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The malleability behind terms referring to common professional roles: the current meaning of "boss" in British newspapers

La maleabilidad de los términos referidos a los roles profesionales comunes: el significado actual de boss en la prensa británica

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Resumen: El objetivo de la presente investigación es abordar la variación y ductilidad de conceptos aparentemente claros e inequívocos relacionados con los roles profesionales habituales. El estudio se centra en las estructuras semánticas, y subsecuentes modelos cognitivos, asociados con el término *boss*, tal y como son expresados y transmitidos en la actualidad a través de los grandes medios de comunicación británicos. El análisis lingüístico, cualitativo y cuantitativo, de un corpus significativo de textos en los que aparece este término muestra claras diferencias en su significado, dependiendo de factores clave como la orientación sociopolítica e ideológica de la plataforma de publicación.

Palabras clave: semántica cognitiva; lingüística de corpus; modelos mentales; roles profesionales; prensa británica.

Abstract: The aim of the present research is to approach the current variation and vulnerability to manipulation of concepts, apparently clear and unambiguous, related to usual professional roles. The study concentrates on semantic frames, and subsequent, cognitive models associated to the term 'boss' as they are expressed and transmitted through large-scale British media. The qualitative and quantitative linguistic analysis of a substantial corpus of texts, in which this term appears, shows clear differences in its meaning, depending on key factors such as the socio-political and ideological orientation of the medium of publication.

Keywords: cognitive semantics; corpus linguistics; mental models, professional roles; British press.

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1. Introduction

There are a number of relational identities and communicative roles (Sluss & Ashforth, 2007) used daily by a great majority of speakers (eg. father, neighbour, colleague, employee, etc.). These identities are named through widespread standard terms that are usually defined briefly and simply; for example, the identity of a "boy or a man in relation to either or both of his parents" is generally referred to as "son" and can be simply defined as "a male descendant" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). However, despite their apparent simplicity, these generic terms reflect complex mental constructs that are very sensitive to cultural variation, socio-political variation, inter-generational variation, etc. (van Dijk, 2006, 2008). Depending on each of these parameters of variation, the mental models attached to these terms, which help in the inference of their pragmatic meaning, are configured dependent on different stereotypes, connotations and socio-cognitive standards, belonging therefore to various semantic fields and frames (Lehrer & Kittay, 1992).

From this variation-sensitive perspective of words concerning communicative roles, the present study focuses on the term "boss", referred to "a person who is in charge of a worker or organization" (*OED*), and also on its closest synomyms: *CEO*, *chairman*, *chief*, *chief executive*, *director*, *employer*, *head*, *leader* and *top*. Our aim is to observe the ductility of this concept in today's mass media, paying particular attention to its compliance with the different socio-political ideologies and perspectives that underlie these media.

The research is framed within the field of corpus-based cognitive semantics applied to professional communication. After essential background about semantic fields and frames is exposed, the paper summarises the range of definitions, synonyms and characteristic expressions associated to the term "boss" according to the major dictionaries in use. Then, the target terms are analysed in a corpus of texts belonging to the British mass media, and both quantitative and qualitative methods are used in the lexical and semantic description which leads to the results.

2. Semantic frames and lexical fields associated with a company's structure

Interest in lexical fields and semantic frames has been growing exponentially since the 1970s (Habermas, 1970; Lehrer, 1974), and especial-

ly since the 1990s (Lehrer & Kittay, 1992), in parallel with the development of other complementary disciplines such as artificial intelligence, computational linguistics, cognitive psychology and interdisciplinary linguistics. According to Fillmore and Atkins (1992:76), semantic field theories study, characterise and catalogue "systems of paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationships connecting members of selected sets of lexical items". Cognitive frames or "knowledge schemata" can only approach a word's meaning "with reference to a structured background of experience, beliefs, or practices, constituting a kind of conceptual prerequisite for understanding the meaning" (p. 77). The meaning of a word can only be fully understood "by first understanding the background frames that motivate the concept that the word encodes".

Cognitive frame analysis, and semantic parsing, has become very popular and productive, especially within the area of computer sciences, with the development of language processing applications based on lexical resources such as *FrameNet*, *WebNet* or *WordNet* (Shi & Mihalcea, 2005). However, the notion of "semantic frame" was originally proposed by Fillmore (1977, 1985) and has also become central in cognitive linguistics, together with key related and interdependent concepts such as "domain" and "cognitive model" (Lakoff, 1987; Van Dijk, 2006, 2008), that have been essential in the development of research areas such as critical discourse analysis (CDA) and of knowledge structures such as metaphor, metonymy and other communicative figures.

The basic assumption of frame analysis is that word meaning understanding and interpretation requires the recognition of the relevant contextually related background information within which that word is expressed, which conforms its semantic frame. According to Fillmore and Baker (2011: 317), frame analysis implies a thorough methodological procedure which allows identifying the essential frame elements and lexical units, necessary to make accurate and objective interpretative observations.

In the present study we will adapt this context-based procedure to approach words related to professions, particularly the word "boss". Historically, as we will comment on in the following section, the conceptualisation of the term "boss" has been associated with a number of key concepts in the past that conform its lexical field; however, today's interpretation of this term seems dependent on other mental models and experiential constructs developed by current speakers, with their present interpretative criteria, concerns, habits, values and way of under-

standing the reality that surrounds the concept of "boss" at the moment. Although our study will be limited to this concept, there is evidence that this semantic fluctuation affects many other terms within business English (i.e. Nelson, 2005). Traditional terms referring to a company's structure (e.g. president, advisor, administrator, officer, supervisor, etc.) are adapting their semantic and pragmatic coverage, not only due to the evolution of socio-economic trends and political ideologies, but also by technological implementation and the modernisation of corporate cultures to foster innovation, motivation and effectiveness in their companies (Camisón & Villar-López, 2014)

3. Defining the lexical field of the word "boss"

According to the most popular and prestigious monolingual dictionaries of English (i.e. *Cambridge Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster*, *MacMillan Dictionary* or *Collins Dictionary*), the general meaning of the noun "boss" refers to "a person who exercises control or authority" or "a person who makes decisions, exercises authority, dominates, etc." According to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, the etymology of this term goes back to the Dutch word *baas*, meaning "master", used in the Dutch colonies settled in North America during the 17th century. The word became popular as a free-labour alternative to avoid the slave-labour related term "master". This original dual positive-negative meaning continues to persist up until now.

This word has a polysemic meaning. In fact, its first dated use in the 13th century places its origins in the Old French and Middle English word *boce*, which belonged to the world of architecture and geology, and referred to a circular ornamental decoration (*MacMillan Dictionary*). Also, according to *Dictionary.com* it also refers to a young cow or calf in biology, a round growth or protuberant part on the body in medicine, a form of protection for a book and a projecting part of a ship's hull. This term is also used as an adjective in slang English, meaning "very good, excellent, incredibly awesome, great" (*Internet Slang Dictionary* and *The Urban Dictionary*).

In the present study these meanings are discarded, concentrating on its meaning inside the world of business and politics. Within this lexical field we find specific definitions, such as the person "who directs or supervises workers" (*Merriam-Webster*), "the person who is in charge of an organization and who tells others what to do" or "the manager, the

person who employs or superintends workers" (*Dictionary.com*), and also other more elaborate and complete descriptions:

> An individual that is usually the immediate supervisor of some number of employees and has certain capacities and responsibilities to make decisions. The term itself is not a formal title, and is sometimes used to refer to any higher level employee in a company, including a supervisor, manager, director, or the CEO (*Online Business Dictionary*).

Its adaptation to political contexts generates more clear-cut definitions such as "the head of a group (as a political organization)" or the person "who controls votes in a party organization or dictates appointments or legislative measures" (*Merriam-Webster*), or "a politician who controls the party organization, as in a particular district" (*Dictionary.com*).

As we see in most of the dictionaries cited, this neutral or positive meaning of the word, as part of the professional hierarchies and responsibilities, seems to be the most widely-accepted, being also expressed through other synonymous terms such as: superior, manager, director, president, managing director, CEO, chief, supervisor, head, foreman, overseer, founder, governor, magnate, taskmaster, master, captain, superintendent, commander, employer, master, trainer, wield power, authority, etc. Nevertheless, the negative, derogatory and sarcastic version of its meaning still persists and is increasingly rooted in today's society. This negative side of the term can be clearly observed when looking at its phrasal use in "to boss someone around" which is defined as "to give orders to, especially in an arrogant, authoritative, or domineering manner" (*Free Dictionary* and *Dictionary.com*). This adverse meaning is evident in the definitions that appear in slang dictionaries: "someone who runs shit in his/her hood or city" or "bosses are like diapers: full of shit and all over your ass" (*Urban Dictionary*). It is also observed in the additional set of metaphorical, hyperbolic and derogatory synonyms, pointed out by most of the above dictionaries, that currently substitute or alternate with "boss", especially in slang and casual registers of English, accentuating three negative dimensions of the term:

- Oppressive and despotic (e.g. padrone, Goliath, fuhrer, dictator, king, etc.)

- Old-fashioned and obsolete (e.g. overlord, skipper, warlord, the powers that be, wear the pants or trousers, etc.)
- Sarcastic and ridiculing (e.g. big cheese, top dog, top cat, head honcho, big shot, etc.)

The first negative concept of the term has developed from its natural duality, which instigated its origin in the 17th century, and it is still a focus of concern within the professional community, as we see in the following research articles: "The boss is watching your every click …" (Newitz, 2006), "Privacy in electronic communication: watch your e-mail, your boss is snooping!" (Kierkegaard, 2005), "In nomine patris: discursive strategies and ideology in the Cosa Nostra family discourse" (Indio et al., 2017). The second dimension is also latent, as we see in "Being the boss is not what it used to be!" (Muller-Smith, 1998) or "Why are there bosses?" (Hess, 1983). Finally, specialists already warned twenty years ago about the third negative trend of its meaning, in publications such as "When the boss is away" (Clarck & Riddick, 1991) or "Think your boss is incompetent? You're probably right" (Buchanan, 2009). This phenomenon has accelerated considerably in the last ten years, together with the global economic, social and ethical crisis, and the way in which society and the media are approaching the values, attitudes and mental models related to this term (i.e. courage, control, respect, authority, etc.) are affecting its present and probably future meaning and use (Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2007).

On this basis, our aim here is to study the current semantic frames and subsequent cognitive models associated to the term "boss" as they are expressed and transmitted through large-scale British media.

4. Methodology and corpus analysis

A sample of 40 articles from two acclaimed British digital newspapers, *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*, has been compiled and analysed. The corpus contains about 50,000 words, including 20 articles from each newspaper, both with a balanced length of approximately 25,000 words. They are representative of the British mass media and, more importantly, respond to British bipartisan politics reflected in different socio-political trends, which is of great interest for our research purposes (e.g. *The Guardian* has traditionally been associated with a centre-left

political ideology while the *The Telegraph* holds a more centre-right, conservative orientation). As we are interested in examining the different mental models attached to the meaning of the term "boss", in the context of Brexit and the global socio-economic crisis, we have particularly drawn our attention to analyse articles included in the "business section", such as those related to finance, retail or economy during the year 2016.

As far as the method of analysis is concerned, we have found it convenient to adapt Fillmore's and Baker's frame analysis (2011) to our study. As this is a preliminary research on the variation meaning of the term "boss" in the British mass media, we have only focused on the first three steps that the aforementioned authors establish in the *FrameNet* process (pp. 321-22). Firstly, we have characterised the frames making up the sample of analysis; secondly, we have concentrated on describing and naming the elements that belong to those frames; finally, we have selected the main lexical units frequently included in the frames.

Both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis are followed. To do so, we have made use of the corpus manager and analysis software *Sketch Engine* (2003). The main findings are distributed into two main parts. One is devoted to describing and discussing the results extracted from a qualitative overview based on the concordance search analysis. The other is focused on the quantitative results drawn from applications such as word lists and frequencies, collocations and word sketch.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. *A qualitative overview*

The findings obtained from the concordance search analysis of the term "boss" indicate important differences between both data sets. As regards *The Guardian*, it is observed that this term leads to and is included in a major distinctive frame that semantically connotes a person who adopts a pessimistic and uncertain attitude towards the economic situation the UK may face after the Brexit vote as well as someone who is not deprived of corruption and owns unfair privileges over employees or the rest of the population. On the contrary, the findings drawn from *The Telegraph* data set show that the semantic frame in which the term "boss" is included differs considerably from that of *The Guardian*. In

this case, the semantic connotation of the term points towards a person who has a more encouraging attitude towards the Brexit vote results and can give hope and improve the economic situation of the UK despite the difficulties the country may have. Additionally, less importance is given to cases of corruption committed by those who are at the top. To appreciate these two apparently contrastive semantic frames, a small selection of the most representative terms extracted from the concordance search analysis, both in *The Guardian* and in *The Telegraph*, is shown in Table 1:

Word categories	*The Guardian*	*The Telegraph*
Noun/adjective+noun	hard Brexit abuse of position low-paid insecure jobs fraud false accounting significant economic damages corrosive impact charges problems prison serious implications	Brexit era, expertise job creation respected boss investment strong economy new opportunities reassurance growth success sense of calm
Adjective	cautious dumb fat lazy stupid	confident reliable able dynamic clear
Verb	accused criticized sabotage spend raided seized sentenced suffer	carry on keep calm committed to maximizing contribute commits to help create ensure get on

Table 1. Examples from the concordance search analysis: *The Guardian* and *The Telegraph*

To throw some light to the above observational findings, a few extracts from *The Guardian* are reproduced next. It is important to observe that the connotations linked with the term "boss", which were previously commented, are also interrelated with grammatical features such as the use of supporting data (*£5.5 m*, *10%*), the inclusion of boosters (*significant*, *pretty*) as well as specific collocations and idiomatic expressions (*false accounting*, *abuse of position*). These seem to be included with the intention of reinforcing the more negative attributions of the term:

- "Loans boss paid hackers to attack consumer websites, court told… was *sentenced* to four months in *prison*…the businessman's home was *raided* and his computer equipment *seized*…There is a low risk of him committing further offences of this nature".
- "Pay ratio between bosses and employees will be '2016's hot topic'… K's top bosses received *10%* pay rise in 2015 as average salary hit £5.5m…The bosses of Britain's largest public companies earned an average of £5.5m last year, and have enjoyed a *10%* pay rise while wages in the rest of the economy lag far behind…".
- *"*Britain will end up looking stupid over Brexit, says Ryanair boss… The UK is going to *suffe*r some *significant economic damage* when they get into the entrails of the Brexit decision...The UK will end up looking *pretty* stupid, he said".
- "Ex-Tesco bosses to appear in court on *fraud* and *false accounting charges*… The former Tesco bosses are all *charged* with one count of *fraud* by *abuse of position* and one count of *false accounting*".

In relation to the examples selected from *The Telegraph*, we can perceive that the semantic connotations held towards the term "boss" are also interrelated with some particular grammatical elements. For instance, it is worth considering the presence of hedged expressions by means of probability adverbs, verbs or linking words of contrast (unlikely, almost, predicted, despite, etc.) to mitigate somehow the more positive connotations concerning the term under analysis:

- "The boss of Britain's biggest business group said it was vital policymakers worked closely with companies to set out a clear plan to *ensure* the UK remained a top *investment* destination… He also urged policymakers to maintain a *'sense of calm'* regarding the millions of EU workers and pensioners who are currently living in the UK …".

- "*Brexit* is *unlikely* to lead to a sudden decline in London's status as one of the leading centres for the global capital markets, the boss of Barclays has *predicted*".
- "British bosses are more upbeat about business prospects this year than *almost* every other major advanced economy, as companies '*keep calm* and *carry on*', *despite* domestic and global uncertainty".

Although these have been the results obtained from a qualitative overview analysis, it is necessary to provide more convincible results by means of an analysis of a more quantitative nature. As such, the next sub-section particularly concentrates on describing and discussing the quantitative findings emerging from our analysis.

5.2. *Quantitative analysis*

5.2.1. Word lists and frequencies

The word lists and frequencies analysis for the term "boss" or its plural form "bosses" yields interesting findings for both samples. To start with, the general use of this term, in raw frequencies, is slightly higher in *The Guardian* (153)[1] than in *The Telegraph* (96), which may suggest that the term is more prone to be included in newspapers with a more left-wing political orientation like *The Guardian*.

If the term "boss" co-occurs with different synonyms, as our preliminary observational analysis has revealed, we have found it important to take them into account in our quantitative analysis. We are referring to words such as *CEO*, *chairman*, *chief*, *chief executive*, *director*, *employer*, *executive*, *top*, along with its plural forms. The results show that, except for the term "director", whose frequency is practically similar in both corpora (G22/T20)[2], *The Guardian* includes a wider number of synonyms. The most widely used in both data sets is "chief" (G115/ T69) either alone or in combination with "executive" (G90/ T42) or "executives" (G60/ T35). In this newspaper, the above synonyms are followed, in terms of frequency of use, by "top" (49), "chairman" (37), "leaders" (27), "director" (22), "CEO" (21), "directors" (16), "employ-

[1] From now onwards the numbers included in brackets refer to raw frequencies.

[2] From now onwards G will be the abbreviation for *The Guardian*, and T for *The Telegraph.*

ers" (16), "CEOs" (15), "head" (15) and "employer" (6). With respect to *The Telegraph*, apart from the higher frequencies obtained for "chief", be it alone or in combination with "executive" or "executives", "chairman" (21) is the most widely used frequent term followed by "director" (20), "top" (20), "head" (13), "CEO" (9), "CEOs" (8) and "leaders" (7). It is noteworthy that no instance of the term "employer" or "employers" is found in *The Telegraph* sample.

A relevant observation is that the terms "boss" or "bosses" and its synonymous counterparts are frequently substitued by means of pronouns performing an anaphoric function in the text. The analysis reveals that the frequencies of these pronouns are also higher in *The Guardian*, perhaps in tune with the characteristic freedom of expression of this newspaper, than in *The Telegraph*: "He" (G79/T37), "His" (G13/T5), "he" (G203/T137), "him" (G15/T7), "his" (G105/T67), "they" (G131/T61), "their" (G142/T79), "them" (G42/T18), "themselves" (G8/T0). It is also noticeable that there is a tendency to include more plural forms of this term in *The Guardian* data set.

Remarkable differences have also been encountered in the frequency of words surrounding the term "boss" and its main synonyms, configuring different semantic frames, which reflect a significant degree of variation in the current mental models which conceptualise this word. This contrast can be observed in Table 2, which shows a small sample of the most distinctive word categories obtained in the word lists and frequencies analysis:

Word categories	*The Guardian*	*The Telegraph*
Nouns	benefits (12), Brexit (91), change (29), charges (13), consequences (7), costs (29), court (11), crisis (16), data (20), decline (15), economy (68), employee (177), evidence (11), executive (150), figures (15), findings (7), growth (62), London (54), losses (9), measure (77), pressure (15), productivity (22), remuneration (20), risk (13), roles (7), salaries (9), source (8), staff (49), strategy (16), success (16), survey (32), UK (234), uncertainty (23), vote (59), wage (25), warning (11), wellness (12), workers (32), etc.	benefits (0), Brexit (49), change (11), charges (5), consequences (0), costs (9), court (0), crisis (0), data (7), decline (6), economy (37), employee (0), evidence (0), executive (77), figures (0), findings (0), growth (46), London (39), losses (0), measure (0), pressure (8), productivity (8), remuneration (0), risk (0), roles (0), salaries (0), source (0), staff (23), strategy (7), success (9), survey (13), UK (137), uncertainty (19), vote (34), wage (0),warning (0), wellness (0), workers (0), etc.
Adjectives	cautious (15), chief (115), clear (21), committed (5), false (6), fat (5), financial (66), global (54), hard (13), living (24), low (16), minimum (8), national (24), new (85), possible (12), significant (22), worry (6), worth (9), wrong (5), etc.	cautious (0), chief (69), clear (13), committed (7), false (0), fat (0), financial (44), global (35), hard (5), living (6), low (8), minimum (0), national (6), new (65), possible (69), significant (10), worry (0), worth (0), wrong (0), etc.
Verbs	accused (5), believe (8), change (29), charged (6), committed (5), earn (8), employs (10), encourage (11), face (13), found (17), help (17), hit (13), improve (13), pay (117), reduce (9), reform (11),shows (12), solve (6), suffer (6), tackle (9), think (45), trying (9), voted (10), want (26), warned (29), etc.	accused (0), believe (0), change (11), charged (0), committed (7), earn (0), employs (0), encourage (0), face (0), found (7), help (10), hit (0), improve (9), pay (10), reduce (0), reform (0), shows (0), solve (0), suffer (0), tackle (0), think (27), trying (0), voted (0), want (19), warned (13), etc.

Word categories	*The Guardian*	*The Telegraph*
Adverbs	actually (8), already (27), even (26), increasingly (6), less (20), likely (17), many (40), more (173), most (56), not (195), probably (7), really (18), etc.	actually (0), already (17), even (13), increasingly (0), less (10), likely (9), many (21), more (100), most (36), not (96), probably (0), really (11), etc.
Prepositions	against (22), by (247), forward (5), over (78), under (23), up (106), etc.	against (7), by (118), forward (0), over (44), under (11), up (74), etc.
Pronouns	He (79), he (203), his (105), him (15), I (102), me (13), they (21), their (142), them (42), themselves (8), this (41), when (49), where (33), who (103), you (14), your (11), etc.	He (37), he (137), his (67), him (7), I (86), me (7), they (10), their (79), them (18), themselves (0), this (23), when (28), where (20), who (57), you (7), your (6), etc.
Auxiliary and modal verbs	do (84), does (40), can (61), could (89), had (93), has (230), have (208), might (17), should (43), will (221), would (170), etc.	do (45), does (28), can (43), could (32), had (42), has (156), have (107), might (0), should (18), will (147), would (80), etc.
Connectors	But (64), Despite (11), However (27), If (31), also (95), and (962), as (328), because (29), but (137), despite (24), if (66), like (36), must (17), or (81), than (120), though (12), while (35), etc.	But (34), Despite (5), However (16), If (13), also (78), and (578), as (212), because (17), but (75), despite (15), if (30), like (17), must (8), or (40), than (63), though (6), while (22), etc.

Table 2. Comparison of word categories from the word lists and frequencies analysis of *The Guardian* with *The Telegraph*. Raw frequencies

The above findings can corroborate the results obtained from the concordance search analysis discussed in the previous subsection. As for *The Guardian*, the results obtained reinforce the mental model of "boss" as a person who seems to hold a distrustful attitude towards the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union and its future consequences for the UK economy (e.g. *Brexit*, *cautious*, *consequences*,

face, *hit*, *vote*, *voted*, *worry*, *wrong*, etc.) and feels insecure and uncertain about the economic situation of the country if it finally leaves the EU (e.g. *crisis*, *decline*, *economy*, *employs*, *hard*, *hit*, *losses*, *pressure*, *productivity*, *risk*, *suffer*, *uncertainty*, etc.). In the same vein, there is a higher frequency of words that refer to "boss" and its synonymous expressions as someone involved in cases of corruption and owning more privileges than the staff or the rest of the population (e.g. *accused*, *benefits*, *costs*, *court*, *earn*, *false*, *fat*, *hit*, *pay*, *remuneration*, *salaries*, *wages*, etc.). These negative connotations and its corresponding synonyms are also translated in a high frequency of prepositions connoting strong opposition, as seen in "against" (G22/T7).

However, not all the mental model is so negative in this part of our corpus. Words relating "boss" to someone who can provide solutions despite the uncertainty and insecurity regarding the Brexit vote are also frequently used (e.g. *change*, *encourage*, *forward*, *improve*, *measure*, *reform*, *solve*, *strategy*, *success*, *tackle*, *wellness*, etc.)

We can also remark in the sample analysed that, in order to justify their own opinions towards the economic and financial situation of the UK, the term "boss" or "bosses" and their synonymous expressions are surrounded by words that semantically connote a person who constantly resorts to the use of proofs demonstrating the veracity of his/her views (e.g. *data*, *evidence*, *figures*, *findings*, *source*, *survey*, *shows*, etc.), together with passive sentences including the agent who performs the action preceded by the preposition "by", whose frequency is also much higher in *The Guardian* (G247/T118). These viewpoints are frequently communicated through the higher use of emphasising adverbs, first person singular pronouns and addition linking words to reinforce bosses' opinions on the problems associated with the UK (e.g. *actually*, *already*, *also*, *and*, *even*, *I*, *increasingly*, *many*, *more*, *most*, *really*, etc.). Nonetheless, despite the veracity of their opinions and reflections, these are frequently mitigated by means of cognitive verbs as well as modal verbs and adverbs of probability acting as hedges (e.g. *believe*, *can*, *could*, *likely*, *might*, *should*, *think*, *would*, etc.). This understatement is also conveyed through the high frequency of contrastive linking words (e.g. *but*, *despite*, *however*, *if*, *or*, *though*, *while*, etc.).

When comparing the results drawn from *The Guardian* with the ones obtained in *The Telegraph*, a partially different picture seems to emerge. The frequency rates, and the semantic frame related to "boss"

in this sub-corpus, seem to spin around terms such as *chief*, *new*, *Brexit*, *growth*, *financial*, *economy*, *executive*, *global*, *London*, etc. The mental model attached to those words differs considerably between both samples: unlike the dark and discouraging attitude that their meaning connotes in *The Guardian*, in *The Telegraph* their semantic connotations evolve around someone closely associated to power centres (both locally and globally), who has a more optimistic attitude towards the Brexit election and calms down the UK population by assuring them that the Brexit is not going to change the economic situation of the country in the future.

By the same token, there are even terms in *The Guardian* which are completely absent in *The Telegraph*. This may portray an image of the "boss" and its synonymous related terms as someone who, despite being attributed cases of corruption and unfair privilege, has the capacity to act as an adviser and expert trying to relax the UK citizenship with solutions and promising a good forecast for the country.

Firstly, we observe that despite the awareness of the Brexit vote and the consequences this may have for the UK's economy, the attitude held by bosses is not as pessimistic and dubious as the one revealed in *The Guardian*. This can be demonstrated, on the one hand, by the lower frequencies obtained for terms such as *Brexit*, *costs*, *crisis*, *decline*, *economy*, *hard*, *national*, *pressure*, *productivity*, *staff*, *uncertainty*, *vote*, *workers*, *etc.* and, on the other, the complete absence of terms such as *cautious*, *consequences*, *employee*, *face*, *hit*, *losses*, *risk*, *suffer*, *worry*, *wrong*, etc.

Likewise, the frequency of words referring to "boss" and its synonymous related terms connoting someone involved with bribery, fraud and in an advantaged position with respect to employees or the rest of the citizens is also lower (e.g. *costs*, *economy*, *hard*, *low*, *over*, *pay*, *staff*, etc.). In addition, there are null frequencies for significant terms such as *accused*, *benefits*, *court*, *earn*, *employee*, *face*, *false*, *hit*, *remuneration*, *roles*, *salaries*, *suffer*, *wage*, *workers*, etc. Apart from that, prepositions connoting negative meanings like "against" (G22/T7) appear in much lower frequencies if we compare them with *The Guardian* data set.

Regarding the concept of "boss" as a person who has the ability to provide solutions despite the British drawbacks as a result of the Brexit vote, the findings uncover that the terms semantically connoting this meaning also appear in lower frequencies than in *The Guardian* sample

(e.g. *change*, *clear*, *help*, *improve*, *new*, *strategy*, *success*, *warned*, etc.). Furthermore, no instances have been found for terms such as *encourage*, *forward*, *measure*, *reform*, *solve*, *tackle*, *trying*, etc.

If in *The Guardian* we have found terms that semantically evoke veracity so as to justify bosses'opinion regarding the economic and financial situation of the UK, the frequencies of these terms in *The Telegraph* are also much lower (e.g. *data*, *like*, *survey*, *when*, *where*, etc.) and no instances have been found for terms such as *evidence*, *figures*, *findings*, *source* and *shows*. Concerning passive sentences followed by the preposition "by" with reference to the agent who performs an action, the frequencies obtained are also much lower than in *The Guardian* (G247/ T118). The same applies to the use of emphasising adverbs and additional connectors to reinforce bosses's views on the economic problems of the UK (e.g. *already*, *also*, *and*, *many*, *more*, *most*, *really*, etc.) and no instances are found for "actually" or"increasingly". In keeping with this line of thought, the frequency of cognitive verbs, modal verbs and adverbs of probability functioning as hedges to downtone bosses' statements is lower too (e.g. *can*, *could*, *likely*, *should*, *think*, *would*, etc.) and others like "believe" or "might" are null. Finally, the recurrence to linking words of contrast to understate bosses' viewpoints are not as frequent as those included in *The Guardian* (e.g. *but*, *despite*, *however*, *if*, *or*, *though*, *while*, etc.).

5.2.2. Collocation analysis

The collocation analysis for the term "boss" also unveils interesting findings as far as both data sets are concerned. As such, the words that co-occur with the term "boss" in both samples indicate divergent frequencies, as seen in Table 3.

The data shown in this table corroborate the trends and contrasts already indicated in the previous findings. The words co-ocurring with the term "boss" in *The Guardian* data set semantically connote someone who has many doubts and indecisions regarding the economic problems the UK citizenship may face after the Brexit political elections as observed in the higher frequencies obtained if these are compared with the ones found in *The Telegraph* (e.g. *bank*, *Britain*, *company*, *customer*, *cut*, *crisis*, *staff*, *warn*, etc.). Nevertheless, no co-ocurrence terms such as *company*, *customer*, *crisis*, *cut*, *not*, *price*, and *staff* for the word

"boss" have been found in *The Telegraph* sample. As most of the times there is a reference to the future consequences of the Brexit vote, it is not surprising to frequently find the preposition "*after*" (G81/T0) and no instance of the latter in *The Telegraph* data set.

The Guardian	*The Telegraph*
after (81), bank (51), benefit (18), big (52), Britain (80), British (49), chief (118), company (219), customer (81), cut (25), could (89), crisis (17), deal (66), employee (3), executive (4), find (41), he (282), high (41), insist (0), London (54), more (176), most (58), new (86), not (273), over (81), pay (151), price (66), receive (13), rise (68), say (419), staff (50), tell (30), than (120), their (142), them (42), they (152), top (55), UK (233), want (37), warn (44), we (237), will (0), year (214), etc.	after (0), bank (26), benefit (0), big (0), Britain (37), British (23), chief (0), company (0), customer (0), cut (0), could (0), crisis (0), deal (0), employee (0), executive (0), find (0), he (174), high (0), insist (9), London (0), more (101), most (73), new (66), not (0), over (44), pay (0), price (0), receive (0), rise (0), say (337), staff (0), tell (0), than (0), their (0), them (0), they (0), top (0), UK (137), want (0), warn (21), we (0), will (154), year (120), etc.

Table 3. Comparison of words from the collocation analysis of *The Guardian* with *The Telegraph*. Raw frequencies

About the words that co-occur with the term "boss" semantically connoting a corrupted person and enjoying more benefits than the rest of the people, the frequency of words that collocate with this meaning is also higher in *The Guardian* (e.g. *big*, *company*, *high*, *more*, *over*, *pay*, *receive*, *rise*, *than*, *their*, *them*, *they*, *top*). Nonetheless, terms such as *big*, *chief*, *company*, *employee*, *executive*, *high*, *pay*, *rise*, *than*, *their*, *them*, *they*, *top* are not found in *The Telegraph*.

The veracity and truthfulness of bosses' opinion are shown in the frequent use of the verb "find" in *The Guardian* whereas the latter does not appear as a collocation term for the word "boss" in *The Telegraph*. Additionally, the use of the modal verb "could" in *The Guardian* and its absence as a collocation word in *The Telegraph* may imply, as observed in previous analyses, that the views held by bosses tend to be understated in the former. Aside from that, the higher use of co-ocurring terms such as *deal*, *new*, *want*, or *we* can convey the idea that the term

"boss" is related to someone who, despite his or her gloomy attitude for the economic and financial inconveniences the UK may have, has the ability to act as an adviser, expert, promoting initiatives and solutions in collaboration with the rest of the citizens to sort out the current shortcomings.

One final point to be made is that in *The Guardian* the presence of verbs like "say" and "tell" co-ocurring with the word "boss" is higher than in *The Telegraph*. Particular importance deserves the verb "tell", with a null presence in *The Telegraph*. This verb is frequently used in neutral or informal registers. This could mean that the register used in the *The Guardian* could fluctuate between neutral and informal and more formal in the case of *The Telegraph*.

5.2.3. Word sketch analysis

The Word Sketch analysis has allowed us to know the different types of modifiers that go with the word "boss", nouns and verbs that are modified by "boss", verbs with "boss" either as subject or object and adjective predicates accompanying the term "boss". The findings stemming from this analysis have also shown important differences concerning both data sets. These are shown in Table 4 below:

Word sketch	*The Guardian*	*The Telegraph*
Modifiers of "boss"	UK (11.08), top (10.33), bank (9.97), British (9.74), Deutsche (9.59), factory (9.05) industry (8.96), new (8.33), respected (8.09), quietly-spoken (8.09), go-ahead (8.09), stripping (8.09)	UK (10.62), new (10.18), Deutsche (10.16), retail (9.94), finance (9.94) female (9.67), factory (9.66), bank (9.64), British (9.48), business (9.19),respected (8.69), supermarket (8.69), quietly-spoken (8.69), economy (8.69)
Nouns/verbs modified by "boss"	skyscraper (10.6), fight (10.6), class (10.54), matter (10.54)	skyscraper (11.0), fight (11.0), Britain (10.68), intelligence (10.24)

Word sketch	*The Guardian*	*The Telegraph*
Verbs with "boss" as a object	falter (10.82), lead (10.75), appoint (10.75) choose (10.68), charge (10.74), allow (9.91), show (98.7), tell (9.67), do (9.32), be (8.19)	terrify (11.19), falter (11.19), appoint (11.09), poach (11.00), choose (10.91), say (10.64), show (10.54), find (10.47) lead (10.24), be (7.31)
Verbs with "boss" as a subject	warn (10.54), remain (10.1), have (9.6), go (9.38), say (9.16), waive (8.89), care (8.89), spy (8.89), land (8.89), acknowledge (8.89), press (8.89), shy (8.89), shrug (8.87), respond (8.87) know (8.87), pledge (8.87), shock (8.87), cite (8.85), appear (8.85), accuse (8.85) receive (8.85), insist (8.82)	remain (10.88), insist (10.47), say (10.38), warn (10.3), have (9.75), shy (9.61), pledge (9.61) respond (9.61), cite (9.61), press (9.61), promote (9.61) slash (9.53), shrug (9.53), argue (9.53), enjoy (9.5), plan (9.48), choose (9.48), predict (9.48), want (9.44), believe (9.41), find (9.38), show (9.38), be (9.09)
Adjective predicates of "boss"	fat (12.83), upbeat (12.41), cautious (11.83), optimistic (11.54), such (9.83)	upbeat (13.41), optimistic (12.41)

Table 4. Examples from the word sketch analysis of "boss" in *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian*. Raw frequencies ordered from the highest to the lowest

The findings reveal that, in *The Guardian*, the terms with the highest frequencies modifying the word "boss" have the semantic connotation of someone who is more aware about the current problems the UK faces as regards important social issues like the Brexit vote, inequality between social classes, particularly regarding the salaries earned by bosses and those earned by staff, cases of fraud and corruption on the part of bosses, etc. (e.g. *accuse*, *bank*, *British*, *cautious*, *charge*, *class*, *falter*, *fat*, *lead*, *matter*, *receive*, *shock*, *skyscraper*, *spy*, *top*, *UK*) as well as someone who acts as an adviser encouraging citizens to improve the current social situation, as observed in *allow*, *care*, *fight*, *go-ahead*, *insist*, *new*, *remain*, *show*, *warn*.

On the contrary, in *The Telegraph* sample, we perceive that this same term is modified by words that tend to connote a person who, despite being concerned about the economic situation that the population of the UK may suffer with the consequences of Brexit, the attitude towards this social issue is more optimistic and confident. Particularly, a boss is perceived as someone acting as an adviser and calming citizens down, that the UK has always been a rich and prosperous nation that cannot be affected, under any circumstances, by the Brexit vote (e.g. *be*, *believe*, *business*, *fight*, *finance*, *find*, *insist*, *new*, *plan*, *UK*, *warn*). Added to that, the negative connotations associated with the concept of "boss" as regards cases of corruption or standing in a more powerful position than the rest of the population is also given scarce consideration, as seen by the complete absence of terms such as *accuse*, *cautious*, *charge*, *class*, *fat*, *matter*, *shock*, *top*. The term "boss" is more conceptualised as a person who deserves respect (e.g. *respected*, *quietly-spoken*), as he or she is chosen and promoted by his or her expertise, intelligence and skills (e.g. *appoint*, *be*, *choose*, *find*, *intelligence*, *promote*). Therefore, he or she can be the perfect guide to ensure workers that the UK is a rich country and nothing can alter that, even if the UK leaves the EU (e.g. *believe*, *Britain*, *British*, *business*, *economy*, *enjoy*, *optimistic*, *plan*, *predict*, *remain*, *show*, *upbeat*, *want*). Likewise, "bosses" are regarded as persons who worry about the negative considerations that the society has towards them regarding cases of bribery and abuse of power, as observed in the frequent use of the verb *terrify*.

In addition to all these insights, the corpus and the analysis could allow for many more findings and interpretations, which would extend further than the aim of the present research.

6. Conclusions

The present study demonstrates that the concept of "boss" mostly transmitted in current British society, and reinforced through its press media, implies certain intrinsic defining elements that foster a solid generic interpretative basis of this professional role as a person who has the ability to act as an adviser and an expert in his field promoting initiatives and solutions despite the surrounding setbacks and uncertainty. This generic interpretative model is also reinforced by widely-accepted synomyms such as *executive*, *director*, *head* and *leader*. These persis-

tent semantic components support socially-shared and accepted mental models which seem to be fairly objective, operative and useful in many professional contexts.

Notwithstanding this, our analysis also shows that today this concept entails another set of defining and interpretive parameters, of a more variable and subjective nature, which are highly dependent on the context and make it very vulnerable to the socio-political ideology or orientation of the speakers who use it and of the media through which it is transmitted. Because of this, in our corpus the semantic frames of "boss" connote both a cautious and gloomy professional who is concerned about –and sometimes adversely involved in– hot socio-economic issues such as Brexit, unfair salaries, inequality, fraud, corruption, etc., and also, by contrast, a hope-inspiring and optimistic expert who seems to be above all these issues and is more concerned about predicting a promising and prosperous future for the UK.

The study implies that, depending on the socio-political and contextual factors involving the expression of terms referring to usual professional roles, their definition and meaning differ remarkably, also affecting other associated concepts, such as authority, hierarchy, power, immunity to criticism, company organisation, etc. This dual conceptual and malleable nature of their meaning can significantly influence the correct understanding, translation, acquisition and use of these words, and their associated cognitive/mental models, in today's professional and educational communication.

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