
Moving Grammar along the Political Chessboard

Steve Buckledee, *The Language of Brexit. How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.

Dana Sala¹

Steve Buckledee has written the book on the grammar of Brexit slogans as a way to retrieve some answers even after the game was over and it could not be undone.

The volume *The Language of Brexit. How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union* is very precise in the corpus of texts it gathers for an accurate analysis. The book is innovative through its unique mixture of theories of language, applied linguistics, and analysis of otherwise elusive political commentaries.

Re-reading the book now, in 2025, we remark an epiphenomenon. Brexit was the incipient process of a polarization of society bigger than the stakes it undertook. The polarization divided not just the political parties, but also families, siblings, friends, colleagues, classmates, peers and dates. How did the two parties, Remain versus Leave, evolve? What shockwaves did they send to other parts of Europe? The voices reclaiming sovereignty and stating that the Others (in this case Europe and its institutions) are attempting to exert control over Britain have become increasingly swollen in other countries, sabotaging the achievements of European Union thorough lies, half-truths and faked pictures or videos. The so-called sovereign movements of some European countries blaming Europe have embraced narratives that are blatantly false. In the case of Romania, the sovereignty-backed narratives even seem to have forgotten about the Gulag induced by a severe sovietization, and bring back the mystification of history that was present in the 1950's and 1960's. A vital difference is that nowadays free speech is allowed. Therefore, the consequences of Brexit are not just political and economic, they outweigh the time lapse that had clear economic Brexit-driven

¹ University of Oradea, Romania

frictions.

The lesson of Brexit seems to be the main focus of the book. The author does not favour the Remain side very much, but uses his commonsense to see the arguments of the Leave campaign.

Other facts invoked from the political sphere are related to the impossibility to vote for UK citizens who were in other countries of residence. Had they been allowed to vote, the results might have been completely different.

The book is written with objectivity. Both sides are given equal parts corresponding to the chapters of the book. Yet Steve Buckledee shows his passion for the topic in the way he tries to understand why it was possible and what was the path. He exemplifies the political errors between 2015 and 2016 and how the intelligentsia could not yet accept that the referendum might have the opposite results of what was commonsense for them.

What does the language of Brexit say?

The Remain campaign used mainly coordination in their speech. The Remainers wanted to point the complexity of the issue, that is why they used very much the coordination through 'but'. Their approach was honesty. Honesty was also their playing card. They showed that remaining in EU is the lesser of the two imperfect choices.

The Leave campaign was more aggressive. It did not use *but*. In turn, it used more subordination in grammar. Therefore, they put the accent on another part of the truth, by reframing it as the main sentence. A slightly different nuance, made with passion. They did not show doubt in their campaign. They did not care about the individual freedom to choose. At the beginning, the lies were not present, just small alterations of truth. Closer to the referendum, they used blatant lies and malevolent statistics, statistics that could never be true. The constituents bought their lies. Such lies were the sum of the millions of pounds saved to go to NHS. It was a future act and it painted the European Union as a greedy monster who prevented UK citizens from funding their National Health System which needs so much financing. The figures were fake. Yet they had an effect of citizens, pushing them in the Leave 'civil army'. Another lie was that UK would be invaded by Turkish immigrants because Turkey was to adhere soon to the European Union.

Brexit showed the fissures of democracy. The author does not discuss the aftermath of Brexit, what did the Leave party do with all its exaggerated claims. How could the Leave party, after winning, align itself with the 'truths' it proclaimed?

Steve Buckledee shows the academic courage to resort to reason.

He does not state whether Brexit was good for democracy and economy or bad for these two. But his grammar analysis shows that the Leave party was with the exaggerated claims and with bending the truth. The volume summons the grammar of the two types of slogans as an objective instrument for dealing with a complex issue, a process combining live politics and grammar.

The language of Brexit. How Britain Talked Its Way Out of the European Union by Steve Buckledee undertakes a complex research on sound, reliable principles, draws with finesse multiple interfaces (between language and society, between language and the galvanization of common ideals), and engages with an extensive bibliography, highlighting the evolution of political slogans and their shift in precise contemporary contexts.