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## JOHNSONISM AS A LINGUISTIC PHENOMENON: PROFESSIONAL DISCURSIVE PERSONALITY OF BORIS JOHNSON

**Summary.** The article focuses on the professional linguistic personality of the British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The linguistic personality of B. Johnson is viewed in terms of political linguistic personology and is grounded on the fact that specific character of a professional linguistic personality of a politician is determined by the combination of individual and institutional communicative and verbal aspects. The study is novel due to the integrative use of communicative-pragmatic, linguostylistic, and rhetorical analysis for identifying the peculiarities of the professional linguistic personality of a political leader. Johnson's linguistic personality is studied through the analysis and interpretation of his professional political discourse, illustrated by the official speeches, commentaries, interviews, etc. which enables to determine the dominant features of Johnson's discursive personality. Johnson-related political discourse is also applied to assess the perception of the politician's discursive personality and behavior by the media. B. Johnson's communicative tactics and techniques are approached as consistent implementation of his communicative strategies and political intentions. The highly diverse inventory of rhetorical and stylistic devices used by B. Johnson is thought to contribute largely to the efficiency of his discourse and to brand Johnson's unique discursive style. The study showed that B. Johnson's linguistic personality greatly contributes to his remarkable political success and continuing popularity in the UK political arena and serves as the linguistic constituent of the Johnsonism precedent phenomenon. Such features of Boris Johnson's professional linguistic personality as intellectuality, linguistic creativity, strategic verbal evasiveness and inconsistency, expressiveness of style, expertise in classical rhetoric, literature and history heavily exploited in the diversified political context, theatricality of self-presentation, are regarded as the basic ones. Professionally gained journalistic competence and extraordinary rhetorical skills developed over the years of political career account for Johnson's independence and sophistication of judgement, great variety of communicative tactics and techniques he employs, high level of intertextuality of the discourse.

**Key words:** linguistic personality, discursive personality, political discourse, Boris Johnson, Johnsonism.

**Problem statement.** E. Coseriu once noticed that "language undergoes constant changes precisely because it is *not* something ready-made but is continuously created in the course of verbal activity. In other words, the language changes because it is spoken" [1, p.184]. Hence, a linguistic personality as an individual considered in terms of his potential and readiness for verbal activity and "characterized not so much by what he knows about the language as by what he can do with the language" [2, p.3], remains a live issue for the contemporary language studies. The linguists' increasing

interest in professional discourses entails their growing concern for the professional discursive personality that combines both individual and institutional communicative features. The political discourse is no exception and a politician's professional discursive personality becomes subject to cognitive, psycholinguistic, communicative-pragmatic, rhetorical, linguostylistic, etc. analysis.

The contemporary political linguistics deploys two main approaches to the discourse study. The first one is based on the politician's individual discourse analysis, while the second focuses on the ways of creating a politician's media or public image in the discourse of other politicians, political analysts, or journalists. Integration of these two enables a researcher not only to observe a politician's discursive behavior and study the perception of this politician in the national consciousness, but also find out if the politician's communicative intentions (both declared and concealed) have been successfully realized and led to the predetermined communicative effect noticeable in the media and public response. Thus, combining the two sources of material (individual political discourse and related critical analysis), we're going to consider the phenomenon of Johnsonism in terms of linguistic and communicative competence as well as discursive behavior of B. Johnson.

The **objectives** pursued in the research are the following: 1) to determine and analyze certain communicative tactics and techniques implementing B. Johnson's communicative strategies; 2) to study the inventory of rhetorical and stylistic devices that help B. Johnson effectively realize his communicative intentions; 3) to outline the distinctive features of Johnsonism on the basis of B. Johnson's discursive activity and his linguistic personality perception by other individual and group actors involved in political communication.

The **methodological framework** of the research includes political discourse analysis, communication theory, discursive personality theory, and linguopolitical personology. In the course of the study, methods of communicative-pragmatic and discourse analysis, as well as the elements of linguostylistic, rhetorical, and intertextual analysis were used to identify the peculiarities of the professional linguistic personality of a political leader.

**Research prerequisites.** In the XXI century, the study of the phenomenon of linguistic personality requires a multidisciplinary approach; it relies on the integration of scientific paradigms of cognitive linguistics (N.N. Boldyrev, V.I. Karasik, V.V. Krasnykh), psycholinguistics (K.F. Sedov), communication theory (F.S. Batsevych, O.A. Semenyuk), political discourse theory (T.A. van Dijk, Ye.I. Sheigal, A.P. Chudinov), linguistic personality and discursive personality theories (G.I. Bogin, S.G. Vorkachev, V.I. Karasik, Yu.N. Karaulov, K.F. Sedov, L.N. Sinelnikova), theory of communicative strategies (T.A. van Dijk, O.S. Issers,

O.L. Mihaleva, O.N. Parshina), linguistic personology (V.N. Bazylev, V.P. Neroznak).

The fact that a linguistic personality realizes itself in discourse and must be viewed as the representation of a speaker's language consciousness in his/her language behavior has been fully acknowledged by linguists [3–8]. A discursive personality manifests itself as a verbal, communicative, linguistic, and ethnosemantic personality. The discourse reveals a personality's psychological traits, philosophical and ideological paradigms, ethno-national, historical, and cultural features [7, p. 44].

The structure of discourse depends on the individual psychological characteristics of the linguistic personality [8]. Operating with such terms as discursive activity, discursive behavior, discursive thinking, discursive competence, K.F. Sedov emphasizes that the evolution of the linguistic personality is the evolution of human communicative competence [9, p. 36].

According to F. Batseyvych, linguistic personality is an individual who has a set of abilities and characteristics that determine the way he creates and perceives texts, characterized by the level of structural-linguistic complexity as well as the depth and accuracy of reflection of reality [10, c. 188].

Among the terms related to the linguistic personality are 'verbal passport', 'linguistic personality profile', 'verbal portrait'. Thus, V.I. Karasik defines 'a verbal passport' as "a set of those communicative features of the linguistic personality that make this personality unique (or, at least, recognizable)" [6]. F. Batseyvych interprets a *verbal passport* as "the information that a person subconsciously conveys about himself in the process of communication by means of a language code" [10, p. 272]. He considers the *verbal passport* a constituent part of the *communicative passport* of a person [ibid].

O.L. Lavrynenko suggests the concept of a *linguistic personality profile* construed as a "specific type of functional relationship between cognitive, motivational, and emotional components of linguistic personality, which is determined by the degree of development of each of these components and shapes a number of psychological qualities of linguistic personality" [11].

A *verbal (speech) portrait* is understood as a functional model of linguistic personality, rhetorical portrayal being yet another example of speech portraying practices [12, p.24].

The discourse of professional politicians has become the object of study of linguopolitical personology, a relatively new school of thought in foreign and national linguistics that focuses on the phenomenon of a professional linguistic personality in the field of politics [12; 13]. Within this framework, researchers widely apply the method of reconstruction of linguistic personality through the speech portrayal and emphasize that the specific character of a professional linguistic personality of a politician is determined by the combination of individual and institutional communicative and verbal aspects. Hence, it is construed as a multilateral and synergetic phenomenon [12; 13; 14].

In the study on the reconstruction of the virtual image of a politician's linguistic personality, based on speech acts analysis, L. Slavova points out that "linguistic personality of a politician can be manifested as individual personality; collective personality representing the ideas of a stratum or nation; generalized symbolic personality – the stratum label of the national ethnic community in the eyes of others; virtual personality constructed by the institute of speechwriting" [13, p. 109]. L. Slavova emphasizes the factor

of a discursive symbiosis of media, internet, and institutional types of discourse enabling the semantic, cognitive, and motivational levels of the linguistic personality of a politician to be verbally implemented in a variety of genres and forms [14, p. 240].

**Results and discussion.** Politics is about gaining and maintaining power. To stay in power, politicians turn to rhetoric as the instrument of political art, the art of persuasion, which, according to Aristotle, is based on *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*.

Political discourse is an institutional type of discourse serving the basic functions of politics – struggle for power, integration, and differentiation of group agents of politics, development of the conflict and establishment of the consensus, implementations of verbal political actions and informing about them, manipulation of consciousness and control over the actions of politicians and the electorate [15]. Political discourse is characterized by the pragmatically determined semantic uncertainty, relativity of designations (when the choice of nomination is determined by the speaker's politics), esoteric, fideistic and manipulative nature, emotionality, the significant role of phatic communication, dynamic language due to the variability of the political situation [15]. These intrinsic properties of political communication are implemented in a variety of ways and their discursive exposure ultimately depends on the politician's individual communicative competence and language skills.

Boris Johnson is American-born British journalist and Conservative Party politician who became prime minister of the UK in July 2019. Earlier he served as the second elected mayor of London (2008-2016) and as secretary of state for foreign affairs (2016-2018) under Prime Minister T. May [16]. The discursive personality of B. Johnson has been moulded since his school years at Eton. Study of classics at Balliol College, Oxford, then a career in political journalism (as a political columnist (1989-94) and an assistant editor (1994-99) for *The Daily Telegraph*, later as an editor of *The Spectator* magazine, till 2005 [ibid.]) left indelible imprint on Johnson's cognitive-discursive phenomenon.

B. Johnson, known for his eloquence and verbal creativity, seems to have brought these skills to perfection over the course of his professional political career and made them serve different political intents. Among Johnson's most noticeable discursive characteristics are evasiveness and implicitness implemented by various language means and discursive tactics. Evasion techniques have become for B. Johnson the discursive instrument for manipulating the addressees, changing their assessment of what is happening to the opposite or, at least, less critical, and avoiding both lying and telling the truth.

In his Brexit Speech of February 14, 2018, the then-Foreign Secretary Johnson said: "In many cases I believe the feelings [those of grief and alienation] are abating with time, as some of the fears about Brexit do not materialize. [...] I want today to anatomise at least some of the fears and to show to the best of my ability that these fears can be allayed, and that the very opposite is true: that Brexit can be grounds for much more hope than fear". [17]. *The Spectator* author Dot Wordsworth, reflecting on this speech, alluded to P.G. Wodehouse's fiction and the anecdotal episode from the life of Lord Macaulay, the XIX century British historian and politician: "As for the speech, its language was not simply a pile of lexical meanings, but also a series of implicit references. Civilised language is allusive. Hence the Wodehouse. [...] Mr. Johnson has read a lot more than Wodehouse. He mentioned that, among some

who fear Brexit, 'the feelings are abating with time'. To use 'abate' here is to invoke the anecdote about Thomas Babington Macaulay as a little boy having hot coffee spilt on his legs and responding to his hostess's solicitous enquiry with the words: 'Thank you, madam, the agony is abated'." (The Spectator: Febr. 24, 2018 [18]). In the headline for his commentary "The Foreign Secretary's Brexit speech once again made the case for having your cake and eating it", D. Wordsworth alludes to B. Johnson's stance on Brexit suggesting the possibility of both leaving the EU and retaining good links with it, and emphasizes Johnson's elusiveness and natural talent for camouflaging the seamy side of big political decisions with long words and impressive rhetoric. No doubt, Boris Johnson does sound appealing and inspiring when talking about Britain's historical uniqueness and exceptionality. On the other hand, Johnson's 'going global' narrative is internally contradictory as there is an apparent logical, as well as verbal, inconsistency in the idea of 'Brexit strengthening global links and re-engaging Britain with its global identity': "It's not about shutting ourselves off; it's about going global. It's not about returning to some autarkic 1950s menu of spam and cabbage and liver. It's about continuing the astonishing revolution in tastes and styles [...] not so much because of our EU membership [...] but as a result of our history and global links, our openness to people and ideas [...]. In that sense Brexit is about re-engaging this country with its global identity, and all the energy that can flow from that". Johnson quoted Konrad Adenauer, the first West German Chancellor (1949-1963), who said that "every nation had its genius, and that the genius of the British people was for democratic politics. He [Adenauer] was right, but perhaps he didn't go far enough. Yes, it was the British people who [...] began the tradition of parliamentary democracy in a model that is followed on every continent. It was also Britain that led the industrial revolution and destroyed slavery [...], who campaigned for free trade that has become the single biggest engine of prosperity and progress. This, the UK, is the country that is once again taking the lead in shaping the modern world." [17]. Johnson fully relies on pathos in a bunch of tactics he uses. He pays the audience the greatest compliment by emphasizing Britain's role in the world history, he cites a relevant quotation to reemphasize the British *genius*, he turns to the nationalist rhetoric to exhibit strong feelings of national pride and engender the feeling of being British. Besides, Johnson's appeal to his nation's singularity is an effective tactic of evading a leader's personal responsibility under a worst-case scenario concerning Brexit. Hence, Johnson's revolutionary optimism borders on the much-stressed idea of the shared effort and responsibility: "And in the current bout of Brexchosis we are missing the truth: that it is our collective job to ensure that when the history books come to be written Brexit will be seen as just the latest way in which the British bucked the trend, took the initiative – and did something that responds to the real needs and opportunities that we face in the world today [...]. And indeed no one should think that Brexit is some economic panacea, any more than it is right to treat it as an economic pandemic. On the contrary, the success of Brexit will depend on what we make of it. And a success is what we will make of it – together." [17]. This effective climax based on pathos and constructed according to all basic rules of classical oratory is not only a perfect example of style and eloquence, but also a neatly implemented manipulative technique. Reinforcing the key message with great optimism and passion in the close of a speech – its most strategic element – is another efficient technique to get the audience

involved and hopeful. Though Johnson's speech features certain contradiction in terms, populism (in terms of rhetoric, a substitution of *logos* (logic) and *ethos* (credibility) for *pathos* (emotion)), it can be justified in terms of the laws of political rhetoric and the scale of strategic goals Johnson, as Britain's political leader, pursues.

Another reason for Johnson's use of evasion techniques is to avoid an unpleasant issue and keep from both telling a lie and telling the truth. Linguistic mechanisms Johnson employs to sound uncertain vary greatly; they include all sort of weasel-words, circumlocutions, so-called political 'waffle', occasional coinages involving foreign inclusions, mainly Latinisms and classicisms from Greek, all configurations of blends, many of which being very obscure in their meaning but truly remarkable in their form. One of the most popular and much-quoted phrases, "an inverted pyramid of piffle", was produced by Johnson in his mayorship period, in response to the allegations (later confirmed officially) about his extramarital affair: "It's complete balderdash. It is an inverted pyramid of piffle. It is all completely untrue and ludicrous conjecture" [19, p. 101]. The phrase that seems to be reminiscent of Algernon's 'bunburying' from O. Wilde's wittiest play 'The Importance of Being Earnest', both in its effect and function, might as well stand for Johnson's deception, fiction, and escapism. Besides, this example reveals Johnson's creativity and eccentricity in implementing avoidance tactics: instead of saying "nonsense" Johnson invented an absurd but effective locution that made the headlines and added to the stunning collection of 'Borisisms'. S. Walters, a seasoned British journalist and the author of "The Borisaurus. The Dictionary of Boris Johnson", reveals an equally impressive trick of 'Latinate evasion' widely employed by Johnson: "If you are backed into a corner and called upon to give a straight answer, there is a way out: give a Latin veneer to your response and people will be so impressed or bedazzled that they won't notice that you have both given and withheld an answer at one and the same time" [19].

The *Londonist* journalist Dean Nicholas mentions another example of Johnson's "experiments with the mother tongue" or "baffling public exhortations" [20]: "I could not fail to disagree with you less" [ibid.]. It should be mentioned that it is a linguistically ascertained fact that the complication of the syntactic structure of an utterance contributes to its indirectness and / or an increase in referential uncertainty and reduces the information content of a discourse. This communicative tactic is implemented by B. Johnson through an apt substitution of the content of an utterance for the form of its expression.

Similar is the case with Johnson's vague explanations of his involvement in the Christmas 'partygate' in December 2020, when the whole Britain was subject to strict Covid measures and millions of people were banned from meeting close family and friends for Christmas celebration, but there was 'a wine-fueled gathering' in Downing Street 10. Speaking in the Commons one year later, in December 2021, after the emergence of the video showing Downing Street officials joking about a non-socially distanced staff party, Johnson was apologizing yet evasive in admitting his fault: "I apologize unreservedly for the offence that it has caused up and down the country and I apologize for the impression that it gives. But I repeat [...] that I have been repeatedly assured since these allegations emerged, that there was no party and that no Covid rules were broken" [21]. The conventional discursive act of apology is supposed to meet the audience's expectations of a speaker's sincerity, admission of his guilt, acknowledgement

of the truth, etc. The form of Johnson's apology, as much as its content, are meant to disguise the speaker's real intentions to evade his personal responsibility, and that is why, seem to offend ethical and moral rules in the eyes of the law-abiding population. Ellie Mae O'Hagan, in her review for London's weekly *The Big Issue*, of January 21, 2022, wrote: **"Until recently, most political commentators would acknowledge that Johnson was slap dash, reckless and economical with the truth. But they would also marvel at his ability to evade any accountability for his actions. Now, it's like all the accountability, built up throughout his political career has crashed down on him at once"** (The Big Issue: Jan. 21, 2022 [22]). Johnson's truth-evasive language has become more obvious and, hence, less effective as a means of manipulation.

Johnson's evasive definitions are never left unattended by the media. In his Levelling Up Speech, of July 15, 2021, Johnson said that strong leadership was *"the final ingredient, the most important factor in levelling up, the yeast that lifts the whole mattress of dough, the magic sauce, the ketchup of catch-up"* and suggested *"he would like to see more local mayors, perhaps at the county level"* [23]. The *Guardian* columnist Zoe Williams reacted with the metaphoric headline *"Yeast. Magic sauce! went the PM as he lost a one-man game of Articulate"* (The *Guardian*: Jul 15, 2021 [24]), and further prolonged her metaphor: *"He crescendoed on the 'yeast, the magic sauce, the ketchup of catch-up', like a guy playing Articulate and just shouting words, while his teammates look on saying 'what even is magic sauce?'"* [ibid.]. Though in this continuous 'Johnson-media' dialogue, Johnson's crescendo parts always alternate with his critics' diminuendo irony, frequently, it is Johnson's striking metaphors and impeccable play on words that linger longest and give the listener a reason to remember the speaker and his speech.

Johnson's apparent inconsistency and irrationality seem to be an integral part of his linguistic personality that reflects his paradoxical mind, characterize his discursive behavior, and affect his political narrative. The *Guardian* political expert Anne McElvoy says: *"It is true that Johnsonism remains an edifice built on a complex construction of paradoxes"* (The *Guardian*: Jan. 9, 2022 [24]). She points out the inconsistency of Johnson's policies threatening with miscommunication within the Conservatives themselves: *"And yet the quest to understand what Johnsonism means looms larger at the start of 2022 as the prime minister faces resistance to Covid-era restrictions in his ranks"* [ibid.]. Relying on a Tory insider, she admits that Johnson couldn't even escape his oldest friends' disapproval: *"If [...] his present curse is that 'Tories think he [Johnson] is doing unTory things they don't understand', he can change those things. Or alternatively, he can explain his narrative more persuasively to keep his internal coalition intact"* [ibid.]. But Johnson seems to be deliberate and persistent in both using puzzling language and following incongruent policies.

Johnson's cake stance formulated by him back in 2004 *"My policy on cake is pro having it and pro eating it"* can as well serve as his political stance helping make out his discursive personality and explain his professional discursive strategy. In his book *'The Churchill Factor'* (2014), Johnson reveals another political secret: *"The key thing is to be Conservative in principle but Liberal in sympathy"* [25]. And those are just a few examples of Johnson's antinomic statements verbalizing his paradoxical mind.

The prime minister's narrative has been frequently reproached for the lack of clarity and consistency, both domestically

and internationally. *BBC News* reporter Anthony Zurcher in his analysis of what the US makes of the new British leader, quotes *The Washington Post* journalist saying that the Conservative leader's *"incessant appeals to the bravura and derring-do of Britain's past' are entertaining but absurd, and won't translate easily into meaningful politics"* (BBC: July 23, 2019 [26]).

In his interview to the *BBC* journalist Evan Devis, in 2014, the then-mayor of London, Johnson said: *"If you want to be heard you have to speak plainly!"* (B. Johnson for the *BBC Newsnight*: Oct. 1, 2014 [27]). So, it would be wrong to believe that Johnson might not understand what effect his words are likely to produce. His 'political wordiness' is intentional, well-thought-through, and, no doubt, strategic.

Johnson's obscure ideas and 'political waffle' seem not to be meant for easy comprehension either by political set or the mass audience yet can tease those journalists who see in Johnson a skilled rival entertaining himself and the public with amusing verbal tricks. These very journalists feed on his perplexing policies and rhetoric, perfecting their journalistic skills in their eye-catching headlines. Both parties are involved in the sophisticated metaphoric dialogue, exercising their wit, much to the delight of each side. Despite constant and heavy criticism, Johnson retains popular, and this popularity is much due to his discursive talent. He remains interesting for his people, precisely, because he has a genuine talent for creating curiosity. Johnson has converted the rhetorical formula of grabbing attention of the public through creating curiosity into one of his main discursive principles. The rich diversity of the techniques Johnson uses to implement this discursive principle has been acknowledged by many political experts, historians, linguists, and journalists and enabled them to speak of the so-called *'Boris effect'* and *'brand Boris'*. Though a considerable rhetorical expertise is not a rare occurrence in the British politics, to make this expertise a well-known brand that provides a sound basis for the political success is a rare gift. And this is what Johnsonism phenomenon is about.

Another distinctive feature of Johnson is his close adherence to the ancient rhetoric and philosophical practices. *"Boris Johnson has repeatedly applied a cocktail shaker of aspects of various political philosophies to his purpose"* (Anne McElvoy, The *Guardian*: Jan. 9, 2022 [24]). *"It is his understanding of classical rhetoric that has allowed him to develop the hybrid of bombast, nostalgia, trivia, highbrow allusions, and politically incorrect bluster that has made him a successful politician, despite his almost total lack of interest in policy"* (Matthew Walter, The *Week*: July 26, 2018 [28]). Matthew Walter refers to Johnson as *"one of the most arresting and entertaining political speakers of his lifetime, a master of sprezzatura who goes out of his way to look disheveled and sound unprepared whenever he gives a speech"* [ibid.].

According to a historian and author Anthony Seldon, while *"some PMs have struggled with language, and so get others to write their words, Boris sees language as Play-Doh, as raw material to be manipulated into an infinite number of novel shapes and combinations"* [19]. Obviously infected by the prime minister's enormous enthusiasm for linguistic experiments, he called him *"our Play-Doh player-in-chief"* [ibid.] evocative of Johnson's playful manner of running politics. On the one hand, the coinages, both lexical and stylistic, associated with Johnson's discourse, such as *'backstop-ectomy'*, *'imbecilio'*, *'an inverted pyramid of piffle'*, *'chip-o-rama rubbish'*, *'boosterism'* etc. evade the common audience's comprehension and require an expert's

guidance to discern the sense. On the other hand, they are integral to Johnson's discursive personality and political image and ensure the unique character of 'Johnsonism brand'. *The Guardian's* chief culture writer Charlotte Higgins disapproves of such frivolous language applications and considers them a mere self-presentation tactic: "*Boris Johnson's love of classics is about just one thing: himself. [...] Like the prime minister, I studied Latin and Greek. His [Johnson's] references are projections of superiority [...], pure show-offery in the service of brand Boris*" (*The Guardian*: Oct. 6, 2019 [24]). Anyway, admired or criticized, Johnson's 'brand' style is openly admitted by everyone. As Peter Osborne, broadcaster, columnist, and former chief political commentator of *the Daily Telegraph*, has put it: "*Boris Johnson has invented a new type of political discourse*" and everyone who wants to understand British politics today must get acquainted with the language the prime minister speaks [19].

B. Johnson's discourse is noted for its theatricality, flowery style, and effective classical rhetoric. In his address to the nation on 'Brexit day', January 31, 2020, Johnson said: "*The most important thing to say tonight is that this is not an end but a beginning. This is a moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up on a new act in our great national drama*" [29]. The theatrical metaphor employed by Johnson reveals his lust for effect along with the full understanding of the extent of the post-Brexit challenges.

In his Brexit Trade Deal Speech, of December 24, 2020, Boris Johnson deployed a bunch of metaphors expressing special thanks to all who have made their contribution to the post-Brexit trade deal: "*And for squaring that circle, for finding the philosopher's stone that's enabled us to do this, I want to thank President von der Leyen, Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission, our brilliant negotiators led by Lord Frost, ...*" [30]. Comparison of the Brexit Trade Deal to the philosopher's stone (originally, according to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, an imaginary stone or substance believed to have the power of transmuting baser metals into gold and sought by alchemists) assumes somewhat elusive quality of the much-sought deal. On the other hand, both metaphors used by Johnson emphasize the role of the UK leader who has managed to 'square the circle', the task that is literally impossible.

The linguistic personality of Johnson particularly reveals itself in his speeches to the fellow party members and adherents, the 'home territory' communication being a great advantage in his public speaking practices. Delivering his speech at the UK Conservative Party Conference 2021, Johnson sounded highly optimistic about the Conservatives and his government, and deeply pessimistic about his political opponents: "*And after decades of drift and dither, this reforming government, this can-do government, this government that got Brexit done, that's getting the Covid vaccine roll out done, is going to get social care done and we are going to deal with the biggest underlying issues of our economy and society*" [31]. Johnson's heavy criticism of the Labour party extends beyond the bias-free language: "*And that's the difference between this radical and optimistic conservatism and a tired, old Labour. Did you see them last week? [B.J. meant their congress in Brighton] Their leader like a seriously rattled bus conductor, pushed this way and that way [...] this way and that by a Corbyn Easter mob of Sellotaped, spectacled sans-culottes, or the skipper of a cruise liner that's been captured by Somali pirates, desperately trying to negotiate a change of course, and then changing his mind*" [ibid.]. A sharp-tongued professional journalist in his past, Johnson has

evolved into a sharp-tongued professional politician whose acid remarks disarm his opponents. His allusions drawn from the French as well as world history, reveal Johnson's nationalist and elitist turn.

Talking about social injustice as the main reason for his new 'leveling-up' policy, B. Johnson refers to one of the best-known poems in English, the *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* by Thomas Gray (1750), and recites its lines to the audience: "*When Thomas Gray stood in that country churchyard in 1750 and wrote his famous elegy as the curfew toll the knell of parting day, he lamented the wasted talents of those buried around him, the flowers born to blush unseen, the mute inglorious Miltons, who never wrote a poem because they never got to read*" [31]. Aptly incorporated in the orator's speech, the poet's words as if blurred with Johnson's, to form a lyrical prelude to the consequent, gradually increasing in their vigor and force, political slogans promoting "evenly distributed opportunity" among those talented, genius, imaginative and enthusiastic throughout the whole country [ibid.]. The sophistication of style combined with the complexity of syntactical patterns involved, as well as skillful handling the prosodic means, create a perfect example of speech-making worthy of an oratory classroom study.

In his speech to the UN General Assembly in New York, of September 24, 2019, Boris Johnson spoke of the assets of the revolutionary technologies and the hazards of 'digital authoritarianism' and made a large variety of metaphors and allusions coexist within one context, contributing to the inner logic and integrity of the speech. One of those metaphors was the well-known Prometheus myth revealing a story of Prometheus, one of the Titans, and a god of fire: "*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, that Zeus punished him by chaining him to a tartarean crag while 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 for ever – a bit like the experience of Brexit in the UK, if some of our parliamentarians had their way*" [32]. Johnson's final parenthesis, seemingly out of place here, shows how pragmatic and consistent Johnson can be when it comes to his personal political goals and agenda: he never forgets to remind the audience, whatever the dominant theme of the speech might be, of his main achievement as the PM of Britain. Secondly, it demonstrates Johnson's accustomed ease and freedom of expression in saying what he likes, in the way he likes. And thirdly, it is due to such unexpected ending of the mythological story, that the listener can identify the true goal of Johnson's metaphor about Prometheus [who got Brexit done] and an eagle feeding on the hero's liver (anti-Brexiters). Johnson's tactic of 'shooting at a pigeon and killing a crow' has been perfectly implemented by way of producing a story that allows for two interpretations and effectively pursues two targets.

Another effective rhetorical tool frequently employed by Johnson is the 'impromptu speaking' tactic. His attempts to produce an impression of saying something *ad lib* are obvious yet do not spoil the enjoyment of the effect. Thus, advocating the Conservatives' 'mission to promote opportunity with every tool they have', Johnson performs the well-prepared *ad lib* scene with an extra player Rishi Sunak, the in-office British Chancellor of the Exchequer and a member of the Conservative Party: "*If you insist on the economic theory behind leveling up, it's contained in the inside of Vilfredo Pareto, a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Italian figure who floated from the cobwebbed attic of my memories. There are all kinds of improvements that you can make to people's lives, he*

[Pareto] said, 'without diminishing everyone else.' Rishi will, I'm sure, confirm this. We call these 'Pareto improvements,' right? They are the means of leveling up." [31]. The verbalized idea of 'the cobwebbed attic' of Johnson's memories capable of the precise quoting from the Italian economist, conceived as another exposure of the speaker's economic expertise, is perceived not without an irony, though adds to the orator's finesse.

The discursive portrait of eccentric and sharp-witted B. Johnson would be incomplete without mentioning his peculiar brand of humour. To entertain and amuse the public with some unexpected linguistic trick or sophisticated irony have always been B. Johnson's forte. According to Michael Jacobs, the *Inside Story* journal reporter, "the British prime minister's principle schtick is jokey literary and historical allusion" (*Inside Story*: Sept. 29, 2021 [33]). In his speech on climate issues at the UN General Assembly, on September 22, 2021, Boris Johnson asked the assembled leaders and ambassadors to recall *Kermit the Frog*, the well-known Muppet Show character (1955) created and originally performed by Jim Henson: "And when Kermit the frog sang 'It's Not Easy Bein Green', I want you to know he was wrong – and he was also unnecessarily rude to Miss Piggy" [34]. It is a common thing for Johnson to say something wonderfully comic in the middle of a serious speech. This technique helps Johnson stimulate the audience's interest and produce a favourable impression. It also serves the phatic and expressive functions.

Johnson's careful selection of related quotations and allusions and their arrangement within the context, parallel implementation of classicism and humour, alternation of climax and bathos effects, make for his efficiency, eloquence, and eccentricity. Johnson plans his verbal provocations in advance and then consistently delivers them to the 'much concerned' audience. He is inventive in making the most of a story or joke he tells and uses humour to skillfully handle communicative pitfalls. For example, Johnson's 'shambolic' 'Peppa Pig speech' delivered at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) annual conference, on November 22, 2021, was, in fact, labelled so by the Labour opposition, and then by the British media outraged by the PM's seemingly out-of-the-context story about 'Peppa Pig World' park, where Johnson and his family have been the day before. Regretting the fact that only a small number of the Conference attendees have been to Peppa Pig World, he openly praised an amazing inventive power of British business whose Peppa Pig franchise brought in an immense revenue to the UK. Johnson's exaggerated focus on what he liked in the Peppa Pig World: "very safe streets, discipline in schools, a heavy emphasis on mass transit systems [...] even if they are a bit stereotypical about Daddy Pig" [35] serves the projections of his personal conservative ideals and suggests inferences about the matters of the prime minister's great concern at a time of his mayoral tenure. Yet, within the context of his 2021 conference speech, where Johnson was expected to set clear objectives for British businesses to survive in post-Brexit Covid-hit country, but instead, openly admitted that the government 'cannot fix everything' and 'the true driver of growth is not government but the energy and dynamism and originality of the private sector' [ibid.], his romanticized story about a fictional world of cartoon characters aroused bewilderment and criticism of the opposition. According to Lib-Dem leader Ed Davey, "Boris Johnson rambling on about Peppa Pig [...] is a perfect metaphor for Johnson's chaotic, incompetent government as it trashes our economy..." (BBC News: Nov. 22, 2021 [26]). However, the Peppa Pig story has proved to be

efficient as the attention-switching tactic to ease the sticky situation Johnson found himself in when he lost his place in the oration, the circumstance that led to the 'awkward 21 seconds of apologies and paper shuffling'. An experienced communicator and orator, Johnson told a funny story that not only refocused the audience's attention but also made headlines. The tactic of making the audience laugh when the laugh is not expected, is disarming and irresistible. Moreover, Johnson delivered his seemingly impromptu story about Peppa Pig World not without self-deprecating humour, saying that: "Peppa Pig World is very much my kind of place" [35], which set the company of business leaders laughing. Johnson's readiness to laugh at himself once again stimulated his strong immunity to public criticism and journalists' mockery. Thus, when the Labour's shadow chancellor, Rachel Reeves, said that "no one was laughing, because the joke's not funny anymore" (reported by Jennifer Scott, for BBC News: Nov. 22, 2021 [26]), it was just a figure of speech.

For Johnson self-deprecating humour, as well as irony, are both rhetorical strategies used for multiple political purposes (to ward off the opponents' attacks, forestall possible criticism, boost his image, avoid an uncomfortable or controversial issue, or just manage stress, etc.) and tools of artistic rhetoric intended for self-expression and self-presentation, producing effect, and entertaining the audience. In many cases, his irony and humour seem to be spontaneous, arising out of the opportunity presented by a communicative situation.

**Conclusions.** The discursive personality of Boris Johnson is characterized by high intelligence level and paradoxical thinking exposed through the use of learned words, a variety of foreign inclusions and quotations, verbal experiments ranging from nonce words of various semantic and structural types to the use of contextually bound incongruent phrases and play on words employed for expressive and stylistic effects, high degree of intertextuality of discourse, and complex syntax. Johnson demonstrates great linguo-rhetorical and discursive competence. A very efficient orator, in most cases, Johnson turns to pathos and persuades by appealing to the audience's emotions, sense of identity or self-interest.

The essential feature of Johnson's discursive personality is evasiveness resulted in sophistry, circumlocution, and populism. Johnson is exceptionally creative and diverse in implementing his 'pro having cake and pro eating it' strategy, both politically and verbally, which finds its manifestation in a great number of evasion techniques he uses.

The need for self-presentation, theatricality, an effective role to play, is inherent part of Johnson's discursive behavior. Both his politics and rhetoric illustrate W. Churchill's well-known saying about a great politician's role: "It's better to be making the news than taking it; to be an actor rather than a critic". Johnson is the political leader who hits the British headlines, arouses a considerable controversy, and remains popular. His political discourse reveals his genuine passion for politics as an art of rhetoric where the victory attends the most successful speaker. Johnson's talent for dazing and amusing the public as well as embarrassing his opponents through efficient use of language, add to his extraordinary discursive personality of the political leader. His optimism and irony are also strategically important as they are what people like and appreciate in their great leaders. Thus, the political success of Johnson is strongly influenced by his language expertise, which enables us to speak of the linguistic aspect of Johnsonism phenomenon.

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### Абрамичева О. Джонсонізм як лінгвістичний феномен: професійна дискурсивна особистість Бориса Джонсона

**Анотація.** Статтю присвячено дослідженню професійної мовної особистості прем'єр-міністра Великої Британії Бориса Джонсона. Мовна особистість Бориса Джонсона розглядається з погляду лінгвополітичної персоналогії та ґрунтується на твердженні про те, що специфіка професійної мовної особистості політика визначається поєднанням індивідуальних та інституційних комунікативних і вербальних чинників. Новизна дослідження полягає в інтегративному застосуванні комунікативно-прагматичного, лінгвостилістичного й риторичного аналізу для визначення особливостей професійної мовної особистості політичного лідера. Задля розкриття мовної особистості Бориса Джонсона було застосовано аналіз та інтерпретацію його професійного політичного дискурсу, репрезентованого офіційними промовами, коментарями, інтерв'ю тощо, що дозволило визначити домінуючі риси дискурсивної особистості політика. До аналізу було також долучено політичний медіадискурс навколо Б. Джонсона з метою оцінки сприйняття дискурсивної особистості та дискурсивної поведінки політика засобами масової комунікації. Комунікативні тактики й прийоми Бориса Джонсона інтерпретуються як послідовна реалізація його комунікативних стратегій та політичних інтенцій. Доведено, що надзвичайно різноманітний набір риторичних і стилістичних прийомів, використовуваних Б. Джонсоном, значною мірою сприяє ефективності його дискурсу й формує унікальний дискурсивний стиль політика. Дослідження продемонструвало, що мовна особистість Б. Джонсона стає важливим чинником його політичної успішності й тривалої популярності на британській політичній арені та є лінгвістичною складовою преедентного феномена джонсонізму.

Переважними рисами професійної мовної особистості Бориса Джонсона є інтелектуальність, мовна креативність, умисна мовна невизначеність, ухильність і суперечливість висловлювань, експресивність стилю, активне застосування знань класичної риторики, літератури й історії в різноманітних політичних контекстах, театральність самопрезентації. Професійна компетентність журналіста й непересічні ораторські здібності, набуті Джонсоном за роки політичної кар'єри, обумовлюють незалежність його суджень, складність й неординарність форм і засобів вираження, велику різноманітність використовуваних комунікативних тактик і прийомів, високий рівень інтертекстуальності дискурсу.

**Ключові слова:** мовна особистість, дискурсивна особистість, політичний дискурс, Борис Джонсон, джонсонізм.