

CARTOONS IN THE GENRE SPECTRUM OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract. *The article examines cartoons as an effective means of political influence aimed at changing the emotional state and behaviour of the addressee, restructuring certain elements of their ideology, modifying the value hierarchy, and forming extralinguistic activity motives.*

The research theoretically substantiates the cartoons' multimodal nature, as their verbal and non-verbal components form a single visual, structural, semantic, and functional whole aiming at a complex pragmatic impact on the recipient. This article emphasizes that a cartoon not only appeals to the mind and aesthetic beliefs of a person but also the sense of humour, thus creating a comic effect often in the form of sharp, caustic satire.

Having analyzed various examples from American and British media the research proves that political cartoons have a wide range of techniques and means for creating a comic effect, namely, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphor, and symbols. Individually or together, these techniques and means add a special colour to the cartoon, reveal the author's dissatisfaction with political realities, and enhance the emotional impact on the addressee. Having the ability to encourage the audience to abandon the automatic perception of reality and look at certain political decisions, events, or facts from an unexpected angle, political cartoons serve as an effective means of manipulation and persuasion.

Keywords: *cartoon, political discourse, multimodality, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphor, symbol.*

Introduction

The interest in the study of verbal and non-verbal means playing a leading role in information and meaning creation is growing since contemporary texts are increasingly multimodal and include not only verbal but also visual components.

The fundamental principles of multimodality are highlighted in the scientific research of Ch. Bally, R. Barthes, J. Bateman, E. Baldry, M. Halliday, J. Delin, G. Kress, T. van Leeuwen, Ch. Forceville, etc. As for the Ukrainian linguists, multimodality has been studied by I. Bekhta, O. Vorobiova, N. Gudz, I. Kolehaieva, L. Makaruk, I. Shevchenko, I. Ushchapovska, and others.

Cartoons are a bright example of a multimodal text, as they are characterized by their semi-realistic nature and the presence of satirical and humorous elements. Presented by the modern media, cartoons often reveal the features of certain political figures, events, and

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social life in general. This type of multimodal text is based on unexpected juxtaposition, hyperbole, and simile.

Despite a significant number of works devoted to cartoons, including those by domestic scholars (N. Zykun, Y. Ivakin, M. Musyichuk, etc.), there is still more to be explored about the cartoons' multimodal features in the political media discourse spectrum making the chosen topic of research *relevant*. The issues of political power and power relations always remain urgent. It affects all levels and dimensions of the functioning of both society as a whole and the individual in particular impacting present and future generations.

The purpose of the research is to identify the multimodal nature of the cartoon and to reveal its linguistic and pragmatic features in the genre spectrum of political discourse represented by the American and British media.

Research methods

The research methodology involves the use of both general scientific and specifically linguistic research methods, namely the method of multimodal analysis and the method of continuous sampling.

The results of the research

Discourse is often referred to as a complex communicative phenomenon that includes the social context and provides an idea of both the communication participants and the processes of message creation or concept in addition to the verbal component (Selivanova, 2010: 120-121).

Political discourse is formed based on the national language used by politicians, political parties, or governmental structures to achieve various goals, such as establishing social consensus; and adopting and justifying certain political, social, and ideological strategies in the context of the multiplicity of public interests in a pluralistic society; preserving or destroying the “status quo”; brainwashing, imposing a particular ideological opinion on the mass consciousness (Musolff, 2016: 22).

I. Kobiakova believes that the specific features of political discourse are mythology, ritualism, dramatization, agonism, sacralization, rhetoric, manipulation, and fashionable semiotic trends (Kobiakova, 2017: 21).

A distinctive feature of the cartoon as a form of political discourse is its multimodal nature, i.e., a combination of verbal and non-verbal aspects. Multimodality is interpreted as a special linguistic and visual phenomenon, a text in which verbal and non-verbal components form a single visual, structural, semantic, and functional whole ensuring its complex pragmatic impact on the addressee (Spodaryk, 2012; Danielsson, Selander, 2021).

Weishenberg points out that a cartoon does not require a lengthy text that reveals its meaning since the thought (emotion, attitude) is expressed mainly graphically (through caricatures, exaggerated depiction of reality, metaphor, a combination of the real and the imaginary, comparison of the incomparable, etc). Both verbal and visual components are equally important for the perception of a cartoon, but the main semantic value is in the text (Weishenberg, 2011: 225-226).

O. Nazarenko focuses on such constitutive characteristics of cartoons as one-sided exaggeration or emphasis of certain features, deviation from the norm, and violation of nature to a certain extent although with a distant resemblance to reality (Nazarenko, Ponomarenko, 2019: 73).

In this research, we will examine the main techniques and means of creating comic in cartoons, such as irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, metaphor, and symbols. They allow the author to freely express their attitude to the problems and events that occur in the political and social spheres of life. Humour in political cartoons goes beyond mere criticism, taking on the features of satire and involving sharp ridicule, and angry condemnation of social vices and unworthy phenomena in the life of society and individuals.

Irony and sarcasm

Irony as an integral part of political discourse is a very effective tool for non-categorical and indirect expression of one's point of view on events in the political sphere.

Scholars interpret irony as "a kind of antiphrasis, a trope where, for hidden mockery or a light-hearted joke, a linguistic unit with a positive-affirming meaning, connotation or modality is used with directly opposite characteristics" (Ukrainska mova, 2004: 43).

In cartoons, irony is one of the main elements of implementing the subjective evaluative modality and presenting the author's position.

As opposed to regular texts, where this literary technique is based on the antonymy of expression and content, irony in cartoons is based on the contradiction of verbal and non-verbal components (Boiko, 2010: 296).

For example, a cartoon published in The Guardian (Fig. 1) depicts the President of the Russian Federation Volodymyr Putin who states, "We have not lost anything." At the same time, he is standing on a pile of bags with dead soldiers, which contradicts his statement and indicates his indifference to human lives and fear of admitting his political and military failures.

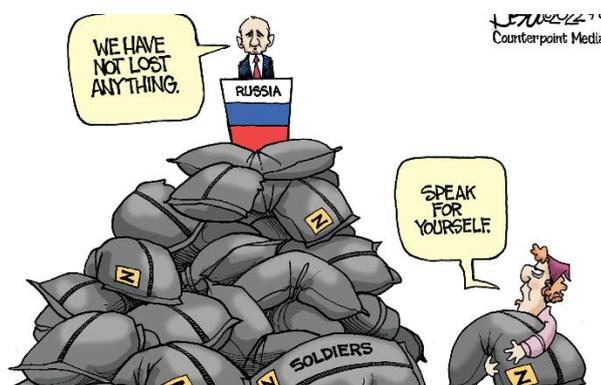


Fig. 1

In contrast to irony, sarcasm is based not only on the heightened contrast between the explicit and implicit sides of a message but also on the direct deliberate emphasis on what is understood.

Thus, another cartoon published in The Week magazine (Fig. 2) depicts Russian President Volodymyr Putin saying, "Why would you think an invasion is inevitable?" At the same time, we notice a book on his desk titled "Invasions for Dummies & Dictators", "Ending Game: Thanos Costume" magazine, and a map showing a plan for an offensive against Ukraine. In addition, Putin is depicted wearing the comic book supervillain Thanos' infinity gauntlet which has been used to wipe out half the population of the universe.

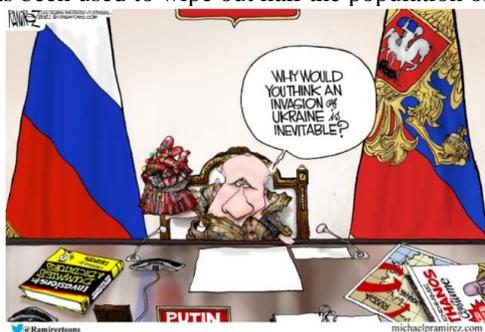


Fig. 2

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is a figure of speech that contains exaggeration to create a certain emphasis. Cartoons in which the humorous effect is created by using hyperbole reflect emotional and expressive connotations along with a personal process of reality cognition. The main feature of cartoons with comic elements is the contradiction arising from the unexpected collision of two incompatible perspectives (Tsakona and Popa, 2011: 16-21).

In terms of cartoons, hyperbole can be both verbal and textual, as well as visual and graphic. Let's look at some examples.

As part of its weekly cartoon carousel, the American media organization Politico published a cartoon about the current situation in US politics in the run-up to the presidential election (Fig. 3). Two elephants representing the Republicans appear in dresses with the caption "Election deniers" saying, "Come vote for us and we'll be here forever and ever and ever..." It is the verbal and textual hyperbole "forever and ever and ever" that creates emphasis and helps the author express his negative attitude toward the situation.

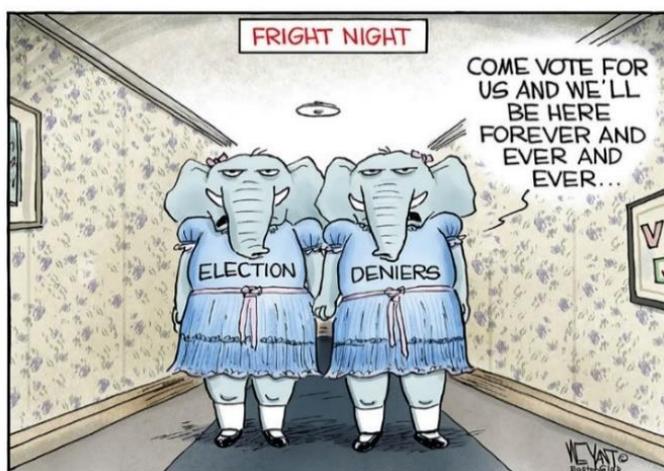


Fig. 3

Metaphor

Political cartoons are often metaphorical. A metaphor is "a figurative word or phrase used based on comparing one unnamed object or phenomenon with another according to their common features" (Pletenetska, 2018: 109).

According to M. Black's research, a metaphor arises associatively when a set of "associated implications" related to an auxiliary subject is added to the main subject. It is not the truth of these associations that is important for a metaphor, but their rapid activation in the mind (Black, 1962: 24).

The most used terms in numerous studies of metaphors in multimodal texts are "non-verbal" or "visual". We agree that studying metaphors in the context of cartoons implies dealing with the visual representation of metaphorical images (Chilton and Ilyin, 1993: 11).

An example is a cartoon from The National News website (Fig. 4), which depicts a globe in the form of a boiling kettle with a reflection in the mirror. It is thanks to the verbal component, i.e., the captions "Ukraine crisis" and "Energy crises", that we can understand the visual metaphor. The author of the cartoon conveys the idea that the whole world is feeling the effects of the energy crisis because of the crisis in Ukraine.



Fig. 4

Symbol

A symbol is a sign that conventionally denotes a certain image or idea. However, being a sign is just one of the characteristics of a symbol. A symbol is inextricably linked to its figurative structure and is characterized by multilayered and multivalent content (Pytlova, 2014: 1976).

Political symbolism can be defined as a set of expressive means that endow political life, political action, and various forms of political materialization with an explicit, especially obvious, emphatic, or, on the contrary, hidden meaning. A symbol, including a political one, is a specific social code through which social messages are transmitted (Temchenko, 2017: 127).

Having analyzed the English-language media, we have identified several of the most common symbolism categories in political cartoons:

1) national political symbols which include the coat of arms, flag, etc. For example, a cartoon published on the Syracuse website (Fig. 5) shows Ukrainian soldiers struggling to hold the flag of Ukraine and the hands of the US and NATO trying to help them.



Fig. 5

2) currency symbols related to a particular country. The cartoon below (Fig. 6) shows Donald Trump in a small bag and his then-rival for the presidency, Michael Bloomberg, in a large bag. The meaning of this cartoon can be interpreted in the following way: Trump mocks Bloomberg's height calling him "Mini-Mike". However, the dollar symbol, which means that there is money in the bags, makes it clear: that Bloomberg is wealthier than Trump despite the latter's mockery.



Fig. 6

3) national and political leaders of the past and present, personified characters. For example, most Americans easily recognize Uncle Sam as a symbol of the United States. He is usually depicted as an elderly man with a top hat on his head almost always dressed in red, white, and blue – the colours of the American flag. The cartoon below (Fig. 7) depicts Uncle Sam with the phrase “My New Year’s resolution is to lose this belly... Oh, who am I kidding?” and the words “Nat’l debt” written on his huge belly. Knowing that Uncle Sam is a symbol of the US government, we understand that the US government isn’t going to solve the question of the national debt.

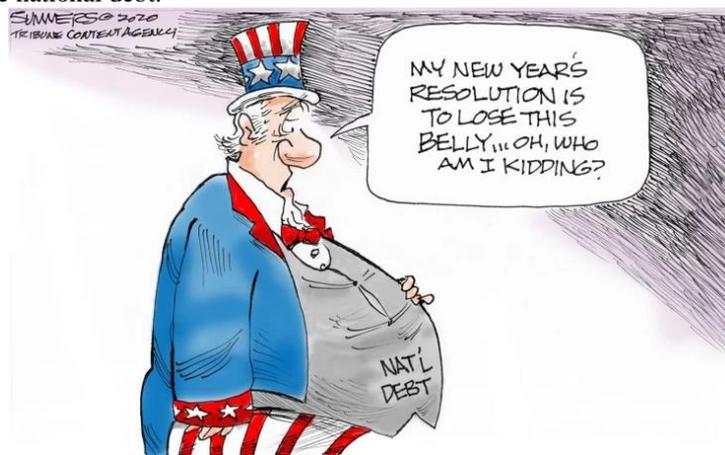


Fig. 7

4) animals that symbolize the country's government. These symbols are often based on stereotypes. For example, the Russian government is represented as a bear (Fig. 8) as the Russian Empire has always demonstrated an aggressive policy towards other nations intimidating others with its power and encroaching on other territories.



Fig. 8

Conclusion

Political cartooning is one of the most important tools of political propaganda, a tool to influence the political choice and political perceptions of the audience. The main purpose of the cartoon is to discredit some forces and praise others. The British-American political cartoon is primarily a satire of specific individuals, political leaders, and officials, and a reaction to specific events in domestic politics. Cartoons are an effective means of persuasion because they can simplify complex issues into forms that are easily understood by the audience. The implicitness of visual meaning is also essential to the persuasive use of cartoons. Since a visual argument may not be entirely explicit, it may require the reader to engage in more mental effort to decode the creative intent of the cartoonist. As we can see, caricatures synthesize different models of creating a pragmatic impact on the addressee, which can rarely be presented in a regular text.

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