Article

Euphoric defiance: The role of positive emotions in the British Eurosceptic discourse

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Abstract

Ever since Britain voted to leave the European Union, emotions have dominated the public debate. How negative emotions, such as anger, have impacted the Brexit vote, has been widely researched. Less attention has been focused on the role positive emotions played in debating Britain's relationship to the EU. Using critical discourse analysis and drawing on appraisal theory to investigate the representation of emotions in six sample texts from a corpus of so-called 'Euromyths' ($N = 334$), this study argues that positive emotions were used to create a myth in Roland Barthes' sense to naturalise a Eurosceptic ideology of British defiance and power.

Keywords

Brexit, critical discourse analysis, Euroscepticism, Euromyths, myth, political communication, positive emotions, Roland Barthes

Introduction

From the outset, British scepticism towards the European Union has been deeply emotional (e.g. Forster, 2002; O'Toole, 2018). Research so far has mostly focused on how negative feelings shaped British-EU relations, and how, for example, anger contributed to the Brexit vote (Clarke et al., 2017; McKenzie, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2016). Less attention has been paid to the role of positive emotions within the Eurosceptic discourse. However, positive emotions have often complemented hostile sentiments against the EU, when, for example, those who strive to make the case for Britain's future outside the EU demand optimism (Fox, 2019; Raab, 2017) or boldness (Frazer et al., 2019), or call on their audience to be 'brave' and show 'confidence' (Johnson, 2016).

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This study argues that, since decades, positive emotions were used to naturalise British defiance against the EU. I will investigate the use of mirth and pride in news coverage of European affairs since the early 1990s. The British Eurosceptic discourse has been driven by a sense of exceptionalism, an 'outsider tradition' (Daddow, 2015), which insisted that Britain was, in Labour leader Hugh Gaitskell's words, 'not just a part of Europe' (cited Reynolds, 2019: 57). Famously considered 'an awkward partner' ever since it joined the then European Community in 1973 (George, 1990), Britain's prime ministers emphasised national sovereignty and the role of the nation state against a supranational European Union (Daddow, 2015; Daddow et al., 2019; George, 1990). The British press, which had overwhelmingly supported Britain to stay in the European Community during the first membership referendum campaign in 1975 (Saunders, 2018), switched towards a Eurosceptic stance from the late 1980s onwards, following Margaret Thatcher's opposition to a federalist, increasingly integrated Europe (Wilkes and Wring, 1998). Some media combined Euroscepticism with disinformation. Indeed, the sceptical British media coverage of European regulations employed exaggerations as well as outright falsehoods to such a degree that the European Commission felt compelled to act (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999: 153−154). Between October 1992 and January 2017, the Representation of the European Commission in the UK monitored and corrected British newspaper stories containing falsehoods, such as the notorious ban of bent bananas.

The collection of what the Commission called 'Euromyths' created a unique catalogue of Eurosceptic media stories. Euromyths spread far, not least because their untruths were widely reported (e.g. BBC, 2007; Lyons, 2016; Sky News, 2014; Smith, 2017). Eventually, they became a stereotype for British media coverage of European affairs (Quatremer, 2016). Despite being regularly refuted, Euromyths also provided rich material for Eurosceptic politicians (Usherwood, 2014). The Euromyths thus represent an influential type of British reporting of European issues within the Eurosceptic discourse in the UK.

This paper investigates the role positive emotions played in the British Eurosceptic discourse. I analyse a sample of news stories that were sourced via the Euromyths blog. The data selection will be explained in more detail further below.

Positive emotions in political psychology

Two positive emotions stand out in the British news stories about European bureaucracy that are here under consideration: mirth and pride. I follow Rod A. Martin and Thomas E. Ford (2018) when I use the word 'mirth' to label the feeling elicited by humour. Martin and Ford describe mirth as 'the distinctive emotion that is elicited by the perception of humor' (p. 19), evoking 'a unique feeling of wellbeing' (p. 18). They discuss and reject, for various reasons, other terms such as 'amusement' or 'exhilaration' and suggest 'mirth' as 'a term that is clearly emotion-related, i.e., associated with humour and laughter without being synonymous with either' (ibid.). Pride has been described as a 'retrospective feeling of pleasure and confidence due to one's success' (Brader and Marcus, 2013: 175), which 'is triggered by a positive self-evaluation for meeting standards or other socially valued outcomes' (Brader and Marcus, 2013: 181). The emotion of pride

involves the assessment of a positive event as conducive for who individuals, or groups, want to be; it has therefore been linked to people's identity (Tracy et al., 2014: 297).

This article is concerned with the discursive representation of mirth and pride. However, it analyses how these emotions were employed within a political discourse. It therefore seems appropriate to consider findings from political psychology about the effects of positive emotions and of mirth and pride in particular to complement the findings from the discourse analysis.

Research in political psychology has observed that positive emotions have a motivating and activating affect. Whereas anger appears when people believe events to be unjust, positive emotions such as enthusiasm, pride or hope facilitate political action (e.g. Sabucedo and Vilas, 2014; Valentino et al., 2011). Positive emotions have also been shown to reinforce loyalty and existing preferences (Albertson et al., 2020; Brader, 2005). The emotion elicited by humour has been linked to how well information is processed. Experimental research using exposure to satirical news shows found that mirth facilitates 'a deeper processing and thereby a more effective storage of the information presented' (Weinmann, 2017: 125). Similarly, Nabi et al. (2007) observed in two experimental studies that mirth, elicited by exposure to political comedy, led participants to process funny messages in a closer, if less critical fashion. Nabi et al. also found that mirth encourages a 'sleeper effect', which means that the persuasive effect of funny messages proved to last longer than for serious ones.

The Euromyths outlived the refutation of their falsehoods. Although they were consistently proved to be wrong, many British people continued to believe the untruths they reported. Just 2 weeks before the Brexit referendum, one in seven Britons thought at least one Euromyth to be true, and a quarter considered the alleged ban of bent bananas to be real (Ipsos Mori, 2016). The Eurosceptic press kept publishing Euromyths even after the referendum to celebrate that Britain was leaving the EU (e.g. Ferguson, 2020). The use of mirth and pride could have contributed to this stickiness of Euromyths, if indeed – as the summarised research in political psychology appears to show – mirth leads audiences to process information less critical while remembering it for longer, whereas pride helps to reinforce already existing loyalties and preferences. Euromyths might therefore have reinforced Eurosceptic beliefs in their audience. Before I will turn to a close examination of mirth and pride in Euromyths, I will briefly summarise existing research about Euroscepticism in British media.

Euroscepticism in British media

The hostility the British press displays towards Europe and its institutions since the 1980s has been the focus of some scholarly interest. Several early studies find British nationalism and xenophobia to be at the heart of Europhobic coverage (Anderson and Weymouth, 1999; Brookes, 1999; Hardt-Mautner, 1995).

Later investigations point to controversial issues, such as the much discussed 'democratic deficit' or the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, to explain Eurosceptic coverage in British media (Gavin, 2001; Khabaz, 2018; Startin, 2015). Hawkins (2012) finds two Eurosceptic frames which conceive of 'the EU as a foreign power and the EU as a bargaining forum' (p. 565). Galpin and Trenz (2017) argue that 'the negativity bias of

political news' (p. 65) can at least in part explain the Euroscepticism of British media, whereas Daddow (2012) maintains that Rupert Murdoch's influence since the 1980s has been decisive in turning the British press against the EU. Copeland and Copsey (2017), instead, contend that the absence of a strong pro-European voice, paired with a long prevailing lack of interest in European affairs, had allowed a vocal minority to dominate the agenda, what they call 'issue capture'. Scholarly investigations into how the media covered the Brexit referendum found that broadcasters and print media focussed on a very limited range of topics (immigration and the economy being the most salient ones) and showed a notable bias towards Leave (Deacon et al., 2016; Levy et al., 2016). As far as researchers considered emotions when analysing British media coverage of European affairs, they focused, as mentioned above, on negative emotions such as anger and fear. There is also surprisingly little investigation into the disinformation spread with this coverage, Anderson and Weymouth (1999) and Chadwick et al. (2018) being among the few exceptions. This study, therefore, fills a gap in the existing literature.

Data

The corpus of news stories used in this article is based on the 'Euromyths' blog that was curated by the former Representation of the European Commission in the UK until 2019 (it has since been taken off the internet, but I copied all entries during the summer of 2019). The blog consisted of 679 alphabetically sorted keyword entries that were all linked to the refutation of disputed news stories. Accounting for 256 duplicates, where different keywords linked to the same blog post, the disputed claims amount to 423 keyword entries. All but 40 of these 423 entries referenced the media that published the falsehood, and in some cases provided links to the relevant online news stories. However, none of the disputed news stories itself was documented or reproduced on the blog. Therefore, to build the text corpus for this article, the 'Euromyths'-blog could only be a starting point. Utilising the references on the blog, and searching the online archives Factiva and Nexis, I collected 378 articles, 334 of which can be classified as news stories, the remaining items as opinion pieces.

The sample texts that this study will analyse were selected from the corpus of 334 Euromyth news stories. Six news stories were selected to represent a period of 20 years, covering the time from the fiercely debated ratification of the Maastricht Treaty up to a year after David Cameron's Bloomberg speech. The sample was selected to reflect the make-up of the Euromyths corpus. For instance, food is the topic covered most often (17% of the corpus news stories); consequently, two out of the sample of six are food stories. Sexual innuendo is another prominent feature of Euromyths stories, which is represented by the topic of one sample story, and additionally displayed in the language of another one. Nearly two thirds of Euromyths stories (62%) were published in the popular press; in the sample for this study four out of six stories were published in tabloid newspapers, one in a broadsheet newspaper (36% in the corpus), and one by the public broadcaster BBC (2.4% in the corpus). Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* published the most Euromyths, followed by the *Daily Telegraph*. Accordingly, I selected two *Daily Mail* articles and one from the *Telegraph* for my sample.

The following sample stories were selected: 'Brussels sprouts the curve-free cumber' (Pendlebury, 1993), published in the *Daily Mail* on 7 May 1993; 'Brussels finally goes bananas' (Davis, 1994), published in the *Daily Mail* on 21 September 1994; 'New rules forbid dog bones' (BBC News, 2004), published on *BBC News Online* on 25 May 2004; 'Hands off our barmaids' boobs' (Spanton, 2005), published in *The Sun* on 4 August 2005; 'EU can stick your flag in the basement, says Pickles' (Holehouse, 2014), published on *The Telegraph online* website on 20 January 2014; 'Well, that sucks' (Sayid, 2014), published in the *Daily Mirror* on 22 August 2014.

Method

For the analysis of my data I adopt Fairclough's (2016) dialectical-relational approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), which aims to research 'the particular significance of semiosis, and of dialectical relations between semiosis and other social elements, in the social processes [. . .] under investigation' (p. 90). I utilised Fairclough's approach to investigate linguistic strategies in my sample texts in relation to the political context which I have briefly delineated in the introduction and which I will detail further in the discussion chapter of this article.

For the investigation of emotions in my sample texts I build on appraisal theory (Martin and Rose, 2007; Martin and White, 2005), which in turn is indebted to Michael Halliday's systemic functional linguistic (Martin and Rose, 2007: XI; Martin and White, 2005: xii; Stenvall, 2014: 462) and thus belongs to the broader field of discourse analysis (Martin and Rose, 2007; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019: 47). Appraisal theory has developed a set of tools to analyse evaluations (or 'appraisals') as 'a system of interpersonal meanings' (Martin and Rose, 2007: 26). It divides appraisals into 'attitudes', which are 'concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgements of behaviour and evaluation of things', 'engagement', which deals with the source of the attitude, and 'graduation', which describes the intensity of the attitude (Martin and White, 2005: 35). Martin and Rose (2007) and Martin and White (2005) both use the word 'feeling' to include emotions as well as judgements and evaluations, whereas they use 'emotion' and 'affect' generally in the same sense. However, they also use all three words interchangeably (e.g. Martin and Rose, 2007: 28). In this article, I prefer the word 'emotion', but where I use 'feelings' or 'affect' both will mean the same as 'emotion'. For the purpose of analysing emotions in the Euromyths news stories, I borrow from Karin Wahl-Jorgenson's (2013) study of the 'strategic ritual of emotionality' (pp. 133−134) and focus on the questions how emotions are expressed, who is the source of the emotional expression, and what role does emotion play in the narrative structure of the news story?

In particular for answering the last question, I draw on Roland Barthes' mythology. I argue that Barthes' (2013 [1957]) theory of 'myth as a type of speech' (p. 217) can help explain the emotional impact of the Euromyths news stories as powerful Eurosceptic stories because it helps to understand the role of emotion in the narrative structure of the news story. Barthes (2013 [1957]) develops his theory of myth, building on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiology, in his essay 'Myth Today', which he published in 1957 to complement his collection of everyday myths that he had written between 1954 and 1956. Barthes describes myth as a 'message' (p. 217) that sits on top of language as a 'second-order

semiological system' (p. 223). Barthes gives the example of a photo in the French magazine *Paris Match* that shows a black man in French uniform who salutes the French flag. On the first, the literal level of language, the photo means nothing but a black man in uniform who salutes the French flag. The myth becomes apparent on the second level, when the 'meaning' – a black man in uniform gives the French salute – retreats and turns into the 'form' for a 'concept' which is motivated by an ideology – the all-inclusiveness of French imperiality in Barthes' example (pp. 226–228). Barthes argues that this process of mythification naturalises the phenomenon of which it speaks. According to Barthes, myth is 'depoliticised speech', because it denies the historical origins of the phenomena it talks about: 'it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification' (p. 255). I will use Barthes' theory of myth to deepen the analysis of the narrative structure of the Euromyths.

Analysis

I divide my analysis following the three above mentioned questions (How are emotions expressed? Who is the source of the emotional expression? What role does emotion play in the narrative structure of the news story?). However, the answers to these questions are interlinked, because how emotions are expressed needs in part to be answered by who expresses them and what function this fulfils in the narrative structure of the news story.

How are emotions expressed?

Martin and Rose (2007), apart from dividing emotions into positive and negative ones, distinguish between their direct and indirect expression (p. 29). The Euromyths display very few words that directly denote an emotional state (Martin and Rose, 2007: 29–30). Out of a total of 2065 words for all six sample articles, only 16 directly denote an emotional state: 'laughed', 'loved', 'surprise', 'ridicule', 'amused', 'contempt', 'laugh', 'surprised', 'worried' (Pendlebury, 1993), 'fun' (Davis, 1994), 'blasted', 'raged', 'frothing', 'fumed' (Spanton, 2005), and 'confused', (not) 'happy' (BBC News, 2004). A further two verbal phrases describe 'physical symptoms' from which it is possible to infer an emotional state (Martin and Rose, 2007: 31): 'will have drinkers choking on their pints' (Spanton, 2005) and 'slammed' (Sayid, 2014). These emotion-words and -phrases are very unevenly distributed: the majority occurs in only one article (Pendlebury, 1993), and out of the two latest news stories (Holehouse, 2014; Sayid, 2014), only in the latter one (Sayid, 2014) one verb from which an emotional state can be inferred appears, whereas the *Telegraph*-story has no emotion word at all. Furthermore, nine of the emotion words denote mirth, but they appear only in two of the six stories (Davis, 1994; Pendlebury, 1993). Four emotion words as well as the two verbal phrases relate to anger, all but one again from only one article (Spanton, 2005). Another article (BBC News, 2004) uses two words to describe two different negative emotional states ('confused', (not) 'happy'). The use of emotion words, therefore, does not offer a coherent picture of the emotional state expressed in the sample Euromyths stories.

That changes when more complex linguistic features are considered. All of the sample stories, apart from the BBC News article, employ word plays and puns, from which

mirth can be inferred, some of them do so extensively (most extensively Davis, 1994, and Pendlebury, 1993). The Euromyths story about the alleged ban of curved cucumbers (Pendlebury, 1993) starts with a pun in the headline ('Brussels sprouts the curve-free cucumber'). Puns then play on the theme of curvature and vegetables, adding sexual innuendo in some cases: the regulation is 'to iron out the *kinks* in British cucumbers', they will no longer 'be allowed to *droop*', a 'slight deviation will be vegetably incorrect', and the article asks 'how does a cucumber get *kinky*?' (my emphases). Similarly, the news story about the alleged ban of bent bananas (Davis, 1994) uses a pun in its headline ('Brussels finally goes bananas') and continues to employ the banana- and fruit theme for comic effect ('The ruling from Brussels was *straight* to the point', 'The latest decree from the *old fruits* of the European Commission', to omit the precise angle of allowed banana-curvature from the regulation 'was not a *slip-up*', 'anticipating accusations of being out of its fruit tree', '*banana shake*-up' [my emphases]). The 'barmaids'-article plays to comic effect with the double meaning of 'cover up' ('Brussels bureaucrats have ordered a cover-up'), and the *Telegraph* and the *Daily Mirror* sample stories both use puns in their headlines ('EU can stick your flag in the basement', 'Well, that sucks' – playing on the double meaning for 'sucks' as to vacuum-clean and as a condemning slang word).

The wordplays, puns, and the comic wording (Fairclough, 1992: 190–192) come together to create what appraisal theory, leaning on Halliday, describes as 'prosody' (Martin and White, 2005: 19): The comic language 'sprawl[s] out and colour[s]' the whole news story (Martin and Rose, 2007: 31) and thus establishes a humorous attitude that evokes the emotion of mirth. The prosody of mirth is reinforced in four of the sample stories through sentences that describe imagined comical scenes, in each case towards the end of the article. The imagined, mirth-inducing scene becomes the culmination point, in each case summing up the discursively constructed absurdity of the alleged regulation: The 'cucumber'-article imagines 'Ministry of Agriculture inspectors, stalking New Covent Garden, tape measures at the ready'; the 'bananas'-article ends on the fantasy of 'individual shops – where signs in future are likely to read: "Yes, we have no bent bananas."'; the 'barmaids'-article ends with the promise of a satirical contest for photographs of barmaids' décolletés ('We'll print the best – and make a plaster cast of the winner's boobs to hang in your local'.); the *Telegraph*-story about the place for the EU flag ends on a mocking suggestion for the right place of the unloved flag ('a spare room in the basement of the building thanks to the closure of [. . .] the civil servants' subsidised pub known as the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions Darts Bar').

There are no emotion words in the Euromyths sample stories to express directly the emotion of pride. However, pride can be inferred from the evaluation of British people as strong and funny or witty, in some cases as stronger and wittier than Europeans. The 'cucumber'-story describes 'British people' as (economically) strong and self-reliant (a '£44 million cucumber industry' with a production of '90,000 tons a year, mostly for UK consumption, in the face of tough Dutch and Spanish competition', whilst British producers 'do not get the subsidies enjoyed by the Dutch or other foreign growers'). This pride in the stronger British cucumber industry is linked to mirth when the industry is said to meet the alleged cucumber regulation with 'ridicule', and British 'produce is

wonkier than that of the Dutch'. The 'barmaids'-story, as has been already shown, constructs the allegedly banned décolletés as priceworthy and thus a matter of pride (rather than of EU regulation), while the satirical character of the competition again links pride to mirth.

Pride and mirth are also linked in the *Telegraph*'s 'flag'-story: The mocking voice of the headline ('EU can stick your flag in the basement') represents the speech by Communities Secretary Eric Pickles in the House of Commons as an act of mirth-eliciting derision. The actual quote, which the article directly represents ('"This burdensome law to fly the EU flag has now gone. This small step shows our nation can and should claim powers back from Brussels," Mr Pickles told the Commons') does not back up the interpretation offered in the headline (which is therefore revealed as the authorial voice's interpretation which will be analysed in more detail in the next section). Instead, it evokes a feeling of superiority over the EU and thus pride: Mr Pickles sets out a positive achievement (claiming back powers) which 'our nation' attained against 'Brussels'. Similarly, the 'vacuum cleaner'-article in the *Daily Mirror* evokes national pride by pointing to the achievements and the power of British technology ('roar and suction of a big motor'; 'top-selling machines'; a quote by the British designer James Dyson, identified as 'who gave the world the bagless vacuum cleaner', draws attention to the 'costly research and development').

To summarise: mirth is the dominant emotion in the Euromyths news stories. Pride occurs in four of the six sample stories, in three of which it is linked to mirth. Only the first two sample stories express mirth directly. However, with the exception of the *BBC*-story all sample articles are infused with indirect expressions of mirth in a prosodic fashion.

Who is the source of the emotional expression?

Emotion in news stories can be expressed either by the 'authorial voice' of the text (Martin and White, 2005), or by people whose emotions are reported. The Euromyths mostly express emotions through the authorial voice. The few instances of reported emotions mostly reflect the emotion that is already present in the authorial voice. For instance, the 'cucumber'-article quotes the farmer Sylvia Cuffaro with an expression of mirth ('"Am I allowed to laugh?" she asked') that echoes the authorial expression of mirth at the beginning of the article ('We laughed [. . .]').

A noticeable exception presents the 'barmaids'-article that reports anger ('the move was blasted as affront', 'Annie Powell [. . .] raged', 'Germans are already frothing', 'Christian Ude fumed') whilst the authorial voice expresses mirth. The authorial voice articulates mirth through a mocking wording ('crackpot war on busty barmaids', 'Po-faced penpushers') and, as already discussed, through the imagined satirical competition in which the news story ends and culminates. This suggested competition proposes an action that turns the anger into laughter. The prosody of mirth, which is thus created through the authorial voice, overcomes the reported anger and turns it into mirth.

The last two sample Euromyths stories, both published in 2014, each report quotes from which the emotion of pride can be inferred. The *Telegraph*'s 'flag'-story quotes Communities Secretary Eric Pickles' defiance against the EU ('"[. . .] our nation can and

should claim powers back from Brussels," Mr Pickles told the Commons'); the *Daily Mirror*'s 'vacuum cleaner'-story quotes British developer James Dyson's insistence that the superiority of British technology was achieved through hard work ('[. . .] it takes costly research and development'.). In the *Daily Mirror* article, the emotion of pride can also be inferred from the authorial voice when it stresses the strength of British vacuum cleaners and the eminence of British designer James Dyson who 'gave the world' a specific type of vacuum cleaner.

Three of the six Euromyths sample stories (Davis, 1994; Pendlebury, 1993; Spanton, 2005) construct the authorial voice as a conversational voice. This happens either directly as in the 'cucumber'-story, where the lead opens with a 'personal deixis' (Fairclough, 2016: 101) which includes the audience in assumed shared laughter ('We laughed when they tried to ban prawn-flavoured crisps and the green colouring in mushy peas'.). Or a conversational tone is implicitly constructed through the puns and word plays and a casual wording. Puns and word plays are typical for the tabloid style and present, in Fowler's (1991) analysis, an 'aesthetic' use of language (p. 44) which serves to disarm 'even a critical reader [. . .] by pleasure' (p. 45). The jokey tone is also typical for what has been observed as the conversational style of tabloid newspapers (Fowler, 1991; Sparks, 1992). However, as the *Telegraph*-article shows, puns in Euromyths news stories are not restricted to the tabloid press. Nor indeed is the use of personal deixis to construct a conversational style. For instance, an article from the corpus of Euromyths news stories that was published in the broadsheet Sunday paper *The Observer* combines a jokey tone with directly addressing its reader ('You might just get away [. . .]', 'To you, sir [. . .]', 'you need to fill in' (The Observer, 1994)).

The authorial voice is the dominant source of emotional expression in the Euromyths. It is especially prominent where it departs from factual reporting and imagines, as noted in the previous section, a scene to evoke mirth. In many instances it uses a conversational tone to construct a common subjective reality and world view with its audience (Fowler, 1991: 57). This latter point will become clearer when we turn to the role emotion plays in the narrative structure of the news stories.

What role does emotion play in the narrative structure of the news story?

The narrative structure of the Euromyths is constituted by the news story genre, understood as 'a relatively stable set of conventions that is associated with, and partly enacts, a socially ratified type of activity' (Fairclough, 1992: 126). Essential to news stories is their reference to the real world as they make claims to the truth (Fairclough, 2003: 85). Tuchman (1972) observed the 'ritualistic procedures' (p. 661) news journalists use to legitimise the objective factuality of their reports, and thus their truth claims. These rituals include 'presenting conflicting possibilities' (p. 667), providing evidence in the form of 'facts' that are deemed by reporters to 'speak for themselves' (ibid.), offering quotes through which 'the reporter may remove his opinions from the story by getting others to say what he himself thinks' (p. 668), and structuring a news story like an 'inverted pyramid', which means that reporters put first what they consider the most important information (p. 670). These practices, which Tuchman witnessed in US newsrooms, are equally taught in British journalism schools and supported by British journalism organisations as

established professional practices (Franklin et al., 2005: 122; Harcup, 2009; Smith, 2007). The professional practices of news reporting, moreover, have been found to be the same across tabloid and broadsheet journalism (Connell, 1998: 28), despite a clear difference between popular and quality newspapers in Britain (Sparks, 1992).

All six sample Euromyths stories enact at least three of Tuchman's four 'rituals of objectivity'. They present conflicting possibilities by quoting both, EU officials and critics of the EU regulation in question; they provide facts deemed to speak for themselves (e.g. 'bananas must be a minimum of 5.5 in long and 1.06 in round' [Davis, 1994]); they offer quotes through which the reporters remove their opinion from the story and let others say what they think (e.g. 'Tim Evans of the Right-wing think tank the Adam Smith Institute [. . .] said: "The whole European ideal is put at risk by these lunatic ideas [. . .]"' (Pendlebury, 1993), "It seems to me to be another barmy EU directive," said Mr Swanson' (BBC News, 2004)); and all, apart from the 'cucumber'-article, structure the news story adhering to the inverted pyramid.

However, most sample stories also depart from the news genre through their use of language. This is most prominent in the three Euromyths that use a conversational tone. The language employed by these Euromyths creates, as has been demonstrated, a prosody of mirth, which in several articles is infused by pride. The conflict between the news genre and the comical language can be more precisely described as the conflict of two discourse types (Fairclough, 1992: 190–192). The factual news discourse is disrupted and thus undermined by a contradicting discourse type which manifests itself through the comical, mirth-eliciting wording.

The jokey, jesting tone constitutes a comical discourse that can be read as a 'metadiscourse', 'where the text producer distinguishes different levels within her own text', and which 'implies that the speaker is situated above or outside her own discourse' (Fairclough, 1992: 122). The conversational, commenting voice stands aside to ridicule the new regulation. Furthermore, the ridiculing voice converts the enacting of Tuchman's 'rituals of objectivity' into empty gestures. For example, where news reporters, according to Tuchman (1972), use quotes as 'supporting evidence' (p. 668), the jokey voice in the 'bananas'-story instead employs quotes to ridicule the quoted. Similarly, when the *Telegraph* news story in its last sentence reports the view of the European Commission ('A European Commission spokesman insisted they came up with the rule change'.), it does so with mocking derision: The verb 'insisted' signals a subjective view which can be disputed; the informal 'came up with', the only instance of conversational tone in this article, devalues the claim; placing the 'insistence' at the end of an article which reported the opposite renders the spokesman's claim laughable. Equally, the correction by an 'EU spokeswoman' in the 'vacuum cleaner'-story is undermined as the *Daily Mirror* places her 'insistence' at the end of a news story that had already constructed a common world view with its audience through shared mirth and pride.

In the same way, the other three seemingly performed 'rituals of objectivity' – the provision of 'facts', the quotes from officials, and the 'inverted pyramid' structure of the narrative – are not exercised to provide an 'objective' report, but to reveal the absurdity of the reported regulation, where the jokey voice acts just like a jester's 'aside' in a Shakespearean comedy (Adamczyk, 2013; Mullini, 1985). The jokey, conversational style, as Roger Fowler (1991) observes, 'implies a commonly held view of the world, a

shared subjective reality that is taken for granted and does not have to be proved' (p. 57). The disruption of factual news discourse through a pleasant, mirth- (and pride-)inducing conversational metadiscourse is therefore significant. It transforms the news story into an expression of ideological agreement.

Discussion: The political context and mythmaking

The Euromyths news stories appeared in the context of a Eurosceptic discourse that eventually led up to the Brexit referendum and the vote for Britain to leave the EU. The first two of my sample stories, which are also two of the earliest Euromyths news stories, were published in May 1993 and September 1994, during and shortly after the 'gruelling' (Duff, 1994: 64) process of debating and passing the controversial Maastricht Bill through the British Parliament. Their ridicule of − alleged − EU harmonisation echoes Margaret Thatcher's insistence on national differences and sovereignty against the concentration of 'power at the centre of a European conglomerate' in her 1988 Bruges speech (Thatcher, 1988), which became central to the Maastricht rebellion and the Eurosceptic discourse (Daddow et al., 2019; Forster, 2002). The 'finally' in the headline of the 'bananas'-story ('Brussels finally goes bananas') and the reference this article and the 'cucumber'-story make to previous Euromyths ('We laughed when they tried to ban the prawn-flavoured crisps and the green colouring in mushy peas' (Pendlebury, 1993), '[. . .] the European Commission – already infamous for trying to crack down on prawn cocktail crisps and getting tough with excessively curved cucumbers' (Davis, 1994)) indicate that these news stories are part of an 'intertextual chain' (Fairclough, 1992: 130) of previous EU regulations, (unfavourable) media reports of these regulations, and Eurosceptic speeches.

The 'cucumber'- and the 'bananas'-story, written 'amid the furore over Maastricht' (Pendlebury, 1993), are located at the beginning of this chain. They set the tone and establish the Euromyths as a kind of text type (cf. Fairclough, 1992: 78). The 'barmaids'- and the *BBC*'s 'dogs' bone'-story are published at a time when the Euromyths as a type of Eurosceptic news story had already been regularly reported, rebutted, and sometimes mocked in other newspapers (e.g. Castle and Grice, 2004; Sebestyen, 1996). However, in 2005 most British people had lost interest in European affairs. At the general election in that year, just 2% of voters named Europe or the Euro as the most important issue facing the country (Whiteley et al., 2005, 810). By the time the final two sample stories where published, in January and in August 2014, Prime Minister David Cameron's Bloomberg speech had promised the Brexit referendum, and the public interest had somewhat returned. Still, the 11% of voters who now considered Europe or the EU the most important electoral issue placed it only in seventh position, behind 'Foreign policy/ foreign affairs' (Ipsos Mori, 2014).

The Euromyths therefore sit in the context of fierce ideological conflict on the one hand and limited public interest on the other. Their use of mirth and pride has a double function. Firstly, as positive emotions both render news stories on a tedious and unloved topic (EU regulation) pleasing to read. Secondly, the Euromyths utilise shared mirth and pride to construct a common world view with their audience. The agreement is either conjured by the jester's voice in a conversational metadiscourse undermining the news

story, or it is constructed through the prosody of mirth (in some instances linked to pride) where the emotion is expressed by an authorial voice that mirrors the reported emotion.

The second function can be explored more profoundly by applying Roland Barthes' concept of myth. It needs to be stressed that 'myth' in Barthes' sense does not mean 'lie'. It is therefore different from and should not be confused with how the word 'myth' is used in the term 'Euromyths'. As myth in Barthes' (2013 [1957]) sense the Euromyths news stories are turned into an 'alibi' (p. 239) for an ideological message. The news story, like the picture of the black soldier saluting the French flag in Barthes' example, retreats into the 'form' for the 'concept' that is the actual message. By utilising mirth and pride to construct an agreement between authorial voice and audience, the Euromyths news stories become an 'alibi' for the myth of defiance against the EU. The mythification 'depoliticises' the Euromyths news stories in the sense that they construct the proud, laughing defiance against the EU not as a political argument, but as undisputable ideology. Their simple message, in Barthes' words, 'is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact' (p. 256).

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of positive emotions in the Eurosceptic news stories that are known as 'Euromyths'. Employing critical discourse analysis and appraisal theory and drawing on Roland Barthes' mythology, it found that the sample news stories utilise mirth and pride to construct a depoliticised agreement between the articles' authorial voice and the audience. This renders the reporting of facts a mere alibi for the myth of British defiance against an overbearing EU.

The depoliticisation through myth is ideological and serves a political purpose. The Euromyths employ mirth and pride to compensate for a loss of power. Some news stories report mirth as an active and thus empowering response to overcome anger against an imposing European bureaucracy. Some report pride as affirmation of a positive British identity.

As shown, the Euromyths belong to a Eurosceptic discourse which deplores the loss of national sovereignty to a centralised 'European conglomerate' (Thatcher, 1988). The depoliticised myth naturalises British defiance. Turning euphoric, it overcomes the melancholia felt in a post-imperial Britain (Gilroy, 2004; Henkel, 2014; Kelsey, 2017).

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