

# **Brexit as an oven-ready pie? A case study of Boris Johnson's BREXIT IS A PIE multimodal metaphor**

**Pauline Rodet, Université Jean Moulin Lyon 3/Centre d'Études  
Linguistiques (UR CEL) (pauline.rodet@univ-lyon3.fr)**

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to study Boris Johnson's conceptualisation of Brexit as an OVEN-READY PIE during the 2019 General Election campaign in the UK through the prism of cognitive linguistics. This election was marked by the omnipresence of digital and social media, which impacted the course of the campaign, but also diversified the modes of communication and interactions. In the light of the works on multimodal metaphor carried out by Forceville (2009), the different media through which this metaphorical conceptualisation of Brexit as a PIE was cued will be thoroughly analysed. The data includes a short video clip, an ad campaign, and the 2019 Conservative Party manifesto. Additionally, some caricatures of this metaphor will also be looked at and compared to the original occurrence of the metaphor which appeared in Boris Johnson's ad campaign. The objectives, functions, and the meaning conveyed by this metaphor will be brought to light. This paper will recount how the metaphor was extended and developed through different modes as the political campaign unfolded.

Ziel des Beitrags ist die kognitionslinguistische Untersuchung der Konzeptualisierung des Brexits als OFENFERTIGER KUCHEN durch Boris Johnson während des Parlamentswahlkampfes 2019 im Vereinigten Königreich. Dieser war geprägt von der Omnipräsenz digitaler und sozialer Medien, die den Verlauf des Wahlkampfes beeinflusste, aber auch die Kommunikations- und Interaktionsformen diversifizierte. Im Lichte der von Forceville (2009) durchgeführten Arbeiten zur multimodalen Metapher werden verschiedene Medien, durch die diese metaphorische Konzeptualisierung des Brexits als KUCHEN auf den Weg gebracht wurde, analysiert. Zu den Daten gehören ein kurzer Videoclip, eine Werbekampagne und das Programm der Konservativen Partei von 2019. Darüber hinaus werden einige Karikaturen zu dieser Metapher untersucht und mit dem ursprünglichen Vorkommen der Metapher in Boris Johnsons Werbekampagne verglichen. Die Ziele, Funktionen und die von der Metapher übermittelte Bedeutung werden untersucht. Der Beitrag legt dar, wie die Metapher im Verlauf der politischen Kampagne auf verschiedene Weise erweitert und weiterentwickelt wurde.

## **1. Introduction**

The 2019 UK General Election was decisive for the unfolding of Brexit. Following Theresa May's departure, Boris Johnson was appointed as the leading figure of a divided and weakened Conservative Party. Yet, this General Election resulted in a smashing victory for the Conservatives, at the expense of a declining Labour Party led by Jeremy Corbyn, who did not manage to reach the voters' expectations by failing to take a stance on the Brexit issue (Rycroft 2020: 3). As opposed to Jeremy Corbyn, his major opponent during this General Election, Johnson built his electoral campaign around his will to deliver Brexit,

whatever it takes, in order to honour the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum. “Get Brexit Done” became the official motto of the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 2019 General Election, a simple yet effective catchphrase that reflected Boris Johnson’s rhetoric and echoed the 2016 *Vote Leave* Brexit campaign (Bonnet 2020). To reach a wider audience and comply with the ever-growing importance of social media during political campaigns, the Conservative Party capitalised on digital platforms such as Twitter and YouTube so as to increase their visibility and target new supporters, especially among the young people. They resorted to innovative communication techniques such as memes and parodies to illustrate their ideas. To depict how supposedly easy “getting Brexit done” would be if Johnson became Prime Minister, the Conservative Party launched an advertising campaign in which Brexit was depicted as an oven-ready meal.

This paper will focus on this specific case of rhetorical metaphor which involved the conceptualisation of Brexit as a MEAL, and more specifically a PIE, through the use of multimodal metaphors during the 2019 election campaign in the UK. The metaphorical representations of Brexit as a PIE will be studied in media from different sorts. The aim of this paper is to illustrate how a metaphor can be stretched through different modes, be used for rhetorical purposes, and be twisted from its initial meaning. To begin with, the links between social media and political campaigning during the 2019 General Election will briefly be discussed. Then, the data and methodology used for this study will be presented. In the third part, an in-depth analysis of the metaphor under scrutiny is carried out. The aim of this third part is threefold: look at how it is cued in the data selected, interpret the choice of the source domain, and comment on how the metaphor was then re-used, extended, and twisted.

## **2. When politics interacts with social media**

### **2.1 Glimpse on the 2019 General Election**

The year 2019 turned out to be another turning point in British politics, and especially in the unfolding of the Brexit process. The United Kingdom was on the verge of a Constitutional crisis, with Theresa May racing against the alarm clock set by Brussels, and the MPs rejecting the deal she had negotiated with the EU no less than three times. Although she had managed to negotiate an extension of the 2-year period guaranteed by Article 50 with the EU Parliament,

she did not succeed in rallying the British MPs behind her Withdrawal bill. Eventually, Theresa May's failure to get parliamentary support led her to step down as Prime Minister in June 2019 after having steered the boat through the Brexit tempest for just over three years. Thus, time was running out for the settlement of a deal, and the UK lacked a strong figure to finally deliver Brexit. This period of uncertainty lasted until 23 July 2019, when Boris Johnson was elected at the head of the Conservative Party, as a result of Theresa May's resignation. This new position allowed him to become one of the frontrunners for the upcoming General Election, which was planned to be held in December of that same year since Boris Johnson had called for a snap election.

During the 2019 General Election campaign, Boris Johnson competed against his main opponent, Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labour Party, and also against the Lib-Dem, slightly less represented in the media. Most of the issues at stake during that campaign were related to the delivering of Brexit, which had started to become a source of weariness and urgency in the country. Public opinion was fractured over how Brexit should be achieved, and over whether Brexit should be achieved at all (Vasilopoulou 2020: 82). The Conservative Party chose to make Brexit the central issue of their campaign, and Boris Johnson made it his mission to Get Brexit Done - "no ifs, no buts, no maybes", as he insisted. In addition to what had already happened during the 2017 General Election, Brexit had a profound impact on the voters' behaviour with people mainly voting in accordance with their stance on Brexit and the EU (Prosser 2020: 10).

Strikingly enough, this time again, the Leave campaign led by Boris Johnson won the election. What was even more striking was the fact that they won a landslide majority in Parliament, with 80 seats and 43.6% of the popular vote, one of the highest percentages ever achieved by the party. This election also resulted in the disappointing defeat of the Labour Party, likely due to Jeremy Corbyn's lack of popularity and his failure to fully grasp the importance of Brexit during the election campaign. This might have influenced the Labour voters to migrate towards the Conservative Party or the Lib-Dem, depending on whether they supported Leave or Remain (Prosser 2020: 9).

However, another decisive point could also account for the crushing victory of the Conservative Party: How the campaign was fought explains how the

campaign was won. Yet, the Conservatives manifestly chose the right candidate and the right communication strategy.

## **2.2 Johnson's communication strategy: social media as a new political tool?**

During the 2019 General Election, Boris Johnson's strategy heavily relied on social media and the latest internet trends. Nowadays, there is no shadow of a doubt that social media play a crucial role in almost every aspect of our existence, whether it be on a personal level, or on society as a whole, and politics is no exception to that current phenomenon (Wring/Ward 2020: 284).

In the last decade or so, it seems that politicians have started to give more and more value to their appearance on social media, such as Twitter and Instagram. These platforms are generally digital places where politicians have room for improvement as regards their voting base. The use of social media by politicians facilitates how they interact with their supporters and stimulates public reactions. It allows them to communicate instantly, share their opinion publicly and without any filters. Most political entities now own, at least, an official Twitter account. Twitter has now become a proper political battleground where politicians try to increase their visibility (Ford et al. 2021: 310). Moreover, the choice to adopt a horizontal approach on the use of social media allows supporters to get involved in campaigns, which means that they can contribute to the rising popularity of a party. According to Bell (2018: 5): "the 'old politics' was more likely to use it [digital media] in a top-down way". Conversely, "the 'new politics' used it in a horizontal manner which allowed people to actively get involved in a political movement". With this horizontal approach, the so-called 'new politics' are able to grant more space to the people in their debates, and thus gives the illusion that they are closer to the people and more approachable.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that social media is also a good means through which politicians can reach youngsters. The majority of Twitter users age from 13 to 34 years old (Dixon 2022). Yet, this age range also encompasses the population who is less likely to cast a vote during elections, and who is less engaged in politics overall (Russell 1999). Additionally, Iyengar (2011: 124) argues that social media seem to have a positive impact on younger generations as regards their engagement in politics since they would be less likely to engage

in traditional forms of political events (TV debates, canvass, handing out flyers, etc.). Therefore, reaching out to them directly in a (digital) place where they are used to spending a lot of time seems to be an effective communication strategy in order to grasp their attention, and thus, their votes. This is also what the Conservative Party intended to achieve during the 2019 General Election. To do so, the party hired two communication strategists – Topham and Guerin – both under 30, who took care of Boris Johnson’s online campaign (Ritchie 2022: 84). Not only do they specialize in online campaigns, but also their young age helps them have a better understanding of their target audience’s expectations, and how social media can be used effectively.

### 2.3 ‘Shitposting’ on Twitter

Before being hired by the Conservative Party to improve their digital campaign, Topham and Guerin had already shown their skills in Australia, where they had worked with the Liberal Party of Australia, which resulted in the unexpected victory of Scott Morrison in 2018 (Waterson 2019). Topham and Guerin aroused curiosity and interest from all parts and became renowned for using ‘shitposting’ as a new form of digital strategy for politicians. Journalist Waterson (2019) defines this new strategy of ‘shitposting’ as follows: “Purposefully low-quality memes based around popular shows such as *Game of Thrones* were used in a bid to drive interactions – good or bad – at any cost, on the basis that this would boost the reach of future Facebook posts”. In other words, shitposting is the act of releasing rubbish adverts on social media in the hope that they will be more likely to be shared and go viral on the internet and beyond. BBC political editor, Laura Kuenssberg explains:

Political parties or campaign groups make an advert that looks really rubbish and then people share it online saying, ‘Oh I can’t believe how shit this is’ and then it gets shared and shared and shared and shared and they go, ‘Ha ha ha, job done’ (Brexitcast 2019).

Posting seemingly low-quality content on social media aims to target a wider audience and eventually trigger an emotional reaction on the part of the audience. The emotional reaction could be anger, laugh, pride. Besides, emotional arousal is a crucial element of a persuasion strategy (Zhang/Clark 2018: 43).

Multiple occurrences of shitposting can be found on the Conservative Party’s Twitter account, especially during the campaign leading to the 2019 General

Election. The example that made the strongest impression is undoubtedly the parody of *Love, Actually* released a few days before Christmas on YouTube and Twitter. This short video clip, which featured Boris Johnson re-enacting the famous placard door scene to implore the voters to vote Conservative, went utterly viral, generating millions of views (Ford et al. 2021: 284). Although politicians are not used to being framed in comical situations, even more during election campaigns, Boris Johnson managed to catch the attention of journalists and voters with this imitation of a widely praised, popular British romantic comedy. In fact, Johnson's unique personality and charisma, as shown in this parody, probably contributed to the victory of the Conservatives in 2019. Bonnet (2020: 6) argues:

The campaign team tried to control Johnson's public appearance carefully to drive home the message encapsulated in the "Get Brexit Done" slogan. To achieve this, they would capitalise on Johnson's charisma and easy-going appearance. To symbolise the fact that he would literally break the Brexit deadlock, he was photographed wearing boxing gloves emblazoned with "Get Brexit Done" in Manchester.

Thus, Johnson and his campaign team focused on illustrating the party's motto for the election – Get Brexit Done – through visual content that is as simplistic and explicit as the message conveyed by the motto. Unlike Theresa May, Johnson aimed to deliver Brexit as quickly as possible, avoiding lengthy negotiations and deadline extensions. This sense of urgency to get Britain out of the EU was also reflected in the multiple mini video clips that flourished on the Internet. This also applies to the "oven-ready deal" scenario studied in this paper, as it was also crafted to illustrate the party's slogan and main campaign promise.

Therefore, Boris Johnson and his campaign team managed to conquer the realm of social media, now considered a decisive place to gather public attention and votes. To do so, they used the latest Internet trends, such as memes and short video clips, as a new form of political discourse and rhetorical tools. Although these elements may seem irrelevant, in the end, they helped Boris Johnson to reach young people, mark a clear distance between his intentions and Theresa May's premiership, and transmit the idea that the Conservative Party is able to adapt to new popular trends, to reach the people. Nonetheless, the Electoral Commission (2020) claimed that some voters raised concerns about the

unfolding of the campaign, especially about the content released on social media and the lack of regulations. The Electoral Commission conducted an opinion poll in which 58% of the respondents regarded online campaigning as either false or deceptive.

### **3. Data and methodology**

#### **3.1 Focus on BREXIT IS A PIE**

This paper aims to study the BREXIT IS A PIE metaphorical scenario that was built during the Conservatives' campaign in the run-up for the 2019 General Election. This metaphorical scenario, which likened the process of parting from the EU to the baking of a pie, emerged from Boris Johnson's claim that he had prepared a deal to deliver Brexit, and that this Brexit deal was "oven-ready." According to Musolff (2017: 643), metaphorical scenarios are defined as some "figurative mini narratives that carry with them an evaluative stance". In this context, the evaluative stance leads toward the idea that Brexit is quick and easy.

Later on, Boris Johnson continued to stretch the metaphor extensively through various modes of communication. This metaphor ended up being distorted, and eventually used against himself, especially through numerous images and drawings of the "oven-ready meal." One way to stretch that metaphor implied rendering the target domain, Brexit, through visual representations, and the pie was carefully chosen as the visual cue for the representation of the source domain. In that respect, the BREXIT IS A PIE metaphor was first cued verbally and was then cued through other semantic modes.

#### **3.2 Data presentation**

A qualitative analysis of a set of data has been performed. The data encompass metaphorical occurrences related to the BREXIT IS A PIE metaphorical scenario during the 2019 General Election campaign. The data collection started with the Conservative Party manifesto for the 2019 General Election in the UK. Then, the aim was to find other occurrences that came to illustrate the verbal occurrence. As a result, eight items will be analysed in this paper. These eight elements have been parted into three categories, according to the modes they display.

Firstly, the analysis will focus on verbal data only, starting chronologically with the excerpt from the manifesto, then moving on to two occurrences appearing

in two speeches delivered by Boris Johnson – an interview and a speech given at the launch of the Conservative Party’s campaign for the 2019 election. Secondly, an examination will be conducted on data that combines visual and verbal modes.

A tweet containing verbal elements as well as a computer-assisted illustration will also be analysed in the light of the OVEN-READY/READY MEAL metaphorical scenario. This tweet was released by the Conservatives’ campaign team on their official Twitter account. It can be considered as one of a long series of meme-like campaign ads posted on social media as part of the digital campaign. Still focusing on visual and verbal elements, but more specifically moving images, a short video clip of Boris Johnson’s visit to a pie factory in Derby will be studied.

And finally, three images featuring the metaphor will be dealt with. These three images – two cartoons and one photograph – provide illustrations in which the metaphor is also cued verbally and visually, but these data items have been chosen due to their different connotations. They are linked to the previous elements since the metaphorical representation of Brexit is built on a similar metaphorical mapping, which likens Brexit to a pie, but the connotation mapped from the source to the target domain may differ.

Thus, each piece of data presented in this part features the BREXIT IS A MEAL metaphor and its variations (BREXIT IS A PIE/BREXIT IS AN OVEN-READY MEAL). However, they do not resort to the same semiotic modes, and their connotation may also vary.

### **3.3 Methodology**

As regards the methodology, the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) elaborated by the Pragglejaz Group (2007) was carried out to establish the metaphorical nature of the verbal data. This procedure suggests fixed criteria in order to determine whether a lexical unit should be considered metaphorical. This can be achieved through a comparison between the basic meaning of the lexical unit and its meaning in a specific context in which it appears (Pragglejaz Group 2007: 3).

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this paper is to look at how a metaphor that first appeared as a rhetorical instrument in a written text, developed through various semantic modes, with consequences on the connotation of its target



domain. Consequently, this analysis also relies on the theory of multimodal metaphors developed by Charles Forceville. According to Forceville (2009: 25), multimodal metaphors are metaphors whose target and source domains are cued in different modes. A mode is defined as a sign system that can be interpreted thanks to a specific perception process often related to the five senses. The modes include written language, spoken language, visuals, sound, and gesture among others (Forceville 2009: 22). Therefore, and following Forceville and Bounergru's work (2011: 212), if the metaphor is cued both visually (image, drawing, gesture) and verbally (written text, speech), it shall be considered a multimodal metaphor.

## 4. Data analysis

### 4.1 Verbal data

The first occurrence of the metaphor under scrutiny appeared in the 2019 Conservative manifesto:

- (1) With a new Parliament and a sensible majority Government, we can get that deal through in days. *It is oven-ready* – and every single Conservative candidate at this election, all 635 of them, have pledged to vote for this deal as soon as Parliament returns (Conservative manifesto 2019).

Thus, the Brexit deal is talked about as if it were some kind of dish ready to be baked in the oven. The deal, or Brexit deal to be more specific, can be seen as a metonymy for Brexit since it is part of the process that will allow Britain to exit the European Union, which is what Brexit is all about. Henceforth, Brexit is linguistically conceptualised as an “oven-ready” dish through this monomodal metaphor cued in the verbal mode.

A few weeks after the release of the manifesto, Boris Johnson re-used and extended the “oven-ready” metaphor in a press interview for *Sky News* during a hospital visit (2) and then in a speech delivered at the launch of the Conservative Party's General Election campaign in Birmingham (3):

- (2) We have *an oven ready deal, let's put it in the microwave*, as soon as we get back after the election on 12 December (October 2019).
- (3) *Whack it* [the BREXIT deal] *in the microwave*, gas mark... I'm not very good at cooking... Gas mark 4. *Prick the lid. Put it in*, and

then we can get on... we can put this deal through Parliament (November 2019).

These verbal occurrences show that Boris Johnson used and repeated the “oven-ready” metaphor as one of his main talking points during the election campaign. Besides, it is worth noting that the meal-deal Brexit metaphor can be considered a creative and unconventional metaphor, as it has been generated in a specific speech, on a specific occasion. It is still perceived as a metaphor since it is not lexicalised, and it is not related to any other pre-existing metaphorical mapping (Dyrel 2009: 30; MacCormac 1985). The metaphor is creative, but also rooted in a basic human activity, that is cooking. Consequently, this makes the mapping easily understandable for most people, hence accessible to most people, including young people. However, although cooking a ready meal can be regarded as a basic human activity, it might not be that obvious for everyone. Indeed, following these declarations, Boris Johnson was mocked by people online who pointed out the fact that he got the oven and the microwave mixed up since there are no gas marks on microwaves.

This verbal metaphor was re-used, extended, and repeated, which fuelled the mapping between Brexit and the meal deal. It first appeared exclusively through the verbal mode, so as a monomodal metaphor.

## **4.2 Verbo-visual meal deal**

On 3 December 2019, a week or so prior to the 2019 General Election, the Conservatives’ campaign team came into action on Twitter with the following ad illustrating Boris’s oven-ready [Brexit] deal on the Conservatives’ official Twitter account:



Fig. 1: Boris's Brexit deal, @Conservatives, *Twitter*, 2019

The following verbal tweet: “Ding! Our Brexit deal is ready” is followed by a computer-generated image that is used as a verbo-pictorial metaphor and consolidates the mapping between the source and target domains, respectively a meal deal and Brexit. Here, the occurrence bears the characteristics that correspond to Forceville’s (2009: 22) definition of a multimodal metaphor. Two phenomena belonging to different categories are used: BREXIT as the target domain and COOKING as the source domain, and these two phenomena are cued in two sign systems: the visual and the verbal systems.

The blue box can be interpreted as a visual symbol of the Brexit deal, so by metonymic extension, Brexit in itself. This box was designed so as to recall the boxes containing ready meals in supermarkets. It is not surprising that the colour blue was chosen, since blue is the official colour of the Conservative Party. Moreover, the three colours of the Union Jack can be spotted (red, blue, and white), adding a patriotic tint to this box. This conveys the impression that the Conservatives are making Brexit theirs, and that they identify themselves with Brexit and the Brexit deal.

It is important to mention that without the verbal elements in and around the picture, the picture would be difficult to understand, and the metaphorical mapping hardly possible. A parallel can be drawn with the semiotic concept of anchoring developed by Barthes (1977: 38-41). According to this theory, verbal elements help the viewer understand the meaning behind an image. Hence, in a multimodal artefact, the verbal part is used to fix the meaning and guide the interpretation (Koller 2009: 47). The instruction on the box claims: "Put it in the microwave", which echoes Boris Johnson's speech excerpt studied in 4.1. It indicates what Johnson intended to do in order to get Brexit done, so the instructions he would follow if his party were elected. The ingredients section of the meal deal features the composition of Johnson's Brexit deal (keeping taxes low, controlling immigration, etc.). Nonetheless, while the food industry does verify the nutritional information of food products, no comparable verification is applied to campaign promises shared on social media. As a result, there may be reservations about the accuracy and reliability of the content comprising the Brexit (meal) deal.

Additionally, in the verbal part of the tweet, the onomatopoeia *Ding!* mimics the sound of the microwave or oven, which could also add another type of semantic mode to the multimodal metaphor, as sound also contributes to the mapping from the source domain.

More than a mere tweet, this can also be considered as an example of 'shitposting', since it seems to match the characteristics of the meme-like campaign ads designed by the digital team led by Topham and Guerin. It is quite simple, the message is straightforward, and some may find it amusing (Bonnet 2020: 7). The simplicity of this meme-like campaign advert makes it easily accessible to all: older voters who are not necessarily familiar with the meme trend (Bonnet 2020: 7), and younger people who are not familiar with the current political affairs. This strategy seems to have worked, as the tweet was retweeted, quoted, and liked thousands of times.

The success of this strategy could also lie in the fact that visual content is more and more popular on social media, even on platforms initially dedicated to written content such as Twitter. It has been shown that a tweet which features a directly viewable image will get more engagement from the audience (Li/Xie 2020). According to Yus (2009: 153), pictures have a more powerful impact and are efficient devices to visualize concepts. As the expression goes, "a picture is

worth a thousand words”, especially on social media where people are usually scrolling without really taking the time to carefully read what pops up before their eyes.

In summary, this tweet represents an additional stage where the cooking metaphor was used and extended for rhetorical purpose. It is cued through a combination of modes: the verbal and visual modes, making it a multimodal metaphor. The visual part of the metaphor heavily relies on the verbal metaphor that captions the image, and the multimodal metaphor in its entirety relies on cultural elements, knowledge of the context, and Boris Johnson’s previous statements. Boris’s Brexit deal is once again conceptualized as an oven-ready deal that will promptly be put in the oven, thus likening Brexit to a food item.

On top of that, a couple of days after the tweet was posted, a video was released in which Boris Johnson was filmed baking a pie and pretending it was Brexit.



**Fig. 2:** Boris Johnson holding his Brexit pie, S. Rousseau, 2019

This event occurred when Boris Johnson visited a pie factory in Derby, as part of his campaign. This visit perfectly suited his talking point, and it happened to be the perfect place to further extend the BREXIT IS AN OVEN-READY MEAL multimodal metaphor. The following occurrence analysed in the next section is extracted from a short video clip, so it includes additional modes that help adding layers to the metaphor: gestures, sounds, visual objects. On top of that, in the video, Boris Johnson is also putting his gestures into words, hence the importance of the verbal mode to get a glimpse on the metaphorical meaning behind this scene.

Here is the transcript of Johnson's discourse in the video:

- (4) This is the *oven-ready pie*. We're here at The Red Olive pie making facility in Derby where we've just made a symbol of what we intend to do if we are lucky enough to get a working majority Conservative government and get Brexit done. *Put the deal we've got ready to go in the oven*, take it out before Christmas and move our country forward. *You put it in, slam it in the oven, take it out, there it is* – get Brexit done, take the country forward, unite, level up. How could we express this side more succinctly and more clearly. There it is! (Boris Johnson 2019).

This short video is the epitome of the BREXIT IS AN OVEN-READY MEAL, and more specifically, BREXIT IS A PIE multimodal metaphorical scenario. In this video, Boris Johnson is proudly holding a pie. Then, he is being filmed as he is putting the pie in an actual oven and then taking it out with a large grin on his face, showing his fresh pie to the cameras. He is wearing an apron emblazoned with the party's motto "Get Brexit Done", which recalls the "Get Brexit Done" boxing gloves scene in Manchester (Bonnet 2020: 6). Thus, this scene is another symbol of what he intended to do to "Get Brexit Done", another visual representation of his motto. The metaphor is cued verbally, as Johnson is giving a verbal description of what he is doing and with the motto on the apron. It is cued visually, through his gestures and actions. The setting and the objects help the viewer identify the source domain, which is more and more obvious and delineated. In terms of metaphorical mappings, Boris Johnson is mapped as the cook, Parliament as the oven, Brexit as a meal (and more specifically, a British pie), and the voters as those who will enjoy the pie cooked by Boris. This metaphorical scenario can be connected to the NATION IS A FAMILY scenario, which was analysed extensively by Musolff (2006, 2016), with Boris Johnson as the father of the nation, baking a pie to his family, the British citizens.

All in all, this analysis aimed to show how the oven-ready metaphor, which first appeared verbally in the 2019 Conservative manifesto, was then re-used, extended, developed through various modes. As time went by, the source domain used to conceptualise Brexit became more and more definite. It started as a mere oven-ready meal, and it ended up being symbolised as a British pie. As for the qualitative interpretation, this metaphor highlights the fact that the Conservative Party wanted to portray the delivering of Brexit as a simple, basic process. Getting Brexit done would be resolved in a few steps, as simple as

putting a pie in the oven. This contrasts with other Brexit metaphors used by David Cameron and Theresa May who mainly depicted Brexit as a long and strenuous process with the JOURNEY metaphorical scenario (Jamet/Rodet 2021). Hence, with his PIE metaphor, Boris Johnson appealed to the voters who desperately wanted to get over Brexit. Negotiations and debates about Brexit took up so much time and space in Parliament and in the media, that all the other issues were swept under the Brexit rug. Nonetheless, this metaphor hides the potential negative consequences likely to arouse once a Brexit deal would be put into effect, such as shortages, devaluation of the pound and issues at the borders with the European continent.

So far in this analysis, the PIE metaphor is positively valued. It was used as a visual symbol to simplify and illustrate the Conservatives' motto "Get Brexit Done", which was already quite simple. However, Boris's PIE metaphor was then re-used and twisted in other contexts with the aim of criticising and mocking Boris Johnson's policy and campaign.

### **4.3 Caricatures of the "oven-ready meal"**

Caricatures of Johnson's oven-ready pie flourished in the media. These caricatures contributed to the extension of the metaphor and the development of the mini narrative. Three examples will be studied in this sub-part, starting with the front cover of the British satirical news magazine *Private Eye* released in September 2020:



Fig. 3: *Private Eye* magazine, September 2020

The picture chosen to illustrate the issue is an image of an oven that contains a food item clearly burnt and overcooked to the point where it seems barely edible. The title preceding the picture indicates that it refers to the latest news from the oven-ready Brexit deal. The metaphor is cued verbally (via the title) and visually. The verbal cue helps the reader identify the target domain (Brexit). This satirised version of the multimodal PIE metaphor conveys the idea that the deal delivered by Boris Johnson is overcooked, hence a failure. It puts into question Johnson's metaphorical cooking skills, thus/hence his skills as the leader of the nation.

On a different note, freelance cartoonist Royston Robertson also partook in the redefining of the PIE metaphor with the following drawing:





Fig. 4: "Prick with a fork", @roystoncartoons, Twitter, December 2019

The cartoonist seems to have borrowed some elements from the oven-ready meal advertising campaign released by the Conservative Party on their Twitter account (see 4.2). In this cartoon, Brexit is also conceptualised as a food container. It is worth noting that contrary to the Conservatives' version of the meal deal, here, the cartoonist labelled it "oven-ready Brexit" instead of "oven-ready deal", which suggests that the deal can be considered as a metonymy to talk about Brexit. On this drawing, the use-by date of the meal refers to the date when the United Kingdom was due to officially leave the European Union. Below the date, there is a visual rendering of Boris Johnson holding a fork, followed by the verbal cue "prick with a fork", which echoes the excerpts from Johnson's speech studied in 3.1 (occurrence 3). The word *prick* here can be interpreted as a subtle pun targeting Boris Johnson. The warning below Johnson's caricature "may blow up in your face" underlines the potentially detrimental effects of Brexit. Moreover, it recalls the "oven-ready" picture in the *Private Eye*. Here, the oven-ready deal multimodal metaphor conveys a derogatory evaluation, which goes in the opposite direction to what Boris Johnson's campaign team intended to do with their image by which this cartoon is inspired.

Lastly, this political cartoon drawn by Christian Adam for the *London Evening Standard* seems to be the pinnacle:



Fig. 5: "I Never Told any Porkies", C. Adams, *London Evening Standard*, 2019

In this cartoon, the multimodal PIE metaphor probably inspired the drawing. The pie evokes Boris Johnson's (un)famous oven-ready pie that he baked in Derby as a symbol of his "Get Brexit Done" motto. In the present case, the metaphor is cued mainly through the visual mode, but the speech bubble helps the reader identify the target domain. Here, the target domain is not Brexit, but it is related to it nonetheless. Here, Boris Johnson himself is encapsulated in his pie, and more precisely as the stuffing of the pie. This can be interpreted as a way to denounce the fact that his pie was cooked up with lies, especially since *porkies*, or *porky pies* is Cockney rhyming slang that signifies "telling lies". Johnson embodies the porky pie, hence the lie.

Overall, this shows that the multimodal metaphor BREXIT IS A PIE, BREXIT IS AN OVEN-READY MEAL, which was first used by the Conservative Party for rhetorical purposes during the 2019 General Election campaign, gradually moved, evolved, and turned into a parody of Johnson. According to Charteris-Black (2004: 251): "Since metaphor is a way of creating cognitive and affective meaning, by changing the metaphor we may change the way we think about something." Thus, the different stances endorsed by this multimodal metaphor change the way we perceive Boris Johnson's legitimacy as leader of the nation and his capacity to deliver Brexit. Consequently, this also illustrates the rhetorical impact metaphors can display as it is "deliberately and consciously used by speakers or writers to obtain particular effects" (Semino 2008: 29), (Chilton/Schaffner 2002: 29). On the one hand, it is used by Boris Johnson to

convey the idea that Brexit is an easy endeavor for its government, and on the other hand, it is used by cartoonists to mock Boris Johnson's political campaign.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, this analysis shows how metaphors can evolve and be used to convey different stances on the same issue, some of these stances can even be contradictory. The BREXIT IS A PIE metaphor under scrutiny stemmed from a monomodal metaphor used in the Conservative Party manifesto. As the metaphor caught attention, it was used as a rhetorical device by Boris Johnson during the campaign leading to the General Election in December 2019. The metaphorical mappings between Brexit and a food item were strengthened as the metaphor was stretched through various modes (visual, verbal, gestures, sound). As the metaphor turned into a multimodal rhetorical tool, this study also highlights the fact that its connotation changed and shifted. To begin with, this metaphor principally highlighted how easy it would be for Boris Johnson to finally get Brexit done. Then, the PIE metaphor was also used as a means to trigger an emotional response from those who value traditions, since the pie is part of the British cultural heritage, which reinforces the identification process on the part of the voters. Besides, according to journalist Harry Stopes in an article published in *The Newstateman* magazine (2020), metaphors tapping into the domain of food are not uncommon in politics. Brexit was also compared to a cake, for instance. Boris Johnson also used the expression "have your cake and eating it" to simplify his policy on Brexit (Charteris-Black 2019: 3). Stopes (2020) claims that food has the power to symbolise deep feelings about national identity, especially food items that are considered food specialties in a country, as is the case of pies, especially pork(y) pies in Britain. However, the connotation and meaning of the initial metaphor were then twisted and diverted from its original meaning as it was used by cartoonists and satirists to criticise and mock the campaign of the Conservatives. The metaphor evolved diachronically, thus triggering a change in the connotations ascribed to it.

Conversely, comparing Brexit to a ready meal means that Brexit is conceptualised as a cheap and low-quality meal, usually industrial, and not recommended due to their poor nutritional value. From this point of view, the connotation of the metaphor switches from being a positive representation of Brexit, to considering Brexit as an unhealthy dish served to the British people.

Nonetheless, ready meals are popular in Britain since they are cheap and easily accessible in every supermarket, so the choice of the source domain could also be interpreted as a way to reach every layer of the British population. Therefore, for further studies, it would be interesting to elaborate on the link between this metaphorical scenario and the populist approach adopted by Boris Johnson since the referendum campaign in 2016.

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