

ELEMENTS OF POPULISM IN BORIS JOHNSON'S POLITICAL COMMUNICATION ON BREXIT

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Abstract. *This paper explores Boris Johnson's political communication style by analyzing his use of language and its populist elements. The aim is to shed light on his linguistic construction of reality by examining the statements he made in a Brexit-related context. Therefore, qualitative discourse analysis was chosen as the most suitable method and 100 statements were generated by the Google search engine from multifarious sources. This included the systematization of several categories of used rhetorical figures, phrases, slogans, and word types. The paper discovered specific patterns in named language categories depending on which elements of populist communication Johnson is practicing. For example, this is reflected in rhetorical questions when he is talking about "dangerous others", the repetition of words such as "fantastic" and "great" and associating them with nouns like "country" and "people" in the sense of national unity, or an evident "us-them" division displayed while referring to Britain's uncertain future.*

Key words: *Boris Johnson, Brexit, political communication, populism, language analysis.*

1. INTRODUCTION

For the analysis of Boris Johnson's political communication on Brexit to be valid, it is necessary to place it in its social and cultural background. Therefore, it is important to highlight a lot happened since Johnson opted for Vote Leave until the United Kingdom left the European Union. Firstly, this period coincided with the general election campaign and Boris Johnson became Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Secondly, Vote Leave itself was a campaigning organization in the context of the 2016 membership referendum. Encyclopedia Britannica explains Brexit as the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union (EU), which formally occurred on January 31, 2020 (Wallenfeldt 2023). Therefore, it could be argued that Johnson's orientation on Brexit had a defining role in this election (Evans, de Geus & Green 2021).

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When it comes to political communication, McNair (2003, 4) defines it as “purposeful communication about politics”. His basic assumption is that one of the best ways to assess the effects of political communication is by “observing voting behavior, relating this to the communication strategies of the contestants in a political campaign” (McNair 2003, 32). Accordingly, it is important to note that in 2019, Johnson’s Conservatives won their biggest majority in more than 30 years. It was considered a great triumph, and many agreed that Johnson won this majority on a promise to “get Brexit done” (Henley 2019). Based on that, the chosen method for analysis in this paper is qualitative discourse analysis. As Temmerman (2016) explains it in her paper on linguistic discourse analysis as a tool for analyzing political communication; “a careful and detailed linguistic analysis helps to reconstruct the ideational and interpersonal meanings a speaker consciously or unconsciously conveys”. Van Dijk (1997) emphasizes that to understand discourse, it is the context that is crucial. Therefore, Robertson (2021, 4) explained that Vote Leave (championed by Boris Johnson, Michael Gove, and Nigel Farage) bestowed itself as the anti-establishment option. Since populism is defined as a call to the people opposed to the established society structures (Canovan 1999), this paper aims to explore the elements of populism in Boris Johnson’s political communication on Brexit. The research questions aim to find out if the analyzed material contains elements of populist communication, what Johnson’s communication style is, and what patterns he uses in his linguistic construction of reality. Therefore, several rhetorical figures have been chosen as best suited to the theoretical context and the purpose of this paper. Led by this, the following chapters present the theoretical context on which the paper relies on, methodology concepts, the analysis itself, results, and in the end, discussion.

2. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

2.1. Populism and its forms

On one hand, Johnson has a very common elite political background and yet, he managed to profile himself as one of the “ordinary” people (Wood, Corbett and Flinders 2016). This statement can be closely linked to the features of populism. Canovan (1999, 3) defines populism as “an appeal to the people against the established power structure and the dominant ideas and values of society”. She claims that populism is the shadow of the representation of modern democracy (1999, 12). While explaining populism as a political communication style, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) try to elaborate its elements to a broader understanding. “Populism is conceived of as a political style essentially displaying proximity of the people, while at the same time taking an anti-establishment stance and stressing the (ideal) homogeneity of the people by excluding specific population segments” (2007, 319). Furthermore, there are many other elements to populism. While some authors tend to describe it as a “thin ideology”, and others as a communication style, Mudde (2007, 23) stresses its appeal to “pure people” as opposite to the “corrupt elite”, as one of its most outstanding characteristics. The corrupt elite may be rivals, representatives of other ideologies, or the establishment which, in the context of this paper, is often related to the European Union. Alexandre-Collier (2022, 527) stresses other possible enemies in his claims of Boris Johnson’s more contemporary leadership as a reflection of a new populist rhetoric in its combination of hard Brexit, antiimmigration and anti-Parliament discourse. He also explains how Johnson related identity politics to the

disengagement from the EU and puts it in the context of the parties' failure to ideologically modernize (2022, 535). While explaining populism as a communication phenomenon, de Vreese et al. (2018, 425) emphasize that the focus is "on the unique contribution of communication processes to 'construct' populist ideas, and the communicative styles that systematically co-occur with it". This statement is of special importance to this paper as it focuses on construction of populist messages. Jagers and Walgrave (2007) also claim that defining populism as a style enables shifting it into a concrete concept and use this suggestion to explain why they chose comparative discourse analysis in their paper. In other words, they find said definition the most operational one, which is taken as a model in this paper.

2.2. Rhetorical figures

While justifying why they analyzed rhetorical tropes in their discourse analysis, Derakhshani, Qaiwer, Kazemian and Mohammadian (2021) claim that language and politics work well together, especially while deconstructing certain political discourse. Accordingly, this paper also uses discourse analysis tools to examine Boris Johnson's political communication elements by exploring the rhetorical figures he uses.

Starting with metaphor, which is perceived as very important in structuring of human perception (Lakoff and Johnson 2003), speech writers use it for simplifying complex issues, raising emotions or for persuasion (Eriksson 2022, 13). The author even claims that Brexit's political success depended on whoever controlled the debate (2022, 13). More on persuasive purposes, Bagić emphasizes how repetition is used to highlight key ideas. He explains how the spaces between repetitions of expressions play an important role in producing an effect on the audience. The shorter and more frequent the intervals between repetitions of expressions, the stronger the figurative effect (Bagić 2012, 101). He explains why repetition is used in texts/speeches, which is mainly due to the enrichment of statements, evoking memorability, rhythmicity and emphasizing key thoughts and ideas to the audience (Bagić 2012, 256). Putting rhetorical questions in the context of populism, it is important to understand this matter in terms of oration. Derakhshani et al. (2021, 1231-1232) explain this matter while analyzing rhetorical tropes in Donald Trump's First Speech to the UN. They claim that the utilization of rhetorical questions can assist the speaker to bolster his rhetorical influence and affective force of his oratory. Furthermore, Bagić claims that the distinctive feature of an adjective is its purpose to emphasize the property of the phenomenon in question. Therefore, it "makes the expression stronger, more convincing, more picturesque" (Bagić 2012, 110). He also explains that the range of discursive possibilities of the epithet is wide and that it is able to concretize, or even revive, the topic (2012, 111).

It would be insufficient not to mention the role of slogans and their rhetorical features when it comes to populist communication. In his text on slogans, Sharkansky explains that they simplify communication. They provide meaning to everyone; they reinforce or trigger existing sentiments, they soothe or provoke, bring out what is attractive or ugly in their audience (Sharkansky 2002, 75). Specifically in the context of Brexit, apart from the carefully thought-out slogans, Eriksson (2022) claims politicians were attentive with their use of pronouns as well. "By repeatedly using 'we' and 'us' when referencing Britain, Boris Johnson humanizes the country as he tries to foster a group feeling, a sense of togetherness" (Eriksson 2022, 3). The author claims that the presentation of the 'warring parties' (the EU and the UK) is an essential part of the Vote Leave strategy, which is evident while analyzing the contrasting conceptual roles in Johnson's speeches. The

author refers to the creation of the classic “us-them” populist division (2022, 27). Another important populist feature is the role the future plays in their communication. In times of unclear social identities and questionable futures, populists have created identities based on divisions and roles, and this has produced feelings of belonging and purpose, which culminate in emotions of victim-seeking (Nagel 2021). Dunmire (2005, 483) further discusses this by asserting that political evocation of the future perceives human anxiety as prey. Expectations regarding the future are always unclear, and thus influence the audience (2005, 484). Therefore, promising a better future and assigning character to the actors who will illuminate it could create an optimistic discourse among voters. Moving along to political speeches, Salih and Braim (2014) analyze the textual use of hyperbole in political speeches: “that is why they use more hyperbole in their speeches, to make images and matters bigger and more important on the part of the audience, so as to convince and direct them to a particular aim, for example, to vote for their own benefit” (2014, 66). Hyperbole often leads to superlative, and Swanson (2014) studied the comparative and superlative adjectives in Tacitus, a truly great Roman orator and public official. He argues that Tacitus uses the comparative and superlative degrees of the adjective to make the emotions he expresses even more intense and to declare the intensity of these feelings (2014, 25). This seems to be of particular interest due to Johnson’s apparent love for literature and his academic direction.

This paper aims to deconstruct Boris Johnson’s political communication with discourse analysis. It does so by asking what types of words/phrases/slogans Johnson uses in terms of Brexit and what is their meaning in relation to populist communication.

3. METHODOLOGY

De Vreese et al. (2018) accentuate the growing acceptance of the importance of discourse when it comes to populism. Discourse analysis deals with the study and analysis of language use. It is imperative to note that this paper uses an integrative qualitative discourse analysis approach that conveys many disciplines which contribute to the specific context of this research. “Discourse analysts illuminate the ways in which people create, convey, share, acquire, and/or (mis)understand the meaning(s) of moments, events/experiences, lives, and (sub)cultures” (Scharp and Thomas 2017, 6-7). What all these analyses have in common, is that they all reject a realistic understanding about language only being a simple way of describing words (Halmi, Belušić and Ogresta (2004, 35). The analysis of discussion is one of the main features for the construction of social reality. The authors state that even the simplest phenomena can be described in countless different ways, and that will inevitably depend on the orientation of the speaker or writer (2004, 38). Regardless of the approach, a wide range of data sources are available to the discourse analyst, including interview transcripts, published literature, media, and web materials (Hodges, Kuper, and Reeves 2008, 570), a combination of which is used in this paper. Furthermore, Wodak (2001) discloses the importance of translating theory into instruments, which is further explained in the context of this paper in the following section.

For the purposes of this study, 100 statements were collected in the period from January 22, 2016, when Johnson opted for Vote Leave, until January 31, 2020, when the United Kingdom officially left the European Union. This period coincided with his general election campaign as Johnson became Prime Minister in the meantime, and his general election campaign significantly clashed with Brexit. The sample was collected with the use of Google search engine and keywords, generating Johnson's statements related to Brexit. The Google search engine offers a time tool which was used to select the period from January 22, 2016, until January 31, 2020. The collected material generated results from the British media (e.g., The Sun, SBS News, The Spectator), Boris Johnson's Facebook and Twitter page (posts, photos, captions, videos), his YouTube interviews and video materials placed during the campaign (e.g., "One day with Boris Johnson", "12 questions", "Love Actually parody"). These materials were then transcribed and taken into analysis and some of the statements are used here as examples. Naturally, not all types of words and figures that were used are named here, as that would not be concise or efficient. Rather, some of the most outstanding and effective forms mentioned in the literature are brought out here as examples of Johnson's communication and language style. Sources mentioned in the text can be found in the list of references at the end of the paper.

As already stated in previous chapters, this paper strives to shed light on Johnson's linguistic construction of reality through the statements he made in Brexit related context. Since qualitative discourse analysis was evaluated as most methodologically suitable, this chapter is divided into several subcategories based on the figures of speech he used. Each of the figures is analyzed and consequently, with examples, placed in the context of this topic. Due to discourse analysis and its exploration of recurring patterns and language, the following pages present a thorough analysis of Johnson's rhetorical language use, political communication style and its populist implications.

4. THE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Repetition

In his first speech to the assembly after becoming Prime Minister, Johnson talked about the changes that are going to follow. A part of his speech is an example of extensive repetition of specific words, such as "parliament": "This new democratic parliament, this people's parliament, is going to do something and you can guess what it is, that this parliament is going to do, once we put the withdrawal agreement back, we are going to get Brexit done."

The Sun spent a 16-hour day with Johnson during the 2019 general election campaign in which he talked about his political obligations and answered questions about it. The journalist mentioned actor Hugh Grant, who stated his opinion on Johnson as Prime Minister, saying it would be catastrophic and that people should do whatever they can to deny his majority. Johnson responded and included repetition of specific words, such as "people" and "great":

"Look, of course a lot of people care very strongly about Brexit, and they want to stop it, but I think the people of this country voted for it. Most people I meet, with the exception of the gentleman you mention obviously, but most people I meet, do think

this is a great country, great democracy, they want us to move forward, and they see great excitement and great potential” (*The Sun* 2019).

In *The Sun*’s article named “Boris Johnson urges *Sun* readers to back Conservatives in General Election to get Brexit done & unite Britain”, Johnson made a clear connection between his wishes and the audience (the people), populistically emphasizing how relevant they are with repetition:

“I want us to get Brexit done. I want to focus on *Sun* readers’ priorities. I want to unleash this country’s potential. Above all I want to end the division and bring this country back together again. Whether you voted Leave or Remain, you matter and your voice matters” (Dunn, Dathan & Gutteridge 2019).

4.2. Epithets

Johnson has a pattern of articulating words like “fantastic” and “great”, which he then associates with nouns such as “country” and “people.” By adding these epithets to these nouns, he creates a repeating discourse of the terms used in his statements. During one of his Brexit speeches, Johnson stated: “We can leave the EU as one UK, whole and entire and perfect, as we promised” (*Global News* 2019).

By constantly repeating specific kinds of words, he familiarizes people with the populist elements of his discourse which often contain unfriendly characteristics regarding his opponents. For example, as part of the general election campaign, he answered 12 questions about himself, one of which was “why are we having this election”, to which he had replied:

“We are having this election because, basically, the whole political system is paralyzed and we have a fantastic Brexit deal what we did, and then Parliament refused to lock it through so that we are stuck in the EU when people voted to leave, so we need to have an election” (Conservatives 2019).

In that same interview, he combined directly addressing the people with the creation of an impressionistic idea of excellence: “Vote for a compassionate one-nation Conservative government that understands the symmetry between a free-market economy and great, great public services” (*Conservatives* 2019).

Another example of combining epithets with repetition and the propagation of national unity and perfection is evident in the context of “dangerous others”: “Every one of you who wants us to focus on a positive, united future, every one of you who worries about the chaos of a Corbyn-Sturgeon alliance in a hung Parliament...” (*Tapsfield and Maidment* 2019).

Illustration 1 shows how elements of Johnson’s communication are intertwined and how he echoes them in different statements by circulating the same messages and same patterns. All of these phrases reflect populist characteristics. For example; the column “political system vs. government” represents the use of a populist distinction between “them” and “us.” Evidently, his statements often include incorporated campaign slogans.

PEOPLE	GREAT	COUNTRY	POLITICAL SYSTEM vs. GOVERNMENT	VOTE	POTENTIAL	FANTASTIC
British people	Great country	Great country	Our political system is blocked	Vote Conservative	Unleash the potential of this whole country	A fantastic Brexit deal
People of this country	Great potential	People of this country	The whole political system is paralyzed	Vote Leave	Unleash the potential of the entire people of this country	Fantastic city
Priorities of the people	Great public services	Heart of this country	Conservative government	Change people voted for	Let's unleash Britain's potential	Fantastic thing
Will of the people	Greatest civilization	Uniting this country	We work as a government	Vote today to break the gridlock	Unleash the full potential of this brilliant country	Fantastic country
People's Parliament	Greatest place to live	Energize the country	I think this has turned out to be a historic election, that gives us now, the people in this government, the chance to respect the democratic will of the British people	Vote to get Brexit done Vote to unleash Britain's potential	Vote to unleash Britain's potential	Fantastic to meet great people

Illustration 1 Systematical representation of repeating patterns in Boris Johnson's communication

4.3. Campaign slogans

Johnson's campaign slogan was originally "Deliver, Unite, Defeat." Afterwards, he added the letter "E" for "Energize", adopted the "DUDE" acronym, and stated: "Dude, we are going to energize the country, we are going to get Brexit done" (Picheta 2019).

Some of the other slogans are: "Vote to get Brexit done", "Vote to unleash Britain's potential", "Enough is enough, let's get it done", "Come with us."

Apart from these slogans, which were directly used as inscriptions, posters, and bits on ex-Prime Minister Boris Johnson's social media, he often "spontaneously" incorporated them into his statements:

"When I look at the potential of this country waiting to be unleashed, I know that we can turn this opportunity into a stunning success. And whatever the bumps in the road ahead, I know that we will succeed. We've obeyed the will of the people. We've taken back the tools of self-government. Now is the time to use those tools to unleash the full potential of this brilliant country and to make better the lives of everyone in every corner of our United Kingdom" (Conservatives^a 2019).

The "obeying the will of people" statement is a clear example of populist communication. Also, the previously mentioned article by The Sun, in which Boris urges readers to back the Conservatives, is another example of him incorporating slogans: "I want us to get Brexit done. I want to focus on Sun readers' priorities. I want to unleash this country's potential" (*The Sun* 2019).

“We will get Brexit done, invest in our NHS, schools, and police, and cut taxes for you and your family” was both his Facebook and Twitter post on November 23, 2019, with a picture of him hugging a man dressed in work clothes, while Boris is also wearing a yellow fluorescent jacket and a helmet.

Ahead of his last day of campaigning, Johnson posted a Tweet saying: “Let’s get Brexit done and get on with spreading opportunity and hope across the whole UK and let’s unleash the potential of this country.”

4.4. Metaphor and Comparison

Considering the relationship between metaphor and comparison and Johnson’s orating skills, it is crucial to mention the time he caused various reactions in the media with a speech he made at the UN General Assembly in New York:

“It is a trope as old as literature, that any scientific advance is punished by the gods. When Prometheus brought fire to mankind in a tube of fennel as you may remember with his brother Epimetheus, Zeus punished him by chaining him to a Tartarian crag while his liver was pecked out. I talked about a hangover cure. His liver was pecked out by an eagle, and every time his liver regrew, the eagle came back and pecked it again, and this went on forever. A bit like the experience of Brexit in the UK” (*The Guardian* 2019).

While giving a Brexit Day speech he stated that the UK’s departure from the European Union is a moment of hope and new beginnings while combining said figures: “This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act in our great national drama” (*CNN* 2020).

He created revolt among the EU legislators by comparing their institution to previous, more forced attempts to unify the continent: “Napoleon, Hitler, various people tried this out, and it ends tragically, the EU is an attempt to do this by different methods” (*CNBC* 2016).

Another example is when he compared the parliament to a reality show. He did so in his Tory conference speech as a criticism of Parliament, which he blamed for failing to get a Brexit deal approved. That way he is simplifying complex issues by using metaphor. “If the Parliament were a reality TV show, then a whole lot of us, I’m afraid, would have been voted out of the jungle by now. But at least we would have the consolation of a Speaker being forced to eat a kangaroo testicle” (*Hereford Times* 2019).

Sky News posted a part of Johnson’s interview on Twitter on October 31, 2019, and the post is captioned with a quote from his interview: “We’ve got an oven ready (Brexit) deal, put it in the microwave as soon as we get back from the election.” Interestingly, he uses the oven/microwave version of this statement regularly in many of his interviews, thus making it closer to the “regular people” by using simple wording and visualizing his points.

4.5. Rhetorical questions

Johnson uses rhetorical questions to belittle his opponents or to build a positive self-image, whereby the pattern of “us-them” division mentioned before, thematizes populist communication. In the context of speaking about the upcoming elections which were near Christmas time, Johnson directly called out his rival Jeremy Corbyn: “What would you rather have under the Christmas tree — £150billion of investment or two referendums from Jeremy Corbyn?” (*Wooding* 2019).

Populistically turning against the elite, while emphasizing one's own benevolence and understanding of the people, can also be seen in his expressions of worry: "I am afraid that it is clear that if the Parliament had its way, then this country would not be leaving even on January the 31st and that, of course, is bad for democracy, it's disastrous for trust in politics, why should MPs decide that they can cancel the result of a referendum?" (*Global News* 2019).

At the end of his campaigning, Johnson decided to use a series of rhetorical questions while talking about his opponent and the future:

"How can you trust Jeremy Corbyn when he said he would respect the result of the referendum, only to want to prolong the uncertainty and chaos by rerunning it? This election is the most important in a lifetime. The result will define the next decade – will we go forward, grow as a country, unleash our potential? Or will we remain stuck, stood still, unable to make any progress?" (Conservatives^a 2019).

On December 13th, his morning victory speech contained several rhetorical questions. This time they were meant to emphasize the victory and the promises he made. It is also important to notice that he is using first-person plural and, once again, giving "people" importance:

Good morning, everybody – well, we did it – we pulled it off, didn't we?
 And with this mandate and this majority, we will, at last, be able to do what?
 And so we will deliver 50,000 more nurses, and 50 million more GP surgery appointments and how many new hospitals?
 And all the other priorities that you, the people of this country, voted for. Record spending on schools, an Australian-style points-based immigration system, more police, how many?
 And that is what we will now do, isn't it? That is what we will now do. Let's go out, let's go out and get on with it" (*Al Jazeera* 2019).

4.6. First-person plural and first-person singular

It is clear now that Boris Johnson makes a distinction in his communication while creating the idea that he is a part of the same group as the voters and while giving the impression that he is a special individual who possesses talent. This chapter is divided into two sections which differentiate these two practices.

4.6.1. First-person plural

In his arrival speech in Downing Street, after succeeding Theresa May, he framed himself as part of the people by firstly using "we" and then "British people": "And that is why we will come out of the EU on October 31st because in the end Brexit was a fundamental decision by the British people" (*Reuters* 2019).

He also regularly uses "we" while referring to the "enemy", which often seems to be the EU establishment: "We need to look at the legal reality, which is that this is an accelerating effort to build a country called Europe" (*ITV News* 2016).

His Facebook post from June 23, 2016, displays a similar pattern:

"Now is the time to believe in ourselves, and in what Britain can do, and to remember that we always do best when we believe in ourselves. Of course we can continue to provide leadership and support in Europe – but intergovernmentally, outside the supranational control of the EU system. Today, I hope you will Vote Leave, and take

back control of this country's destiny; and if we Vote Leave, then all our votes will count for more in the future. Let's make today our Independence Day”.

An example of this can also be seen in a part of a statement he made when asking people to take back control, while populistically addressing the problem of immigrants: “We can take back control of 350 million pounds a week and spend on our priorities here in this country, including on the National Health Service. We can take back control of our immigration system...” (*AP archive* 2016).

4.6.2. First-person singular

On the other hand, Johnson's use of first-person singular seems to be present while asking people to trust him and back him up directly or when he is stating his power and abilities.

On November 7, 2019, a video was posted to his Facebook page saying: “If I come back here with a working majority in Parliament, then I will get Parliament working again for you”.

While giving a speech about Brexit at Downing Street, Johnson used that same statement (*Global News* 2019) and again insinuated that politicians should be subjected to voters.

When British MPs voted against an early election in September 2019, Johnson accentuated his power and abilities while furthering himself from “them” (the government): “I will go to that crucial summit on October the 17th and no matter how many devices this parliament invents to tie my hands, I will strive to get an agreement in the national interest... This government will not delay Brexit any further” (*SBS News* 2019).

Another example of this is evident in a statement (a version of which he regularly makes): “My job is to bring this country together now and take us forward” (*CNN* 2020).

While expressing that all of the Conservative Party candidates in the December 12 election have pledged to back his Brexit deal, he added: “I am offering a pact with the people: if you vote Conservative you can be 100% sure a majority Conservative government will unblock Parliament and get Brexit done” (*Reuters*^a 2019).

4.7. Future tense

Johnson uses the future tense in form of promises and repetition. An example is taken out of his first speech after becoming Prime Minister:

“The doubters, the doomsters, the gloomsters - they are going to get it wrong again. The people who bet against Britain are going to lose their shirts, because we are going to restore trust in our democracy and we are going to fulfil the repeated promises of Parliament to the people and come out of the EU on October 31, no ifs or buts” (*BBC News* 2019).

More on the subject of promises and its appeal to the future, a video was posted to his Facebook page on December 29 incorporating his slogans: “We will be out of the EU on the 31st of January. We will invest billions more in our NHS. We will level up and unite our country.”

A little more than a month before the elections, on November 7, 2019, a video was posted to his Facebook page making a condition: “If I come back here with a working majority in Parliament, then I will get Parliament working again for you”.

Another example of his references to the people and serving them was incorporated in his Facebook and Twitter posts shared five days after the general elections in 2019: "This is a people's government, and we will deliver on the priorities of the British public".

4.8. Superlative and hyperbole

Expressing nationalism and its consequent need for unity is another characteristic of populist communication described in the literature. Johnson tends to use superlatives and hyperbole while referring to nationalism. A part of his Facebook post, published on June 23, 2016, was about the polls being open all day and encouraging people to go for Vote Leave and it said: "This is the most remarkable country on earth".

On November 12, 2019, a post on his Facebook page accentuated the promises he made about making Britain great again: "I want us to get Brexit done so that we can get on with making this the best country in the world to live. The greatest place to start a business, to have a family, to get an education – to have a life".

One month later, on December 12, 2019, he was thanking people through a Facebook post, this time emphasizing the role of democracy: "Thank you to everyone across our great country who voted, who volunteered, who stood as candidates. We live in the greatest democracy in the world".

Johnson's Twitter post from December 15, 2019, is another example of his descriptions of a bright and, conditionally possible, future: "Let's unite this country, let's spread opportunity to every corner of the UK, with superb education, superb infrastructure, and technology. Let's get this done and move forward".

5. DISCUSSION

This paper aims to understand how Boris Johnson communicated during Brexit by analyzing his statements. The conducted research suggests that Johnson uses populist elements in his communication while appealing to the people or mobilizing voters. Grbeša and Šalaj (2018) discuss three main elements of populist communication. The first one being positive evaluation of the people, and negative evaluation of political elites. Johnson frequently uses a patriotic and helpful tone while addressing "the people", and a hostile tone while attacking, for example, his rival – Jeremy Corbyn. He does so by insinuating that Corbyn and his party are a threat to the country's progress (*Conservatives* 2019). The second criterion is about identifying with people by using informal language. Johnson uses slogans and simple wording while trying to address the masses, which is perhaps best represented in his slogans: "Dude, we are going to energize the country, we are going to get Brexit done" (Picheta 2019). The last criterion is the "empty signifier", which is associated with "dangerous others". Normally, dangerous others are political rivals. This can be confirmed for Johnson, as he often talks about Jeremy Corbyn and the Labor party like they are the enemies, but even more so, while referring to the European Union. One of the examples is when he said the EU is forcibly trying to unify the continent, just like Napoleon and Hitler tried to (*CNBC* 2016). He distinguishes himself from the elite by using first-person plural and presenting himself as "one of the people". He does so by, for example, posting on his Facebook page: "if we Vote Leave, then all our votes will count for more in the future." He uses first-person singular to further himself from the elite too, but in a way that accentuates his will and power: "no matter how many devices this parliament

invents to tie my hands, I will strive to get an agreement in the national interest... This government will not delay Brexit any further” (*SBS News* 2019). Repeating the word “people” is often put in the context of Johnson working for his voters and trying to turn things in their favor. Using epithets, superlatives, and hyperbole is about describing the United Kingdom as: “a fantastic country”, “the greatest democracy”, “the most remarkable country on earth”, which is a populist way of evoking nationalism. Another one is using the concept of the future against human uncertainty: “The doubters, the doomsters, the gloomsters – they are going to get it wrong again. The people who bet against Britain are going to lose their shirts, because we are going to restore trust in our democracy...” (*BBC News* 2019).

CONCLUSION

This paper aims to explore the ways and style of Boris Johnson’s political communication. Therefore, it analyzes Johnson’s communication style by asking what types of words/phrases/slogans he uses in the context of Brexit and what their analyzed meaning in terms of populism is. The analysis of 100 statements, some of which are included in this paper as examples, indicates that Boris Johnson’s communication style contains populist elements. In relation to the theoretical context, linguistic figures that stood out are repetition, metaphor, comparison, rhetorical questions, epithets, slogans, use of first-person plural vs. first-person singular, future tense, superlative and hyperbole. It should be noted that this paper does not cover all the populist elements, nor does it use all the tools discourse analysis provides as it does not tend to determine whether Johnson is a true populist figure nor what that would contain. In future research, it would be valuable to do a comparative analysis of different politicians in different national contexts or to explore Johnson’s rhetoric in the context of anti-immigration and other far-right populist characteristics. Also, it would be interesting to explore Brexit in relation to the media and new media with more detail, as this research showed it was extensively used.

Johnson’s populist references to “the people” are reflected in his glorification of the English nation by evoking nationalism and using epithets, superlatives, and hyperbole. He frequently uses populist phrases like “people’s government” or “parliament working for you”, which is closely related to “empty signifiers” (Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck 2016, 335–336). When it comes to metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) suggest that an integral part of metaphors is the structuring of human perception and thinking, or even action. This is particularly interesting in the context of Johnson comparing Brexit with continuous liver pecking done by an eagle (*The Guardian* 2019) or comparing the parliament to a reality show while talking about a Speaker eating a kangaroo testicle (*Hereford Times* 2019). Rhetorical questions are used to bolster the oratory, and they are his way of attacking the enemies directly: “How can you trust Jeremy Corbyn when he said he would respect the result of the referendum, only to want to prolong the uncertainty and chaos by rerunning it?” (*Conservatives* 2019). A lot like metaphors, his political slogans are witty, creative, and carefully thought out. A statement by British politician Geoffrey Van Orden in *The Parliament Magazine* perhaps best sums up the effectiveness of these slogans: “Boris’ simple promise to deliver Brexit and unleash Britain’s potential touched people’s hearts in a way that didn’t happen since Margaret Thatcher”. In the same article, Labor politician Neena Gill called “the lies about Brexit and the outcome of the election the price of populism” (*Banks* 2019).

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ELEMENTI POPULIZMA U POLITIČKOJ KOMUNIKACIJI BORISA JOHNSONA O BREXITU

Ovaj rad istražuje politički komunikacijski stil Borisa Johnsona analizirajući njegovo korištenje jezika i popratne populističke elemente. Cilj je prezentirati njegovu lingvističku konstrukciju stvarnosti istraživanjem izjava koje je dao u kontekstu Brexita. Stoga je kvalitativna analiza diskursa odabrana kao najprikladnija metoda te je generirano 100 izjava putem Google tražilice iz različitih izvora. To je uključivalo sistematizaciju nekoliko kategorija korištenih retoričkih figura, fraza, slogana i vrsta riječi. Rad je otkrio specifične obrasce u navedenim jezičnim kategorijama ovisno o tome kojim se elementima populističke komunikacije koristi. Na primjer, to se odražava u njegovim retoričkim pitanjima dok govori o „opasnim drugima“, ponavljanju riječi kao što su „fantastično“ i „sjajno“ te njihovom povezivanju s imenicama kao što su „zemlja“ i „narod“ u smislu nacionalnog jedinstva, ili evidentna podjela „mi-oni“ dok se referira na neizvjesnu budućnost Britanije.

Ključne riječi: Boris Johnson, Brexit, politička komunikacija, populizam, analiza jezika.