

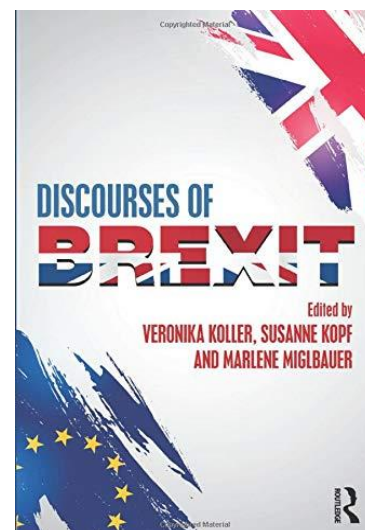
Veronika Koller, Susanne Kopf and Marlene Miglbauer, eds.

Discourses of Brexit

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Review by Sharon Hartle

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As the editors emphasize in their introduction, written in January 2019, Brexit is still “an omnipresent and inescapable news item across the United Kingdom and mainland Europe” (Kindle loc. 257). In fact, the result of the 2016 referendum has proved fertile ground for a whole range of publications ranging from newspaper articles to personal accounts of the effects on individual EU nationals resident in the UK (Remigi et al. 2017) and UK residents in Europe (Remigi et al. 2018). Brexit is considered by some to be a manifestation of right-wing populism and the editors of this volume pose the question as to whether this is true or not, stating that although there is evidence of left-wing populist argumentation, the answer is, on the whole affirmative (Kindle loc. 295). The phenomenon can be seen as symptomatic of right-wing populist trends both in Europe and beyond, which are a “cultural backlash” (Inglehardt & Norris 2016) reacting to the failure of traditional parties to respond adequately to such contemporary issues as immigration, class politics and economic and cultural globalisation.

This publication makes a timely contribution to the fields of both social sciences and, in particular, to discourse analysis with essays that explore the choices of language made in the discourses leading up to, surrounding and in the aftermath of the 2016 referendum, in an attempt to understand the reasons for, and the processes of, the phenomenon. Its primary aim is to provide insight into the ways in which discourse was managed and manipulated during the referendum itself and how this ultimately influenced the results. The analysis of various genres, undertaken from different methodological approaches, provides a comprehensive view of the discourse surrounding Brexit in different contexts. The decoding of political, social, and

discursive strategies show clearly that Brexit means far more than the widely cited slogan “Brexit means Brexit.”

The introduction to the volume provides a political and historical context for this research, describing the rise of Euroscepticism and the complex relationship between the UK and the European Union, as well as providing a research review of the area. The editors (Kindle loc. 346) cite Daddow’s 2012 study, for instance, which showed that as early as 1984 the *Sun* newspaper used war and fight metaphors when depicting the relationships between the UK and the EU, a trope that persisted in the 1980s and 1990s fomenting the view, in the eyes of the public, of an antagonistic relationship between Britain and the EU. This is just one example of how useful data that emerges from discourse analysis can be and why research of this type is essential if a greater understanding of the why’s and wherefore’s of this referendum result, and the success of right-wing populism, are to even begin to be understood.

The editors come from a range of disciplines in the social sciences and are well placed to discuss this topic. Veronika Koller is Reader in Discourse Studies at Lancaster University (UK) and her publications include *Metaphor and Gender in Business Media Discourse* (2004). Susanne Kopf is a Research and Teaching Assistant at WI Vienna University of Economics and Business (Austria) and her research addresses corpus-assisted (critical) discourse studies. Marlene Miglbauer is Senior Lecturer in English Language-Linguistics and E-Learning at the University of Teacher Education Burgenland (Austria) and her research interests include identity constructions in various contexts. In this volume they have collated an impressive selection of studies.

The volume provides a kaleidoscopic view, covering various aspects of Brexit, and is organized chronologically starting as far back as 2012 in the period leading up to the referendum, and then moving on to consider the post referendum period. The many different methodological approaches act to some extent to triangulate the various findings presented and this is one of the strengths of the book. The methodologies used draw on traditional quantitative approaches such as corpus linguistics informed analysis, but there is also considerable evidence of qualitative methodologies such as multimodal analysis. Another strength is the fact that the contributors live and work in various parts of Europe and beyond, which creates a pan-European perspective. Two contributors, for instance, Lalić-Kirstin and Silaški, are from Serbia; another, Hansson, is a researcher in Tartu, Estonia, and another, Zappavigna, works in New South Wales, Australia, providing an even more distant perspective. It is also worth noting that two of the editors are Austrian. At the very least, this range of nationalities goes some way towards avoiding bias. One noteworthy feature of the book is that the contributions throughout the

volume, in fact, are balanced in that they cover both the 'Leave' and the 'Remain' campaign viewpoints. The book is divided into two parts and to provide an overview of some of the most interesting topics, without going into excessive detail, here is a brief introduction to a selection of sample contributions.

Part One, which is entitled "Discursive Drivers of the Brexit Vote," focuses on data which ranges from traditional news media to official governmental communications and parliamentary debates to social media. The aim is to gain insight into ways in which a multitude of voices approached the topic of Brexit up to and during the referendum. To see how this is done, let's turn now to consider a few chapters from this section. Firstly, the view of the EU and its legitimation historically in Britain is described by Beckett (Chapter 2). He analyzes the discursive uses of values in the speeches and statements of key Brexit figures in the UK and in EU Institutions, concluding that values were frequently called on as a legitimating strategy, collective identities were called into question and the discourse of EU representatives themselves may actually have contributed towards legitimizing Brexit, in that they frequently express a value of superiority which may have been interpreted in the UK as "Brussels telling us what to do" (Kindle loc. 922), thus cementing, to some extent, the views of Eurosceptics. On the other hand, national identities in the UK are explored by Wenzl (Chapter 3), who analyzes parliamentary debates prior to the 2016 referendum by means of a discourse-historical approach (DHA). He shows how Conservative politicians constantly create "visions of British national identity" (Kindle loc. 1077) whether arguing for or against leaving the EU. In this way, interestingly, remain campaigners actually undermined their own positions through an underlying Euroscepticism where they actually presented a view of Britishness which differed from other EU member states. There is a return to the topic of values in Chapter 4 but this time the focus is social media. Zappavigna, in this chapter, analyzes Michael Gove's tweets, where he refers to 'experts' despite having earlier commented that he had "had enough of experts" in a Sky News interview. Zappavigna analyses the replies to these, focusing in particular on ways in which the negotiation of values is communicated through censure and ridicule, which was aimed at exposing Gove's "apparent hypocrisy" (Kindle loc. 1871).

Part Two, which is entitled "Discursive Consequences of the Brexit Vote," explores the referendum's discursive consequences. Some of the interesting topics covered in this section include Jeremy Corbyn's discourse strategies in his policies around the referendum in 2016 and the general election in 2017, analyzed by Demata (Chapter 8). He found that even though Corbyn was campaigning for 'Remain,' his discourse stresses the populist dichotomy of 'the people' versus 'the elite' thereby paradoxically employing a strategy that was actually associated

rather with the 'Leave' campaigners and is possibly another example of a politician undermining his own somewhat ambiguous position as a Remainer due to discursive patterns associated with populism and which, to a large extent, "derived from the discourse surrounding the referendum itself" (Kindle loc. 3481). Another interesting topic is the official vision of 'global Britain': Brexit as rupture, explored by Zapettini (Chapter 9), who describes, through argumentation theory, how the institutional documents in a corpus of official documents, issued by the newly created Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU), outline a conflicting vision for the future of Britain based both on a continuing relationship between Britain and the EU whilst at the same time promoting a 'global Britain' that trades freely with the world, combining, therefore, a discourse of both rupture and continuity and emphasizing that internationalism, in his words, is "laden with different, sometimes opposed ideologies" (Kindle loc. 2953). Bouko and Garcia (Chapter 11) carry out a Hallidayan, multimodal analysis of private citizens' discourse, studying reactions, which also make use of images, on Twitter, in the aftermath of the referendum. They found that in the month following the referendum the majority of these reflected a critical stance towards Brexit, revealing a negative attitude which is not uncommon for social media reactions to events. They also found that, although both the economy and immigration were two major themes in the media during the referendum campaigns themselves, it was the economy, rather than immigration, that was the major theme in their corpus. Focusing on a specific expression and how it is used, Musloff (Chapter 13), on the other hand, explores the appearance of the expression "having your cake and eating it" in Brexit discourse, with particular reference to Boris Johnson. In his contribution, Musloff traces the use of this proverb historically, together with its permutations in the discourse of the Brexit negotiations with the EU, concluding that it serves the purpose of portraying Brexit as an improbable venture and use of the expression also implicitly means taking the critical stance which is part and parcel of the idea itself. Lalić-Kirstin and Silaška (Chapter 14) in their whimsically entitled contribution "Don't Go Brexin' My Heart," also consider specific expressions which may be considered to be ludic in their examination of neologisms related to Brexit, noting a high incidence of linguistic playfulness and creativity in terms such as 'brexhausted' or 'regrexit.' They underline the fact that wordplay such as this may not only be seen as comic relief but also, in fact, used as a coping strategy by those who are facing "an uncertain future outside the EU" (Kindle loc. 6394).

One of the strengths of this book, as mentioned above, is its wide range of approaches and topics, although a collection of separate voices like this one, on a topic as complex as Brexit, inevitably leads to more questions perhaps than answers. This, however, also provides considerable food for thought. Another strength is that the book may be approached in different ways. It can, in

fact, be read straight through or consulted according to the reader's specific interests. It will, in fact, appeal to researchers, students and a broader audience that is interested in populism or Brexit but also discourse and the way it shapes identity and opinion. It is well written with clearly presented thought-provoking research that is a credit to its contributors and editors alike.

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