



Rishi Sunak vs Keir Starmer: Cartoon Representation in the Context of the 2024 General Election

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Abstract. This research is devoted to the images of personalities in the modern world political arena from the point of view of linguistic analysis. The purpose of the article is to identify the specific representation features of the dramatic results of the parliamentary elections in Great Britain in the news Internet discourse at the non-verbal level of the text. The study is conducted through cognitive discourse analysis of images and metaphors based on creolized texts. The selected cartoons are attributed to two stretches of time as regards their release dates: the anticipation of the 2024 UK General election and on the date of election (July 4, 2024) or within a month afterwards. The caricatures were classified according to who was featured: Rishi Sunak alone, Keir Starmer alone, or both of them contrasted. The results of the research were obtained by means of a complex 7-step analysis. It is concluded that it is the combination of images / motifs incorporated within one cartoon that might make it especially powerful at leaving its imprint on the target reader. Regardless of the tactics applied by the cartoon authors to formulate the connotative vectors in the sample, one may see that each image / motif is supported by two prominent means. That is metaphorical transference that alters the cartoon space, action or appearance of the politicians so as to converge two differing phenomena of reality and characterise one through another. Allusions to events or previously made utterances are another basis for the sampled cartoons. The essential point that stems from the conducted research is that the English-language cartoons of Rishi Sunak are harsher than the ones of his opponent and concurrently the winner of the election. Although many of them appeal to negative connotations, some still represent Keir Starmer neutrally (e.g. a cleaner) or even positively (e.g. a winner of a sports competition). The inclusion of allusive elements is particularly characteristic of the cartoons representing Keir Starmer.

Keywords: cartoon, caricature, UK Prime Minister, general election, metaphor, image, Rishi Sunak, Keir Starmer

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Риши Сунак vs Кир Стармер: карикатурная репрезентация в контексте парламентских выборов

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Аннотация. Настоящее исследование посвящено образам деятелей на современной мировой политической арене с точки зрения лингвистического анализа. Целью статьи является выявление особенностей репрезентации ошеломительных результатов парламентских выборов в Великобритании в новостном аспекте интернет-дискурса на невербальном уровне текста. Исследование проводится посредством когнитивно-дискурсивного анализа образов и метафор на основе креолизованных текстов. Выбранные карикатуры отнесены к двум временным отрезкам по датам выхода: в преддверии парламентских выборов в Великобритании 2024 года и непосредственно в сам день выборов (4 июля 2024 года) или в течение месяца после них. Карикатуры классифицируются в зависимости от персоны, запечатлённой на изображении: Риши Сунак отдельно, Кир Стармер отдельно или оба политика в противопоставлении. Результаты исследования получены с помощью комплексного анализа, включающего в себя семь этапов. Отмечается, что именно сочетание образов в одном изображении позволяет достичь большего воздействия на реципиента. Вне зависимости от используемых авторами карикатур тактик формирования коннотативных векторов в предложенной выборке, можно увидеть, что образы задействуют два основных средства. Метафорический перенос направлен на преобразование пространства на карикатуре, действий или внешности политиков таким образом, чтобы соединить два разных явления действительности и тем самым опосредованно получить представление о каждом из них. Аллюзии на события или ранее сделанные заявления представляются ещё одной общей основополагающей чертой отобранных изображений. Существенным выводом, вытекающим из проведённого исследования, является то, что англоязычные карикатуры на Риши Сунака носят более резкий негативный характер, чем карикатуры на его оппонента-победителя выборов. Несмотря на то, что многие из них апеллируют к негативным коннотациям, некоторые всё же представляют Кира Стармера нейтрально (например, уборщиком) или даже положительно (например, победителем спортивного соревнования). Включение аллюзии особенно характерно для карикатур, представляющих Кира Стармера.

Ключевые слова: карикатура, премьер-министр Великобритании, парламентские выборы, метафора, образ, Риши Сунак, Кир Стармер

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1. Introduction

One of the most prominent and widely publicised events in the political sphere is the regime change and the vector of state development through parliamentary elections. It seems possible to include Great Britain among such striking examples that changed the course of government implemented by the Conservative Party for the first time in 14 years. The party's hold on power became difficult 10 years ago when it decided to cut social spending after the global financial crisis and strengthen the influence of the ideological component in politics but all attempts were undermined by scandals related to the party's leaders.

In this regard of peculiar interest is the image of a politician in the context of such political turbulence: the electorate's expectations are compared with the achievements and actions taken and then transformed into a certain conclusion. Not only are the results of staying in power considered, but also the general behaviour prior to the elections. For example, Downing Street's Covid parties and corruption in public procurement during the pandemic brought popular Prime Minister Boris Johnson to resign. This was followed by the fleeting but disastrous premiership of Liz Truss which almost bankrupted the country's pension system. She was replaced by Rishi Sunak by an internal party decision, not by the results of the general election. The early announcement of a parliamentary election stunned the Prime Minister's allies since no situation of success for a sustainable campaign was created. In the first two of the six weeks of the short and unexpected election campaign, Rishi Sunak inspired an incredible number of memes. He managed to take a photo next to the "exit" sign and give a speech at the shipyard in Belfast where the Titanic was built. After the first meeting with voters, it turned out that the questions from the people were asked by costumed functionaries of his own party. After the first televised debate, Rishi Sunak had to fight off accusations of outright lying to the opposition that its coming to power would allegedly cost each British family £2,000 in new taxes. In addition to all that, the Tories promised to reduce immigration to tens of thousands a year but it has been breaking record after record. Keir Starmer had a simpler task – he proposed to give the opposition a chance since the Conservative Party had failed in 14 years.

One of the most common instruments for identifying the perception of a politician is a political cartoon, which is often referred to as a universal tool of communication between governments and the people. Political cartoons remain topical for as long as the news genres exist due to the fact that they reflect the moods of society in an easy-to-decode form that combines pragmatic meanings of textual and visual elements. In this regard, they attract scientific attention from researchers of the explicit metaphoric field in various discursive aspects [1], [2], [3], [5], [7], [10], [14], [16], [20], [24], etc. Researchers Dugalich N.M. and Gishkaeva L.N. claim that "at a structural level, political cartoon is a creolized text, i.e. the combination of semiotic codes of the iconic and verbal levels, the compatibility of the components of which determines the originality of the cartoon" [8, p. 428]. Political cartoons may be analysed within the scope of certain publishing agencies (editorial cartoons) and independently as random images attached to an event or a political figure in the search field of the Internet: "A political cartoon as an object of informal communication can be used independently, outside of publication, remaining a creolized text consisting of an image and a caption" [12, p. 77].

Taking into account the reflective nature of political cartoons, we see that they are often used as explicit graphic support for news in all kinds of media (online magazines, messengers, video previews and captures etc.) as "political cartoons and comics have some interlinked history, sharing newspapers as a location of early development, and they share many formal features in their use of text and image, methods of representation and drawing techniques" [6, p. 127]. Integration of political cartoons into digital news genres "makes them more accessible for the audience (hence more impactful)" [19, p. 131] and that is why the news aspect of the Internet discourse (understood as a special type of communication mediated by news media in the near-political environment) [9] provides limitless scope for linguistic research.

The purpose of this article is to identify the specific representation features of the dramatic results of the parliamentary elections which highlighted mass dissatisfaction with Rishi Sunak and the policies he pursued, as well as the emergence of a new figure, Keir Starmer, who presented his alternative to the

political settlement of a wide range of pressing issues along with ways to restore trust in the institution of power and meet the expectations imposed on it in the news aspect of the Internet discourse at the non-verbal level of the text. The relevance of the issue under consideration is due to the contradictions that arise when the personality and actions of a politician do not live up to the expectations of the electorate. The Prime Minister who leads the party represents not only himself but also a huge political force with a clearly defined vector of state development, and therefore, a cardinal reshuffle in the Parliament means a significant shift at the conceptual level of public demand.

2. Material & Methodology

The study is conducted through cognitive discourse analysis of metaphors within the news aspect of Internet discourse based on creolized texts. By means of continuous sampling, 244 English-language graphic files were selected illustrating the perception of the results of the parliamentary elections represented by the party leaders: Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer.

This pool of cartoons can be attributed to two stretches of time as regards their release dates:

1. In anticipation of the 2024 UK General election, these cartoons started to appear in the Internet space most actively since March 2024.
2. The rest saw daylight either on the day of election (July 4, 2024) or within a month afterwards.

The results of the research were obtained by means of a complex analysis containing the following steps: a) material selection; b) identification of the major subjects and content depicted in the images; c) iconic component interpretation; d) verbal component interpretation (including target readers' reactions in the comment sections below the publications, containing the selected cartoons, to assess the approval rate of their content); e) synthesis of the collected information; f) decoding the final pragmatic meaning of the image; g) clustering the images according to the revealed common patterns. When working with practical material, the authors relied on the following methods: description, comparison, content analysis, cognitive discourse analysis.

3. Results

Having chosen the caricatures, we were able to classify them according to who was featured: Rishi Sunak alone, Keir Starmer alone, or both of them contrasted. In each group there emerged several prominent motifs with the solo ones containing most examples.

3.1. Cartoon Representation of Rishi Sunak without his opponent

Where Rishi Sunak appears alone, the largest number of images belongs to the group of him being consigned to *history* by being put into either a *museum* or a *dumpster*. Figure 1 represents the former, where we can see the previous Prime Minister alongside his predecessors not being recognised by his constituency (see '*And who were these guys, Daddy?*'), indicating the fleeting nature of his ruling and the lack of its long-lasting impact. The next picture (Figure 2) clearly communicates a similar message of the utter irrelevance of the slew of recent incumbents, with Rishi Sunak being the latest addition while in the background a sermon is being delivered burying the Conservative Party. It is noteworthy that yet again the members of the public are not mourning the proceedings, rather they are impatient to move on.

In both examples, there are iconic and verbal means of unlocking their pragmatic potential. Both a museum exhibit next to an extinct dinosaur and an item of rubbish buried under the epitaph '*RIP Conservative Party*' employ layered metaphorical transference, which could be unravelled as a **history (museum / dumpster) = death = obsolescence / irrelevance**. Here it is directed immediately at Rishi Sunak and his party (also see '*The Tory Party*' museum information stand).

Further proof of this can be found in the comment section¹ on X.com², where users say ‘The woman looking at her watch 🕒 🍌’ or ‘In an ideal world you’d want to see a long, long line of cement mixers stretching into the distance to seal them back down in hell for a good few centuries’ indicating the public’s attitude. The recurrent motif of death, found in such a commentary (e.g. emojis and lexemes pertaining to the domain), is worthy of attention and signals that the public does not wish the politician any good.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Death and **destruction** wherein Rishi Sunak is jumping off a cliff or is standing amid total chaos with the world being destroyed around him either foreshadowing his defeat in the upcoming election or demonstrating its aftermath is the second example in this group. Figure 3 features a clueless Rishi falling off a cliff with the election being his saviour, which turns out to be his downfall. Likewise, Figure 4 shows the current Prime minister saying ‘Well, that went well...’ surrounded by rubble and a torn national flag indicating the total failure for the Conservative Party, confirming the forecasts.

Compared to the aforementioned first group, here death and destruction are caused by Rishi Sunak (even in Figure 3 it is a self-directed action) and, hence, the pragmatic message, although employing a somewhat similar image, is slightly different. It is **death / destruction = failure**. The use of irony in both examples is of particular note as the ex-Prime Minister’s words clash with the visual context, which also suggests the politician is naïvely unaware of the real state of affairs.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

¹ Hereinafter, the commentary authors’ spelling and punctuation are preserved in all contexts.

² Currently restricted in Russia

The following group depicts the *heatwave* and Rishi Sunak being *in the pouring rain* which in and of itself indicates mistrust due to some dark deeds and/or misfortune. Figure 5 shows the exhausted Sunak encouraging people to vote amid the sweltering heat of the desert with vultures soaring closer to the day of the elections indicating the unfavourable outcome of his endeavour. Figure 6, by contrast, shows him marching under a dark cloud with the words ‘*next*’ crossed out and changed for ‘*last*’ with reference to the six weeks remaining until the 4th of July.

As is seen, extreme weather conditions are widely utilised to formulate the metaphoric transference **heatwave / pouring rain = problems**. Although he is still portrayed to be taking action, Rishi Sunak looks devastated and succumbs to these weather conditions. The verbal level only heightens the effect both in the abovementioned corrected text and in the depiction of falling leaflets ‘*Vote Sunak*’ from his hands, which suggests the loss of the electorate ready to vote for him.

This prediction of his defeat is further supported by the comment section on X.com where one commenter wrote “‘*This country is a better place to live now than it was in 2010,*’ Sunak says. 🤔🤔🤔 When he loses his job on Thursday he should go into comedy!’, clearly showing the lack of confidence in Sunak’s victory.



Fig. 5

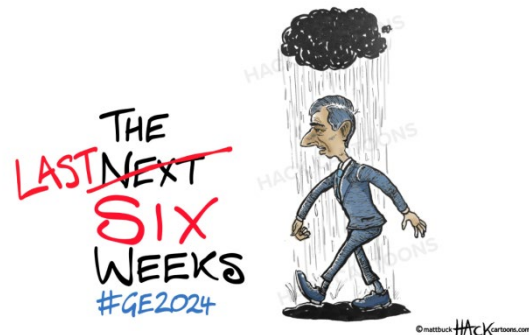


Fig. 6

The fourth image, which is quite widespread, has to do with **betting**. Here, Rishi Sunak is either under cover, as shown in Figure 7, surreptitiously placing a bet that he will resign on the 5th of July or encouraging other people to bet on his resignation in Figure 8 (also see the hand in the bottom right corner reaching with ‘*£100 on Rishi to resign July 5th*’). One of the comments to the former image on X.com reads ‘*Sorry sir, but we do not take bets on forgone conclusions.*’, indicating that the public is just as aware of how good the odds are that Sunak will lose. Remarkably, the latter is simultaneously a representative of the second motif as the cartoon carries a pun name containing the lexeme ‘*buried*’ and depicts the tombstone of the Tory Party. In either case, the implication is clear – his resignation is a fair bet.

Betting here is intertwined with buffoonery, which in fact adds to the metaphorical transference **betting** in this context = **absurdity**. It is achieved in these examples by portraying Rishi Sunak acting illogically (betting against himself or dancing on his party’s grave, even though a toilet roll is thrown at him) and simultaneously keeping a wide smile on his face. Moreover, these are also based on the allusion to the betting scandal³, which took place because some representatives of the politician’s inner circle allegedly placed bets that the election would occur on July 4th long before the date went public.

³ “Alleged bets on election date add to woes for ‘incredibly angry’ British PM Rishi Sunak”. NBC News, 22 Jun. 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/uk-gambling-bets-election-date-pm-sunak-conservatives-rcna158230> (Accessed 31.07.2024).



Fig. 7



Fig. 8

In the same vein of something underhanded going on, we can see some instances of ballot *fraud* or even expressed apprehension about *a prison sentence*. In Figure 9 one can see Rishi Sunak making his escape with some ballots falling out of the van, which implies the attempt to tamper with the votes. Whereas Figure 9 includes the same pattern as Figure 5, namely falling leaflets / ballot papers as a metaphor for losing voters, here this action raises questions as to the legitimacy of Rishi Sunak driving a van full of completed ballots. The same negative connotation is conveyed in Figure 10, where Rishi Sunak's team member suggests following in Assange's footsteps by pleading guilty so as to avoid heavier punishment for all the wrongdoings during his term as PM. Of note is the allusive analogy between Assange's 14 years (see 'Assange free after 14 years') towards the plea deal and the Conservative Party's 14 years in charge, which emphasises the metaphor of Rishi Sunak, aka the Conservative Party, being a criminal.



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

Escape is another route, albeit less represented, which commentators see as possible for the now-former Prime Minister. Figure 11 shows him fleeing, come the day of the election, with his bags in hand, showing the perceived cowardice and the lack of prospects for victory. Surprisingly, this example appears to be multi-layered since the cartoon alludes to the D-day commemoration in June 2024, more specifically to Rishi Sunak cutting his attendance short (something he was strongly criticised for). It is clearly hinted by the author that the ex-Prime Minister should act identically during the election in July. By the same token, Figure 12 shows Rishi Sunak who realising taxes are his Achilles heel, hails a taxi out of the residence making a swift escape. In either illustration, the ex-Prime Minister appears to be scared.

Both examples employ phonetic puns in a noteworthy way and contribute to the realisation of the metaphorical comparison of a real-life escape to the "escape" from duties and responsibility. Figure 11 has a wordplay based on the likeness of [di:dei] in the military term, the contraction of this cartoon's name "Decision Day" and the colloquial way of pronouncing "the day"; and Figure 12 focuses on the proximity of [tæksɪz] and [tæksi].

With regards to this image, *The Guardian* commenters write, ‘This cartoon gives the unfortunate impression that Ri\$hi is capable of hailing a taxi. I have my doubts on that one!’, communicating their belief in the sheer ineptitude of Rishi Sunak, which had been observed in another group of images, or showing conviction in his imminent escape from No 10 – ‘I imagine Sunak fleeing No 10 as if it was the fall of Saigon. He scrambles into a helicopter that has landed on the roof, kicking away desperate Tories who want to escape with him.’



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

The least prominent image is Rishi Sunak shouting into the *abyss* / *void*, indicating that his messages are bound to fall on deaf ears since the public no longer believes him. This is the case in Figure 13, which contains a satirical denial of what the Prime Minister is doing. We see consistently this ironic discrepancy between the politician's words and the context that is aimed at intensifying the pragmatic effect through the oppositional correlation of verbal and non-verbal elements. The front door of 10 Downing Street in Figure 14 became another basis for setting the pattern. Flushed down the sewage, Rishi Sunak is screaming, yet again, not to be heard.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14

3.2. Cartoon Representation of Keir Starmer without his opponent

Moving on to the group where Keir Starmer is seen solo, we have identified a distinct set of images with three dominant vectors.

The one image most cartoonists ascribe to the challenger is that of a *caretaker* in charge of *cleaning* out the *mess*. Thus, Figure 15 shows Keir Starmer opening the door of his new office only to find it in shambles, ruined, clearly communicating that the task ahead of him is to rebuild everything. One commenter on X.com referred to this state as ‘*scorched earth*’, further confirming our conclusion (‘*The Conservative Party has left behind a fully scorched earth that will be difficult, if not impossible, to restore for the Labour Party.*’).

A more explicit message is seen in Figure 16 where Keir Starmer is, alongside his new cabinet, actively scrubbing all the grime and dirt off the No 10 floor. The comment section on this image from *The Guardian* abounds in citizens expressing doubt at the state of the mess depicted, signalling the public's perception of the amount of clean-up ahead 'Only ankle-deep? Seems like a relatively optimistic assessment of the amount of detritus to be removed.'

This metaphor, regardless of whether the new Prime Minister is depicted simply gazing at the mess or already cleaning it, tends to be associated with facial expressions of astonishment, shock or even sadness. At times there is obviously some irony (see the sarcastic 'Welcome' on the doormat). However, the pragmatic effect of both the image and metaphor is rather positive as Keir Starmer here is **to clean up the mess = to solve the problems** left by the previous First Lord of the Treasury.



Fig. 15



Fig. 16

Interestingly, the next group offers a very different perception trajectory of the new Prime Minister – he is portrayed as *inept, weak, cowardly or two-faced* because he is clumsily attempting to please everyone around, showing the distrust of the public of the new leader. Moreover, it is one of the few groups in which the sampled cartoons share the motif but not the dominant metaphor, although each example contains one of its own.

Figure 17 features the new leader of the party and the government to be quite illiterate and unable to even spell the word 'agenda' which does nothing to reassure the viewer of his capabilities as far as complex issues are concerned, with one scathing comment on X.com saying 'At least the apostrophe is correctly placed.' which is nothing short of a miracle. On top of everything else, a play on words, which connects this example with the undermentioned group, could be detected here as well. Instead of 'agenda', Keir Starmer seems to be about to write 'a gender', a topic, on which his statements have scandalised the public several times. This phonetic pun is centred around the fact that both chunks are pronounced identically as [ədʒendə] and also refers to the politician wavering between the two options, doubting which one to use to satisfy the public.

In Figure 18, on the other hand, Keir Starmer is seen as a duplicitous politician promising one thing while keeping his real plans concealed behind his back, though, admittedly, the public can see through him, which could be interpreted as him being not brave enough to say what he wants and not smart enough to hide his true intentions. Figure 19 depicts Starmer as a clueless, weak buffoon as he is opening the door of his residence in an attire indicating he has been asleep, which could be subtle subtext indicating a lack of awareness of current affairs, only to find he is surrounded by hungry members of the public with neither a way of feeding them, nor a plan.

This lack of direction is perceived by the members of the public with comments on X.com ranging from 'Absolutely bang on the nose too!' to 'It's tough at the top' with some conclusion that this is the deplorable situation left by the Starmer's predecessor – 'It summarises the state Public Services have been left in by the Tories, and the challenge that faces Labour'.



Fig. 17



Fig. 18



Fig. 19

Colouring something **red** (the colour of the Labour Party) is a distinctive feature of the third dominant group, which signifies a change of government for the first time in 14 years, be that a new coat of paint on the No 10's door in Figure 20 or spraying 'Tories' red. The former was also accompanied by *The Economist's* comment 'A change of management is a good result for Britain.'

The caption 'Lasting damage' prominently displayed in Figure 21, which was released before the election and result announcement, suggests that the author was convinced of the Labour Party winning at that stage already and of the subsequent repercussions for the Conservative Party. Furthermore, the scene itself is an allusion to an event which had taken place just a couple of days before the publication of this cartoon. In its course, several environmental protesters covered Stonehenge in powder paint. Whereas this colour is likely to 'be removed without lasting damage'⁴, the same prospect for the Tories is called into question by the cartoonist.

In general, colour metaphors are a rather comprehensible and therefore well-established instrument in political caricature. Since they reexamine the colours that are widely associated with some political entity, the pragmatic message is much easier to decipher.



Fig. 20



Fig. 21

The other images, despite being less frequent, are no less scathing in their nature. They are grouped together based on the indispensable allusive inclusion. Almost always one needs to stay updated on the political agenda and latest news of this linguoculture to be able to effortlessly decipher the content. Each motif's example contains a metaphor but it appears less salient in light of the allusive element. Sometimes (see the *Ming vase* below) the metaphor is also hard to understand without being aware of the local politics.

Similarly to Figure 17, Keir Starmer is shown to (what has been called by the press) 'flip-flop'⁵ on **gender** issues, which clearly does not win him any favour with the female constituency, as can be seen in Figure 22. Moreover, Starmer's appeal to his 'father' being a member of the *working class* is a point he has

⁴ "Stonehenge covered in powder paint by Just Stop Oil". BBC, 19 Jun. 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cw44mdce0zzo> (Accessed 31.07.2024).

⁵ "A brief history of Sir Keir Starmer's trans flip-flopping". The Spectator, 3 Apr. 2023, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/a-brief-history-of-sir-keir-starmer-s-flip-flopping-on-trans-rights/> (Accessed 31.07.2024).

used a tat too often as is illustrated in Figure 23 with the slogan 'Do *CHANGE* your tune', which allows us to conclude that this is a mere overused trick which the public can see through. One more employed image is the *Ming vase*, which could signify fragility, hidden dangers if there is a crack, or great value since they are objects of high worth. In the case of Figure 24, this artefact could also be an appeal to past election commentary⁶ where the candidate was likened to someone carrying a Ming vase with the floor being highly polished, i.e., a futile endeavour likely to result in failure.

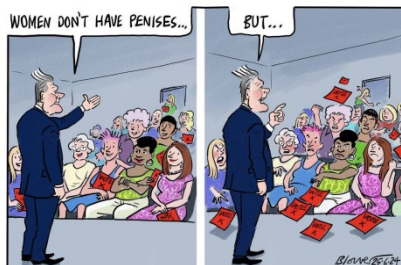


Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24

3.3. Cartoon Representation of Rishi Sunak vs Keir Starmer

This group comprises Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer side by side as opponents. Three recurrent patterns emerged in the course of our analysis.

By far the most frequently conveyed message was that *both* are *unfit* to do the job, as often as not putting them alongside the current at that moment *American candidates* neither of whom is, according to the cartoon authors, worthy of being elected. Figure 25 is an illustrative example with the caption 'Net zero' indicating that there is essentially no difference between the two politicians. The empty speech bubbles have been interpreted by some commenters as '*...the most sensible thing either of them have said in the whole campaign.*'

Similarly, Figure 26 shows Rishi Sunak joining the recent slew of former Prime Ministers that Britain has seen, with a clear message – the new incumbent is no better than his predecessors. The similarity with the 2024 US presidential election is prominently displayed in Figure 27 where the setting is analogous to the situation in America with both viewers saying 'Are you two *REALLY* the best we've got', communicating the discontentment of the public with the choice which is further substantiated by the comment section on X.com where the users remarked 'Perfect. I was thinking this while watching the Trump-Biden debate 😂' or 'There is a big difference in calibre between the UK and US. The US candidates are next level bad!'.

The common metaphorical transference for this group is **absence of words = empty talk**, which is carried out through blank speech bubbles, their complete absence or them with corny filler phrases. Not being alien to cartoons in general, this feature is highly significant here as the Prime Ministers are situated in the context of communication – either attempting to produce speech or addressed with a question.



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

⁶ "Who came up with the analogy of carrying a Ming vase?". The Spectator, 22 Jun. 2024, <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/who-came-up-with-the-analogy-of-carrying-a-ming-vase/> (Accessed 31.07.2024).

The second group predicts the **victory** of Keir Starmer and often employs sports as the leading metaphor, particularly **tennis** or **races**, which is not unexpected since elections are a competition with winners and losers and has been previously noted by other researchers as present across linguocultures [4], [13], [18]. Consequently, in Figure 28 we can see Starmer being in the lead in the last lap of a car race, indicating his forthcoming victory, with Sunak and his other opponents not that far behind. Curiously, Rishi seems to have gotten into a trap which hampers his chances of winning. The futility of his actions is prominently displayed in Figure 29 where we can see him being overwhelmed by Keir Starmer, who is already holding a trophy in the background, with multiple tennis balls in Sunak's corner. By contrast, Keir Starmer is foregrounded in Figure 30 giving a speech on his strategy '*I just stayed in the middle...*' with Sunak leaving the court not having scored any goals, defeated. Notably, the score is 666:0 which could be a subtle jab at the winner, implying he is no angel.



Fig. 28

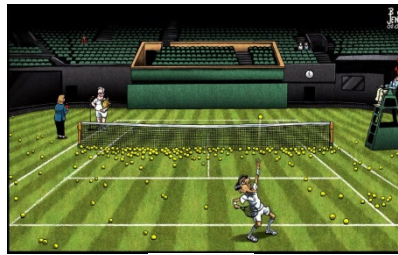


Fig. 29



Fig. 30

Remarkably, the last group includes the images from their solo appearances – a **dumpster** and the **Ming vase**. In spite of the fact that in Figure 31 Keir Starmer is seen as dusting the proposed policies coming into his Downing 10 residence with Rishi Sunak put into a rubbish bin, the caption '*Change?*' is obviously not optimistic since the issues in question are the likes of 'Two child policy cap' and 'NHS privatisation'. Figure 32 likewise has the word 'Change' inscribed on the Ming vase, the focal point, yet its prospect is bleak as Keir Starmer is bound to slip on the floor so kindly polished by the following Rishi Sunak. The one in pursuit is hoisted with his own petard as the chord of the implement is tangled around his leg indicating the imminent spectacular fall.

Here, *The Guardian* commenters confirmed our conclusion by stating '*The problem with the Ming Vase analogy⁷, is that sooner or later, voters are going to twig that it is being carried by an empty vessel*', implying that there is no change or expressing it even more explicitly by saying '*Change? What change ?*'.

Noteworthy, in publicly available sources Rishi Sunak is reported to be almost of the same height as Keir Starmer – 1.7 m and 1.74 m respectively. Nonetheless, in Figure 32 the former is half the new Prime Minister's size and even shorter than the floor polisher. This is an example of the metaphoric antithesis **big vs small**, which has been noted by us in our previous research [9] as common in the caricature of Rishi Sunak. The bigger object / personality is represented as more significant and powerful. In Figure 31 there is another antithesis **up vs down**, which carries the same pragmatic message. As a result, we can conclude that when both politicians are portrayed in the cartoon and there is an inclusion of a motif from their solo caricature, the dimensional metaphor tends to be applied. It is rarely in favour of Rishi Sunak.

⁷ See Footnote 1



Fig. 31



Fig. 32

4. Discussion

In the sense that appointments of new heads of the UK government who also happen to oust the previously ruling party have been few and far between for more than a decade, there has been a plethora of political caricature shedding light on both the 2024 General election context and constituency's views on it. The popularity of politicians is directly related to the breadth of the audience they work for. This is confirmed by the fact that before being elected to the post of Prime Minister both politicians were “out of the spotlight” and, therefore, did not attract that much attention from cartoonists and journalists who subject every spoken word to careful analysis. Previous works devoted to the figure of Rishi Sunak noted the dynamics of the increase in linguistic material in the form of visual metaphors (their explicitness, provocativeness and tendency to have a negative connotation) at the verbal and non-verbal level of the text [9, p. 186]. A similar pattern may be applied to Keir Starmer. At the same time, recipients get the opportunity to compare verbal signals (promises, explanations, justifications) with reality in the form of actions that become an object of cartoon satire. It should also be noted that despite the all-consuming capture of the media space by various kinds of digital tools for transmitting information, caricature remains the most representative in terms of public perception of political figures. It may be explained by the fact that the linguistic analysis of caricatures is based on the versatility of the methods of conveying the pragmatic meanings laid down by the authors, the synthesis of text levels and the establishment of correlation relationships to attract the attention of recipients and the intensity of the resulting images.

The analysis of the sampled cartoons, grouped according to the featuring politician and the central motifs, has shown the prevalence of those that employ repetitive situational images rather than metamorphosis ones. In the majority of cases, Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer are depicted as their own selves, wearing a suit, with no additional attributes attached directly to their figure that would help to establish the satirical effect. Apparently, there is a standard set of media to exaggerate their looks (such as enormous ears and small stature for Rishi Sunak and a flushed face for Keir Starmer), but these changes bear little metaphorical potential and are drawn on their physical appearance.

In contrast, our previous paper [Ibid.], focusing exclusively on the cartoon representation of Rishi Sunak before and after taking up office on 25 October 2022, revealed that connotative assessment of his personality in the caricature of that time was primarily carried out exactly by assigning various paraphernalia to him (e.g. clothing of a rich man, equipment of a magician, cold weapons, abacus and other mathematical items, etc.), hence, transforming Rishi Sunak into a pompous nobleman, dishonest illusionist, coldblooded killer, inept mathematician.

The current pool concerning another milestone in his career, however, achieves the satirical effect via transforming the situational context around him instead of his own appearance. For instance, Rishi Sunak is placed in a dumpster or museum to show that he is now past his prime. There is also chaos and destruction in his background, which reflect the results of his governing. Placing him in the void implies the futility of his actions and loss of the connection with the constituency.

The same could be said about the caricature of Keir Starmer in the light of the recent election, although, unlike the case of Rishi Sunak, we are not yet able to contrast it with previously used tools utilised in cartoons featuring him during other political landmarks as this field remains understudied. Quite often it is about manipulating and adapting the background content or the actions of the new Prime Minister rather than his attire. For example, he is portrayed to be painting objects red as a symbol of the Labour Party rising to power or is depicted to be failing at his public speech as a reflection on his unsuitability for the post. Admittedly, some cartoons do employ alterations of the personal image, e.g. both Rishi Sunak and Keir Starmer as tennis players / racers or the latter as a caretaker, but such ones are nowhere near as widespread as the approach discussed above.

Regardless of the tactics applied by the cartoon authors to formulate the connotative vectors in the sample, we see that each image / motif is supported by two prominent means. That is metaphorical transference that alters the cartoon space, action or appearance of the politicians so as to converge two differing phenomena of reality and characterise one through another. Allusions to events (irrespective of whether these events are directly connected to the politicians in question) or previously made utterances are another basis for the sampled cartoons.

The inclusion of allusive elements is particularly characteristic of the cartoons representing Keir Starmer. In fact, this is what makes many of them less easily comprehensible and requires either strong background knowledge and awareness of the current events or additional research from target readers. Multiple references to his regular changes of opinion on the matters of gender, to his family's working-class background, the Ming vase, the Stonehedge incident, etc. exemplify the case.

The satirical effect in this sample is commonly produced by merging several constituents. On the one hand, it is the combination of iconic and verbal components (with inclusions of phonetic wordplays at times). The majority of the selected cartoons contain speech bubbles, captions, inscriptions on objects, and so on, that correlate with the picture in a variety of ways. Oppositional correlation, known for its comic function [15], [17], [23], is repeatedly observed in the group that illustrates Rishi Sunak without his opponent. For instance, death and destruction around is commented on by him with rather positive remarks or he denies staring into the abyss when it is exactly what he is shown to be doing. On the contrary, in the group that illustrates Keir Starmer solo, non-verbal and verbal elements are interconnected in ways that do not provide defeated expectancy or contradiction, consequently, contributing to the humorous message less effectively.

On the other hand, it is the combination of images / motifs incorporated within one cartoon that might make it especially powerful at leaving its imprint on the target reader. To illustrate, the images of a dumpster and betting are used alongside the images of death in the cartoons of Rishi Sunak. In a different example, we see a rubbish bin with him inside and Keir Starmer as a caretaker. As is seen, such a method of constructing caricatures could be found in cartoons with the politicians' single and joint appearances.

As a result, one last essential point that stems from the conducted research is that the English-language cartoons of Rishi Sunak are harsher than the ones of his opponent and concurrently the winner of the election. Although many of them do appeal to negative connotations, some still represent Keir Starmer neutrally (e.g. a cleaner) or even positively (e.g. a winner of a sports competition). Conversely, the caricature of Rishi Sunak in the context of the past election appears to be not only purely negative, but also distinctly offensive and snide at times, i.e. putting him into a pile of garbage or portraying him witless and greedy enough to be placing bets on his own loss. Interestingly enough, the connotative vector of Rishi Sunak's cartoon representation being predominantly negative has been indicated both in our previous study [9] and by other researchers of his caricature [21], [22] and even graffiti [11].

Besides, as has been noted above, a lot of images / motifs in the cartoons of Keir Starmer exploit allusion, hence aiming at ridiculing him for specific deeds rather than at merely mocking him. Additionally, oppositional correlation of iconic and verbal elements does not occur as often in these cartoons as it does in the ones of Rishi Sunak. It might imply that the extent of the satirical effect is intentionally underplayed by cartoonists.

Practically the same idea is deduced from the commentary left under the online publications of the researched cartoons. Not a single comment is there to be found that would defy the mockery of the cartoons' content and openly show support for Rishi Sunak. Instead, each and every one either expresses wholehearted approval of or aims at adding to derision. Although Keir Starmer is also gladly laughed at by netizens, who enjoy the caricature of him, many commentators appear to share their realisation of the fact that the new Prime Minister is literally left with a mess to clean up, hence, sympathising with him.

The yielded results could be interpreted in several ways. Firstly, having faced a range of crises such as Brexit or the pandemic over the last 14 years, the Conservative Party has been gradually losing the trust of the electorate. Being the fifth in a series of passing the role of the PM on to the representatives of his party, Rishi Sunak seems to have reached the boiling point and the deepest dissatisfaction of the nation. His favourability with the public was getting from bad to worse since taking up office⁸. Secondly, a variety of his political decisions and actions also leave little room for approval from the populace. As it is accounted for in the press, *'everything he does seems to backfire in some way'*⁹. Finally, both Keir Starmer and the Labour Party amid this built-up frustration at lingering hardships might emanate hope for positive change in the eyes of the constituency.

While it has been only a month since the new PM started to perform his duties, his favourability rating has already begun to decline compared to mid-July¹⁰. Thus, the question of whether his cartoon representation will still include positive and negative connotative vectors or will shift entirely to the latter one has untapped potential for further research.

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