

NARRATIVE COMPLEMENTARITY IN SELECTED SPEECHES OF PRIME MINISTER BENJAMIN NETANYAHU

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Abstract

This study examines the rhetorical strategies employed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his speeches delivered in (2009, 2012, 2015, 2018), focusing on the concept of narrative complementarity. The analysis reveals how Netanyahu consistently balanced themes of innovation, existential threat, and moral appeal to enhance rhetorical effectiveness. By juxtaposing Israel's achievements in science, technology, and resilience with warnings about Iran's aggression, his discourse fused optimism with urgency, creating a layered narrative that appealed to both emotional and rational dimensions of persuasion. This rhetorical pattern reinforced Israel's national identity while simultaneously positioning its concerns within a universal moral framework. The findings contribute to narrative linguistics by demonstrating that narratives of progress and threat are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing, functioning as a persuasive device in political communication. Netanyahu's speeches exemplify how leaders can transform national concerns into global appeals through narrative complementarity, thereby constructing legitimacy and mobilising support in international forums. Recommendations for further research include comparative studies of other leaders' UN speeches, such as Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, or Mahmoud Abbas, to explore cultural and geopolitical variations in narrative strategies. Interdisciplinary approaches integrating linguistics, political science, and communication studies could further enrich the theoretical framework. Ultimately, this study highlights the enduring power of narrative in diplomacy, where storytelling—anchored in history, identity, and imagery—can redefine perceptions, mobilise alliances, and influence the trajectory of global affairs.

Keywords: Narrative Complementarity, Political Communication, United Nations General Assembly, Benjamin Netanyahu

Introduction

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, has consistently utilised the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) platform to articulate Israel's foreign policy positions, particularly in relation to security threats, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and Iran's nuclear programme. His speeches frequently weave together historical references—such as the Holocaust, the founding of the State of Israel, and struggles experienced by Jewish diaspora communities—with contemporary geopolitical challenges. In doing so, Netanyahu situates Israel's present dilemmas within a broader narrative of survival, resilience, and legitimacy. Scholars have observed that his rhetorical style relies heavily on narrative framing, employing stories of collective memory and existential struggle to reinforce Israel's stance in international diplomacy (Soukni, 2025; Alsemeiri, 2025;

AlAsttal, 2024). This recurring pattern underscores the importance of examining how narrative complementarity functions in his discourse, as it allows him to merge historical trauma with modern political urgency, thereby strengthening the persuasive impact of his arguments on both sympathetic and sceptical audiences.

Netanyahu's UNGA addresses are not merely political statements but performative acts of identity construction and national representation. By invoking Jewish history, cultural resilience, and the moral lessons of past persecution, he positions Israel simultaneously as a victim of historical injustice and as a defender of modern democratic values. This dual narrative strategy enables him to appeal to moral authority while also justifying controversial policies, such as military interventions or settlement expansions, by framing them as necessary measures for survival.

His speeches exemplify how narratives complement logical and legal arguments, transforming them into powerful tools for shaping international opinion and mobilising support. In this way, Netanyahu's discourse demonstrates the strategic use of semiotic resources—language, imagery, and symbolism—to craft a compelling vision of Israel's role in global politics, one that appeals emotionally while asserting political legitimacy (Soukni, 2025).

This research contributes to political linguistics by demonstrating how narrative complementarity enriches our understanding of political discourse. It highlights the role of narratives in legitimising state actions, shaping collective memory, and influencing international opinion. By situating Netanyahu's speeches within the framework of narrative inquiry, the study underscores the importance of integrating narrative analysis into discourse studies. Furthermore, the findings have implications for understanding political communication in conflict settings. They reveal how leaders strategically deploy narratives to construct identities, justify policies, and challenge global institutions. This not only advances theoretical discussions in linguistics but also provides practical insights into the dynamics of international diplomacy and rhetorical persuasion (AlAsttal, 2024).

The central problem lies in understanding how narratives function as complementary devices in political communication, particularly within the high-profile setting of the United Nations General Assembly. Traditional discourse analysis often emphasises argumentative structures such as logical reasoning, evidence-based claims, and rhetorical appeals to authority. However, Netanyahu's speeches demonstrate that narratives are not secondary embellishments but integral components of persuasion. His consistent use of historical analogies, binary oppositions (civilisation versus barbarism), and emotionally charged appeals illustrates how narratives reinforce and legitimise political positions while simultaneously shaping collective memory and identity. These narrative strategies allow him to situate Israel's contemporary challenges within a broader historical and moral framework, thereby

strengthening the impact of his arguments on both domestic and international audiences (Alsemeiri, 2025). By embedding stories of survival, resilience, and existential threat into his discourse, Netanyahu exemplifies how narrative complementarity operates as a powerful linguistic and rhetorical tool in global diplomacy, which requires a critical discourse analysis.

This study is justified by the need to explore how narratives supplement rational argumentation in high-stakes diplomatic contexts and how they shape perceptions of legitimacy and moral authority. In the case of Netanyahu's UNGA speeches, narratives do more than provide background—they actively construct Israel's identity, frame its geopolitical challenges, and position its policies within a moral discourse that appeals to international audiences. Recognising narrative complementarity as a deliberate rhetorical strategy rather than a stylistic choice is essential for understanding the dynamics of political communication in global institutions. By analysing these speeches, the research will uncover how narratives, when combined with logical reasoning, influence global audiences and institutions, thereby contributing to broader discussions in political linguistics and discourse studies. This justification underscores the importance of integrating narrative analysis into the study of political rhetoric, as it reveals the interplay between storytelling, persuasion, and legitimacy in international relations.

The research objectives of this study are threefold: first, to analyse how Netanyahu's narratives complement argumentative strategies by reinforcing logical claims with historical and cultural references; second, to examine the diplomatic functions of narrative complementarity in legitimising Israel's policies and framing international conflicts; and third, to evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of narrative complementarity in shaping perceptions of Israel's identity and moral authority within the UNGA context. Collectively, these objectives highlight the intricate interplay between narrative, power, and persuasion, aligning with broader discourse studies that emphasise how political leaders strategically employ storytelling to construct

legitimacy, mobilise support, and influence international audiences.

Conceptual Framework

The concept of narrative complementarity in linguistics highlights the way stories and symbolic references operate alongside other communicative strategies to reinforce meaning and persuasion. Rather than functioning as isolated texts, narratives interact with broader discursive structures, providing emotional appeal and contextual depth. Labov (2013) explains that narratives are fundamental linguistic resources for organising experience and conveying social meaning, while Riessman (2008) emphasises their role in supplementing formal discourse by shaping interpretation and audience engagement. These perspectives position narrative complementarity as a crucial mechanism for examining how language and meaning are co-constructed in political and social contexts.

Building on this definition, the theoretical premise of narrative complementarity draws from narrative inquiry, discourse analysis, and rhetorical studies. Narrative inquiry, in addition, situates human experience within storied forms, making it central to qualitative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Discourse analysis, as Fairclough (1995) argues, investigates how language constructs social realities, including power relations and ideology. Rhetorical studies further expand this perspective by analysing persuasive strategies in public communication, with Charland (1987) demonstrating how constitutive rhetoric shapes collective identity. Together, these frameworks provide a foundation for understanding how narratives complement other discursive practices, particularly in contexts where persuasion, ideology, and legitimacy are at stake.

A distinction must, however, be made between narrative as a primary strategy and narrative as a complementary strategy. When narrative dominates discourse, it becomes the primary mode of communication, shaping the entire communicative act through storytelling. Conversely, when narrative supports other modes of argumentation—such as legal reasoning or statistical evidence—it functions as a

complementary strategy. Kress (2010) notes that multimodal communication often integrates narrative as a secondary layer to enhance meaning, while van Leeuwen (2008) highlights how discourse practices embed narratives within broader structures of authority and legitimacy. This distinction is critical for analysing political texts, where narratives may either drive the discourse or reinforce other forms of argumentation.

The relevance of narrative complementarity to political communication and international diplomacy is particularly significant. Leaders often employ stories to frame national identity, legitimise policies, and appeal to international audiences. Nye (2008) argues that soft power relies heavily on narrative framing to influence global perceptions, while Chilton (2004) demonstrates how political discourse uses metaphors and narratives to construct legitimacy in international relations. Edelman (1988) earlier shows that narratives in political communication complement logical and legal arguments, making them more persuasive and accessible to diverse audiences. In this way, narrative complementarity becomes a vital tool for understanding how political actors shape meaning, mobilise support, and negotiate authority within the global arena. In this sequence, the theoretical models highlight the basis for identifying the methodological considerations for analysing speech events that seek to persuade and elicit sympathy from the interlocutor. Central to this expectation is what the discourse sets out to achieve in legitimising the ideological premise in context.

Complementary Functions of Narrative

The persuasive function of narrative has been widely recognised in communication studies, particularly through Fisher's (1984) narrative paradigm, which argues that coherent stories persuade humans more than abstract logic. Political leaders often rely on narrative structures to simplify complex policy issues, making them accessible to diverse audiences. In this sense, narratives act as vehicles for reinforcing logical arguments by embedding them within familiar storylines that resonate with cultural values and collective memory. Scholars such as Bennett and

Edelman (1985) further emphasise that political narratives transform technical details into symbolic representations that carry persuasive weight. By framing policy debates with vivid metaphors or historical analogies, leaders enhance the clarity and memorability of their arguments. This literature suggests that persuasive narratives are not merely rhetorical provisions but integral to the construction of political meaning, ensuring that logical claims are reinforced by narrative coherence.

The same appeal goes for narratives, which also serve a legitimising function by embedding political positions within moral and historical frameworks. Van Dijk (2006) argues that discourse legitimises power by situating it within socially accepted narratives, thereby transforming political stances into ethical imperatives. Leaders often invoke collective identity, historical resilience, or moral duty to justify their policies, aligning present actions with past struggles and shared values. This legitimising function ensures that political arguments are not perceived as isolated strategies but as natural extensions of a nation's historical trajectory. Fairclough (2010) extends this view by highlighting how discourse constructs legitimacy through intertextuality, drawing on historical events and cultural narratives to justify contemporary positions. In political communication, legitimacy is achieved not only through rational argument but also through narrative framing that situates policies within broader moral and ethical discourses. This literature underscores the importance of narrative complementarity in legitimising political positions, such as stories of survival, innovation, and moral duty.

Another perspective, which explains further, is that the emotional dimension of narrative has been explored extensively in political linguistics. Chilton (2004) states that political language operates through both cognitive and emotional channels, with metaphors and historical references serving as affective triggers. Emotional appeals complement rational discourse by mobilising collective trauma, pride, or fear, ensuring that political messages are directed on both the intellectual and visceral levels. This

duality highlights the role of narrative in intensifying urgency and strengthening audience engagement. Research by Lakoff (2002) on framing further demonstrates how metaphors and symbolic language evoke emotional responses that reinforce rational arguments. Political leaders often employ repetition, urgency, and historical memory to activate affective resonance, transforming policy debates into moral imperatives. The literature suggests that emotional narratives are essential to political persuasion, as they complement rational discourse by appealing to shared experiences and collective identities (Bermberg, 2012).

On a final note, narratives also function as diplomatic tools, bridging national concerns with global values. Fairclough (2010) emphasises that discourse constructs shared realities, allowing leaders to situate their national narratives within universal struggles for progress and security. Diplomatic framing enables states to reposition themselves as global actors, transforming domestic achievements into contributions to the international order. This literature highlights how narrative complementarity extends beyond domestic rhetoric to shape global diplomacy. Scholars such as Roselle, Miskimmon, and O'Loughlin (2014) argue that strategic narratives are central to international relations, as they allow states to frame their identities and policies in ways that appeal globally. By presenting national achievements as part of a universal struggle, leaders construct diplomatic legitimacy and foster alliances. This perspective underscores the broader relevance of narrative complementarity, showing how political communication at the international level relies on narratives to align national interests with global concerns.

Methodological Considerations

This study adopts a qualitative design to explore how semiotic and rhetorical strategies are embedded in Benjamin Netanyahu's selected speeches. The methodology is organised into five components: Design, Corpus, Selection Criteria, Analytical Tools, and Procedure. The research design is qualitative and interpretive based on eclectic selection, focusing on discourse analysis and rhetorical criticism. This approach allows for

an in-depth examination of language, imagery, and symbolic codes as they appear in political texts as entirely tenable corpus analysis.

The corpus sourced for this analysis comprised four speeches, delivered with dates, titles, and subject matters presented in the table as follows:

Netanyahu's Key Speeches		
Date & Event	Place of Delivery	Subject Matter
2009 President's Conference – "Making the Impossible Possible"	Jerusalem, Israel	Focused on <i>innovation and energy independence</i> . Netanyahu emphasized eliminating global dependence on fossil fuels, promoting renewable energy, and highlighted Israel's achievements in turning "impossible" challenges into reality.
2012 UN General Assembly – September 27	United Nations Headquarters, New York	Addressed <i>Israel's historical legitimacy and security threats</i> . He contrasted modernity vs. medievalism in the Middle East, defended Israel's right to exist, and warned about Iran's nuclear ambitions.
2015 U.S. Congress – March 3 (Iran Deal Speech)	Joint Session of the U.S. Congress, Washington D.C.	Strongly opposed the proposed <i>Iran nuclear deal</i> . Netanyahu argued it endangered Israel's survival and global security, drawing parallels to historical threats against the Jewish people.
2018 UN General Assembly – September 27	United Nations Headquarters, New York	Revealed alleged <i>Iranian secret nuclear facilities</i> . Netanyahu presented evidence of a "secret atomic warehouse" in Tehran, criticized European powers for appeasing Iran, and reaffirmed Israel's readiness to act against Iranian and Hezbollah threats.

The above-listed speeches were selected based on three criteria: (a) delivery on different occasions between 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018, (b) thematic relevance to Israel's foreign policy priorities such as security, legitimacy, and diplomacy, and (c) recurrence of semiotic and rhetorical devices such as historical references, binary oppositions, and symbolic imagery.

To investigate further, the study employs discourse analysis to explicate how language constructs power and legitimacy, rhetorical criticism to identify persuasive strategies, and thematic coding to categorise 'recurring motifs' such as collective memory, identity politics, and propaganda framing. These tools together provide a comprehensive framework for analysing narrative complementarity. The analytical model guiding this study is Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. Fairclough (1995) provides a systematic approach for examining how language constructs social

realities, power relations, and ideological positions. His model is particularly suited to political texts because it integrates linguistic analysis with social theory, allowing researchers to uncover how discourse both reflects and shapes broader structures of authority and legitimacy.

Case Studies of Selected Speeches

Benjamin Netanyahu's speeches from 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018 reveal recurring themes of security, peace, and Israel's global role, but each reflects the shifting geopolitical context of its time. Through close reading, it can be identified that narrative segments that complement one another equally compare how his rhetoric evolved over the years.

2009 (President's Conference, "Making the Impossible Possible")

Example 1: *Netanyahu highlights Israel's achievements: reviving Hebrew, making*

the desert bloom, and peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. This narrative segment emphasises resilience and innovation.

Netanyahu declared: *"We revived the Hebrew language, we made the desert bloom, we signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan."* This line uses parallel structure and enumeration to emphasise resilience and innovation, presenting Israel's accomplishments as a sequence of triumphs over adversity. The linguistic rhythm builds momentum, while the discourse feature of **historical continuity** links past struggles to present success. By framing achievements as collective national victories, Netanyahu reinforces the theme of Israel as a nation that repeatedly turns impossibility into possibility.

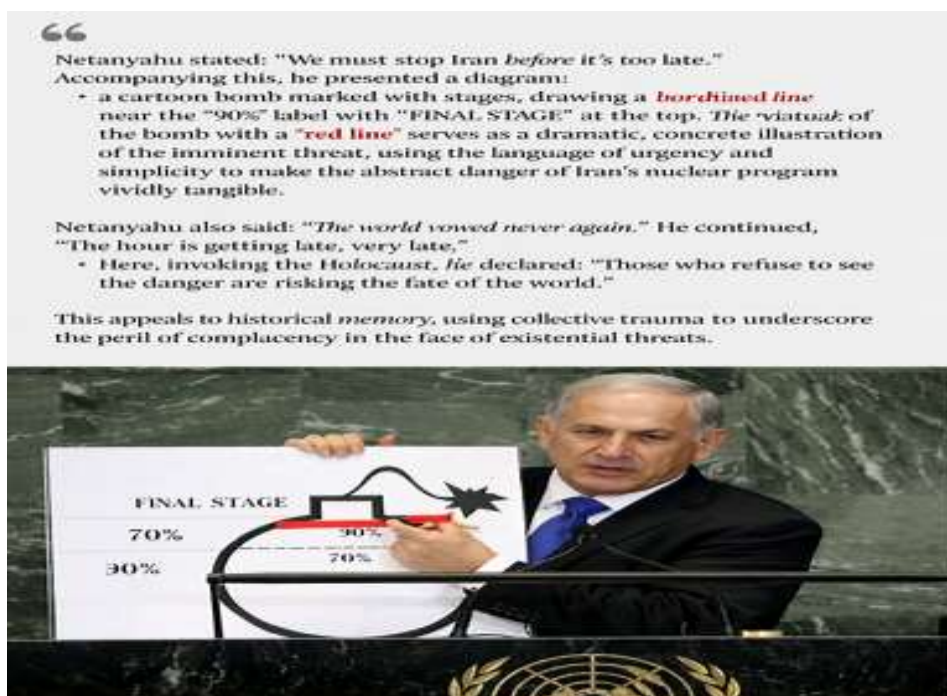
Example 2: *He directly appeals to Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) to lead Palestinians toward peace,*

framing peace as "possible" if courage is shown. This segment complements the innovation narrative by linking Israel's past achievements to future aspirations.

Netanyahu urged, *"Abu Mazen, be courageous and make peace with Israel."* The direct address and imperative verb "be courageous" function as a rhetorical appeal and personalisation, shifting the discourse from abstract diplomacy to a personal challenge. This linguistic choice positions peace as attainable if the Palestinian leadership shows bravery. The discourse feature here is complementarity: the appeal to Abbas aligns with the earlier narrative of innovation, suggesting that just as Israel overcame immense challenges, Palestinians too can achieve the "impossible" by embracing peace.

2012 (UN General Assembly, September 27)

Example 1: *Netanyahu famously used a cartoon bomb diagram to illustrate Iran's nuclear threat, dramatising urgency and making the abstract danger tangible.*



Source: UNO (2012) <https://copilot.microsoft.com/th/id/BCO.b809de62-0479-4a53-9fac-a42a1bb3e2f1>

Netanyahu declared: *"We must stop Iran before it's too late."* He then held up a large poster of a

cartoon bomb, drawing a bold red line near the “90%” mark labelled “Final Stage.” The visual metaphor transformed an abstract nuclear enrichment process into a simple, dramatic image. Linguistically, the phrase “before it’s too late” employs temporal urgency and apocalyptic framing, while the diagram itself functions as a discourse strategy of concretisation—turning technical nuclear data into a universally understandable threat. This dramatisation reinforced the theme of imminent danger and the necessity of decisive action.

Example 2: *He balanced this with appeals to history, invoking the Holocaust as a warning against ignoring existential threats. This segment complements the visual metaphor by grounding it in collective memory.*

Netanyahu reminded the assembly: “*The world vowed never again.*” He followed with: “*The hour is getting late, very late.*” These lines employ intertextuality, invoking the Holocaust as a collective memory to frame Iran’s nuclear ambitions as an existential threat. The repetition of “late” intensifies urgency through anaphora, while “never again” functions as a moral imperative rooted in historical trauma. The discourse feature here is collective identity construction—he situates Israel’s security concerns within a global moral narrative, complementing the bomb diagram by grounding the urgency in shared historical responsibility.

2015 (U.S. Congress, March 3 – Iran Deal)

Example 1: *Netanyahu warned that the proposed Iran nuclear deal would “pave Iran’s path to the bomb,” portraying it as a direct danger to Israel’s survival.*

Netanyahu warned Congress that the proposed nuclear deal would “*pave Iran’s path to the bomb.*” The phrase uses metaphorical framing—“pave” evokes construction and inevitability, suggesting the deal smooths the way for Iran’s nuclear ambitions rather than blocking them. The linguistic feature of alliteration (“pave” and “path”) reinforces rhythm and memorability, while the discourse strategy of **threat amplification** heightens urgency. By portraying the agreement as

a facilitator of danger, Netanyahu positions Israel’s survival as directly imperilled, aligning his rhetoric with the theme of existential security and moral responsibility.

Example 2: *He framed Israel as standing on the “front lines of civilisation,” positioning the country as both victim and defender of Western values. This complements the critique of the deal by elevating Israel’s role in global security.*

Netanyahu asserted that Israel stands on the “*front lines of civilisation.*” This phrase employs spatial metaphor and civilisational discourse, situating Israel as both shield and sentinel of Western values. The linguistic contrast between “front lines” (military imagery) and “civilisation” (cultural ideal) fuses defense and moral duty, creating a heroic narrative. The discourse feature of **collective identity construction** elevates Israel from a regional actor to a global defender, complementing his critique of the Iran deal by reframing Israel’s resistance as a universal struggle for the preservation of democratic and moral order.

2018 (UN General Assembly, September 27)

Example 1: *Netanyahu showcased Israel’s technological and diplomatic achievements, citing new alliances in Africa, Asia, and the Arab world.*

Netanyahu proclaimed: “*Israel is the innovation nation—the place where drones, autonomous vehicles, and water technology are transforming the world.*” He then listed new partnerships with countries in Africa, Asia, and even parts of the Arab world. The linguistic feature of epithet (“innovation nation”) encapsulates national identity through creative branding, while the enumeration of technologies and alliances builds credibility and pride. The discourse feature of positive self-representation situates Israel as a global contributor rather than a regional actor, reinforcing the theme of progress and diplomatic expansion. This rhetoric celebrates Israel’s ingenuity and positions it as a beacon of modernity amid geopolitical complexity.

Example 2: *He accused Iran of hiding*

nuclear materials, presenting satellite images and intelligence. This complements the positive narrative of

Israel's progress by contrasting it with Iran's alleged deception.



Source: Microsoft Copilot (2026).

In the image above, Netanyahu asserted: “*Iran is hiding nuclear materials in a secret warehouse in Tehran.*” He supported this claim with satellite images and intelligence data, employing visual evidence as a discourse strategy to legitimise his argument. Linguistically, the phrase “secret warehouse” evokes concealment and deceit, contrasting sharply with Israel’s transparency narrative. The discourse feature of binary opposition—Israel as honest innovator versus Iran as deceptive aggressor—complements the earlier positive narrative. This juxtaposition strengthens the theme of moral contrast, portraying Israel’s progress and openness as the antithesis of Iran’s alleged duplicity.

Discussion

Across Netanyahu’s speeches (2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018), narrative complementarity—the interplay between achievement, threat, and moral appeal—enhances rhetorical power by balancing emotional appeal with logical persuasion. His 2009 optimism about innovation and peace complements the 2012 and 2015 warnings about existential danger, creating hope and vigilance as watchword vision and preoccupation of the Jews. This duality allows audiences to engage both affectively and cognitively: pride in Israel’s progress amplifies the urgency of defending it. The

technique exemplifies how narrative layering—juxtaposing triumph and peril—strengthens persuasion by appealing to identity, memory, and shared values. These speeches by Benjamin Netanyahu, outrightly reflected the seeming “persecution syndrome”, previously and at any moment trending in the Arab xenophobic messages by Islamic clerics like Sheik Muhammad Yaqub Hussein’s cited in (Katz, 2009; Meir, 2010). The Prime Minister’s preoccupation, therefore amplifies the typical tone often overstated in most Jewish counter narratives.

At the UN, Netanyahu’s discourse exemplifies how leaders use performative storytelling to shape global perception. The assembly becomes a stage where national identity and moral authority are dramatised through narrative coherence. His speeches demonstrate that UN rhetoric is not merely diplomatic communication but a strategic narrative arena, where visual metaphors and historical memory compete with policy detail. The implication is that political discourse at the UN functions as a hybrid of argument and theatre, where persuasion depends as much on narrative framing as on factual substantiation.

Netanyahu’s 2012 UN General Assembly speech on September 27 is often remembered for

the dramatic “red line” diagram he held up to illustrate the urgency of stopping Iran’s nuclear programme. When compared with earlier studies of his UN speeches, scholars note that this performance built upon his longstanding rhetorical strategy of framing Iran as an existential threat to Israel. For example, Wodak (2012) on his 2011 UN address highlights how Netanyahu consistently invoked historical memory—particularly the Holocaust—to argue that Israel must act preemptively against hostile regimes. In both speeches, the central theme was the portrayal of Iran as a uniquely dangerous actor, but the 2012 speech added a visual, almost theatrical element to reinforce the immediacy of the threat (Schweitzer, 2012).

Another comparative study of Netanyahu’s 2009 UN speech shows a different emphasis: while he still warned about Iran, he devoted significant attention to delegitimising Holocaust denial and defending Israel’s right to exist in the face of international criticism. By 2012, however, his rhetoric had shifted toward concrete timelines and thresholds for Iran’s nuclear progress, signaling a more urgent call to action. Thus, when placed side by side, the 2009 and 2011 speeches laid the groundwork in terms of historical legitimacy and moral framing, while the 2012 speech escalated the narrative by introducing a vivid symbol—the “red line”—to demand international intervention. Together, these speeches illustrate Netanyahu’s evolving strategy of combining historical appeals with increasingly urgent warnings about Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

From a linguistic perspective, Netanyahu’s speeches illustrate how narrative syntax—the sequencing of achievement, threat, and moral appeal—constructs coherence and legitimacy. The speeches often rely on narrative syntax, linking stories of Israel’s past into present challenges. In his 2009 President’s Conference speech, he structured his narrative around Israel’s transformation from scarcity to innovation, using a syntax that moved from “what was impossible” to “what is now possible.” Similarly, in his 2012 UN General Assembly address, he employed a sequential narrative—beginning with historical persecution of the Jewish people, moving to the

Holocaust, and then to Iran’s nuclear ambitions—creating a cause-and-effect storyline that positioned Israel as a nation constantly overcoming existential threats.

His use of repetition, metaphor, and direct address exemplifies how political communication relies on narrative pragmatics: the ability to align linguistic form with ideological purpose. On this note, Netanyahu’s speeches are designed to achieve specific communicative goals: persuasion, warning, and mobilization. His 2015 U.S. Congress speech against the Iran nuclear deal exemplifies this pragmatic function. He tailored his language to resonate with American lawmakers, invoking shared democratic values and historical parallels to argue that the deal endangered not only Israel but the entire Western world. The pragmatic dimension here was clear—his narrative was not just descriptive but action-oriented, urging Congress to reject the agreement.

In broader terms, these speeches show that political narratives are not static stories but discursive performances that evolve with context, audience, and geopolitical tension. They highlight the power of narrative linguistics to decode how leaders craft meaning, mobilise emotion, and negotiate truth in the global public sphere. Finally, his discursive performances highlight how he dramatises political issues to capture attention and legitimacy. In the 2012 UN speech, the famous “red line” diagram was a performative act that turned abstract nuclear thresholds into a vivid visual symbol. In 2018, at the UN General Assembly, he performed discourse by revealing alleged Iranian nuclear sites, using props and evidence to stage a performance of truth-telling. These discursive acts went beyond words—they were theatrical interventions meant to shape international perception, reinforce Israel’s credibility, and dramatize the urgency of his message

Conclusion

This study of Netanyahu’s speeches to the UN General Assembly (2009, 2012, 2015, 2018) shows how narrative complementarity—balancing themes of innovation, existential threat, and moral appeal—enhances rhetorical effectiveness. Each speech combined Israel’s achievements with

warnings about Iran, weaving optimism and urgency into a coherent discourse. The analysis demonstrates that his rhetoric consistently relied on juxtaposition: Israel as a resilient innovator versus Iran as a deceptive aggressor, thereby reinforcing national identity while appealing to global audiences. The findings contribute to narrative linguistics by illustrating how complementarity functions as a persuasive device in political communication. Netanyahu's speeches exemplify how narratives of progress and threat are not contradictory but mutually reinforcing, creating a layered discourse that appeals to both emotion and reason. This supports the theoretical claim that narrative complementarity is a key mechanism through which political leaders construct legitimacy and mobilise support in international forums.

Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies could extend this analysis through comparative research with other leaders at the UN, such as Barack Obama, Vladimir Putin, or Mahmoud Abbas, to explore how narrative complementarity varies across cultural,

ideological, and geopolitical contexts. Such comparisons would deepen understanding of whether the balance of achievement and threat is a universal rhetorical strategy or uniquely tied to Israel's geopolitical position. Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches combining linguistics, political science, and communication studies could enrich the theoretical framework.

Ultimately, Netanyahu's speeches underscore the enduring power of narrative in shaping global diplomacy. At the UN, where factual argumentation often competes with symbolic performance, narrative complementarity allows leaders to transform national concerns into universal moral appeals. His rhetoric demonstrates that in international politics, stories—anchored in history, identity, and imagery—can be as influential as policy details. This highlights the broader truth that diplomacy is not only about negotiation but also about storytelling, where the narratives leaders craft can redefine perceptions, mobilise alliances, and influence the trajectory of global affairs

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