

The ‘Then’ and the ‘Now’ in Brexit Discourse:  
A Discourse-Historical Approach Case Study

ما كان والآن في الخطاب عن بريكست:  
دراسة في ضوء المدخل الى التحليل التاريخي للخطاب

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## The 'Then' and the 'Now' in Brexit Discourse: A Discourse-Historical Approach Case Study

The present paper investigates three speeches about Brexit delivered by the British Prime Minister Theresa May over the time span (2016-2019) from a discourse historical approach perspective. Brexit has been the most debated concern in British politics and media for almost three years now. In fact, voting for leaving the European Union was the main reason behind the resignation of the former British prime minister David Cameron, and the present one Theresa May coming in office. The present paper examines the Brexit discourse to highlight the similarities and differences in the discursive strategies employed over the past few years which led to what is now described as a (U turn) in Brexit process. The speeches are examined in the light of Wodak (2009) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). DHA defines discourse as “a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social actions” (Wodak et al, 2010, p.89). It can be concluded that the discursive strategies of nomination, predication, framing as well as argumentation have been manipulated differently at different points of time to achieve varying goals. Brexit is once framed as an opportunity in the first speech, a challenge in the second speech, then finally a heavy duty in the third speech.

**Keywords:** discourse-historical approach, political speeches, Brexit, Theresa May

ما كان والآن في الخطاب عن بريكست: دراسة في ضوء المدخل الى التحليل التاريخي للخطاب  
ملخص

تُعنى هذه الدراسة بتحليل ثلاث خطابات ألقته رئيسة الوزراء البريطانية تيريزا ماي حول بريكست في الفترة من ٢٠١٦ الى ٢٠١٩ وذلك في ضوء نظرية روث ودوك (٢٠٠٩) للتحليل التاريخي للخطاب. تعد اتفاقية بريكست أكثر الموضوعات المتداولة حالياً على الساحة البريطانية والدولية، بل أنها كانت سبباً مباشراً لاستقالة رئيس الوزراء السابق دايفيد كامرون وتولي خليفته تيريزا ماي رئاسة الوزراء. تسعى الدراسة إلى بيان الاستراتيجيات اللغوية والاستطرادية المستخدمة في الخطابات الثلاث وذلك لبيان مدى موائمتها للسياق التاريخي والاجتماعي والسياسي الذي أُلقيت خلاله. وقد أوضحت الدراسة أن استراتيجيات الحجاج اختلفت بشكل ملحوظ باختلاف السياق والهدف وكذلك اختلفت استراتيجيات التسمية والاشارة والتأطير لبريكست وما يحيط بها.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** التحليل التاريخي للخطاب، خطابات سياسية، بريكست، تيريزا ماي

## **Introduction**

“ ‘Brexit’ won the political word of the year 2016... you can hardly listen to a news bulletin here in the UK without hearing the word” (“Oxford Learner’s Dictionary”). A blend word formed by combining the two root words Britain and exit, in reference to the United Kingdom (UK) leave of the European Union (EU), Brexit- as a national concern- is the most heated topic in Britain. In fact, voting for leaving the EU was the main reason behind the resignation of the former British prime minister David Cameron, and the present one, Theresa May, coming in office.

The present paper is a case study of three speeches delivered by Theresa May, the British Prime Minister, on Brexit over the time span (2016-2019). It is designed to give a linguistic account of what is commonly termed nowadays as a (U Turn) in the Brexit process.

The analysis of the speeches is done in the light of Wodak’s (2009) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA). DHA is a field of study that falls under the umbrella of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Working along the same lines of thought pioneered by Fairclough (1995, 2002), van Dijk (2006), van Eemeren (1992, 2016), Ruth Wodak developed her model of analysing discourse using a triangulated approach, lending due importance to both the macro-context of the discourse as much as the micro-context.

The present work is two-fold oriented. First, the speeches are investigated to highlight the major discursive strategies used by the British Prime Minister over the past three years, showing the beginnings and transformations of arguments. This is meant to trace the ‘historical’ development in the discourse which has thus led to recontextualization of Brexit in the present. Second, it aims at drawing guidelines, based on the ‘then’ stages of Brexit, for a successful persuasive discourse, and at the same time, highlighting the pitfalls that could be the reason behind the stumbling of the process ‘now’.

Examining the selected speeches in the light of the above model of analysis helps shed light on the ups and downs manifested in the Brexit road ever since the 2016 Referendum until the 2019 No Deal Vote. On

another note, it also adds up to the literature on persuasive discourse, in general, and the discourse on Brexit, in particular.

### **Research Questions**

The present paper examines the selected speeches to shed light on the crossroads Brexit is arriving at recently. To achieve this, the following questions are answered:

1. What are the main topics covered in Theresa May's Brexit speeches?
2. What are the major events, processes, social actors involved in Brexit discourse?
3. How are they linguistically named and framed?
4. What are the main argumentation strategies used by Theresa May to legitimize or delegitimize a particular course of action?
5. How far have these strategies reflected the transformation in the Brexit process?
6. What are the most effective strategies used for persuasion and argumentation?

### **Theoretical Framework:**

In this case study, Wodak (2009) Discourse Historical Approach is used as the framework of analysis. It has been particularly chosen since it is a comprehensive research design, which is "useful in the analysis of discourses about racial, national, and ethnic issues" (Wodak, 2010). The data under investigation is a typical instance of a national issue, hence the choice of the framework. Secondly, 'discourse' as defined by Wodak is "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices... it is topic related, that is discourse on x" (pp.89-90), where x here is Brexit. It is worth noting that Wodak differentiates between discourse and text, where the former is more comprehensive and encompassing, while the latter are parts of discourses. Moreover, this is a 'triangulated approach' which enables the analyst to look into the data from different angles, which result in reliable and feasible findings.

In her model, Wodak identifies the strategies that are employed in the discursive construction of discourse. These are the discursive strategies of:

1. Referential/ nomination
2. Predication
3. Argumentation
4. Perspectivation, framing, or discourse representation,
5. Intensification and mitigation (2006, p.73).

Referential and nomination strategies are concerned with how the major social actors and events are named or categorized. Linguistically, this nomination is encoded in deictics, anthroponyms, metaphors, use of verbs and processes, etc. Predication, as the name implies, denotes how the actors or events are positively or negatively labelled, which is linguistically achieved through the use of explicit predicates or predicative adjectives, presuppositions, implicatures, rhetorical figures, etc.

Framing is concerned with the positioning of the speaker's point of view, which reflects the degree of engagement. This is particularly encoded in the use of either direct, indirect, or free indirect speech. Intensification and mitigation relate to the force of the utterances given by the speaker. The use of diminutives, tag questions, vague expressions, hyperboles, indirect speech acts are all linguistic devices that are employed to that effect.

The final discursive strategy, argumentation, lies at the heart of this model, and has received the biggest attention by critical discourse analysts in particular, and linguists working within other disciplines, in general. This strategy is based on the use of the concept of a "topos" (pl. topoi). Kienpointner (1992) defines "topoi" as "parts of argumentation which belong to the obligatory, either explicit or inferable premises. They are content-related warrants or 'conclusion rules', which connect the argument or arguments with the conclusion, the claim" (194).

Topos is a term that dates back to Aristotle's rhetoric, where it has been particularly mentioned/ used extensively in all forms of persuasive speeches. However, with the advent of modern argumentative theories, topoi have come to surface as one of the fundamental devices of argumentation. Within Wodak's model, there are fifteen major topoi.

Among the most commonly used topoi, and which are relevant to the present study:

1. Topos of Burdening
2. Topos of Reality
3. Topos of Numbers
4. Topos of Finances
5. Topos of History
6. Topos of Authority
7. Topos of Threat
8. Topos of Definition
9. Topos of Justice
10. Topos of Urgency (Wodak, 2006, p.74).

Each of these topoi can be best phrased as an argumentation schema, stating a premise, supported by a warrant, then leads to a conclusion (Wodak, 2009, p. 11). So, for instance, in the topos of history, which frequently exists in the data under investigation, it could be said that since history gives a specific lesson towards a particular course of action which turned out negatively, then a similar course of action should be omitted to avoid the same consequences. As for the topos of threat, it could be said that if a certain action is expected to pose danger/threat, it should be avoided.

**Methodology:**

As mentioned earlier, the present study is designed to account of the linguistic realisation of the instability and indecision facing the Brexit deal nowadays from a discourse historical approach perspective. It is a qualitative study that analyzes all the speeches in depth to show that major discursive strategies. In few instances, a quantitative count is adopted, simply as a means of supporting the point being made. It is noteworthy that no phonological level of analysis is taken into consideration, hence the researcher has worked on the full written transcripts of the speeches.

The researcher considers two major levels of analysis: 1) the immediate language of the speeches, and 2) the broader historical and sociopolitical context. The analysis of the speeches focuses on the

discursive strategies as per Wodak (2009) approach. Each speech is analysed to pinpoint these strategies. This is followed by comparing and contrasting the findings of each speech with the others. Finally, in the Discussion section, the implications of these findings are reviewed and interpreted.

### **Source of Data:**

The source of data in the present study is three speeches given by Theresa May, the current British Prime Minister over the span of time (2016-2019). A political speech is mainly defined as:

an argument of some kind: an attempt to provide others with reasons for thinking, feeling or acting in some particular way; to motivate them; to invite them to trust one in uncertain conditions; to get them to see situations in a certain light. ... [also] in some measure, adapt to audiences, confirming their expectations and respecting their boundaries, even as it tries to transform them (Finlayson & Martin, 2008, 450).

The selected speeches have been particularly chosen for a number of reasons. First, the choice of the speaker is of significance, not only because she is currently the British prime minister, but also being the former Home Secretary, who used to be an active “in” campaigner, before shifting to being the number one official in the “out” campaign and the one official responsible for the implementation of Brexit.

Secondly, the speeches took place at particular points of time, each of which marked a milestone in the Brexit route. The first was delivered by May in April 2016, when she was still Home Secretary, and an adamant Remain advocate. The second speech was delivered in January 2017, after being elected as Prime Minister, and the Leader of the Conservative party, who was specifically responsible for the implementation of the Leave process. This speech was a route-map for the execution of the Brexit Deal. Finally, the last speech, given in January 2019, marked a come-back attempt after the crushing defeat with the Parliament voting “No” to the Brexit Deal.



Accordingly, examining her speeches at these different 'historical' moments could unveil the reasons of the indeterminacies that inflicted the Brexit deal over the last couple of years.

### **Review of Literature**

Analysing political speeches has always occupied a central position within CDA studies. Political discourse has been widely investigated (e.g. Fairclough 2002; Jones & Collins 2006; Wodak & Chilton. 2005; Wodak & Meyer 2009). This interest in the holistic, ideological and linguistic features of political speeches has culminated in the development of van Dijk's (1997) Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) as theoretical framework. PDA is seen by van Dijk as "both about political discourse, and it is also a critical enterprise". He argues that in conducting a critical analysis of political discourse such as political speeches, the analyst has to take into consideration three main components: (1) political actors or authors, (2) the assumed recipients of the political speech, and (3) political speech itself (1997). A number of studies adopted the PDA approach (Carreon, and Svetanant, 2017; Hussein, 2016, Al-Majali, 2015; Wang, 2010).

Using argumentation theories has also been a tool of analysis of political discourse. Adopting the pragma-dialectical approach of argumentation, van Eemeren (2010) has employed the strategies of argumentation in examining the motto of the European Union "in Varietate Concordia". Mohammed and Zarefsky (2011) have used this model of analysis in examining Barak Obama speech in Cairo 2009, where they conclude that this approach helps in 'reconstructing' Obama's logic and shows how he manages to deal with multiple audiences simultaneously.

What is of particular concern to the present study is the use of Wodak's argumentation model of analysis in political discourse in general and national issues in particular. An important study is conducted by Wodak herself (2006), where she investigates the FPO petition "Austria first" using the discursive strategies developed in her model to highlight aspects of 'discriminatory discourse'. In her analysis, she shows that the most commonly used type of topoi is that of burden, "where the FPO

implies, by a topos of burden in combination with a topos of threat and a topos of culture, that for Austrian schools, non-native speakers of German represent a great handicap for the school education of the ‘Austrian’ children” (p.92). A more recent study is conducted by Boukala (2016) where an analysis of Greek media discourse on “Islamist terrorism” is conducted using the concept of topoi.

New trends in argumentation make use of corpus tools available for a bulkier analysis. Among the most recent approaches is the development of argumentation mining techniques (Green et al. 2014). Using Natural Language Processing procedures, this newly-developed approach analyses all forms of discourse. A recent study applying this methodology is the one conducted by Menini, et al. (2018) where they analyse the speeches of J.F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon election campaigns in 1960. They conclude that this approach could help in the detection of argumentation patterns (i.e., topics on which both candidates agree or disagree, topics on which they provide contradictory assertions) and the analysis of how they connect with the other statements asserted in the speeches (p. 4895).

One final area of intersection with the present work is the studies conducted on Brexit discourse. Wodak (2016) conducts an analysis of David Cameron’s speech related to the UK-EU relationships. Weißbecker (2017) has adopted an eclectic approach of some of Wodak’s model in analysing the speech given by Michael Gove in support of the Leave camp. She highlights how the speech is clearly persuasive in nature, its goal being to get voters to vote ‘Leave’ in the referendum, by primarily using topoi of burden and threat, as natural outcomes of staying within the EU.

### **Analysis of Data:**

As previously noted, DHA is a triangulated approach which examines discourse from more than one angle. In fact, one of the main angles of analysis is the sociopolitical and historical context of the discourse. It is commonly known that the UK-EU relations have not always gone quite smoothly, which has been reflected in many unsigned agreements between the UK and the EU, for instance, the case of Britain

keeping its currency, even after being a member of the EU. This and other facts have earned the UK the title “the awkward partner”.

From a cultural perspective, the British people do not truly perceive of themselves as Europeans, a case that was helped by the fact that the UK is a set of islands. Copsey and Haughton (2014) maintain, “In contrast to Germans who have tended to see ‘Europe’ as an integral part of national identity and the French who see European integration as a chance to further national identity [...], Britons – or perhaps more accurately the English – tend to see Europe as a threat to national identity. They have difficulty reconciling themselves to the idea of being both British and European” (“Wiley Online Library”).

As a result of being pressured by the Eurosceptic members of his Conservative Party, David Cameron fulfilled his previously-promised word to hold an in/out Referendum in June 2016 on the UK’s continued membership of the EU. Despite being the initiator of the referendum, Cameron was a “Remain” campaigner, who eventually lost the referendum and his office to his former Home Secretary and successor as leader of the Conservative Party, Theresa May in July 2016. The narrative of the rise of the “Brexit” idea can be summarised as follows:

In the history of ideas, context is all.... [T]he embrace of Brexit by a significant tranche of the political class reflects despair with the EU, matched, more interestingly, by a faith in Britain’s ability to go it alone.... Even if leave loses on 23 June, the aspiration it reflects will survive, and live to fight another day” (D’Ancona, 2016).

Analysis of speech 1: “*Let us, Great Britain, stand tall and lead*”

This speech was given by Theresa May on 25<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, when she was still Home Secretary in David Cameron’s cabinet, and an adamant Remain campaigner. It was delivered at the Institute of Medical Engineers in central London.

The analysis of the speech is done along the same patterns adopted by Wodak (2006), where the macro-context is first elaborated, then, the

discursive strategies are identified, and finally the implications of the results are interpreted.

### 1.1. Macro-topics:

This speech primarily focuses on weighing the pros and cons of the Remain and the Leave scenarios. It is mainly oriented towards giving the British people all the reasons why they should retain the EU membership.

Examining the 6000-word speech, it is concluded that the major macro-topics, and sub-topics covered can be summarized as follows:

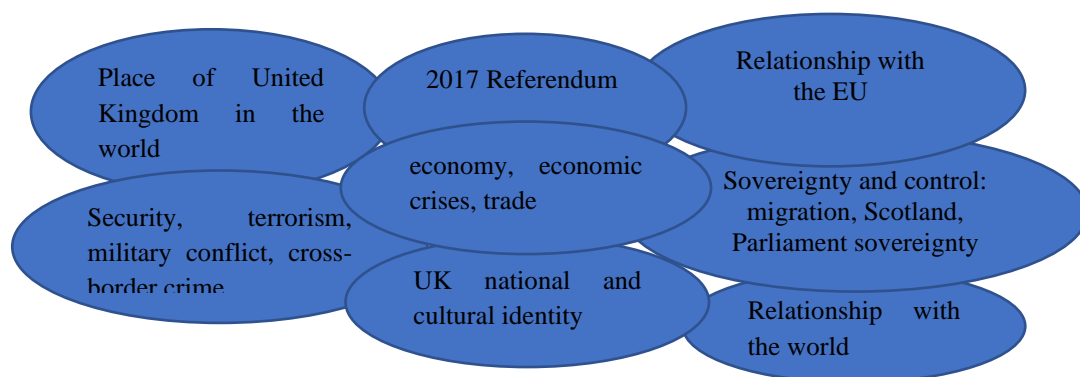


Figure 1. Macro-topics in “*Let us, Great Britain, stand tall and lead*”

The following part investigates the different discursive strategies, employed by May in her speech:

### 1.2. Discursive strategies:

#### 1.2.1. Referential and nomination strategy:

As highlighted in the Theoretical part, this strategy helps in identifying the major social actors, objects, events and processes. Linguistically, this is encoded in the use of deictics, membership categorization, etc. (see above), which eventually leads in the “US” versus “Them” dichotomy. It is commonly accepted that this dichotomy is one of the constituting tenets of CDA, pioneered by van Dijk, where the representation of the ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ forms a pivotal concept. This dichotomy is termed in Wodak’s model the “Ingroup” and the “Outgroup”.

The analysis shows that May focuses on three major social actors, namely: the UK, the EU, the voting public. Moreover, two events are

constructed, which are naturally, the Remain and the Leave events. These actors and events are constructed either implicitly or explicitly throughout the whole speech by reference, nomination and predication.

May identifies herself, and her adjunct Remain advocates, with the UK. They are framed as one whole body/ social actor: they are the "US"; the "Ingroup". The "Them", on the other hand, is the opposing Leave campaigners, rather than the EU, which is portrayed as on the same side with the UK. This is highlighted in the extensive use of "we", "us", "our" versus the use of "others" or "some". Examples include:

1. "we make this important decision" (L. 113)
2. "And let us do so in a serious and mature way. Let us concentrate on Britain's national interest. Britain's future. Our influence around the world. Our security (L. 396)

Nomination includes the use of expressions like "the British leadership" (L.148), "London's position as the world's leading financial centre" (L. 229), "the country of Magna Carta" (L.74).

#### 1.2.2. Predication and framing:

Nomination is further enhanced by the predication strategy, which involves how the main social actors and events are qualified, and hence positioned or framed. This is done through the use of explicit predicates, adjectives or even collocations. It also involves the use of defining predicates such as "we are a European country" (L. 105) and "we are not part of the Schengen" (L. 175).

The UK is positively constructed throughout the whole speech with positive predicates or modifying adjectives. These cover both the framing of Britain in isolation, and the framing of Britain with respect to her relationship with the EU. Indeed, Britain is recurrently framed as a country in control. This is equally done by the use of presupposition as in "We would *still* be part of the Five Eyes" (L.125) and "we need...a *bigger* role for Britain" (L.363). These are some examples of how *predication* serves to *position* the major social actors:

3. “We are the fifth biggest economy in the world... We have a military capable of projecting its power around the world, intelligence services that are second to none” (L.95)
4. “Britain is big enough and strong enough to be a success story in or out of the EU” (L.281).

It is worth noting that *control* is one of the pressing topics in the speech and across the whole campaign. In fact, it features as an instance of intertextuality, alluding to the Leave campaign moto (Take Back Control). Accordingly, it is of importance to construct a sovereign, in-control Britain:

5. “Let us, Great Britain, stand tall and lead” (L.400)
6. “Inside the EU, without Britain, the balance of power in the Council of Ministers and European Parliament would change for the worse” (L.252)

This frame of power extends over other linguistic tools including metaphor, as in:

7. “To what extent does membership bind the hands of Parliament?” (L.326)

Other metaphors are faintly used such as:

8. “We all know the game (i.e. policies) that has been played in the past” (L.346)

On the other hand, Brexit is framed as a danger, with nomination strategies including “immediate risks” (L.283), use of verbs such as “Brexit *risks*” (L.303), whereas the EU is framed an opportunity not to be missed, despite the challenges:

9. “The economic case for remaining inside the European Union... isn’t just about fear, but about optimism – optimism that Britain can take a lead and deliver more trade and economic growth inside Europe and beyond” (L.216)

#### 1.2.3. Metigation and intensification:

This is another strategy that is manipulated to modify the impact of the text, by either giving it more or less force. One of the linguistic tools

used is the interrogative, instead of declarative sentences, to cast doubt on the validity of the proposition:

10. "Does it make us more influential beyond our shores?" (L.315)

11. "Do we stop the EU going in the wrong direction?" (L. 368).

In example 11, three major discursive strategies merge together: the mitigation strategy, the predication using presupposition (EU is going in the wrong direction!) and the topos of responsibility of the UK towards the EU.

It is, however, noted that the majority of the text takes the form of declarative sentences, which gives the impression that the propositions asserted are factual.

Another tool that serves mitigating the force of the "Them" power is the use of vague expressions such as "Now, it is sometimes suggested" (L.285), "Some say" (L.264), "I have heard some people say" (L. 185).

Intensification primarily pertains to ridiculing the "Them" and their arguments as "nonsense" (L.95) and "false dichotomy" (L.241).

#### 1.2.4. Argumentation:

As per Wodak (2006), there are different types of topoi, which all revolve around the premise-then-warrant-then-conclusion schemata. There is evidence of some relevant topoi in the speech, though with a significant variation in their frequency. The EU is represented as an opportunity, rather than a threat and the UK is represented as an authorized leader, rather than a follower. Responsibility and justice are defined as important. For example, the topos of threat works as follows: if leaving the EU could affect "our bond with Edinburgh and Glasgow [or] cause the destruction of an older and much more precious Union" (L.300), then we shouldn't leave.

Table 1 summarizes the most frequent topoi used. These results are consistent with the persuasive orientation of the speech, which aims to mobilise voters towards the Remain camp.

Type of topos	Frequency (# times)	Example
Topos of threat & danger	10	Outside the EU, for example, we would have no access to European arrest warrant” (L.130)
Topos of usefulness & advantage	5	Remaining inside the European Union does make us more secure, it does make us more prosperous and it does make us more influential beyond our shores” (L.314).
Topos of responsibility	6	if we leave the EU ... these parts of the single market might never be created at all (L.214)
Topos of history	5	Looking back at history...we know what a world without international, multilateral institutions looks like” (L.39)
Topos of finances	4	We have a trade surplus in services with the rest of the EU of £17 billion” (L.196)

Table 1. A list of the frequency of occurrence of the different topoi, with examples.

*Concluding remarks:* After analysing the whole speech, it becomes clear that it is predominantly persuasive; its goal being to mobilise the public to vote for the Remain scenario. To do so, May constructs the EU, not as a flawless organisation, but as one which is worth working with, especially with the UK positioned as a leading power. In contrast to the Remain event, the Leave is framed as a threat, that would incur losses and danger. All the discursive strategies used are meant to legitimise the Remain, and delegitimise the Leave. Finally, employing the topoi of responsibility and authority, May shows how the UK should take over, “stand tall and lead” within the EU. It is in “control” of the course of events. Whether through the discursive strategies of nomination,



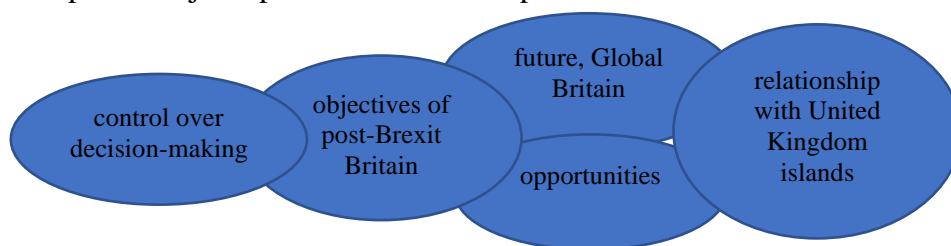
predication or topoi, the event of Remain is constructed as a promise whereas the event of Leave is constructed as a danger.

## 2. Analysis of speech 2: “Plan for Britain”

This second selected speech was given by May at Lancaster House in London On 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2017. At that time, the referendum was over, with the Brexit winning and May also winning the prime minister office. In her speech, May sets out the Plan for Britain, highlighting the main priorities the Government will use to negotiate Brexit.

### 2.1. Macro-topics:

It is quite evident that the scope of topics, and sub-topics, in this speech is much narrower than the first one. This can be attributed to the fact that the Referendum has not left many doors open, hence one road is to be taken—that of Brexit. Accordingly, the topics are all Brexit-deal oriented. Figure 2 maps the major topics covered in the speech.



#### 2.2.1. Referential and nomination:

Being a speech that marks a new phase in the UK-EU relationship, it is marked by significant use of nomination and referential strategies. This is consistent with the need for defining and *naming* things in what May calls the “post-Brexit Britain”. The main social actors that are presented in this speech are: the Government, the British people, the people of Europe, the European Union, and faintly, the Houses of the Parliament. The main, and almost sole foregrounded event, is the Brexit plan.

This strategy spreads over the whole speech where she repeatedly mentions “global Britain” (9 times), “precious Union” (L.30) (referring to the United Kingdom), “plan for Britain” (L.19) (referring to the Brexit deal), “family ties and bonds of affection” (L.180)(referring to Republic of Ireland), “controlled immigration” (L.196) and “partnership with EU”

(L.325). In fact, and as will be shown in section 2.2.4. below, the topos of definition and name interpretation features prominently in this particular speech, in comparison to all other speeches.

12. “fairer Britain is a country that protects and enhances the rights people have at work” (L.221)

The “US” in this speech is the Government and the British people, whereas the EU is the “Them”.

Another significant feature is that, unlike the first speech, the choice of verbs, as part of the referential and nomination strategy, is very significant. Mental verbs, rather than material, prevail throughout the speech. They include cognitive verbs “I *believe* it is in our national interest” (L.370); “I *know* my emphasis on striking trade agreements...” (L.277). Desiderative verbs such as “we *hope* our citizens will be welcome in yours” (L.96), “We *want* to get out into the wider world” (L.272), and “we *seek* the greatest possible access” (L.247) feature extensively. In fact, the verb ‘want’ occurs 43 times across the speech and ‘seek’ 15 times, compared to 13 times for ‘want’ and 2 times for ‘seek’ in the previous speech. This can be seen as a cue to how the present phase is one which calls for deep thinking and consideration, before putting any thing into ‘action’.

#### 2.2.2. Predication and framing:

Both predication and framing are realised differently from the previous speech. For instance, the frame of the ‘powerful Britain’, the ‘stronger Britain’ has been replaced by the “fairer Britain (L.144)”, “a magnet for international talent” (L.12), ‘wonderful diversity’ (L.84), and “open and tolerant country” (L.224).

The relationship between the UK and the EU has been qualified as partnership, where differences, rather than similarities are stressed:

13. “Our political traditions are different” (L.61)

14. “new, positive and constructive partnership between Britain and the European Union” (L.121)

2.2.3. Argumentation:

In the present speech, there is a significant variation in the type of topoi employed. Whereas the topoi of threat, usefulness and finances featured prominently in the pre-Referendum speech (speech #1), the most frequent topoi in this post-Referendum speech are those of reality, definition and right respectively. This is consistent with the fact that the choice is already taken, and people need to figure the way forward based on facts, rather than threats or advantages. The clause ‘this means/ that means’ occurs 15 times across the speech. Significantly enough, the topos of history also disappears in this speech, where the present and the future, rather than the past, that concern the people at the moment. Table 2 summarizes the most frequent topoi used. These results are consistent with the factual orientation of the speech, which aims to give a full-fledged picture of the present to embark on the future.

Table 2.

Type of topos	Frequency	Example
Definition, name interpretation	12	“Brexit must mean control of the number of people who come to Britain from Europe” (L. 202).
Reality	12	And it is true that full Customs Union membership prevents us from negotiating our own comprehensive trade deals (L. 280) “Britain and France are Europe’s only 2 nuclear powers” (L.401).
Responsibility	5	“but that process must be managed properly so that our immigration system serves the national interest” (L. 193-194)
Law and right	2	We want to guarantee the rights of E.U. citizens who are already living in Britain, and the rights of British nationals in other member states, as early as we can (L.210)
History	1	Because Britain’s history and culture is profoundly internationalist (L. 34)

Finances & Threat	1	It would jeopardize investments in Britain by E.U. companies worth more than half a trillion pounds. It would mean a loss of access for European firms to the financial services of the City of London. It would risk exports from the E.U. to Britain worth around £290 billion every year(L. 422-424)
Threat	1	Important sectors of the E.U. economy would also suffer. (L. 427)

*Concluding remarks:* Investigating the Plan for Britain speech shows that the different historical and sociopolitical moment has been linguistically and argumentatively encoded. The post-Referendum speech was given after the Britons had voted for the Leave, and also after May became Prime Minister; or as put by May herself: “the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union. And my job is to get the right deal for Britain as we do” (L. 108-109). Accordingly, she needs to clearly define her terms, her goals, and her partners. Since Brexit was ‘the road taken’, then, there was no longer a need for reviewing the threats or the dangers that come with it, nor the advantages of remaining. Instead, there is a need to clarify the realities and facts. This constructed frame was reflected in the absence of the topoi of threat, danger and advantage, and the prevalence of the facts and reality topoi. Similarly, there is no more a need to dwell on the past, nor on the lessons of history; all focus should be directed to “shape a brighter future for our country” (L.2). Notably, there is no significant use of either mitigation or intensification in this speech.

### Analysis of speech 3: “Plan B Brexit”

The final speech to be examined is the one delivered by May on 21<sup>st</sup> of January 2019. It was delivered in the Parliament, a few days after May gained confidence in her cabinet. During the meeting, May tabled the amendments proposed to the ‘road-map’ of Brexit, around a week after what was called a ‘crushing defeat’ of her Brexit deal.

#### 3.1. Macro-topics:

The main goal of this speech is to ensure a fair deal for exiting the EU. Accordingly, no ‘security’, ‘prosperity’ or ‘control’ issues are

evoked. The main topics are those that relate to the duty of the Government to lawfully implement Brexit. Figure 3 summarises the main topics:

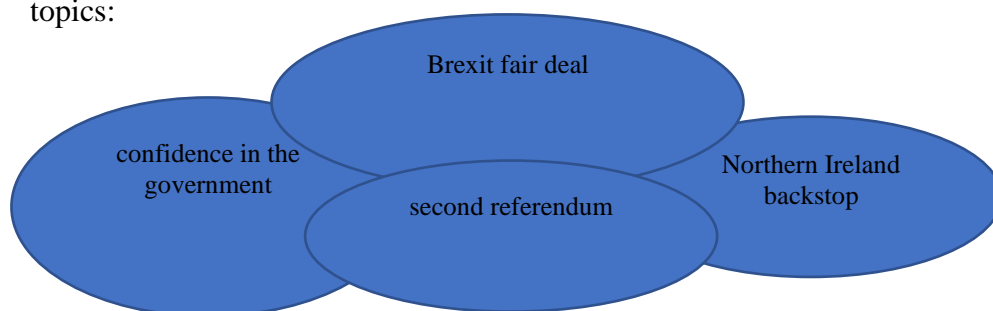


Figure 3. Macro-topics in speech# 3.

### 3.2. Discursive strategies:

There is a significant difference between this speech and the other two previously analysed. Since this speech was given for the Parliament, and it was expository in the first place, it is noted that there is significantly less use of all the different types of discursive strategies. For instance, there is remarkable decrease in the use of topoi of all types. This can be attributed to the fact that this is not a typical persuasive speech, where May aims to align her audience to a particular stance. In fact, it was given, after she has already gained confidence in her government. This explains then that there is decreased use of nomination and predication. Mitigation and intensification are almost non-existent.

#### 3.2.1. Referential and nomination:

Examining this speech, the major social actors are the Government, the Parliament members (MPs), and the British people. In this respect, the Government and the people are the 'Ingroup', whereas, members of the Parliament- either collectively or individually- are framed as the 'Outgroup'.

Since this speech was directed to the MPs, then there was almost no need for defining concepts or phenomena, as they are already fully aware of it. There is even no definition of nominations such as "Political Declaration" or the "Ireland backstop", which suggests that all MPs know that it refers to changing the borders with Northern Ireland.

One of the recurrent nomination strategies pertained to the topic of confidence as in “Having established the confidence of Parliament in this government” (L. 9), “representations about the anxieties facing EU citizens” (L.133).

In this speech, as in the first one, the choice of verbs is of minor significance. The speech oscillates between material and verbs.

### 3.2.2. Predication and framing:

The Government is particularly framed as responsible, rightful, and works in the best interest of the British people. Clearly described as “more flexible, open and inclusive in the future” (L.167). The dutiful frame is exemplified as in:

15. “The Government has approached these meetings in a constructive spirit” (L.15).
16. “giving much importance to its “obligations to the people of Northern Ireland” (L.75).

The MPs are often referred to vaguely, as “there are those on both sides of the House” (L. 24), “, there are others who think that....” (L.32). Those MPs are framed as stoppers, or at least stumblers.

The amended Brexit plan is recurrently described as crucial and serious as in “widespread concern” (L.23), “my deep concerns” (L.44), “I fear a Second Referendum would set a difficult precedent....” (L.46).

### 3.3.3. Argumentation:

As has been noted, this speech is expository, rather than persuasive. Hence, the use of topoi has significantly declined. Table 3 summarises the frequency of the topoi used throughout:

Table 3. Types and frequencies of topoi

Type of topos	Frequency	Example
Responsibility	5	It is Government’s responsibility to negotiate, but it is also my responsibility to listen to the legitimate concerns of colleagues (L.113)
Reality	5	this Government will not reopen the Belfast Agreement (L.69)

Law and right	2	I believe this would go against the referendum result and I do not believe that is a course of action that we should take (L. 40)
Definition	2	to revoke Article 50 – which would mean staying in the EU (L.31-32)
Threat	2	I fear a Second Referendum would set a difficult precedent (L.46).

*Concluding remarks:* This speech is different from the other two speeches in terms of all elements of discursive strategies. The difference in orientation and goal has been realized linguistically in the choice of all strategies used. Not only in terms of the length of the speech, but also in terms of the use of nomination, framing, predication and argumentation.

**Discussion:**

With the discourse-historical approach as a theoretical basis, three speeches of Theresa May have been analysed for discursive strategies of nomination, predication, framing, mitigation and intensification as well as argumentation. The analysis has revealed some major patterns used and other variations that correspond to the moment of delivery. These can be summarised as follows:

1. The historical context of delivering the speech plays a determining role in the construction of the discourse. This explains why every speech covers particular macro-topics. Whereas the focus in the first speech is on the threats and dangers of Brexit surprisingly, the second speech centres on the opportunities and challenges of Brexit; whereas the responsibility and duty of the British towards their country lies at the heart of the third speech.
2. The sociopolitical context also affects discourse, where the speeches vary as per the audience and their political background. Accordingly, the wider, and more diversified the audience is, the more elaborate, clarifying and persuasive the speech is.
3. The goal of the discourse seems is a very most crucial factor in discourse. Accordingly, whereas the first two speeches could be

categorized as visionary or speculative speeches, the third is more expository. Hence, the discursive strategies used in the first two are quite similar to one another-with varying degrees, yet they are quite distinct from the third one.

Comparing and contrasting the speeches in terms of the discursive strategies it can be concluded that:

1. All speeches make use of nomination, predication, framing and argumentation in discursively constructing the various social actors, phenomena and events. Naturally, Brexit is the highest common event in all three speeches; either to warn against it (first speech), embrace it (second speech) or regulate it (third speech). Social actors differ according to the situational context; however, the British people seem to be always present either in the foreground or background.
2. Whereas almost all strategies are used, their effect on framing differs. So, whereas the pre-Referendum Britain is framed as “strong Britain”, it is framed as “global Britain” in the post-Referendum speech, and finally as “fair Britain” in the Brexit deal speech.
3. Similarly noteworthy is the discursive construction of the “US” and the “Them”, which varies according to the historical context. The “US” has almost always been May and others: either the Remain campaigners, the people, or the Government. The “Them” varies considerably: either the Leave campaigners, the EU, or the Opposition MPs.
4. Moving to argumentation, it can be said that there is one-to-one correspondence between the goal of the speech and the type of topoi used. The first speech, which was meant to mobilise voters to a no-Brexit scenario, is loaded with both the topoi of advantage (to recommend Remain) and the topoi of threat (to denounce Leave). The topoi of history and finances are also widely used to allude to similar cases of success and to evoke benefits of membership. With the Referendum settling on a yes-to-Brexit scenario, a new phase of



UK-EU relationships has started, which entails defining, *naming*, and *framing* all new phenomena. The topoi of reality and authority are also extensively employed so as to have a well-based future. In the third speech, opportunities are narrowing down, and challenges are accumulating, hence there is no much room except for highlighting the critical situation, where the topos of responsibility and the topos of reality are appealed to.

5. The transformation in the Brexit process can be thoroughly explained via examining how it has been discursively constructed over the past three years. Each situational and historical context has had its imprint on the discourse design, whether to reflect power, futurity or duty.

In the light of all the above findings, and as per research question number 6, few comments are due:

1. On the theoretical level, and based on the analysis of the speech, one further topos could be added to the list of topoi, introduced by Wodak (2006). The study recommends adding a 'topos of logic'. In fact, much of May arguments presented in her speeches are based on the logical sequence of events or actions. In other words, the argument in that case appeals to people's logic, rather than reality, threat, advantage, or any other topos.
2. From a functional perspective, it can be concluded that appealing to reality, finances, history, or even law and right need not always be the right route to persuasion. Looking at how these are the main topoi employed by May in her first speech (the Remain speech) or even the second one (the Brexit Plan), and how both did not yield the intended outcome, it can be said that other topoi could be more effective, especially in dealing with public. It is suggested that the topos of danger and the topos of advantage are of particular significance in case of persuading discourse.
3. The historical context- the 'then' and the 'now'- is clearly linguistically encoded in the discourse, where, in addition to the socio-political context, they all determine how a text/ discourse in

discursively constructed. In fact, the transformations witnessed by the Brexit is evidently reflected in the use of all discursive strategies employed. Hence, they ought to be deeply taken into consideration whenever a political speech is designed.

**Conclusion:**

Using the discourse-historical approach as the theoretical basis, Theresa May's Brexit speeches have been analysed to examine the type of discursive strategies used by her over the period of time 2016 to 2019. It can be concluded that the discursive strategies of nomination, predication, framing as well as argumentation have been manipulated differently at different points of time to achieve varying goals. The twists and turns in the Brexit process are linguistically realized. Brexit is once framed as an opportunity in the first speech, a challenge in the second speech, then finally a heavy duty in the third speech. No wonder it is nowadays often dubbed "hard Brexit".

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