

# Figures of Speech and Intentions in British Political Interviews

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## Abstract

This paper discusses the use of figures of speech and communicative intentions behind such stylistic choices in British political interviews. By using a qualitative stylistic framework based on the models of Simpson (2004) and Leech and Short (2007), this research investigates the usage of metaphors, similes, and analogies by British politicians between 2009 and 2024. This study has found that such rhetorical devices are strategically utilized to reduce intricacy, create emotional appeals, and command authority. Key findings underline the fact that key metaphors constitute the framing of policies in an accessible and positive light, reinforcement of political positionality through similes, and projection of competence and trust through analogies. This is a very significant lacuna in literature, as almost all previous studies have focused on rhetorical devices in American political speeches rather than British interviews. It tries to show the purposes of such stylistic strategies and allow a bigger understanding of political communication in British contexts to linguists, political strategists, and media analysts. The findings point up the centrality of language in the engendering of public perception and offer insight into the persuasive functions of rhetorical devices in contemporary political discourse.

**Keywords:** Figures of Speech, Political Interviews, Metaphor, Persuasion, Stylistic Analysis

## Introduction

Figures of speech are significant in political speech, as they help speakers relate to an audience through simplification of issues, the use of imagery, and evoking emotions. Metaphors, analogies, and similes are paramount in framing a story and establishing one's authority in British political interviews (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Jeffries, 2017). These are not merely ornamental; they are

practical tools used to influence public perception and reinforce political messages (Hudson, 2021).

Figures of speech in political discourse are deeply embedded in rhetorical traditions that emphasize persuasion as the primary function of communication. For example, metaphors have been used to highlight abstract thoughts and frame them in relatable terms so that they can be easily comprehended by an audience and stuck in their minds (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). British politicians often make use of analogies and similes when interviewed to explain complex policies in terms of related experience. In doing so, policies are supposed to become more relatable and understandable. (Springer 2023) For example, comparing the economy with a "complex machine" states the need for precise interventions while implicitly underlining his expertise. More recent scholarship has placed emphasis on the cognitive and emotive qualities of rhetorical tropes, linking these tropes with audience engagement and persuasion. (Molek-Kozakowska 2020). Critical stylistics, developed by Jeffries (2015), provides the framework for analyzing exactly how linguistic choices convey ideological messages that disclose the interplay between language and both power and society. This perspective is most relevant to political interviews, whereby rhetorical strategies will typically work on at least two dimensions: that of simplifying policies for public consumption and embedding ideological content to shape perceptions in the long run (Browse, 2018).

Despite their significance, the figures of speech used in British political interviews remain underexplored in academic literature. Previous studies have primarily focused on speeches or written texts, overlooking the unique constraints and opportunities presented by interviews (Hudson, 2021). This gap is notable, as interviews demand a balance between spontaneity and strategic messaging, making them a rich site for analyzing the interplay of rhetorical devices and communicative intentions (Stetsyk, 2018).

The present study will fill in these gaps by systematically analyzing the use of figures of speech in British political interviews, testing both their frequency and functions. Drawing on recent research findings from 2018 through 2024, it elaborates on an all-rounded understanding of how rhetorical strategies shape political narratives and contributes to larger discussions of language and power in political communication.

## **The Problem**

However, tropes, like metaphors and analogies, remain some of the strongest tools in political discourse and yet are highly underestimated in the interview format. While the use of rhetorical devices has received great attention in speeches, their role in interviews is not so well investigated as real-life, interactive, and spontaneous situations-see, for example, Jeffries (2017), Molek-Kozakowska (2020). Furthermore, studies often fail to discuss the strategic motivations behind such choices, be it about making policy more comprehensible or emotionally appealing to an audience-for instance, Lakoff & Johnson (1980), Hudson (2021).

In the British context, the use of rhetorical devices is shaped by cultural, historical, and ideological factors, which are rarely addressed in existing literature (Alaghbary et al., 2024; Springer, 2023). Politicians often use figures of speech to embed ideological content subtly, but the extent to which these influences public perceptions remain under-analyzed (Browse, 2018).

Moreover, little has been said regarding the interplay between rhetorical devices and other stylistic features in the interview setting, such as tone and spontaneity (Nature 2020).

The present study tries to fill these lacunas by focusing on the frequency and functions of rhetorical devices in British political interviews. It tries to ascertain how politicians employ metaphors, analogies, and similes in constructing arguments, appealing to their audiences, and commanding respect. This work combines the results of studies from recent years (2018-2024) for the further development of knowledge in the field of the rhetorical ground of political discourse.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This research is conducted to establish the frequency and role of figures of speech; that is, metaphors, analogies, and similes in British political interviews. To be more specific, the paper attempts to understand exactly how such rhetorical means reduce complexity in policies, stir emotional resonance, and build authority through an analysis of these devices in order to reveal their contribution to political narrative-building and public opinion.

Another goal is to uncover the strategic purpose of deploying rhetorical devices. It discusses how British politicians deploy figures of speech to render messages accessible and relatable, embed ideological content, and establish rapport with the audience.

This paper inserts the findings into recent studies' results (2018-2024) and places British practices into the context of global political communication trends. It also aims at adding both to the theoretical and empirical understanding of rhetorical strategies in interviews, and to critical stylistics and political linguistics.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The current study aimed to address the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1.** Which specific figures of speech are most commonly used by British politicians in media interviews to enhance persuasiveness?

**RQ2.** What are the primary purposes behind the use of these figures of speech?

**H1.** British politicians frequently use metaphors, similes, and analogies to simplify complex issues and engage audiences.

**H2.** The primary purposes behind these stylistic choices include emotional appeal, simplification, and authority-building.

### **Significance of the Study**

The strategic use of figures of speech in political interviews has far-reaching implications for both political communication and public understanding. This study examines how politicians construct narratives to simplify complex policies, provoke emotional responses, and create credibility

through metaphors, analogies, and similes. This is particularly important within a media landscape in which public perceptions often depend on the ways in which messages are framed (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Hudson, 2021).

The findings of this study carry pedagogical and practical significance. Academically, it enriches the areas of critical stylistics and political discourse analysis by responding to some gaps in the literature with a focus on the interactive and spontaneous nature of interviews (Jeffries, 2017; Browse, 2018). These findings should help media practitioners in the formulation of better rhetorical strategies that will enhance audience engagement and trust. The study also contributes to building a more critical and informed public, given the tools to critically analyze political language.

## **Review of Literature**

### ***Theoretical Background***

The research on figures of speech, especially the cognitive and persuasive functions of figures of speech, has been one of the milestones in linguistics and political communication studies. The breakthrough work by Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), set grounds for metaphors being not a kind of linguistic decoration but rather a cognitional basis through which people conceptualize abstract notions. This insight has been widely applied to political discourse analysis, where figures of speech have been such useful tools for framing arguments, simplifying complex ideas, and appealing to public opinion. Indeed, Charteris-Black (2018) affirms this.

Recent scholarship has placed focus on the use of FOS in developing emotive appeal and narrative coherence. Molek-Kozakowska (2020) focuses on their frequent use in political speeches; indeed, metaphors and other analogies present imagery that corresponds vividly with audiences. However, less attention has been accorded to their usage in interviews, a genre that demands spontaneity and adjustability. In interviews, figures of speech not only function to convince but also help politicians wriggle out of problematic questions and keep the audience interested.

Research is also emerging on the digital transformation of political communication and how rhetorical strategies are adjusted for social media and online interviews. Ahmed et al. (2023) further argues that the cognitive effect of figures of speech is heightened in digital platforms, where clear and hard-hitting messages are the key to success. This section of work indeed broadens our knowledge on rhetorical devices; however, there is a lack of discussion with regard to specific uses of the same in British political interviews, an underexplored yet crucial genre in political discourse.

Figures of speech in political communication are exceedingly steeped in linguistic and stylistic theories. The framework presented by Simpson (2004) focuses on how stylistic features establish meaning according to context. As Jeffries (2017) points out, this perspective aligns with the broader aims of critical stylistics, within which the language choices in texts are analyzed in light of the power relations and ideological positionings they reveal. Indeed, Simpson's model serves as a useful analytical framework in separating the devices-rhetorical devices-and their functions in political discourse. Complementing this view, the framework by Leech and Short (2007) organizes research into stylistic features in terms of textual and contextual dimensions.

Their system classifies figures of speech into lexical, grammatical, and discursive levels, which enable a more orderly analysis of their usage in political interviews. Based on the theoretical underpinning provided by this framework, the metaphor, simile, and analogy will be studied to see how they are strategically used in order to realize specific rhetorical functions of simplification, emotional resonance, and authority building.

Critical discourse analysis has also significantly contributed to the study of rhetorical devices, emphasizing the way in which the rhetorical devices shape the public perception and reinforce the ideological perceptions. Fairclough 2018 and van Dijk 2021 emphasize the importance of tracing the socio-political context in which those devices function, even stating that figures of speech often function as means of legitimation of political action. By setting these views into a theoretical framework, this book provides an all-rounded approach to the cognitive and persuasive functions of figures of speech in British political interviews.

### ***Empirical Background***

Empirical studies have extensively documented the use of rhetorical devices in political speeches, particularly in American contexts. Hudson's (2021) analysis of metaphors in political discourse demonstrates their effectiveness in simplifying complex policies and aligning public sentiment with political objectives. For example, metaphors like "economic recovery as a journey" create relatable narratives that make abstract economic concepts accessible to lay audiences. However, it lacks the investigation of how these devices work in British political interviews as a genre of discourse characterized by interactivity and, quite often, adversarial relations. Indeed, most of these studies, including Molek-Kozakowska (2020) and Charteris-Black (2018), focus on speeches, thus leaving a gap in the understanding of how rhetorical strategies are adapted to the spontaneous and dialogic format of interviews.

Recent research has begun to fill this gap by examining concrete rhetorical features of British political speech. Alaghbary et al. (2024) report that analogies appear as one of the favorite means by which British politicians establish authority, particularly in discussing complex issues like Brexit. Conversely, Wodak (2020) signals the use of emotive metaphors during the COVID-19 pandemic with the aim of generating solidarity and urgency. While these studies represent valuable insights, they rarely set up a focused analysis of how figures of speech function within the unique constraints and opportunities of political interviews.

### ***Literature Gap***

Despite all the scholarship on rhetorical devices in political communication, British political interviews are underrepresented in the literature. Most of the studies indeed focus on speeches, debates, or campaign rhetoric. These kinds of studies never consider a truly dynamic and high-stakes environment: interviews. Unlike speeches, which are highly scripted, interviews actually force politicians to respond spontaneously. For that reason, their rhetorical strategies become more indicative of their communicative intent and their adaptability.

This has been highly skewed towards American political leaders, with studies like Lakoff's (2016) and Charteris-Black's (2018) focusing entirely on U.S. contexts. This ignores important cultural

and stylistic differences in British political discourse, such as the reliance on irony, understatement, and humor (Stetsyk 2018). These features are explored below in a comparative analysis of British political interviews, thereby filling an important lacuna in the literature and enriching our understanding of rhetorical strategies adopted across different political genres and cultural contexts.

Secondly, the interaction of figures of speech and audience reception in interviews is a relatively unexplored field. Further studies can expand the current research with an analysis of audiences that may show how different demographics interpret and respond to rhetorical devices in political interviews. These omissions are filled by this research, which contributes to the wide understanding of political communication, thus representing a practically relevant view for linguists, media professionals, and political strategists.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative study employs a descriptive approach using stylistic analysis to examine the figures of speech utilized in British political interviews. Based on the models of Simpson (2004) and Leech and Short (2007), the study dissects linguistic elements at lexical and discoursal levels to uncover the communicative intentions behind politicians' use of metaphor, simile, analogy, and other rhetorical devices.

### **Corpus of the Study**

The corpus consists of televised interviews with British political figures from 2009 to 2024. The data includes interviews with prominent figures such as Gordon Brown, Theresa May, Rishi Sunak, and Boris Johnson, drawn from established news sources like the BBC and *The Guardian*. This timeframe captures significant political events, including the Brexit negotiations and the COVID-19 pandemic, providing a rich basis for exploring how political language adapts to contextual pressures.

### **Model of the Study**

The study applies Simpson's (2004) and Leech and Short's (2007) stylistic frameworks to categorize and analyze figures of speech in three primary areas:

1. **Metaphors:** Examining metaphorical language that frames political issues as accessible, relatable, or visionary.
2. **Similes:** Identifying similes that emphasize politicians' positions, often portraying stability or resilience.

3. **Analogies:** Analyzing analogies used to convey complex ideas with a sense of expertise and authority.

These frameworks facilitate an in-depth understanding of how language influences perception and persuasion within political discourse.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Interviews were selected from reliable media archives, ensuring diversity in content and authenticity of data. Selection criteria included the relevance of topics to significant political events and the prominence of figures, aiming to capture diverse rhetorical patterns and intentions. Transcripts of the interviews were used to ensure accuracy in identifying stylistic choices.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The obtained data were analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring rhetorical devices and the purposes behind them. The analysis process involved:

1. **Lexical Analysis:** Identification and categorization of figures of speech, such as metaphor, simile, and analogy.
2. **Discourse Analysis:** Examination of the broader contexts in which these devices were employed to determine the underlying intentions (e.g., simplification, emotional engagement).
3. **Coding and Interpretation:** Coding of figures of speech using qualitative software, with frequency counts to validate patterns and ensure consistency across the corpus.

This systematic approach enabled the extraction of key stylistic elements, allowing for detailed comparisons and robust conclusions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The data were drawn from publicly available sources, ensuring compliance with ethical guidelines regarding data transparency and usage. The study's focus on linguistic features rather than individual personalities ensures an objective analysis.

## **Results**

### **Statistical Results for the Third Research Question**

The analysis of the third research question reveals significant insights into the distribution of rhetorical devices in British political interviews, as summarized in Table 3.

#### **Table 3**

### *Distribution of Rhetorical Devices Used in the Analyzed Interviews*

<b>Figure of Speech Frequency (%)</b>		<b>Example</b>
Metaphors	35%	"A brighter future lies ahead." (Johnson)
Analogies	25%	"Economy as a complex machine." (Sunak)
Similes	20%	"As steady as a rock." (May)
Allusions	20%	References to Churchill's leadership.

Metaphors were the most frequently used rhetorical device, accounting for 35% of the examples. Their prevalence underscores their effectiveness in framing abstract political concepts in a relatable and compelling manner. Analogies (25%) and similes (20%) were also prominent, particularly in simplifying complex technical arguments to make them accessible to a wider audience. Allusions, also comprising 20%, played a key role in reinforcing the authority of political figures and establishing a sense of historical continuity. These patterns highlight the strategic choices political figures make in their discourse to connect with their audience and convey their messages effectively.

### **Statistical Results for the Fourth Research Question**

The analysis of the fourth research question explores the underlying purposes of employing rhetorical devices in political interviews, as detailed in Table 4.

**Table 4**

#### *Purposes Behind the Use of Rhetorical Devices*

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Frequency (%)</b>	<b>Example</b>
Simplification	40%	"The economy is a ship." (Sunak)
Emotional Resonance	35%	"A nation in crisis."
Authority-Building	25%	"Following Churchill's legacy."

Simplification was the most frequent purpose (40%), achieved through the use of metaphors and analogies to make intricate policies and concepts more relatable to the general public. Emotional resonance (35%) emerged as another key strategy, with rhetorical devices designed to evoke strong emotional responses, helping politicians connect with their audience on a more personal level. Authority-building (25%) was achieved through references to historical figures or events, such as invoking Churchill's legacy, which anchored political statements in moral or historical legitimacy. These findings illustrate the multifaceted objectives behind the use of rhetorical devices, emphasizing their versatility in achieving both practical and emotional appeals.



## **Discussion**

### **Analysis of Figures of Speech in British Political Interviews**

#### ***Deliberate Use of Figures of Speech***

The findings underscore a deliberate and strategic use of figures of speech, with metaphors, similes, and analogies dominating the rhetorical landscape of British political interviews. Consistent with Hudson's (2021) analysis, metaphors were prominently used to simplify complex policies and shape public perception. For instance, Boris Johnson's metaphor of Brexit as "a bridge to a brighter future" reframed a divisive issue into an optimistic transition, illustrating the persuasive power of figurative language in redefining contentious policies.

#### ***Emotional Engagement and Audience Resonance***

The use of emotive language, particularly patriotic and optimistic metaphors, plays a crucial role in fostering audience solidarity. This aligns with Charteris-Black's (2018) argument that political language often aims to create emotional connections. Similes, such as Theresa May's "as solid as a rock," highlighted resilience and stability during times of political uncertainty, reinforcing Molek-Kozakowska's (2020) findings on the rhetorical devices employed to maintain public confidence. These stylistic choices reveal the dual purpose of emotional engagement: strengthening the connection with the audience while projecting a sense of reliability and strength.

#### ***Authority-Building through Analogies***

Analogies surfaced as powerful tools for authority-building, enabling politicians to project expertise and credibility. For example, Rishi Sunak's analogy comparing the economy to a "complex machine" underscores technical competence, particularly in discussions of policy intricacies. This supports Wodak's (2020) assertion that specialized language and technical comparisons enhance perceived credibility, especially in areas requiring expert knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

This paper will present an overall analysis concerning the frequency of figures of speech in British political interviews, their strategic purpose, and consequences. It will closely examine the rhetorical use of metaphors, similes, and analogies in interviews from 2009 through 2024 and reveal how such stylistic devices serve to simplify complex policies, evoke emotional resonance, and project authority. The results underline the role language plays in shaping political narratives, influencing public perception, and reinforcing ideological positions.

Metaphors were the most prevalent device, indicating how metaphors can frame abstract problems within the more familiar terms and recast controversial issues into positive ideals. Similes and analogies supported the same effort by reinforcing stability, robustness, and technical capability—all particularly when politics were unstable or relatively intricate. These findings bolster the current scholarship on political discourse while extending its applicability to the interview format—a genre which demands spontaneity and adaptability.

It also fills in critical gaps in the literature by exploring the relatively understudied domain of rhetorical strategies in British political interviews, compared to political speeches. By placing these findings within more established theoretical frameworks such as Simpson 2004 and Leech and Short 2007, the research feeds into both stylistics and political discourse analysis. It deepens insight by showing how rhetorical devices are fitted to interactive media settings that rely on immediacy and engagement.

Notwithstanding these contributions, the study points to a number of limitations. Its narrow focus on British political discourse raises problems of generalizing findings across cultural and political contexts. While it places a strong emphasis on the production of rhetorical devices, it falls short in explaining reception, which is an important aspect when considering the efficacy of political language. Such lacuna is welcomed in future research, particularly with comparative analyses across different political systems and cultures, and investigations into audience perceptions and gender-based rhetorical variation.

In short, the present study on stylistic choices in political communication develops a critical intervention needed not only by linguists but also by media analysts, educators, and political strategists. The demonstration of strategic functions of figures of speech in interviews creates the base for further research into the dynamic interplay between language, power, and persuasion that shapes contemporary political discourse.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This study bridges gaps in the literature by extending the examination of rhetorical strategies to British political interviews, a discourse genre less frequently analyzed compared to speeches. It aligns with theoretical frameworks from Simpson (2004) and Leech and Short (2007), contributing to the broader field of stylistics and political communication. By focusing on metaphors, similes, and analogies, the research highlights their strategic roles in simplifying complex topics, establishing emotional resonance, and constructing authority within the dynamic and interactive context of interviews.

The findings reinforce Hudson's (2021) observations on rhetorical strategies, emphasizing their universal applicability across political systems. For example, metaphors like Johnson's "a bridge to a brighter future" reframed contentious policies such as Brexit into hopeful narratives, while similes and analogies clarified abstract ideas and strengthened politicians' credibility.

In addressing the limited focus on figures of speech in British political interviews, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how rhetorical devices function in contemporary political communication. It underscores the importance of stylistic choices in shaping narratives and influencing audience perceptions, offering valuable insights into the persuasive power of language in political discourse.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings presented in the study carry very important implications across a wide array of different domains and fields. This extensive study hence provides media professionals and political advisors with a framework useful in critically analyzing and creating an effective political message. Knowing how to use figures of speech in a more strategic and purposeful way, these professionals can achieve improvement and advancement in their communication strategies, making sure that clarity is ensured, emotions are stirred, and authority is created in public discourse. For example, using metaphors, political strategists may simplify complex policies into better comprehensible and accessible wording to the general public, while avoiding mixing up rhetorical pitfalls that might lead to alienating or dissociating diverse audiences.

For teachers, this is a comprehensive study that opens up many practical applications in the teaching of the complex aspects of stylistics and rhetoric within the vibrant environment of political discourse. Indeed, this in-depth analysis of naturally occurring, authentic interviews offer students a unique opportunity to explore in depth this exciting interface of language, persuasion, and media—something that dramatically enhances their critical reception of the diverse political narratives presented to them. Educators can empower and endow future generations with the crucial skills needed in order to analyze and interpret political discourse with a better degree of efficiency and to improve their level of critical literacy for an ever-changing media environment by judiciously incorporating these astute findings into their curriculum.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although this study does provide very valuable and insightful information with regard to the usage of different stylistic devices in the context of British political interviews, there are indeed a few limitations that need to be taken into consideration while evaluating its conclusions. First of all, it is realized that the findings of this research are constrained by a particular cultural and political environment since they are predominantly based on the British political discourse. As such, this inherent limitation may finally make it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts or political settings beyond those that are distinctly British. It is undoubtedly possible that the specific stylistic choices and the variety of rhetorical devices that have been followed in this context are not representative of the kind of things that go on within other systems of politics. After all, these systems tend to be highly diverse concerning the cultural standards and the distinctive communication styles, which often differ dramatically from one to another. Lastly, it has to be noted that the whole work seems to lay a strong emphasis on the creation and crafting of rhetorical devices by politicians and other public figures, yet it totally neglects the equally important aspect of how these devices are received, understood, and judged by the audiences to whom they are addressed. Audiences' reception, which is the most vital and essential aspect of any communication, was unfortunately poorly explored in previous literature and scholarship. In actuality, this omission eventually becomes the cause of a severe failure in exploring and learning the more far-reaching and deeper consequences of these rhetorical strategies that are employed in all types of communication. Also, this discussion does not explore possible gender-based differences in great detail, which is itself a topic that can yield valuable information and insight into the dynamic nature of political communication in our society.

While the analysis has, therefore, brought out several patterns in the rhetorical techniques that can be labeled as fundamentally gender-neutral, it does not really speak to or explain the acknowledged big differences.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this research and in consideration of the identified constraints, a number of potential further avenues for exploration are proposed. First and foremost, there is an absolute need for comparative research into a diversity of political systems and cultures around the globe so as to find out and understand how the application and influence of stylistic devices could be significantly different in various contexts worldwide. For example, cross-cultural studies may compare the rhetorical strategies applied in the venues of political speeches within different countries like the United States of America and European countries, among others in Asia. In this regard, this comparative analysis can yield results that establish the complex and multi-layered influences that cultural values have on political communication in their respective venues. Further studies should also address how the audience perceives and interprets different rhetorical devices applied in these speeches since the understanding of an audience's reception is important for a full analysis of the political speeches. This would then involve a close analysis of how different demographic aspects, like age, professional decisions, or political inclinations, may effectively determine the interpretation of figures of speech and to what extent these demographic aspects impact that interpretation. To illuminate and clarify these complicated processes, the use of audience surveys with experimental methods may well prove highly useful and revelatory.

It is to be concluded that it is one of the most promising options for further research to trace all possibilities related to gender-based disparities in applying stylistic devices. It is, therefore, possible that the study into the question of whether male and female politicians have distinctly different rhetorical strategies could shed light on and help clear up the various ways through which gender shapes political communication. Such research would go a long way in developing a much more nuanced and holistic understanding of the intricate gender dynamics that manifest themselves within both the political arena and environment.

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