WHEN A RELATIONSHIP ENDS "THERE CAN BE NO TURNING BACK"
The divorce metaphor in the Brexit discourse

DENISE MILIZIA[1], CINZIA SPINZI[2]
[1]UNIVERSITY OF BARI ALDO MORO, [2]UNIVERSITY OF BERGAMO

Abstract – Brexit has inspired far more metaphors than it has solutions. Many conventional and novel metaphors have been used to frame this issue and the relationship between the EU and the UK. This paper addresses one of them: the divorce metaphor.
Starting from the assumption that it is not the side with 'the most' or 'best' facts that wins but the one that provides the most plausible and reliable scenarios (Musolff 2017), this paper intends to explore how the metaphor of divorce has been used by British politicians and in British mainstream media with a view to influencing citizens when justifying political actions. Modelling our method of analysis on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (Charteris-Black 2004), we try to demonstrate how the same metaphor becomes a powerful tool for disseminating different evaluative content and expressing criticism.

Keywords: Brexit; discourse; metaphor; divorce; frame.

In the early 1960s you could hardly pick up a newspaper without finding a story about the UK's desperate efforts to get in. No-one thought to call it "Brexin". But that's what it was.

1. Introduction[1]

One of the most remarkable political changes in our democratic epoch is the revival of radical right-wing movements which are fuelled by ethno-nationalist myths about cultural homogeneity and national identities. The logic of English nationalism has also been studied as being one of the invisible drivers of the Brexit referendum (Virdee, McGeever 2017). The claim for national sovereignty and other localisms such as *take back control*, *create new borders and walls, pull up the drawbridge* (Milizia 2018) used by political actors as a framework for politics making are undoubtedly seen as

---

[1] Even though the two authors conceived the paper together, for practical reasons Cinzia Spinzi is responsible for sections 1, 2, 3.2, 3.3, and 5. Denise Milizia is responsible for sections 3.1, 4 and 6.

metaphorical expressions of populist rhetoric. In particular, these xenophobic and ethno-nationalist frames are used to construct meanings based on the friend-enemy dichotomy. Therefore, *create borders or walls* implies a divide from the 'other' as well as *take back control* implies that somebody else has taken it for a while. These binary oppositions together with conceptual metaphors provide the foundation for the development of ideology in discourse (Lassan 1995). For their communicative efficacy, usefulness and persuasiveness, it has been generally agreed that metaphors are more likely to be encountered in extremists' speeches rather than in those of other groups (Vertessen, De Landtsheer 2008, p. 274), and that they are mainly used to "arouse moral beliefs associated with the creation, maintenance or restoration of control" (Charteris-Black 2008, p. 4).

Despite the tautological expression used by Theresa May "Brexit is Brexit" and "Brexit means Brexit" to gain the Conservative MPs' support, Brexit discourse is replete with metaphors and one of them in particular, the divorce metaphor, which is the focus of our study, structures the British separation from the Union as the outcome of a complex and tangled relationship between the EU and the UK, a relationship of love and hate (Đurović, Silaški 2018). If the Prime Minister prefers to avoid the word 'divorce' when referring to Brexit (Milizia 2019a), for all the negative and embarrassing implications that a divorce might entail, her comment and repeated use of the phrase "deep and special partnership" as a replacement has not stopped the media from continuing to use the metaphor to refer to Brexit. Through a critical metaphor analysis of the 'divorce metaphor' as used by British speaking political elites – politicians and journalists – the ideological implications of such choices will be made explicit. More particularly, this study aims at investigating how discourse metaphors (Musolff 2004), namely those metaphors whose meaning is also shaped by their use at a given time and context about a particular topic, are discursively and then ideologically employed to serve politicians' political agenda first: hence, it also aims at showing how the same metaphor is re-contextualized by the British media to support their view and hence shape the political minds of citizens.

Before addressing these matters in detail, we briefly set out the theoretical framework to this study in the next section; we will then move on to the analysis of the divorce metaphor in the political speeches first, and then to the mediated political discourse. Findings show how the same metaphor occurs in specific patterns that have a strategic function in the narrative of the complex relationship between the EU and the UK.

2. Theoretical background: metaphors and political communication

Since the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's ground-breaking work in 1980, the conceptual significance of metaphors has been confirmed by the bulk of evidence in different fields of study which have contributed to shape the current cognitively-informed discourse approaches to metaphor (Musolff 2004). Intended in terms of a systematic set of correspondences between two conceptual domains or schemas, conceptual metaphors perform crucial functions in natural discourse, thought, and communication. Culturally relevant frames and embodied experience are chosen in metaphors insofar as they activate links to other unfamiliar frames making topics clearer and more manageable. Apart from this potent feature, metaphors in political communication aim "either to promote one view against another or to discredit or humiliate political adversaries or enemies" (Cammaerts 2012, p. 6). However, since the figurative meaning of a proposed frame is not unambiguous, it leaves room for multiple interpretations making metaphorical meanings negotiable. A fairly common, frequently cited example, which illustrates this haziness of metaphors, concerns the "common European House" metaphor used by Gorbachev in the 1980s (Chilton, Ilyn 1993; Zinken 2007). The Russian leader's main intent was to convey the meaning of shared responsibility of the various states that were compared to the several rooms of the common house, whose cultural referent in Russia are the apartment blocks. On the contrary, on the basis of the stereotypical image of detached house, the interpretation privileged by the western media was related to the freedom of moving from room to room in a house.

Our research draws upon the critical approach to the study of metaphors mainly known as Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA), which aims at uncovering ideological and political meanings behind metaphors (Charteris-Black 2004, 2006, 2019). According to this approach, political discourse is seen as thoroughly permeated with metaphors which also constitute powerful tools to achieve politicians' aims. A plethora of examples may be mentioned to support the view that metaphors are crucial to the construction of meanings in both speeches and mediated political discourse. As Charteris-Black (2006) notes, Churchill relied on the monster-like analogy to describe the enemy, i.e. the Nazi Germany, and struggle against it; in this way, Britain was profiled as a hero. Former UKIP leader Nigel Farage exploited the space-container scenario in his public addresses during the proto-referendum debate to strengthen his anti-immigration rationale (Cap 2019); right wing parties made use of the immigrant as scrounger scenario (i.e. negative analogies with animals like locusts) to represent Jews as

enemies in the British Fascist discourse (Spinzi 2016), as well as in Nazi discourse (Wodak, Richardson 2013).

The common thread in this bulk of literature is the focus on "discourse metaphors" (DMs) considered as "relatively stable metaphorical mappings that function as a key framing device within a particular discourse over a certain period of time" (Zinken *et al.* 2008, p. 364). Like cognitive metaphors, DMs imply a set of correspondences or conceptual mapping operations rooted in sensorimotor experiences and "highlight salient aspects of a socially, culturally or politically relevant topics but are not independent on time" (Koteyko, Ryazanova-Clarke 2009, p. 114). This feature of DMs is relevant to our research in that our purpose is to demonstrate that the 'divorce' metaphor is crucial, from an ideological point of view, to the meaning-making and dissemination of knowledge of the Brexit discourse. Indeed, as put forward by Lakoff (2004), one of the main tasks performed by metaphors is that of validating political choices by confiding in the elemental social and cultural value systems. Hence, Lakoffian cognitive categories (also known as "frames" – Fillmore 1976; Musolff 2006, 2019) provide language users with interpretative templates to make complex phenomena more intelligible (Spinzi 2017).

In line with this viewpoint, for example, Koteyko and Ryazanova-Clarke (2009, p. 124) have shown that the metaphorical framing of path and building in Putin's public speeches has contributed to constructing a political narrative where the leader's actions are legitimized as forces of good which aim at fortifying the state apparatus, at building economy leading it on a path in contrast with the wrong direction/path taken by the former president. Nevertheless, the activation of a frame in a specific discourse does not necessarily lead to its acceptance. As Musolff (2019, p. 3) notes, the receiver may reject the frame or replace it with other frames. Thus, by analysing the metaphoric phrase *Britain at the heart of Europe*, Musolff (2017) maintains that this conventional metaphor grounded in the physical metonymy of the heart as the centre of a container-like entity has been quoted as a slogan since 1991, when Prime Minister John Major used it to highlight his favourable attitude towards the European Community's policy. Three years later, when new proposals (e.g. the division of Europe in a circle of member states) to foster European integration were put forward, specifically by France and Germany, Major's approach to promote Britain as being at the centre of the European community revealed itself to be fallacious. As a matter of fact, because of these new political proposals, which did not match with Major's ideas of looking at Britain as a key player in Europe, his metaphorical slogan was then used by the euro-sceptics for sarcastic purposes: being at the heart of Europe was not conceivable because the heart got sick. As Musolff explains (2017), the conventional undertones of the source domain concept

'heart', (i.e. prominence and good state of health), are implied in its initial uses but then contradicted over time. The schematic shift from heart-as-centre to heart-as-organ entails emphasis on the organ, hence, on emotions rather than on position. For this reason, it provides new avenues of interpretation for the re-contextualised historical and political scenario. By hiding or highlighting the emotional potentialities of the new metaphoric formulation, new ways of representing Euroscepticism have cropped up: the original positive connotations of the slogan have left space for a range of negative abstractions in terms of illness and death.

This means that the same metaphor lends itself to controversial interpretations according to the prevailing schema chosen for representation, and that constancy and variation of DMs may be analysed not only synchronically but also diachronically to explore how they strive for existence. For these reasons, metaphors in discourse are both strategic and ideological (Hart 2010, p. 127), and they use language "to activate unconscious emotional associations" (Charteris-Black 2004, p. 53). As a matter of fact, a perlocutionary effect has been attributed to metaphors in that they persuade people to act according to a set of feelings, values and intentions (Gregg 2004, p. 60). In this sense, metaphors constitute guides to decision-making.

The divorce metaphor found in our data is seen as an entailment of 'nation is a family' (Charteris-Black 2019; Chilton, Lakoff 1995; Musolff 2016), a conceptual metaphor which activates its implicit analogies to the domain of relationships through other words and phrases such as *couple, parents, married life*, (Musolff 2016, p. 31). Relationships may be successful or not, amicable or unamicable, short or long, they might experience tiffs and reconciliation and, if they end, bad or good may follow. Furthermore, as shown in the literature (Đurović, Silaški 2018; Musolff 2009), the marriage metaphor as well as the divorce metaphor unveil the traditional stereotypes of gender and family roles in the Brexit discourse, i.e. Britain as female and Europe as male (Musolff 2009).

3. Data and Methods

3.1. The spoken corpus

The spoken corpus we have relied on for the present analysis is retrieved from the institutional website, number10.gov.uk and totals, at the time of writing, approximately 4 million words. Transcriptions are made available on the website and are free of charge. The corpus includes pre-vote data and post-vote data, thus embracing speeches and statements from David Cameron and Nick Clegg in the 5-year period coalition (2010-2015), David Cameron's

speeches delivered in the one-year period from 2015 to 2016 until the referendum date, some speeches delivered by Theresa May when she was serving as Home Secretary and all the speeches delivered in her premiership, a few speeches delivered by Justine Greening, Secretary of State for International Development, some speeches and statements delivered by Philip Hammond when he was serving as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and some speeches when he was appointed Foreign Minister in the post-referendum government.

Politicians	Political stance on Brexit	Role	no. of words
David Cameron and Nick Clegg	Remainer	PM and Deputy Prime Minister	1.423,40
David Cameron	Remainer	Prime Minister	842,533
Theresa May	Remainer	Home Secretary	250,543
Justine Greening	Remainer	Secretary Int. Development	25,006
Philip Hammond	Remainer	Chancellor of the Exchequer	89,008
Alan Duncan	Remainer	Europe Minister	1,657
David Lidington	Remainer	Secretary of State for Justice	12,833
Jeremy Hunt	Remainer	Brexit Secretary	10,553
Theresa May	Leaver	Prime Minister	416,062
Philip Hammond	Leaver	Foreign Minister	1,657
Nigel Farage	Leaver	Leader of UKIP	78,235
Boris Johnson	Leaver	Foreign Secretary	300,054
David Davis	Leaver	Secretary of State exiting EU	453,008
Dominic Raab	Leaver	Brexit Secretary	1,504
David Jones	Leaver	Minister of State	1,982
			4.057,36

Table 1
Political stance of British politicians on Brexit.

The corpus includes also some speeches by Alan Duncan, Europe Minister, all speeches and statements by David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union until July 2018, when he stepped down in opposition to the Chequer's Plan that the Prime Minister was putting forward. A few speeches by Boris Johnson are also part of the corpus, a prominent Brexiteer and the Foreign Secretary until July 2018, when he resigned over Brexit a few hours after David Davis, claiming that May's plan "sticks in the throat" and that the UK "was headed for the status of a colony". Some speeches by Nigel Farage are also included, the then leader of UKIP and a prominent Eurosceptic in the

UK and, at the time of writing, leader of the Brexit party, together with some speeches by Dominic Raab who took over Boris Johnson as Foreign Secretary, but who also resigned after only four months in opposition to the Draft Withdrawal Agreement. Dominic Raab was succeeded by Jeremy Hunt, and his speeches are also included in the corpus, as well as those by David Jones, the then Minister of State at the Department for Exiting the European Union.

As is clear from Table 1, the political stance on Brexit of the politicians object of our study, and of British politicians in general, does not follow a consistent direction, thus corroborating the tragic split that the Brexit mess has caused. Indeed, there has never been a clear-cut division and a consistent trend within the British political parties, and whether we might be inclined to believe that Conservative Ministers are mainly Eurosceptic and Labour Ministers are mostly Europhiles, the table above illustrates that quite the opposite is true. David Cameron, for example, leader of the Conservative Party for eleven years and Prime Minister of the UK for six years, was a fervent Remainer, adamant that Brexit would be an act of "economic self-harm", insisting time and again that "Britain is stronger, safer and better off inside the EU", and that it was in the national interest to stay inside a reformed EU. Lib-Dem Nick Clegg, who, together with Conservative David Cameron formed the first coalition since the Second World War after the hung parliament of 2010 (Charteris-Black 2014), was highly passionate about his pro-Europeanism, like all Liberal Democrats who, unlike the other parties, have always been quite united as a group. Indeed, David Cameron and Nick Clegg did not see eye to eye on the referendum issue, with the Deputy Prime Minister always warning the Prime Minister that promising the British people a referendum was actually playing with fire, and "if we go down this track, it is Britain that will get burned".[2]

David Cameron and George Osborne, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, both closely involved in running the Remain campaign, had tried to seek the advice of experts and global policymakers, including American President Barack Obama who, taking advantage of his visit to the UK on the occasion of the Queen's birthday, warned the British people that "if the UK does leave the EU, there might be a UK-US trade agreement, but it's not going to happen anytime soon, because [...] the UK is going to be at the back of the queue". President Obama's opinion and his incitement not to give up on Europe was not welcomed by several nationalists, such as Michael Gove, former UK Minister of Education, who, endorsing "the arrogance of

---

[2] The then Britain's Deputy Prime Minister, and leader of the Liberal Democrats, Nick Clegg answered delegates' questions at the party's autumn conference in Glasgow, Scotland, September 16, 2013.

ignorance" (Wodak 2015), said that the British people had made their decision, they know what is good for them and they do not need experts, nor intellectuals. However, this trait of challenging the élite, including intellectuals, resembles typical traits of populism and, as Moffit (2016) puts it, big crises like the one the UK has been experiencing in recent years pave the way for populism and, more often than not, crises are interpreted as "the struggle of the new to be born" (Moffit 2016, p. 119).

Needless to say, when Theresa May was serving as Home Secretary in David Cameron's government, she was pro-Europe, fighting together with the Prime Minister "with all her heart and soul" to stay in the Union. Yet, when David Cameron announced, in his resignation speech after the referendum outcome on June 23, 2016, that he could no longer "steady the ship over the coming weeks and months", Theresa May was among the most likely potential successors to take the lead, together with Andrea Leadsom, and Boris Johnson, former mayor of London. Nigel Farage, who had a been a prominent supporter of the Leave campaign, quite surprisingly, stepped back, saying that, with the UK having voted to leave the EU, his political ambition had been achieved.

Despite being part of the Remain camp in the run-up to the referendum, Theresa May was chosen to be, to borrow David Cameron's words, "the captain that steers our country to its next destination" (Spinzi, Manca 2017), with the purpose of pushing ahead with the UK's divorce from Europe: she was appointed Prime Minister by Queen Elizabeth on July 13, 2016, becoming the second female British Prime Minister after Margaret Thatcher, who held office from 1979 to 1990.

Justine Greening and Philip Hammond, both belonging to the Conservative Party, were both pro-Europe. Yet, Philip Hammond, just like Theresa May, switched to the Leave side after the referendum outcome. Alan Duncan, David Lidington and Jeremy Hunt, from the Conservative party, were all fervent Europeans who campaigned for the Remain vote. To conclude with the other politicians included in the spoken corpus, David Davis, Dominic Raab and David Jones all belong to the Conservative party and all convincingly campaigned to leave the Union.

3.2. The media corpus

The data for the analysis of the mediated political discourse was collected from the Lexis Nexis archive using the following query words: *EU, Britain, relationship, divorce* and *Brexit*. All the articles after the referendum (July 2016) until December 2018 were then downloaded. Representativeness in the media corpus was ensured by the selection of different politically oriented newspapers and magazines. Relying on their standpoint towards Brexit, we included two pro-Leave newspapers (*The Daily Mail* and *The Telegraph*),

two pro-Remain newspapers (*The Guardian* and *The Mirror*), and a pro-Remain magazine (*The Economist*). The articles extracted amount to 143,438 running words.

Newspapers	Political stance	Number of words
The Guardian	Left	29,856
The Telegraph	Right	25,973
The Economist	Liberal	43,976
The Mirror	Left	22,546
The Daily Mail	Right	21,087
Total number		**143,438**

Table 2
The media corpus: political stance of the newspapers and no. of words.

3.3. Methodology

From a methodological point of view, we embraced a deductive approach to the study of the divorce metaphor in the context of Brexit, assuming that there is a conventionalized cross-domain mapping in thought (Steen 2017, p. 78) such as NATIONS ARE FAMILIES. The procedure for the identification of metaphorically used words in discourse was the one put forward by the Pragglejaz Group (Metaphor Identification Procedure, 2007). This method is concerned with the linguistic analysis of metaphorically used words, i.e. lexical units, in discourse and it is carried out through four different steps. First, we read most of the speeches and the articles and we established the metaphoricity of the lexical unit considered (e.g. divorce) by comparing its contextual meaning to its basic meanings. What is important to highlight here is that two different text typologies will be dealt with in our investigation: speeches given by political elites to speak to their own and to opponent parties and to the electorate, and articles extracted by the mainstream media whose main aim is both to express criticism and to make an intricate political process more agreeable. These differences will give us the opportunity to study the same metaphor in political communication but moving from a specialized level to the public sphere.

Our analysis is mainly qualitative in that we were interested in investigating the use and the function of metaphor in the Brexit discourse for popularizing purposes. If the politicians' corpus revealed 22 instantiations of divorce, twelve of which have a metaphorical meaning with reference to Brexit, three metaphorically refer to normal life, e.g. 'divorced from normal life', 'divorced from the wider economy', and 'our opponents are trying to divorce the two issues" (Table 3, lines 16, 18 and 21), in the media corpus all the occurrences were found to carry a metaphorical meaning.

4. The divorce metaphor in the political speeches

As anticipated in the Introduction, in her narrative Theresa May makes all efforts to shy away from the word 'divorce' when referring to Brexit, for all the negative connotations that the word carries within itself. The Prime Minister said that, more often than not, when people get divorced, they do not have a good relationship afterwards, whereas what the British people are trying to seek with their European *friends and allies* is *a deep and special partnership*,[3] and the relation they want will be *enduring*, *strong*, *deep*, *broad*, *close* and *unique*.

It is well known that the relationship between the UK and the EU has always been troubled and fraught, hard, difficult, ill-fated, erratic, turbulent, tumultuous, to quote just a few adjectives that have been used to refer to the relationship between Britain and Europe, a marriage on the rocks (Milizia 2015, 2019b), as it were, and that the UK has never been too keen on *tying the knot with Europe* (Milizia 2014, 2016, 2019a). In 1975, after only two years of marriage, one of the two sides, the UK in fact, who is often referred to, in the couple, as the unfaithful wife (Đurović, Silaški 2018), had already tried to apply for divorce and, on several occasions one of the two sides, the unfaithful wife again, had tried to rewrite the marriage vows. Thus, in this context, Britain is given the female role and the EU the male role who is, in the case in question, the aggrieved husband (Đurović, Silaški 2018). Since Britain on June 23, 2016, decided to turn its back on Europe and file for divorce, asking to put an end to this four-decade dysfunctional relationship, people have been wondering whether it will be a separation or a divorce, and whether an amicable divorce is only a pipe dream. Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, reiterated on several occasions his conviction that "this divorce is a tragedy", and that Theresa May should call things with their real name: "this break-up is a divorce". Relying on another metaphor, the EU Commission President argued that the EU is not a golf club that can be joined or left at will, it is a family (Musolff 2009) and, as a consequence, Brexit should be treated as divorce, despite all the efforts to try and avoid the word.

It is true that the United Kingdom is sometimes seen, as David Cameron said in one of his famous speeches on Europe, as an argumentative and rather strong-minded member of the FAMILY of European nations but, if the UK leaves the Union, they will still be neighbours, and will still continue to champion the same beliefs.

---

[3] The binomial *deep and special*, in the pattern *deep and special relationship*, is historically and conventionally related to the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Hence, the one with the UK is a *deep and special partnership*.

Lingue e
Linguaggi

The marriage between the UK and the EU started as difficult in the first place, indeed even prior to the UK's accession, in that they were denied membership twice;[4] throughout the years, like any family, they experienced the ups and downs that every couple goes through, with the several crises that finally brought them to the final decision of a break-up.

In the paragraph below, the analysis of the spoken corpus is carried out, taking into account both the data before the referendum outcome and the data after the British people had decided to "turn their back on Europe".

4.1. The spoken data

Before looking at how British politicians tackle the divorce metaphor, we should bear in mind that the same metaphor applies also to Scotland, and thus two references to the Scottish independence referendum, held in September 2014, have emerged in our corpus.

N	Concordance
1	did leave the UK; that this marriage of nations has run its course and it needs a divorce. Now, today I want to take on all these views: the idea we'd be better off
2	say that this marriage of yours is stronger than ever; others say you're planning a divorce. Could I ask you both how would you sum up the state of your union?
3	say that this marriage of yours is stronger than ever; others say you're planning a divorce. Could I ask you both how would you sum up the state of your union?
4	end before they were 12 years old. One of my half brothers then went through a divorce himself after his first wife left him- and left him with the care of three young
5	interests and accidentally slide into a no-deal separation and an acrimonious divorce, I am afraid that we risk losing our sense of common destiny, undermine
6	out one type of relationship over another. There are millions of separated and divorced parents who continue to have a really good relationship just as there are
7	these events but very well remember the second, and my brother's separation and divorce were difficult enough for the rest of the family, let alone for his three children
8	of uncertainty for Britain, just as we are getting back on our feet. And, like any divorce, the negotiations with our former EU partners are likely to be difficult. The
9	the EU succeed politically and economically. In exit we are not seeking a bitter divorce, but a better relationship. That's the Government's ambition. The outcome
10	the EU to remain as close as possible in the future. We should aim for a friendly divorce, that would be our starting point in the coming negotiations. Of course our
11	you to channel Margaret Thatcher and make clear to our EU partners that a Brexit divorce would be unreasonable. Do you agree with the Foreign Secretary? Prime
12	we do that? Again, it flies in the face of common sense. It would be like getting divorced, moving out, then still expecting to pick what colour curtains you have in
13	to someone settled in the UK. He got indefinite leave to remain then immediately divorced his UK-based spouse, returned to Pakistan, remarried and then applied
14	personally for a moment. My dad was married twice and his first marriage ended in divorce. My two older half-brothers Richard and David saw their parents' marriage
15	ally for the US and all countries that share our values. But the risk of a messy divorce, as opposed to the friendship we seek, would be a fissure in relations
16	may have changed today – indeed these schools have become more and more divorced from normal life. Between 2010 and 2015 their fees rose 4 times faster
17	the fact that people are living longer. Others we should regret - like the high rate of divorce or the immigration policies that led to a net influx of 1.7 million people into
18	flourish. We must never, ever talk about consumers as if they are somehow divorced from the wider economy. The UK's green industry is worth around £128
19	made their decision and of course we respect that, and there's no way around the divorce. But I can assure you that we will miss you when you leave. Despite the
20	not have members of our immediate or extended families who have gone through divorce or separation or other form of family break up. I was appointed to my job as
21	will really drive living standards up in the long term. Our opponents are trying to divorce the two issues. As if living standards and the deficit weren't intrinsically
22	be if the remainder of the UK agreed to become a 'new state'. The so-called velvet divorce of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, where two successor states emerged,

Table 3
Concordance lines of *divorce* in the spoken corpus.

[4] The UK made its first application to join in 1961 and was vetoed by President Charles De Gaulle in 1963. A second application was vetoed by the French again in 1967. The French General was adamant that the British view of the European project was characterized by a deep-seated hostility and that the UK would require a radical transformation if it were ever to be allowed to join the Common Market. He said that London showed a "lack of interest" in the Common Market, and that several aspects of Britain's economy made Britain incompatible with Europe.
It was only in 1969 that the green light was given to negotiations for British membership. The United Kingdom joined the EEC (European Economic Community) in 1973 with Ireland and Denmark. The UK's application for membership was not approved until General De Gaulle fell from power, and he was dead before the UK actually joined.

As we can see in line 1, Table 3, Prime Minister David Cameron says that "this marriage of nations has run its course and now needs a divorce". These words might, at first, sound weird, it being very well-known that David Cameron always made clear that the United Kingdom is stronger with Scotland within it, and that the four countries together are like a powerful brand: separating Scotland out of that brand would be like separating the waters of River Tweed and the North Sea. Thus, enlarging the context, we find out that David Cameron, in a speech delivered a few months before the Scottish vote, argues that there are a whole range of different views about the referendum: there are the 'quiet patriots', the 'shoulder shruggers', and those who think that the UK is better off if Scotland did leave the UK and, hence, that "this marriage of nations has run its course and now needs a divorce". Indeed, never did we find David Cameron, in his six-year premiership, use the word divorce in relation to UK-Scotland, as well as in relation to the couple UK-EU. Yet, it is worth highlighting that, in our data, the divorce metaphor was at work also before 2014, even though with reference to another partner.

In line 22, Lord Wallace is talking about the "so-called velvet divorce", envisaging a scenario where the separation of Scotland from the rest of the United Kingdom would be as smooth and calm as the one that brought to the creation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the early 1990s and to the extinction of Czechoslovakia. Indeed, such a divorce is also what Theresa May was hoping to bring about, an orderly and calm Brexit, envisaging a smooth transition into a new reality with an EU made up of 27 instead of 28 member states.

As stated earlier, the marriage metaphor is one of the conventional metaphors of political discourse (Charteris-Black 2014; Musolff 2004, 2009), and it has become common to speak of the relationship between broader entities such as nations or states, or political parties, or politicians, as is the case in line 3 (Table 3), where the interviewer is asking David Cameron and Nick Clegg about their relationship and their coalition government:

> Interviewer: Some say that this marriage of yours is stronger than ever, others say you are planning a divorce. Could I ask both of you how you would sum up the state of your union?
>
> David Cameron: I hate to sort of spoil the party, but let me put it like this: we are married, not to each other. We are both happily married. You know, this is a government, not a relationship. […] To me, it's not a marriage. It is, if you like, a Ronseal deal: it does what it says on the tin. We said we would come together. We said we'd form a government. We said we'd tackle these big problems. We said we'd get on with it in a mature and sensible way, and that is exactly what we've done.

In the one-year period of the Conservative government from 2015 to 2016, the divorce metaphor was relied on just once, and in particular by Philip Hammond, as we can see in line 8: "And, like any divorce, the negotiations with our former EU partners are likely to be difficult". It would have been very interesting to compare, in relation to the divorce metaphor, Philip Hammond's speeches before and after the referendum, but unsurprisingly he never uttered the word when he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer in the new government. Just like Theresa May, after backing Remain in the Brexit referendum, Philip Hammond, in fact, agreed he would support the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. However, it is worth knowing that, in January 2018, senior Conservatives asked Theresa May to sack him as Chancellor, following his comments about Brexit, which were deemed to be too Europhilic in nature.

In this speech delivered in March 2016, only three months before the referendum, the then Foreign Minister attempted to stress the drawbacks of leaving, after being offered 'the special and unique status' that David Cameron had painstakingly negotiated: outside the Euro, outside Schengen, with an opt-out in Justice and Home Affairs matters, an exemption from 'ever closer Union', and a new mechanism to limit access to British benefits system for EU migrants. With this offer, Philip Hammond concedes, Britain was offered the best of both worlds. In his speech he managed to foresee what might happen in the future, which is indeed happening at the time of writing, namely that after three years of excruciating debate the two sides have not reached an agreement, yet.[5] Brexit was scheduled for March 29, 2019, and it was meant to be easy, Nigel Farage promised, and "there will be no downside, only a considerable upside", David Davis pledged. But the reason why no deal has been reached at the time of writing, and the deadline was extended for several times, is because *they* – the Leave supporters – "cannot point to an example which is better than the special status within the EU that we now have on offer". The 27 member states, he adds, already think that they have gone the extra mile for Britain. As many scholars have pointed out in this respect, the image of the cake has often been employed in this

---

[5] Even though Boris Johnson as Prime Minister has succeeded where Theresa May had failed, i.e. strengthening the conservatives in a national election and carrying the UK out of the EU on January 31, 2020, delivering on his promise to "get Brexit done", at the time of writing a deal has not been reached yet between the UK and the EU. In the 11-month transition period the two sides will need to negotiate the terms of their future relationship. If a new agreement is not in place by the beginning of 2021, the UK will become a "third country" to Brussels.

context, referring to the British government's wish to retain EU membership benefits without its obligations (Musolff 2019).

In this speech Philip Hammond uses the divorce metaphor likening Brexit to the legal proceedings that follow a failed marriage (Musolff 2017), balancing the burdens and the benefits, and listing the many disadvantages that would emerge out of such a leap in the dark.

It has been noted (Koller *et al.* 2019) that Remain politicians and supporters largely failed to represent the EU in positive terms and make a positive case for EU membership, thus the Remain side started as disadvantaged with respect to the Leave side, in that a positive image of the EU membership was never laid, and never established in the past by the media and politicians. Through the often-used scaremongering tactic (Zuccato, Partington 2018), Philip Hammond is trying to instill fear and scare in the British people that a blunt and hard divorce would be difficult, and would bring no positive effects, but only uncertainty, frustration, fear, a feeling of revenge on the part of the former partner who has been 'dumped', or 'jilted' (Berberović, Mujagić 2017), who would have no interest in helping the unfaithful partner to thrive outside the EU, as well as apprehension, from the other 27, of a British 'contagion' that a Brexit might bring to other countries. It seems that Remainers were only able to show the several disadvantages of leaving, yet without providing any advantages for remaining, relying on the common and apologetic formula "Europe is not perfect but we're stronger, safer and better off within a reformed European Union", and that, in the end, "it is best to simply stick with the status quo" (Buckledee 2018).

The evidence of the data shows that the Remain campaign appealed to rationality and negative emotions – with Philip Hammond appealing in particular to economic facts in his role of Chancellor of the Exchequer – whereas the Leave side appealed more to positive emotions, managing to sound more confident and more engaging in their language, by telling the people what to do: *Vote leave! Take back control!* rather than giving them a statement such as *Britain Stronger in Europe* (Koller *et al.* 2019). Needless to say, the imperative construction, the most prototypical means for the expression of orders, has a different appeal on voters, particularly on wavering voters, than plain assertions. The imperative *Get Brexit done*, for example, Boris Johnson's mantra in the 2019 election campaign, turned out to be as successful, short in form but wide in scope.

In line 12 (Table 3), the divorce metaphor was uttered by a woman, Justine Greening who, in the Cameron's government, was serving as Secretary of State for International Development. The past three decades have seen an increase in the number of women serving in high-level political positions in countries throughout the world (Ahrens 2009), and even though

Theresa May is not the first female British Prime Minister, the number of British female parliamentarians has never been as high as recently. In 1997, over 100 women became MPs, and this arose out of the Labour Party policy of requiring equal numbers of male and female candidates for elected positions within the party (Charteris-Black 2009).

The language of women has long been held to display peculiar traits (Jespersen 1922), and one of these is that women tend to refer to their immediate surroundings, the finished product, the ornamental, the individual, and the concrete, while the masculine preference is for the more remote, the constructive, the useful, the general, the abstract. This is reflected in Justine Greening's words:

> It would be like getting divorced, moving out, then still expect to pick what colour curtains you have in the front room. […]
> Why would any club or membership organization give non-members a better deal – people who are outside it? It's like cancelling your gym subscription and expecting to get upgraded access to all the fitness machines.

What Leave campaigners are proposing, Justine Greening claims, flies in the face of common sense: it appears at times that they want to have, as said earlier, their cake and eat it: they are claiming that they can shape the EU more from being outside than from being in. "This is illogical and absurd", continues Justine Greening but, as it often happens, the divorce proceedings could turn into a long fight over everything, including furniture, or into an endless legal battle over trivial things. If a couple decides to divorce, the partner who moves out will have no say on the furniture or the colour of the curtains in the front room, just like a person who decides to cancel his/her gym subscription will have no access to all the machines whose use is free for the members of the club. Justine Greening is warning her fellow citizens that, if Britain decides to exit the club/gym, they will not be able to keep the assets and maintain occasional relations with the EU.

She then goes on, instilling fear of a leap into the unknown, relying on the well-known metaphor of the one-way ticket with no clear destination, borrowed very likely by David Cameron who spoke of a one-way ticket without a return:

> But it seems to me that, as it stands, leaving the EU is a one-way ticket, with no clear destination.

Jespersen's assumptions are shared by Charteris-Black (2009) who, in his study on the use of metaphors used by female and male parliamentarians, found that women are far less likely to indulge in grand metaphorical constructs than men. Justine Greening, with her symbols, is in fact trying to persuade the Leave supporters that divorce is not the best option and that,

Lingue e Linguaggi

even though the idea of divorce may appear thrilling after many years of dull and passionless marriage, freedom is not always such fun (Berberović, Mujagić 2017), and when "you take back control" there is no one to blame when things go wrong.

As mentioned earlier, it is interesting to notice that, in Table 3, out of 22 instantiations of divorce, 12 have a metaphorical meaning and they all refer to Brexit, whereas 7 carry a literal meaning, and 3 are meant metaphorically but do not refer to the relationship between the UK and the EU. This high frequency clearly indicates that the figurative scenario of the UK-EU divorce metaphor is by now somehow firmly entrenched in the discourse community and, at least in this time in history, is widely shared by the public at large.

In September 2018, Vice Premier David Lidington went to Siena, Italy, to a conference titled "Bridging the Gaps". In this speech, he repeats time and again that the British are leaving the institutions of the European Union but are not leaving Europe, and spells out how deeply they value their relationship with Europe and Italy in particular. This said, he explains that the reason why they are doing all this, despite the fact that it would be easier for the UK just to stay in the EU, is because the British people have made a democratic choice in a referendum, and in a democracy a democratic choice has to be respected, otherwise what is pretty fragile public confidence in the political process would be damaged still further. David Lidington's words clearly mirror a fervent Remainer's ideology, yet he seems unable to build a positive case for Europe, but rather he appears to accept passively, almost resigned, what has already been decided, even though this may mean "leave without a deal". Yet, a deal is in both the UK and the EU's interest, thus, David Lidington argues, we should on both sides look for one, as we read in line 5, because if we forget our common interests and "accidentally slide into a no-deal separation and an acrimonious divorce, we might risk losing our sense of common destiny, undermine our ability to cooperate, facing the challenges of the 21st century divided". He thus suggests that we should try and avoid an acrimonious divorce, but rarely does a divorce carry positive feelings; it can be by mutual consent, but seldom friendly and without any grudge, in that even though it was a loveless marriage, or a marriage of convenience, rather tedious and restrictive (Berberović, Mujagić 2017), from a sterile partner (Musolff 2017), it is still a divorce after 45 years.

Playing with the adjectives *bitter* and *better*, David Davis' words in line 2 reflect the wishful thinking that, in exit, the UK is not seeking "a bitter divorce but a better relationship", still knowing well that it will not be easy and that "it won't be plain sailing, but we need to navigate the course together". The evidence of the data shows that the divorce metaphor is employed by both Remain and Leave supporters, and David Davis, as

Secretary of State for exiting the European Union, obviously chose to leave, confident that the people voted for a better and brighter future for the UK, despite the challenges that would lie ahead.

In line 11 it is the interviewer who, questioning Theresa May at the European Council meeting, utters the word *divorce*, ascribing it to Boris Johnson, and presenting it as a reflection of the Foreign Secretary's views:[6]

> Boris Johnson has called on you to channel Margaret Thatcher and make clear to our EU partners that a Brexit divorce would be unreasonable. Do you agree with the Foreign Secretary?

It is interesting but hardly surprising to notice that not only does Theresa May not repeat the word *divorce*, but she also leaves the question unanswered.

Lines 10 and 19 come from the same statement, held in Copenhagen between the British Prime Minister and the Danish Prime Minister. The word *divorce* is uttered twice, and both times by Lars Løkke Rasmussen, who seems to bear no grudge whatsoever that one of the two partners, the UK in fact, is breaking the relationship. Denmark is a natural partner to the UK, says Theresa May, they are like-minded allies and even though Britain is leaving the EU, she repeats one more time, they are not turning their back on Europe. The Danish Prime Minister seems to passively accept their decision, but he adds:

> I think that it is tragic that the UK is leaving the European Union, but the Brits have made their decision and of course we respect that, and there's no way around the divorce. But I can assure you that we will miss you when you leave. […] We should aim for a friendly divorce.

Donald Tusk, the former President of the European Council, also spoke of a tragedy in the same respect, claiming, ten days after the referendum outcome, that "Brexit would mark nothing less than the beginning of the destruction of western political civilization in its entirety".

As Geary and Lees (2016) rightly argue, divorces can be such tragedies, yet at the same time if people stay together it can even be worse: unhappy couples simply do not stay together, let alone couples who have been drifting apart for decades. As Musolff (2016) puts it, this relationship resembles drama or soap opera plots even though, according to some

---

[6] We did not manage to find the original source where Boris Johnson makes such a statement. Thus, what we read here are the interviewer's words, ascribed to the Foreign Minister. Indeed, being Boris Johnson one of the fathers of Brexit, we found it odd to actually see the noun *divorce* co-occurring with the adjective *unreasonable*.

politicians, this separation is proving to be more serious and more difficult than an "ordinary lovers' quarrel".

In line 15, Foreign Minister Jeremy Hunt is warning against the risk of leaving the Union with no deal, and against the risk of a messy divorce, which would bring to a fissure in the relations between European allies, and whose fissures would take a generation to heal. This process has been likened to the opening of a Pandora's box (Nejad 2015): being the first time that a member state has withdrawn from the Union, we may find in the Pandora's box all possible negative consequences and troubles.

Indeed, if Europe used to be regarded as a house with a closed or missing exit door (Musolff 2000, p. 226), now it has become more willing to allow member states to withdraw, with all the possible consequences and troubles arising from the fact that no other member state has ever left the Union before: only Greenland left the EU in the 1980s over fishing rights, but Greenland is part of the Danish realm, hence there is no precedent for how the fourth most populous European nation would divorce the EU. The framework of exiting generates metaphors like escaping a prison, and often has the EU been compared to a prison, to an oppressive force, a trap, a straitjacket, and therefore Brexit is like a liberation from a trap (Musolff 2017).

5. The divorce metaphor in the media

Although Theresa May voices opposition to the dangerous divorce metaphor, newspapers and magazines are replete with it. In *The Guardian*, 74 occurrences of *divorce* out of 80 are used metaphorically and are part and parcel of the marriage/divorce narrative. It is not surprising that *divorce* is negatively evaluated as a *stressful* and *hostile process* in *The Guardian* as well as in other Europhile newspapers, such as *The Mirror* in our data, because divorce sanctions the end of a long relationship with Europe.

1. **Divorce** is often a <u>stressful, hostile process</u>, riven by bad feelings on both sides. For Theresa May's government, <u>leaving a union </u>with Europe is proving to be a <u>humiliating experience</u>. (Dec 8th, 2017)

2. A **divorce** <u>is between two equal partners</u>. But the UK is to the EU what Belgium, Austria or Portugal are to Germany: an entity eight times as small. If the EU informs the UK that "no soft Brexit means no soft Brexit" then that is what it is. For the same reason the analogy of a "game of chicken" for the coming negotiations should be cast aside. The UK and the EU may be driving at furious speed into one another, each expecting the other to swerve. <u>But if the UK is a Mini then the EU is a truck</u>. (March 30th, 2017).

*L*ingue e
*L*inguaggi

As it can be observed from these two extended citations, not only does *The Guardian* reject ideologically divorce as a solution to the problem but it also challenges the metaphor by showing its inadequacy as shown in example 2. When repeated, metaphors become conventionalised, and conventional metaphors are taken as self-evident starting points in debates. The debate here questions the equality between the UK and the EU. A divorce is assumed to happen between two equal partners, and metaphorically speaking between two countries, which is not the case in point since the UK is a small entity if compared to the EU. A further metaphor is then introduced which helps comprehend the difference between the two parties in terms of size and hence power (e.g. the UK is a Mini and the EU is a truck). For this reason, the divorce metaphor cannot work, and a more acceptable imagery for *The Guardian*, as written elsewhere, would be that of "a club of almost 30 vessels sailing together in the belief that this serves their interests" (March 30th, 2017). The idea of a 'club' seems to leave more space for negotiation of broken relationships whereas, in a broken marriage, a couple rarely remarries when the choice has been to divorce. Metaphors are used purposefully to strengthen certain views on the world, and in the case of the divorce metaphor *The Guardian* takes a more critical stance towards the divorce by stating that what is being negotiated between Britain and the EU is not the end of a marriage but "it's a self-inflicted downgrade" (March 30th, 2017) which does not encompass any prospects for reconciliation. Other metaphors emerged in this newspaper (e.g. means of transport such as truck and vessels; clubbing) seem to point to a rather "authoritarian way of framing" the Brexit issue (Charteris-Black 2019, p. 228) which implies, in the case of the 'club', the presence of a set of rules and facilities to comply with and an emphasis on directions to take in the case of the means of transport. The strength of the vessel or truck metaphors may be seen in their ability to naturalize the peculiar lack of equality between the EU and its member states due to the different size and speed of the various means of transport employed.

Coming back to the main metaphor investigated in this research, the other pro-European newspaper, *The Mirror,* naturalizes the feelings of dread due to the post-referendum events by likening them to the moral and often unknown consequences in a divorce, and it does so by foregrounding the negative emotional effects of a separation (*pain, dread, humiliation,* examples 3 and 4). By evoking the ethical implications of divorce, above all the traumatic effect on children, *The Mirror* calls for the two parties to strike a deal that will not leave one or both sides devastated and resentful, and reminds the reader that parents have an obligation to protect their children from harm, all else being equal. The view behind this position is that marriage creates moral obligations primarily because it involves promise-making and, last but not least, because parents have the moral responsibility

to safeguard their offspring. In so doing, the pro-remain newspaper adopts the view that couples/nations, despite their conflicts, should stand united.

3.   "WE'RE getting a **divorce**." It's something we all <u>dread </u>hearing, whether from our children, siblings, best friends or parents. […] It's not just the heartbreak of seeing their **marriages** end, it's also the gut-wrenching knowledge of the <u>pain</u> it will bring. Because while everyone starts out hoping to keep things friendly and civil, <u>we all know it rarely ends that way. </u>(July 28th, 2017)

4.   **Brexit's** like a **divorce,** like being told by someone you love that they're leaving you and then having to deal with saving face while trying not to drown <u>in a sea of humiliation</u>. **Divorces** happen. It's how they turn out and its effect they have on the children that matters. <u>Unfortunately, in this case we're the children</u>. So, let's hope it's resolved amicably, for all our sakes. (October 10th, 2018)

In the Pro-Leave newspaper, *The Telegraph,* the breakup between the UK and the EU is described as "an unresolved divorce on a monumental scale" (May 19th, 2018). Initially, *The Telegraph* focuses attention on the Brexit *divorce bill* with *bill* as the main collocate (e.g. "*sufficient progress" had been made over the issues of the Brexit divorce bill*, Dec 16th, 2017). The divorce from the EU entails the contraction of financial debts (framed as *divorce bill*) that the UK is supposed to pay after leaving the union for its historic commitments (Charteris-Black 2019, p. 9). Seen as the price of freedom, the *bill* fits perfectly in the divorce scenario in that, like a divorce between two people, the two parties have to deal with money and access to the children afterwards. The ideological function of the metaphor is clear from a headline in this newspaper: "*It's not divorce, so the EU can forget alimony*" (April 27, 2017). If the two countries are not divorced because they have never been married, so there is no reason to discuss *alimony*.

In line with the Prime Minister's stance, *The Telegraph* rejects the divorce metaphor because it does not fit the real situation, and historical facts are put forward to sustain the pro-Brexit position. *The Telegraph* ideologically privileges the distinctive aspects of Britain (example 6) rather than emphasizing the effects of the end of the marriage to the Union, to demonstrate that Britain can live by without the EU.

5.   …We were never in a **marriage** with the EU and we are not going through a **divorce** […] Let's at least try to stop sounding like an **embittered couple** trying to deal with heartbreak while working out a way of remaining civil to each other because we must. Securing a good deal is hard enough without all this emotional baggage. (August 7th, 2017)

6.   What we are, and always have been, is **good neighbours**, and it must be

possible to remain just that <u>without</u> being part of an **ever-closer political union**. We never joined the euro, we stayed out of Schengen, and we have continued to drive on the left side of the road. (August 27th, 2017)

The Daily Mail, which has been very influential when advocating Brexit, relies on an argumentative narration where the main point is that, even though Christians do not divorce (cf. excerpt 7), there is no absolute prohibition on putting an end to the marriage when it does not work. As a matter of fact, the best solution, at times, is to split up and have the marriage *annulled* as if it had never existed. In so doing, the *Daily Mail* legitimises and naturalises the change in the UK-EU relationship that should be intended in terms of neighbourhood rather than as a marriage.

7. Many Christians seem to believe that our relationship to the EU is analogous to **divorce** - and Christians don't **divorce** do they? But there has never been an absolute prohibition on **divorce** among Christians. The Bible allows **divorce** under certain circumstances and even the most traditional churches have accepted that **marriages** can die, or can be <u>annulled.</u> To follow the analogy of **marriage** and **divorce** there comes a time when such <u>harm</u> is taking place within the **marriage** that there is no choice but to end it.

    But of course, the <u>relationship with the EU is not a marriage</u>. It is a treaty which can be replaced by a better treaty. So there should be no squeamishness about unity, peace and harmony. Many countries contribute to brotherly fellowship and international peacemaking without surrendering their democratic controls. (May 15th, 2016)

8. Yes, we have decided to leave the EU's political structures, but we should still seek a close economic, diplomatic and legal **relationship** with our European <u>neighbours.</u> (June 10th, 2018)

When the metaphor of divorce is used in *The Economist*, the opportunity is taken to evaluate the separation from the union negatively. This is because, firstly, divorce is seldom *amicable* and, secondly, after a *bitter divorce* cordial relations are impossible. By stressing the bad consequences of the divorce above all on the economic level, *The Economist* exploits the metaphor to invite readers to concentrate more on uncertain and *acrimonious* relationships with Europe. The metaphor is used to criticise Brexit and, even though divorces exist, there is always an opportunity to revoke *the letter of divorce.*

9. **DIVORCE** is seldom <u>amicable</u>, as Britain's exit from the European Union shows. […] <u>Both sides </u>have points. The EU is right that the British papers lack substance and list options more than solutions. It is also fair to complain over Britain's failure to publish any proposal on its

divorce bill. […] Yet the real question may be: are cordial relations ever possible after a <u>bitter</u> **divorce**? (August 31ˢᵗ, 2017).

10.   Britain and Ireland are too distracted to give enough attention to Belfast, which looks like the child in an <u>acrimonious</u> **divorce**. (March 31ˢᵗ, 2018)

11.   Throughout the Brexit talks, the door remains open for the UK to change its mind and revoke its **divorce** letter. But once Britain walks out, the door slams shut. (June 19ᵗʰ, 2017)

The interpretative analysis of metaphors sets up discursive links between the source and the target domains. The conceptualisation of the state or the nation as a family rests on the following cross-domain correspondences:

Target domain		Source domain
EU	→	Family
EU/UK	→	Partners in a marriage; couple
Brexit	→	Divorce; letter of divorce
Negotiations	→	Divorce bill; terms; deal; proceedings; settlement; terms
Problems	→	Offspring; expenses;
Future outcome	→	Unknown; uncertainties; rupture; better neighbours;

Table 4
Cross-domain correspondences in the state/nation as a family metaphor.

The metaphor of divorce constitutes in the media a mini-narrative or metaphor scenario (Musolff 2006) which reflects all the complex aspects of almost 45 years of troubled relations between the EU and the UK. The scenario starts from the marriage breakdown seen as the natural outcome of sick marriages. Divorces then may develop further, following either a conciliatory way or on the contrary with a feeling of hatred and longing for revenge. When divorce procedures start, what follows is a phase of transition. In this temporary phase, the two countries still *live in the same house* but *sleep in separate beds* or - as Theresa May has said - *dine separately*, *maintaining a polite façade* (*The Telegraph* October 18ᵗʰ, 2018). The transition period may be quite long but necessary. In the following phase, negotiations take the offspring into consideration and all the expenses for the divorce. Further implications of this metaphor concern uncertainties about the future relationship and agreement between the Union and the UK. However, the relationship can take different forms, from friendship to good neighbourly relations, or a civilised married ex-couple where each person goes their own way.

Lⓢ ingue e
Lⓢ inguaggi

Even though it is very difficult to say how far the mainstream British newspapers have influenced the public opinion on Brexit, what can be safely stated is the vital role played by the metaphor of divorce in structuring a narrative of the UK leaving the European club. The same divorce metaphor cautiously but also strategically used by politicians in their speeches, as seen in the previous sections, has been exploited in the media in all its facets. Lexically speaking, the divorce metaphor has provided media with a rich vocabulary to frame a strenuous political and economic membership and its potential and unforeseen consequences; textually speaking, the same metaphor performs a textual cohesive function in this narrative of love and betrayal. Where the aim was to emphasize the dangerous effects of Brexit, i.e. the sensitive side of the long relationship and the ethical issues of such a dissolute decision have been stressed (see *The Guardian, The Mirror* and *The Economist*); by contrast, these emotional effects have been blurred when negotiations had to be emphasised. Thus, in the mainstream press, which has long been antithetical to British membership, attention has been shifted to other types of "better" relationships (e.g. neighbourhood; friendship; partnership). Furthermore, the metaphor lends itself to legitimising the still ongoing negotiations for settlement since discussions to reach an agreement may be hard and long, but necessary to put an end to a complex relationship maybe useless and not suitable to such an independent and powerful nation as Britain (see *The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail*).

The higher frequency of the divorce metaphor in the media (0.18%) with respect to the spoken corpus of politicians' speeches (0.00055%) is due to a number of reasons: firstly, whatever the outcome will be, the flexibility of this metaphor fits the needs of journalists who amplify its resonance by plotting the events as in a drama serial and also those of the politicians who sometimes obfuscate truths. Secondly, the divorce metaphor is dissociation-oriented, unlike for example other metaphors that might have been used for the same purpose of representing two dissimilar entities or teams (i.e. sports metaphors); thirdly, it highlights the inevitable hardship endured during a separation phase and evokes the need to settle everything down, in an appeal to order; finally, it is a flexible metaphor which is still valid in case of an upside down turn.

6. Conclusions

The public discussions about the European Union and Brexit are couched, like all political discourse, in metaphors (Musolff 2017). Brexit has inspired very many metaphors, and politicians and the media, very often related to one another, as we have shown, have come up with their own way to describe the

British vote to leave the European Union. The word *Brexit* itself is a persuasive metaphor, and even though the portmanteau of British Exit has become an entirely natural part of discourse, the concept of exiting the EU is metaphorical, mediating between conscious and unconscious persuasion, between cognition and emotion, giving the public the idea that Britain can stop being an EU member by simply walking through a door.

In this paper our purpose was to investigate the use of metaphors in the European debate, more specifically we have looked at the use of the divorce metaphor in a spoken political corpus of British politicians and in the mainstream media. Our analysis has shown that while the divorce metaphor is more popular in the media for dissemination purposes but also because of its potential for moral and ideological reasoning, politicians are more cautious about using it, both on the Leave side and on the Remain side. This outcome has emerged also in relation to 'family' metaphors, mainly in view of the fact that the European Commission had long used the metaphor of the 'European family', which was welcomed by some and altogether rejected by others. Our corpus has shown that politicians on the Leave side have in fact argued for a new sort of relationship, different from a family, thus suggesting partnership, friendship, alliance, neighbourhood. Being partners, friends, allies or neighbours implies different kinds of obligations, because the frame for 'family' includes emotions and notions of right and wrong behaviour (Charteris-Black 2014), which do not strictly typically pertain to friendships or other kinds of relationships, where more freedom and liberty, i.e. independence, are generally accorded.

It was interesting to notice that, according to some media, the UK was never in a marriage with the EU and, consequently, "we are not going through a divorce", also taking into account that a marriage or a divorce is usually between two equal partners, and this is not the case because the UK is a small entity if compared to the EU.

The metaphor we have investigated in this paper is by no means novel, indeed the conventional and well-established metaphor of the FAMILY and, in particular, of MARRIAGE/DIVORCE is prominent among conceptual metaphors used in EU discourse. The DIVORCE metaphor has turned out to be malleable and mouldable, according to the different perspectives and contexts: going through a separation can be a disaster and a tragedy, a humiliation, yet ending a marriage and taking a different path can be emotionally therapeutic, even more so when the couple has been building towards separation for decades, and one of the two has always been a reluctant partner in an asymmetric marriage relationship. The European Union was meant to be a win-win situation for both the UK and Europe, yet many have come to wonder throughout these 45 years whether the marriage was a 'marriage of convenience' (Berberović, Mujagić 2017) or, as it has often been called, a

'shotgun wedding' (Koller 2002), which now seems to have come to an end. After the referendum outcome, Britons have thrown the wedding ring, have instructed lawyers, have lodged the petition but, as the Brexit mantra goes, "nothing is agreed until everything is agreed". Indeed, even though Boris Johnson has managed to carry Britain out of the EU, Brexit is far from over, and nothing has been agreed yet, or better not everything has been agreed and, after three years of excruciating uncertainty, the UK remains split vis-à-vis its relationship with the European Union. The kingdom is in pieces, even though the sound parliamentary majority won by Boris Johnson may have given the impression of a countrywide consensus for the divorce. The future could foresee, instead, a divorce of Scotland from the rest of the UK, as well as a divorce of Northern Ireland, to unite the island under Dublin.

The divorce metaphor can certainly be regarded as one of the master metaphors among the many metaphors built around the Brexit debate. Interestingly but not surprisingly, we noticed that even though Boris Johnson as a journalist is an inveterate metaphor addict, he tried to shy away from the divorce metaphor both as a Foreign Secretary and as a Prime Minister. Yet, relying on metaphors whose origins he carefully attributes to someone else, on several occasions indeed did he make clear that, for him, departure from the EU was not the end of a marriage but simply the realignment of a friendship group, thus framing the UK's relationship with the EU as a transactional one (Charteris-Black 2019). For him, marriages are constraining forces on the individual freedom that he values so highly, as is clear in one of his speeches where he compares Britain to a beautiful girl, called Britannia, who was persuaded to go into an arranged marriage with a foreign gentleman who didn't speak much English and who, over time, became more controlling and needy, and who kept making up new rules and inviting new guests (Berberović, Mujagić 2017).

To conclude, our study has shown that the divorce metaphor originated in the media framing the British-EU relations (Charteris-Black 2019) and, since the marriage was framed as 'a marriage of convenience' from at least 1990 onwards, divorce was always a possibility. However, events such as divorce can be reframed in terms of 'moving on', and what Brexiteers are now considering is to frame the Commonwealth as an alternative 'family' to which Britain could return when the EU and Britain will be no more than neighbours.

Bionotes: Denise Milizia is Associate Professor at the University of Bari Aldo Moro. She is assistant editor of the international journal *ESP Across Cultures*. Her research and her main publications include ESP – mainly political and legal English – Applied Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, political phraseology in American, British and Italian cultures, and

phraseology in Legal English, in particular in European documents. She has published several works in which she analyses the relationship between the UK and the European Union, with a special focus on the role of metaphor in European politics in particular, and on the dissemination of knowledge in general. Her more recent interests lie in the spread of populism in Europe and beyond.

Cinzia Spinzi is Associate Professor at the University of Bergamo. She holds a PhD in *English for Specific Purposes*, a Master's in *Translation Studies* from the University of Birmingham, and a Research Fellowship from the City University of London. She is co-editor of *Cultus: the journal of intercultural mediation and communication.* She is member of the Research Centre on Languages for Specific Purposes (Cerlis) and of the EU funded Project TTRAILs on teaching Language for Specific Purposes. Her research interests include cultural mediation and translation, Corpus Linguistics and Functional Grammar applied to the study of ideology and metaphors in specialised communication (political and tourism discourses).

Authors' addresses: denise.milizia@uniba.it; cinziagiacinta.spinzi@unibg.it

References

Ahrens K. 2009, *Analysing conceptual metaphors in political language*, in Ahrens K. (ed.), *Politics, Gender and Conceptual Metaphors*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 1-5.

Berberović S. and Mersina Mujagić M. 2017, *A marriage of convenience or an amicable divorce: metaphorical blends in the debate on Brexit*, in "Explorations in English Language and Linguistics" 5 [1], pp. 1-24.

Buckledee S. 2018, *The Language of Brexit*, Bloomsbury, London.

Cammaerts B. 2012, *The strategic use of metaphors by political and media elites: the 2007- 11 Belgian constitutional crisis*, in "International journal of media & cultural politics" 8 [2/3], pp. 229-249.

Cap P. 2019, *Britain is full to bursting point! Immigration themes in the Brexit discourse of the UK Independence Party*, in Koller V., Kopf S. and Miglbauer M. (eds.), *Discourses of Brexit*, Routledge, London, pp. 69-85.

Charteris-Black J. 2004, *Corpus approaches to critical metaphor analysis*, Palgrave-MacMillan, London.

Charteris-Black J. 2006, *The communication of leadership: The design of leadership style*, Routledge, London.

Charteris-Black J. 2008, *Metaphors as Models of Political Leadership*. https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/.../metaphors_as_models/Charteris2.pdf.

Charteris-Black J. 2009, *Metaphor and Gender in British Parliamentary Debates*, in Ahrens K. (ed.), *Politics, Gender and Conceptual Metaphors*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, pp. 139-165.

Charteris-Black J. 2014, *Analysing Political speeches. Rhetoric, Discourse and Metaphor*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Charteris-Black J. 2019, *Metaphors of Brexit: No Cherries on the Cake?*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Chilton P. and Ilyn M. 1993, *Metaphor in Political Discourse: The Case of the 'Common European House'*, in "Discourse & Society" 4 [1], pp. 7-31.

Chilton P. and Lakoff M. 1995, *Foreign Policy by Metaphor*, in Schäffner C. and Wenden A.L. (eds.), *Language and Peace*, Darthmouth, Aldershot, pp. 37-60.

Đurović T. and Silaški N. 2018, *The end of a long and fraught marriage: Metaphorical images structuring the Brexit discourse*, in "Metaphor and the Social World" 8 [1], pp. 25-39.

Fillmore C. 1976, *Frame semantics and the nature of language*, in "Annals of the NY Academy of Sciences" 280 [1], pp. 20-32.

Geary M.J. and Lees K.A. 2016, *Brexit and the long, slow EU-UK divorce*, in "The National Interest". https://nationalinterest.org/feature/brexit-the-long-slow-eu-uk-divorce-16664.

Gregg R.B. 2004, *Embodied meaning in American public discourse during the cold war*, in Beer F.A. and De Landtsheer C. (eds.), *Metaphorical world politics*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, pp. 59-74.

Hart C. 2010, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science. New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Jespersen O. 1922, *Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*, Allen and Unwin, London.

Koller V. 2002, *"A Shotgun Wedding": Co-occurrence of war and marriage metaphors in mergers and acquisitions discourse*, in "Metaphor and Symbol" 17 [3], pp. 179-203.

Koller V., Kopf. S. and Miglbauer M. (eds.) 2019, *Discourses of Brexit*, Routledge, London.

Koteyko N. and Ryazanova-Clarke L. 2009, *The Path and Building Metaphors in the Speeches of Vladimir Putin: Back to the Future?*, in "Slavonic" 15 [2], pp. 112-127.

Lakoff G. 2004, *Don't Think of an Elephant: Know your values and frames the debate*, Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, VT.

Lakoff G. and Johnson M. 1980, *Metaphors we live by*, Chicago University Press, Chicago.

Lassan E. 1995, Лассан, Э. Р. Дискурс власти и инакомыслия в СССР: когнитивно-риторический анализ. Вильнюс.

Milizia D. 2014, *In, out, or half way? The European attitude in the speeches of British leaders*, in "Lingue e Linguaggi" 11, pp. 157-175.

Milizia D. 2015, *Discourse and politics in Britain: politicians and the media on Europe*, paper presented at *The eight Corpus Linguistic Conference: In honour of the life and work of Geoffrey Leech*, University of Lancaster, July 20-24.

Milizia D. 2016, *A bilingual comparable analysis: The European Union in the speeches of British and Italian Ministers*, in Garzone G., Heaney D. and Riboni G. (eds.), *Language for Specific Purposes: Research and translation across cultures and media*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, pp. 301-325.

Milizia D. 2018, *Walls or bridges: the language of populism in the UK and in the US*, paper presented at the International Conference *Political Discourse - Multidisciplinary Approaches: New discourses of populism and nationalism*, Edinburgh Napier University, June 21-22.

Milizia D. 2019a, *Pull up the drawbridge? Conventionality and creativity in British political discourse*, in Bonsignori V., Cappelli G. and Mattiello E. (eds.), *Worlds of Words: Complexity, Creativity, and Conventionality in English Language, Literature and Culture*, Pisa University Press, Pisa, pp. 293-309.

Milizia D. 2019b, *'We are leaving the European Union but we're not leaving Europe'. Brexit seen from within*, paper presented at the Annual Workshop at Bari University, *The new European Union: now what? Different perspectives from different Member States*, May 16.

Moffit B. 2016, *The global rise of populism: performance, political style and representation*, Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Musolff A. 2000, *Political imagery of Europe: A house without exit doors?*, in "Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development" 21 [3], pp. 216-229.

Musolff A. 2004, *Metaphor and Political Discourse*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Musolff A. 2006, *Metaphor Scenarios in Public Discourse*, in "Metaphor and Symbol" 21 [1], pp. 23-38.

Musolff A. 2009, *Love, parenthood and gender in the European family: the British perspective*, in Renger A.-B. and Ißler R.A. (eds.), *Europa – Stier und Sternekranz. Von der Union mit Zeus zum Staatenverbund*, Bonn University Press, Göttingen, pp. 536-548.

Musolff A. 2016, *Political metaphor analysis: Discourse and scenarios*, Bloomsbury Academic, London/New York.

Musolff A. 2017, *Truths, Lies and Figurative Scenarios – Metaphors at the Heart of Brexit*, in "Journal of Language and Politics" 16 [5], pp. 641-657.

Musolff A. 2019, *Brexit as 'having your cake and eating it': the discourse career of a*

proverb, in Koller, V., Kopf. S., Miglbauer, M., *Discourses of Brexit*, Routledge, London, pp. 208-221.

Nejad A.S. 2015, *An Analytical Approach towards David Cameron's Bloomberg Speech on the European Union: Opening Pandora's Box*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281005297_An_Analytical_Approach_towards_David_Cameron%27s_Bloomberg_Speech_on_the_European_Union_Opening_Pandora%27s_Box.

Pragglejaz Group MIP 2007, *A Method for Identifying Metaphorically Used Words in Discourse*, in "Metaphor and Symbol" 22 [1], pp. 1-39.

Spinzi C. 2016, *'The whole is greater than the sum of the parts'. Metaphors of inclusion and exclusion in the British and Italian Fascist discourse of the 1930s*, in "Lingue e Linguaggi" 19, pp. 287-303.

Spinzi C. 2017, *Framing issues in the specialized discourse of Diplomacy. A quantitative and qualitative approach*, in "Iperstoria" 10, pp. 94-104.

Spinzi C. and Manca E. 2017, *Reading figurative images in the political discourse of the British press*, in "Textus" 30 [1], pp. 241-256.

Steen G. 2017, *Identifying metaphors in language*, in Semino E. and Demjén Z. (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language*, Routledge, New York, pp. 73-87.

Vertessen D. and De Landtsheer C. 2008, *A metaphorical election style: Metaphor use at election time*, in Pikalo J. and Carver T. (eds.), *Politics, Language and Metaphor*, Routdlege, London, pp. 271-285.

Virdee S. and McGeever B. 2017, *Racism, Crisis, Brexit*, in "Ethnic and Racial Studies" 41 [10], pp. 1802-1819.

Wodak R. 2015, *The Politics of fear. What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean*, Sage, London.

Wodak R. and Richardson J.E. (eds.) 2013, *Analysing Fascist Discourse. European Fascism in Talk and Text*, John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Zinken J. 2007, *Discourse metaphors: The link between figurative language and habitual analogies*, in "Cognitive Linguistics" 18 [3], pp. 445-466.

Zinken J., Hellsten I. and Nerlich B. 2008, *Discourse metaphors*, in Frank R.M., Dirven R., Ziemke T. and Bernárdez E. (eds.), *Body, language and mind*, Mouton de Gruyter, New York, pp. 363-386.

Zuccato M. and Partington A. 2018, *Brexit: Before and After: A corpus-assisted study of the referendum campaigns and the immediate aftermath*, in "Textus" XXXI [1]: 119-139.