Insurance or entrapment? A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Brexit backstop coverage in Irish and UK newspapers

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Tämä tutkielma käsittelee brexit-neuvotteluissa esiintynyttä backstop-järjestelyä, jonka tarkoitus oli säilyttää Irlannin saaren historiallisesti ja poliittisesti kiistanalainen raja avoimena Iso-Britannian EU-eron jälkeen. Vaikka backstop-lauseke hylättiinkin neuvotteluiden edetessä, se on yhtenä brexit-prosessin keskeisenä teemana ja pääasiallisena viivyttäjänä kiinnostava tutkimuksen kohde.

Tutkin backstop-järjestelyn käsittelyä brittiläisissä ja irlantilaisissa sanomalehdissä keväällä 2019, jolloin aiheeseen liittyvä uutisointi oli vilkasta. Lisäksi tutkin aineiston kannalta merkittävien poliittisten toimijoiden ja prosessien käsittelyä. Tutkimuskysymykset ovat seuraavat: 1. Miten backstop-järjestelyä, brexit-neuvotteluja sekä Iso-Britannian parlamentin toista äänestystä brexit-sopimuksesta representoidaan brittiläisissä ja irlantilaisissa lehdissä? 2. Miten eri poliittisia toimijoita representoidaan näissä artikkeleissa? 3. Millaisia diskursseja näistä artikkeleista löytyy, ja millaisin kielellisin keinoin ne rakentuvat? Tutkimusmenetelminä ovat Richardsonin erittelemät media-aineiston kriittiseen diskurssintutkimukseen sopivat menetelmät eli sanaston, transitiivisuuden, modaalisuuden sekä presuppositioiden analyysi.

Backstopia representoidaan laajalti negatiivisessa mielessä ansana, pidäkkeenä, siedettävänä asiana, ongelmana, yleisesti epätoivottuna sekä Pohjois-Irlannin irrottajana Yhdistyneestä kuningaskunnasta. Backstopin mahdolliset vaikutukset kuvataan merkittävinä. Näihin näkemyksiin liittyi vahvasti EU-vastainen ideologia sekä Pohjois-Irlantilainen unionismi. Kuriositeettina backstopin representaatioissa painotetaan merkittävästi sitä, mitä backstop-järjestely nimenomaan ei ole. Positiivisemmat representaatiot kuvaavat backstop-järjestelyä turvallisuuden luojana sekä osoituksena EU:n yhtenäisyydestä. Nämä näkemykset ilmentävät EU-myönteistä tai Pohjois-Irlantilaista tasavaltalaista ideologiaa. Backstopin representaatiot rakentuvat vapausdiskurssin, talousdiskurssin, poliittisen diskurssin, geopoliittisen diskurssin, turvallisuusdiskurssin sekä kansainvälisten suhteiden diskurssin kautta.

Neuvottelut ja parlamentin äänestys esitetään vaativina ja dramaattisina prosesseina, jopa pelinä. Prosesseihin liitetään runsaasti Iso-Britannian pääministeri Theresa Mayn henkilökohtaisia merkityksiä. Prosesseja representoidaan osanottajien välisiä suhteita kiristävinä. Toisaalta ne merkitsevät brittiläistä nationalismia, toisaalta eurooppalaista yhtenäisyyttä. Ideologisella tasolla myös nämä representaatiot linkittyvät EU- myönteisyyteen tai vastaisuuteen. Niiden taustadiskursseiksi määrittyvät niin ikään poliittinen ja kansainvälisten suhteiden diskurssi, lakidiskurssi, nationalistinen diskurssi sekä sisäpoliittinen diskurssi.

Euroskeptikkoihin sekä Pohjois-Irlannin demokraattiseen unionistipuolueeseen liitetään vihainen tunnereaktio, ja heitä kuvataan voimakkailla termeillä. Pääministeri Mayta ja Iso-Britannian valtionjohtoa representoidaan niin ikään negatiivisessa valossa petoksen ja vilpillisyyden, epäonnistumisen, huolimattomuuden ja vastuuttomuuden, epäonnistumisen, nöyryyttävän tappion, ylimielisyyden ja kulissien rakentamisen kautta, ja yksittäisenä positiivisena representaationa myös sinnikkäänä. Poliittisten toimijoiden representaatiot rakentuvat aineistossa etenkin tunnediskurssin ja moraalisen diskurssin kautta.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom has left the European Union. 'Brexit' took place officially on 31 January 2020. At the time of writing this, the UK is amidst a transition period, and it continues to negotiate the terms of its future relationship with the EU on areas such as trade, security, and foreign policy. The Brexit process has turned out to be a very complex one and different from what was promised to the voters, and the terms of leaving the EU have been difficult to outline and agree both on the part of the UK and EU policy makers.

A crucial dilemma with the terms of withdrawal has been the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland. While Ireland is a member state in the EU, Northern Ireland is part of the UK and hence no longer part of the EU. Given the historical sensitivities in relation to the border, which are elaborated further in the next chapter, the negotiations on the terms of the withdrawal agreement have required a great effort to ensure that the border will remain a so-called soft border in the future. The current protocol sees the continuance of the soft border on the island and adherence of Northern Ireland to certain regulations of the European ingle market while remaining in the UK customs territory. However, practical solutions concerning the border are susceptible to changes until the terms of the future trading relationship between the EU and the UK are finalised (European Commission 2020).

Negotiations on the future of the Irish border relied for a long time on the so-called backstop solution. The backstop refers to an arrangement where at least Northern Ireland would remain in the EU customs union and the Single European Market in case no agreement on the border was reached until the end of the transition period. This way an evident border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland would be avoided, which is important because of the volatile historical context. The backstop appendix has been controversial, and it was removed from the approved Brexit agreement, but, as indicated above, the border issue continues to be subject to changes. In any case, the backstop can be regarded the main reason for the prolonged Brexit process – along with certain instability in the UK's domestic policies – and therefore it is an important topic in contemporary history.

This thesis analyses the media coverage on the backstop arrangement. More specifically, I am investigating the types of discourses that emerge in the backstop coverage and the linguistic means through which they are constructed. Closely related to this, I am also analysing the way that the backstop, certain relevant political processes as well as different political actors

are represented in the data. The backstop entails an intriguing set of questions related to politics, history and identity, and the theory of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) offer the means to process these themes on a detailed linguistic level. Its analytical dimension, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) supplies the methodology.

Fairclough's (1995b) renowned view is that the media has a significant influence on the surrounding society. Moreover, the power that the media possesses is first and foremost linguistic and discursive, and it is thus through a linguistic analysis that we can seize this power on a profound level. CDS provides the researcher with an opportunity to analyse discourses in the news coverage, but also their impact on the surrounding reality (e.g. Fairclough 2015). According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009), discourses present certain ways of knowing as the truth, and it is therefore important to inspect which discourses are given prominence in the society – and which ones are suppressed or forgotten. The backstop arrangement is connected to strongly dissenting views on the past and different expectations on the future, for reasons that receive more elucidation in the chapters to come, and it therefore constitutes an interesting object for discursive analysis.

There has been relatively little linguistic research on Brexit, and the focus has been largely on the period that predates the referendum. My intention is to enlarge this body of research and direct attention to the isle of Ireland. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, as Borchardt, Simon & Bironzo (2018: 9) point out, Ireland is the "highest stakes" in the Brexit process, given its position as an EU member state and the UK's neighbouring state. Secondly, while Northern Ireland voted largely in favour of remaining in the EU, it has little influence on the Brexit process (Tonge 2017). Considering these factors, there is arguably more room for academic scrutiny on the Ireland and Northern Ireland viewpoints.

Although the weight that individual factors had in the outcome of the referendum is difficult if not impossible to determine, it is clear that the British press did influence the UK's departure from the EU (Martill & Steiger 2018: 7; Jackson, Thorsen and Wring 2016). In order to illustrate in a cross-cutting manner the post-referendum Brexit coverage, focusing on the backstop, the data consists of seven newspapers from the UK and Ireland: three newspapers from England, two from Ireland and two from Northern Ireland. While my stated objective is to focus on the media in Ireland and Northern Ireland, English media is included for holistic albeit quantitatively imperfect purposes: if English newspapers were excluded

from the data, it would be more difficult to detect by comparison any prospective special traits that occur in the Irish and Northern Irish newspapers.

The next chapter presents the theoretical framework. First, Brexit as a phenomenon and central issues in relation to the Irish border are given a political and historical contextualisation. The subsection that follows initiates a shift to linguistics with an overview of the body of research on the discursive aspect of Brexit. The theory of Critical Discourse Studies is discussed subsequently, as well as its connection and application to the subject matter of Brexit and the backstop. Chapter three covers the practicalities of the present study: research problem, data, and methods. Chapter four constitutes the analysis of the data. Finally, the findings are discussed further in the concluding chapter five.

Lastly, I would like to express a disclaimer of sorts. The societal setting in Northern Ireland entails certain sensitive issues given the historical course of events. Acknowledging the fact that language, as much as anything else, is a site for ideological struggle (Fairclough 2015: 110), the following presentation aims for impartiality in reference to political groups and events. The objective of this study is to improve understanding of the topics of Brexit and the backstop, and any shortcomings are unintentional.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Brexit: referendum and main causes

In January 2013, the prime minister of the United Kingdom David Cameron announced that an in-out referendum on the UK's membership in the EU would be held if his Conservative Party won the 2015 general election. The party secured its majority in the elections, and the referendum took place on 23 June 2016. The British people cast their votes, and a narrow majority, 51.68 percent, voted for the 'leave' option. Cameron, who himself had been in favour of staying in the EU, resigned the next day. He was replaced by then-Home Secretary Theresa May both as the prime minister and the Conservative Party Leader. The election of Chairperson was contentious: May also supported staying in the EU, which was disliked by the party's right-wing (Kantola 2019: 211).

The result of the referendum was surprising to many (e.g. Jackson et al. 2016: 8) and has therefore left an abundance of speculations concerning its main causes. The referendum itself was largely instigated in the discontent that had emerged in the Conservative Party during the coalition government of 2010-2015. Collaboration with the Liberal Democrats was follow-up to Cameron's attempts to bring the party closer to the political centre, which was not approved by the Conservative right-wing. The referendum was in part Cameron's attempt to reassure them. (Kantola 2019: 10). Martill and Steiger (2018: 3-4) point out that while the referendum was closely connected to the party-politic context, its roots lie, however, in wider dissatisfaction with "the European project", the politics of the content, and that dissatisfaction had been cumulating for decades. In addition to that, the role of Nigel Farage, the former leader of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) should not be understated. Koller, Kopf and Miglbauer (2019: 6) believe that Farage had a major influence on the result of the referendum as well as the referendum being effected in the first place; the UKIP had campaigned for the UK leaving the EU from its very establishment, and Farage as a person had also constructed an appealing public image that was certainly fit for this purpose

Indeed, the outcome of the referendum cannot be linked to the politics of the Conservative Party only, and neither to the events of the last decade or so. According to Koller et al. (2019: 2), the UK's difficult relationship with the EU – or even Europe – date back to the end of the Second World War. What Martill and Steiger (2018: 7) call Britain's "awkward" role in the European integration echoes the differences in the UK's legal and political systems as well as its divergent economic preferences compared to the EU politics, and even its imperial past plays a role. Nevertheless, the newer developments – or their absence – in the UK's domestic politics cannot be ignored. Kantola (2019: 9-12), who explores British politics of the decades leading up to Brexit, refers to a general lack of direction and consensus in British politics, where the political outlook on the development of the country differs between the major parties, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party. Both parties have dissenting voices at their right or left wing as well. More importantly, Kantola (2019: 209-211) goes on to describe the sociopolitical failure in the course of five premierships. To begin with, the British people did not feel secure amidst globalisation. They felt that the EU had, for instance, failed to protect its borders, and that it was indecisive on defence politics (ibid.). The increasing number of migrants was regarded as a threat to the British identity, especially at the countryside. Kantola (ibid.) notes that especially several Labour voters felt that globalisation

had benefitted the elite, not them – although, interestingly, anti-EU establishment has for long been used by the elite itself to increase their power.

While anti-migration and anti-EU establishment had certainly an impact on the outcome of the referendum, they share another common nominator in the context of Brexit: populism. Koller et al. regard Brexit as the "manifestation of right-wing populism"; it had a significant effect on the Brexit campaign, for instance in the portrayal of a "threat from outside", in the form of immigrants and the EU. The abovementioned failure of major parties to seize the changing society made room for the emergence of new populist parties. (Kantola 2019: 2-4). Populistic discourse is discussed further in section 2.4, given its connection to language and ideologies.

Partly the result of the referendum lies in the successful campaign for Brexit. According to Kantola (2019: 206-2010), the opposers of Brexit were in turn overtly formal, elitist and boring, their arguments emphasising the economic aspect. The supporters of Brexit, on the other hand, were campaigning actively and made use of emotional slogans, sometimes even unfounded – albeit effective – assertions. They were also well-funded, owing to the fact that a certain proportion of London's financial industry disliked the EU's regulation on banking. Importantly, they managed to stay united. (ibid.) They were also aided by demographical factors: a fact that should not be overlooked is the voting activity of the older generations who were in favour of leaving the EU. (Kantola 2019: 210)

While the referendum result has been associated mainly with right-wing politics, it should be acknowledged that Brexit was also supported on the other side of political spectrum or groups associated with it. Many left-wingers, Labour's working-class supporters as well as long-term unemployed voted in favour of Brexit as well, reasons ranging from migration to the EU's dictate politics. Noteworthily, Jeremy Corbyn had speculated on the possibility of the Labour party being in favour of leaving the EU before his election to the Labour Leader, although he changed his mind eventually. (Kantola 2019: 206-207).

2.2 The divided island and implications of Brexit

The negotiations on the Brexit withdrawal agreement were difficult from the beginning. May's government did not have a majority in the UK parliament, and there was internal dispute within Conservative Party on the nature of the terms of withdrawal and the future relationship with the EU (Kantola 2019: 214). While several issues were on the table, the question of the Irish border was one of the most controversial ones. The backstop mechanism that would prevent a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland was a central part of the agreement for a period of time. In order to understand its importance, we must first consider the societal setting in Northern Ireland.

To summarise and unavoidably simplify a long chain of events, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland divided the island of Ireland in 1921 in the wake of Irish independence movement. The southern part became what is now the independent Republic of Ireland, and the UK was "reinvented", in the words of De Mars et al. (2018: 3), as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The division of the island left a scattered community of Irish nationalists, mainly Catholics, in Northern Ireland. Unionists, who were mainly Protestant, wanted Northern Ireland to remain in the United Kingdom. While tensions between the groups can be traced back at least to the 17th century, the wider historical context tends to get overshadowed by the events of the 21st century now known as 'the Troubles'. In the late 1960's, "decades of prejudice and suspicion boiled into the Northern Ireland conflict", to re-quote De Mars et al. (ibid.), that lasted for three decades. The events were the largely a culmination of the Catholic population's experiences of exclusion and inequality: they had been discriminated against especially in the labour market (e.g. Fay, Morrissey and Smyth 1999). Nearly 4,000 people were killed and over 40,000 injured (ibid., 121) in a near-civil war until the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) was settled by the UK and Irish governments on 10 April 1998. The main parties responsible for the violence include various republican (i.e. nationalist) and loyalist (i.e. unionist) paramilitary organisations, the British Army, and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), with the Irish Republican Army (IRA) responsible for the highest number of deaths (ibid., 169).

The GFA has, according to Tonge (2017), managed the religiopolitical divide but not resolved it. The ethno-religious divide persists, and occasional acts of violence continue to take place.

As De Mars et al. (2018: 4) point out, several items of the agreement remain unfulfilled, although there have been "significant successes". For example, the GFA provides the citizens of Northern Ireland with the right to hold British and Irish citizenships. In addition to that, a shared, decentralised governance, in a sense 'forced' cooperation has led to a multifaceted cross-border cooperation. Before the referendum, Anglo-Irish governmental relationship was better than ever, and the "cooperative bilateralism" had been aided by shared membership in the EU (Tonge 2017: 11).

Tonge (2017) points out that Brexit, however, places Northern Ireland in a vulnerable position. While 56 percent of Northern Ireland voted in favour of remaining in the EU, it has little bearings on the negotiations that are dependent on the UK and the EU. According to Tonge (2017: 1), most nationalists voted for remain, while a majority of unionists voted for leave. This applies to the major political partied as well, with the republican Sinn Féin voting against and the unionist Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in favour of it. While the division of the Northern Irish people into nationalists and unionists is somewhat outdated and ignores diversity (De Mars et al. 2018: 4), the referendum result shows that the ethno-religious divide persists nevertheless (Tonge 2017: 4). As Wright (2018: 105-106) points out, the referendum result has on its part increased tension in the politics of Northern Ireland, which has further diminished the presence of Northern Ireland viewpoints in the Brexit process. Stormont, the Northern Ireland Assembly was in a state of suspension in between January 2017 and January 2020, although it should be noted that the policy disagreements that caused its collapse extended beyond Brexit.

While the primary concern is often aimed at maintaining peace, Brexit has other, potentially severe implications for Northern Ireland. In the aftermath of the conflict and the GFA, Northern Ireland has been receiving significant development funding and support for the peace process from the EU, and relatively it receives substantially more agricultural subsidies than the rest of the UK. It has been estimated that the UK would not be able to compensate for the loss of these subsidies. In addition to that, the economies of Ireland and Northern Ireland are to great extent interdependent: in 2015, for example, export of goods to the Republic of Ireland constituted 36 percent of the total export of Northern Ireland (HM Government 2017). In a worst-case scenario, Northern Ireland would pay the price for Brexit, while a significant part of Ireland's agriculture is also at risk (Wright 2018; Borchard et al. 2018)

To return to the backstop arrangement, the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland has experienced an array of modifications, but it has become a 'soft' border after the implementation of the GFA: EU citizens have the right to free movement over the border, and there are no customs or immigration controls. The border has its historically sensitive dimension, while a practical one as well in connection to freedom of movement and the economic aspect in the form of cross-border trade. These are now routine in practice (Tonge 2017). The purpose of the backstop was therefore to maintain the status quo on the border. If no other agreement were reached, the backstop arrangement would have marked a single EU-UK customs territory. Northern Ireland would have adhered to EU's Customs Code as well as limited set of rules related to the EU's single market (European Commission 2018). This way, a hard border would have been avoided.

In short, the backstop was a precaution; it was not meant to be used in the first place. It nevertheless demonstrates how borders have a practical impact on people's daily lives, but at the same time they encapsulate a multitude of symbolic meanings and history. The backstop is a display of power relations and identities, which makes it particularly interesting from the viewpoint of Critical Discourse Studies. From this body of knowledge, I now turn attention to the theory of CDS.

2.3 Critical Discourse Studies

The theoretical framework of the present study stems from Critical Discourse Studies[1] (henceforth CDS), a subcategory of the larger research field of discourse studies. While CDS operates typically at the intersection of discourse and dominance, it has no standardised theoretical framework (Blommaert 2005: 21; van Dijk 2015b: 468). This owes partly to the fact that CDS is used cross-disciplinarily, and it is therefore only natural that its premises vary among different fields of research. Van Dijk (ibid.) points out that its applications vary greatly in linguistics alone. The following presentation of the theoretical framework of CDS is

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[1] While the current trend is to distinguish between 'Critical Discourse Studies' as the theoretical framework and 'Critical Discourse Analysis' as its methodological application (van Dijk 2015b), historically 'CDA' has been used by most authors to refer to both aspects. Given the reformative pursuits of CDA/CDS, I use the term 'CDS' synonymously with the 'CDA' of previous decades to discuss the theory, while by "CDA" I refer to the research method. This means that the authors who are cited on 'CDS' have probably used 'CDA' in the original work. The division in terminology is practical, and it does not take root unless it is used in academic publications.

linguistically oriented to the study of news articles, but it is, in short, a mere glimpse of the wider research tradition.

A built-in view in CDS is the view on language as a **system** is that serves different **functions**. According to Foucault (1972), the use of language entails certain systematic ways of meaning-making, in other words discourses. These patterned and/or systematic manners of speaking and thinking (i.e. discourses) control the linguistic representation of the social reality, but individuals have at the same time the possibility to choose from a wide range of options (Pietikäinen and Mäntynen 2009: 14). The choice between these options highlights the fact that different options carry different functions (ibid.). The systemic-functional notion constitutes the basis for Halliday's systemic-functional linguistic (SFL). Halliday views functionality as a built-in element in language, which provides us with the resources to create different meanings (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). In SFL, language is observed through its three metafunctions: textual, ideational, and interpersonal functions (ibid.). While SFL is not discussed further in the present work, it should be noted that SFL forms the historical basis for CDS (e.g. Blommaert 2005: 22), and its view on language has influenced significantly the other definitions of discourse that are cited in this study (e.g. Fairclough 2015).

In order to proceed with the theory of CDS, it is necessary to begin with a definition of the concept at the centre of attention, namely **discourse**. While the field of Discourse Studies is very multidisciplinary and multivocal, the concept of discourse is not very straightforward itself. The term 'discourse' can be used in a variety of ways, and there is no unequivocal definition of it. Because of its multifaceted nature, each researcher needs in practice to define their own position in relation to discourse. Even if my pursuit were toward an accessible and meaningfully demarcated definition, it should be noted that it is not a comprehensive one, and it is always subject to subjective processes of selection. My definition of the term is influenced by established authors on the topic, but it is only one of the possible ways to 'process' discourse.

In a general sense, the term discourse is used to describe the use of language as a social practice (Fairclough 1995a: 7). Discourse refers to the use of language in a certain situation; it can be considered a linguistic deed. Blommaert (2005: 2) describes discourse as "language-in-action" and "a general mode of semiosis". The study of discourse exceeds the level of a single

word or sentence – in the words of Tannen (2012), "discourse analysts study larger chunks of language as they flow together".

Another way to approach discourse is to see language, besides a social practice, as a socially constructive phenomenon. This influential view by Foucault (1981) suggests that the use of language has an impact on the surrounding social reality. To begin with a practical example, Foucault (ibid) describes in a famous examination how sexuality started to exist to people when it was formulated into discourse. It is this view on discourse that lies in the core of CDS. According to Blommaert (2005: 3), discourse "comprises all forms of meaningful semiotic human activity seen in connection with social, cultural, and historical patterns and developments of use". Discourse is not simply language that is being used, rather than a part of a complex continuum that heavily influences or, to some extent, even governs the way we operate in the world. There is a duality to the constructionist view as well: the same social reality that the 'Foucauldian' discourse constructs is at the same time conditioning language use, i.e. discourse (Pietikäinen 2000: 192) in an interwoven manner.

What has been presented above as discourse is indeed a multifaceted phenomenon. Importantly, discourses are not stable; despite the systemic and patterned facet they possess the capacity to change. Foucault (1981: 100) prefers to view them as "a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies". In a sense, discourse entails a delicate contradiction; it operates continuously at the intersection of a system with a history and an individual in passing. According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 18), language – when used, indeed – is marked by an individual person's choices and values, but at the same time by norms and values of the surrounding social reality. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen aptly describe Foucault's definition of discourse a temporal and situational 'encapsulated understanding of reality' (2009: 25-26). In short, language use provides us with a glimpse into the experiential world of an individual. It is through its temporal and shared dimension that we can seize as *discourses*. To make a distinction, Fairclough (1995: 18) views Foucault's conception of discourse as a social construction, a way of knowing, but suggests a linguistically oriented definition where discourse is seen as social action in real, tangible situations. Both notions are crucial in the present study: while discourses are inherent in social interaction, they materialise in the social reality.

As has been indicated above, discourse can be used both in singular and plural form. While the singular concept refers on a general level to language as social action, the plural one may require a little more demonstration. One way to do this is to think that different discourses enable one to express a certain thing in different ways and with different implications. Pietikäinen (2000: 192) offers an explanation of discourse as different views on a certain matter, realised in a different linguistic outcome: a disease, for instance, can be illustrated through a medical or homeopathic discourse. How these discourses are constructed may in turn be best illustrated through Fairclough's (2015: 58) renowned three-level model of discourse. According to Fairclough, there are three different levels to discourse: textual level (written/spoken/visual text), interactional level (processes of text production and consumption) and contextual level (societal conditions of text production and consumption). In this notion, language as a linguistic system is intertwined with the discursive and social semiotic system. CDS, in other words, enables the analysis of textual features (i.e. micro level) while relating it to the societal level (i.e. macro level). These levels are inseparable, and an inspection of one requires always an inspection of the other in CDS.

The plural conception of discourse therefore provides us with a tool with which to analyse the construction of meanings. A crucial notion in that process is the notion of **context**. Context itself is not a simple concept either, or definable in a comprehensive manner. Van Dijk (2015: 10) views context as the conditions that control social phenomena, including discourse. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 28-37) describe context as a multifaceted and multi-layered phenomenon. Similar to discourse, to determine the context is a very subjective and selective process. Contexts can be multiple, depending on the point of view, and it is essential to be aware of the layers of context that are excluded in the definition. In case of the backstop, for example, a meaningful way to begin with the dissection of context is to regard it as the setting and background where the use of language takes place. On a more detailed level, relevant context might include such items as Brexit, the wider historical-political context, the media context of the data, and the everyday context of people's ordinary lives. On the other hand, selection of one entails the exclusion of potentially relevant contexts; in the context of the media representation of Brexit, for instance, certain institutional contexts such as that of the editorial office could be identified. The key to selecting the relevant context/s is that context is relevant when it is present; according to van Dijk (2015: 10), context defines for the social actors what is relevant in social action. What this means in CDS is that a single word is not necessarily interesting, but it is rather made interesting in – and by – the context. Context

is a subjective experience as well (e.g. van Dijk 2001), although some of its layers must understandably be shared for a 'successful' shared semiosis.

Returning to the view on discourse as action, a view central to CDS is that discourse is seen as a means of **power**. The way power operates is at times difficult to understand, and it is the aim of CDS to make it more distinguishable and transparent (Blommaert 2005). Foucault (1981: 92) describes power as a "multiplicity of force relations" that "constitute their own organization". While power is in Foucault's view not only repressive from above to below, CDS is usually concerned with the ways that the use of power leads to inequality (Van Dijk 1997, 1998). In the view of CDS, power is materialised as *dominance*; dominant discourses are used to legitimate and normalise (Herman and Chomsky: 1988). They are often constructed in a subtle manner, which is where CDS comes applicable.

In order to illustrate the way that power operates in language, it is necessary to discuss two closely related concepts: **ideology** and **representation**. Ideology can be defined as an implicit assertion that is rooted in the premises of a text and furthers the formation and maintenance of inequal relations of power and control (Fairclough 1995b: 25). On the other hand, ideology is something lot less concrete and conscious; Blommaert (2005: 162) describes ideology as an abstract "deep structure" of social reality. Importantly, ideologies are not exactly personal beliefs of an individual rather than social and shared systems of thought (van Dijk 2011: 382). Ideologies are underlying factors behind discourses and thereby linked to dominance and hegemony. Ideology is a good example of the micro-macro trait of discourse: ideologies on the macro-level influence language use on a textual, micro-level, and, correspondingly, micro-level texts participate in the production of macro-level discourses (Fairclough 1995a: 35). The concept of ideology is certainly relevant in case of the backstop arrangement and Brexit; ideologies that guide concrete political decision-making and are materialised in decision-making are undoubtedly at play there. National and social identities, which are linked to the abstract and unconscious side of ideologies are surely present as well, given the sentimental and historical aspects.

In any case, ideologies might lead to inequal power relations, and one channel for this is the aforementioned concept of *representation*. Representation is a semiotic process that includes, symbols, narratives, and genres, among other things (Blommaert 2005: 203). Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 53-55) consider representation as an "image" that is constructed of the

object of parole – the object is depicted in a certain manner, and certain meanings are attributed to it. Widdowson (1998: 138) calls representation "an encoded version of reality", noting that "any alteration of perceived reality is necessarily representational". In Fairclough's (1992) view, representation acts as a social and societal facet of discourse. With the concept of representation, it is possible to analyse the way that people and events are depicted as "true or occurred" (ibid.). Importantly, representation takes place in a space and time, and therefore it is bound to context as well (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2009: 53–63.). Representation is a particularly interesting object of research in the case of backstop, since the historical context entails strongly dissenting views on what has happened and why, and different group's expectations concerning the state of things post-Brexit vary as well.

In order to bring together the concepts of power, ideology, and representation in language, let us consider populist discourses in the Brexit campaign as an example. As has been pointed out, immigration themes played a role in the outcome of the referendum. Cap (2019) conducted a research on the anti-immigration discourses of the UKIP and its leader Nigel Farage. The discourses were found to be "conceptually bipolar", applying an antagonising division of people into 'us' and 'them' (Cap 2019: 81-82). Farage's rhetoric produced an othering of immigrants and presented immigration as a threat. For example, Farage referred to asylum seekers as *illegal entrants* at *our gates* (Cap 2019:81). Cap's study serves as an example where the prevailing *ideology* is anti-immigration, as might be expected. The negative *representation* of immigrants is an exercise of *power* in that it led to the desired outcome (Brexit), but at the same time it places them in an inequal possession of exclusion and otherness. To contrast, an alternative representation of immigrants could for instance rest upon an inclusive ideology where immigrants were considered a vital part of 'our' workforce. Populist anti-immigrant establishment as a phenomenon is, of course, not only linked to Brexit but part of a Europe-wide development where various factors have contributed to the recent rise of populist – and in many cases extreme – political movements with a nativist discourse (e.g. Wodak, KhosraviNik and Mral 2013). While such a hegemonic aspect as in the example is not the primary lens through which the backstop arrangement is viewed in the present study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge the way that hegemonic discursive elements have influenced the outcome of the Brexit process.

Discursive power may also be manifested more subtly, in which case it is useful to apply the Foucauldian (1981) notion of *orders of discourse*. Discourses are not in an equal position

rather than in a hierarchic relationship. According to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 58), the orders of discourse define what kind of discursive practices are acceptable in the society, the process itself depending on the values of the surrounding society. Fairclough (1995a: 12-13) notes that the orders of discourse are not stable but in a dynamic relationship. In the multitude of discourses, the underlying scheme is, in short, that not all discourses are in the same position, rather than aligned according to the orders of discourse. Power relations are not always manifested as blatant oppression and dominance, and therefore the present study leans on a more subtle notion of discursive power. In this case, the orders of discourse operate as a tool with which to address this 'subtler' form of discursive power in case some discourses receive more prominence in the backstop coverage than others.

As has been presented so far, CDS focuses on the way that discourses affect our understanding of the social reality and the very organisation of it. A final aspect that deserves more elucidation is its objective of *linguistic reform*. In Fairclough's (2015: 5-6) view, the purpose of CDS is not only to combine analysis, explanation and critique of discourse but also to make a *change*; analysts surely need to criticise the use of language and suggest improvements, but ultimately their contribution should be towards a comprehensive social change in the society where the criticised discourses are "related in particular ways to other social elements such as power relations, ideologies, economic and political strategies and policies" (Fairclough 2015: 5). Blommaert (2005: 35) draws attention to the temporally limited scope of CDS; the "linguistic bias" disregards a major part of the trajectory of linguistic action, and therefore the analysis should extend beyond the textually organised part of discourse. In Blommaert's (2005: 1) view, it is thus essential that CDS analyses the effects of language use. Taken together, these views suggest that CDS has an *emancipatory* mission: by analysing and unravelling inequal discourse structures it aims for a social change and impact beyond language. While a comprehensively reformative approach might be out of reach within the resources of the present study, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that CDS ultimately aims for social change.

Before moving on to the next section, it is necessary to address some critique of CDS that might be relevant as regards the present study. One common criticism concerns 'cherry-picking'. In other words, CDS entails the risk that analysts select data that attracts their attention but is not necessarily representative of the discourses, which results in "generalisations based on a few purposely selected examples", according to Koller and

Mautner (2004: 18). Stubbs (1997) presents a similar concern over the focus of CDS on quantitatively minor data and thereby neglect of their relation to wider linguistic patterns and language forms. It has been suggested that CDS should for instance include larger sets of data (Stubbs 1997) or be integrated with corpus-linguistic approaches (Aluthman 2018) in order to resolve the question of representativeness.

While this criticism is not unfounded, it should be emphasised that linguistic CDS aims for a detailed qualitative analysis. When conducting a qualitative analysis, selections must be made – and in the case of mass media, such as in the present study, there is indeed a massive body of data to choose from. In addition to that, it is one the core objectives of CDS to uncover and analyse inequal discourse structures. As Fairclough (2015: 49) notes, CDS "includes critique of relations between discourse and power, focusing upon discourse as part of exercising power over others in ways which are illegitimate, unjust or otherwise harmful". Considering this objective of CDS, it is hardly misguided to direct the analysis to where such phenomena occur. As regards representativeness, the prominence of context in CDS offers at least some resolution. This means that the results are not arbitrary and unfounded claims, rather than a careful interpretation of text justified by its social conditions. CDS addresses the emergence of discourses on the level of individual texts, and inclusion of quantitative approaches could risk the level of detail. Importantly, study of discourse does not aim for an orthodox and comprehensive result, as Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2009: 163-164) point out, and research carried out in different fields and with different methods should therefore be regarded mutually supportive.

A final critique, or rather observation, concerns the politics of CDS. To many, the mission of CDS is emancipatory, which requires, in the words of Fairclough (2015: 252), "taking sides". Van Dijk (2015b: 466) characterises CDS as a social movement of "politically committed discourse analysts". Indeed, van Dijk argues that there cannot be a neutral stance to inequality in CDS (1993: 253, 270). Bearing this in mind, Breeze (2011: 520) emphasises that the political objectives are a quintessential part of CDS, and this should always be acknowledged when exploring work carried out CDS. Addressing the potential problematics of this political 'bias', Fairclough (2015: 252) aptly notes that CDS and other academic work alike is subject to peer evaluation. While the political ambitions in the present study are less determined than in Fairclough's or van Dijk's work, it is nevertheless useful to acknowledge that CDS and

other types of qualitative research alike can never be fully neutral. An explicit goal of CDS is to challenge inequal discourse structures, and that applies to this study as well.

2.4 Brexit, British media and CDA

Before moving to the practicalities of this study, it is necessary to address previous studies on the topic. Given the relative recency of Brexit as a phenomenon as well as the uncertainty and delay in its implementation, studies on the discursive aspect of Brexit can be expected to become more voluminous in the years to come. The research on the media discourses of Brexit has been conducted mainly in the areas of media and communication studies as well as social sciences, and notably on international newspapers (e.g. Borchardt, Simon & Bironzo 2018). In other words, there is room for more linguistic research on Brexit. While the body of linguistic research on Brexit and discourse is relatively minor, it certainly exists, however. Aluthman (2018) conducted a corpus-assisted discourse analysis on the representation of immigration in the discussion on the Brexit referendum. The data consisted of a large corpus of blogs, tweets, and news articles. The results showed that immigration was one of the central themes in the referendum, and attitudes towards it were polarised. The analysis revealed negative attitudes towards an uncontrollable movement of immigrants and general concern about the effect that immigrants have on wages, education, and healthcare. More positive attitudes underlined the positive effects that immigrants have on the economy.

Arguably the most comprehensive study so far on the discursive aspect of Brexit has been compiled by Koller et al. (2019) in the book *Discourses of Brexit*. The data in the articles of the edited volume largely predates the referendum, and it includes governmental materials, social media, parliamentary debates as well as traditional media. While the volume can be regarded multifaceted and thorough, the chapter that is of particular relevance with regard to the current study is that by Lutzky and Kehoe (2019). Lutzky and Kehoe studied the discourses that emerged in the *Guardian's* online coverage on Brexit and the way that they changed in the years leading up to the referendum. The study was a corpus-linguistic study of 1.9 billion articles published between 2000-2017. The large corpus data enabled a diachronic study of patterns in language use in the construction of Brexit. Results showed that new words were derived from the base word 'Brexit', which illustrated the "discursive spread of the

concept and -- the need for further expressions to allow for the relevant narratives on the UK's leaving the EU to be construed" (2019: 118). Importantly, these neologisms denoted the supporters of Brexit. Contextualisation of these word neologisms revealed that there was significant variation in the newspaper's discourses of Brexit. For example, the business section focused on "future perspectives" as well as economic consequences of Brexit, as might be expected, while the Comment Is Free section, designed for debate and opinions was focused on the very qualities of Brexit – what is should or should not be. These choices were influenced by the uncertainty and negative implications associated with the Brexit process, and Lutzky and Kehoe described them as a way of "coming to terms" with the phenomenon (ibid.).

3 RESEARCH PROBLEM, DATA AND METHODS

3.1 Research problem

The present study is interested in the way that discourse operates in the backstop coverage in the context of Brexit. While discourse is at the centre of the research problem, it is necessary to address the concept of representation as well. Influenced by Fairclough (1992), representation is here linked to discourses' capacity to portray and depict the world in different ways; they are regarded as intertwined. Discourse serves as the deeply rooted, cognitive and linguistic model that leads to the production of a certain – importantly, temporal – representation on a specific matter. Given the ideological divergence that the backstop arrangement entails, it is important to be able to seize the different representations of concrete actors of events that may arise in individual instances of data but to also address their connection to the wider social structures. My research questions are therefore the following:

1) How are the backstop, the Brexit negotiations and the second 'meaningful vote' represented in the backstop coverage in Irish and UK newspapers?
2) How are different political actors represented in these articles?
3) What kind of discourses can be found in these articles, and how are they constructed linguistically?

While the intention is to focus on the backstop, it is necessary to address the wider framework of Brexit in the analysis as well. Brexit and the backstop are, obviously, intertwined processes, and it would be impossible to focus on the backstop only and somehow rule out Brexit. The research questions thus make use of a symbiotic viewpoint: Brexit is the context in which we are able to examine the backstop coverage, and the backstop itself provides us with a defined viewpoint from which we might be able to seize certain qualities or viewpoints of Brexit that could receive less attention elsewhere; it helps us narrow down the larger phenomenon of Brexit. What this means in relation to the data is that backstop serves as the topic of the articles, but rather than being limited to the backstop only, the analysis also covers other meanings that emerge in the data, prospectively.

The negotiation process and the second 'meaningful vote' are included in the second research question because they constitute a major part of the news content. The second meaningful vote refers to the UK parliamentary vote on the withdrawal agreement, which is explained in more detail in the following chapter. These processes mark the more interactive aspects of the backstop and Brexit in the data, and as an analytical step they also display in particular the way that ideological differences collide in political decision-making. Political actors in the second question include the so-called Eurosceptics and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Theresa May and the UK government. May has been selected for inspection as the only individual person because of her centrality in the data, given the prime minister's central role in as the UK's representative the Brexit negotiations. Correspondingly, the DUP has been chosen for inspection as the sole political party because of its distinctiveness in the data. After the UK general elections in 2017, the DUP agreed to support May's minority government. The backstop was, however, a point of contention between the DUP and the Conservative Party, which can be observed in the result chapter. The selection of the actors and processes is explained in more detail in section 3.4.2.

A further note on the research questions concerns the fact that news media is often treated as something that should be fully objective. In case of the backstop coverage, however, it is necessary to acknowledge its openly political nature of the British press: journalists operate in an environment, where they must be aware of the fact that they take part in distribution of certain viewpoints. What this means for the present study is that the purpose is to examine the norms that are created in journalistic content; instead of solely tracing and 'finger-pointing'

ideologies, they are rather examined and explained. The politics of British and Irish newspapers are discussed in more detail in section 3.2.2.

3.2 Data

3.2.1 Selection and collection of data

The data of this study consists of newspaper articles, as has been pointed out. Tosh (2010: 97) describes news as an important form of contemporary description: in an electronically mediated world, important decisions are increasingly communicated through means that leave no trace to posterity, and newspapers often remain the only record of events.

Since previous studies on Brexit have focused largely on English newspapers, articles from Irish and Northern Irish newspapers constitute a slight majority of the data in the present study. Three English newspapers are included as well because of their prominence and to give the study a certain diversity. Even though the objective of is to shed light on the Irish and Northern Irish viewpoints, inclusion of English newspapers helps us illustrate the discussion on the British Isles as a whole. It should also be noted that journalistic content is consumed overlappingly in the area (e.g. Mercereau 1995), and therefore regional aspects are not the only relevant classification of the newspapers in question.

The data consists of 14 articles from seven newspapers from the UK and Ireland: *Belfast News Letter* (Northern Ireland, henceforth *News Letter* in accordance with their online presence), the *Daily Telegraph* or mere *Telegraph* as in the online publication (England), the *Guardian* (England), the *Independent* (England), *Irish Independent* (Ireland), the *Irish News* (Northern Ireland) and the *Irish Times* (Ireland). The articles were published during spring 2019 when the backstop was a very prominent topic in the Brexit coverage. A majority of the articles was collected through the newspaper database PressReader, which provides the user with virtual copies of the newspapers. Through PressReader, I was able to collect articles from the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, *Irish Independent*, *Irish Times* and the *Telegraph*. Articles from the *News Letter* were collected through ProQuest Central, which is also a database but more multifaceted and multi-disciplinary in content. Finally, in order to improve

the representation of the media of Northern Ireland in the research data, I collected articles from the *Irish News* through the newspaper's website.

The selection of data began with a search of backstop articles that were deemed high in relevance by the database's or newspaper's search engine. Timeframe for the publication date was January-March 2019, when the backstop coverage was particularly prominent. The articles that appeared relevant for the research problem as regards their content and language were selected for further inspection. Two articles were chosen from each newspaper. The first article from each newspaper (named as DT1 for the *Telegraph*, II1 for *Irish Independent*, IN1 for the *Irish News*, IT1 for the *Irish Times*, NL1 for *News Letter*, TG1 for the *Guardian* and TI1 for the *Independent*) was selected because it offered relevant content for analysis considering the topic and the research problem; while there is not unifying topic – apart from the backstop, of course – or event behind these articles, they are used to ensure that the data is as diverse as possible. Since the topics vary among these articles, a brief summary is necessary:

- DT1 addresses the DUP's rejection of the UK government's pledges that the backstop, if used, would not weaken the UK's ties to Northern Ireland.
- II1 describes a tense phase in the relations between Irish and UK governments resulting from a reported shift in May's policies regarding the backstop.
- IN1 covers the Tánaiste (deputy head of the government of Ireland) at the time Simon Coveney's speech in Belfast, where he addresses the Irish government's stance on the backstop.
- IT1 is about May's visit to Brussels in order to negotiate changes to the backstop clause in the withdrawal agreement, the visit taking place in the aftermath of Donald Tusk's (president of the European Council at the time) comments that a 'place in hell' awaits those who advocated Brexit without plans.
- NL1 reports Jim Allister's (leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice, a conservative-unionist Northern Irish political party) comments that the backstop would lead to Northern Ireland leaving the UK.
- TG1 addresses May's speech in the pro-leave town of Grimsby, where she asked support for her revised version of the withdrawal agreement and expressed the request that the EU make concessions to its backstop stance.

- Lastly, TI1 covers May's visit to Belfast, where she held meetings at Stormont in order to find alternatives to the backstop arrangement.

For a balanced structure, second article from each newspaper (DT2 for the *Telegraph*, II2 for Irish Independent and so forth) has been published on the same day, 12 March 2019. That date was selected because it was an eventful phase in the Brexit process. Prime minister May had just arrived from a last-minute meeting in Strasbourg with Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission at the time. May had negotiated a revised version of the withdrawal agreement that she hoped would reconcile different parties' concerns over the Irish border. In the first vote on the agreement in January 2019, also known as the first 'meaningful vote', the proposed deal was defeated by a margin of 230 votes at the UK House of Commons. The second 'meaningful vote' took place on the evening of 12 March, and May's revised deal was defeated again. Apart from the *News Letter* (NL2), the articles have been published before the vote took place. In any case, the first article from each newspaper has been published before the second article. For example, TG1 and II1 have been published before TG2 or DT2, since the latter have been published on 12 March. In exception, the *News Letter* applies a reverse chronology in that NL1 has been published on 18 March and NL2 on 12 March. The purpose of this is to ease the examination on NL2 along with the other newspapers.

It should be noted that only news articles have been included in the data, excluding columns and other types of opinion texts. This might operate against the objective of drawing a wide picture of the backstop discussion, but it should again be noted that a meticulous analysis becomes more difficult to conduct as the amount of data increases. The aim of the present study is not to be an all-encompassing depiction of a current, political phenomenon, rather than its detailed and carefully delineated analysis.

The data entails a certain asymmetry that should be addressed. Apart from the *Independent*, which has been an online-only publication since 2016, the articles collected through PressReader are virtually copies of the print articles. In other words, print media constitutes a majority of the data. This is supported by the fact that a major part of British people still read their newspapers as print versions (Statista 2019). However, several articles have been published online in a similar or a substantially edited version. I was only unable to locate two of the articles online, and they were from different newspapers. The *Telegraph* used a paywall

that prevented me from comparing the print and online versions, and the similarity between the two versions is deduced based on the website's article preview, not the whole article. On the other hand, I had no access to the print versions of the *News Letter* and, as mentioned above, the *Independent* only publishes an online newspaper these days. In short, a certain asymmetry lies between different instances of data; some articles are verifiably published in the print edition and/or online, and, in some cases, it is not possible to compare between different versions. As a researcher, I can only accept the fact that I cannot use such data that I have no access to. While the selection of different types of data may seem a peculiar choice, I believe it may strengthen the validity of this study. My original intention was to analyse articles collected through PressReader only, since that way I would have similar types of data. However, I wished to expand the data, since my interest lies in questions of the Irish border, and the data might have been somewhat meagre without additional data from Ireland and Northern Ireland newspapers. Also, the differences between the print and online versions are not relevant with regard to the research questions and methods since visual aspects (e.g. multimodality) are not included in the analysis. Research methods are discussed in more detail in section 3.4.

3.2.2 Contextualization of the newspapers

Before moving on to the following section, it is necessary to offer a contextualisation on the newspapers behind the data. As was suggested in section 2.2, context is potentially infinite. Given the scope of the study and certain heterogeneity in the collection and properties of data, potentially relevant aspects such as circulation, advertising, journalistic practices (e.g. editing, attention span in online environment etc.) are omitted from the description. As suggested by van Dijk (2015a), the relevant contexts are those that are meaningful for interpretation, and I am therefore focusing on the ideological aspect of the newspapers – noting that the backstop has largely been contextualised in chapter 1.

In any case, a long-established quality of the British media is its openly political nature. The *Guardian* and the *Independent* are self-proclaimed liberal newspapers (e.g. The Guardian 2008; The Independent 2013), while the *Telegraph* supports the Conservatives (The Telegraph 2019). Northern Ireland has its equivalent division in the "staunchly unionist" *News Letter* and "constitutional nationalist", social democratic and Labour-supporting *Irish*

News (Aldridge 2007: 127). Aldrige (2007) notes that the divide in Norther Ireland "ensures that there are not only two parallel social universes to be reported, but two alternative interpretations of the news." As regards the press in Ireland, it is neither free of politics with the liberal *Irish Times* and conservative *Irish Independent* (Brochard et al. 2018: 46).

Deacon et al. (2016: 187) point out that major newspapers in the UK have traditionally expressed their preferences ahead of an election, and so they did ahead of the Brexit referendum as well. Pro-Brexit *Telegraph* and pro-remain *Guardian* were juxtaposed in the campaign coverage, as might be expected (Levy, Aslan and Bironzo 2016: 33). As regards Ireland, *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent* were included in a study by Borchard et al. (2018), which showed that Irish media were largely opposed to Brexit. Concerns on the future of the country was emphasised in the campaign coverage. While research on the Brexit stances of the different newspapers involved the current study appears somewhat meagre, individual newspapers' stances should not be given too much weight here. The backstop coverage takes place in a different environment, as the referendum vote is in the clear – despite some parties' hopes for a second referendum – and the attention is, after all, on the question of the Irish border.

3.2.3 News genre and quotations

While genre is not in the centre of attention in the current study, it is necessary to address it briefly. Fairclough (1992: 14) calls genre a "socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity". Reunanen (1993) points out that genre affects the production and interpretation of texts. In a traditional sense, news articles (to distinguish between other types of journalism, e.g. editorials) communicate factual information on current events and phenomena – although Pape and Featherstone (2005) note that the exact 'novelty' of news content varies to a degree. Strive for objectivity is regarded a cornerstone of journalism in Western democracies, and not least by journalists themselves (Borger, Hoof and Sanders 2019: 446). In short, news articles are in terms of genre considered factual and depersonalized, and that is the framework within which the readers experience it. Of course, the situation is slightly different with British media, as suggested in the section above.

Another aspect that requires attention is quotation, since the articles in the data turned out to be richer in quotes than originally anticipated. According to Nylund (2006), the practise of quoting is central in the production of news. Moreover, what is transmitted to the recipient is preceded by "(co-) construction, selection, editing and representation of comments, explanations, interpretations, speculations, praise and blame, among other things", in the words of Nylund (2006: 147) News are largely talk constructed as news; they are not mere reports on concrete events rather than involve parole of different levels of materialization – what has happened, what could happen, what is hoped to happen and so on (ibid.). In the process of recontextualization, events that are discursive and interactional in nature are transformed into quotes, squeezed between the journalist's 'objective' reporting (Nylund 2006, quotation marks in original). According to Nylund (ibid.), quoted content is usually established in interviews, press conferences, however this process being very opaque to the reader. The same applies to political speech, which is also present in the data of this study. In other words, quotation involves a lot more than a mere representation of what is said. Given the complex political setting of the backstop, it would surely be interesting to inspect for instance the way that quotations from different actors are divided in different newspapers (e.g. Borchard et al. 2018: 39-42). However, this would require a more expansive set of data as well as a different type of approach. In short, the discursive practice of quotation is complex; while it is not the object of analysis in this study, the impact it makes on the background on the construction of news is acknowledged.

3.4 Methodology

3.4.1 Analytical process

After an engagement in the theoretical dimension of Critical Discourse Studies in the previous chapters, it is time to discuss its methodological applications, namely Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA). CDA has been chosen as the analytical method because of its flexible nature - it does not have explicit directives as to what to include in the analysis. This is important in a study such as the present one: the research problem predates the data, and it was not possible to know which aspects of linguistic scrutiny would ultimately turn out the most relevant. Another aspect that supports the selection of CDA is that it is particularly applicable to media data, as has been pointed out above. The representative power that the

media possesses is linguistic and discursive, and they possess the capacity to create expectations regarding the operations of different political groups (e.g. Fairclough 1995b); CDA provides the mode for addressing these qualities of news media.

While the theory of CDA has been discussed to an extent, it is necessary to address certain general practicalities of CDA, which justify the ultimate selection of the research methods. In Fairclough's three-level model on discourse presented in chapter 2.3, the textual level equates to linguistic traits (in this case the concrete news articles), and it is through certain analytical procedures that we can connect these traits to the social reality and surrounding society. In Fairclough's (2015: 128-176) procedure for CDA, the analytical process consists of "description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context". This process is outlined below to the extent that is relevant for media analysis.

Description of text involves an examination of the formal features of a text. According to Fairclough (2015: 128-153), the discourse that operates as the 'source' behind the text provides the writer with certain (vocabulary or grammar) options, based on which the writer chooses the formal features of the text. Fairclough describes the description process as an alternation "between what is 'there' in the text, and the discourse types that the text is drawing upon". This aspect is essential in the analysis section: a critical examination of what is in present the text, as opposed to what could be there instead. The textual objects of analysis are listed subsequently.

Interpretation of the relationship between the text and interaction refers to a process that, in the words of Fairclough (2015: 172), "makes explicit what for participants is generally implicit". Its definition becomes somewhat complex from a participatory point of view, since I only have access to the final end of the interaction (i.e. the news article) – although the 'final end' of the interaction is slightly difficult to outline, given that the texts could be consumed indefinitely. Since my aim is towards a detailed, linguistic study instead of an immersion to pragmatics or sociology, the relevant relationship for interpretation is in this case defined as that between the journalist and the audience. According to Fairclough, (2015: 171), "producers must assume that their interpreters or likely interpreters are equipped with particular interpretative procedures, and conversely interpreters must assume that the producers of the texts they are interpreting are so equipped". As news articles are presumably

aimed for anonymous audiences, a certain level of shared knowledge between the journalist and a regular member of the audience (incl. the researcher) can be assumed accordingly.

Lastly, the purpose of *explanation* of the relationship between interaction and social context is the phase that weaves together the textual level and its social determinants. As an analytical procedure, this requires an understanding of the social context (sections 2.1 & 2.3) and the theoretical paradigm (section 2.3). According to Fairclough (2015: 176), a crucial aspect for the process of explanation is self-consciousness: the analyst is required to explicate the analytical steps.

The purpose of this description of the analytical process is to respond to the concern that the analysts, in doing CDA, draw their interpretations and readily disregard the possibility of other interpretations. In a critique of CDA, Widdowson (1998: 150) notes that "to foreclose on any interpretation must be to impose a significance which you are disposed to find". Widdowson (ibid.) adds that "to be critical about discourse is to be aware of this". A partial resolve can certainly be found in Fairclough's (2015: 176) comment on self-consciousness. In addition to that, CDS researchers rely on transparency in presentation, and the reader is thus enabled to make their own judgements. The analytical process described above requires in reality a reasoned and conscious course of action. It also shows that CDA is simultaneously a multi-layered method of analysis and involves certain abstract, mental processes that are somewhat challenging to outline in writing. In any case, the methodological steps for that I have chosen for textual analysis are certainly established practices, and they are described in the section that follows.

3.4.2 The methods of textual analysis

Since my research questions concern discourses and their linguistic construction, and an inspection of the formal features of a text constitutes the body of linguistic CDA, the selected research methods engage closely in the textual properties of the data. Richardson (2007: 46-74) has devised a list of methods that are particularly convenient for textual analysis of newspaper discourse. The following methods have been selected from Richardson's list because of their semiotic importance in the data:

Lexical analysis. Lexical choices carry different meanings and connotations, and their analysis is typically the first step in analysis of discourse (Richardson 2007: 47). Attention is paid to the use of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs in particular since they tend to "carry connoted in addition to denoted meanings" (ibid.). Lexical choices have a significant representative power; Richarson (ibid.) points out that lexical items are closely linked to value judgements. Given the centrality of political themes in my research, aspects that are particularly salient in lexical analysis include predication (i.e. what kind of qualities are being assigned to people, events, actions etc.) and the way that people are individualised or collectivised, which is of highly relevant since the backstop involves several different parties and starkly varying interests.

Transitivity refers to the "relationships between participants and the roles they play in the processes described in reporting" (Richardson 2007: 54). Analysis of transitivity involves the way that different actors are connected to an activity – who does what, and to whom. As Richardson (ibid.) points out, transitivity is crucial to representations and it highlights the optional nature of representation: that an event and its participants could always be represented in a different manner. In the data, for instance, transitivity analysis captures the way that the backstop arrangement as a process is given significant power over human decision-makers.

Modality analysis inspects the way in which the producer of the text deems events or phenomena likely or unlikely, desirable or undesirable, possible or impossible, and so forth. It refers to "judgements, comment and attitude in text and talk", and the producer's commitment "to the claim" (Richardson 2007: 59). Modality is usually expressed through modal verbs (e.g. *could*, *should*, *must* or their negations) or adverbs (e.g. *certainly*, *probably*). Richardson links modality to the producer's attitudes, judgements, or political beliefs, and calls it "a window into the political functions and - - effects of the language of journalism". This dimension of modality is indeed central to the research problem since the data involves descriptions but also judgements and speculations on political processes. In the data, for instance, phrases such as *it remains to be seen if* expresses a level of scepticism in relation to a political process.

Presupposition is the final component in the set of methods, and it concerns the opaquer elements in the text. According to Richardson (2007: 63), meaning is not always readily

manifest in the text but hidden or presupposed. Presupposition thus relates to events and phenomena that the producer assumes the receiver to know already. It is expressed for instance through certain types of verbs (state verbs such as *stop*, *continue* and implicative verbs such as *manage*, *forget*), definite and possessive articles, and questions that begin with wh- (*who*, *what*, etc.). As Richardson (ibid.) points out, presuppositions are implicit claims rooted in the seemingly explicit content, and it is therefore important to analyse their appearance in journalistic products. Van Dijk (1988: 64, 69) adds that presuppositions produce ideology in news media especially by leaving something unsaid, in which case the missing content must be inferred as "taken for granted" information.

While the set of methods is adequate in volume, it should be noted that several potentially beneficial methods have been omitted; Richardson's list alone includes further aspects such as narrative and rhetorical tropes. Due to formal features of the data discussed in section 3.2, visual aspects such as multimodality are neither included the analysis of data – in which regard the data could surely be a worthy of inspection. As the purpose of this research is to conduct a detailed, linguistic analysis, the methodology cannot be exhausting.

Before moving on to the results, it is necessary to elucidate the relationship between the research questions and the selected methods. As indicated in section 3.1, my research questions involve both human actors (Eurosceptics, the DUP, May and the UK government) and processes (backstop, negotiations). The selected actors are central in the Brexit process, but they were grouped as analytical entities especially because their treatment in the data was subject to systematic and patterned presentation. The same applies to the second meaningful vote and the Brexit negotiations. In order to simplify the structure of the analysis, they are processed as one analytical entity. Correspondingly to Brexit and the backstop, the negotiations and the UK parliamentary votes are intertwined processes and subject to similarly systematic presentation in the data. In short, the research problem involves both processes and human agents. Moreover, the latter includes both individuals and groups which are clearly defined to a varying degree. The selected methods are necessary in order to address both aspects of the backstop coverage. While lexical analysis, for instance, tends to receive more prominence than other aspects given its wide applicability, transitivity analysis may in turn be more useful when examining the role of the processes in the data. The following result chapter provides more illumination on the way this all operates in practice.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Overview of the analysis

The analysis is structured along the previously mentioned groupings: the backstop, the second meaningful vote and the withdrawal negotiations, and the DUP, Eurosceptics, May and the UK government. These entities are structured along their representations. Each representation is followed by a review of the discourses present in case a certain discourse and its ideological components can be established in connection to the representation in question. It should be kept in mind that representations and discourses are not always explicitly definable, and there might be some overlapping. To avoid redundancy, frequent discourses are not always named under each representation; representations can be considered here as discourses' way of materialising, and it is merely comprehensible that representations on different topics exhibit the same, underlying, discourse. The processes (backstop, negotiations) are discussed first, after which I move on to the social actors.

The representations and discourses that arise in the data are bolded in the body text. Quotation marks in the examples signal a quotation in the original document. The analyst's explanatory comments, when necessary, are in square brackets. If the example does not explicitly mention who is being quoted or who is the agent in the example, that information is provided in square brackets as well.

4.2 The contradictory backstop

As the backstop serves as the primary topic of the present study, it is only natural that it serves as a starting point for the analysis. The backstop arrangement receives multiple different representations in the data. A dominant representation of the backstop is that the backstop is depicted as a **trap** for the UK:

> 1) – with Geoffrey Cox, the UK attorney General, who will today issue fresh legal advice on whether the UK **could be trapped forever in the backstop** if it came into force as a result of **failed trade talks**. (II2)
> 2) -- changes that will allow the attorney general, Geoffrey Cox, to revise his legal advice **warning that the UK could be trapped indefinitely** in the backstop. (TG1)

3) Steve Baker, one of the leaders of the ERG, said there was "deal fever" but the group would not vote for anything that could amount to "**entrapment" in the backstop forever**. (TG2)

4) -- And a document written by the UK side containing fresh legal advice on why the UK **will not be 'trapped' in the backstop**. (II2)

In all the examples above, the backstop is explicitly described through entrapment which has, of course, a strongly negative connotation, especially since it would result from *failed talks* (example 1). Geoffrey Cox (the UK Attorney General and a Conservative MP at the time) is the chief legal adviser for the government, and therefore his advice *warning* (example 2) that the UK *could be trapped* (examples 1-2) in the backstop is noteworthy. Indeed, the choice of the word *warn* to describe this advice attaches a sense of menace to a legal document – although it should be noted that reported speech does not necessarily mean that the original formulation has been an explicit warning. The adverb *indefinitely* in example 2 emphasises the potential long-lasting impact of the backstop, as does *forever* in example 1 as well as in the comments by Steve Baker, leader of the ERG (European Research Group, a research group to support Conservative MP's) at the time in example 3. Embedded in the notion that the backstop would trap the UK, these adverbs contain not only a presupposition of entrapment but indeed an infinite entrapment, which contributes to the gravity of the situation. While example 4 expresses it through negation – and *will not* expresses definite non-occurrence in modality – the frequency of the trap discourse makes it appear a salient topic in political discussions that has an effect on decision-making. These representations exemplify what I have named as a **freedom discourse**: the backstop is viewed as a question of the UK's liberty. Noteworthily, this view is expressed by Conservative actors.

Elsewhere in the data, the idea of entrapment is also present in more subtle expression of **containment**:

5) The British government states that the document "**reduces the risk that the UK could be deliberately held** in the Northern Ireland backstop indefinitely -- (IN2)

6) -- concerns raised by MPs who **feared the backstop would keep the UK in a customs arrangement with the EU indefinitely**. (IN2)

In example 5, entrapment is expressed through the more general *held*. While the UK could be *deliberately held* in the backstop, the process is not linked to any active agent. Linking *risk* with the backstop suggests again that it should be avoided. Containment in example 6 takes the form of *customs arrangement* which could take place, consistent with the previous examples, *indefinitely*, as is the case with example 6. The transitivity structure suggests that this time it is the backstop itself that would *keep* the UK in the arrangement. Example 6 marks one of the

fewer occasions of **economic discourse** in the data: the significance of the backstop arises from its economic implications on the UK. While there is no elaboration on these implications, the use of economic discourse suggests the presence of an anti-EU ideology: staying in a customs arrangement with the EU is in itself undesired.

Where the previous examples apply a transitivity structure where the UK is simply 'trapped' in the backstop or trapped by the backstop, an **instigator behind the entrapment** is named elsewhere in the data:

7) The prime minister's de facto deputy David Lidington said that the new documents gave "confirmation that the EU **cannot try to trap the UK in the backstop indefinitely** -- (IN2)
8) Mr Lidington said the new legal "instrument" confirmed that **the EU could not try to trap the UK in the backstop indefinitely** --, (TI2)
9) Last night a senior Eurosceptic said the star chamber is likely to give Mrs May's proposals a "rough ride" because they rely on proving that the EU is acting in "bad faith" in order to **break off from the backstop**. (DT2)
10) The Republic's minister for foreign affairs [Simon Coveney] said: "**We** don't want the backstop for it to be some kind of **trap in which to ensnare and hold the UK or Northern Ireland.** (IN1)

David Lidington served as Minister for the Cabinet office and May's de facto deputy at the time of the articles' publication. His comments in examples 7 and 8 repeat the references to a *trap*, but this time the backstop is explicitly presented as the *EU's* tool for entrapment of the UK. Analogous to the examples of the previous paragraph, *indefinitely* in examples 7 and 8 embodies the same temporal potential of the backstop. *Break off* in example 9 connotes the idea that there is certainly reason to avoid it. To contextualise, 'star chamber' in example 9 refers to a group of Eurosceptic lawyers from the aforementioned ERG and the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party). In general, there appears to be no evaluation of how likely it is that the EU would indeed entrap the UK in the backstop 'forever'. Moreover, the nature of this entrapment is not elaborated on: whether the EU would be for instance dictating the UK's internal policies in this scenario or, alternatively, whether the UK would be participating in the EU's fiscal policies remains unclear. Example 10 makes an exception to the previous examples: Tánaiste (deputy head of the government of Ireland) Simon Coveney expresses a view where, semantically, it could be Ireland (*we*) that could *ensnare and hold* the UK (and Northern Ireland) in the backstop. The **freedom discourse**, which is present in these examples as well, thus appears be linked, again, to an anti-EU ideology: the EU is presented through alleged power use, a scenario which is in turn used to assign the backstop an undesired quality, entrapment. Again, these views are expressed by Conservative actors, whose political aims may offer some explanation: the backstop would mean that Northern

Ireland stays in some of the EU's customs and market arrangements, which would mean that Northern Ireland would undergo a minor Brexit reform than the rest of the UK.

The backstop is often represented as something that is **needed** or simply needs to be **accepted:**

> 11) And SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said that his party had told Ms May that it is now time to "put up or shut up", as the **backstop was only viable solution to the border issue**. (TI1)
> 12) SDLP leader Colum Eastwood expressed disappointment at the vote but said Westminster **will "have to accept the backstop at some point"**.
> "Sooner or later, the British Parliament **is going to have to support a backstop** for Northern Ireland or else support no Brexit at all - there is no happy medium between these two eventualities," he said. (NL2)
> 13) "The **backstop is part and parcel** of the Withdrawal Agreement. There is **no scope for doubt** on that point," [Michel Barnier] said. (II1)
> 14) Brexit betrayal adds to **need** for backstop, **Leo tells May** (II1)

In example 11, we can observe how Column Eastwood (leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party, an Irish nationalist and social-democratic political party) views the backstop is the *only viable solution* regarding the border, which emphasises its necessity in lack of alternatives. Eastwood's comments in example 12 present the backstop as inevitable; modally, *will have to accept* and *is going to have to support* signal that there is no other possible course of action. In short, there is no desire towards a situation where the backstop is used, it is considered the necessary evil. While the comments by Michel Barnier, the EU's chief negotiator in the withdrawal process in example 13 do not convey a sense of tolerance per se, *part and parcel* together with *no scope for doubt* construct the backstop as a quintessential part of the withdrawal agreement. Barnier could thus imply that without the backstop, there will be no withdrawal agreement. In example 14, a reported betrayal adds *need* for backstop. In parenthesis, the headline of article II1 (i.e. example 14) embodies a certain asymmetry: Varadkar called by given name and to May by surname. This suggests the presence of a patriotic sentiment where Varadkar is presented as familiar, 'our' Leo and May on more detached terms. In any case, the representation of the backstop as something that merely needs to be accepted is an example of **political discourse** in the data. Political discourse is here defined generally as expression of a stance on a political matter. Influenced by Richardson (2007: 59), it is linked especially to the expression of modality in different matters: political discourse expresses the producer's judgements of the way that different events or phenomena are for instance likely or desirable, as was discussed in the method section. In the examples above, political discourse verbally restricts the scope of action or optionality around the backstop by representing it as unavoidable. While this this is not

unusual of political statements, such as here where Labour or democratic parties wish to maintain the status quo on the Irish border, it serves as an introductory example of the way that political discourse operates in the data. Political discourse is treated here as a rather obvious part of political discussion (i.e. citations in the data), and therefore it is not specified in relation to each representation where it appears.

Certain comments express the view that the backstop is a **problem** that needs to be **replaced** or **removed**:

15) [Downing Street is marked as the speaker:] "Jeremy Corbyn has said he also has **concerns** about the backstop – **so this is an issue that needs to be resolved**, not just for our Conservative MPs and the DUP, but for MPs across the House." (IT1)
16) [Arlene Foster:] "As I've said, the Brady amendment is clear in relation to the withdrawal agreement that the backstop **needs to be replaced**. (TI1)
17) DUP leader Arlene Foster also **ramped up the pressure on Ms May to strip the** backstop from the deal -- (TI1)
18) The deal proposed by the chief EU negotiator, Michel Barnier, was expected to include a joint interpretative instrument that would add legal force to **previous assurances that the EU would make the maximum effort to find alternatives to the backstop**. (TG2)
19) Mr Varadkar said Ireland's position remains "unchanged", adding that "the latest developments had reinforced the **need for a backstop which is legally robust** and workable in practice". (II1)

Besides articles TI1 and DT2 with explicit references to the backstop as a *problem*, it evokes *concerns* and *needs to be resolved* (example 15). Arlene Foster's, leader of the DUP, comments in example 16 express this sentiment on steeper terms: the backstop needs to be *replaced*. *Strip*, together with *ramped up the pressure* in example 17 suggests that the backstop should be disposed quickly. In example 18, *previous assurances* of the EU making the *maximum effort* suggests that the EU is willing to go to great lengths in order to find another solution. Leo Varadkar's, Taoiseach (i.e. Irish prime minister and head of government) at the time], call for a legally *robust backstop* in example 19 expresses a rare, even mildly positive view on the backstop in that it attaches a somewhat positive future potential to the backstop, although the connotation that the current state is inadequate certainly persists.

In general, the backstop is **unwanted**:

20) In a late night statement yesterday in Strasbourg [May] argued the new-look deal meant Britain could not be trapped in the **"Irish backstop" so hated** by eurosceptic Tories and her DUP allies -- (TI2)
21) [Lidington] said -- and that the arrangements "**do not need to replicate the backstop in any respect**" (DT2)
22) David Lidington, the Cabinet Office minister who acts as Theresa May's deputy, said the pledges were designed to reassure Northern Ireland that Government would not allow the **backstop to dilute** its commitment to the Union. (DT1)
23) Jim Allister: **EU backstop would be the end of Northern Ireland** (NL1)

In example 20, *so hated* denotes a strong dislike towards to backstop. Elsewhere in the data the backstop is described for instance as *unpopular* and *controversial* (TI1). In example 21, Lidington's comments that alternative arrangements to the backstop *do not need to replicate* it could also embody a dislike for it; *in any respect* suggests that there is a will for complete detachment from the backstop. The linking of the backstop with the capacity to *dilute* in example 22 implies in a similar way its undesirable nature. Jim Allister's (leader of the Traditional Unionist Voice, a Northern Irish unionist-conservative political party) comment that the backstop – the *EU backstop* – would be *the end of Northern Ireland* in example 23 further depicts the backstop as unwanted, even tragic. Moreover, examples 22 and 23 signal, given the political context, a unionist ideology through **political discourse**: backstop is considered a threat, even a fatal one, to the *Union* (which refers in this context to British unionism, i.e. the UK as a sovereign state, not the European Union).

Considering the main function of the backstop arrangement, it is hardly surprising that it is represented as a **deliverer of security**. Interestingly, even this view is linked to its undesired nature:

24) [Tánaiste Simon Coveney:] "And we need **a backstop or insurance mechanism** based on legal certainty-- (II1)
25) [SDLP leader Colum Eastwood:] "The bottom line is that the backstop, aside from scrapping Brexit entirely, is our only **insurance policy** against a hard border. (NL2)
26) [Jean-Claude Juncker:] "**We have no incentive nor desire to use the safety net**. But at the same time, no **safety net can ever truly be safe** if it can just be removed at any time" -- (II1)
27) Mr Juncker said there could be "no slipping back into **darker times past**". (II1)

Even though *insurance mechanism* and *insurance policy* in) Simon Coveney's comments in example 24 and Colum Eastwood's in 25 can be considered a part of the basic lexicon in the backstop discussion, a closer inspection of the metaphor reveals the 'real' nature of the backstop: it is fundamentally an unwanted solution, but on the other hand it brings security in the same way that insurances generally do. Jean-Claude Juncker's (President of the European Commission at the time) comments on the backstop in example 26 explicate this idea: the backstop is not wanted but needed for security; it is a *safety net*. *Darker times past* in example 27 forms the counterpart, the menace against which the backstop offer protection. As might be expected, this representation of the backstop as security marks the use of **security discourse** in the data. While the other examples apply the security discourse on a rather mechanical level, it appears to be particularly in Juncker's comments (example 26) linked to a peace-maintaining ideology: the backstop is regarded a stabiliser in a potentially volatile situation.

What has only been indicated in the examples so far is what I have named, in lack of a better-established term, as a **negational representation** of the backstop; in other words, the backstop is prominently described through what it is *not:*

> 28) [May] said: "What we have secured is very clearly that the backstop **cannot be indefinite. Cannot become permanent. It is only temporary**. (IN2)
> 29) The backstop which ensures **no return** to a hard Border on the island of Ireland **remains unchanged** -- (II2)

May's comments in example 28 is a rich instance of this representation, with the significance of the backstop stemming from what it is not: it *cannot be indefinite* and *cannot become permanent*. Similarly, the word 'only' expresses a modality that significantly limits the scope of the backstop to being *only temporary*. Example 29 could also be included in the negational representation since it involves two instances of negation: the backstop ensures *no return* and remains *unchanged*. Elsewhere in the data, the backstop is described for instance as *not a trap* (IN1) and *no longer permanent* (TG2). While there is no explicit ideological nominator behind these negational representations, they exemplify the contested nature of the backstop arrangement: public discussion on the backstop, including journalism, predominantly responds to previous concerns rather than presents new information.

A notion that is largely embedded in the strong resentment towards the backstop as well as the trap discourse in particular is that the backstop is **powerful**:

> 30) The backstop is an arrangement in the existing withdrawal agreement that comes into play if the EU and UK fail to agree future trading arrangements by the end of 2020, thus **keeping the Irish border open, but also locking the UK into a customs union with the EU** on a potentially indefinite basis. (TI2)
> 31) -- but the **DUP and other Brexiteers claimed** [backstop] **would undermine the constitutional integrity of the UK** by creating barriers between Northern Ireland and Britain. (IN1)
> 32) Mr Allister said that the deal was "a disgrace in every dimension –but it is particularly disastrous for this part of the United Kingdom because of the backstop. **The backstop would annex this part of the UK into a vassal protectorate of the EU**".
> He said that any unionist MP who embraced the **backstop** "at all in any circumstances ... **would be setting us not to exit the EU but setting us to exit the UK**. That is the backstop. That is the essence of it." (NL1)

In example 30, the opaque transitivity structure places the backstop as the agent that will be *keeping the Irish border open* whilst *locking the UK into a customs union*. This suggests that the backstop will have a significant effect on the British Isles, again through **economic discourse**. The reported views of the *DUP and other Brexiteers* in example 31, even though hedged by the word *claim*, similarly contribute to the depiction of power through definite expression of modality: the backstop *would undermine the constitutional integrity of*

the UK. Here, the power that the backstop possesses has negatively perceived implications even on a constitutional level. Jim Allister's comments in example 32 likewise state the impact of the backstop to be tremendous: it is the backstop that *would annex* Northern Ireland into a *vassal protectorate of the EU* and set Northern Ireland *to exit the UK*. Interestingly, Allister does not elaborate on whether the 'vassal protectorate' would make a significant difference to the status quo, considering that Northern Ireland is largely dependent on decisions by the UK government, as has been pointed out. In any case, these examples show that transitivity choices present the backstop arrangement as powerful and its consequences are deemed considerable while the presence of 'real', tangible decision-makers in the process is diminutive. Allister's comments are also an example of **geopolitical discourse** in the data – geopolitics defined here as the relationship between countries as geographical territories and countries as states. Through geographical discourse, the backstop is recognized as a crucial factor for the future division and administration of the British Isles. While there are allusions to the Irish unity elsewhere in the data as well (e.g the following paragraph), Allister's comments vocalise this geopolitical aspect exceptionally explicitly. One possible interpretation to be drawn from this is that the geopolitical division of Northern Ireland persists as a very sensitive issue.

Elsewhere, the view that that the backstop **severs Northern Ireland from the UK** is discussed in different terms:

33) It was hoped that the 13-page paper might assuage DUP anger over the **backstop, which leaves Northern Ireland in a separate arrangement with the EU, putting up potential barriers to trade** across the Irish Sea. (DT1)
34) [Mary Lou McDonald] -- adding: --**then the only last option – the backstop of last resort** – is a referendum on Irish unity." (TI1)
35) Ms Foster told reporters at Stormont there had been a "useful engagement" with the prime minister where the party reminded Ms May of their opposition to the Irish **backstop, as the DUP believe it creates divergence between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK** (TI1)
36) -- the DUP, who fear that [backstop] would in effect **sever Northern Ireland from the rest of Britain**, by requiring checks as goods pass back and forth across the Irish Sea. (TG1)
37) [Jim Allister] said there was **"hysterical enthusiasm" for the backstop from "pan-nationalism"** because it was **"delivering what they want"** and would make Northern Ireland "economically, and thus ultimately constitutionally, more and more attached to the very institutions of Europe to which those in the rest of Ireland belong". (NL1)

Example 33 expresses this view, again, through **economic discourse**: the backstop would place Northern Ireland in a *separate arrangement* with the EU, effecting *barriers to trade*. Sinn Féin president Mary Lou McDonald (example 34) also associates the backstop with Northern Ireland's detachment from the UK, this time in connection to an Irish nationalist ideology; Irish unity is Sinn Feín's central political objective is, and linkage between the

backstop and a *referendum on Irish unity* is certainly fit for this objective, albeit as *the only last option*. Correspondingly, a backstop which *creates divergence between* (example 35) or *severs* (example 36) Northern Ireland from the UK if a more worrying matter to the DUP. Examples 34-36 mark another occasion of **geopolitical discourse**, which appears to, apart from example 34, entail traces of both anti-EU and unionist ideologies: the backstop would – undesirably – keep Northern Ireland in the EU and detach it from the UK. Correspondingly, Allister (example 37) views the backstop as weaning Northern Ireland towards the EU's economic and constitutional institutions, while his message is delivered on more hyperbolical terms and opaque sentence structure: there is *hysterical enthusiasm* for the backstop from *pan-nationalism*, to whom the backstop would cater *what they want*. While there is no elaboration on who exactly are the 'pan-nationalists' and 'they', the negative representation links it in this context to an anti-EU ideology. Elsewhere in the article NL1, Allister makes allusions to a *waiting room for Irish unity* and the way that Northern Ireland is *weaned away* from *our natural economic attachment and outlet* (i.e. the UK). Whilst not giving Allister's comments disproportionate presentation, given that they appear in an individual article in the data, it is noteworthy that Allister's comments in article NL1 together with McDonald's comment in example 34 represent the few elaborations of this concern, which is merely hinted elsewhere (e.g. in the trap discourse).

Article II1 also presents the backstop as a question of unity. However, in contrast to the previous examples, the backstop represents not Irish or British but **European unity**:

> 38) EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker said those in Westminster **hoping** Europe plans to "**abandon the backstop and so Ireland** at the last minute" will be **disappointed**. (II1)
> "This is not a game. And neither is it a simple bilateral issue. It **goes to the heart of what being a member of the European Union means** --(II1)
> 39) Germany's foreign office also tweeted **the entire EU "stands by Ireland**" and **will not allow this country "to be isolated" on the backstop**. (II1)

In example 38, we can observe how the backstop is linked to the EU's ties to Ireland. By not abandoning *the backstop and so Ireland*, Juncker presents the EU as a loyal friend of Ireland, which is repeated in the uplifting *goes to the heart*. Echoes of this sentiment can be observed in *stands by Ireland* in example 39, with a reference to the menace that Ireland could be *isolated on the backstop*. Other articles contain phrases such as *heavyweight backing* (II1) and *firm commitment to the backstop* (IT1) to describe the EU's support for Ireland. As the different representations of the backstop appear largely in relation to EU-UK or NI-UK relations, it is at the least noteworthy how this is the sole depiction that is centred on relations

between the EU and Ireland. This representation involves a **discourse of international relations:** the backstop is presented as a point where the strength of collaboration within the EU member countries is manifest. On an ideological level, it is hardly surprising that the EU and remaining member countries strive to increase regional cohesion when a member country is leaving the union. Juncker's comments can also be regarded as **emotional discourse**. By linking the intention to not abandon Ireland to Westminster *hopes* and *disappointment*, Juncker associates a certain malice to the UK government's actions; g*oes to the heart* certainly has a sentimental connotation.

In summary, the contentious nature of the backstop is illustrated with its conflicting representations in the data. It is contradictory: some parties see it as a precondition for the happening of Brexit, others see it leading to a 'watered-down' Brexit. In most cases the backstop was negatively conceived of. The backstop is represented as problematic and unwanted; it is powerful, a trap and would sever Northern Ireland from the UK. These views marked the presence of unionist and/or anti-EU ideologies, which were expressed through freedom discourse, economic discourse, political discourse, and geopolitical discourse. On the other hand, the backstop was also represented as something that simply needs to be accepted or as a deliverer of security. It was also represented as a characteristic of European unity. These views were linked to ideologies that support European cohesion or Irish unity.

4.3 Negotiations and the meaningful vote: drama, urgency, games and mostly strained relations

While the backstop is largely represented disapprovingly, the negotiations and the meaningful vote appear to be no less problematic in the data. As an example of the way that linguistic patterns are established in the data and, subsequently, judged as patterns, let us for a start consider the representation of the events of 12 March in the articles as a **dramatic or even chaotic day**:

> 40) The announcement came after **another dramatic day** in Westminster yesterday, which began with talk of Ms May potentially delaying today's vote on her deal after a **seemingly fruitless weekend** of talks. (TI2)
> 41) --came at the end of **a tumultuous day in Westminster**. (DT2)
> 42) After **a day of frantic activity** in Dublin, London and Strasbourg-- (II2)
> 43) May's **breakthrough appeared imminent** after **a day of drama** on both sides of the channel--(TG2)

44) After **a day of drama** in Westminster, **predictions of a crushing defeat** for Mrs May's deal **gave way** to speculation that she could pull off an **unlikely victory** in tonight's vote --(DT2)
45) The Cabinet was called to an emergency session at short notice yesterday evening, leaving a number of ministers **scrambling** to get back into the city centre. (II2)

The examples above show that the events are discussed on rather similar terms in four different newspapers: the *Independent*, the *Telegraph*, *Irish Independent* and the *Guardian*. In addition to describing the events on simple, fact-centred terms, the unfolding of events is presented in a dramatic narrative through evaluation of events. Example 40 makes use of a contrasting of events where a *seemingly fruitless weekend* is succeeded by *another dramatic day*. The dramatic narrative is an all-encompassing theme especially in the article TI2; phrases such as *things suddenly began to move more quickly* appear throughout the article and contribute to the impression of an action-packed political event. Examples 41 and 42 embody a similar narrative through adjectives such as *tumultuous* and *frantic* that create an impression of chaos. In example 43, *day of drama* contributes to a similar narrative, especially by linking it to an *imminent breakthrough*. Example 44 embodies a similar presentation especially by contrasting different scenarios: *predictions of a crushing defeat* that *gave way* to the possibility of an *unlikely victory*. *Scrambling* in example 45 shows that a chaos extends to the Irish government (i.e. *the Cabinet*) as well. While these examples show no explicit ideological alignment, they serve as a good example of the way that patterns and analogies are established in the data.

An overarching impression is that the negotiations and the meaningful vote are represented as a **demanding process**:

46) Then came the terse phone call between Mr Varadkar and Mrs May which resulted in total **deadlock**. (II1)
47) Downing Street had started the day admitting that the talks were "**deadlocked**"-- (DT2)
48) Talks between the EU and UK **collapsed** over the weekend after Mrs May's cabinet rejected the original outline of what is now on the table. (II2)
49) But while talks are expected to continue over the weekend, government insiders have become increasingly **gloomy** about the prospects for a last-minute shift.(TG1)
50) Nigel Dodds, the DUP'S Westminster leader, was **keeping his powder dry**, saying: "All this will need to be taken together and analysed very carefully." (DT2)

Examples 46 and 47 demonstrate the demanding nature of the negotiations which are *deadlocked* in two different articles published on different dates. *Collapsed* talks in example 48 suggests an even more fundamental breakdown in the negotiations. Elsewhere in the data, the articles use words such as *stalemate* (TG2), *impasse* (TI1, NL2) and *setback* (IT2) to depict the way that the negotiation process is in halt or in adversity. Adjectives such as

gloomy (TG1) to attach a level of scepticism to the prospects of the important vote of 12 March. This outlook is repeated in Nigel Dodds' (the DUP deputy leader and the party's leader in the House of commons at the time) comments in example 50, where *keeping one's powder dry* (example 10) suggests a level of wariness towards May's revised deal.

The negotiations and the parliamentary vote are often infused with a sense of **pressure and a need for action**:

51) The Brexit secretary, Stephen Barclay, responded: "With a very real **deadline looming**, **now is not the time** to re-run old arguments. (TG1)
52) Mr Juncker said: "There **will be no** new negotiations. **It is this.**
"In politics, sometimes you get a second chance. It is what we do with the second chance that counts. Because there **will be no** third chance.
"There **will be no** further interpretation of the interpretations and no further assurances on the reassurances.
"Let us be crystal clear about the choice - it is this deal or Brexit might not happen at all." (IN2)
53) And SDLP leader Colum Eastwood said that his party had told Ms May that **it is now time to "put up or shut up"**-- (TI1)

Stephen Barclay, the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union and a Conservative MP at the time, describes a *looming deadline* in example 51, which implies an impending event with a slightly menacing connotation. Juncker's comments in example 52 signal finality: the repeated *will be no* applies a modality that expresses definite non-occurrence of further opportunities, in this case further negotiations, and together with the 'chances' and the statement that *it is this* it is certainly an attempt to induce action. Description of the important Commons vote as a *crunch* (IN2) elsewhere in the data as well as *fundamental choice* (TI2) also imply that there is a lot at stake. Colum Eastwood's comment that is *now time to put up or shut up* in example 53 is also a clear demand for action. Discursively, these comments are an example of the way that **political discourse** operates in the representation these processes. Barclay's and Eastwood's statements that it is time or not the time to act in a certain way contain in reality the speakers' judgements on due conduct. Correspondingly, Juncker's comments that there *will be no third chance* mark merely his own commitment to the statement – with hindsight, the negotiations did continue after the second meaningful vote.

Elsewhere in the data, the second meaningful vote and its aftermath are represented even more explicitly through menace, an **impending threat**:

54) Mr Lidington said: "Tomorrow will be a **fundamental choice**. To vote for the improved deal or to **plunge the country into a political crisis**. (TI2)
55) [Colum Eastwood] "Until MPs accept this reality, Article 50 should be extended to avoid us **crashing out of the EU** without a deal." (NL2)

56) [Leo Varadkar] warned that the EU **will not allow** a delay if it merely creates for a **"rolling cliff-edge".** (II2)

In the comments by David Lidington (example 54) and SDLP leader Colum Eastwood (example 55), the wordings *plunge* and *crashing out* suggest severe, even fatal implications for undesirable results of decision-making. Varadkar's comments in example 56 create a similar menacing atmosphere with the speculation that the situation could spin out of control as a *rolling cliff-edge*, with *will not allow* attributing a sense certainty to it – a modality characteristic of **political discourse**. Political discourse appears in Lidington's comments as well: not voting for the improved deal is in this representation tied to a *political crisis* – it is an either-or situation, where there is no middle ground. Ideologically it is, of course, understandable that Lidington wishes support for the UK government's deal.

Another representation that is prominent in the data is the depiction of the negotiations and the meaningful vote as a **game**:

57) Steve Baker, one of the leaders of the ERG, said there was **"deal fever"** (TG2)
58) The British government claimed last night it had **won** legally binding changes to the Northern Ireland backstop -- (IT2)
59) Ministers have been told to be "extremely cautious" with their public commentary, amid fears that a **triumphalist tone from Dublin** would immediately **derail** any progress Mrs May hopes to make within her party. (II2)
60) Some in the ERG are expected to **hold out against the deal** whatever May comes back with and do everything they can to **nudge** the UK towards a no-deal Brexit. (TG2):
61) [Mary Lou McDonald] said: "We have told her that the **British strategy** of running down the clock and playing a **game of chicken with Ireland and Irish interests** is profoundly unacceptable and wrong. (TI1)

In examples 57, Steve Baker's comment demonstrates the way that the negotiations are assigned the sense of a game: *deal fever* connotes an eager attitude ahead of a vote, which is somewhat rare in the data. *Won* in example 58 has a certain triumphalist connotation given its appearance in a description of negotiation instead of a vote; winning the changes suggests that the opposing side has had to make concessions. This idea is better explicated through example 59, where the very *triumphalist tone* from Irish ministers would *derail* progress with the UK Conservative Party. This can be considered as another example of **discourse of international relations**: political actors' conduct viewed through its implications on international collaboration. In example 60, *hold out against* and *nudge* in contribute to the game representation in suggesting the presence of tactics. Mary Lou McDonald's comments in example 61 contribute to an impression of a more serious game, where the *British strategy* of playing a *game of chicken* suggests that the British government is gambling at the cost of Ireland.

In addition to the overarching game discourse, the negotiations and vote are represented more as **May's personal game** than through concern on the future of Brexit:

62) BRITISH Prime Minister Theresa May will have a **final roll of the Brexit dice** today after securing a **'fudge'** on the Irish backstop. (II2)
63) Mrs May returns to the UK to **win over her detractors** with a warning that the EU will not move further and, if the deal does not pass muster, Brexit may not happen at all. (II2)
64) Mrs May's **chances of** success in selling this deal now rest with Geoffrey Cox - - (II2)
65) -- McDonald warned the prime minister that she risked breaking up the UK if she engaged in **brinkmanship** with the EU (TI1)

Reference to May's presentation of documents as a *fudge* in example 62 suggests that the documents are a façade, a tactical move. *Final roll of the Brexit dice* is an explicit conveyance of the negotiation process as a game, and a dice could attach a sense of arbitrariness to it. *Win over* (example 63), while more neutral in tone, could be part of this same portrayal of a game or tactics given its appearance with the word *detractors* which implies a highly negative attitude towards May's actions. In example 64, *chances of success* and *selling* add to the sense of a game and trade-off. *Brinkmanship* in example 65 embodies a risk of May's gambling. The sense of May's tactics is present elsewhere in the data as well in formulations such as *in a bid to sway* (DT1). While the ideological dimension of these representations is not explicit, it is at least noteworthy how these examples forecast an unstable political future for May.

A further prominent representation of the second meaningful vote is through its **urgency to May**; that there is little time and a lot at stake for her:

66) Theresa May claims to have secured significant changes to her Brexit deal in a **last-minute dash** to Europe just hours before she must put her plan to a critical vote in parliament. (TI2)
67) May also urged the EU to make new concessions over the Irish backstop – the issue that caused many of her MPs to vote against the withdrawal agreement the first time – before **last-ditch** talks in Brussels this weekend. (TG1)
68) May **urges** MPs to 'get Brexit done' (TG1)
69) The prime minister **urged** MPs to "**get it done**" and back her deal in an **impassioned speech** at a dockside warehouse in the pro-leave town of Grimsby. (TG1):
70) [May:] "European leaders tell me they worry that **time is running out** and that we only have one chance to get it right. My message to them is: **now is the moment for us to act**." (TG1)

In examples 66-70, we can observe how the vote is represented as a pressing issue for May. Words such as *dash* and *last-ditch* present in examples 66 and 67 as well as elsewhere in the data (TG2, DT2) represent May's visit in Brussels as hasty; dash suggests hurried action with a frantic connotation, while *last-ditch* implies a desperate, final attempt. In examples 68-70, May expresses repeatedly the request for action. May *urges* (examples 68 and 79) MP's to bring Brexit to *get Brexit done* in a situation where *time is running out* and it is *now the*

moment for us to act (example 70), which also marks **political discourse**: May links the vote to the occurrence of Brexit and depicts it as potentially the last chance to make it happen. Interestingly, *impassioned speech* in example 69 appears to attribute a sincerity to May, which is somewhat rare in the data. Notworthily, this representation of the vote through its urgency for May appears largely in the liberal *Guardian*.

While the confrontational aspect of the negotiations and votes has been hinted, it deserves more explication in what constitutes the representation of these processes through **strained relations**. A weakening of relations between Irish and UK governments is discussed on multiple terms:

71) As Anglo-Irish relations **hit a modern-day low** – (II1)
72) **But** relations between Dublin and London **continue to plummet.** (II1)
73) In a **terse** phone call between Mr Varadkar and Mrs May – (II1)
74) TAOISEACH Leo Varadkar **bluntly** told British Prime Minister Theresa May that her betrayal of the Brexit deal has only "reinforced" the need for a backstop. (II1)
75) In an unscripted remark at an event in Dublin yesterday, Tánaiste Simon Coveney **took aim** at the British Conservative Party --(II1)
76) A senior source in Dublin said: "Any country can say here's 'what we think'. But they can't **needle** us. (II2)
77) Sinn Fein president Mary-Lou McDonald **hit out** at the defeat of the Withdrawal Deal, claiming it shows an **"absolute disregard for the people of Ireland"**. (NL2)
78) The Irish government will watch **eagerly** in the hope that Mrs May can gain support for the deal in today's vote. (II2)

Wordings such *hit low* and *continue to plummet* (examples 71 and 72) suggest a tailspin in the negotiations, the latter with the connotation of a severe collision. In example 72, the conjunction 'but' at the beginning of a sentence also creates a contrast to the preceding content, which could be seen to increase the severity of the situation. In examples 73 and 74, the words *terse* and *bluntly* further depict the relations between the UK and Ireland as charged. *Took aim* in example 75 implies severe criticism towards the UK government. In example 76, *needle* suggests irritation, that the UK's actions are an attempt to provoke the Irish government. *Hit out* in example 77 suggests strong rejection towards the UK Parliament's actions, whereas *absolute disregard for the people of Ireland* in the same example suggests a stark neglect for the Irish viewpoint in the process; since Sinn Féin identifies as Irish, this can be considered a part of the strained Ireland-UK relations. Example 78 makes an exception to the other examples in attributing the slightly positive *eagerly* to the vote. Again, these examples mark the **discourse of international relations**: Brexit negotiations and the meaningful vote are represented as a contentious issue between Ireland and the UK.

EU-UK relations appear not to be in a better state as indicated in the data, and it is mainly the result of the **EU leaders' confrontation**:

79) European leaders also **rounded on** Mrs May over what they see as an act of bad faith. In a **coordinated effort**, EU leaders **publicly admonished** UK politicians over what is being seen as Mrs May's 'backstab on the backstop'. (II1)
80) Likewise, Mr Barnier said he found it hard to accept the UK was trying to **blame** his team for the **current mess**. (II1)
81) A senior EU official admitted Barnier's response could be seen as a **"slap in the face".** Before making public his offer, Barnier had briefed EU ambassadors in what was said to have been a **"gloomy"** meeting. "There has been a **total breakdown in trust**," one EU diplomat said. (TG1)
82) But Barnier immediately appeared to **rebuff** the prime minister-- (TG1):
83) It comes as European Council president Donald Tusk **drew fury** from Eurosceptics by saying **there was a "special place in hell" for Brexiteers without a plan**. (TI1)

Rounded on and *publicly admonished* in example 79 suggest an aggression or an intent to humiliate in the actions of EU leaders, especially since they are the result of a *coordinated effort*. In relation to this, *blame* and *mess* in example 80 denote friction and dissenting views. *Slap in the face* in example 81 suggests direct disregard for the other party, effecting 'gloominess' and *total breakdown in trust*. Rebuff (example 82) certainly suggests direct disregard for the other party's views. Donald Tusk's (president of the European Council at the time) 'hell' comments in example 83 are a downright confrontation, and *drew fury* depicts its explicit emotional effect. The **discourse of international relations** is present in these examples as well, while this time the dispute is between the EU and the UK. Considering the hostile and abrupt representation of the EU in examples 79 and 80, this discourse can there be traced to a certain anti-EU mindset. Tusk's comment in turn (example 83) appears to involve a minor occurrence of **religious discourse**, although the purpose is probably figurative rather than ideological.

In contrast to the hostile EU representation, some statements express **resentment towards the EU** on relatively subtle terms:

84) DUP deputy leader Nigel Dodds, whose party's support is regarded at Westminster as key to approving the deal, said he would analyse **"very carefully" what emerges from Strasbourg**. (IT2)
85) [David Lidington] said it provides confirmation the EU cannot try to **trap** the UK in the backstop indefinitely and that doing so would be a breach of the legally-binding commitments both sides have agreed.
"If – contrary to all expectations – the EU were to act with that intention, the UK could use this acceptance of what could constitute an explicit breach as the basis for a formal dispute, through independent arbitration, that such a breach had occurred – ultimately suspending the protocol if the EU **continued to breach its obligations**," he said. (IT2)

In example 84, Dodds' reference to *what emerges from Strasbourg* together with the advice to analyse it *very carefully* leaves an ambiguous impression: one should be concerned about the actions of the EU, but there is no explication why. Correspondingly, example 85 uses an indirect method to express a concern regarding the EU. While the EU's likeness to act with the intention of *trapping* the UK in the backstop is *contrary to all expectations*, Lidington nevertheless describes the situation where the EU would *breach its obligations* in detail. Whilst similar to the earlier trap representation and thus freedom discourse, Lidington's comments are more representative of **legal discourse**; it expresses an anti-EU ideology through a legal scenario which is, importantly, hypothetical.

Internal politics of the UK are also presented in a state of **confrontation**:

86) Tánaiste Simon Coveney took aim at the British Conservative Party, suggesting **internal wrangling** was behind the prime minister's U-turn on the backstop. (II1)
87) But Brexiteers were **deeply divided** last night over whether the new compromise was enough to tempt them to switch their votes and support the deal. (DT2)
88) On a two-day visit to Belfast, Ms May **set herself at odds** with Brexit hard liners by saying she was seeking "changes" to the controversial backstop, rather than its total removal from the withdrawal agreement. (TI1)

Examples 86-88 offer an explicit account on schism in the form of *internal wrangling*, *deeply divided* and *set herself at odds*. In addition to that, the transitivity structure in the latter places May in active position and thus suggests primary culpability in May. Elsewhere in the data, dispersion is marked by lexical items such as *Tory rebels* (TI2) and *Brexiter rebels* (TG1). As a counterpart to the discourse of international relations, I have named the discourse present in these examples as a **discourse of domestic political relations**, the word politics included in order to distinguish state politics from civil issues. While these examples share no explicable ideology, this representation of the UK's struggle in domestic politics serves as yet another example of the difficult nature of the Brexit negotiations and the second meaningful vote.

In contrast with other – strained – relations, the negotiations occasionally signal **European collaboration and solidarity** as the backstop did earlier:

89) [Leo Varadkar] **paid tribute** to the continued solidarity of **the EU 27**. "As a leader of a small country that is fully committed to the EU, this solidarity **resonates** deeply in Ireland, but not just in Ireland, in **all small member states**," he said. (IT1)
90) EU leaders promise not to **abandon** Ireland as Juncker declares Border 'is our priority' (II1)
91) Mr Varadkar did not elaborate on what measures would have to be taken on the Border beyond acknowledging an **Irish obligation** to protect the single market. (IT1)

Varadkar's comments in example 89 vocalise the EU's solidarity with the phrase *all small member states* depicting the EU as a protector. *Paid tribute* and *resonates* express mutuality in the sentiment, while the *EU 27* constructs the remaining 27 member states after Brexit in a unitary, brand-like manner. *Abandon* in example 90 suggests that Ireland could be a left alone in Brexit, albeit through negation. While Varadkar's reference to an *Irish obligation* (example 91) is not in direct analogy with the unity presentation, there are two interpretations to be drawn from it: the formulation could express a patriotic sentiment where Ireland uprightly stands up to its duties, or, alternatively, it could suggest that the onus is on Ireland alone to protect the single market – importantly, the European single market. These examples can again be viewed as a case of **discourse of international relations**, which stems this time from a pro-EU ideology: the Brexit negotiations are presented as a showcase for European collaboration.

Finally, some statements mark the way that the vote and negotiations are a showcase for a **united and sovereign UK**:

92) [May:] "Now is the time to **come together** to back this improved Brexit deal and to **deliver on the instruction of the British people**." (IN2)
93) The second new document is branded a **"unilateral declaration by the UK"** which **sets out** "the **sovereign action** the UK **would take** to **provide assurance** that the backstop would only be applied temporarily". (IN2)

Example 92 holds an interesting contradiction in the context of Brexit. May says that the improved deal is mere compliance with the *instruction of the British people*. Appeal to a 'people' implies that there is a unitary people who want the deal that May has negotiated, despite the fact that the disparity in the referendum result was rather narrow, and because of that, there is a significant proportion of Britons who would have wished for something else. *Come together*, in its unifying tone, is perhaps an attempt to mitigate this dispersion. In example 93, a *unilateral declaration* that *sets out* suggests a certain level autonomy even though the documents have been approved by the EU negotiators as well. *Sovereign action* emphasizes that the UK is an independent political actor that *would* act if necessary. *Provide assurance* conveys a sense of protection, although it is not clear whether it is the British people or the UK government that benefits from this assurance. What these linguistic choices – reference to a people and sovereignty in particular – suggest is the presence of a **nationalist discourse**. Through a nationalist discourse, political processes are viewed through the UK's national interest.

To conclude, the vote and negotiations are represented on multiple terms, as was the case with the backstop. The processes are often represented as dramatic, demanding, and pressurised. They are represented as a game and Theresa May's personal game in particular; the vote is represented as a very urgent issue for May. Most prominently, the vote and negotiations are trying for both international and the UK's internal relations. On some occasions, the processes are viewed as an issue of unity and sovereignty of the UK. On the other hand, the negotiations occasionally mark European solidarity and collaboration. These representations involve political discourse, legal discourse, nationalist discourse, and a discourse of international relations as well as domestic political relations. Ideologically, these often motivated by anti-EU cognition, while there is also a reserve towards the actions of May's government, despite few pro-EU viewpoints. However, the ideological dimension of these representations is not always unambiguous. This might in part be explained by the processes themselves: compared to the backstop, they are more instrumental and defined in nature, while the backstop is subject to constant contest in the data.

4.4 Eurosceptics, DUP, May and the UK government: anger, failure and misfortune

In a shift from processes to social actors, let us consider the representation of the Eurosceptics and the DUP in the data. A conspicuous representation in the data is that of the Northern Ireland DUP in the article DT1 through an **angry** reaction:

94) THE DUP yesterday **emphatically rejected** attempts to **reassure** it over the Irish backstop, dismissing government pledges as "cosmetic and meaningless". The **crushing response** came after the publication of a government paper -- (DT1)
95) **But even before** its publication, senior DUP politicians were **tearing into** the "assurances" and repeating their opposition to the Withdrawal Agreement -- (DT1)
96) The DUP is **angry** that concessions it believes it won in the December 2017 "Joint Report" are not honoured in the agreement -- (DT1)
97) -- in the Conservative and Democratic Unionist parties, who **refused to** back May's deal in January leading to a record defeat by more than 230. (TG2)
98) It was hoped that the 13-page paper might **assuage** DUP anger over the backstop -- (DT1)
99) Sammy Wilson, the DUP hardline Brexit spokesman, said the pledges **would not win** his party's support. (DT1)

In these examples, the DUP is depicted as an active agent but prominently through a strong emotional reaction. *Emphatically rejected* and *crushing response* (example 94) together with

tear into (example 95) and *angry* (example 96) present the DUP as an enraged group. Example 95 also marks the construction of a narrative in the initiating *But even before* that highlights the dramatic reaction of the DUP. Refusal to *back May's deal* (example 97 connotes a level of stubbornness. The angry tone is repeated elsewhere the data, where the DUP and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP, a Northern Irish a conservative-unionist political party) are described on terms such as *vociferously opposed* (TI1). Intentions to *reassure* (example 94) and *assuage* (example 98) the DUP could imply that there is a desire to patronise or control them. Eurosceptic MP Sammy Wilsons's (DUP) comment in example 99 expresses a contrary view, that the DUP's support must be *won* over. Common to these examples is that they involve **emotional discourse**. Through emotional discourse, the DUP might lose some political credibility, as emotions are generally contrasted with rationality as political motivators. What is noteworthy here is that the angry representation of the DUP appears for the most part in the *Telegraph*, a Conservative supporter as has been pointed out. This demonstrates again the disputable nature of the backstop, as it causes divergence among the conservative parties and their collaborator at the time, namely the DUP.

The **angry representation** is not only limited to the DUP, however:

> 100) Brexiteers **reacted with anger** to Mr Tusk's remark, which he made after a meeting with Taoiseach Leo Varadkar in Brussels yesterday. (IT1)
> 101) -- with many centrist Tories **outraged** by the suggestion she had planned to pull her meaningful vote to replace it with a provisional one showing the EU what Eurosceptics in her party would accept. (TG2)

In example 100, we can observe a similar representation of an emotional reaction in *reacted with anger*. Interestingly, that is the only reference to the Brexiteers' reaction besides an ambiguous reference to May's visit being *overshadowed by a row over remarks* elsewhere in the article IT1. Thus, the angry reaction is made salient, and any elaboration on the matter – for instance identity of the 'Brexiteers' or possible political views related to Tusk's comment – remains on a presuppositional level. In example 101, *outraged* Tories mark an extension of the angry representation in a way that is only applied to the DUP and the Conservatives in the data. As might be expected, these examples mark another occasion of **emotional discourse**, this time in liberal newspapers.

A further, interesting observation is that the Eurosceptics are discussed in **terms that are not necessarily used elsewhere**:

102) [May] appeared to be at risk both from Eurosceptics **attempting to oust** her to replace her with a more **hardline** Brexiter and Tory centrists **planning to take power out of her hands** by allowing parliament to find a majority for a softer Brexit. (TG2)
103) However, it is still not certain to be accepted by **hardline** Eurosceptics in the Conservative and Democratic Unionist parties -- (TG2)
104) May was hoping for an agreement that would be enough to win over about 115 MPs to her deal out of the Eurosceptics and some Labour MPs with **heavily leave-voting** seats. (TG2)

Example 102 presents the Eurosceptics operations as a plot. While an attempt to *oust* and plans to *take power out of* May's hand can be considered an extension to the depiction of strained relations, they also represent Eurosceptics as conniving. In examples 103 and 104, we can observe how the Eurosceptics receive nominations that lean towards extremity. *Hardline* and *heavily leave-voting*, while being familiar representations of the Eurosceptics, would hardly appear in representations of EU-minded parties (e.g. hardline pro-EU, heavily stay-voting and so forth). Again, these representations appear in the liberal *Guardian*.

As regards May and the UK government, they are prominently represented in terms of **betrayal and deceit**:

105) Brexit **betrayal** adds to need for backstop, Leo tells May (II1)
106) In a coordinated effort, EU leaders publicly admonished UK politicians over **what is being seen as Mrs May's 'backstab' on the backstop**. (II1)
107) **--** Tánaiste Simon Coveney took aim at the British Conservative Party, suggesting internal wrangling was behind the **prime minister's U-turn** on the backstop. (II1)
108) Brussels has regarded that move as an attempt to **slip** a unilateral exit mechanism into the withdrawal agreement. (TG1)

In example 105, the word *betrayal* is included in the headline of II1 and it is thus given particular salience in the article. *What is being seen* in example 106 attaches an experiential quality to this betrayal, suggesting that the topic stems from reactions and sentiments of the EU leaders. *Prime minister's U-turn* in example 107 contributes to the sense of betrayal. The substance of May's 'Brexit betrayal' remains on a presuppositional level, however, since there is no elaboration on it in the article. An occasional reader is thus left mainly with impression of May's deceitfulness, which must be inferred as taken for granted, as van Dijk (1988: 64, 88) points out. Correspondingly, *slip* in example 108 suggests that the EU views deceitful elements in the actions of the UK government. In general, these examples express towards May and the UK government. The first two can be interpreted as **moral discourse**: since May's actions are represented as a betrayal, they are judged as moral violation.

A dominant theme in the data is the representation of the negotiation process as May's and UK government's **failure** or through certain level of scepticism:

109) It had looked yesterday morning as if Ms May would **enrage all sides** of the Brexit debate by trying to either delay or downgrade the vote today after **failing to win** concessions at the weekend. (TI)
110) Downing Street was **forced to deny** claims that the EU had made an offer of sorts on Sunday only for it to be turned down in London--(TI1)
111) With many convinced over the weekend that the government was **heading for defeat**, **speculation over May's future was rife**. (TG2)
112) Nick Boles, a leading Tory pushing the government to rule out a no-deal Brexit, **warned** May she would **"forfeit the confidence** of the House of Commons" if she failed to put it to a vote. (TG2)
113) -- it **remains to be seen if** the concessions will be enough to see it pass through Parliament (IN2)

Example 109 makes an explicit reference to May's misfortune in *failing to win*, while the mention of enraging *all sides* does not diminish this impression. Being *forced to deny* (example 110) contributes to the impression that the events are not what the UK originally hoped for. In example 111, the government being *headed for defeat* explicates the way that May and the UK are not treated with high expectations, and *rife speculation* over May's future finalises the impression. Nick Boles' (Conservative MP at the time) comments in example 112 include an explicit *warned*, while *forfeit the confidence* looms as a punishment for a possible failure to put what he wants to a vote. In example 113, *remains to be seen* exemplifies the way that speculation, arguably scepticism, is produced in the article IN2.

The meaningful vote is also depicted as a **humiliating defeat** for May, either past or impending:

114) -- **predictions** the prime minister was headed for **a second humiliating defeat** on her Withdrawal Agreement (IN2)
115) **Speculation** had mounted that Mrs May would have to pull tonight's meaningful vote to avoid **an even greater defeat** than the 230-margin reverse she **suffered** over the January Brexit deal. (DT2)

In examples 114, the reference *humiliating defeat* – indeed, a *second* humiliating defeat – represents the vote literally as a humiliating defeat for May. The sense of May's misfortune is heightened by the dispiriting *an even greater defeat* and *suffer* (example 115). While *humiliating defeat* refers to May's emotions on the matter, it also guides the receiver's interpretation of the way that the vote would come about in the Parliament. The notion of humiliating defeat is echoed elsewhere in the data in descriptions of a past important vote through wordings such as *defeated by a record margin* (DT2, II2) and *overwhelming rejection of the deal* (IT1, IN2). As might be expected, these choices represent **emotional discourse**: the vote is discussed in terms of May's personal emotions. Ideologically, these choices could be interpreted as resentment towards May and an attempt to present her as vulnerable.

Some statements represent May's and the UK government's actions as **negligence and reclessness**:

> 116) Asked about Britain **walking away** from the backstop, [May] replied - - (II2)
> 117) But [May] faced accusations she'd turned up "**empty-handed with the same old rhetoric**, with no plan, no credibility and frankly **no honour**" (TI1)
> 118) [Naomi Long] went on: "I am tired of people **chasing unicorns**. It has to stop, we don't have time. (TI1)
> 119) [Jeremy Corbyn]"Since her Brexit deal was so overwhelmingly rejected, the prime minister has **recklessly run down the clock**, failed to effectively negotiate with the EU and **refused to find common ground** for a deal Parliament could support." (IN2)

Walking away in example 116 implies a certain neglect from the UK, an inability to face difficult situations. While the question is not explicated in the article, it exemplifies the way that presuppositions entail implicit claims – in this case, the claim that Britain is walking away from the backstop. Naomi Long's (leader of the liberal centrist Alliance Party of Northern Ireland) comments in examples 117 and 118 suggest that May irresponsibly pursuing impossible goals without the intention to deliver through wordings such as *empty-handed*, *same old rhetoric*, *no honour* and *chasing unicorns. Recklessly run* in Jeremy Corbyn's (Labour Party leader at the time) comments (example 119) suggests that the current phase in the negotiations is result of May's sovereign, uncontrolled actions, and *refusal to find common ground* adds to an impression of stubbornness. Elsewhere in the data, the UK government's reckless negligence is alluded in wordings such as *running out of road* and *pushing unworkable ideas* (IT1). Ideologically, May's representation as irresponsible can be interpreted as an attempt to undermine her political credibility.

Elsewhere in the data, the actions of May and the UK government are constructed as a **façade**:

> 120) DUP rejects May's **'cosmetic and meaningless'** backstop pledges (DT1)
> 121) But Steve Baker, the deputy leader of the ERG, said: "The Government has put a very **good gloss** on what falls short of what was expected." (DT1)
> 122) But Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn dismissed the **move** and called on MPs to reject the deal. (IN2)
> 123) The second new document is **branded** a "unilateral declaration by the UK -- (IN2)
> 124) - - the UK government **boasted** of achieving "legally binding" changes that "strengthen and improve" the Withdrawal Agreement (II2)

Cosmetic and meaningless in example 120 imply that May's actions are superficial and not sincere. In example 121, *good gloss* (repeated in TI2) contributes to this impression by suggesting that the government is trying to make things appear better than they are in reality.

Dismissal of a *move* in example 122 suggests that the presentation of new documents is merely tactical, and Corbyn sees through it. *Branded* in example 123 implies that the title of the document is part of public relations work, and it could be interpreted as a certain level of scepticism. Elsewhere in the article IN2, the documents are referred to as 'add-ons', which connotes the idea of technical attachments over political measures. In example 124, the word 'boast' connotes pride with a negative connotation, which can be considered a part of the façade representation in alluding to the UK government's proudful self-representation. All these examples show, again, reserve towards the actions of May and the UK government

Finally, while the general representation of May leans towards struggle and desperation, the prime minister is also granted **resilience** in the articles:

125) May keeps deal **afloat** after last-minute Strasbourg dash (DT2)
126) -- speculation that she could **pull off an unlikely victory** in tonight's vote, or at least limit the scale of the defeat to a level that would enable her to fight on. (DT2)
127) However, May could **come back with another attempt** at a meaningful vote at some point over the course of the week--(TG2)

In example 125, May keeping deal *afloat* embodies a sense of survival. Elsewhere in the data, May is *raising her hopes* (TG2) which suggests that not all is lost for May. Examples 126 and 127 include wordings such as *pull of an unlikely victory* and *could come back* present May as a dark horse of sorts, a tenacious politician that will not cease trying.

To conclude, social actors are represented as richly as processes in the data. Eurosceptics and the DUP are represented in terms of an angry reaction, which involves emotional discourse. Notably, this is expressed by the *Telegraph*. Eurosceptics are also discussed on terms such as *hardline* that are not used with other parties, predominantly in the *Guardian*. May and the UK government are represented in terms of betrayal, failure, humiliating defeat, negligence, recklessness, and the construction of a façade. These representations involve primarily a moral discourse, which presents May's actions as a moral violation, and an emotional discourse, which discusses political processes in terms of May's personal emotions.

5   DISCUSSION

The present study is an inspection of the backstop coverage in Irish and UK newspapers through Critical Discourse Analysis. Analysis of the lexical items, transitivity, modality, and

presuppositions in the fourteen articles shows that multiple viewpoints are given prominence in the backstop coverage.

The backstop arrangement has been a point of contention in the Brexit process, and its contradictory nature is evident in the many representations in the data too. For the most part, the outlook on the backstop was negative. The backstop was represented as a problem and unwanted. Its implications were deemed powerful. Prominently, the backstop was a trap, often by the EU, and it would sever Northern Ireland from the UK. The discourses present in these representations were defined as freedom discourse, economic discourse, political discourse, and geopolitical discourse. Ideologically, these were linked to British unionism or Euroscepticism. Not all the representations of the backstop arrangement were negative, however. Significantly, the backstop was represented in terms of a reverse representation that gave prominence to what it is not. The backstop was also represented as necessary, or something that simply needs to be accepted. Given its peace-maintaining function on the historically volatile Irish border, the backstop was also represented as a deliverer of security. In some cases, the backstop characterised European unity. The discourses behind these representations were defined as political discourse, security discourse, and discourse of international relations. These representations and discourses marked ideologies that endorse European cohesion or Irish unity, the latter referring to Northern Ireland republicanism.

The negotiations and the second meaningful vote are also represented in a versatile manner in the data, while they also tend to lean towards the negative. The processes were described as demanding and dramatic. They were largely represented as a pressurised process that lead to strained relations between the participants on a national and international level. They are represented as a game, significantly Theresa May's personal game. The vote in particular is represented as an urgent issue for May. In some cases, the representation of the processes connoted a united and sovereign UK. Alternatively, the negotiations were represented through European solidarity and collaboration. The discourses present in these representations were defined as political discourse, legal discourse, nationalist discourse, and discourse of international relations as well as domestic and political discourse. Ideologically, these were often linked to an anti-EU mindset, although these representations also suggested wide reserve towards May's government. Some pro-EU viewpoints could be established as well.

As the final analytical entity, the Eurosceptics and the DUP together with May and the UK government were also subject to a wide array of different representations. The Eurosceptics and the DUP were represented prominently in relation to an angry emotional reaction, and their representations involved stark nominations, such as *hardline*, which were not applied to other groups. Theresa May and the UK government were represented largely in negative association through betrayal, deceit, failure, humiliating defeat, negligence, recklessness, even arrogance, and the construction of a façade, although some positive or at least somewhat neutral depictions appeared in the description of May as resilient. The discourses present in these representations were defined as emotional discourse and moral discourse.

The organisation of the analysis turned out to be somewhat challenging. The research problem was somewhat complex since the attention to both processes and human actors lead to the organization of the analysis in its current, largely overlapping form. The backstop, for instance, was represented as a trap by the EU. It could have, however, been named alternatively as the EU's representation as a captor. This meta-representational dilemma suggests that the previously mentioned self-consciousness of the analyst is crucial in CDA: analytical solutions must always be explicated and double-checked, since they are ultimately decided by the analysts themselves.

Although the purpose of this study was to analyse both discourses and representations, the findings emphasise the latter. Discursive-ideological definition turned out to be more difficult than expected. One explanation for this lies in the nature of the news articles in the data. As the articles are to great extent organised along individual citations, the body text becomes rather fragmentary. Their discursive inspection is therefore challenging at times since there is not enough continuous material for analysis. On the other hand, it should be kept in mind that the results were organised along representations and, in order to avoid redundancy, the discourses present were not always named (e.g. political discourse).

While the presence of a certain ideology was mostly linked to cited content or reported speech, the data also marks some occasions where the ideological dimension was produced primarily by journalistic presence. The most explicit example of this was the DUP's representation on furious terms in the *Telegraph*, which seemed to undermine the party's political rationale. The description of the DUP through emotional discourse indicates that the question of the Irish border creates new political divisions, as is the case with these two

highly or somewhat Eurosceptic groups who at the time of the articles were in a collaborative agreement.

In general, however, the journalistic presence was not linked to party politics but general reserve, even resentment towards the actions of May and the UK government, which is an overarching feature in the data. Although the backstop is the stated topic of this thesis, the results show that May is undeniably a prominent key-figure in the process. This can be explained by the prime-minister-led political system in the UK as well as the unprecedented and challenging nature of Brexit and the backstop: the negotiations have dealt with significant, conflicting themes related to national and regional interests, and May as an individual has had an enormous responsibility over their reconciliation – or at least attempting to do so.

The way that discourses are ordered in the data shows that discourses which gave prominence to anti-EU viewpoints are most prominent in the data. Let us consider economic discourse as an example. While the economic implications of Brexit on the UK may only start to show after the transition period, the forecasts of the implications on Northern Ireland are rather dire, as was pointed out in the theoretical section. In the data, however, economic discourse is often linked to the view that staying in any customs arrangement with the EU is predominantly disadvantageous, while other prospective views are absent.

As regards the vocalised interest of the present study on Northern Ireland, the results show that unionist views received more foothold in the data than republican views. Both views were expressed in English newspapers too. However, the analysis shows that the backstop coverage is largely centred on the UK as a whole, while Northern Ireland's viewpoints, arguably the whole reason for the occurrence of the backstop clause, received little elaboration apart from unionist and republican views.

In any case, the results show that the backstop had indeed been a yielding object for analysis. While it turned out to be difficult to focus on the backstop arrangement instead of other dimensions of the Brexit negotiations, such as the substantial representation of international relations, the results nevertheless indicate that the narrower viewpoint produces distinctive results. For instance, immigration, a central theme in Brexit, is completely absent in the data despite the focus on border issues. While populist discourse is present in the data, primarily in

Jim Allister's comments, the anti-EU mindset is overshadowed by geopolitical, regional concern. The results also suggest a successfully targeted selection of data despite the fragmentary nature of the articles. As can be observed in the 'day of drama' representation, consistencies run between the different articles and patterns are established, even though the discursive dimension is not always explicit.

As regards Blommaert's view that CDS should analyse the effect of discourse and Fairclough's view on reform through CDS, it is necessary to note that a narrow study such as the present one does not fully deliver on the 'ideals' of CDS. In studies of a limited scope ambitions are understandably more modest. For that reason, the analysis can be considered as a first step towards linguistic reform. In order to change the inequal structures in the society and language, it is crucial to understand how they come about on textual level. The significance of the results stems from Brexit itself: it divides and unravels the phenomenon into smaller entities and, as a part of the ensemble of CDS it makes it more understandable and the power relations more visible.

In evaluation of the prospects of further research on the topic, it should be kept in mind that while the backstop arrangement is in the past, Brexit as a process is not yet finalised. The results of the current study indicate that even in the coverage on the backstop arrangement, attention is largely directed at the political operations of the UK and the EU (and their politicians, correspondingly) despite the backstop affecting the Republic of Ireland as well. This suggests a continuance in the research gap on the linguistic dimension on the implications of Brexit on the island. Brexit in general is such a exceptional phenomenon that research conducted on the topic may even become more relevant in the future than now, given the increasing prominence of Eurosceptic movements all over Europe.

As regards more specific guidelines for research, a few directions can be defined on the basis of the present study. For instance, influenced by Borchard et al. (2018) it would be productive to inspect who is given voice in the Brexit coverage. The data in the present study relies heavily on citations or reported speech, as has been pointed out. The division of quotes could therefore be worthy of more inspection into aspects such as whose views receive most prominence in the articles and whether the quotation practices differ significantly between different newspapers or different countries, and so forth. While the backstop coverage reports

the views of several Irish and Northern Irish politicians, they might not be given a voice in Brexit coverage elsewhere.

On a general level, Brexit has been a complex process, and the backstop coverage has not necessarily made it more comprehensible at all times. Considering the representation of the backstop as entrapment, for instance, the articles do not scrutinise this entrapment and what it truly entails. In general, the citations merely report the political statements in lack of further critical inspection. While this is not representative of all articles in the data, it is an observation that could yield more research as well.

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