



THE DISCURSIVE REPRESENTATION OF LONDON DURING BREXIT IN THE SPANISH PRESS

ISMAEL RAMOS RUIZ (ISMAEL.RAMOS@U-PARIS.FR)¹, ÁLVARO RAMOS RUIZ (ARAMOS@ULYOOLA.ES)²

¹Université Paris Cité, France

²Universidad Loyola Andalucía, Spain

KEYWORDS

Brexit
London
Spanish press
Discourse analysis
Representation
Corpus linguistics
Media

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the Spanish press has represented the City of London during the Brexit negotiation process (2016–2020). Using a corpus of 11,291,140 words extracted from articles in four major Spanish media outlets, both general news (El País, El Mundo, La Vanguardia, and ABC) and those specialising in economics (Expansión, Cinco Días, and El Economista), we apply a methodology that combines discourse analysis with corpus linguistics. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of the discursive construction of London in journalistic texts, as well as an analysis of its role in the context of Brexit. The results of the analysis reveal a dual representation of the city, highlighting its inaccessibility and its economic impact. Expressions such as “London gentrified” and “London is the economic engine of the UK” underscore the image of an expensive and exclusive city, thus evidencing its transformation and the challenges faced by its residents in a context of political and economic uncertainty.

Received: 24 / 06 / 2025

Accepted: 15 / 01 / 2026

1. Introduction

The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (EU), known as Brexit, marked a milestone in contemporary European political history. For the first time, a Member State decided to leave the supranational bloc, thereby interrupting the progress of European integration (Malo de Molina, 2017, p. 141) and forcing the EU to redefine its relationship with the United Kingdom after more than four decades of association (Ramos Ruiz, 2022, p. 31). This unprecedented event attracted significant attention from European media, which provided extensive coverage of all the developments and stages of Brexit. In the case of Spain, media coverage of this process was particularly intense, not only due to the political and economic impact of Brexit but also because of the relevance of the debate concerning the sovereignty of Gibraltar (Á. Ramos Ruiz & I. Ramos Ruiz, 2021, p. 381). Over recent decades, the Spanish press has maintained a distinctly pro-European stance (Córdoba Hernández, 2009), supporting EU integration at various key moments, such as the Constitutional Treaty in 2005 (Berganza Conde, 2008, p. 127) or the 2016 referendum on the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (Ramos Ruiz, 2021a, p. 1994).

During this coverage, London gained significant prominence in the media, as the capital of the United Kingdom is one of the world's leading financial centres (Plaza Cerezo, 2001). However, it has been one of the cities most affected by the impact of Brexit, in political, economic, and social terms. Its role as the political epicentre of the EU exit places it at the heart of negotiations and debates, while its financial influence makes it a barometer of the economic repercussions of this process (Dörry, 2017).

From a social perspective, the City of London stands out for its significance as an international hub that continues to attract investment and global talent, even in times of instability. However, it is a metropolis in constant transformation, becoming increasingly inaccessible to many people due to its rising cost of living and the economic barriers that have emerged, particularly since Brexit. Economically, the City of London, despite its financial strength, faced significant challenges during the United Kingdom's exit process. Uncertainty surrounding future trade relations with Europe caused market fluctuations that affected businesses and key sectors, particularly those linked to international trade, finance, and services (James & Quaglia, 2021; Van Kerckhoven & Odermatt, 2021). This social and economic context intensified during the Brexit negotiations, making London a symbol of the United Kingdom's internal divisions (Kalaitzake, 2022; Panitz & Glückler, 2022; Hall & Heneghan, 2023).

In this regard, it can be argued that the Spanish press played a crucial role in constructing a narrative about London during the Brexit negotiation period (2016–2020), articulating a representation that highlighted both its global importance and the challenges it faced due to the uncertainty and structural changes mentioned above. It should be noted that the press, like other media, does not merely report facts but also constructs a partial interpretation of reality in line with its editorial stances, which is reflected in its media discourse. Consequently, language serves as a powerful tool for constructing and reproducing reality, with the words used acting as a means to describe and represent what has been experienced (Labbé & Monière, 2008, p. 9).

Therefore, this study addresses the following question: how has the Spanish press represented the City of London during the Brexit negotiation process (2016–2020)? Based on this question, the main objective is to analyse how Spanish print media have represented London's transformation, with a particular emphasis on discourses reflecting its role in addressing the economic, political, and social challenges arising from Brexit.

To conduct this analysis, a corpus of 11,291,140 words was used, extracted from texts published in seven major Spanish media outlets, both general news (*El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *ABC*) and those specialising in economics (*Expansión*, *Cinco Días*, and *El Economista*). The methodology combines techniques from corpus linguistics and discourse analysis (Baker et coll., 2008; Partington et coll., 2013; Taylor & Marchi, 2018), which makes possible the analysis of the discursive construction of London in these journalistic texts. Through this approach, the study identifies the most recurrent representations of the city and how these

intertwine with the context of political and economic uncertainty generated by Brexit, highlighting key aspects such as its exclusivity and the economic impact on its residents.

This article is structured as follows: first, the Brexit process is contextualised historically and politically; second, a theoretical framework on the press and information bias is presented; third, the composition of the corpus is detailed, and the methodology used for its analysis is explained; fourth, the results of the analysis of the journalistic texts under study are presented and discussed; fifth and finally, the conclusions of this research are outlined.

2. Historical Context of Brexit

Although the United Kingdom joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1972, its participation in the European project was always tempered by numerous reservations and exceptions, such as its refusal to adopt the euro or join the Schengen Area (López Basaguren, 2017, p. 111). Indeed, this Euroscepticism has its roots in the final years of the Second World War and has been a defining feature of British politics in its relations with continental Europe over recent decades (Borrell, 2017, p. 17). More specifically, in 1975, a referendum on continued membership in the EEC was held, in which the electorate decided, by a majority of 67.2%, to remain within the bloc (Ramos Ruiz, 2021b, p. 5).

However, sentiments of distrust towards the European project resurfaced strongly following the 2008 economic crisis. High levels of unemployment, cuts to social spending, and increasing migratory flows fuelled a renewed debate about the merits of remaining in the EU, exacerbating internal political tensions (Idígoras, 2017, p. 23). In this context, UKIP (United Kingdom Independence Party), under the leadership of Nigel Farage, gained prominence as the primary advocate for leaving the EU. The party successfully capitalised on public discontent and channelled a growing sense of national sovereignty, a cause historically associated with the Conservative Party (Castellá Andreu, 2016, p. 313).

Political pressure increased significantly, leading the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, to make a pivotal promise: if he won the 2015 general election, he would call a referendum to decide the United Kingdom's future in the EU (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1261). Against all expectations, Cameron secured an absolute majority in the election, obliging him to fulfil his pledge. Consequently, the referendum on EU membership was held on 23 June 2016.

The campaign was highly polarised, with two clearly defined camps: on one side, the "Britain Stronger in Europe" movement, which advocated for remaining (Remain), and on the other, the Vote Leave and Leave.EU platforms, which supported leaving (Leave) (Rivière-De Franco, 2017, p. 2). Turnout was substantial, at 72.2%, and the result was closely contested: 51.9% of voters opted to leave the EU, while 48.1% preferred to remain (Dunt, 2018, p. 22).

Although the referendum was advisory in nature, the British Parliament interpreted it as politically binding, laying the foundation for the formal process of withdrawal (Colantone & Stanig, 2016, p. 5). Following the referendum result, David Cameron resigned and was succeeded by Theresa May, who took on the responsibility of guiding the country through the negotiation process with the EU. One of her first actions was to invoke Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union in the spring of 2017, which establishes the right of any member state to withdraw from the EU (Dunt, 2018, p. 30). Additionally, May announced that the United Kingdom would exit the European Single Market and the European Customs Union (Sampson, 2017, p. 167).

During her tenure, May faced significant domestic challenges, including persistent opposition from various factions within her own party. Although she reached an agreement with the EU in November 2018 (Barnier, 2021, p. 164), it was rejected multiple times by the British Parliament, weakening her leadership. Despite surviving a vote of no confidence, the growing political deadlock and lack of consensus led May to resign in June 2019 (Barnier, 2021, p. 327).

Boris Johnson succeeded May as Prime Minister, managing to unblock negotiations by securing a new extension to the withdrawal date and renegotiating the agreement with the EU. This revised agreement was approved by the British Parliament in October 2019, enabling the United Kingdom's formal exit on 31 January 2020. However, a transition period extended until 31

December 2020, when the separation was fully completed, marking the beginning of a new era in UK-EU relations.

This process has had profound political, economic, and social implications for both the United Kingdom and the EU. Domestically, it has reignited debates about the unity of the United Kingdom, particularly in Scotland and Northern Ireland, where the vote to remain in the EU was predominant. Internationally, Brexit has generated uncertainty regarding future trade and diplomatic relations between the two blocs, as well as the long-term impact on the stability and cohesion of the European project as a whole (Sampson, 2017).

3. Theoretical Framework: Information Bias in the Press

The press has played a crucial role in covering the Brexit process due to its ability to narrate and analyse events in real time (Borrat, 1989, p. 67). As a medium of communication, it has not only served as a central platform for debating the benefits and drawbacks of the United Kingdom's membership in the EU (Khabaz, 2018, p. 496) but has also exerted significant influence on shaping public opinion. This role manifests in its dual function: firstly, the press meets the public's information demands through news coverage (Gomis, 2008, p. 25); secondly, it contributes to shaping public opinion by publishing analyses and evaluative articles (Kircher, 2005, p. 116). Moreover, as a source of social power, the media, particularly the written press, enables citizens to stay informed about events affecting their environment (Charaudeau, 2005, p. 48; Gomis, 2001, p. 14). This social power grants them considerable influence over audiences, thanks to their capacity for persuasion, which they develop indirectly and over the long term (Trent & Friedenber, 2004). This persuasion is primarily achieved through media discourse.

The press, like other media, acts as an intermediary between social reality and the public (Gomis, 1974, pp. 530–531), constructing and projecting a particular worldview based on editorial criteria (Ramos Ruiz, 2021b, p. 3). This specific representation of reality, constructed through media discourse (Charaudeau, 2005), endows the media with considerable persuasive power (Parsons, 1967). Journalists often do not use neutral language when reporting events but resort to a lexicon imbued with opinion or connotations, which can generate information bias (McCombs & Evatt, 1995, p. 8), thereby influencing public perception of events (Ramos Ruiz, 2021a, p. 1982).

The information process is far from being an objective or neutral phenomenon. According to Verdú Cuelo (2009, p. 83), the journalist's work in preparing and presenting information inevitably involves a degree of subjectivity. Each media outlet is compelled to adapt information according to its own needs and constraints, meaning that news is produced under certain criteria that may compromise its neutrality (Vázquez Bermúdez, 2006, p. 260). Consequently, the information process can generate what is termed structural bias (Gunter, 1997), that is, an unintentional deviation resulting from the circumstances and constraints inherent in news production (Verdú Cuelo, 2009, p. 88).

However, bias is not solely a matter of structure or technical limitations. As Fowler (1991, p. 222) notes, journalistic information is a product of the media industry, which often maintains close relationships with governments and political organisations (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 98). This intersection between the media and political and financial powers generates an influence that transcends mere news production. Media products are, in many cases, used as tools to shape public opinion and fuel ideological disputes that benefit power groups linked to the media (De Cesare, 2018, p. 10). Thus, the information disseminated may reflect a bias aligned with the interests of these actors, deviating from impartiality and occasionally favouring specific political parties or sectors (Ramos Ruiz, 2018, p. 375).

The concept of information bias has been subject to various definitions in the specialized literature. For example, Gunter (1997, p. 13) defines it as a systematic and differential treatment of a candidate, party, or event over time, implying a lack of fairness in covering different voices. Verdú Cuelo (2010, pp. 139–140) describes it as a deviation from the deontological principles of truthfulness, impartiality, and plurality, leaning towards specific interests rather than

representing the common good. Finally, McQuail (1998, p. 191) characterizes bias as a tendency to deviate from the path of objective truth, whether towards the left or the right of the political spectrum. Despite the differences between these definitions, they all emphasize the absence of journalistic practices oriented towards the general interest and, instead, directed towards serving particular interests (Á. Ramos Ruiz and I. Ramos Ruiz, 2019, p. 351).

In the present day, this lack of impartiality in the treatment of information has profound implications for democracy, as it influences how citizens interpret events and make political decisions. Media manipulation through bias not only affects public perception of reality but also contributes to the polarization of societies, amplifying ideological divisions in favour of those who control or benefit from the prevailing media narrative.

4. Corpus and Methodology

For this study, a corpus composed of journalistic texts, both news and opinion pieces, was used, extracted from the main national newspapers in Spain, based on data from the Estudio General de Medios (EGM)¹ and the Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión (OJD)². For this study, general news outlets such as *El País*, *El Mundo*, *La Vanguardia*, and *ABC* were selected, along with newspapers specializing in economics, namely *Expansión*, *Cinco Días*, and *El Economista*. The corpus covers the entire Brexit process, from the day following the referendum on 23 June 2016 to the United Kingdom’s administrative exit from the EU on 1 February 2020. The selected sample consists of a total of 17,974 texts and 11,291,140 words. The articles included were those containing the word “Brexit”, ensuring that the corpus comprehensively reflects the coverage of this key event.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the number of texts and words for each newspaper analysed:

Table 1. Number of texts and words in each newspaper in the corpus.

	Number of texts	Number of words
<i>El País</i>	2,244	1,276,281
<i>El Mundo</i>	1,380	1,163,630
<i>La Vanguardia</i>	1,874	1,139,792
<i>ABC</i>	3,537	1,870,502
<i>Expansion</i>	3,743	2,120,488
<i>Cinco Días</i>	2,168	1,375,810
<i>El Economista</i>	3,028	2,344,637
	17,974	11,291,140

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

For the analysis of this corpus, a methodology was employed that combines various theoretical and technical approaches, integrating discourse analysis with corpus linguistics (Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013; Taylor & Marchi, 2018). Furthermore, this method is situated within the framework of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies, as developed by Partington (2004). As Maingueneau (2021) notes, this discourse analysis methodology integrates more qualitative analytical techniques that predominate over others.

¹ Estudio General de Medios (EGM). Available at: <<http://www.aimc.es/>> (last accessed on 22 September 2024).

² Oficina de Justificación de la Difusión (OJD). Available at: <<https://www.ojd.es/>> (last accessed on 22 September 2024).

The approach used in this study enables both quantitative and qualitative analysis of journalistic texts by identifying recurrent patterns in lexical co-occurrences and their semantic weight, contributing to a deeper understanding of the information biases present in the media. According to Bhatia (2006), this approach to journalistic discourse is essential for understanding how the media contributes to the reproduction of power structures and the shaping of public opinion, particularly in politically charged contexts such as Brexit.

The use of methodologies based on discourse analysis provides a robust framework for examining media discourses in the Spanish press from various perspectives, such as linguistic choices, ideological implications, and power dynamics present in media communication (Á. Ramos Ruiz & I. Ramos Ruiz, 2022, p. 174). In particular, Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies offer an effective tool for identifying discursive strategies and ideological frameworks that structure journalistic communication, thereby revealing the power dynamics and political interests that influence the construction of information.

For the analysis, the software Sketch Engine® (Kilgarriff et al., 2014) was used. Through the Word Sketch function, the word “London” was retrieved semi-automatically, enabling the identification of its co-occurrences and collocations. This provided a detailed and contextualized view of how this word is used in Spanish journalistic discourse, allowing the identification of key linguistic and semantic patterns underlying the representation of the British city. Through this detailed analysis, not only the frequency of use but also the most common and significant discursive associations were identified. These elements enrich the news coverage and, consequently, the representation of London. Finally, the results obtained from the seven newspapers were compared by calculating the relative frequencies of words to analyse differences in news coverage among the selected outlets.

5. Results and Discussion

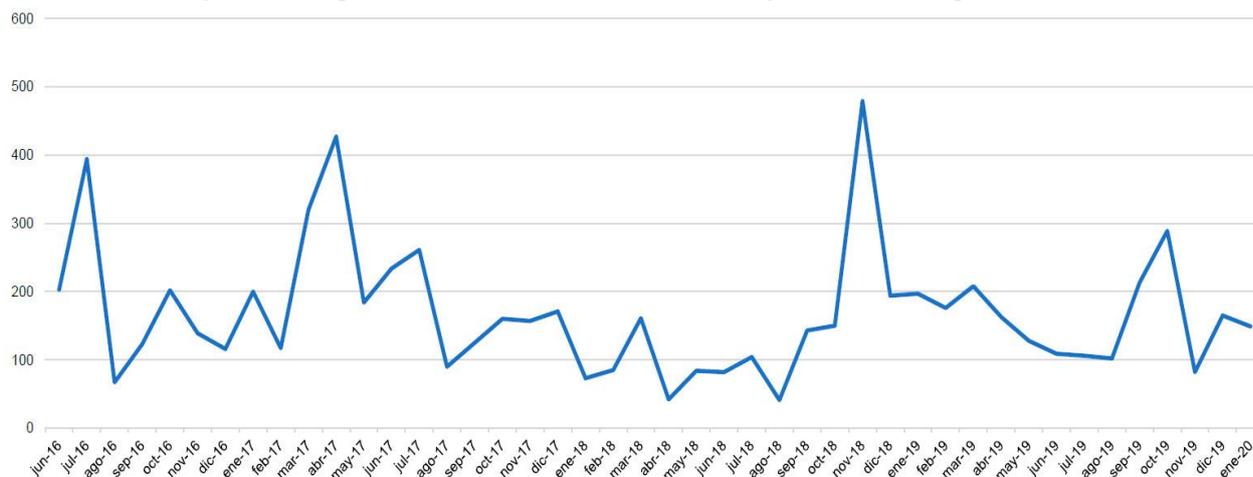
The following presents the results of the representation of London in the media discourse of the Spanish press regarding Brexit. This analysis is structured in two distinct parts: firstly, the quantitative data are discussed; secondly, the qualitative aspects are addressed, providing a detailed interpretation of the findings.

5.1. Quantitative Results

It is important to note that “London” was mentioned a total of 7,415 times in the news and opinion texts of the Spanish press. This considerably high figure allows for various interpretations and highlights the prominence of the British capital in the Brexit narrative. On the one hand, London, as the political and administrative centre of the United Kingdom, is the setting where the most significant decisions regarding the EU exit process were made. Likewise, its role as the seat of major governmental institutions, such as Parliament, the Prime Minister’s residence, or the British Crown, makes the city an essential point of reference in any analysis of Brexit.

In this regard, the Spanish press has found in London one of the most representative symbols of the complex debates and negotiations that have characterized this process. Moreover, London is also a major financial and economic centre, home to the City of London, one of the world’s leading financial markets. This makes the city a reference point not only in the political sphere but also in the economic one. Similarly, London was the seat of key European institutions such as the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the European Banking Authority (EBA), whose relocation to Amsterdam and Paris, respectively, symbolizes the loss of the British capital’s influence in the European context post-Brexit. This change has had a direct impact on London’s economy and prestige, as well as serving as an indicator of the magnitude and consequences of the United Kingdom’s decision to leave the EU. To delve deeper into the analysis, a diachronic perspective was applied, allowing the evolution of these references to be observed over time, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The presence of the word “London” throughout the Brexit process.



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The presence of London in the media discourse of the Spanish press has been a constant throughout the entire Brexit process, as evidenced by the data shown in Figure 1. However, the prominence of the city has fluctuated over the months, coinciding with the most critical and significant moments of the Brexit negotiations. A first peak in prominence is observed in July 2016, following the resignation of the Prime Minister David Cameron, which marked the formal start of the negotiation period with the EU. This moment was crucial, as it initiated a historic and uncertain process that captured the attention of the media and positioned London as the epicentre of the debate about the United Kingdom’s future.

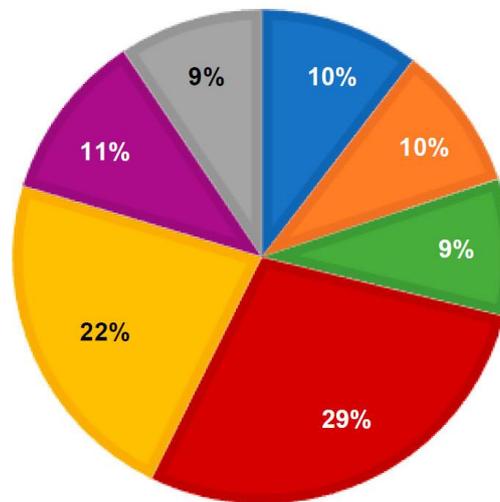
Subsequently, a notable increase in mentions of London was detected in March and April 2017, when the new Prime Minister, Theresa May, invoked Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union, formally initiating the United Kingdom’s exit from the EU. This event reinforced the separatist stance and highlighted the British Government’s firm resolve to carry out Brexit. A further surge in media coverage occurred in November 2018, prompted by the first withdrawal agreement reached between Theresa May and the EU. The significance of this agreement lies in its establishment of the foundations for the exit process, generating considerable media anticipation.

Finally, in September and October 2019, a further increase in mentions of London is observed, coinciding with the new agreement reached between the EU and the new Prime Minister Boris Johnson, following several failed attempts by Theresa May to secure parliamentary support. This moment was particularly significant, as it marked a turning point in the negotiations and brought the United Kingdom closer to its definitive exit from the EU. Consequently, London’s prominence in the Spanish press has not been uniform; however, this has not diminished the relevance of the British capital, which has become a reference point for the different phases of the Brexit negotiations, as well as establishing itself as the epicentre of the events that have shaped the United Kingdom’s trajectory and its relationship with Europe.

The presence of London in each of the analysed newspapers is examined below, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Percentage of occurrences of the word London in the analysed newspapers.

■ El País ■ El Mundo ■ La Vanguardia ■ ABC ■ Expansión ■ Cinco Días ■ El Economista



Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The presence of London in the media discourse of the Spanish press has been notably uneven, reflecting a varied distribution among the different types of newspapers analysed. As shown in Figure 2, it is noteworthy that more than half of the mentions, 58%, are concentrated in general news outlets, while economic newspapers account for 42%. This difference underscores how Brexit and its political and social implications have had broader resonance in the generalist sphere, although its economic impact has also been significant.

Among the newspapers with the highest frequency of mentions of London, the newspaper *ABC* stands out, where the word appears a total of 2,108 times, representing 29% of the total corpus analysed. This figure highlights the particular attention this outlet has paid to the role of the British capital during the Brexit process. The next most significant outlet is the economic newspaper *Expansión*, with 1,657 mentions of London, equivalent to 22% of the total. These data may suggest that, given its economic focus, it has provided greater coverage of London, reflecting concern about the effects on the financial and business sectors.

The percentages tend to balance out among the other outlets analysed. For example, the economic newspaper *Cinco Días* records 816 references, representing 11% of the total. Among general news newspapers, *El País* and *El Mundo* register 769 and 706 mentions, respectively, each accounting for 10% of the corpus. Finally, in the lowest position, the newspapers *El Economista* and *La Vanguardia* account for 9% of the total mentions, with 694 and 665 references, respectively. Although these figures are lower, they confirm the significant presence of the term “London” in the media narrative.

5.2. Qualitative Results

Following the analysis of the quantitative data, this section presents the qualitative data, enabling a deeper understanding of how the image of London has been constructed and represented in the media discourse of the press. This phase of the analysis not only reveals the predominant narratives and approaches used by the media but also provides a critical perspective on the nuances and interpretations that shape public perception of the city in the context of Brexit.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that, in general, the seven newspapers analysed tend to mention London as a fundamental element of the United Kingdom’s negotiation process within the context of Brexit. In this sense, the British city is equated with the European capital, Brussels, as both cities host the main governing bodies and key institutions of the respective parties involved in the negotiations. This equivalence reflects the centrality of London and Brussels in the

media discourse, underscoring their role as the primary settings for the decisions and agreements that have shaped the development of Brexit. A clear example of this comparison can be observed in the following excerpts from the newspapers, which state:

- 1) “[...] el Ejecutivo quiere garantizar una situación de apertura en el futuro acuerdo entre Londres y Bruselas” (“[...] the Government seeks to ensure an open situation in the future agreement between London and Brussels”) (*El País*, 2020a).
- 2) “La compleja negociación del Brexit entre Londres y Bruselas no ha hecho más que arrancar, pero ya se vislumbra que llegar a un acuerdo será muy costoso” (“The complex Brexit negotiation between London and Brussels has only just begun, but it is already clear that reaching an agreement will be very costly”) (*El Mundo*, 2017).

As can be observed, these excerpts illustrate how the Spanish press has presented London and Brussels as the symbolic and actual capitals of the negotiations, thereby reinforcing the notion that the dialogue and confrontation between these two cities formed the core of the relationship between the United Kingdom and the EU during this historic negotiation process.

Likewise, Spanish newspapers often focus their attention on the negative effects that Brexit could have on the British capital. In this regard, they emphasize the consequences that the United Kingdom’s exit from the EU would entail, particularly if it were to occur abruptly without a prior agreement. Clear evidence of this concern can be found in the following excerpts from the newspapers, which state:

- 3) “[...] mientras que Londres ha sufrido el impacto del brexit y ha perdido la segunda posición en beneficio de Los Ángeles” (“[...] while London has suffered the impact of Brexit and has lost its second position to Los Angeles”) (*Cinco Días*, 2016a).
- 4) “Ante la incertidumbre, las empresas están evitando Londres y llevando sus congresos y sus viajes a otras ciudades de Europa” (“Amid the uncertainty, companies are avoiding London and taking their conferences and trips to other European cities”) (*El Economista*, 2017).
- 5) “En Londres preocupados por el Brexit” (“In London, concerned about Brexit”) (*La Vanguardia*, 2018).

Thus, we observe that the Spanish press has highlighted the risks and challenges facing London in a no-deal Brexit scenario, underscoring concern for the future of the British capital in the post-Brexit context. Similarly, we find some more specific examples of this negative scenario in which the media emphasizes the potential economic, political, and social impacts that a disorderly exit could provoke in London, from the loss of its status as an international financial centre to the relocation of key institutions and businesses. The following examples illustrate this:

- 6) “Barcelona era una de las candidatas favoritas para acoger a los casi 900 profesionales del medicamento que, tras el Brexit, debían buscar otro emplazamiento que no fuera Londres para continuar en la Unión Europea” (“Barcelona was one of the leading candidates to host the nearly 900 pharmaceutical professionals who, following Brexit, had to find a new location outside London to remain in the European Union”) (*El País*, 2017a).
- 7) “El informe asegura que el 35% de los emprendedores cree que Londres es menos interesante para las start-ups después del Brexit” (“The report states that 35% of entrepreneurs believe that London is less attractive for start-ups after Brexit”) (*La Vanguardia*, 2017a).

On the other hand, it is striking to observe that several newspapers, particularly those of a generalist nature, report statements from citizens, entrepreneurs, artists, or politicians that highlight the virtues of the British capital, even beyond the potential drawbacks that the United Kingdom’s exit from the EU might cause. These statements underscore London’s image as a

dynamic, resilient city with a cosmopolitan identity that transcends the circumstances of Brexit. Thus, this optimistic perspective is reflected in the city's ability to remain a global cultural, economic, and social reference point, despite the challenges posed by the EU exit process.

The Spanish press captures these opinions as a counterbalance to the negative narrative, thereby offering a perspective that celebrates London's strength and appeal. This idea is clearly illustrated in the following examples, which demonstrate the extent to which the British capital continues to be admired and valued for its many qualities:

- 8) "Londres también es la capital mundial del comercio electrónico, un sector al que, debido a la depreciación de la libra y la dispersión geográfica de sus usuarios, el Brexit parece sentarle bien" ("London is also the global capital of e-commerce, a sector that, due to the depreciation of the pound and the geographical dispersion of its users, seems to be faring well post-Brexit") (*El País*, 2016).
- 9) "Londres siempre ha sido un gran crisol de ideas; y depende de esta gran afluencia de otras culturas para mantener su dinámica" ("London has always been a great melting pot of ideas; it relies on this influx of other cultures to maintain its dynamism".) (*El Mundo*, 2019a).
- 10) "-Sí, porque el ambiente en Londres es muy bueno. Hay una sensación bastante fuerte de unidad" ("-Yes, because the atmosphere in London is very good. There is a fairly strong sense of unity") (*ABC*, 2017a).

Despite the uncertainty generated by Brexit, London continued to be perceived as a vibrant, diverse city full of opportunities, as evidenced by the analysed excerpts. This perception reinforces its role as a global reference point, even in times of change and turbulence. Similarly, it is observed that Spanish newspapers, particularly those specializing in economic matters, prominently highlight London's importance in the financial and business spheres, even after the realization of Brexit. These outlets emphasize that, although the United Kingdom left the EU, the British capital remained a leading financial centre, maintaining its influence and appeal as an essential hub for international business. It is also underscored that the City of London has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation in the face of Brexit's challenges by implementing strategies to preserve its leadership position and remain attractive to investments, innovation, and global talent. The following examples illustrate this perspective:

- 11) "Londres es el motor económico de Reino Unido, posicionándose como un centro financiero, abierto a los negocios y con un régimen fiscal de impatriados que le ha permitido atraer a los mejores profesionales" ("London is the economic engine of the United Kingdom, positioning itself as a financial centre, open to business and with a tax regime for expatriates that has enabled it to attract the best professionals") (*Expansión*, 2019).
- 12) "Londres es un centro de importancia mundial y, si algo ha demostrado a lo largo de las últimas décadas, es que siempre ha salido con mucha solidez de los escenarios de crisis o recesión, porque es un polo de atracción incuestionable para inversiones de todo el mundo" ("London is a centre of global importance and, if anything has been demonstrated over recent decades, it is that it has always emerged strongly from crisis or recession scenarios, as it is an unquestionable pole of attraction for investments worldwide") (*El Economista*, 2016).
- 13) "Londres es la plaza financiera más internacional del mundo por el mercado interior europeo" ("London is the most international financial hub in the world due to the European internal market") (*El País*, 2017b).

The selected examples highlight the perception that London remained a key player in the global economy and an essential reference point for business and financial activities, despite the context of the EU exit. In this context, the Spanish press also emphasizes that London had become a

magnet for wealthy individuals investing in the city's property market through the purchase of luxury properties. This influx of high-level investment not only spurred the growth of the high-end real estate sector but also led to the opening of exclusive establishments and businesses designed to cater to the needs of these elite investors, rather than the ordinary citizen. This attraction of foreign capital and wealthy individuals has consolidated London as one of the world's preferred destinations for acquiring luxury properties, contributing to the redefinition of the urban and commercial landscape in certain areas of the city, transforming them into spaces inaccessible to most of the population. Some examples illustrating this reality are found in the following excerpts:

- 14) "Londres es la ciudad más atractiva para que los más ricos del mundo compren una propiedad inmobiliaria de lujo" ("London is the most attractive city for the world's wealthiest to purchase luxury real estate") (*Cinco Días*, 2017).
- 15) "Hace unos meses también inauguró su showroom en Berkeley Square, epicentro del Londres más inaccesible" ("A few months ago, she also opened her showroom in Berkeley Square, the epicentre of the most inaccessible London") (*ABC*, 2016a).

These examples highlight the appeal that London exerts on high-net-worth investors and how this trend has transformed certain areas of the city into exclusive enclaves designed to meet the demands of a select and affluent audience. On the other hand, the Spanish press also reflects London's significance as a highly attractive tourist destination, particularly for Spanish citizens.

The British capital maintains its popularity and charm among travellers and continues to be perceived as an iconic place full of opportunities for tourism, despite the uncertainties generated by the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. Spanish media emphasize that, even in a context of potential changes in travel conditions or in the relationship with the EU, London continued to offer a wide variety of cultural, historical, and leisure experiences that attracted tourists from all over, especially from Spain. This perception is clearly reflected in the following examples:

- 16) "Puede seguir generando incertidumbre en distintos sectores, pero en el hostelero Londres está teniendo en 2017 el mejor año de ocupación de su historia" ("It may continue to generate uncertainty in various sectors, but in the hospitality sector, London is experiencing its best year of occupancy in 2017") (*ABC*, 2017).
- 17) "Desde hace más de una década, Londres es un destino típico de Navidad entre los españoles donde combinar la visita a alguno de los museos más importantes del mundo, dar rienda suelta al shopping o visitar los turísticos Trafalgar Square, el Big Ben o el London Eye, la noria" ("For over a decade, London has been a typical Christmas destination for Spaniards, combining visits to some of the world's most important museums, indulging in shopping, or visiting the tourist landmarks of Trafalgar Square, Big Ben, or the London Eye, the Ferris wheel") (*Cinco Días*, 2016).

Finally, it is relevant to note that the Spanish press has also reported certain negative aspects associated with the British capital. One of the most prominent issues is the population increase, linked to both the growth in residents and the constant influx of tourists, which has led to situations of overcrowding and intensified processes such as gentrification. A clear example of this reality can be found in the following excerpt:

- 18) "El barrio de Leyton es sinónimo del Londres gentrificado" ("The Leyton neighbourhood is synonymous with London gentrified") (*La Vanguardia*, 2017a).

This type of coverage highlights the urban challenges facing London in terms of overpopulation and the displacement of local communities due to rising housing prices and the transformation of certain neighbourhoods. Likewise, the Spanish press has also emphasized more problematic and controversial aspects, such as the presence of xenophobic attitudes in the British capital. It should

be noted that the issue of immigration was one of the most frequently used arguments by the pro-Brexit camp, which fostered a climate of rejection towards immigration and fuelled episodes of intolerance in some parts of the city. Examples of this situation are found in the following excerpts:

- 19) “Londres es mucho peor que Harlow, este no es un mal lugar para vivir” (“London is much worse than Harlow; this is not a bad place to live”) (*ABC*, 2016b).
- 20) “Sin extranjeros Londres se para” (“Without foreigners, London would grind to a halt”) (*ABC*, 2016c).

It is evident that the press has reflected the social impact of Brexit on London, highlighting episodes of xenophobia and the fear that the city might lose its cosmopolitan and multicultural essence. Similarly, Spanish newspapers have covered anti-European British stances that, on some occasions, are expressed within the City of London itself. This facet has been captured by the press through excerpts that illustrate the complex relationship between the capital and the notion of belonging to the European Union, as seen in the following examples:

- 21) “Independizarse de un Londres antieuropeo será más que una tentación” (“Breaking away from an anti-European London will be more than a temptation”) (*El País*, 2019).
- 22) “Londres era el principal actor europeo en poner “freno” en la integración política y económica” (“London was the main European actor in putting a “brake” on political and economic integration”) (*El Mundo*, 2019b).

Although considered an open and multicultural city, London has also been a stage for Eurosceptic attitudes and has played an active role in the debate on European integration, reflecting the contradictions and tensions that Brexit has generated in British society.

The analysed excerpts reveal that London’s presence in the Spanish press during the Brexit process projects a complex and multifaceted image of the British capital. On the one hand, the city is presented as a key actor in the Brexit negotiations, comparable to Brussels as one of the decisive epicentres of this historic process. On the other hand, the media also highlights London’s importance in the financial and business sectors, noting that, even after the United Kingdom’s exit from the EU, the capital remains a global reference point in this field and continues to attract significant international investments and wealthy individuals.

Likewise, the Spanish press emphasizes London’s role as a prominent tourist destination, particularly for Spanish citizens. This destination retains its appeal even amid the uncertainty generated by Brexit. However, negative aspects are also reported, such as the effects of overpopulation, gentrification, and the emergence of xenophobic attitudes that surfaced in the context of Brexit. Furthermore, the role London has played in British Euroscepticism is highlighted through its influence on the process of separation from the EU. Therefore, it is evident that the representation of London in the Spanish press during Brexit reflects its status as a global, resilient, and diverse city, while also underscoring the challenges and contradictions it faces in a time of historic change and uncertainty.

6. Conclusions

The results of this study achieved the initial objective, which was to analyse how Spanish print media represented the transformation of London. This analysis has focused on discourses that illustrate the city’s role in addressing the economic, political, and social challenges arising from Brexit. Consequently, examples from the press have been examined using a corpus, enabling the identification of patterns that portray London as a key actor in a context of uncertainty and change.

The analysed data reveal that the lexical environment has endowed the term “London” with specific connotations, thereby influencing the Spanish audience’s perception of the city. In particular, media coverage has tended to highlight the negative effects that the United Kingdom’s exit from the EU will have on the British capital. Additionally, other aspects, such as gentrification

and xenophobic manifestations, directed towards certain foreign communities, have been addressed, evidencing a negative bias in relation to this English city. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the press, particularly economic newspapers, continues to regard London as a robust financial centre that persists in attracting investments, businesses, and tourism, despite the uncertain landscape posed by Brexit. It is important to note that newspapers specializing in economic matters have focused much more on this facet of the city than generalist media, thus presenting a more nuanced and less alarmist image regarding London's future in the post-Brexit context.

Regarding the methodology employed, the primary innovation of this study lies in the application of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) to examine information bias. This approach combines techniques from corpus linguistics with discourse analysis methods, enabling the examination of the lexical environment of the term "London" within an extensive corpus over a specific period (2016–2020). Although this type of analysis has been previously applied to other journalistic corpora, the present study focuses on a current phenomenon, such as Brexit, and addresses the role of a key global city that has been little studied from a linguistic perspective until now. Thanks to this methodology, it has been possible to appreciate how London assumes significant prominence during the Brexit negotiation process.

Both the results obtained and the methodological approach proposed in this study can serve as a robust starting point for future research addressing similar issues. This is particularly relevant in the context of the transformations experienced by major cities in scenarios of political and social change. Furthermore, the importance of analysing how the press constructs and projects the urban image of these cities through media discourse is highlighted.

7. Acknowledgements

This work has been supported by the CLILLAC-ARP research group (3967) at the University of Paris Cité (France), the FENIX group (SEJ-596) at the University of Seville (Spain), and the Léxico y Discurso group (Lexicon and Discourse) (HUM-265) at the University of Granada (Spain).

References

- ABC. (2016a, September 17th). La princesa libanesa que enoja a la jet set. *ABC*.
- ABC. (2016b, October 23rd). Los polacos de la ciudad callan tras recibir desde el Brexit dos ataques xenófobos, uno de ellos saldado con un muerto. *ABC*.
- ABC. (2016c, October 9th). Entrevista a Nacho Manzano, Chef. *ABC*.
- ABC. (2017a, 25 de junio). Geoff Dyer: «Me pregunto cómo sobrevive la gente que no tiene sentido del humor». *ABC*.
- ABC. (2017b, November 6th). El arco español de Londres será un Waldorf Astoria. *ABC*.
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., Khosravini, M., Krzyżanowski, M., McEnery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society*, 19(3), 273–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508088962>
- Barnier, M. (2021). *La grande illusion. Journal secret du Brexit (2016-2020)*. Éditions Gallimard.
- Berganza Conde, M. R. (2008). Medios de comunicación, “espiral del cinismo” y desconfianza política. Estudio de caso de la cobertura mediática de los comicios electorales europeos. *Zer: Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, 13(25), 121–139. <https://doi.org/10.1387/zer.3580>
- Bhatia, A. (2006). Critical discourse analysis of political press conferences. *Discourse and Society*, 17(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926506058057>
- Borrat, H. (1989). El periódico, actor del sistema político. *Anàlisi*, 12, 67–80.
- Borrell, J. (2017). El Brexit, ¿principio del fin o nuevo impulso para la Unión Europea? *La Albolafia: Revista de Humanidades y Cultura*, 12, 13–18.
- Castellá Andreu, J. M. (2016). El referéndum sobre el Brexit: una historia inacabada. *Revista de Derecho Político*, 97, 297–334. <https://doi.org/10.5944/rdp.97.2016.17626>
- Charaudeau, P. (2005). *Les medias et l'information. L'impossible transparence du discours*. Éditions De Boeck.
- Cinco Días. (2016a, October 21st). Madrid logra 5.200 millones de inversión inmobiliaria. *Cinco Días*.
- Cinco Días. (2016b, November 25th). Pasar las Navidades en casa de los abuelos no se lleva. *Cinco Días*.
- Cinco Días. (2017, February 8th). Londres, la ciudad preferida por las grandes fortunas. *Cinco Días*.
- Colantone, I., & Stanig, P. (2016). Global Competition and Brexit. *BAFFI CAREFIN Working Papers*, 1644, 1–45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055417000685>
- Córdoba Hernández, A. M. (2009). *La línea editorial de ABC, El País, El Mundo y La Vanguardia frente al conflicto palestino-israelí: 1993-2004*. Universidad de Navarra.
- De Cesare, F. (2018). *Populismo y Prensa. La construcción discursiva de la crisis griega y del Brexit en dos periódicos españoles*. Paolo Loffredo initiative Editoriali.
- Dörry, S. (2017). The geo-politics of Brexit, the euro and the City of London. *Geoforum*, 85, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2017.07.003>
- Dunt, I. (2018). *Brexit. What the Hell Happens Now?* Canbury Press.
- El Economista. (2016, July 22nd). El «Brexit» deja a las empresas en un marco de incertidumbre. *El Economista*.
- El Economista. (2017, October 24th). «Frenazo» en las reservas del turismo de negocios en Cataluña para 2018. *El Economista*.
- El Mundo. (2017, April 2nd). España tiene ahora la sartén por el mango en Gibraltar. *El Mundo*.
- El Mundo. (2019a, May 5th). «No creo en la belleza como verdad». *El Mundo*.
- El Mundo. (2019b, June 7th). Borrell: «Al final el Brexit ha sido una vacuna». *El Mundo*.

- El País. (2016, October 29th). Crecen las ventas en Internet. *El País*.
- El País. (2017a, November 22nd). Los empresarios lamentan la «oportunidad perdida» de la EMA. *El País*.
- El País. (2017b, May 3rd). Sin miedo hacia el «Brexit». *El País*.
- El País. (2019, April 16th). Ampliar el «nosotros». *El País*.
- El País. (2020, January 30th). Gibraltar, pesca y ciudadanos, líneas rojas de España tras el Brexit. *El País*.
- Expansión. (2019, January 8th). Un nuevo modelo de negocio para España. *Expansión*.
- Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. Routledge.
- Gomis, L. (1974). *El medio media: La función política de la prensa*. Seminarios y Ediciones.
- Gomis, L. (2001). *Teoría del periodismo: cómo se forma el presente* (2e ed.). PAIDOS IBERICA.
- Gomis, L. (2008). *Teoría de los géneros periodísticos*. Editorial UOC.
- Gunter, B. (1997). *Measuring Bias on Television*. University of Luton.
- Hall, S., & Heneghan, M. (2023). Brexit and “missing” financial services jobs in the United Kingdom. *Contemporary Social Science*, 18(2), 235–249. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2023.2189294>
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hobolt, S. B. (2016). The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(9), 1259–1277. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1225785>
- Idígoras, M. Á. (2017). El Brexit: una decisión que divide a un país y a un continente. *La Albolafia: Revista de Humanidades y Cultura*, 12, 19–31.
- James, S., & Quaglia, L. (2021). Brexit and the political economy of euro-denominated clearing. *Review of International Political Economy*, 28(3), 505–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290.2019.1699148>
- Kalaitzake, M. (2022). Resilience in the City of London: The fate of UK financial services after Brexit. *New Political Economy*, 27(4), 610–628. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2021.1994540>
- Khabaz, D. (2018). Framing Brexit: the role, and the impact, of the national newspapers on the EU Referendum. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 39(4), 496–508. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739532918806871>
- Kilgarriff, A., Baisa, V., Bušta, J., Jakubíček, M., Kovář, V., Michelfeit, J., Rychlý, P., & Suchomel, V. (2014). The Sketch Engine: ten years on. *Lexicography*, 1(1), 7–36. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1007/s40607-014-0009-9>
- Kircher, M. (2005). La prensa escrita: actor social y político, espacio de producción cultural y fuente de información histórica. *Revista de Historia*, 10, 115–122.
- La Vanguardia. (2017a, October 25th). Barcelona es la tercera ciudad europea preferida para crear «start-ups». *La Vanguardia*.
- La Vanguardia. (2017b, May 4th). e-konomía. *La Vanguardia*.
- La Vanguardia. (2018, April 6th). «Hay que trabajar la marca más que nunca». *La Vanguardia*.
- Labbé, D., & Monière, D. (2008). *Les mots qui nous gouvernent : Le discours des Premiers ministres québécois : 1960-2005*. Monière-Wollank Éditeurs.
- López Basaguren, A. (2017). Brexit: la secesión de la Unión Europea entre teoría y realidad. *UNED. Teoría y Realidad Constitucional*, 40, 111–140. <https://doi.org/10.5944/trc.40.2017.20903>
- Maingueneau, D. (2021). *Discours et analyse du discours (Seconde)*. Armand Colin.

- Malo de Molina, J. L. (2017). El futuro del proyecto europeo después del Brexit. *Información Comercial Española, ICE: Revista de Economía*, 896, 141–152. <https://doi.org/10.32796/ice.2017.896.1936>
- McCombs, M., & Evatt, D. (1995). Los temas y los aspectos: explorando una nueva dimensión de la Agenda-setting. *Comunicación y Sociedad*, 8, 7–32.
- McQuail, D. (1998). *La acción de los medios. Los medios de comunicación y el interés público*. Amorrortu editores.
- Panitz, R., & Glückler, J. (2022). Relocation decisions in uncertain times: Brexit and financial services. *Economic Geography*, 98(2), 119–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2021.2009336>
- Parsons, T. (1967). *Sociological Theory and Modern Society*. The Free press.
- Partington, A. (2004). Corpora and discourse, a most congruous beast. *Corpora and Discourse*, 1, 11–20.
- Partington, A., Duguid, A., & Taylor, C. (2013). *Patterns and Meanings in Discourse: Theory and Practice in Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies (CADS)*. John Benjamins.
- Plaza Cerezo, S. (2001). La capitalidad de Londres en la economía global. *Boletín Económico ICE*, 2686, 7–17.
- Ramos Ruiz, Á. (2018). El sesgo ideológico en la prensa económica española: un estudio de corpus. In M. González & M. Valderrama (Eds.), *Discursos Comunicativos Persuasivos Hoy* (pp. 375–388). Tecnos (Grupo Anaya).
- Ramos Ruiz, Á. (2021a). El sesgo ideológico en la cobertura del Brexit en la prensa digital española. In N. Sánchez-Gay & M. L. Cárdenas-Rica (Eds.), *La comunicación a la vanguardia. Tendencias, métodos y perspectivas* (pp. 1981–1997). Fragua.
- Ramos Ruiz, Á. (2021b). El sesgo ideológico y la prosodia semántica en la construcción del discurso mediático del Brexit en la prensa española. *Tonos Digital: Revista de Estudios Filológicos*, 41(II), 1–35.
- Ramos Ruiz, Á. (2022). *El discurso mediático sobre el Brexit: estudio léxico-semántico del sesgo informativo en la prensa española*. Universidad de Granada - Université Paris Cité.
- Ramos Ruiz, Á., & Ramos Ruiz, I. (2019). El sesgo ideológico en el tratamiento informativo del BREXIT en la prensa anglosajona. In P. López Villafranca, J. I. Niño González, & L. F. Solano Santos (Eds.), *La nueva comunicación del siglo XXI* (pp. 347–358). Pirámide (Grupo Anaya).
- Ramos Ruiz, Á., & Ramos Ruiz, I. (2021). El sesgo ideológico en el discurso periodístico de opinión sobre el Brexit en la prensa española: el caso de Gibraltar. In A. M. Botella Nicolás, M. Roderigo, & R. Moreno López (Eds.), *Investigando sobre tendencias en análisis de contenido de vanguardia* (pp. 381–392). Tirant Lo Blanch.
- Ramos Ruiz, Á., & Ramos Ruiz, I. (2022). El sesgo ideológico en el discurso político de la prensa española: la reforma constitucional de 2011. *Círculo de Lingüística Aplicada a La Comunicación*, 89, 171–182. <https://doi.org/10.5209/clac.70743>
- Rivière-De Franco, K. (2017). Le référendum sur l'Union européenne: une crise identitaire pour la presse britannique? *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique. French Journal of British Studies*, 22(XXII-2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4000/rfcb.1325>
- Sampson, T. (2017). Brexit: The Economics of International Disintegration. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(4), 163–184. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.4.163>
- Taylor, C., & Marchi, A. (2018). *Corpus Approaches to Discourse. A Critical Review*. . Routledge.
- Trent, J. S., & Friedenber, R. V. (2004). *Political campaigning communications*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Van Kerckhoven, S., & Odermatt, J. (2021). Euro clearing after Brexit: Shifting locations and oversight. *Journal of Financial Regulation and Compliance*, 29(2), 187–201. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFRC-02-2020-0021>
- Vázquez Bermúdez, M. Á. (2006). Los medios toman partido. *Ámbitos*, 15, 257–267. <https://doi.org/10.12795/Ambitos.2006.i15.1>
- Verdú Cueco, Y. (2009). *Sesgo y encuadre en las noticias de TV: mecanismos de manipulación periodística a propósito del urbanismo y del agua en los informativos de Canal 9*. Universidad de Valencia.
- Verdú Cueco, Y. (2010). El tratamiento del urbanismo y del agua en los informativos de Canal 9. *Arxiu de Ciències Socials*, 23, 137–148.