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## “THE EU” AND “BREXIT” CONCEPTS IN THE BRITISH POLITICAL DISCOURSE: COGNITIVE APPROACH

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**Abstract.** The paper deals with the cognitive features of “the EU” and “Brexit” concepts in the British political discourse. The study demonstrates that the political actors treat “The EU” and “Brexit” terms differently and resort to a series of strategies for the ambiguity of such concepts in the political communication. The analysis carried out in this paper shows that the meaning of the concepts is not something static but rather dynamic, which changes depending on the conceptual metaphor being imposed.

**Keywords:** the European Union, political discourse, Brexit, conceptual metaphor, political communication.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays a political discourse has become a topical issue in linguistics. A point to be noticed here is that due to divergent influence and dramatic events happening all over the world, people try to be aware of the political situation in other countries. Politics is of considerable significance as a phenomenon that explains the influence of speeches, debates and hearings on people. It is obvious that intentions and ideas of politicians are sufficiently identified and hidden in conceptual metaphors.

Within the paradigm of cognitive linguistics, the study of conceptual metaphor, as a basic cognitive device that allows us to deal with abstract domains of experience, has become one of the subjects of linguistics.

The aim of the article is to give a general description of “The EU” and “Brexit” concepts taking into consideration their influence on shaping the public mental set and opinions and to state the role of conceptual metaphors in the British political discourse.

Traditionally the term discourse refers to “the whole process of interaction of which a text is just a part” [5, p. 24]. Refining the definition, we can see that there exists interrelation between the language and the social reality. It is possible to detect that it is necessary to analyse political discourse in order to understand the connection between language and power in different aspects.

In linguistics the political discourse, as a subcategory of discourse in general, “can be based on two criteria: functional and thematic. Political discourse is a result of politics and it is historically and culturally determined. It fulfills various functions due to different political activities” [5; 6]. It is evident that political discourse is a set of speech acts that are used in the political discussions, political beliefs

and also its negative manifestation. Any kind of text affects consciousness of a listener, but this affect is the main aim of communication.

## 2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

It must be mentioned that there are general issues that determine the process of political communication such as *power, conflict, control, or domination* [1; 4; 5; 6]. The politicians all over the world use the techniques that can control people's choices and beliefs. A political discourse can model interests of the society, it is connected with the future context which aims at the future success that cannot be proved now. That is why it is beneficial for politicians because the time of verification is not identified.

Consequently, any political discourse is the usage of a language in the socio-political sphere of communication. It accompanies a political act in a political situation. As a language material of researches there can be speeches of politicians, political comments, publications in mass media etc. The function of persuasion is the main function of political discourse, because any political text affects people's minds. It is evident that the speech effect is the main aim of communication.

Nowadays the European Union is often characterized by "missed opportunities" [2] or an "awkward partner" [7]. This also has caused an identified position of Great Britain. On the one hand, Britain is one of the leading members of the European Union. On the other hand, Britain remains independent, stays outside and it still does not have its role.

It is reasonable to assume that the processes of European integration caused a set of profound consequences in the socio-cultural sphere. This led not only to the formation of a new kind of discourse, but to the serious political and economical changes. The beginning of the formation of political discourse is considered to be the 90s of the XX century. The idea of the united Europe plays a major role in the European integration discourse. There is the assumption that the European integration can be described by the Aesopian motto 'United we stand, divided we fall'.

The main figures in the development of the European integration discourse are the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the Western European Union and the European Court of Justice. It is important that within these organizations the most important official documents are created – official speeches, resolutions, declarations and also the material that is produced by mass media. Thus, in 1992 *Margaret Thatcher* during her speech in the Hague provided the suggestion that "*such a body [a European Community of 30 nations, ...] is an even more utopian enterprise than the Tower of Babel. For at least the builders of Babel all spoke the same language when they began*" [11]. The conclusion on this issue is ambiguous.

The main strategy of the European integration is cooperative because it supports the integrational processes. The obvious explanation of these phenomena is that the new values were formed which became common for a new kind of community. With this a new system of social and mental values are being created. The aim of the European Union was to develop the way of building the society that will meet the needs of almost all European countries. "*New Europe is above all a community of values. Europe has spread these values throughout the world*" [16]. These values are based on the old ones or they are called European traditional values and on the new values that are connected with the future. Suppose, these values are : tolerance, belief, freedom, justice, peace, solidarity, human rights, new community and others. "*The European values should capture the public's aspiration: a better balance between work and family, combining growth with environmental well-being, and achieving economic dynamism with social cohesion*" [17].

It's possible to follow different explanations what the European Union is and according to them there is a wide range of definitions from an "*objet politique non-identifié*" to "*a technocratic edifice*" [8] from "*a Family of Nations*" [11] to a "*concept charged with significance*" [10]. The usage of such conceptual metaphors in the political discourse implies the idea of European integration and it is the indicator of

the ideological system of European Union. The key moment in determination of ideological specificity is striving to find the European identity.

Another case of interest is that there were the events that reflect some negative perception of Europe. One of these memories is totalitarianism and the belief that one nation must completely dominate other peoples, or the Cold War that separated Eastern and Western Europe, or the period of stagnation. The crucial point is that Europe has overcome all that 'black spots' on its history and became a strong, united and democratic alliance. The European policy aims at the common goal that will unite all European peoples. So all the communication techniques and acts of politicians reflect the idea of the perfect future, ideal social system and the utopian idea of Europe.

After the referendum in the United Kingdom in 2016, a point of extensive discussion was *Brexit* (*British exit*) from the European Union. In our opinion the articles from BBC news clearly demonstrate the reasons of this event. As a result the thoughts and opinions of such well known politicians and public figures as Theresa May, David Cameron, Donald Tusk, David Davis, Nigel Farage, James Dyson, Angela Merkel, John Kerry, Rebecca Harms, Enda Kenny, Andrew Lansley, Iain Duncan Smith, Beata Szydlo and others have been analysed in this article, considering the importance of the British political discourse and the role of "The EU" and "Brexit" concepts in it.

On analysing 50 articles from the BBC news we consider it possible to state that all politicians tend to be "political actors" and treat "The EU" and "Brexit" terms differently and with some restrictions. To mask the politicians' attitude to Brexit and the EU such means of communication as *conceptual metaphors* are used in their speeches.

Thus, David Cameron would attempt to "*steady the ship*" of Brexit over the coming weeks and months and was not absolutely clear in his different speeches about the position of Britain in/out the EU:

*"The British people have voted to leave the European Union and their will must be respected," said Mr Cameron. "The will of the British people is an instruction that must be delivered".*

*"If I didn't think it was in Britain's interests to stay in the European Union I wouldn't argue for our membership. I think the situation today is what we need is a reform of the European Union and then a referendum where the British people, not me but the British people watching at home, they have the choice in an in/out referendum by the end of 2017".*

He is convinced that in a few years British people will realize their mistake, but their opinion must be respected now.

UKIP leader Nigel Farage hailed Brexit as the UK's "*independence day*" and told the supporters:

*"Dare to dream that the dawn is breaking on an independent United Kingdom".* After such speeches Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said she was "*absolutely determined*" to keep Scotland in the EU so a second Scottish independence referendum was now "*highly likely*".

Another leading Leave campaigner, Labour's Gisela Stuart, said the UK would be a "*good neighbour*" when it left the EU.

The reaction to Brexit of Boris Johnson, the ex-London mayor and public face of Vote Leave, was rather controversial. On the one hand, he said he had not yet decided whether to support David Cameron's campaign for Britain to remain in the European Union and declared his position as "*no need for haste*" about severing the UK's ties. Mr. Johnson said voters had "*searched in their hearts*" and the UK now had a "*glorious opportunity*" to pass its own laws, set its own taxes and control its own borders. At a Brexit party, he said: "*If the predictions are right, this will be a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, and a victory for decent people*".

Another supporter of Brexit was David Davis who called for a "*brisk but measured*" approach, with a likely exit from the EU around December 2018. He said the "*first order of business*" should be to strike trade deals with non EU countries. Moreover Mr. Davis stated that the "*ideal outcome*" would be "*continued tariff-free access*" to the EU single market, adding:

*"Once the European nations realise we will not budge on control of our borders, they will want to talk, in their own interests".*

The political speeches of James Dyson aim at no compromise on membership of the single market. As a result he is sure that the UK would do far better if it is no longer bound by any EU rules:

*"I think we should be absolutely out," he said. "If Europe wants to have free trade with us, then that's great, if they don't, we won't. It's the freedom - we don't have things imposed on us by Brussels. We can make our own laws and determine our own future and determine our own trade deals with other countries throughout the world. I'm thrilled. I think it is a liberation and a wonderful opportunity for all of us".*

Guy Verhofstadt, who was given the role of negotiator by the leaders of the main party blocks in the parliament, said he was not out for revenge against the UK and called for an end to what he said had been the *"collective depression on both sides of the channel"* after June's Brexit vote.

*"Brexit is not a liability. I see it more as an opportunity... We have our duty, our responsibility to make from Brexit a success for Europe, for all the citizens of Europe. Brexit is not a matter of punishment. It's not a matter of revenge... It's in my opinion a question of the sound relations between Britain and Europe",* he stressed.

The UK PM Theresa May was rather restricted and reserved in her political speeches expressing her attitude to the EU and Brexit. She said she wanted to *"make a success of Brexit"* and would *"seek to address the concerns of the British people about free movement"* while working for a *"close economic relationship with the EU"*. The UK Prime Minister stressed that the UK was *"not leaving Europe or withdrawing from the world. Once we have left the EU we will continue to work with our partners across Europe, indeed Brexit is an opportunity to intensify those relationships"*.

Despite the growing tendency of most politicians to present Britain out if the EU there appears a regressive force of other politicians who support the Britain's Europeanness.

Mr Van Rompuy rejected suggestions that the EU should have given former Prime Minister David Cameron a better deal after he sought reform of the UK's relationship with the EU, saying the main reason for the Brexit vote *"lies in Britain"*. He said EU leaders had warned former Prime Minister David Cameron it would be a *"mistake"* to hold a referendum on membership. The politician stressed that the UK already had a *"very special status"* within the EU, which was illustrated by it not being a member of the eurozone or the Schengen Agreement, but this meant it was also *"not fully a member of the hardcore where decisions are taken"*. *"Britain had not many friends anymore,"* Mr Van Rompuy said. He added that not only he but most European leaders still viewed Brexit as a *"political amputation of the first degree"*.

Being the supporter of the EU, the politician stated:

*"Because Europe was for many countries still a model, a model that you can achieve peace among peoples and states that waged wars for centuries, so it was a model of co-operation and integration"*.

According to the policy of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British people should have thought twice before the referendum:

*"Nobody wants a long period of limbo. Neither the British people nor the European member states. Everyone has an interest that the preparations are conducted in a thorough manner, that the positions are clear, and I think it is absolutely understandable that Britain needs a certain amount of time for this"*.

She expressed *"great regret"* at the outcome, and EU chiefs said they expected the UK to begin negotiations to leave *"as soon as possible, however painful that process may be"*.

Supporting the idea of the UK/EU relationship, the US Secretary of State John Kerry said:

*"As Britain and the EU begin negotiating the new terms of their partnership, America is rooting for and will do all we can to try to encourage and assist in the development of the smoothest possible transition and a highly integrated and collaborative EU/UK relationship. The British have told us that they can't sign any kind of new trade agreement... until they are no longer a member of the EU. So there is a time period here no matter what, the process that may take at least a couple of years before anyone can contemplate some kind of agreement"*.

Hence, it is obvious that Brexit was an unexpected event not only in the political life the EU, but for the whole world as well. Nowadays Britain must prove its status of *"a great global player"* and the fact it can take back the control as an isolated from the European Union country.

After analysing the speeches of the majority of politicians we must state that conceptual metaphors are a key to understanding some aspects of political communication. These metaphors are meant to persuade listeners and readers that what is said by politicians about the EU and Brexit is worth

listening to and reading. Thus, it is possible to confirm that the politicians' attitude to Brexit is hidden in such conceptual metaphors:

"a great future/success", "glorious victory" "a velvet divorce", "fresh leadership", "a political amputation", "independence day", "pulling up the drawbridge", "great regret", "a good neighbour", "hard-fought campaign", "not a liability", "freedom", "a long period of limbo", "a joke", "self-interested" and "stark contrast", "championing leave", and "a period of deep instability and uncertainty" etc.

The selected conceptual metaphorical expressions of the term "the EU" reveals the importance of such a concept in the political communication:

"ideal outcome", "a business market", "a good partner", "a business dictator", "The Tower of Babel" etc.

The concept of the European Union presents the idea of the unity as a united system, united partnership and united family. After the referendum in summer 2016 there started the period of disagreement, disputes and conflicts. The point is that Britain will become an isolated leader, but not an enemy of the European Union and Britain will continue cooperation and integration. The political discourse is impossible without the historical events that will help predict some future developments. However, great attention is given to the formation of a New Europe, new leadership, new cooperation that is set by the goal of unification of people who live in Europe.

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

From the brief analysis we can conclude that our cognitive system is determined by a great number of conceptual metaphors, some of which are deeply embodied. The EU and Brexit concepts can be metaphorically conceptualised in the political discourse in different ways: both with positive and negative evaluations. The use of conceptual metaphors is two-fold: to describe a complex political reality and guide readers' value judgement according to the logic displayed by the usage of such conceptual metaphors.

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Стаття присвячена загальному опису когнітивних ознак концептів EU та Brexit у британському політичному дискурсі. Дослідження демонструє той факт, що політичні актори по-різному тлумачать такі терміни як EU та Brexit і вдаються до певних стратегій щодо двозначності цих концептів у політичній комунікації. Здійснений аналіз вказує на те, що значення досліджуваних концептів не є статичним, а динамічним, яке змінюється внаслідок застосованої концептуальної метафори.

**Ключові слова:** Європейський Союз (ЄС), Брекзіт, політичний дискурс, концептуальна метафора, політична комунікація.