A Metadiscourse Analysis of Brexit Resignations by Government Aides from May's Second Ministry

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434

List of Abbreviations

EU	European Union
PPS	Parliamentary Private Secretary
UK	The United Kingdom

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المستخلص

فحصت هذه الورقة استقالتين رسميتين مقدمة من الأمناء البرلمانيين الخاصين من حكومة تيريزا ماي الثانية :سويلا برافرمان وآن ماري تريفيليان أعضاء الحكومة ومجلس النواب .شغلت سويلا برافرمان منصب وكيل وزارة الخارجية البرلمانية للخروج من الاتحاد الأوروبي بينما شغلت آن ماري تريفيليان منصب السكرتيرة البرلمانية الخاصة لوزارة التعليم .استقال المساعدان الحكوميان من منصبهما الحكوميين بسبب مسودة اتفاقية الانسحاب من الاتحاد الأوروبي المقرر التصويت عليها في مجلس العموم في 15يناير 2019.تم فحص الاستقالات المختارة باستخدام الفئة التفاعلية من نموذج ما فوق الخطاب (Hyland,2005) . وفحصت الدراسة الاستقالات لاستخدام التحوطات والمعززات وعلامات الموقف والذكر الذاتي وعلامات المشاركة للتحقيق في الوسائل التي استخدمها أعضاء الحكومة المستقيلون لتوضيح مواقفهم المعارضة .وكشفت الدراسة أن الرفض موجه بشكل أساسي نحو الشروط المقترحة لصفقة المغادرة .علاوة على ذلك، أظهر التحليل استخدام المساعدتين لعلامات الموقف لتسليط الضوء على معارضتهم القوية لمسودة اتفاقية الانسحاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية :خطاب خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، خطاب المعارضة، استقالات مساعدي الحكومة، نموذج ما فوق الخطاب.

Abstract

This paper examined two official resignation letters submitted by Parliamentary Private Secretaries from Theresa May's second government: Suella Braverman, MP and Anne-Marie Trevelyan, MP. Suella Braverman served as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union while Anne-Marie Trevelyan served as Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Department for Education. The two government aides resigned from their government positions over Brexit Withdrawal Agreement Draft scheduled for voting in the House of Commons on 15th January 2019. The selected resignations were examined using the interactional category from the Metadiscourse model (Hyland, 2005). The study examined the letters for the use of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions and engagement markers to investigate the means the resigning aides used to explicate their opposing stances. The study revealed that the rejection is directed mainly towards the proposed terms of the departure's deal. Further, it showed the aides' use of attitude markers to highlight their strong opposition to the Withdrawal Agreement Draft.

Key words: Brexit Discourse, Opposition discourse, Government aides' resignations, the Metadiscourse Model.

1. Introduction

According to Wallenfeldt (2024), Brexit is portmanteau word formed from the two words "British" and "exit" used to refer to the UK's decision to end its membership of the European Union following the referendum held on 23rd June 2016. The result of the referendum supported the leave option and David Cameron the UK's prime minister then announced his resignation and Thersa May was appointed as his successor to lead the negotiations on the terms of the UK's departure deal (Walker, 2021). The pathway of negotiating the terms of the exit deal was challenging and conflictual causing a torrent of resignations from May's second ministry. The fundamental reason for these resignations was the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement Draft scheduled for the meaningful vote on 15th January 2019. Thus, examining some of the government aides' resignations submitted over Brexit offers an opportunity to investigate an under researched area of Brexit discourse and to understand the means of expressing their opposing views.

2. Previous Research

This section explores previous studies conducted on Brexit discourse in addition to previous research conducted using the Metadiscourse Model.

2.1 Previous studies on Brexit Discourse

Brexit discourse was the centre of abundant research using a plethora of theories. Analysing the media campaigns of either pro-leave or pro-remain received much attention (Buckledee, 2018; Freedman, 2020; Parlington & Zuccato, 2018; Spencer & Oppermann, 2020; Zappettini, 2019a).Moreover, discourse analysis studies were conducted on Brexit discourse employed by political parties (Bennett, 2019a; Cap, 2019), political leaders' discourse (Brusenbauch

Meislová, 2018; Wodak, 2018), political institutions' discourse (Wenzl, 2019), and voters' discourse (Miglbauer & Koller, 2019; Tolson, 2019).Furthermore, discourse studies were conducted on the newspaper coverage of the referendum including both hard as well as electronic copies (Maccaferri, 2019). Also, the scope of Brexit discourse research extended to examine the representation of Brexit on certain social media platforms e.g., Twitter (Zappavigna, 2019) and Facebook (Bossetta et al., 2018). Additionally, some studies were conducted on the shape of the UK-EU's future relation shared on media platforms (Henkel, 2018; Lutzky & Kehoe, 2019; Zappettini, 2020). Further, the conceptual metaphors implemented to describe Brexit were multiply investigated (Đurović & Silaški, 2018; Koller & Ryan, 2019; Musolff, 2017, 2019; Rodet, 2020; Tincheva, 2019a, 2019b, 2020). In addition, the description of Brexit outside the UK's border in media platforms was investigated plentifully (Aiezza, 2021; Brusenbauch Meislová, 2021; Filardo-Llamas, 2021; Kopf, 2021; Knoblock, 2021; Miglbauer and Koller, 2021; Queraltó, 2021). Consequently, Brexit discourse piqued the interest of many researchers using different data except for Brexit resignations by government members over Brexit negotiations.

2.2 Previous research on Metadiscourse

Hyland (2017) assert that metadiscourse is inherently used to examine academic discourse. Much work has been done on the investigation of academic discourse (Abdollahzadeh, 2011; Hyland, 2005; Hyland and Tse, 2004; Mu et al., 2015), the discourse of classrooms (Hu and Cao, 2011). Nonetheless, the scope of metadiscourse has extended to encompass the discourse of corporate correspondence mainly emails (Ho, 2018; Huang and Rose, 2018), the discourse of advertising

(Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Wang, 2012), news interviews discourse (McKeown and Ladegaard, 2020), and newspapers discourse (Dafouz-Milne, 2008; Kuhi and Mojood, 2014). Yet, the use of metadiscourse in the investigation of political discourse is heretofore underexplored.

3. Objectives of the Study

The current study attempts to investigate selected official resignations letters submitted over Brexit Withdrawal Agreement's negotiations by two British government aides who served in Theresa May's second government. It seeks to contribute to the studies conducted on Brexit discourse by exploring an under researched area i.e., the discourse of resignations by government officials who also served as members of the British House of Commons. Additionally, it attempts to apply Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model to data other than academic discourse.

4. Significance of the study

This study seeks to make inroads into linguistic research done on Brexit discourse by selecting data heretofore not seclected for conducting linguistic research i.e., the resignation letters submitted by government aides over Brexit Withdrawal Draft. Further, it attempts to extend the scope of Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model from being primarily used to investigate academic discourse to be used in scrutinizing political discourse.

5. Research Questions

To fulfill the study's objective, the study proposes the following research questions:

1. What are the metadiscourse interactional subcategories used by the resigning aides to express their opposition?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the use of the metadiscourse interactional subcategories?

6. Research Methodology

The study adopts a quantitative approach putting in use the interactional category from Hyland's (2005) Metadiscourse Model. According to Hyland (2005), metadiscourse is "embodying the interactions necessary for successful communication" (p.41). Hyland (2005) perceives metadiscourse "as a social and communicative engagement, offering a means of understanding the ways we project ourselves into our texts to manage our communicative intentions" (p.14). Hyland (2005) confirms that "metadiscourse studies must begin with functional classifications and analyses of texts" (p.36). Hence, the model's interactional category comprises five subcategories summarised as follows in Table 1.

Table 1

Metadiscourse Model's Interactional Subcategories

Subcategory	Function	Examples
Hedges	Withhold commitment	Perhaps, may
Boosters	Emphasise certainty	Clear; definitely
Attitude Markers	Express attitude	Unfortunately,
Self-mentions	Explicit reference to the author	I, my, we,
Engagement markers	Establish author-reader relationship	Consider, note

Source (Hyland, 2005)

7. Data Description

The current study examines two selected resignations officially tendered by parliamentary private secretaries -PPS- from Theresa May's second ministry: MP Suella Barverman

and MP Anne-Marie Trevelyan. The selection criteria for the resignation letters are as follows:

A. Both PPS served in Theresa May's second ministry.
B. Both PPS tendered their resignations in opposition to Brexit's Withdrawal Agreement Draft.
C. Both PPS resigned from the government by submitting official resignation letters holding their signature.
D. Both PPS resigned in the same month; November 2018.

Table 2 provides a brief description of the resiginig aides, their positions, and their resignation dates.

Table 2

A Brief Description of the Resigning Aides

Minister's Name		Position & Office	Date of resignation
	Suella Braverman	Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union	15th November 2018
	Anne-Marie Trevelyan	Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Department for Education	15th November 2018

Original copies of the selected resignation letters were obtained from the resigning aides' official Twitter accounts. Figures 1 and 2 below show authentic copies of the aides' resignations.

441

Figure 1

Suella Braverman's Resignation Letter

SUELLA BRAVERMAN M.P.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th November 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

This is a difficult letter to write. One which I never expected to compose. It has been an immense honour to support you in delivering the historic opportunity of leaving the EU as a Parliamentary U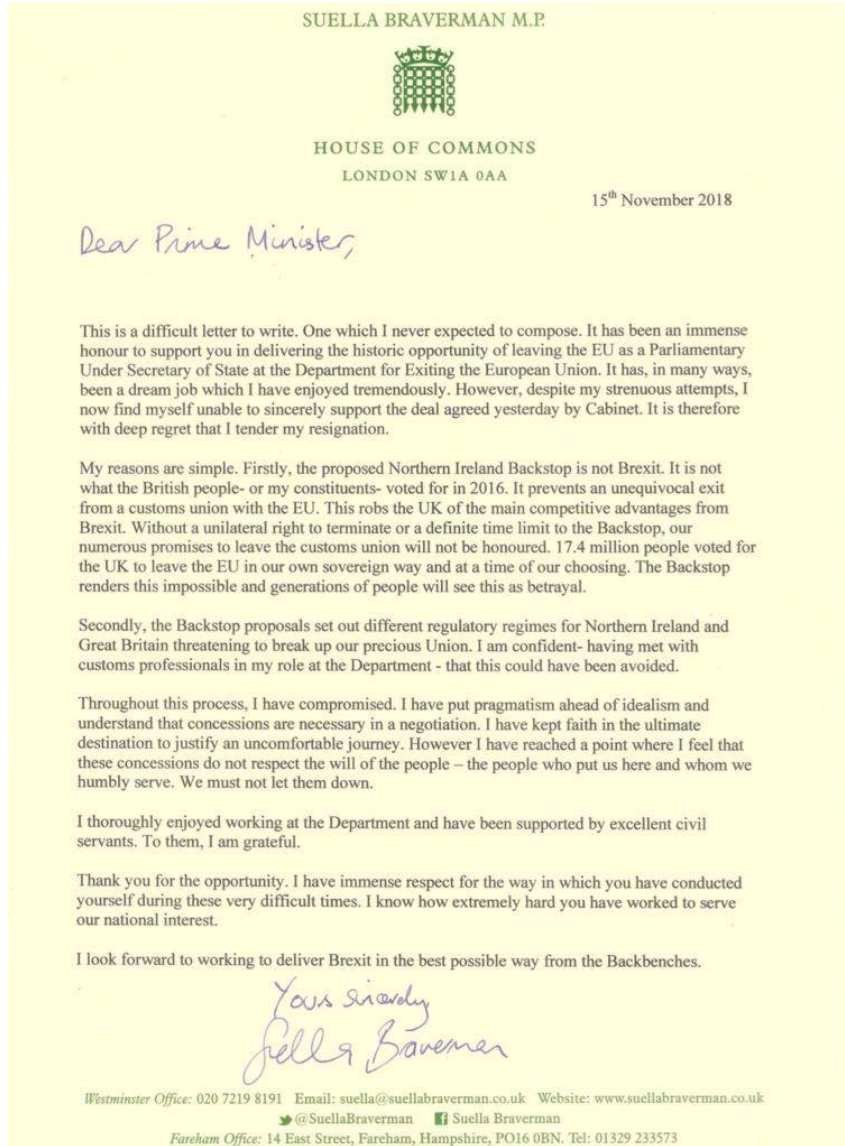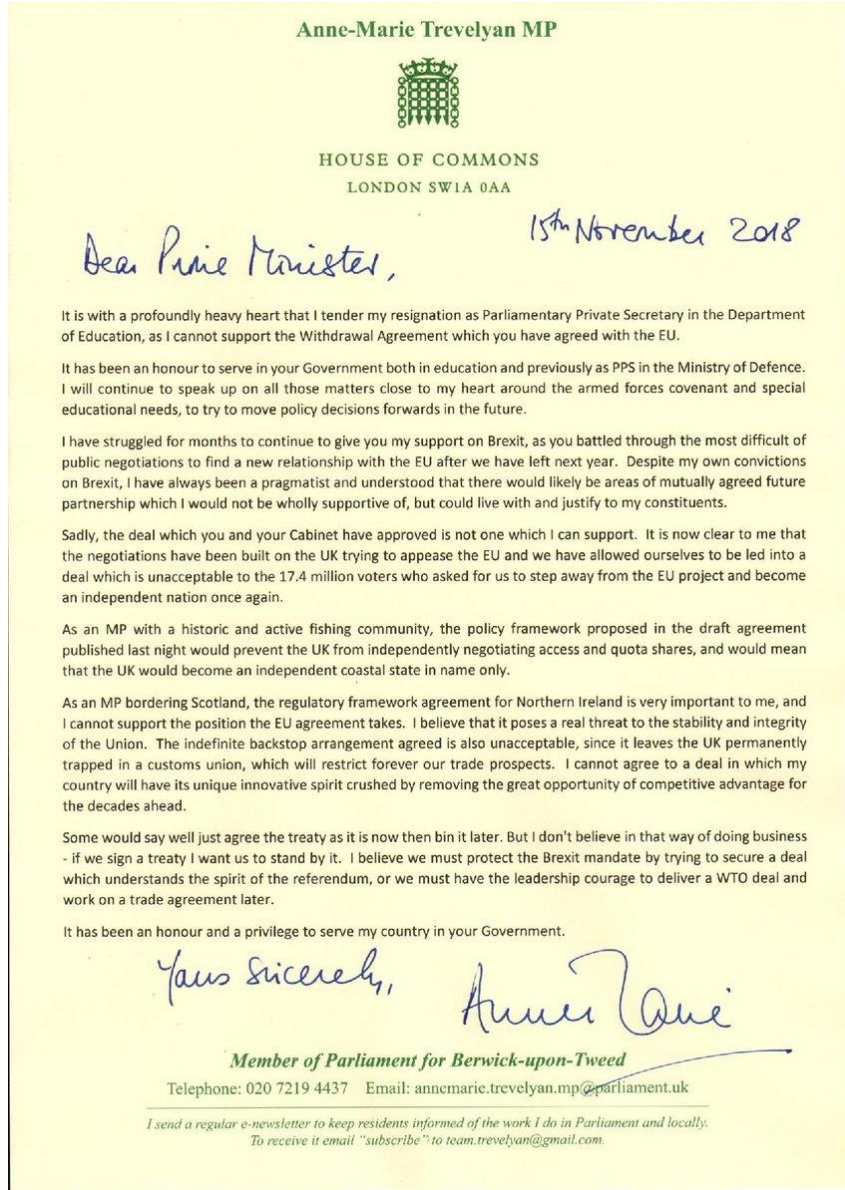nder Secretary of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union. It has, in many ways, been a dream job which I have enjoyed tremendously. However, despite my strenuous attempts, I now find myself unable to sincerely support the deal agreed yesterday by Cabinet. It is therefore with deep regret that I tender my resignation.

My reasons are simple. Firstly, the proposed Northern Ireland Backstop is not Brexit. It is not what the British people- or my constituents- voted for in 2016. It prevents an unequivocal exit from a customs union with the EU. This robs the UK of the main competitive advantages from Brexit. Without a unilateral right to terminate or a definite time limit to the Backstop, our numerous promises to leave the customs union will not be honoured. 17.4 million people voted for the UK to leave the EU in our own sovereign way and at a time of our own choosing. The Backstop renders this impossible and generations of people will see this as betrayal.

Secondly, the Backstop proposals set out different regulatory regimes for Northern Ireland and Great Britain threatening to break up our precious Union. I am confident- having met with customs professionals in my role at the Department - that this could have been avoided.

Throughout this process, I have compromised. I have put pragmatism ahead of idealism and understand that concessions are necessary in a negotiation. I have kept faith in the ultimate destination to justify an uncomfortable journey. However I have reached a point where I feel that these concessions do not respect the will of the people – the people who put us here and whom we humbly serve. We must not let them down.

I thoroughly enjoyed working at the Department and have been supported by excellent civil servants. To them, I am grateful.

Thank you for the opportunity. I have immense respect for the way in which you have conducted yourself during these very difficult times. I know how extremely hard you have worked to serve our national interest.

I look forward to working to deliver Brexit in the best possible way from the Backbenches.

Yours sincerely,

Suella Braverman

Westminster Office: 020 7219 8191   Email: suella@suellabraverman.co.uk   Website: www.suellabraverman.co.uk
@SuellaBraverman   Suella Braverman
Fareham Office: 14 East Street, Fareham, Hampshire, PO16 0BN. Tel: 01329 233573

Figure 2

Anne-Marie Trevelyan's Resignation Letter

Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

15th November 2018

Dear Prime Minister,

It is with a profoundly heavy heart that I tender my resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Department of Education, as I cannot support the Withdrawal Agreement which you have agreed with the EU.

It has been an honour to serve in your Government both in education and previously as PPS in the Ministry of Defence. I will continue to speak up on all those matters close to my heart around the armed forces covenant and special educational needs, to try to move policy decisions forwards in the future.

I have struggled for months to continue to give you my support on Brexit, as you battled through the most difficult of public negotiations to find a new relationship with the EU after we have left next year. Despite my own convictions on Brexit, I have always been a pragmatist and understood that there would likely be areas of mutually agreed future partnership which I would not be wholly supportive of, but could live with and justify to my constituents.

Sadly, the deal which you and your Cabinet have approved is not one which I can support. It is now clear to me that the negotiations have been built on the UK trying to appease the EU and we have allowed ourselves to be led into a deal which is unacceptable to the 17.4 million voters who asked for us to step away from the EU project and become an independent nation once again.

As an MP with a historic and active fishing community, the policy framework proposed in the draft agreement published last night would prevent the UK from independently negotiating access and quota shares, and would mean that the UK would become an independent coastal state in name only.

As an MP bordering Scotland, the regulatory framework agreement for Northern Ireland is very important to me, and I cannot support the position the EU agreement takes. I believe that it poses a real threat to the stability and integrity of the Union. The indefinite backstop arrangement agreed is also unacceptable, since it leaves the UK permanently trapped in a customs union, which will restrict forever our trade prospects. I cannot agree to a deal in which my country will have its unique innovative spirit crushed by removing the great opportunity of competitive advantage for the decades ahead.

Some would say well just agree the treaty as it is now then bin it later. But I don't believe in that way of doing business - if we sign a treaty I want us to stand by it. I believe we must protect the Brexit mandate by trying to secure a deal which understands the spirit of the referendum, or we must have the leadership courage to deliver a WTO deal and work on a trade agreement later.

It has been an honour and a privilege to serve my country in your Government.

Yours Sincerely,

Anne Marie

Member of Parliament for Berwick-upon-Tweed
Telephone: 020 7219 4437   Email: annemarie.trevelyan.mp@parliament.uk

I send a regular e-newsletter to keep residents informed of the work I do in Parliament and locally.
To receive it email "subscribe" to team.trevelyan@gmail.com.

443

8. Analysis and Discussion

The journey of composing the deal of the UK's departure from the EU's membership was uneasy and conflictual. Since the Withdrawal Agreement would shape the UK-EU future, items of the agreement should be beneficial for the two sides. However, the draft put before the Cabinet by the prime minister was rejected and caused the resignation of many of them from their positions in the government. The resigning members wrote official letters to explain their rejection and attitudes towards the drafted deal. The current study attempts to investigate two of these letters to find out the opposing attitudes and whether they were intensified or mitigated.

8.1 Metadiscourse Analysis of Braverman's Resignation

Suella Braverman officially tendered her resignation from her role as a PPS in May's second ministry on 15th November 2018. Her resignation letter consisted of 402 words and 29 sentences counted using Voyant Counting Tool (Sinclair& Geoffrey, 2016). Braverman asserted in her letter that the fundamental reason for her resignation is the Withdrawal Agreement Draft as it would cause many insurmountable issues that the UK would be unable to deal with. The analysis showed the predominance of attitude markers at 16.7%, followed by self-mentions at 8.5% while engagement markers' percentage is 3.5%. Boosters and hedges are not frequently used as the other interactional subcategories. While boosters are little used at 1.2%, hedges are the least used among all the interactional subcategories at 0.7%.

Table 2 presents the textual analysis, the number of occurrences, and the percentage of each of the interactional subcategories while figure 3 shows the distribution of the categories visually.

444

Table 3

*Interactional Categories in Braverman's Resignation Letter*

Interactional category	Textual Realisation	No. of occurrences	Percentage
Hedges	Could(x1)- feel(x1)- possible(x1)	3	0.7%
Boosters	Definite- find- know- must- never	5	1.2%
Attitude Markers	Difficult- never- expected- immense- honour- support- historic- dream- enjoyed- tremendously- unable- sincerely- support- agreed- regret- simple- not Brexit- voted for- prevents- unequivocal- robs- main- competitive-	67	16.7%

	advantages-unilateral right-terminate-definite-numerous-promises- not honoured-own-sovereign-choosing-renders-impossible-betrayal-different-regulatory-threatening-break up-precious Union-confident-been avoided-compromised-put ahead-pragmatism-necessary-kept faith-ultimate-justify-uncomfortable - not respect-humbly-		

	serve- let down- thoroughly- enjoyed- immense- difficult- extremely- hard-national interest- worked- best- possible		
Self-mentions	I(x15)-My(x5)-We(x2)-Our(x5)-Us(x1)	34	8.5%
Engagement markers	You(x4)-yourself(x1)-do not(x1)-find(x1)-must(x1)-see(x1)- set our(x1)-us(x1)-We(x2)	14	3.5%

Figure 3

Distribution of Interactional Categories in Braverman's Resignation
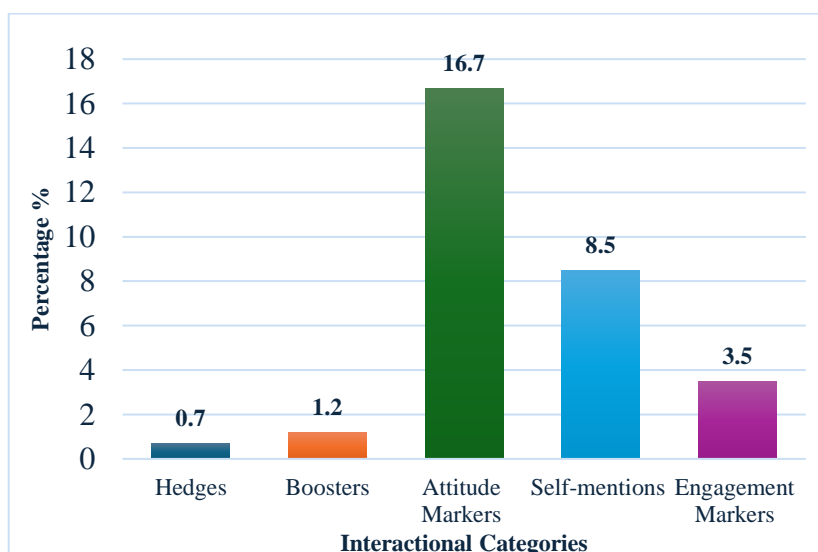
8.2 Metadiscourse Analysis of Trevelyan's Resignation

Ann-Marie Trevelyan left her position in May's second ministry as a PPS in the Department for Education on 15th November 2018. Her letter of resignation comprises 487 words and 18 sentences according to Voyant Counting Tool (Sinclair& Geoffrey, 2016). Trevelyan's resignation highlights her perception of Brexit in addition to her rejection of the drafted deal. Trevelyan presumes that the Withdrawal Draft is likely to stunt the UK's independence by giving the EU privileges without an accurate date specifying the end of the UK's membership on the EU. The analysis reveals the dominance of the attitude markers' subcategory at 15.8%, followed by the self-mentions at 5.7%, and then the engagement markers at 3.9%. The least utilised interactional subcategories are hedges and boosters. While hedges' percentage is 2.7%, boosters' percentage is 1.8%. Table 3 presents the textual analysis, the number of occurrences, and the percentage of each of the interactional subcategories while figure 4 shows the distribution of the categories visually.

Table 4

Interactional Categories in Trevelyan's Resignation Letter

Interactional category	Textual Realisation	No. of occurrences	Percentage
Hedges	Around(x1)- could(x1)- likely(x1)- would(x6)- cannot(x3)- can(x1)	13	2.7%
Boosters	Always(x2)- believe(x3)- clear- find- must(x2)	9	1.8%
Attitude Markers	Profoundly- heavy-not support- agreed- honour - previously- continue(x2)- speak up- close- try- move- forwards- struggled- give- support- battled through- most- difficult- new- left- always- pragmatist- understood- likely- mutually- agreed- not	77	15.8%

	wholly supportive- justify- sadly- approved- not one- support- now- clear- appease- allowed- unacceptable- step away- independent(x2)- historic-active- proposed- prevent- independently- in name only- very- important- not support- poses-real threat-indefinite- agreed- unacceptable- permanently- trapped- restrict- forever- not agree- unique- innovative- crushed- removing- great- competitive- decades ahead- agree- bin-		

	stand- protect-secure-understands-honour-privilege- serve		
Self-mentions	I(x11)- My(x7)- Me(x2)- We(x5)- Our(x1)- Us(x2)	28	5.7%
Engagement markers	You(x4)- your(x3)- us(x2)- allowed(x1)- find(x1)- must(x2)- don't-We(x5)	19	3.9%

Figure 4

Distribution of Interactional Categories in Trevelyan's Resignation
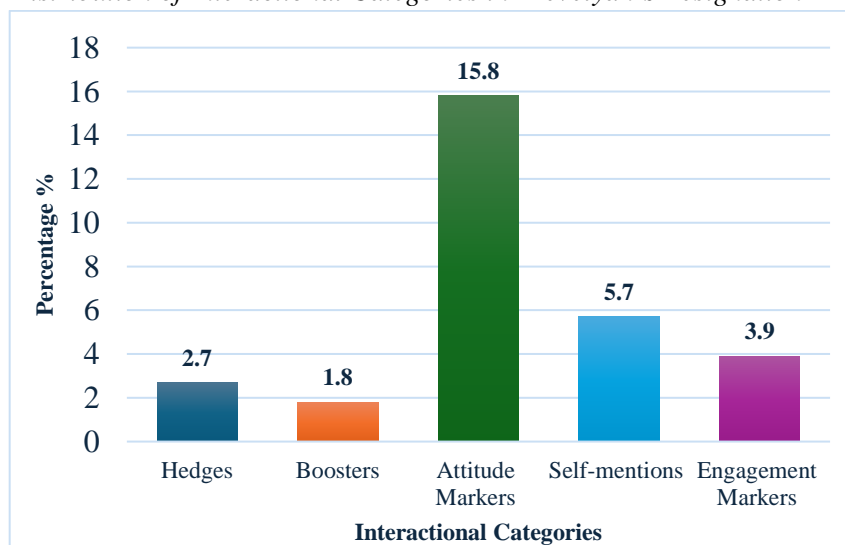
9. Findings

The analysis of the selected letters using the interactional category of the Metadiscourse model (Hyland, 2005) allows a thorough exploration of the resigning government aides' perceptions of Brexit, their rejecting stances, and the way they exgibit their opposition. Therefore, the findings could be summarised as follows:

1. Both PPS resigned mainly over the drafted deal.
2. The subcategory Attitude markers was the most dominant and frequently used by both PPS to heighten their opposition to the Withdrawal Agreement Draft.
3. The opposition was steadfast and clearly expressed using lexical choices highlighting negative attitude.
4. Self-mentions were the second most frequently used subcategories in both letters to establish a link with the reader by fostering a positive self-image underscoring the contributions they made throughout their tenure as government members.
5. Hedges were the least used subcategory in Braverman's resignation whereas boosters were the least used subcategories in Trevelyan's resignation.
6. There is a slight difference in the use of engagement markers in both letters.
7. The key quantitative findings could be summarised in table 5 and visually compared in figure 4 below

Table 5

Summary of the key quantitative findings

Interactional Subcategories	Braverman	Trevelyan
Hedges	0.7%	2.7%
Boosters	1.8%	1.8%

Attitude Markers	16.7%	15.8%
Self- mentions	8.5%	5.7%
Engagement Markers	3.5%	3.9%

Figure 5

Summary of the Interactional Subcategories in the selected Letters
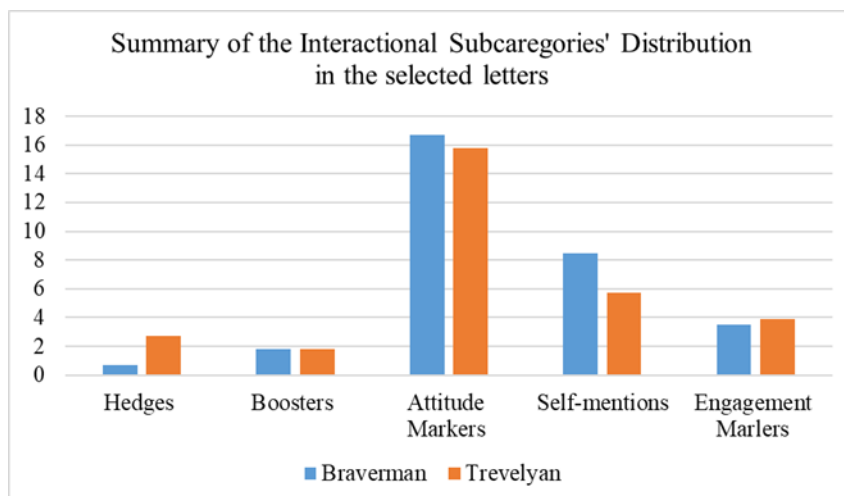
10. Conclusion

To conclude, this study attempted to explore an underexplored area of Brexit discourse, i.e., the discourse of government aides' resignations submitted over the Withdrawal Agreement Draft. The study employed the interactional category from the metadiscourse model (Hyland, 2005). The data comprised the resignation letters tendered by two members May's second government: Suella Braverman and Anne-Marie Trevelyan. The study concluded that the opposition is directed mainly towards the terms of the drafted deal and not towards the leave

decision. Further, the study revealed that attitude markers were the most frequently used from the metadiscourse subcategories to emphasise their opposition. Lastly, minor discrepancies in the distribution of hedges and boosters also existed.

11. Limitations and Recommendations

The limitations of the study are the lack of research done on Brexit resignations that could offer valuable insights into the research. Additionally, the study focuses on only two resignations submitted by two government aides on the same day. Therefore, the following recommendations could be made:

1. Extending the scope of the research to examine other resignations that might have been tendered within the same timeframe.

2. Examining other resignations from the perspective of gender performativity to investigate the likelihood of intersectionality between political roles and gender identity.

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