

**ДИНАМІКА СТРАТЕГІЙ САМОПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЇ БОРИСА
ДЖОНСОНА В БРИТАНСЬКОМУ МЕДІАДИСКУРСІ: ВІД
“ІНТЕЛЕКТУАЛА-ПРОВОКАТОРА” ДО “СВІТОВОГО ЛІДЕРА”**

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**DYNAMICS OF BORIS JOHNSON'S SELF-REPRESENTATION
STRATEGIES IN BRITISH MEDIA DISCOURSE: FROM "PROVOCATIVE
INTELLECTUAL" TO "GLOBAL LEADER"**

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***Анотація:** У статті досліджено еволюцію стратегій самопрезентації Бориса Джонсона в британському медіадискурсі на матеріалі його передмови до збірки «Lend Me Your Ears» (2003), першої промови на посаді прем'єр-міністра (2019 р.) та програмного інтерв'ю для «Center for European Policy Analysis» (2024). Інтеграція риторичної концепції Д. Джолліффе та інструментарію критичного дискурс-аналізу Т. Хакіна дозволила простежити трансформацію образу мовця від «інтелектуала-провокатора» до «глобального морального авторитета». Обґрунтовано, що зазначена динаміка є наслідком цілеспрямованої адаптації його ідіолекту до мінливих геополітичних контекстів: від журналістського епатажу до державного лідерства в умовах подолання наслідків російської агресії проти України та зміцнення архітектури євроатлантичної безпеки.*

Доведено, що провідну роль у цьому процесі відіграє стратегія легітимізації, яка спирається на концепт національної винятковості («Глобальної Британії») та поєднання елітарного й популістського типів дискурсу. Особливу увагу приділено модифікації риторичного трикутника (етосу, патосу, логосу), де конструювання авторитету базується

на дихотомії класичної освіти (латинізми, алюзії) та навмисної ексцентричності, а іронія слугує засобом нейтралізації критичного дискурсу опонентів. У підсумку констатовано, що ретельна текстуальна маніпуляція та конструювання іміджу «нового Черчилля» свідчать про високу риторичну гнучкість мовної особистості Б. Джонсона, спрямовану на збереження його тривалої дискурсивної присутності в медіапросторі.

Ключові слова: Борис Джонсон, самопрезентація, ідіолект, риторичний дизайн, критичний дискурс-аналіз (КДА), стратегія самоприниження (*self-deprecation*), “тефлонова” репутація

Abstract: *The article explores the evolution of Boris Johnson's self-presentation strategies within the British media discourse, drawing on a text corpus that spans his foreword to Lend Me Your Ears (2003), his inaugural prime ministerial address (2019), and a landmark interview for the Center for European Policy Analysis (2024). Employing D. Jolliffe's rhetorical framework alongside T. Huckin's approach to critical discourse analysis (CDA), the study traces the discursive shift from an "Intellectual provocateur" to a "Global moral authority." It is maintained that this transformation reflects a deliberate adaptation of the politician's idiolect to shifting geopolitical contexts – ranging from journalistic provocation to state leadership during global crises, notably the response to Russian aggression against Ukraine and the reinforcement of Euro-Atlantic security.*

The analysis reveals that the legitimization of Johnson's political course relies heavily on appeals to British exceptionalism and a synergetic blend of elitist and populist discourses. Special attention is paid to the calibration of the rhetorical triangle (ethos, pathos, logos), wherein the speaker's ethos is constructed through the interplay of classical erudition (Latinisms, literary allusions) and calculated eccentricity, while his pathos utilizes irony to neutralize adversarial critique. Ultimately, it is argued that the construction of a "modern Churchill" persona serves as a potent vehicle for authority substantiation in the post-Brexit era, showcasing the high rhetorical plasticity of Johnson's linguistic personality aimed at securing his enduring discursive presence.

Keywords: Boris Johnson, self-presentation, idiolect, rhetorical design, critical discourse analysis (CDA), irony, self-deprecation, “teflon” reputation,

Introduction and Problem Statement .The communicative behavior of Boris Johnson has increasingly drawn scholarly attention as a distinct rhetorical phenomenon that challenges conventional political discourse. Rooted in a complex synthesis of the jester and intellectual archetypes, this linguistic conduct can be argued to represent a systematic discursive practice rather than a series of idiosyncratic speech habits. The politician's calculated deployment of a carefully curated, unconventional public persona – often conceptualized in political biography as a strategic tool [Purnell, 2011] – serves as a potent instrument for authority maintenance within the contemporary media landscape. Under the conditions of the "post-truth" era, his integration of high

cultural capital with populist appeal facilitates the domestic implementation of political influence.

The core problem under scrutiny resides in the discursive dichotomy inherent in Johnson's public image. Despite an elite socio-educational background (Eton and Oxford), the speaker consistently subverts traditional markers of institutional superiority to engineer a hybrid communicative style. By juxtaposing classical Latinisms with colloquial vernacular, the discourse constructs a flexible rhetorical framework that simultaneously secures populist legitimacy and sustains intellectual authority. Within the framework of modern "politainment," this linguistic strategy functions as a semiotic buffer, wherein deliberate humor and systemic self-irony soften political conflict, transforming adversarial debates into a mediatized spectacle. Consequently, there emerges a distinct necessity for a critical discourse analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the textual mechanisms through which such hybrid strategies manufacture consent and secure discursive dominance in contemporary media environments.

Analysis of recent studies and publications. Scholarly inquiry into Boris Johnson's idiolect is traditionally situated at the convergence of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and political rhetoric. The theoretical underpinnings of this domain are substantially enriched by W. C. Booth's (1983) conceptualization of the "implied author" and R. Cherry's (1988) seminal distinction between ethos and persona — frameworks that remain vital for deconstructing the systemic bifurcation between a speaker's elite academic background and a mediatized public image.

J. Charteris-Black (2011) identifies Johnson as a practitioner of "anti-rhetoric," arguing that calculated linguistic blunders and tactical hesitations are deployed as strategic tools to forge an aura of authenticity in contrast to seemingly "robotic" political elites. This perspective correlates with S. Taylor's (2014) findings, which categorize the politician's pervasive irony as a "rhetorical shield" functioning to domesticate political conflict and evade direct accountability by reframing sensitive propositions as eccentric humor. Furthermore, within the paradigm of crisis communication, R. Wodak (2020) examines the implementation of the "savior" narrative and strategies of "othering" utilized to consolidate populist support during socio-political transitions.

Despite this extensive groundwork, a distinct research gap persists regarding the longitudinal evolution of Johnson's discursive personality, specifically the trajectory spanning from his 1990s journalism to the "statesmanlike" rhetoric observed in recent years. Contemporary scholarship (2021–2026) reveals a significant shift towards corpus-assisted critical discourse studies within the post-Brexit landscape. A pivotal contribution to this dimension is offered by T. Parnell (2024), who traces the empirical trajectory of British national identity narratives, maintaining that the transition to "Brexit Britain" was accompanied by a profound destabilization of national identity paradigms, which subsequently created a discursive vacuum filled by performative leadership.

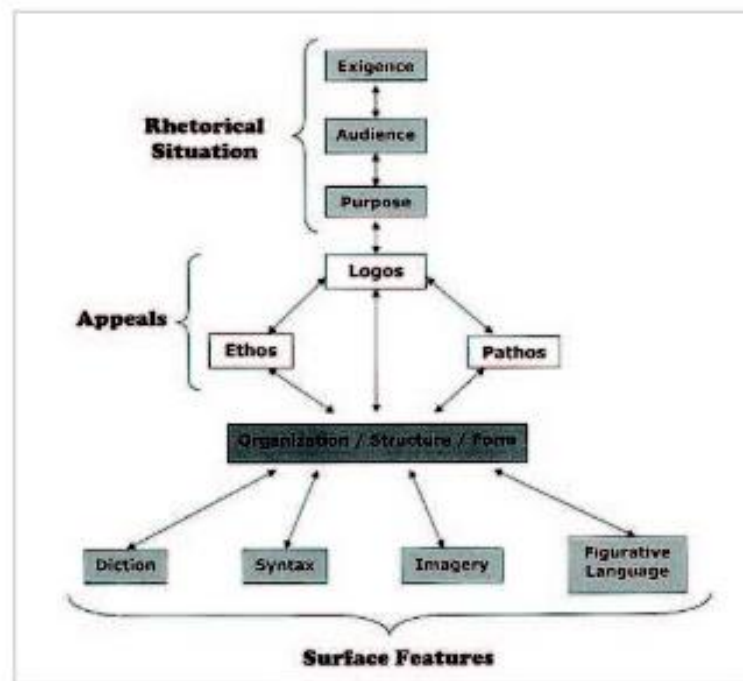
Parnell's study specifically elucidates how political actors navigate this sociolinguistic

instability through “identity positioning” — a strategy that strongly resonates with the shifting rhetorical masks under scrutiny. This empirical evidence demonstrates that such idiolectal variations transcend personal stylistic choices, functioning instead as a calculated response to the ongoing re-articulation of Britishness in a post-EU context. By situating the target idiolect within this broader corpus-assisted perspective, it becomes possible to discern how the tactical deployment of informal language operates as a mechanism of “discursive legitimation” (Parnell, 2024), thereby ensuring that the transition from micro-linguistic markers to macro-political evaluation remains grounded in rigorous academic standards.

Aim and methodology. The methodological apparatus of this study integrates D. Jolliffe’s (1999) rhetorical framework with T. Huckin’s (1997) critical discourse analysis (CDA) techniques. While the former model facilitates a macro-structural evaluation of the rhetorical situation — encompassing aspects of exigence, audience, and purpose — the latter approach enables a micro-level examination of lexical selection, topicalization, and framing. This dual analytical perspective ensures a comprehensive deconstruction of Boris Johnson’s idiolect, moving beyond surface-level stylistic idiosyncrasies to uncover the underlying ideological structures that shape the communication.

The primary objective of this inquiry is to explicate the constitutional layers of Johnson’s public persona, mapping the discursive transition from linguistic eccentricity to strategic statesmanship. By synthesizing Jolliffe’s rhetorical categories with Huckin’s CDA tools, the study aims to elucidate how the conventional “jester’s mask” functions as a sophisticated, calculated apparatus for power legitimation. As conceptualized in Jolliffe’s hierarchical scheme (see Fig. 1), the communicative event is structured to allow for a systematic transition from micro-stylistic surface features (diction, syntax, and figurative language) to broader rhetorical appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), eventually anchoring them within the overarching rhetorical situation.

Fig. 1. Jolliffe’s rhetorical framework diagram (Jolliffe, 1999)



To achieve analytical clarity and rigor, the research adopts a three-dimensional approach consistent with N. Fairclough's and T. Huckin's paradigms of critical discourse studies. Accordingly, the empirical analysis is operationalized across three interrelated dimensions:

1. The micro-level (linguistic/textual), which encompasses specific lexical choices, syntactic configurations, and classical rhetorical devices, such as Latinisms, deliberate anaphora, and irony;
2. The meso-level (discursive practice), which resides in the strategic deployment of discursive personas and self-presentation techniques tailored to manipulate or influence diverse target audiences;
3. The macro-level (sociopolitical/ideological), which addresses the broader systemic implications of the discourse, specifically the naturalization of the "Global Britain" narrative and the continuous substantiation of political authority amid shifting geopolitical contexts.

Research results: evolutionary stages. The empirical investigation allows for the systematization of Boris Johnson's discursive personality into five distinct evolutionary stages (see Table 1), each characterized by a specific reconfiguration of micro-linguistic markers and macro-rhetorical goals.

The initial stage, conceptualized as The Provocative Intellectual (1994–2000s), is characterized by a high density of low-frequency Latinisms, archaic syntactic structures, and complex literary allusions utilized as instruments of intellectual provocation. The primary discursive indicator within this timeframe resides in the dominance of a pedantic elitism in tone, which functions to establish a rigid boundary of competence between the speaker and the established political class, masking journalistic skepticism behind an overlarge display of cultural capital.

The subsequent transition to *The Eccentric Optimistic Mayor* (2004–2012) is marked by a significant increase in self-deprecating irony and the strategic deployment of colloquial pragmatic markers (e.g., “crumbs”, “whiff-whaff”). Linguistically, this persona reflects a shift from exclusive academic structures to an inclusive, populist idiolect designed to bridge the distance with the urban electorate. Within this paradigm, the politician's calculatedly awkward movements and seemingly shabby public appearance are effectively operationalized as elements of a carefully managed populist brand.

This inclusive rhetoric underwent substantial modifications during the third stage, *The Eurosceptic Rebel* (2010–2018), which is defined by the emergence of binary oppositional metaphors (e.g., “the shackles of Brussels” versus “British liberty”). The dominant discursive indicator here is the radicalization of deictic markers (the polarization of “Us” versus “Them”), wherein the speaker’s irony transitions from a comedic device into a weapon of political delegitimization, enabling him to stoutly and defiantly challenge supranational institutional norms.

The fourth period, *The Statesman* (2019–2022), is distinguished by an intentional reduction of pervasive irony in favor of Churchillian rhetorical figures, most notably anaphora, tricolon, and high-gravity imperative discourse centered on themes of national mobilization and sovereignty. The linguistic adaptation is evidenced by a shift from perfunctory political compliance to an authoritative, state-centric narrative aimed at power consolidation in the post-Brexit environment, where previous lapses into pure humor are strictly disciplined.

The contemporary stage, *The Global Moral Authority* (2023–2026), is identified by the prevalence of value-laden adjectives (e.g., “grotesque”, “unconscionable”) and abstract ethical nouns. The primary discursive marker of this period is the near-complete abandonment of the unconventional “buffoon mask” for a discourse of moral absolutism. Here, the idiolect functions not as a tool for domestic electoral appeal, but as a mechanism for global diplomatic influence, specifically tailored to legitimate Euro-Atlantic security paradigms and mobilize international support against aggression.

It is worth noting, however, that the temporal boundaries of the proposed stages remain flexible rather than hermetic. To account for the structural overlaps between the second and third periods (2010–2012), the concept of “discursive diffusion” is introduced. During this interval, while Johnson as Mayor continued to employ a localized optimistic discourse, his texts concurrently featured the earliest lexical indicators of the Eurosceptic Rebel persona (e.g., “sovereignty”, “diktat”). This micro-linguistic shift strongly suggests a gradual, strategic preparation of a new rhetorical mask, illustrating the high plasticity inherent in the politician’s communicative behavior.

Table 1. Periodization of the development of rhetorical masks B. Johnson (1994–2026)

Period	Discursive personas	Years	Representative texts and sources
I.	The Provocative intellectual	1994 - 2000s	Introduction: "When istory Speed Up" (Lend Me Your Ears, 2003)
II.	The Eccentric optimistic mayor	2004 - 2012	"Bigley's Fate" (The Spectator, 2004); "What I should say sorry for" (2004); "Let's blow our vuvuzelas for a bright South African future" (The Telegraph, 2010); "Hail the heroic parents who let their children cycle to school" (2012)
III.	The Eurosceptic rebel	2010 - 2018	"Snooty Europhiles should be forced to crawl in penitence" (2010); "Vote to leave the EU" (The Telegraph, 2016); "Denmark has got it wrong: the burka is oppressive and ridiculous" (The Telegraph, 2018)
IV.	The Statesman	2019 - 2022	First speech as Prime Minister (Gov.uk, 2019); Statement on coronavirus (COVID-19) (BBC/Gov.uk, 2020); Final speech as Prime Minister (2022)
V.	The global moral authority	2023 - 2026	Interview for CEPA: "Boris Johnson on growing global risks" (2024); Articles in Daily Mail (2023–2026)

Case Study 1: The journalist's manifesto ("Lend Me Your Ears", 2003)

The foundational stage of Boris Johnson's discursive evolution finds its clearest instantiation in his retrospective manifesto, namely the introduction to *Lend Me Your Ears* (2003). This text operates effectively as a meta-discursive map wherein the author provides a theoretical rationalization for the linguistic strategies deployed throughout his fifteen-year career in journalism. As noted in biographical scholarship [Purnell, 2011], this formative journalistic phase was fundamentally centered on the deliberate construction of a "Brussels-bashing" narrative. This period proved pivotal for the crystallization of The Provocative Intellectual persona, wherein the speaker utilized

what has been conceptualized as “classical literacy” [Green, 2019] to carve out a highly idiosyncratic discursive niche within the British media landscape.

Within this retrospective text, the ethos of the provocative intellectual is carefully engineered through deliberate stylistic contrasts. By deploying the archaically colloquial phrase “Crumbs, I thought” (p. 1), the writer performs a calculated accessibility that effectively veils his elite socio-educational pedigree. Under this paradigm, the immediate rhetorical exigence — positioned at the precipice of a bomb crater in Baghdad — is transformed from a tragic geopolitical event into a highly personalized, almost picaresque narrative. Through the juxtaposition of the “technological virtuosity” of bunker-buster missiles with a mundane nearby “chicken and chip joint” (p. 1), the discourse achieves a profound rhetorical dissonance, which constitutes a core structural element of this early communicative mask.

A micro-level textual examination, grounded in Huckin’s approach to critical discourse studies, reveals how the speaker systematically leverages synthetic personalization to dissolve the institutional distance between the elite observer and the vernacular reader. The pervasive utilization of the first-person singular (“I was standing,” “I thought”) ensures that the subjective “I-personality” functions as the primary interpretive filter through which the audience perceives the reported reality. Furthermore, the text exhibits a pronounced degree of lexical hybridity, oscillating continuously between a “high” academic register and “low” colloquialisms, thereby projecting an overlarge display of erudition that is simultaneously softened by self-deprecating humor.

At the macro-structural level, this strategic topicalization serves to radically reframe the conventional role of the journalist. The author’s unconventional style, saturated with deliberate archaisms and ironic detachment, is presented not as a mere stylistic eccentricity, but as a necessary, non-conformist rebellion against the sterilized, seemingly robotic idioms of the contemporary political establishment. Ultimately, this manifesto confirms that the politician’s early idiolect transcended random verbal habits, operating instead as a functional rhetorical shield. By masterfully exploiting this carnivalesque “laughing culture,” the speaker succeeded in domesticating political

conflict, thereby preparing the discursive terrain for a seamless transition from a provocative commentator to a populist national leader.

Case Study 2: the "Doorstep speech" as a statesman's manifesto (2019)

The success of Johnson's 2019-2022 "Statesman" persona was predicated on years of strategic eurosceptic rhetoric, a process meticulously documented by J. Henley (2019). This narrative allowed Johnson to reframe the complexities of the Brexit deadlock into a moral imperative, utilizing the global Britain concept to resolve the tension between national sovereignty and international aspirations, as further explored in T. Parnell's (2024) corpus-assisted study. With the 2019 "Doorstep speech," Johnson's idiolect undergoes a tactical recalibration as the former "Eurosceptic rebel" assumes the gravitas of a crisis manager.

From a CDA perspective, this populist appeal is not merely a political stance but is empirically grounded in the micro-level selection of inclusive deictics and the strategic simplification of complex socio-political issues into binary oppositions. Johnson employs the strategy of synthetic personalization, repeatedly stating "My job is to serve you" and "the people are our bosses," which creates a rhetorical bridge between elite power and the electorate. By positioning "the people" against "the gloomsters," he utilizes a populist discursive strategy to bypass institutional criticism and establish a direct, unmediated emotional connection with the audience. This rhetorical maneuver aligns with T. Parnell's (2024) observation that post-Brexit discourse is fundamentally rooted in the "re-articulation of Britishness," where the leader acts as a mediator in a "destabilised" national narrative. However, this is balanced by a shift to "personal responsibility" ("the buck stops here"), a phrase famously associated with Harry Truman, which semiotically frames Johnson as a strong, accountable executive leader, effectively manufacturing consent through a blend of populist accessibility and statesmanlike authority.

At the macro-structural level, topicalization is employed to reframe Brexit from a legalistic process into a moral imperative of democracy. Johnson elevates the discourse by invoking the "awesome foursome" (the United Kingdom) and the symbolic power of the "red, white, and blue flag." As Parnell (2024) emphasizes, such

a “Global Britain” narrative functions as a strategic attempt to resolve the tension between national sovereignty and international interconnectedness, effectively constructing an image of “historical exceptionalism.” By listing high-tech sectors (bioscience, battery technology, space systems), he constructs a logos of “Global Britain” – a future-oriented statesmanlike vision that replaces the irony of his earlier journalism with a narrative of national destiny. This case study confirms that the “Statesman” persona was not a replacement of his idiolect, but a functional recalibration of his rhetorical tools to suit the demands of supreme executive power.

Case Study 3: The "Unbound" global advocate and moral arbiter (CEPA Interview, 2024)

The final phase of Boris Johnson’s discursive evolution (2023–2026) unfolds primarily within the arena of international fora, finding its definitive instantiation in his 2024 interview with the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA). Within this temporary landscape, the politician’s self-presentation strategy undergoes a profound metamorphosis: shedding the institutional and executive constraints inherent in the Premiership, the speaker assumes a dual persona of a “global moral authority” and a “strategic architect of Western alignment.”

An application of Jolliffe’s rhetorical scheme to the text under scrutiny elucidates how the speaker’s ethos is carefully reconstructed through the paradigm of historical prescience. While the former Prime Minister ironically distances himself from formal institutional titles, he concurrently asserts his foundational status as a pioneer of European military assistance, emphasizing British primacy in delivering lethal aid to Ukraine. Concurrently, the dimension of logos shifts from localized domestic concerns to the macro-structural stability of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. By reframing military support as an “immensely cost-efficient” long-term investment, the discourse constructs a pragmatic defensive narrative aimed at securing American hegemony without direct military deployment on the ground.

Concurrently, the pathos of the communication becomes deeply, ethically polarized. The calculated deployment of emotionally charged, high-gravity descriptors — such as “morally abominable,” “creepy,” and an “absolute catastrophe” —

effectively radicalizes the narrative, positioning the adversarial leadership as an existential threat to civilization. From the perspective of critical discourse studies, this axiological polarization strongly resonates with Wodak's (2020) conceptualization of the "savior" narrative, wherein the speaker intentionally systematically eliminates rhetorical nuance to establish a rigid, non-negotiable moral binary. This transition from political evaluation to dogmatic moral judgment is linguistically manifested through a near-complete abandonment of hedging devices in favor of absolute modal certainty.

Furthermore, a micro-level textual examination, grounded in Huckin's analytical methodology, brings to the fore a strategic revival of the speaker's signature eccentric metaphors. His satirical comparison of European leadership to a "tribe of baboons offering acts of simian homage" signals a tactical re-actualization of the "buffoon archetype"; yet within this new context, it functions as a potent rhetorical weapon aimed at critiquing Western political indecision. This meso-level recycling of an earlier, highly provocative idiolect demonstrates that the politician's verbal eccentricity transcends personal idiosyncratic habits, operating instead as a functional, highly malleable rhetorical tool recalibrated for global advocacy.

At the macro-structural level, the discourse is characterized by a profound ideological naturalization. In alignment with Parnell's (2024) observations on post-Brexit narratives, the speaker presents his personal worldview not as a contested political alternative, but as the only logical trajectory available for a "liberal capitalist democracy." By systematically invoking historical precedents and iconic figures such as Ronald Reagan and Winston Churchill, the text performs an autobiographical myth-making, positioning the speaker's political legacy as a continuation of the "Great Man" theory of history. Ultimately, this case study confirms that the target idiolect has evolved into an instrument of "post-political influence," wherein irony no longer serves as a protective shield for accountability evasion, but as a primary vehicle for shaping the global ideological agenda.

Conclusions and prospects for further research. The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that Boris Johnson's idiolect represents a salient paradigm of rhetorical flexibility, wherein micro-linguistic resources are systematically adapted to

volatile socio-historical contexts. Over a longitudinal trajectory spanning more than three decades (1994–2026), the politician's self-presentation underwent a definitive transition from provocative, non-conformist journalism to global moral leadership. The core mechanism enabling this durability resides in the functional dichotomy sustained between the “buffoon” and the “scholar” archetypes — a structural duality that ensures long-term discursive resilience across diverse media environments.

The synthesis of Jolliffe’s rhetorical framework and Huckin’s approach to critical discourse studies has elucidated how this rhetorical anomaly operates as a protective shield. Through the strategic calibration of pervasive irony, classical Latinisms, and conscious “anti-rhetoric,” the speaker successfully neutralizes adversarial critique, systematically reframing structural political conflict as a ludic, performative element. The subsequent metamorphosis into *The Statesman* and *The Global Moral Authority* represents not a rejection of the earlier idiolect, but rather its functional expansion via Churchillian rhetorical frames and a high-gravity moral register. Concurrently, the strategy of calculated self-deprecation operates as a preemptive defense mechanism, wherein the persona of a “comic amateur” effectively dissolves political accountability into a carnivalesque laughing culture. This rhetorical dexterity enables the individual under scrutiny to maintain systemic legitimacy as an “authentic insider” within the contemporary post-truth era.

Ultimately, the evolution of the politician's rhetorical masks reflects a broader epistemic shift within contemporary political communication. When situated within the context of the “destabilized identity narratives” conceptualized in recent scholarship [Parnell, 2024], it becomes evident that the speaker’s communicative success was largely contingent upon an ability to navigate a discursive vacuum through highly performative, flexible leadership. His idiolect, characterized by a complex “calculated informality,” operates not merely as a personal stylistic trademark, but as a sophisticated linguistic apparatus for political legitimation during a period of profound national transformation.

Prospects for further research in this domain reside in exploring the transposition of these rhetorical strategies onto digital media platforms. Specifically, scholarly

attention could be productively directed toward examining how the politician's "calculated informality" is mediated by contemporary social media algorithms and how such hybrid discursive strategies influence the axiological orientations of younger demographic cohorts within modern digital communicative spaces.

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