THE "FRIEND–FOE" OPPOSITION
IN MODERN IRONIC POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract. The present study focuses on irony in political communication and ways of expressing it, since in modern political discourse irony is becoming an indispensable characteristic. The ideas are verified on the material of English and American politicians' speeches. The paper argues that the ironic type of communicative behaviour is realized through an ironic image, a certain temporary role, in compliance with which the speaker builds up his/her remarks. The ironic image functions as an element of the strategy of theatricality, which is typical of political discourse and is aimed at an indirect addressee – the public. Such images rely on the "friend–foe" opposition (also known as: "us vs. them"), which divides the world into those who support "us" and those who oppose "us". The latter becomes the object of political irony, which is implemented in discourse through various ironic discourse tactics, such as destructiveness, eccentricity, harmonization of communication and others. These tactics are closely connected with the national style of communication and reflect the communicative values of Anglo-Saxon culture: privacy, individualism, common sense, competitiveness, politeness, etc. The hypothesis, stated and verified in the paper, regards ironic images, which in this study are divided into two kinds: those connected with the genre (situational images) and those regulated by the context and the format of speech (emotional images); the latter reflect the mood and feelings at the given moment. The results of the analysis may help to reveal the real politicians' intentions and preferences and pose challenges for further investigation of political discourse regarding irony and ironic images.

Keywords: irony, ironic image, political communication, political discourse, "friend–foe" opposition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern political communication is losing its formal structure and adopting the characteristics of talk shows. This shift towards theatricality and irony attracts the audience and keeps it engaged. According to the opinion of modern scholars, irony has become an indispensable feature of political discourse (Arroyo, 2010; Charteris-Black, 2005, 2014; Fialkova, 2013; Hall, 2016; Hutcheon, 2005; Ponton, 2011, etc.). As irony, according to the etymology of the word, is pretence and mystification, it is realized through ironic images, which are chosen by political leaders to express their communicative intention. This study aims to regard political irony in the frame of the "friend–foe" opposition.

Any chosen tactic is based on some form of opposition. Linguists have observed that political activity often centers around the opposition of semantic and value parameters between "us" and "them". Similarly, the fundamental opposition in the realm of morals is typically seen as "good" versus "evil". Everything close to "friend" approaches the pole of "good", and what refers to "foe" is associated with "evil" and "wrong". The main components of the "friend–foe" opposition are represented by an active element (the leader of "us"), an object of aggression (the enemy) and a passive element (the public led by the leader) (Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2015).

According to the theory, stated in the paper, the "friend–foe" opposition is a channel of implementing irony in political discourse via discursive tactics and ironic images, which are chosen by the politicians and which convey the real intentions and preferences of the speaker.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. The image of the "enemy"

Discourse, particularly political discourse, is a complex phenomenon that involves more than just the words spoken or written. It also includes extralinguistic factors such as knowledge about the world, cultural and historical context, and the communication participants' goals and attitudes. Therefore, it makes sense to consider discourse as a special type of communication that requires constructing and then deconstructing an image of the opponent. In political discourse, which is inherently agonal and often aggressive, one of the main places belongs to the principle of competition, which has been repeatedly noted by researchers (Ponton, 2011; Scollon, 2007; Van Dijk, 2006; Wodak, 2011, 2015). Political discourse is often compared to a battlefield, with language used as a weapon to defeat the opponent. The goal of such discussions is to undermine the enemy's position. Within this framework of "friends" and "enemies", the primary aims of political discourse participants are to present themselves favourably and discredit their opponents. To create and maintain the superiority of "us" over "them", according to T. Van Dijk (2006), speakers adhere to two directions: on the one hand, the justification of superiority, on the other, the denial of its existence. This opposition is one of the prerequisites for the aggressiveness of political discourse. The formation of the image of the enemy, or, as R. Wodak (2015) calls it, the search for a "scapegoat", is based on stereotypes common in this environment. Even though the very identity of the enemy can change, the image of something alien, undesirable and dangerous, along with the mechanisms of its identification, is transmitted from generation to generation. In modern political discourse, the division into "friends" and "foes" is becoming more and more uncompromising, and the discrediting of "foes" is manifested in increasingly aggressive forms (which is intensifying against the background of growing tension in the world: Brexit in the UK, the introduction

of economic and political sanctions against Russia, the unexpected rise to power of D. Trump as president of the United States in 2017, the doping scandal surrounding Russian sports, heated discussions in the world about the expediency of certain medical procedures, the introduction of QR codes in several countries, etc.). "Them" means "external enemies" – all those persons who can threaten the national security of the state: terrorists, immigrants, etc.; or "internal enemies" who pose a danger to democracy, progress and stability.

The "friend–foe" opposition is often realized through aggression, which is associated with one of the tasks of political discourse – victory over an opponent. Aggression is included in several strategies of political discourse, which has created conditions for the formation of a new direction in linguistics – the linguistics of information and psychological warfare as one of the directions of political linguistics, developed by a number of scholars (Arquilla, 2011; Libicki, 2017, etc.).

The actualization of the "friend–foe" opposition occurs through the use of linguistic and non-linguistic means (markers, slogans, symbols, etc.), which has a strong effect on the recipient. Researchers P. Brown and S. Levinson (1987) called such speech acts "face-threatening", i.e. intentionally aggressive attacks that violate the zone of privacy. It is noted that such speech acts make up a large part of political discourse, they are not only permissible but also encouraged by certain political institutions (Arroyo, 2010, p. 426).

2.2. Implications of irony

Destructive behaviour implies a high level of verbal aggression, or "hate speech" (also "hate language"). This term means the use of rudeness and insults to the interlocutor. The moment when politicians deviate from discussing pressing issues and turn to personalities is not always clear, especially when a variety of stylistic techniques are used in destructive discourse. In this case, irony helps to express aggression in a disguised form. In political discourse, language can take on extreme, exaggerated forms. This can include blunt insults or caricatures, rather than just disguised mockery or veiled criticism. Sarcasm is also present in political speech, and some authors consider it to be a kind of irony (Attardo, 2007; Leech, 2014). Such irony is a polite way to be rude and is realized at the expense of an "inferred contradiction" (Alba-Juez, 2014, p. 145).

On the one hand, irony can mask improper behavior; on the other hand, it conveys a negative implication to the interlocutor. This is one of the secrets of successful discussions: "If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which does not conflict with the Principles of Pragmatics, but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implication" (Leech, 1983, p. 82). Indeed, irony is often one of the most effective ways to express an evaluation of current events and convey a critical attitude while maintaining political correctness. Since irony usually requires discursive collaboration, the responsibility for understanding the hidden meaning falls to the addressee, who must discern the critical content behind the ironic form.

2.3. Argumentation and manipulation as strategies of political discourse

Criticism and attack are features characteristic of the political discourse of any language, as politicians assert themselves by defeating their opponents. Nevertheless, the language of politics has other characteristics that are also closely related to irony and manifest themselves in the "friend–foe" opposition. Since one of the goals of political discourse is to influence society and impose a particular viewpoint, this influence is achieved through several means, including argumentation and manipulation. Manipulation and coercion can coincide when an official distances themselves from the "I" persona and self-identifies with the "we" role, equating their policy with justice for all, as noted by political discourse researcher P. Chilton (Chilton, 1990). In other words,

a politician assumes the responsibility of speaking on behalf of the public and presenting their opinion and aspirations as aligned with the public good. Nevertheless, it is not always possible to equate a statesman's goals with societal interests. Manipulation of public consciousness is carried out in political discourse by creating certain emotions. Political discourse contains many expressive units, often conveying a negative assessment of the opponent. N. Woods emphasizes the importance for speakers of the ability to manipulate the expressive means of the language to convince the audience (Woods, 2006, p. 51), forcing the public to change their beliefs and views. The manipulation of words actively manifests itself in political discourse either through changing the meanings of words or through the choice of certain words to designate objects. Often, politicians deliberately resort to ambiguous language, because their speech is addressed to opposing groups of people. It is noted that ambiguity in the discourse of politicians is most effective precisely in situations of increased social tension, when "the balance of rational and irrational in the mass consciousness is disrupted – towards the irrational" (Chilton, 1990, p. 203).

Today, the term "black rhetoric" is gaining popularity in both political and business discourse. This concept involves manipulating rhetorical techniques to steer the conversation in a constructively desirable direction, guiding an opponent or the public towards a necessary decision or outcome, and transforming the interlocutor's negative thinking into positive, for example, by appealing to national historical memory. "Black rhetoric" practically embodies destructive and manipulative discourse, aiming to disrupt relations. In terms of its tasks and functions, this type of political discourse approaches the negative pole. Conversely, political discourse can perform the strategy of harmonization, which functions through the tactics of amusing the audience, minimizing the distance, and defusing tension.

There is an increasing tendency for politicians to flirt with the audience. Currently, this trend is developing: many political debates are losing their formality and seriousness, acquiring the appearance of a talk show containing provocative jokes on the verge of impropriety. The replication of successful and unsuccessful jokes by politicians, spoonerisms and imitating tongue-tied language (being unable to speak properly, e.g. stuttering) causes laughter not only because of the voluntary or involuntary irony of the statements but also because it allows the public to symbolically "rise" above their rulers. Blurring the boundaries between political discourse and entertainment helps politicians strengthen their image (Fialkova & Yelenevskaya, 2013, p. 218).

Some of the modern political figures look out of place in the political arena, their appearance and manners are more in line with the comedy club scene. A striking example is D. Trump: during his time in power, he, like stand-up actors, used gestures to express mockery and superiority and to entertain the audience, as noted by researchers of his discourse (Hall et al., 2016; Ryshina-Pankova & Quam, 2016). All these features were his unique style and may partly explain his success with the audience.

The spread of such type of political discourse as "infotainment" (information + entertainment) is due to social demand. There is a significant spread in the media of jokes beyond the bounds of decency (Blank, 2013), politically incorrect humour and black humour (Bilig, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Luginbuhl, 2007), metaphoric political language (Musolff, 2016, 2017; Ponton 2011). The entertaining nature of some varieties of modern political discourse implies the widespread use of such linguistic means of expressing irony as metaphor, ironic comparison, hyperbole, litotes, and wordplay. They give the language of politics brightness, expressiveness and emotional saturation, which meets the tastes and demands of the audience.

2.4. The functions of irony

The highlighted features of modern political discourse correspond to its main goal – the struggle for power and its retention – and manifest themselves in the "friend–foe" opposition. These features are expressed in language through the use of irony, which can convey aggression or eccentricity or serve to facilitate harmonious communication. Thus, irony in political discourse serves the following purposes:

- it reflects the inherent agonal character of political discourse and helps to defeat the opponent;

- it is a way of capturing the attention of the audience and withholding it;

- it optimizes communication, discharges tension and suggests compromises.

The abovementioned functions of irony make it possible to single out its main directions in political discourse: destructiveness, eccentricity and harmonization of communication.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1. Data collection

The research material was presented by the speeches of English and American politicians belonging to various political genres (institutional and non-institutional) in the recent period. A few examples together with the analysis are given in the paragraph "Results and discussion" (discourse of King Charles III, B. Johnson, L. Truss, B. Obama, M. Crowley). When analyzing English-language political discourse, it seems possible to consider British and American political discourse together, due to a number of overlapping themes and stylistic similarities between these political cultures. Therefore, it is reasonable to combine them into one group, based on the following reasons:

– in many English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States, common topics are currently being discussed and new similar trends in political discourse are developing (immigration policy, a decrease in tolerance against the threat of global terrorism, a new look at political correctness and hyperbolized political correctness, the appropriateness and limits of using humour and irony);

– the United Kingdom and the United States are similar in the social and cultural organization of society (economic conditions, vertical distance – Power Distance, showing the degree of social inequality separating interlocutors; these parameters differ significantly from those in other cultures, for example, Russian);

– in the modern era of globalization, national variants of the English language are merging into a common one used throughout the English-speaking world.

3.2. Criteria

The criteria for selecting the material are as follows: the chosen ironic utterances must be recent (from within the last ten years), represent English or American political discourse, and be taken from public speeches, excluding off-the-cuff remarks. Potential biases in selecting and interpreting speeches can be mitigated by focusing on the linguistic aspects, without considering the speaker's personality or reputation. The selected dataset totals 350 ironic utterances, British and American, plus around 500 words and collocations used ironically. The material refers to the period from 2014 to 2024.

3.3. Analysis

The following methods of analysis were used: intent analysis, which infers the author's attitude towards a particular object; content analysis, which assesses the frequency distribution of words and phrases; and discourse analysis (specifically, critical discourse analysis), aimed at identifying the essential characteristics of social communication. Intent analysis, conducted on audio and video records of politicians' speeches, involves a step-by-step examination of ironic utterances. The intent behind the ironic utterance was determined through establishing the functions of irony which were singled out in compliance with the strategies of political discourse. These functions can be grouped into pairs of opposites:

Attack – Defence;

Distancing from the opponent – Minimizing the distance;

Self-praise – Self-diminish;

Aggravation of conflict – Discharging tension.

It should be noted that the polar points do not exclude one another but can function in a combination, for example, the same ironic utterance can be a form of aggression against an opponent and serve as a defensive means for the speaker; or, bring the addresser closer to the audience and simultaneously distance them from the "enemy". The evaluation criteria for intent analysis also include target audience, situation (formal/informal), speaker's aim, speaker's background, etc.

Content analysis identifies patterns of ironic usage, including irony's mechanisms and expressive means. For political irony the following mechanisms were singled out: irony of paradox, ambiguous irony, irony of absurdity, irony of negation, irony of combining various stylistic registers, etc. The mechanisms are launched through expressive means and stylistic devices, such as metaphor, hyperbole, litotes, ironic wordplay, ironic comparison, ironic citation, etc. Thus, each ironic statement undergoes, first, the stage of intent analysis (evaluating ethno- and individual style, situational context, target audience, function(s) of irony); second, the stage of content analysis (mechanisms and linguistic means). In addition to the above-mentioned, elements of social role analysis, genre analysis and communication strategy analysis were used in the study.

3.4. Hypothesis

The above-mentioned methods made it possible to obtain results to validate the research hypothesis: irony is a type of communicative behaviour with pronounced ethnocultural specifics. Irony can be implemented in political discourse through ironic images, the external aspect of which is established by linguistic stylistic means, while the content is reflected in three components: ethnic style, the politician's individual style, and the situation. As a subject of linguistic research, irony can be studied by analyzing the discursive tactics politicians employ to create ironic images. The suggested theory is based on communicative, stylistic and pragmatic approaches to the study of its key concepts: irony and ironic image. The use of these approaches is manifested in the choice of the three parameters for the analysis of ironic images (ethnostyle, individual style, situational context), as well as in the construction of a scheme for analyzing the ironic image of a politician, taking into account genre (situational), stylistic (emotional) and pragmatic aspects of discourse.

The dependence of irony on ethnostyle is considered in accordance with the principles of communicative ethnostylistics, aimed at systematizing national and cultural behavioral peculiarities. The study is based on the notion of a national communication style, a historically formed type of communicative behavior predetermined by culture and tradition, and manifested in the choice of

certain verbal and non-verbal communication means. A politician's individual style is shaped by their background, education, life experience, and personal character traits. Thus, the combination of ethnic and individual features in a given situation produces an ironic utterance for analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. The basics of the ethnodiscursive theory

Ironic image can be defined from different points of view: first, as a way to convey irony in discourse; second, as a form of self-representation through discursive tactics. Irony is regarded as a strategy of political communication that functions in conjunction with the strategy of theatricality. Bearing in mind the functions of irony, it seems reasonable to view it as encompassing three main sub-strategies: destructiveness, eccentricity, and communication harmonization. These lines are singled out by stylistic and discursive peculiarities of irony in political communication.

Another issue is represented by the reasons for choosing a certain ironic image: the question is whether it is a random or deliberate choice. Scholars still do not have a definite answer to this question. Since the main characteristic of political discourse is the effect made on the audience, the range of discursive tactics is rather wide and presupposes deviations from the general line.

Political discourse possesses dialogic characteristics, reflecting the rapid shift of communicative roles and speakers' emotional reactions to events. Thus, irony use cannot always be planned in advance; ironic images can result from spontaneous choices, formed under the influence of the situational context.

This assumption gives rise to the hypothesis that ironic images can be at least of two kinds: those connected with the genre (situational images) and those regulated by the context and the format of speech (emotional images), the latter reflect the mood and feelings at the given moment.

The proposed ethnodiscursive theory establishes the interconnection of the key concepts: discursive practice, strategies and tactics, and can be based on the following assumptions:
- Irony is a discursive practice;
- Irony is a strategy of political communication, which functions within the strategy of theatricality;
- As a strategy, irony can be divided into three sub-strategies: destructiveness, eccentricity and harmonization of communication.
- The above-mentioned sub-strategies are implemented in discourse via discursive tactics, which create ironic images for self-representation;
- Ironic images can rely on the genre and be situational or depend on the style and be emotional.

The ironic image, chosen by a politician, is often the representation of the opposition "us-them", which is the core of the tactics, chosen to implement irony in discourse. Everything, that is associated with "us" is regarded as positive and welcome, whereas "them" are considered alien, weird and dangerous. Ironic communication in the frame of this opposition includes several participants: the author (the addresser), the addressee, the object of irony (the victim) and the public, which is the main target audience of the communication.

The pragmatic effect of ironic image analysis is manifested in a politician's demonstration of his/her preferences and views. Because political preferences are prone to change, every ironic image indicates "us" and "them" at a certain given moment.

Now the examples of ironic images will be given and analyzed in compliance with discursive tactics: destructiveness, eccentricity and harmonization of communication.

4.2. Destructiveness

Charles III, King of the United Kingdom, greets Prime Minister Liz Truss with the following words: *Back again? Dear, oh dear* (Dugan, 2022). The strategy of irony, in this case, is defined as an example of destructiveness since the irony in the King's phrase expresses an explicit mockery bordering on sarcasm: the Prime Minister held office for only 44 days, set an anti-record for the shortest stay in power in the history of Great Britain, failed in her duties and was forced to resign. Upon taking office and leaving it, Prime Ministers appear for an audience with the monarch, and Charles's remark contains an ironic hint that too little time has passed between the first and last meeting, which indicates the failure of Liz Truss as a politician. Recalling Liz Truss's election promises to implement a "bold plan to save the economy," the irony about her failure can be regarded as sarcastic. The tactics of ridicule are actualized in the ironic image of the "senior in status," which testifies to King Charles's pragmatic attitudes. Having recently taken the royal throne, Charles tries to come across as a strict and busy monarch who does not approve of politicians who undertake the wrong business. This image relies on the genre and is conditioned by the situation, actualizing the opposition of "us and them" at this point: "us" are people of business, serious statesmen, and "them" are political losers. Following the suggested plan of irony analysis, it is possible to identify the function of irony in the utterance, which is "attack" (mockery at the interlocutor) and "self-praise" at the same time. The mechanism, performing the function, is "ambiguous irony", expressed by the word "again" (which presupposes the failure of the victim of irony in her political career).

The statement by Monica Crowley, a commentator on the SkyNews program, contains irony about the Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris: *Thank God we have Kamala Harris as a vice-president! We can rely on her* (Mahdawi, 2020). Explicit irony implies a meaning that contradicts the literal one ("We cannot rely on Kamala Harris"), the ironic strategy of destructiveness is formed largely under the influence of the situational context: if there are doubts about the health of President Joe Biden, it is necessary to have a reliable vice president who could take over if necessary. Kamala Harris does not meet the requirements and cannot be a worthy successor. It is this idea that is expressed by means of irony in the commentator's phrase, and the discursive tactic of "feigned admiration" is embodied with the help of an ironic image, which can be classified as emotional (stylistic); "jubilant". The feigning glee of the author conveys the opposite meaning: discontent and criticism of the "enemy" – the object of irony. According to the plan of analysis, the function of irony is identified as "attack" and "distancing" from the opponent, the mechanism is "irony of absurdity" (it is not normal to rely on a person who is totally helpless in leading a country). The expressive means are represented by high-elevated lexis (an appeal to God) while the exclamatory intonation reminds of a slogan.

The function of defense is often performed by irony, especially in cases of discussing sensitive subjects. For example, Joe Biden uses a face-saving strategy while talking about his age: *I get that age is completely a reasonable issue. It's on everybody's mind. And by "everyone" I mean the New York Times. Headline: "Biden's Advanced Age is a Big Issue. Trump's, However, is Not". Sorry, that was the New York Times Pitchbot, I apologize* (C-SPAN, 2023). Bearing in mind that at the moment of speaking the President was already 79, his age (and health) were becoming a growing concern. Being self-ironic, he re-addresses the concern to Donald Trump, his political

rival and age-mate. Biden uses the irony of absurdity, implying that for one person advanced age is a problem, but it is absolutely normal for another person of the same age to run for presidency. Ironic citation of the lines from "The New York Times" together with ironic commentary stresses the fact of the press being biased to him (from the point of view of the speaker). The ironic image of "agreeing with what is quoted" is emotional: it is used to distract attention from the speaker and switch to his political opponent.

4.3. Harmonization

The strategy of harmonization in an ironic type of behaviour can be found in the response of Liz Truss (at that time a candidate for the post of Prime Minister of Great Britain) to a provocative question from the host of the election debate about the cost of her costume and jewellery:

Host. *Let's talk about the cost of your earrings and your suit.*

Truss. *Rishi is a finely dressed person. I am a great admirer of his dress sense* (BBC News, 2022).

Liz Truss's pragmatic aim – to avoid answering a personal question about unjustified luxury in clothes and at the same time transfer the discussion to the opponent – is reflected in the ironic type of behaviour she chooses, which is realized through the discursive tactic of "transferring the conversation to the opponent." The ironic image of "admirer", chosen by the speaker to protect her privacy and save face, can be classified as emotional; it is used to distract attention from an unpleasant issue and draw attention to a political opponent. The irony in this phrase implicitly performs a corrective function: the hidden meaning lies in the fact that it is the high cost of Rishi Sunak's costume that should be paid attention to by the audience of concerned taxpayers. The strategy of harmonization is reflected in the achieved result: the speaker manages, firstly, to put a protective block for an undesirable discussion, and secondly, to complement the opponent by reducing the distance between herself and the "enemy" (in this case, the opponent in the debate). According to the suggested plan of analysis, the function of irony can be defined as "discharging tension" while the mechanism is characterized as "irony of paradox" (being asked about the cost of her own clothes, the speaker answers about her political opponent). The irony is realized through emotionally coloured words with a positive connotation: "finely", "great", and "admirer", which implicitly point to the high cost of the opponent's costume.

The strategy of harmonization is present in Joe Biden's ironic remark about Rupert Murdoch, Chairman of Fox Corporation and media mogul, who repeatedly depicted Biden in an unpleasant way: *You might think I don't like Rupert Murdoch. That's simply not true. How can I dislike a guy who makes me look like Harry Styles?* (Barr et al., 2023). Admitting that he (J. Biden) actually likes R. Murdock is the irony in the function of discharging tension and minimizing distance with the opponent. The mechanism is "irony of negation" realized in the sentence "That's simply not true" supported by an ironic comparison of the speaker with a young and good-looking singer and actor Harry Styles. This comparison also performs the role of self-praise, describing the politician as a young and active person. The ironic image "a friendly person" relies on the genre and is conditioned by the situation, opposing "I" and "him": the speaker is revealed as a kind, friendly person, well-disposed to everyone around, even his critics; "he" is a wicked one, with intentions to harm the reputation of other people.

4.4. Eccentricity

Eccentricity is a fairly common strategy of irony for politicians, especially in the UK, where absurdity and ridicule often border on humour and irony. Eccentricity seems to be a convenient form of self-presentation and drawing attention to one's personality, this strategy is embodied through a variety of tactics. So, the British politician Boris Johnson successfully combines feigned delight with the image of ironic rudeness:

It's absolutely wonderful to be here in Manchester – one of the few great British cities I have yet to insult (Boris Johnson Soundboard, 2019).

There is self-irony here: B. Johnson (then Mayor of London) recognizes his reputation as an arrogant man who despises all other cities except the capital, thus carrying out self-presentation as an eccentric. The comic effect is based on a contradiction (oxymoron), in this case, it manifests itself in the collision of the words "wonderful" and "insult" used in the same context. The word "absolutely" enhances the comic effect and turns the statement into an ironic one. Since "insult" is synonymous with the word "rudeness", the tactics are defined as "rudeness", the ironic image of a rude person is characteristic of a situational context. The function of irony is self-praise (drawing attention to his personality) together with self-criticism (the speaker admits having insulted a number of cities). The irony of paradox is conveyed through the juxtaposition of words with opposite meanings and connotations (positive and negative).

Eccentricity as a strategy of irony in the discourse of Barack Obama, the former president of the United States, is embodied in the following statement:

I raise a lot of money, but you know, fellows, my middle name is Hussein (The New York Times, 2016).

The pragmatic aim of the politician, in this case, is to bypass the awkward topic of money and to save face. The speaker demonstrates eccentric behaviour, a deliberate violation of ethics (in American culture it is not customary to ask and talk about earnings) and uses an ironic allusion to the namesake of Barack Obama – Saddam Hussein, a very rich man, an enemy of the United States. An important communicative value of the Americans – pragmatism and assertiveness, confidence in the present and the future – is reflected in this phrase of Barack Obama. Tactics embodying the strategy of eccentricity in discourse can be defined as bragging, while the ironic image of a "rich braggart" belongs to the category of emotional ones and is used to entertain the public. In this case, the "friend–foe" opposition is revealed in self-irony and manifests itself in an ironic attitude towards oneself. In addition, there is a reminder of the former and defeated enemy of the United States, Saddam Hussein, who is also a "foe". The function of irony is self-praise, the mechanism can be classified as "ambiguous irony", which needs an additional context to be interpreted in the right way.

The tactics of "bragging" in the discourse of Barack Obama, actualizing the strategy of eccentricity, is also presented in the ironic image of a "tyrant politician", represented in ironic hyperbole:

What am I doing here? I am the President of the United States and I have a nuclear code (CBS News, 2015).

The pragmatic attitudes of the politician are quite transparent and understandable to the audience: it should be assumed that the head of state seeks to show that he cares about the interests of the country, and not about his own good. But behind the self-irony expressed by an ironic hyperbole, the true political views of the American president are hidden: the unlimited power of the United States in the world, and supremacy over other countries.

As is seen in the examples above, eccentricity is often conveyed in self-ironic statements. This trend is proved by Joe Biden's self-irony: *In a lot of ways this dinner sums up my first two years in office. I'll talk for ten minutes, take zero questions and cheerfully walk away* (C-SPAN, 2023). The irony of self-praise helps the speaker to draw attention to his own personality and highlight some of the typical features of his individual style: reluctance to answer questions, self-confidence, and cheerfulness (at least, these are the traits the politician wants to stress). The ironic comparison of the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner to a period of two Presidential years in office represents the mechanism of paradox.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, the "friend–foe" opposition is a means of actualizing irony in discourse, and the analysis of the ironic image helps to determine those who appear in the discourse of a politician as "friends" and as "foes" at a given time. The fragments of the discourse discussed in this paper highlight sub-strategies of irony (destructiveness, harmonization, eccentricity), which are actualized through a variety of tactics, namely: the tactics of ridicule, the tactics of feigned admiration, the tactics of transferring the conversation to the opponent, the tactics of comparing "us" and "them", "bragging" tactics, "rudeness" tactics, "agreeing" tactics and others. The tactics comply with the characteristics of political discourse and reflect the communicative intention of the speaker. The pragmatic aims of politicians can be judged by the images they choose, such as "a man of business", "a politician-tyrant", "braggart", "rude", "jubilant", which can be classified as situational (depending on the genre) or emotional (depending on the style).

The step-by-step analysis of irony in discourse (functions – mechanisms – linguistic means) made it possible to highlight some of the trends: for example, the function of "attack" on the opponent is often combined with the function of "defence"; self-defence is often realized through self-irony; the mechanism of "ambiguous irony" is realized in the situation when the addresser (or the audience) possesses extralinguistic information. The interdependence of a certain ironic mechanism and certain expressive means still has to be explored and poses challenges for further study.

Conflict of Interest
The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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