Brexit as a Discourse

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Abstract

Discourse related to any political event is a portrayal of the views of the participants involved. These views in turn are based on the underlying ideologies, beliefs and, concepts. Intertextual connections, among other aspects of discourse, make a discourse more meaningful and understandable in a given context. This article is an attempt to bring to light the various shades of discourse of Brexit, in terms of its participants and characteristics that emerged on the canvass of British political scene in the wake of 2016 EU Referendum campaign. Moreover, it goes on to explore instances of intertextual connections in post referendum Brexit discourse. For this purpose, a number of placard images from the "People's Vote march", an anti-Brexit march organized on October 20, 2018, were selected. This paper brings to light the dichotomy of Britons into Leavers and Remainers during Brexit referendum and further bisects them into senders and receivers to elaborate the participants of Brexit discourse. A review of the literature reveals Leavers' discourse to be chiefly based on populism, Euroscepticism, British sovereignty, global Britain, anti-immigration, racism, misrepresentation of facts and discreet handling of language by the leaders of leave camp. On the contrary, it is found that Remainers' discourse mainly relied on regarding immigrants as strength of UK and EU membership as a source of imparting stability and productivity to the UK on the one hand and on highlighting the loss of healthcare benefits to the UK and NHS and prevalence of unemployment on the other hand.

Introduction

Brexit has been a significant event in the recent political history of Britain in particular and the world in general. The term is "used to refer to the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). It was the result of a referendum held on 23 June, 2016 in which the UK decided to leave the EU by 52% to 48%. However the official withdrawal of the UK

from the EU occurred at 11 p.m. GMT on 31 January, 2020. There has been extensive campaigning in Britain during the 2016 Referendum by the "Vote Leave" and "Britain Stronger in Europe" campaigns. These were the official Leave and Remain campaigns respectively, declared by the Electoral Commission of the United Kingdom on 13 April, 2016.

Brexit dichotomized the Britons ideologically on the grounds of populism, nationalism and Euroscepticism. Alkhammash (2020), research on Brexit related discourses is the need of the hour as it helps unfold the association between the language used in Brexit campaigning and the ideological foundations that underlie it in relation to populism.

Brexit has greatly influenced the sentiment of people of both camps and has given rise to a new discourse in British society. Therefore, these new dimensions of language and its use offer great areas of interest to the linguists and language researchers in terms of the participants, intertextuality, semiotics and paralanguage of the Brexit discourse.

This article attempts to establish the participants involved in Brexit and review various aspects of Brexit discourse concerning the sociopolitical scenario prevalent at the time of Brexit campaigning. Moreover, it explores instances of intertextuality from texts displayed on a few Remainers' placards used during a post referendum march.

What is Intertextuality?

Intertextuality refers to "the complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as basic to the creation or interpretation of the text" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The term was coined by Julia Kristeva in 1966. Her conception of intertextuality is based on Bakhtinian notion of dialogism.

Dialogism denotes that humans are in interaction with themselves as well as with others and with the surrounding "world" that exists around them (Alfaro, 1996). Kristeva (1980) elaborates that Bakhtin regards history and society as readable texts for a writer who incorporates himself into these through producing their rephrased versions. Referring to intertextuality, Kristeva (1984) regards it as "transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another" (p. 59). Moreover, elaborating the "literary word", she argues that it is "an intersection of textual surfaces rather than a point (a fixed meaning), as a dialogue among several writings" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65). This indicates that one text is interrelated to other texts.

Raj (2015), discussing Kristevan intertextuality concludes that meaning, text and interpretation cannot exist as free autonomous entities rather these are always interconnected. a text incorporates within it culture and history. Likewise, Brexit discourse also has intertextual connections to other texts.

Types of Intertextuality

There are several types of intertextuality like appropriation, allusion, parody, pastiche etc. Within these, allusion is a significant type. An allusion is a reference to another text. It can also be a reference to a person, place or event. It can be literary, cultural, Biblical or religious and historical in type.

Intertextual connections in Brexit discourse will be discussed later in the coming sections of this paper.

Literature Review

Participants in the Brexit Discourse

Brexit discourse can be viewed in terms of its two major dimensions namely the Leavers' discourse and the Remainers' discourse. Both of these constitute the participants of the discourse of Brexit. Cook (2001) explains that participants are usually described as senders and receivers. When we analyze a discourse, we have to identify senders and receivers. Different discourses have different senders and receivers.

Models of Communication

Based on how people interact, there are straightforward and complex patterns in communication. Keeping in view those patterns of communication, some theorists of communication have given models of communication.

Models of communication are conceptual models used to explain the human communication process. There are two basic models of communication, namely;

- Linear Model of Communication

- Interactive Model of Communication

Linear Model of Communication

This is a one-way model to communicate with others. It consists of the sender encoding a message and channeling it to the receiver in the presence of noise. In this model there is no feedback or response which may allow for a continuous exchange of information. The message flows in a straight line from sender to the receiver. There is no concept of feedback. The only task that a receiver does here is to receive the message. The linear model was first introduced by Shannon & Weaver in 1949. Examples include a teacher delivering a lecture to the students, a story teller narrating a story to the audience and a Radio or TV broadcast.

Interactive Model of Communication

It is two linear models stacked on top of each other. The sender channels a message to the receiver and the receiver then becomes the sender and channels a message to the original sender. This model has added feedback, indicating that communication is not a one way but a two way process. Examples include a question answer session where you just ask a question and then get an answer and sending and receiving messages on phone.

Harris (1996) explains that in a political discourse, the senders are 'media, politicians, and advertisers' and the receivers are 'citizens, the general population and voters' (p.32). But, in actual scheme of things, media is not a sender of a political discourse. It may be responsible for promoting that discourse. Therefore, we need be more accurate regarding the term 'sender'. There is a need to know more about sender in Discourse analysis.

Senders & Receivers in Brexit Discourse

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Taking into account the above discussion, Fig. 1 shows senders of the Leavers' discourse as Queen Elizabeth, the pro-Brexit politicians like Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage etc., British media and, British Leavers. In contrast, the receivers of the Leavers' discourse are the European Union, the anti- Brexit politicians like David Cameron, Theresa May etc., immigrants to UK and, British Remainers. Contrastively, Fig. 2 reveals senders of Remainers' discourse as the European Union, the anti- Brexit politicians like David Cameron, Theresa May etc., immigrants to UK and, British Remainers. In a similar manner, receivers of the Remainers' discourse are Queen Elizabeth, the pro-Brexit politicians like Boris Johnson, Nigel Farage etc., British media and British Leavers.
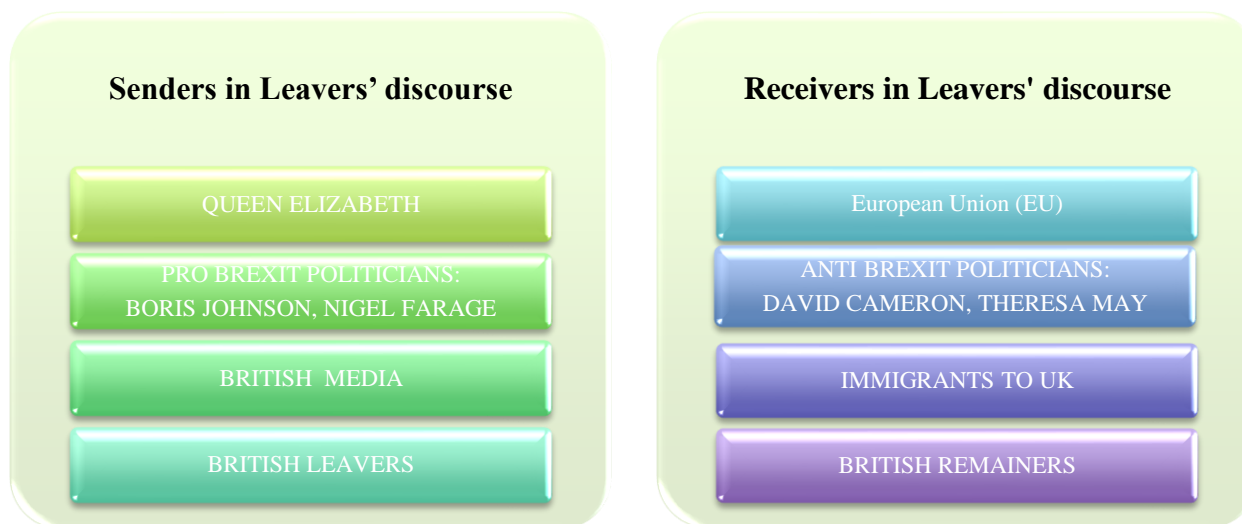
Senders and Receivers in Brexit Discourse

Senders in Leavers' discourse	Receivers in Leavers' discourse
QUEEN ELIZABETH	European Union (EU)
PRO BREXIT POLITICIANS: BORIS JOHNSON, NIGEL FARAGE	ANTI BREXIT POLITICIANS: DAVID CAMERON, THERESA MAY
BRITISH MEDIA	IMMIGRANTS TO UK
BRITISH LEAVERS	BRITISH REMAINERS

Figure 1. Senders and Receivers in Leavers' discourse

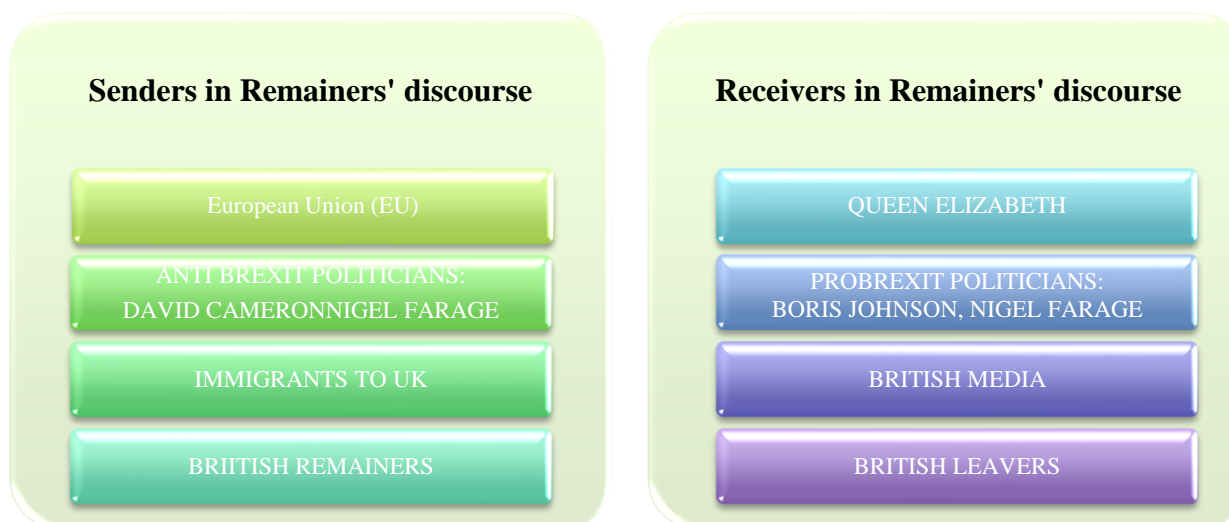| Senders in Remainers' discourse	Receivers in Remainers' discourse
European Union (EU)	QUEEN ELIZABETH
ANTI BREXIT POLITICIANS: DAVID CAMERONNIGEL FARAGE	PROBREXIT POLITICIANS: BORIS JOHNSON, NIGEL FARAGE
IMMIGRANTS TO UK	BRITISH MEDIA
BRIITISH REMAINERS	BRITISH LEAVERS

Figure 2. Senders and Receivers in Remainers' discourse

Now we will discuss various aspects that were central to Leavers' and Remainers' discourse respectively.

Main Aspects of the Leavers' Discourse

Leavers' discourse is colored with various shades depicting the sociocultural, sociopolitical and ideological influences of British people belonging to Leavers' campaign. These are demonstrated in Fig. 3 as follows:

Figure 3. Figurative Representation of Main aspects of the Leavers' Discourse

The Eurosceptic and populist element in the discourses of politicians of Leave Campaign

Discourses in relation to speeches and interviews of the key political leaders of the Leave Campaign tended to endorse Eurosceptic and populist views. For instance, Boris Johnson's proclamation "We send the EU £350 million a week - let's fund our NHS instead" that became the slogan of the Leave camp displayed on the Brexit bus clearly shows Euroscepticism.

Likewise, Boris Johnson's first speech as British PM, delivered on 24 July, 2019 depicts his inclination to portray Britain without Brexit as a country whose legislation would not be a domain of the British people. This is evident when he says "Because in the end, Brexit was a fundamental decision by the British people that they wanted their laws made by people that they can elect and they can remove from office" (*Boris Johnson: First speech as PM*, 2019, para. 30). Here, the PM tends to hit the populist pulse of the Leavers as well.

Similarly Euroscepticism is conveyed by Nigel Farage's statement at the Doncaster annual conference when he claims "we want our country back" (*UKIP leader Nigel Farage*, 2015).

Leung (2018) analyzed the thematic choices in the discourse of the then British Prime Minister Theresa May as regards to Brexit. It is revealed that there is repeated mention of British society in her speech delivered in the Lancaster House. This is indicative of the significance given by the Prime Minister to

the say of the common people of Britain peculiarly while delivering a speech to them. Moreover, hopefulness about the future of Brexit and expression of unity between Britain and EU by the use of first-person plural pronoun "we" have also been found to be eminent themes in the aforementioned discourses of May.

Element of prejudice based on Anti-immigration and Racism

Andreouli, Greenland and Figgou (2020) conducted a study on twelve focus groups (N=12) encompassing the period before and after the EU referendum. The researchers attempted to investigate how the element of prejudice in public discourse became associated with sustenance for Brexit. The study demonstrated that this bias is based on nationalism and anti-immigration ideologies that constituted the chief factors for the upkeep of Brexit. This was mainly from the perspective of Remainers. Interestingly, this led Leavers to give substitutive explanations for such discriminations that tended to project Brexit as a sensible and logical phenomenon rather than something insane.

Highlighting the sovereignty of Britain

Highlighting the sovereignty of Britain and the proposed threat to it Boris Johnson advocated independence of the UK when in an interview, he stated that the UK "should take back control" (Soady, 2016, para. 2). It seems as if the EU has been projected as a threat to the sovereignty of UK.

Likewise, in a speech that the PM delivered after Brexit in Greenwich, Boris Johnson once again highlighted the aspect of the sovereignty of the UK (presumed to be regained as a result of Brexit) but paradoxically hinted at Brexit as controversy as follows:

"Because once again we have settled a long-running question of sovereign authority, we have ended a debate that has run for three and a half years - some would say 47 years.

I won't even mention the name of the controversy except to say that it begins with B" (GOV.UK, 3 February, 2020, paras. 13-14).

The Propagation of Global Britain in Leavers' Discourse

In a study, Zappettini (2019) highlighted the stance of the UK government on global Britain as evident from the public documents displayed by the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU), on the official website of the UK government as follows:

The United Kingdom has a long and proud history as a great trading nation and champion of free trade with all parts of the world. We want to maximize our trade opportunities globally and across all countries – both by boosting our trading relationships with old friends and new allies, and by seeking a deep and special partnership with the EU. (Preparing For Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 5, as cited by Zappettini, 2019)

Likewise, PM Boris Johnson's stance on global Britain becomes evident during a speech delivered in Greenwich when he convicts "We have the opportunity, we have the newly recaptured powers, we know where we want to go, and that is out into the world" (GOV.UK, 2020, para. 16).

Misrepresentations of facts by the Leavers

The pro-Brexit campaigners have been denounced for the misrepresentations of facts in certain aspects. One of these is in terms of transformations in the implied meanings of the commonly used metaphors in public discourses. Musolff (2017) points out that Brexit campaigning has not been a game of winning on the basis of presenting "the most" or "the best facts" rather it has been so on the basis of projecting apparently reasonable circumstances in relation to the context. For example, the slogan "Britain at the heart of Europe" employs a human organ 'heart' as a metaphor to convey centrality of Britain in Europe. However, the Leavers have conversely used its corporal implications to convey the notion of death with respect to union with EU. This undoubtedly affected the voting inclinations of general public. The study concluded that even such misrepresentations can be considered tolerable and trustworthy if they matched the beliefs of those projecting them.

It is also observed that the politicians tended to switch to misrepresentations of facts and figures and used fallacies to project a negative image of remaining with the EU and the effects produced on the British economy and trade. For instance, Nigel Farage, former MEP remarks after the 2016 Brexit Referendum "We have fought against the multinationals, we have fought against the big merchant banks, we have fought against big politics, we have fought against lies, corruption and deceit" (Withnall, 2016).

This propagated a general conception as if the British people, the general public, had been exploited by a class of elites that served its own interests and had never got any soft corner for the masses.

Tactful Handling of Language and Populism used as a tool to Shape Public opinion

Valdés-Miyares (2018) compares the tactics used by the United Kingdom Independent Party (UKIP) pro-Brexit leader Nigel Farage in his victory speech delivered in June 2016 with the eloquence employed by Combo, the protagonist of Shane Meadows' film *This is England* (Meadows et al 2007).. The setting of the film is in early 1980's. This study focuses on how ultra-nationalism is used by Combo to attain supremacy over his squad. It further goes on to explore how in a similar manner, Nigel Farage manipulates the notion of populism in his speech and plays on the sentiment of public by exaggerating the facts and ultimately shaping the opinion of the masses.

Likewise, Roberts (2020) in the light of her personal experience of living in a post-Brexit Britain shares the formula of success of Brexit that includes the tactful handling of discourse using simple language appealing to the public as "Plenty of money to pay for political campaigns, a largely sympathetic media, use of highly persuasive, emotive, divisive, and simplistic language to whip people into a frenzy" (pp. 500-501).

Main aspects of Remainers' Discourse

According to a rundown on the fors and againsts of leaving or remaining in the EU, made prior to EU 2016 Referendum and still considered effective (*Brexit - the people and arguments*, 2020), Remainers' discourse chiefly comprises arguments against Brexit. Some of these are shown in Fig. 4 as follows:

Figure 4. Figurative Representation of Main aspects of the Remainers' Discourse

Now, we will discuss briefly some main aspects of the above shown anti-Brexit arguments of Remainers as follows:

1. There would be loss of favor from other European countries, a ruining of economies on both sides and consequent isolation of Britain if Britain leaves the EU.

2. Immigration regarded as a great strength rather than weakness of the UK economy. It cannot be completely halted as the UK needs both trained and untrained workers from abroad if it wants a flourishing economy.

3. "Britain stronger in Europe than out" as otherwise it is likely to lose its dominant position in the world.

4. Trade and economy: Britain is likely to suffer economically if it leaves EU, world's largest economic zone. A post- Brexit Britain will have to observe the principles of EU for trading in EU countries while having no say in influencing them.

5. EU conception: Britain's association with the EU has proven to be productive and peaceful over almost four decades. It has imparted stability to Britain in terms of safeguarding the rights of British people, environment, consumers, cutting down the roaming charges of companies in the telephone sector and establishing clarity in matters related to money-laundering and tax evasion etc. One of the chief drains on business like "living wage" is the result of interference of UK's own government rather than EU.

6. Impact on business: In view of the key business figures peculiarly associated with mainstream exporting enterprises, Brexit would negatively affect the prospects of creating new avenues related

to their corporate sector and reduce job creation in Britain. Moreover pensions would also be reduced in the given economic scenario.

7. Many firms in the UK are unable to exist and prosper without hiring workers from European countries. The situation will turn graver when there will be restricted mobility of people in general and workers in particular in a post- Brexit Britain. Similar state of affairs will damage the job market and employment opportunities.

8. Healthcare benefits: Remaining in EU is beneficial for the UK and the National Health System (NHS) on account of various research endowments received by the NHS from EU. Moreover, access to top specialists from Europe for the British public and the advantage of utilizing a free EHIC card that allows British citizens to enjoy health services in various European countries has only been possible due to the UK's membership of EU.

9. The cost of belonging to EU is only 0.34% of the UK's wealth in contrast to 35% paid in the form of domestic taxes by the Britons. Considering the huge benefits of EU membership, this cost of belonging to the EU appears very small. The figures given by the Leave campaign in this regard are totally false as these do not take into consideration what the Britons get back.

British media and Brexit Discourse

Alkhammash (2020) conducted a study to explore how the EU related sentiment is projected in the British media as regards to both Leave and Remain camps. As far as the depictions related to the Leave campaign are concerned, it is revealed that collocates used concerning the term "EU" mostly have negative implications. This is indicative of adopting a fairly pessimistic attitude by the British media in epitomizing the EU in relation to the Leave camp. However, for the Remain campaign, both positive and negative portrayals of EU exist as displayed by the UK media. The use of collocates "integration" and "remain" is established with the term "EU" rendering a brighter outlook of EU and immigrants. Depiction of the common values that exist between the UK and EU is also manifested as an optimistic stance. Contrastively, the negativity is demonstrated in the form of condemnation of the present state of EU by the British media.

BBC covered the stance of the then PM Theresa May on global Britain as "Theresa May said her government will make a success of Brexit, and work to increase global trade and the UK's role in the world" (*Theresa May calls for 'truly global Britain'*, 2016).

To sum up, a review of literature on Brexit discourse reveals that many studies have attempted to cover various dimensions of the discourse of Brexit: biasness based on nationalism and anti-immigration ideologies in Leavers' discourse (Andreouli, Greenland, & Figgou, 2020; Tandberg, 2020), populism (Valdés-Miyares, 2018; Leung, 2018; Tandberg, 2020), language as a tool (Valdés-Miyares, 2018; Roberts, 2020), metaphorization in Brexit discourse (Koller & Ryan, 2019; Bilyk & Pyliachyk, 2018), global Britain and free trade (Zappettini, 2019), misrepresentations of facts by the Leavers (Musolff, 2017), media and Brexit discourse (Alkhammash, 2020; Zappettini & Krzyżanowski, 2019) and intertextuality in Brexit negotiations (Tandberg, 2020) as well as various aspects of Remainers' discourse have also been highlighted (*Brexit - the people and arguments*, 2020). However, little has been explored in terms of participants of Brexit discourse and inter-textual connections in Brexit

discourse related to post referendum marches and protests. This paper therefore is an attempt to bridge this gap.

Intertextuality in Brexit Discourse

This paper explores intertextual connections in relation to a post-referendum anti-Brexit protest scene in Britain. For this purpose, four photograph images from "People's Vote march", an anti-Brexit march organized on October 20, 2018, were selected. These images displayed Remainers holding placards with text written on them and demanding a new Brexit Referendum. As many as 700,000 demonstrators took part in that march making it the second largest remonstration of the century in the history of UK next to the "Stop the war" protest in 2003 (Busby, 2018).

The reason for selecting these images is that the texts displayed on these placards images are clear instances of literary and historical allusions showing intertextual connections. Moreover, one of the images is an example of satire produced through homonymy. These are explained one by one as follows:

An example of Literary Allusion:

Reference to a film "Star Wars: THE PHANTOM MENACE"

The pro-EU protesters of the Remain campaign particularly expressed their opposing views regarding Brexit through various sorts of intertexts displayed on their placards. For example, the text on placard shown in Fig. 5 marks government trade negotiations as "WORST" and intertextually relates these to a film titled "Star Wars: THE PHANTOM MENACE" made in 1999. Here, these protesters are trying to demonstrate that the current government with a pro-Brexit stance is not competent enough to carry out successful trade negotiations with the EU as was the case with the protagonists of the film, i.e., Qui-Gon Jinn Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin.
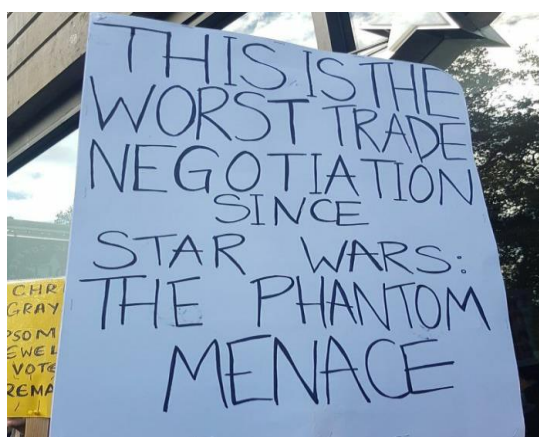

Figure 5. (Gerda, 2019)

Examples of Historical Allusions

Reference to Adolf Hitler

The text displayed on the placard shown in Fig. 6 is an example of historical allusion by Remainers to express their aggression related to Brexit and the government. Reference to Adolf Hitler is made here.

He was a German dictator, who initiated World War II by attacking Poland on 1ˢᵗ September 1939. His brutal and inhumane Nazi ideology led to the genocide of millions of Jews, civilians and prisoners of war.

There is the use of parallelism here. Repetition of "17 million" for "Adolf Hitler", "Brexit" and "Wrong" indicates that the Remainers equate Brexit and Hitler on the grounds of being wrong. Perceived economic recession and related gravity of the situation in a post-Brexit Britain led them to relate Brexit with economic genocide of the UK.

Figure 6. (Gerda, 2019)

Reference to Year 1066

In Fig. 7, reference to the year 1066 in history is made by the Remainers in relation to the immigrants indicating that just as after 1066, no nation has been able to invade England rather preferred seeking friendly relations with the UK, immigrants are no exception. They are not a crisis but a contribution towards making Britain Great.

Figure 7. (Gerda, 2019)

Satirical Element in Brexit Discourse

An element of satire is also evident in Remainers' discourse in particular.

An example of Satire through use of Homonymy by Remainers

IKEA is a multi-industry company based in Netherlands, an active member of EU. It is famous for its worldwide furniture retails. In terms of intertextuality, the text "IKEA HAS BETTER CABINETS" shown in Fig. 8 can be taken as an instance of satire. Here, satire is produced by making use of the homonymy of the word "CABINET". The Anti-Brexit Remainers are trying to ridicule the

government's cabinet for its incompetence and Pro-Brexit stance by conveying that IKEA shows better performance in making cabinets.

Figure 8. (Gerda, 2019)

Conclusion

Brexit discourse contains symbols, intertexts and paralinguistic features. It has two dimensions: Leavers' discourse and Remainers' discourse. An analysis of discourses of Brexit reveals how language and media frames are used as tools by the politicians to propagate peculiar ideologies in the public to serve their interests. It also shows how truth can be constructed in relation to projecting a glorious past through powerful use of specific types of discourse strategies and how sentiment of public can be channelized or exploited on the basis of populism, patriotism and sovereignty. We also conclude that how heated debates and campaigns based on public sensitivities like patriotism and identity ultimately led to not only occurrence of a historic political event of recent political scenario i.e., Brexit Referendum, 2016 but also resulted in breaking of a major political and economic alliance of European countries i.e., the European Union, EU. Remainers projected beneficial aspects of EU membership like healthcare benefits and employment opportunities. Moreover, texts in placard images from "People's Vote march" (a post referendum anti-Brexit march organized on October 20, 2018) reveal that Remainers chiefly made use of devices like historical and literary allusions with clear intertextual connections to express their anti-Brexit sentiment along with employment of homonymy to produce a satirical effect.

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