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The Semiotics of Political Discourse and the Reconstruction of the Mental Image of the British Monarchy: An Analytical Study of King Charles III's Speech before Congress (April 29, 2026).

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Abstract:

This study seeks to explore the semiological dimensions of political discourse and their impact on engineering the international mental image of the British monarchy, by analyzing King Charles III's speech before the U.S. Congress (April 29, 2026).The research problem stems from a fundamental question regarding how linguistic and non-linguistic symbols and messages are employed within the royal discourse to reshape mental impressions among the American public and political elites in the post-Queen Elizabeth II era. The study centers on deconstructing the discursive strategies aimed at transitioning the monarchical institution from its traditional protocol framework into the broader sphere of contemporary diplomatic efficacy.

The study reached a set of results, most notably: the King's success in utilizing "semiotic displacement" to shift the image of the monarchy from the field of "rigid tradition" to the field of "modernity and universal values" (such as sustainability and digital ethics). Furthermore, the analysis revealed the use of a "value framing" strategy to enhance British soft power, leading to the construction of a balanced mental image that combines historical continuity with future leadership. This contributed to strengthening the "Special Relationship" between London and Washington amidst current geopolitical shifts, transforming the discourse from a mere protocol act into a comprehensive semiotic performance that bolsters the international standing of the British monarchy.

Keywords: *Political Communication, Political Discourse, International Mental Image, Public Diplomacy, Soft Power.*

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I. Introduction

In the contemporary era, the phenomenon of political communication has become the core of diplomatic practice and the benchmark of a state's effectiveness within the international sphere. Discourse is no longer merely a tool for conveying official positions; rather, it has evolved into a complex symbolic structure utilized in engineering mental images and managing impressions within global public opinion. Given the shifting balance of power and the emergence of international narratives attempting to diminish the traditional roles of major powers, states have become heavily reliant on public diplomacy strategies as an instrument of soft power, seeking to win hearts and minds through communication channels that transcend dry official frameworks to address the collective consciousness and shared human values.

Within this broad semiotic and geopolitical context, the British Throne's discourse emerges as an exceptional case study. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, specifically in the new "Carolean era," the British monarchical institution underwent a radical shift in its communication philosophy. The "Crown" is no longer a rigid sovereign symbol content with traditional protocols; it has transformed into a strategic actor striving to maintain "continuity" while demonstrating "modernity" in a post-Brexit world.

King Charles III's speech before the U.S. Congress in April 29, 2026 .represents a pivotal moment in this trajectory. It is not merely a ceremonial event, but a carefully studied "semiotic act" that gained immense significance as an attempt to reformulate the political identity of the monarchy in the eyes of its greatest strategic ally. The choice of "Congress" as a platform for this speech carries profound symbolic connotations; it is the historical site where concepts of liberation from the Crown were crystallized, and the same venue that has been used in recent years as a platform for movements attempting to downplay the traditional bonds between London and Washington.

The problematic addressed by this study lies in the complex intersection between linguistic text and semiotic symbol. While the speech appears as a friendly message, at its core, it performs a process of "restoration" and the crafting of a peer-to-peer image for the monarchy following the passing of Queen Elizabeth II, utilizing the tools of discourse semiology to transform protocol symbols into directed political messages. The paradox emerges in how the "Crown"—as a hereditary symbol—is adapted to become acceptable within the "Capitol" as a democratic symbol, through a communicative language that blends the dignity of history with the flexibility of the present, employing humor and shared symbols to break the ice and build a mental image consistent with the aspirations of the twenty-first century.

Based on the aforementioned, this study seeks to answer the following primary question: **"How did the semiological structure of King Charles III's speech before the U.S. Congress contribute to reconstructing the international mental image of the British monarchy and enhancing its positioning within the framework of contemporary public diplomacy?"**

In order to encompass all dimensions of the problematic, the study seeks to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What are the major sign systems (signifiers) that formed the deep structure of the discourse, and how were they invested to generate political meaning?

2. How did "political humor" and storytelling in the discourse transform from a mere rhetorical style into an "attraction tool" to win over the American legislative elite (both Democrats and Republicans alike)?
3. What are the features of the new mental image that the discourse succeeded in shaping, and was it able to transition the King from a "hereditary symbol" to a "value-driven leader"?

Furthermore, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To provide a narrative semiotic reading (according to the Greimassian approach) of the royal political discourse, moving beyond superficial description to an analysis of the "political act" latent within the symbols.
2. To deconstruct the relationship between "discourse construction" and the "exercise of soft power," proving that power in discourse lies in its engineering and the context of its delivery.
3. To monitor shifts in the political communication strategies of Britain during the reign of King Charles III, and how the connotations of the "Story of the two Georges" were used as a symbolic framework to reshape the historical relationship between the Crown and the Republic from conflict to partnership.
4. To track and analyze the semiology of "political humor" in the King's speech, and how it was employed as a tool for "humanization" and the dismantling of psychological barriers with American lawmakers.

II. Conceptual Framework and Terminology Foundations

The conceptual framework represents the theoretical pillar of this study, as it seeks to define the terminological boundaries and the cognitive intersections between the various fields of study involved. Defining these terms is not merely a procedural step, but rather an "epistemological foundation" aimed at dismantling the overlapping layers between language, politics, and the mental image.

1. Political Communication

Broadly defined, political communication functions as the vital link between various elements of governance; it is a purposeful activity aimed at circulating political messages between the rulers and the ruled through diverse communication channels. (Ezzi, 2003, p. 56) More deeply, one might view this field as a 'laboratory'- as suggested by recent scholarship- where semiological symbols are transmuted into political legitimacy. It is through this intricate discourse that a state's international mental image is meticulously engineered, serving as a cornerstone for a diplomacy that prioritizes the art of persuasion over the force of coercion. (Wolton, 2005, p. 112) Furthermore, it provides the essential cognitive arena where official, media, and public discourses intersect—a dynamic that remains a prerequisite for any functional modern democracy. (Wolton, 2005, p. 26). Within the specific context of this study, this concept is embodied in the symbolic performance led by the King on April 29, 2026, utilizing the U.S. Congress as a strategic communicative platform to recalibrate the monarchy's relationship with the global superpower.

2. Political Discourse

Political discourse is fundamentally understood as the collective utterances issued by institutions and key actors within the political arena. It is uniquely characterized by its "performative" nature, where language functions as a tool to effect tangible change in reality or to architect institutional legitimacy. (Charaudeau, 2005, p. 45) Furthermore, it serves as a strategic process of image construction; here, the speaker meticulously selects symbols and vocabulary designed to cement a positive impression within the international community, effectively turning the discourse into a strategic "front" that masks contradictions while highlighting pillars of strength. (Cotteret, 1991, p. 82) In the context of this study, this is embodied in the King's address before Congress-a synthesis of linguistic structure, vocal tone, and physical gestures that together form a "semantic unit" aimed at asserting prestige.

3. Semiology of Political Discourse

The semiology of political discourse represents an approach that seeks to deconstruct the link between the "sign" and its political significance. In this context, discourse is not merely an accumulation of words, but a sophisticated system of signs-linguistic, visual, and kinetic-leveraged to craft meaning and guide the recipient. A semiological analyst views discourse as a "signifying structure"; (Greimas, Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method, 1983, p. 11) where vocal tone, hand gestures, background color choices, and even strategic silence become elements carrying political connotations as vital as the written text itself. Political semiology, therefore, is the study of semiotic systems that produce meaning within the dynamics of power, examining how language and imagery are utilized to either consolidate or destabilize political hegemony. (Al-Ghadhdhami, 2006, p. 74) Thus, the semiology of political discourse is the science that examines the life of political signs within social life, focusing on the connotative meanings of the political text and its accompanying visual symbols aimed at influencing the audience. (Al-Arwani, 2024, p. 1) Within this research, it serves as the methodology that tracks the "signifiers" in the King's speech to reach their profound political "signifieds," particularly in deconstructing the strategy of "implicit rebuttal" against competing discourses. (Kristeva, 1980, p. 65)

4. Soft Power: Concept and Sources

Soft power represents the essence of the modern shift in the philosophy of international relations. It transcends the classical concept of power based on "the carrot and the stick"—or military coercion and economic pressure—to settle in a more subtle and profound space: "attraction." It can be defined as that spiritual and moral capacity a state possesses to make others adopt its choices and seek to achieve its goals voluntarily, not out of fear of punishment, but out of admiration for its model and identification with its values.

In short, it is the "art of persuasion without exertion of pressure," where a state invests in its intangible resources, such as its cultural radiance, ethical superiority, and the credibility of its foreign policies. This concept was introduced by the renowned Joseph Nye in 1990. The soft power of a country rests primarily on three sources: its culture, its political values, and its foreign policies. (Al-Aswad, 2012, p. 42) Soft power is a political behavior that relies on investing in a state's intangible resources to create a positive mental image, leading public opinion to adopt the state's positions voluntarily. Furthermore, it is the ability to influence others to obtain desired results through attraction rather than coercion or payment. (Nye, Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics, 2004, p. 6)

5. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy is defined as the organized efforts exerted by a state to communicate with foreign audiences to understand, win over, and influence their minds in a way that serves national foreign policy objectives. (Cull, Public Diplomacy: Lessons from the Past., 2009, p. 12) It is also defined as the power through which a state seeks to create a sense of familiarity and acceptance within external public opinion toward its policies, utilizing media, cultural, and intellectual tools. (Al-Tayeb, 2014, p. 88) Amidst current shifts, public diplomacy is no longer just about sending messages; it has evolved into integrated political communication that relies on the power of discourse and its visual semiotics to attract audiences. (Seib, 2012, p. 45.) Through this mode of diplomacy, a state seeks to influence the opinions of both peoples and elites to facilitate the achievement of its foreign policy goals. (Cull, Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age, 2019, p. 54)

6. Mental Image

The mental image is understood as the cognitive schema and the rational and emotional representation formed in the minds of individuals toward a specific entity. It is the "perception of reality"—the sum of information, experiences, and semiotic messages received by the public through political communication channels. (Jowett, 2018, p. 102) Boulding views the image as the totality of what an individual believes to be true. (Boulding, 1956, p. 6) From an international relations perspective, Marcel Merle argues that it represents a subjective depiction of collective reality. (Merle, 1987, p. 215.)

In Arabic terminology, it is defined as the final product of subjective and psychological impressions formed by individuals or groups regarding an institution or state. (Ajwa, 2000, p. 45) Similarly, Webster's Dictionary defines it as the revival or simulation of a sensory experience. (Webster's, 2020, p. 716) Despite the varying nomenclatures, the essence revolves around the "final output of impressions" that influence human life. (Al-Mashharawi, 2011, p. 22)

III. Methods and Materials:

1. Study Sample

This study relies on a purposive sample, specifically selecting King Charles III's speech before the U.S. Congress (April 29, 2026) based on several considerations:

- **The Weight of the Platform:** The U.S. Congress is considered the most significant international "political stage"; a speech delivered there transcends bilateral relations to reach global public opinion.
- **Geopolitical Timing:** The speech comes during a phase of British "repositioning," making every sentence within it laden with precise diplomatic missions.
- **Symbolic Density:** The speech is characterized by diverse levels of expression (ranging from humor and parity to emotional resonance), providing rich material for semiotic analysis that seeks to uncover the "unspoken."

2. Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, specifically utilizing the "Semiotic Approach,"[1] to delve into the "context of meaning production." This methodology allows us to understand how a "joke" is transformed from an entertaining tool into a political "sign" expressing confidence and parity.

2.1. Research Tools

To ensure the highest level of accuracy, three analytical tools have been integrated:

- **A. Narrative Semiotic Approach (Greimas Model):** Used to analyze the discourse as a "story" or a "narrative program."[2] We examine the: (**Subject**: the King and his aspirations; **Object**: reconstructing the mental image and parity; **Helper**: history, soft power, and humor; **Opponent**: competing narratives and geopolitical marginalization).
- **B. Intertextual Analysis:** A tool used to monitor the links between the King's speech and previous discourses, such as the Trump narrative or the speeches of Queen Elizabeth II.[3] Intertextuality here aims to reveal "implicit responses" that were not stated explicitly but are embedded within the text's structure.
- **C. Pragmatic Semiotics:** Focuses on the "act of speaking" and how language is used to achieve an "effect" on the recipient (such as wining over Democrats through a values-based discourse).

2.2. Procedural Stages of Analysis

The analytical process was conducted through three fundamental stages:

- **Deconstruction Phase:** Dividing the discourse into "semantic units" (Introduction unit, Body unit, and Conclusion unit).
- **Monitoring Phase:** Extracting central "signifiers" in each unit (keywords, historical symbols, implicit cues).
- **Interpretation Phase:** Linking these signifiers to the 2026 political context to answer the study's central question regarding the "reconstruction of the mental image."

IV. Results and discussion : The Semiotic Deconstruction of the Discourse

In this section, we will analyze the semantic units of the speech according to the meaning trajectories previously identified:

1. The Semiology of the "Exordium" (The Introduction)

The King began his speech with a "joke" regarding tea taxes and the story of American independence. Semiotically, this is termed an "ingratiation strategy," where the King employed a painful historical "signifier" (the revolution against the Crown) and transformed it into a humorous "signified." The aim of this semiotic act was to announce the end of the era of the "Transcendent King" and replace it with the image of the "Friendly King." This move sought to dismantle the "old colonizer complex" within the American collective mind, thereby paving the way for the acceptance of subsequent political messages.

The King stated: *"I can promise you that I do not come here to lecture you on taxes... after all, I think we both know how that ended last time we tried it in this city!"* Here, the King utilized "sarcastic historical intertextuality" regarding the "Boston Tea Party" and tea taxes. Semiotically, this quote functions as a "negotiatory sign"; it acknowledges a confrontational past to emphasize the maturity of the current relationship. It is a deliberate "self-destruction" of the old colonizer's prestige to build the image of the "Friendly Partner."

2. The Mechanism of Responding to the "Other" (Counter-Intertextuality)

In one of the strongest moments of the speech, the King summoned cultural identity to respond to attempts at marginalizing Britain. He said: *"Some might have suggested that I should have addressed you in French today to suit the shifting winds of diplomacy, but I believe the English language—our shared inheritance—still speaks the loudest when it comes to freedom and innovation."*

This segment represents a "counter-semiotic act." It is a direct response (though wrapped in diplomacy) to narratives that viewed Britain as a declining power after Brexit. The use of the term "shared inheritance" repositions Britain as a "source" of American values rather than just a "follower." In this part, the King referenced the "French language" in response to what was previously raised regarding Trump's discourse about the American role in World War II in preserving European identity when he said: "If it weren't for the United States, Europe would now be speaking German and perhaps Japanese as well." Here, we find a "counter-intertextuality" with political narratives (such as the 2019 Trump narrative that undervalued allies). The King did not leave the matter without a response; rather, he exercised "linguistic sovereignty." Invoking "parity" through language is an indication that Britain is not a "dependent," but rather an "origin" in the Western system. This semiotic displacement transforms Britain's image from a "state in need" to a "state that bestows value."

3. Strategic Repositioning

The speech focused intensely on (climate, artificial intelligence, digital ethics).

- **Analysis according to the Greimas model:**
    - **Subject:** King Charles.
    - **Object:** Leading the world toward new ethical values.
    - **Helper:** The King's historical commitment to the environment.

Here, the image of the "Value-driven King" is constructed. By adopting issues of concern to the new generation in America (specifically Democrats), the King ensured "trans-border legitimacy." This "soft power" acts as a bridge crossing the monarchy from the circle of the "past" to the "digital future." To transition from a "historical symbol" to a "contemporary actor," the King focused on issues of innovation and climate, saying: *"Our alliance is no longer just about the battlefields of the past, but the digital frontiers and the preservation of our planet. The crown I wear is ancient, but the challenges I champion—AI ethics and climate resilience—are the very pulse of the future."* We notice here a semiotic contrast between the "Ancient Crown" and the "Pulse of the future." This "binary opposition" aims to create a "hybrid" mental image that combines the legitimacy of the past with the dynamism of the future, targeting the liberal base in Congress.

4. The Semiology of "Continuity"

The King invoked the memory of Queen Elizabeth II at specific moments in the speech, using the "iconic sign" of the late Queen as "symbolic capital." The goal was to reassure the American recipient that "change" in the person of the King does not mean a "rupture" with shared values. He attempted to transfer inherited "prestige" to the new "action," reducing the risks of "non-acceptance" for the new King.

The analysis proved that King Charles III's speech is an integrated "semiotic engineering." Every joke, every historical reference, and every rhetorical pause served one goal: "To break the old mental image (dependency/tradition) and build a new mental image (strategic partnership/institutional modernity)." Political communication at this moment succeeded in transforming the "Crown" from an artifact into a strong and influential "political brand."

The King linked his legitimacy to the legitimacy of the late Queen to ensure "semiotic stability," saying: *"My mother, the late Queen, spoke from this very podium with a belief in the 'unshakeable bond' between our nations. I stand here not to replace that bond, but to renew it for a new century."* Here, the King used the phrase "unshakeable bond" as an inherited "iconic signifier." Semiotically, he practiced a process of "transference of charisma" from the icon of Elizabeth II to his own person, to give his new image a "historical legitimacy" that protects it from criticism.

V. **Conclusion**:

This research has sought to deconstruct the mechanisms of political discourse construction in King Charles III's speech before the U.S. Congress (2026), relying on a semiotic approach to reveal how "language" is transformed into "soft power" capable of re-engineering the international mental image of the British monarchy. The study highlighted the strengths of the royal political discourse, and the analysis demonstrated that King Charles III's speech before the Congress (April 29, 2026). was not merely a fleeting diplomatic event, but rather an integrated communicative strategy for Britain's international repositioning.

The study reached the following results:

-The discourse succeeded in shifting Britain's positioning from the category of a "geopolitical follower" to that of an "equal and strategic partner" through the technique of counter-intertextuality, which restored the balance of symbolic power within the Atlantic space.

- The construction of the discourse itself served as a pivotal tool for exercising soft power, as "political humor" was transformed into an operational sign to break the psychological resistance of the American legislator and establish a contract of mutual emotional acceptance.

-The discourse managed to engineer a new mental image of the King as a "global and value-driven leader" by substituting a "legitimacy of achievement" (climate change, digital ethics) for a mere reliance on traditional hereditary legitimacy.

-The study found that the symbolic icon of the late Queen was employed as a communicative bridge to ensure the transfer of the monarchy's historical prestige into the new era without causing an identity shock for the international audience.

-The study concludes that "semiotic diplomacy" is the most potent engine in modern soft power struggles, where international standing is built upon the ability to encode messages of power within contemporary ethical and aesthetic frameworks.

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