they could see the pressures of *uncontrolled immigration* on the NHS and other services. They were alarmed that the influx was about 220,000 a year […] (Boris Johnson-22 May, 2016).

14) The risks to pregnant women and their unborn children are only going to get worse *if we don't regain control of our borders* [it will take 18 months to get a hospital appointment] by voting Leave on June 23. (Allison pearson-3 June, 2016).

15) At no point did the Remain campaign explain how this country *is going to absorb* at least 250,000 incomers – a city the size of Newcastle – every single year for the foreseeable future; […] (Allison Pearson, 21 June/2016)

The examples included touch on feelings of concern and alarm about the impact of uncontrolled immigration on public services like the NHS, highlighting a sense of being overwhelmed by the scale of immigration. Furthermore, feelings of fear and urgency are also activated, emphasizing that without controlling borders the risks to vulnerable groups like pregnant women and their unborn children will

increase, urging immediate action through voting *leave*. Finally, there is a prevalent sense of frustration and criticism towards the Remain campaign for not addressing or clarifying the difficulties of accommodating such a large number of immigrants each year (equivalent to a city the size of Newcastle), triggering the image of a three-dimensional space filled beyond what is comfortable and safe. This situation is likely to create a sensory experience of being "overcrowded" within the limited container of Britain, stemming from the prospect of admitting so many immigrants at once, as if the 250,000 newcomers were depicted as a massive 'wave' —IMMIGRANTS ARE LIQUID— that need to be "absorbed" (Charteris-Black 2006; El Refaie 2001; Santa Ana, 2002).

In the light of the anticipated overcrowding in Britain and the resulting strain on social services, the only solution seems to be to regain control of its borders. This involves switching from being pressured —under the compulsion schema— by numerous immigrants coming from the struggling Eurozone to becoming an empowered agent —under the enablement schema— capable of determining its own course. Hence, the slogan "take back control" is suggested as the formula to galvanize the country's citizens into the right direction: vote leave on June 23rd (2016).

Discussion

Regarding the first stage, the narrative employed by the journalists of *The Daily Telegraph*, including some politicians, across the three different scenarios chosen, conveys a chain of mini-narratives overlapping one another where strong emotions were mobilized to openly ask the readership to oppose the EU and vote for Brexit. This strategy was partly based on tapping on repeated negative scenarios across the media, which touched on some of the perceived shortcomings of belonging to the EU, as not only not having the role it deserved within the Union but even being treated unfairly. Hence, the sequence of the three scenarios played two different functions: delegitimating the EU's unfair behavior towards the UK, which was at times victimized, and legitimating in turn the request to the readership to have the courage to vote *leave* to put an end to an unwelcome relationship. The occasion of the referendum proved itself to be the best opportunity to tap into the collective imagination of what it meant to be part of the EU, which had been spreading across different newspapers for years (Zappettini & Krzyzanowski 2019; Zappettini 2019, 2021).

The second stage completed the legitimating path to vote for Brexit: whereas the first stage served to remind readers of the reasons why bringing the relationship to a halt was necessary, the second one played the role of projecting themselves into a new and promising future away from all the constraints of the EU —which validated further the claim to take back control. This second stage —while meaningfully supported by the scenario of reimagining Britain as an enabled and powerful agent— was built upon the scenario of taking back control, as the slogan which best packed and summarized the needs of the country at that particular time. It was a cognitively simple formula offered to the readership to strategically compress a very complex political situation into a compelling outcome to the narrative offered in the first stage. If constrained by Brussels; if driven in the wrong direction, unwillingly; if not given the opportunity to fully develop as an adult; what else would it make sense rather than to leave and take back control?

Conclusion

This qualitative study has tried to show how the framing of the Brexit discourse from the perspective of *The Daily Telegraph* was purposefully constructed: legitimizing the vote leave position. In order to achieve this political purpose, the whole discourse rested upon a number of powerful metaphor scenarios (the EU as a prison, as a vehicle taking you in the wrong direction and as a nanny), which triggered a profound disgust with a relationship that was dominating the UK. They were strategically used and imposed one over another as layers of meaning to create a loaded perspective on that historic moment.

Furthermore, the power of this discourse was strengthened by the coherence in the message communicated by metaphor scenarios and image schemas. Hence, the sensory experience of being constrained by the EU (blockage schema) was completely in line with the conceptual experience of being imprisoned, being taken in the wrong direction or not having the freedom to grow up (three metaphor

scenarios) in the first stage. Likewise, the embodied experience of the UK having the power to act (enablement schema) was in line with the conceptualization of becoming a leader and taking back control, which was explored through the issue of controlling their own borders. In other words, the powerful narrative of the metaphor scenarios chosen was supported and reinforced by the sensory experience conveyed by all the image schemas. Whereas in the first stage a schema of blockage and constraint pervaded the negative portrayal of the EU, a schema of enablement ran through the construction of a newly empowered UK in the second stage. Since evaluations are embedded into the framings of metaphor scenarios, an umbrella of ethical reasoning ran through the narrative under analysis (Zappettini 2021): within this narrative, exiting the EU is the only path to regenerate their severely damaged national pride.

The metaphor scenarios in the first stage seemed to fulfill a role to delegitimize and cast a negative light on the unequal power dynamics between the two actors (the UK and the EU), very probably in a drive to mobilize the readership's emotions into opposing and othering the EU in the lead-up to the coming referendum. In turn, delegitimizing the EU was only the first step into validating a position to vote *leave*. The second and more important step was to shift attention away from the EU to focus on themselves as a nation: the need to regain its position as a leader and, eventually, take back control, as the compressed formula which resonated with them very likely by evoking strong emotions and a sense of understanding of the whole complex issue.

In the light of the above discussion and going back to the first research question —regarding the presence of evaluative and affective dimensions of metaphor scenarios and image schemas in the representation of Brexit, it can be answered positively. As for the second research question —related to the use of embodied actions to enhance the understanding of Brexit, there is no doubt that the use of image schemas was key in pushing forward the experiential basis triggered in real-time reasoning, grounding the conceptual nature of metaphor scenarios. Hence, a number of familiar actions, as points along a continuum leading to the referendum, were likely to guide the readership in their way towards the referendum: 'exiting' an unwelcome place and distancing yourself from those who are keeping you away from your personal interests; and eventually 'taking back control', which implies an empowered agent willing to 'stand up' to reclaim authority and decision-making power.

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