

**THE ARMADA IS COMING:
EDITORIALESE STRATEGIES IN ECONOMIC COMMENT COLUMNS**

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Abstract

This paper analyses the *economic comment columns* of the British electronic versions of *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian* and *The Independent* when dealing with the numerous examples of *Spanish corporations* that have crossed the Channel in order to buy *British companies*. Firstly a classification of the *strategies* present in these articles will be provided. Then, I shall analyse the results. For this purpose I shall resort to Baker's recent adaptation (2006) of Bruner's narrative theory (1991), which attempts to reflect upon the ways in which various types of conflicts are reflected in the news. I shall cover the sample by identifying *framing patterns* (Baker 2006: 104ff) in the discursive construction of the texts: ambiguity, labelling and repositioning of participants. I shall put two issues to the test: whether the British news media project a negative view of the arrival of Spanish capital and whether this view is present to the same extent in the four media.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades economic development has made it possible for Spain to become one of the strongest economies in the world. According to International Monetary Fund's 2005 estimates, the country ranks 9th in nominal Gross Domestic Product (or GDP) and 25th in GDP per capita, whereas the World Bank's figures for the same year places the country in the 8th position, just before Canada. It has the fifth largest economy in Europe and has been described as one of the "most vibrant economies" in the continent by the (*Financial Times*, 17/02/07), which has prompted many of its companies to embark on foreign ventures, either on their own or with other international corporations. Ferrovial, Telefónica, Banco Santander and Iberdrola feature among the Spanish companies buying European assets and showing a particular interest in British ones. Ferrovial, for instance, sold Budapest Airport in 2007 after buying BAA, which includes some of Britain's most important airports. Banco Santander now owns one of Britain's most important mortgage providers, Abbey National, whereas Telefónica acquired the mobile firm 02. Iberdrola, on its part, bought the utility company Scottish Power also in 2007. Additionally, many other Spanish companies have settled in the UK. Retailer Inditex is now established in most British high streets. Its main brand, Zara, has become Britain's favourite and, in London, lies next to traditional stores like Selfridges or the exclusive Harrod's. As has been noted, the trend is likely to continue due to the strength of the Spanish economy and the open-market policy that foreign companies find in the UK. But the British press does not seem to have shown much enthusiasm to what has been described as an "invasion" of Spanish capital.

In this paper, I set out to explore the reaction of British quality-papers towards the arrival of Spanish money in comment columns and editorials. Both have recourse to editorialese, which can be defined as a series of lexical, grammatical or textual strategies characteristic of editorials that may also be used in news reporting or commenting whenever the writer is attempting to imbue the text with an ideological position or interpretation of the event. In this sense, we might make an initial distinction between factual and evaluative texts, the former presenting the events before the eyes of the reader, the latter providing opinions

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páginas 69-81

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about them. Fowler has underlined the convenience of this distinction (1991: 208) in order to establish a clear differentiation of the objective and the subjective within the same medium. Alonso (2004: 44), on her part, distinguishes three subtypes to explain the different nuances in the approach to the news event: the informative text, the editorial or opinion article and the interpretative text, which would combine features of the first two subgenres. For the purpose of this paper, I shall obviate the difference pointed out for the last two types, and, thus, editorialesque will be used as an umbrella term very much as “officialese” is used to refer to the lexicon and structures characteristic of “official English”, “journalese” to those of “journalistic English” and so on.

2. The corpus

The paper will cover a small corpus of one hundred texts, selected from the electronic version of Britain’s four quality newspapers: *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph* as well as their Sunday editions. The choice of these media rather than economic newspapers like the *Financial Times* is based on the understanding that the circulation of the quality papers is broader than that of the economic media and, in this sense, will reach a wider sector of the audience. The distribution of the articles is as follows: thirty from the *Daily Telegraph*, twenty-seven from *The Guardian* (and its Sunday version *The Observer*), twenty-two from *The Independent* and twenty-one from *The Times*. They were published between August 2003 and August 2007. The selection of texts from their archives has been carried out on a random basis. I have attempted to avoid those texts that could be clearly labelled as factual and chosen those that were clearly presented as comment articles or that were identified as a combination of factual and evaluative elements, but with a stronger presence of the latter over the former. It should be noted that these papers do not follow a standard procedure to introduce comment articles. They might be referred to as “comment columns”, “opinion columns”, “economic sketches”, “business comments” or “analysis columns”. They might not even be identified as such. In this case, the headlines have been taken as indicative of the evaluative, rather than factual, nature of the content of the article. Bell (1991: 185-189) stated that headlines have two main functions: informative (of the event being reported) and persuasive (to attract prospective readers). But, although he indicated that “evaluation and other commentary categories are absent” from headline structure (1991: 189), evaluation may also be a relevant component of the headline. It is precisely this element that has contributed to the selection of some of the texts analyzed here. Consider, for example, the following:

- (1) Spain’s ship comes in at last (*The Times*, 08/06/2006)
Failed strategies (*The Guardian*, 13/06/2006)
The Stock Exchange should stay British (*The Observer*, 11/02/2007)

Here the headlines announce the position of the writers (probably on behalf of the media they work for) with regards to the content. The first two examples are quite opaque since the first headline uses a metaphor that would require further reading in order to be understood, whereas the second one provides the readers with an evaluation of the event even if the facts have not been reported yet. Thus, the informative function suggested by Bell as characteristic of headline structure is reduced to the minimum. In the third headline, the use of the modal “should” clearly indicates stance, which is underlined by the fact that the word

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

Recibido: 8-1-2008

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“comment” is placed above the headline. However, if, after reading the whole text, the informative content superseded the evaluative analysis of the news event, the text was automatically discarded.

The analysis will consider two main issues as regards the evaluative reporting of the arrival of Spanish capital in the UK. Firstly, I shall ascertain whether the texts project a positive or negative view onto the readers. In the country that epitomizes free trade and globalization within the European Union vis-à-vis the more restrained positions of the other major countries (Germany, France, Italy and Spain), I shall consider whether the free trade economic policies fostered by the successive British governments are questioned by the media when affecting Britain. Secondly, I shall consider whether these views are present in all the four media or offer different nuances depending on the side of the political spectrum they represent. Both will be discussed in the last section, once the results have been presented and commented upon.

3. The methodology

The study begins with a table presenting the results concerning the recurrent use of lexical items and other features that imbue the texts with their evaluative content. This table will allow us to examine the device called “labelling” as well as two other strategies (ambiguity and repositioning of the participants) which are components of the “narrative framework” (Baker 2006) favoured here. This will be followed by an interpretation of the results based on Baker’s proposals for text analysis.

Baker’s theoretical framework is a critical approach to texts based on previous proposals by Bruner (1991) and Fisher (1984, 1985, 1987). It was originally conceived to be applied to Social and Communication Sciences, but Baker has adapted it for the study and analysis of multimodal texts (that is, verbal, visual or a combination of both). Although the author works within the discipline of Translation Studies, the framework has been designed to be applied to any genres or types. Baker herself uses it not only in connection with translated texts but with other micro and macrottexts in first language (Baker 2006: 88-96) as did Fisher (1985, 1997) and Sommers and Gibson (1994) before her.

“Narratives” are defined as “public and personal stories that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour” (Baker 2006: 19) and represent and construct our perceptions of the world at the same time. They are classified into four main types: ontological or biographical, public, conceptual and meta narratives. Of particular interest for the analysis of the texts are the second and the fourth types, since public narratives refer to the stories that circulate within larger institutions such as the family or the nation, and meta narratives are concerned with the stories in which we are embedded as individuals appertaining to a particular time and space (Sommers and Gibson 1994; Baker 2006: 44-48). The approach, although not explicitly mentioned by Baker, is concomitant with Fairclough’s version of discourse analysis (1992, 1995a, 1995b). However, Baker’s proposal places special emphasis on the flexibility of “narratives” to refer to both hegemonic stories circulating in society as well as to those stories that contest them. Narrative theory, as Baker herself explicits, lacks a framework capable of carrying out textual analysis. For this reason, she provides a number of tools, based largely on functional linguistics, to approach texts, either verbal, visual or, more broadly speaking, polysemiotic. Of these tools, we find three of particular interest here:

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

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ambiguity, labelling and repositioning of participants¹. These three elements are part of the larger concept of “framing”, which implies an active participation on the part of the writer in the construction of reality (Baker 2006: 106), or the construction of certain construes of reality. The elements that will be presented in the next section fall into the strategies that the author of a text might have resort to in order to interpret or “frame” reality, in this case a given news event or series of news events.

By “labelling” Baker implies the use of any “lexical item, term or phrase to identify a person, place, group, event or any other key element in a narrative” (2006: 122). The choices made by the writers are certainly powerful tools to portray the story, or comment on the news event in our case, in a certain light. Names and titles are particularly relevant in the creation of certain images in the mind of the readers and, consequently, appeal to their own recollections and representations of the world to embed contemporary stories, but they are not the only ones. Baker mentions the case of the various forms in which the West Bank can be referred to in Western media (2006: 127), but there are other examples equally disturbing. I have worked upon the case of the electronic version of the CNN in its Spanish and English versions with respect to a report on a series of rapes in an American university. The English text presented the news actors as “alleged rapists”, in accordance with the American legal system, but also with the Spanish one. The Spanish text, though, transferred the term “presuntas” [alleged] to the victims, offering a different narrative of the event (Valdeón 2007b).

“Ambiguity” refers to the strategies that present “the same set of events [...] in different ways” (Baker 2006: 107). This contributes to create competing or conflicting ways in which those events can be perceived. Baker, following Chilton, mentions how violent conflicts can be framed as war, civil war, terrorism, etc (2006: 107). In a previous piece of research I covered, for instance, the Basque conflict in Anglophone and Spanish media. The same actors as well as their actions were referred to as “separatist” or “terrorist” depending on the medium and the language we are dealing with (2007a: 99-118).

Finally “repositioning of the participants” is related to the way “in which participants in any interaction are positioned, or position themselves, in relation to each other and to those outside the immediate event” (Baker 2006: 132). Any change in these positions has an immediate effect on the interpretation of the events.

4. The results

The recurrence of certain lexical items, used in connection with Spanish take-overs of British companies, is presented below. The items covered are “raid” (or any of its derivatives, e. g. “raider”) and two loans from Spanish, “conquistador” (as well as its English version, “conqueror”) and “armada”. The table includes information about the number of articles with one or more occurrences per item. Therefore, the total percentage per medium has been calculated without taking into account that some terms may appear more than once in one single article (that is, “raid” or any of its derivatives may be used several times in a given

¹ The term “participants” refers to what researchers into news writing have called “actors” (Fowler 1991, Bell 1991).

column). However, if two different items feature in one text, they are considered separately (that is, if both “raid” and “armada” are used, the article is included in both categories).

The total percentage for the use of one item in the whole of the corpus is straightforward since it covers a hundred texts and each item or group of items within the same text has been counted as one.

	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Independent</i>	<i>The Times</i>	Total in the corpus
“Raid”	6	4	4	2	16 (16%)
“Conquistador”	4	2	2	3	11 (11%)
“Armada”	5	2	3	3	13 (13%)
Total per medium	15 (43.4%)	8 (27.8%)	9 (34.9%)	8 (24.3%)	40 (40%)

Table 1. Labelling.

In the table we can see that the tendency to introduce hostile labels is higher in the conservative *Daily Telegraph* than in the other three media survey, including the *The Times*. Particularly interesting is the repeated use of the item “raid”, although the electronic version of the *Telegraph* also has recourse to additional derogatory terms or expressions. For instance, the paper uses the phrase “Latin country” in a disparaging way. This has not been found in the other three. Conversely, it is noticeable that *The Times* is the least inclined to resort to items aimed at portraying the companies (and their country of origin) in a negative light.

	<i>Daily Telegraph</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Independent</i>	<i>The Times</i>	Total
Ambiguity	17	6	7	4	34 (34%)
Repositioning	11	4	6	8	29 (29%)

Table 2. Ambiguity and repositioning

This table reflects the use of strategies that promote ambiguity towards the events and/or reposition the information. This is carried out by establishing a contrast between good corporate practices in the UK and the protectionist policy of its continental counterparts, notably Germany, France and Spain. “Labelling” can also be instrumental in creating ambiguity or repositioning the actors of the news event, but other strategies are also at play. For instance, writers can resort to direct speech or quotations of British executives in order to expose the position of a Spanish corporation. They may also provide readers with a comment on the positive aspects of a given corporate move to follow with a sentence beginning with, for instance, “However...” in order to introduce the harmful effects of the take-over for the British economy, companies or consumers.

As for repositioning of the participants, writers also tend to use labels to introduce historical references that will establish relationships between past and current events. This strategy might be aimed at portraying Spanish companies in a negative light, but they can also be used to accept the face of a new and vibrant Spain, as we shall see below.

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

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The figures in the table refer to the number of articles where one or more of these strategies are present.

5. Discussion

Although I shall deal with the strategies in three separate sections, it should be noticed that they are intertwined in such a way that references will also be made to the other two as they are being dealt with individually.

5.1. Labelling the actors of the news stories.

Baker stresses that labels are used to identify “a key element or participant in a narrative, then provides an interpretive frame that guides and constrains our response to the narrative in question” (2006: 122). Past images of Spain as a backward country portrayed by British writers such as Laurie Lee or Gerald Durrell have given way to a new Spain whose thriving economy and wealthy corporations are ready to purchase foreign companies. This conjures up past images of Spain in the minds of some writers of Britain’s main newspapers. Golden Age Spain is retrieved and brought to the forefront of the news along with other more traditional metaphors likely to be viewed as representative of the country. The most forceful label encountered in these sites is that of the Armada, or the Spanish Armada as it is usually referred to, which contributes to establish a comparison with the arrival of the new Spanish corporations on British soil. The image is favoured by the more conservative newspapers:

(2) Buy British

The Spanish newspapers were crowing last week over the success of the latest armada to set sail from their shores. Thankfully, the headlines referred not to a fleet of warships but to the Spanish corporate raiders that have snapped up some of Britain's largest companies on a spending spree that has included £9bn for Abbey National, the bank, £17.7bn for O2, the mobile phone network, and last week £10bn for BAA, the owner of the UK's biggest airports. (Ian Dey and Edward Simpkins, *Daily Telegraph*, 10/06/2006)

Here the writers combine the reference to the success of the Spanish companies with an allusion to the Spanish attempt to invade Britain under Philip II. The writers playfully, but also skilfully, introduce a historic element that has traditionally haunted Britain². They start by quoting Spanish newspapers, but gradually introduce the “vocabulary of aggression” (Valdeón 2006: 416), akin to the “militarization of discourse” mentioned by other authors (Fairclough 1992: 195): “corporate raiders”, “fleet of warships” and “snapped up” are reminiscent of a lexicon that connects present and past Spain. But this imaginary fleet is by no means new in *Daily Telegraph* reporting. Some twenty days earlier, the same historic reference had been made in a column entitled “The Wright stuff for BAA”. The pun in the headline is very indicative of the concern over the takeover of the main British airports by Ferrovial, which is labelled as arrogant in the main body of the text. The writer, Martin

² Although recent historians provide us with more balanced accounts of that part of the common history of Spain and the UK (Carr 2001), the vivid images of the failed invasion that have circulated until the 20th century (Green 1895: 415ff) still remain to a great extent.

Baker, resorts to another strategy characteristic of business news: the tendency to attribute human features to corporations. In fact, this personification process allows the writer to voice a sense of relief as the Spanish company encounters difficulties in the British market:

- (3) Permission to land denied. How the Spanish want to jet in, but the construction giant Ferrovial is being thwarted by clever deal traffic control. (Martin Baker, *Daily Telegraph*, 21/05/2006)

The language of aggression is present again by projecting Biblical images of power (“construction giant”) where strength is beaten by intelligence. The closing sentence leaves no doubts, as the writer recaptures the pun on Wright, the British executive opposing the Spanish bid, and draws a final and fine comparison with another historic figure: “If Ferrovial is the Armada, Wright, at present, is Sir Francis Drake”.

But the depiction of Spanish companies as a menace is not exclusive to the more conservative sites. *The Independent* provides its readers with interpretations of the market economy that combine historic memories and present instances of the capitalist policies championed by both Labour and Conservative governments. Cohen, for instance, has written a well-documented book on how New Labour embraced the policies of global capitalism to obtain the support of multinationals and media moguls (2003: 146-147). Thus, ex-Prime Minister Tony Blair is reported to have accepted the rules of the new economy because “the old solutions of rigid economic planning and state control won’t work” (Cohen 2003: 146). However, the reluctance to fully accept the rules of global capitalism is reflected in these two paragraphs which conclude a comment article on Iberdrola’s take-over of the British electricity company Scottish Power:

- (4) But in Britain, many will see Iberdrola as another member of the “new Spanish Armada” of companies launching raids on British firms.

Where their countrymen failed in 1588, when the original Armada Invencible was defeated by Sir Francis Drake, companies like Ferrovial, Telefónica and Banco Santander have proved more successful in gaining a foothold in Britain, by taking over BAA, O2 and Abbey National. (*The Independent* 10/11/2006).

This combination of historic references and present threats substitutes figures and facts, in yet another episode of the recurrent saga of the invasion of the islands by Spanish companies. The text is ripe with “vocabulary of fear and war” (“launching raids”, “Armada Invencible”, “gaining foothold”), clearly reminiscent of the British glorious past and, apparently, the current tendency of its economy to surrender to foreign hands. As Baker points out, names “are particularly powerful means of framing” (2006: 123), that is, names contribute to construe certain images of the world, to project images that need to be accepted by the readers in order to function. Framing is also connected with another element of the “narrative” theory, “selective appropriation”. This implies the conscious use of certain material in order to build the narrative favoured by the writer, responding to either personal or editorial judgements or views. In the case we are examining selective appropriation could be said to be either positive (A+) or negative (A-). It can be argued that the strategy is positive (A+) when the writer has decided to include the information in the text published, whereas it is negative (A-) if the writer has opted to exclude material that might provide readers with a more comprehensive view of the economic and political issue being dealt with. Thus, the historic allusions in (4) as well as the references to recent corporate moves are “positive appropriation” (A+) since they are present in the text. But the writer has been careful enough to resort to negative appropriation (A-), that is, to avoid any references to

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

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take-overs of Spanish companies by British ones: Telefónica bought mobile company O2, but Vodafone had purchased Spanish Airtel years before, Ferrovial took over BAA but National Express acquired the Spanish transport company Alsa. Negative appropriation implies the suppression of material but also the promotion of negative views, which are projected onto the readership.

This defensive position remains very much a stronghold for the British press, as we move towards the more progressive news portals. Both *The Observer* and *The Guardian* resort to similar presentations by using positive and negative selective appropriation and also turning to similar labelling strategies when describing Spanish companies:

- (5) The conquistadors are back. Only this time they have not set their sights on the open economy of Britain but the relatively closed one of France [...] In the UK the conquistadors have bought Abbey (Santander), O2 (Telefónica) and Scottish Power (Iberdrola) with little or no resistance or regulatory restraint. But in France, Italy and Spain itself, companies are encouraged to go on overseas forays but protected from foreign predators at home. (*The Guardian*, 25/04/2007)

All the elements are present once again, including the use of the lexicon of threat, as exemplified in the choice of “foreign predators”. This phrase, although applied to corporations attempting to take over European companies, is used in a paragraph where the predators have been provided a few lines before (Santander, Telefónica, etc) and labelled as “conquistadors”, a term associated in the UK with the black legend of the conquest of the Mayans and the Aztecs. Additionally, *The Observer* tends to promote the image of Spanish entrepreneurs as extremely aggressive. For instance, in recent reports about the attempts to take over the Dutch bank ABN Amro, the paper claims that the “Spanish bank Santander, with which RBS has a close relationship and which is run by the deal-hungry Emilio Botin, owns Abbey in the UK” (17/04/2007), where the CEO-President of Santander is portrayed very negatively.

5.2. Ambiguity.

The previous points link up with the next device: ambiguity. Ambiguity enables the writers to justify a critical approach to the arrival of Spanish capital in the UK. This strategy is widely used in all the sites surveyed, but it is particularly noticeable in the case of the conservative *Daily Telegraph*. This portal tends to present any economic episode as part of a larger strategy and in relation to the weak attitude of the British authorities towards market economy. In this sense the writers resort to “relationality” as a way of interpreting isolated events as part of larger framework and, at the same time, of producing ambiguous representations for the readers. Thus, the acquisition of a British company is interpreted against the background of previous economic moves from other Spanish and European companies, and in connection with the economic regulations at work across the channel. Thus, Ferrovial’s take-over of the main British airports became the perfect excuse to launch a diatribe against the moves by several European governments to put a stop to such attempts within their own boundaries. The column began thus: “Ferrovial’s takeover of BAA is only the latest in a long series of high-profile foreign raids on UK plc.” This opening sentence establishes the mood and goes on to list a number of foreign companies interested in the

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

Recibido: 8-1-2008

Aceptado: 22-2-2008

British corporate market. Then, it proceeds to comment upon some alleged contradictions in mainland Europe. In order to make their point, the writers quote a British top executive:

- (6) However, he too rails against the double standards that prevail when British companies try to buy businesses elsewhere. "What does vex me is the hypocrisy in all this," he says. "Is it any surprise that Spanish companies such as Santander, Telefónica or Ferrovial are buying British companies when the Spanish government is giving its companies a tax bung for buying businesses overseas? (*Daily Telegraph* 10/06/2006)

Ferrovial's act is, therefore, presented as one in a series of episodes that make up the larger picture of the global economy of the 21st century, which reflects an inescapable truth. As news consumers, we are exposed to corporate moves on a daily basis. This is foregrounded by the writers so as to remind their readers of recent events that might make an important impact on the economy of their nation. However, this contradiction also serves to establish the binomial "good practices" versus "bad practices", with the UK representing the former and most other European countries epitomizing the latter, a fact that contributes to promote the anti-European sentiment so cherished by part of the British media (Valdeón 2006). Besides, the writers, once again, are careful to avoid mentioning the number of European and Spanish companies bought by their UK counterparts over the past decade, becoming ambiguous and contradictory in their approach to the issue.

The *Daily Telegraph* also gives vent to other more aggressive views. In a column posted on 09/02/2006, the writer called for a new Sir Francis Drake to put an end to the series of raids by Spanish companies in a column entitled "Spain's reigning predators cast eye over BAA", emphasizing the negative view by using derogatory lexicon which includes the use of expressions like "Latin country" in order to deride the new proprietors of formerly-owned British companies.

5.3. *Repositioning of the participants.*

This is a key feature of "relationality", which might throw light on the position of the writers. So far we have seen that most commentators embed themselves within a defensive framework whereby foreign companies are raiders taking advantage of the good practices of British corporations and authorities.

But particularly critical is the *Daily Telegraph* and, more precisely, two of its comment articles, both by George Trefgarne. In the first one, published on 13/07/2003, the writer makes barely any references to the raids, since it is still early times. Nevertheless, the column serves as an economic omen and it is structured around three repositioning factors. Firstly, Britain is situated where it should be: outside the grasp of the EU and in the hands of the US. This, of course, is smartly dressed up as an act of independence from the Eurocrats who designed a useless constitution. Secondly, the UK is an economically sound nation: "Britain spread its influence and saw off nations such as France and Spain because it was a naval power with superior financial and constitutional arrangements". Paradoxically enough, Trefgarne himself acknowledges this repositioning within a particular framework of superiority of the UK when he goes on to admit that "Britain was not only the most powerful nation but also the most democratic (...) It is a reassuring, if rather Whiggish, narrative, also in vogue among other historians, such as Niall Ferguson." And thirdly, he ends up by

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

Recibido: 8-1-2008

Aceptado: 22-2-2008

reclaiming the number one economic position in the world: “We have the largest mobile phone group (Vodafone), largest bank (HSBC), largest advertising group (WPP) and the second largest oil company (BP).

Repositioning the UK in the world along those lines might sound certainly gullible, but the second column goes well beyond the limits of repositioning and clearly crosses the borders of what might be described as political-fiction in editorial comment. In the article entitled “Let's hold on to Gibraltar and get Spain to accept Scotland instead”, Trefgarne uses the conflict of Gibraltar's sovereignty as a solution to the closer-to-home conflict of Scotland, and suggests trading Gibraltar for Scotland to resolve the issue of the devolution of legislative powers to Scotland. The author has recourse to various strategies to persuade the readers of his position. Firstly, he introduces the topic by using irony. Secondly, he resorts to what has been described as the conversationalization of discourse, that is, the use of features characteristic of colloquial or informal English in order to sound closer to the audience (Cameron 1995: 33ff):

- (7) ONE of the things that gives Tony Blair's patriotism a hollow ring is his devious negotiations with the Spanish over Gibraltar. Well, I have got a another idea. Why doesn't the Prime Minister persuade them to accept Scotland instead?

Political fiction permeates through the whole text, with historic references to Tudor times and the attempts by Philip II to forge an alliance with Scotland in order to suffocate England in between, the reluctance of the many Scots to maintain the Union with England and, of course, the reference to the arrival of foreign capital, with a clear reference to the euro currency as a threat too. The connection between the two is certainly made clear in sentences like "The conquistadors could bring their new coins with them." Here the menace of Spanish capital arriving on British soil is used as an ironical element to disparage both the Spanish and the Scottish, the former as a traditional enemy, the latter portrayed as traitors to the Union.

Paradoxically enough, the one news site that seems more likely to provide their readers with more positive views is *The Times*. Although, *The Times* commentators also resort to labelling devices in their references to Spanish companies, these are not necessarily meant to have a negative impact. On the one hand, certain comment columns resort to the same commonplace expressions used by most of the British press. For instance, on 12/02/2006 Dominic O'Connell commented on the latest attempt by a Spanish company to take over a British one. The move was described in the following terms:

- (8) The battle of Britain's airports
Ferrovial's daring raid on BAA was the equivalent of Sir Francis Drake's famous game of bowls before the arrival of the Spanish Armada. Clasper, who declined a request for an interview last week, will hope that, like Drake, he is able to fight off the Armada.
Ferrovial, an aggressive construction and infrastructure group
Ferrovial has considerable experience in using more aggressive and “innovative” capital structures.

The text recalls the vocabulary of war with continuous references to the menace posed by the Armada; it establishes comparisons between the CEO of BAA and Sir Francis Drake as a way of portraying Britain's resistance to be swallowed up by foreign companies; and it depicts Ferrovia as an aggressive corporation that might not take Britain's interests into account.

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

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Recibido: 8-1-2008

Aceptado: 22-2-2008

However, there is a more balanced presentation in *The Times* than in other media. In the comment column "Spain's ship comes at last", Graham Keely completes a historic circle by making reference to the failure of the Armada to invade Britain in Philip II's times, but introduces the arrival of Spanish capital as the flagship of modern Spain. The text exemplifies the use of historic references as part of the strategy of *labelling*, but the repositioning of participants is here far less negative than in the cases examined before. The writer mentions Spanish newspapers as being keen on using these labels themselves but he is also careful to include other more positive references. Thus, *Abc* is referred to as a conservative newspaper, with the nationalist connotations it may entail, but it is also underlined that "The right-wing daily ABC said that this "cliché" only reflected badly on Spain when manipulated by nationalist politicians. Emili Blasco said that it shows, rather, an "admiration towards the strength and expansion of the Spanish economy". That is, positive appropriation of material is also used to reposition Spain in a more positive way so that readers will not necessarily perceive the news event as a menace to their national identity. In fact, other elements of positivation are also introduced in this attempt to situate the "new Spain" in a better light. For instance, the writer uses phrases like "new found confidence in Spanish business" and resorts to direct quotations from his Spanish counterparts to disseminate this new image of the country.

6. Conclusions

Although, as Baker points out, public narratives change considerably over time giving way to new perceptions, realizations of the events originating in a society, interpretations and stories (2006: 33), the most important finding in this paper is perhaps the tendency to reproduce and disseminate pre-existing narratives of the relationship between Britain and Spain. Authors select some very precise historic episodes to imbue recent events with feelings of threat, on the one hand, and fear, on the other, and, thus, maintain the uniqueness of British culture and history. Particularly relevant is the fact that writers resort to past events to critically approach economic corporate moves, putting special emphasis on the need to keep British companies in Anglophone hands. Writers elaborate a narrative where the arrival of foreign companies in general and Spanish ones, in particular, are equated to an invasion. General terms like "raiders", "fight", "battle", "warships" and "defeats" are used to interpret the new economic situation of the country while others like "Armada", "Conquistadors" and "Sir Francis Drake" provide the former with names and faces. The most important feature of this image is the reliance on pre-existing clichés that have circulated over the centuries in the UK. These stereotypes are brought back to the forefront of economic comment columns and editorials in order to project that negative illustration of Spanish economy as a threat to England. By doing this, the policies of free trade are clearly effaced to the benefit of a more protective economy ready to defend their brands and companies as part of their national identity.

This does not occur to the same extent in all the four media, although all of them partake of it. However, it should be underlined that some are more inclined to dismiss Spanish capital in the UK. Certainly the conservative *Daily Telegraph* provides very graphic representations of Spain as a threat. The writers contribute to promote the discourse of a country to be mistrusted by conjuring up images from the past. The threat is taken so seriously that some of its writers cross the border of what can be referred to as political

RæL-Revista Electrónica de Lingüística Aplicada

Volumen Monográfico 1 (2007): *Different Approaches to Newspaper Opinion Discourse*

Isabel Alonso Belmonte, ed.

páginas 69-81

Recibido: 8-1-2008

Aceptado: 22-2-2008

fiction, combining the Southern Latin threat with the Northern Celtic issue. Let us trade “Scotland” for “Gibraltar” is the argument put forward as a solution. These discursive practices incorporate references to European issues in order to portray the assault upon British sovereignty carried out by Brussels and exemplified by Spain. In fact, the policies of the British government are criticized as having surrendered to European pressures. It is argued “Britain has come to the crossroads. Indeed, the euro-isation process has already started as the Government has surrendered to an armada of EU initiatives” (13/07/2003). This is not without significance, and the writers clearly combine certain controversial matters in one single stretch. Thus, the recurrence of the term “armada” emphasizes the fact that, like editorials proper, comment columns aimed at convincing the readers that the opinions put forward by the writers are the only acceptable way to interpret certain news events. The use of “armada”, being the forceful term that has remained over the centuries in the imagination of the British people, produces the images the text producers require, not only to portray Spain in a negative light, but Europe as a whole. Thus, Britain should become “fortress Britain” to defend its uniqueness vis-à-vis the pan-European threat.

But, although the conservative media could be expected to defend such positions, it is much more unexpected to come across a similar, if not quite the same, stance in the more progressive news portals. *The Guardian* (and *The Observer*) as well as *The Independent* are also adamant to see Britain engulfed by foreign companies, notably Spanish ones. In a comment column published on 26/11/06, *The Observer* warned against the odds of letting too much of Britain be taken over by foreign companies while the British did not make any moves abroad: “...the sell-off of British companies has not entailed obvious economic or social sacrifices: few factories have been closed, and important know-how has not been moved abroad. The test may come with the next economic downturn, when foreign corporations have to decide where they should cut costs.” Even within their restrained and careful wording, the less conservative newspapers warn of the risks of foreign investment in the UK. Only *The Times* provides its readers with a combination of better-balanced views where Spanish corporate views are portrayed as something natural within the economic system in vogue while defending British positions at home and abroad. However, this might not necessarily be understood as fair play on its part, but should be interpreted as the likely consequence of the editorial policy of a news portal that belongs to an American-naturalised Australian-born media mogul who makes the world his own global business.

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