

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311963162>

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon: Social Networking in the Time of Crisis available at svsu.edu/~nlknoblo

Chapter · May 2016

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0081-0.ch002

CITATIONS

0

READS

2,365

1 author:



Natalia Knoblock
Saginaw Valley State University

18 PUBLICATIONS 31 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Grammar of Hate [View project](#)



Modal verbs as markers of stance and political affiliation [View project](#)

Chapter 2

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon: Social Networking in the Time of Crisis

Natalia Knoblock
Saginaw Valley State University, USA

ABSTRACT

The chapter investigates the use of sarcasm and irony at the time of on-going political and social crisis in Ukraine. It analyzes examples collected on popular Russian and Ukrainian social networks in 2014 that stood out as especially creative, original, or successful in achieving their communicative goals. Ironic statements are usually characterized by pretence and by echoing (lexical, genre, and conceptual) and display the speaker's dissociative attitude to the opinions or evaluations expressed in the utterance. Sarcasm and irony present several benefits for those who employ it, such as increased memorability and creation of the self-image as a witty person knowledgeable about the current events. Sarcasm and irony are used both to mock and offend the opponents by exposing their viewpoints unworthy of an earnest response and to strengthen in-group bonding through expressing the shared opinions. Despite the fact that sarcasm and irony are indirect modes of communication, in many cases they appear to be more effective than straightforward messages.

INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2013/2014, a political and social crisis erupted in the Eastern European country of Ukraine. The revolution that replaced the Ukrainian government in February 2014 split the country into pro- and anti- western factions and produced, among other effects, an explosion of linguistic creativity. Many of the texts and slogans used in the conversations devoted to the conflict and targeted at the opposing side exhibit the characteristics of sarcasm and irony. This paper will analyze the nature of these communicative techniques and their functions in the politicized communication surrounding the current conflict.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0081-0.ch002

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

This project grew out of a personal quest to find unsolicited, uncensored information about the events. This goal often led to spending a considerable amount of time on social networking websites. Consequently, this study focuses on irony in the medium of online social networks. Unlike the majority of literature devoted to the study of irony, which uses artificial examples and short exchanges that leave context reduced and ambiguous (some exceptions include Bryant & Fox Tree, 2002; Myers Roy, 1981; and Kotthoff, 2003), the work presented here is based on the samples of real online conversations and authentic posts regarding the conflict in Ukraine that were taken from actual social network websites.

The material largely comes from the posts on a popular Russian-speaking site Odnoklassniki.ru (Classmates) with occasional examples found in other locations after following links pasted in the comments on Odnoklassniki. The website is used both by Russian and Ukrainian citizens and speakers. The examples used in this paper are mostly translated from Russian, though occasionally there is a Ukrainian sample or a mixed-code expression where both languages are present.

The posts often originated in such user groups as “AntiMaidan and we are millions, Truth and God are with us!” and “Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the Heroes of Maidan!” The collection started with joining the groups on Odnoklassniki.ru that contained the words “Maidan” (the name of the central square in the capital, Kyiv, which gave its name to the protest movement) or “Anti-Maidan” in the titles of the groups, and then the membership extended to other groups whose posts commented on the current events.

The number of posts grew exponentially between the winter and summer of 2014 but decreased around the time that the conflict escalated to military actions. At this time, verbal fights appeared to lessen while people switched to physical and military fighting. Therefore, the majority of the examples used in this paper were collected between March and August of 2014.

Because of the complicated situation with ethnic and national identification of the discourse participants and the multifaceted nature of the conflict in the south-east of Ukraine, a few issues need to be clarified. The authors of posts and comments included in this paper (according to the information in their profiles) come from both Russia and Ukraine, and their nationality does not predict their viewpoint on the issue: some Russian nationals express pro-Ukrainian, anti-Russian views, and some citizens of Ukraine may express opinions that could be labelled pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. In reality, these people do not denounce their respective countries, but the division comes down to either supporting or rejecting the current reforms and changes in Ukraine. For example, the residents of the south-east territories of Ukraine who have been called “pro-Russian” in the media do not hate their homeland; they do, however, disagree with the results of the revolution, largely fuelled by the forces from the western part of the country, and refuse to accept their new government as legitimate.

Therefore, this paper will avoid such labels as pro-Russian or pro-Ukrainian but will use the identifications most commonly used by the discourse participants themselves – namely the South-East or the Western Ukraine and pro-Kyiv and anti-Kyiv – to denote acceptance or rejection of the reforms. Another common method of identification is by the use of “Maidan,” the name of the central square in Kyiv, where the revolution of 2014 originated: the supporters of the revolution will be identified as pro-Maidan and their opponents as anti-Maidan.

The examples in this paper come from both pro- and anti-Maidan groups indiscriminately, and their choice was dictated by how typical they were rather than by the side they supported. The examples that appear in this paper are not used to make a political statement but to illustrate the linguistic strategies utilized by communicators in the discourse under analysis.

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

SOCIOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

Euromaidan movement received considerable attention both from the mass media and academia. According to the available accounts (e.g., Goban-Klas, 2014; Marples, 2014; Onuch, 2015; Ronzhin, 2014; Zaliznyak, 2014, et al.), starting in November of 2013, Ukrainian citizens gathered in Maidan to protest against President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. Throughout the winter, the protests increased exponentially, fuelled by the perception of widespread government corruption and abuse of power. By the end of February, the situation turned violent after police used force to disband the protest camp and "fired guns, with both live and rubber ammunition, in multiple locations in Kyiv" (Goban-Klas, 2014, p. 169). Clashes, resulting in casualties, continued for several days until the night of February 21, when Yanukovich and many other high government officials fled Ukraine. The president was impeached and an interim government took over the country. The situation did not improve, though, with the start of the Crimean crisis and pro-Russian unrest (Goban-Klas, 2014; Marples, 2014; Onuch, 2015; Ronzhin, 2014; Zaliznyak, 2014).

Social media has been credited with an enormous role in Euromaidan movement: some experts argue that "the Revolution of Dignity [Euromaidan] was a new media revolution" (Zaliznyak, 2015, p.180). The commentators exemplify social media's enormous role in the movement by asserting that it started with a particular Facebook post that called the citizens to protest in the Maidan (Miller, 2014; Nayem, 2014; cited in Onuch, 2015, p. 171; see also Bohdanova, 2014; Ronzhin, 2014; Szostek, 2014; Zaliznyak, 2014). Such "tools" as Facebook, YouTube, Ustream, Twitter, and VKontakte were used extensively during the Euromaidan protests (Onuch, 2015). Social media are credited with enabling the activists to sustain the movement (Bohdanova, 2014) and fulfilling such functions as "internal organization, dissemination of news, [and] mobilization and external communication" (Ronzhin, 2014, p. 446). Researchers also argue that social media has "facilitated the bridging of diverse networks and individuals, helping shape a collective discourse and identity" (Onuch, 2015, p.175).

Since the social media tools had such a significant effect on the development of the situation in Ukraine, it makes sense to extend the line of research into analyzing the content of the posts and the linguistic features employed in communication. Consequently, the study of language as a propaganda tool, specifically sarcasm and irony, deserves to be developed.

Unlike the cited studies, the current project leads the research from socio-political to the linguistic domain. This paper will analyze the discourse born during the Maidan movement and anti-Maidan resistance and their functions from the point of view of linguistic pragmatics.

THE SCOPE OF THIS PROJECT

This paper investigates the pragmatic aspects of politically-charged communication devoted to the events and issues related to the ongoing Ukrainian conflict which consists largely of speech acts of offense and insult and often takes form of sarcasm and irony. The primary goal of this project is to describe the patterns observed in the usage of sarcasm and irony in the medium of online social networks. This paper will discuss the examples that stood out as especially creative, original, or successful in achieving their communicative goals. Additionally, the paper will focus on the reasons the speakers choose to

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

employ these devices, the function that the device serves in discourse, and the functions of sarcasm and irony in the politicized communication devoted to Russian-Ukrainian relations during the crisis. Finally, this paper will examine the reasons why sarcasm was chosen by the speakers for communicating their messages and the reasons this mode of communication was more effective than a direct assertion or a straightforward insult.

Consequently, this study attempts to answer the following questions: (1) What kind of verbal irony is being used in communication about the conflict? (2) Is it successfully interpreted? (3) Why should speakers risk employing it when, logically speaking, indirect speech should only harm their chances of being correctly understood? (4) What functions do sarcasm and irony serve in politically charged communication on social media? and (5) What are the potential strategic benefits of using irony?

SARCASM AND IRONY IN POLITICIZED COMMUNICATION

Definition

Sarcasm and irony are somewhat challenging to define even though those types of expressions have been studied extensively since classical times. Although there have been arguments voiced that the terms sarcasm and irony should not be used synonymously (e.g., Littman and Mey, 1991), many scholars do exactly that (e.g., Attardo et al., 2003) and admit that sarcasm and irony definitions are inconsistent or problematic, and “for all practical purposes they cannot be reliably differentiated” (Attardo, 2013, p.40). Gibbs (1986) and Toplak & Katz (2000), among other authors, point out that identification of utterances as either ironic or sarcastic depended on the communicators’ roles and perception.

To explain the apparent difficulty in separating these phenomena, it has been suggested that “the concept of irony may be structured as a type of family resemblance or radial category in which various instances are connected by different motivated links” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 105), or that it is a “prototypical and perhaps exemplar category” (Attardo, 2013, p.39) with members possessing certain qualities of ironic/sarcastic communication but to different degrees. Since the focus of this paper is more functional than ontological, and because of the difficulty in reliable differentiation of irony and sarcasm, this paper will use these terms interchangeably.

Often sarcasm is understood to be the communicatively aggressive version of irony with passages seen as sarcastic when the amount of ridicule is increased (Jorgensen, 1996; Lee & Katz, 1998; Kreuz and Glucksberg, 1989). Even though some scholars have challenged the conventional view of sarcasm as the hostile and offensive version of irony and have pointed out that sarcastic utterances can range all the way to banter and even humor (Dews, Kaplan & Winner, 1995; Vance, 2012), the predominant position seems to be that sarcasm is an offensive, victimizing, and even anger-provoking version of irony (e.g., Bowes & Katz, 2011). Leggitt and Gibbs (2000), for example, report that making sarcastic statements resulted in the impression of feeling more angry, disgusted, and scornful. Toplak and Katz (2000), in turn, confirmed that speakers who used sarcastic criticism were perceived as being more verbally aggressive and offensive than speakers who used literal criticism. As Attardo states, “irony and sarcasm are very closely related and occur on a continuum of aggression: irony is less aggressive, sarcasm is more so” (Attardo, 2013, p. 40).

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

Features

The discrepancy between the views expressed by researchers of sarcasm and irony may be a consequence of the large number of variables involved in the production and comprehension of those phenomena. Utsumi (2000), for example, argued that the main characteristic of irony is implicitness. Other scholars have argued that irony depends on some type of incongruence of the utterance with previous knowledge (e.g., Attardo, 2000; Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Jorgensen, 1996).

Additionally, it has been argued that sarcasm is the expression of a dissociative attitude toward an evoked thought or perspective, where verbal irony is understood as a type of “echoic allusion” to an attributed utterance or thought (Sperber & Wilson, 1981). In this case, the speakers express their reactions to ideas by making a statement that they imply to belong to someone else and which they want to expose as false or unintelligent. The echoes and reminders of previously discussed information point out an apparent inconsistency between the “echoed” and observed facts, events, or behaviors. In their model, Sperber and Wilson also include the possibility that users echo hypothetical sources: “There are echoic mentions of many different degrees and types. Some are immediate echoes, and others delayed; some have their source in actual utterances, others in thoughts and opinions; some have a real source, others an imagined one; some are traceable back to a particular individual, whereas others have a vaguer origin” (Sperber & Wilson, 1981, p. 310).

Another approach depicts irony as a type of pretense. In this approach, the speaker pretends to declare something, while expecting the audience to see through the pretense and recognize the critical or mocking attitude behind it (Clark & Gerrig, 1984; Currie, 2006; Walton, 1990). For Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995), a crucial feature of these utterances is their pragmatic insincerity: the speaker intentionally “makes as if” to perform a certain speech act while meaning something else. Following this line of thought, Camp (2012) argues that sarcasm should be analyzed in terms of meaning inversion, but that the meaning should be understood more broadly to include illocutionary force and evaluative attitudes as well as propositional content since sarcasm types “invert something that the speaker pretends to mean (or presupposes someone else to have meant) relative to an evoked normative scale.” (Camp, 2012, p.588)

Researchers have also proposed that the “echoing” and “pretense” approaches are not mutually exclusive but instead are possibly complimentary to one another, such that sarcastic utterances involve both an allusion to or reminder of an expectation or a norm that went wrong as well as some echoing interpretative use. Kumon-Nakamura et al. (1995), for example, propose an “allusional pretense” account of irony which involves elements of both attribution and pretense. Currie (2006) and Walton (1990) also discuss irony from the perspective of pretense but argue that there is an inferred attributive element in it.

Various aspects have been proposed as the necessary qualities of irony. A large role in irony production and comprehension plays its relevance to the communicative situation (e.g., Wilson & Sperber, 2002). Besides, many authors consider that irony necessarily includes some sort of evaluation, explicit or implicit, and that ironic messages are often aimed at somebody or something (the target of irony) (e.g., Dews & Winner, 1995; Gibbs, 2000; Kotthoff, 2003). This factor is very prominent in politicized communication and, therefore, is notably present in the corpus of examples used in this paper.

It has been proposed (Burgers, Van Mulken & Schellens, 2012) that irony needs to possess five elements: evaluation, incongruence with the context, a reversal of valence, and it should be aimed at some target and be relevant to the communicative situation. In prototype-based understanding of irony, though, it seems reasonable to expect that specific elements may be present more or less prominently in particular examples.

*Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon***Functions of Irony and Sarcasm**

The human factor plays the defining role in the production of sarcasm. Gibbs (2012), among others, points out that people use different forms of sarcasm and irony to communicate complex pragmatic goals: “Irony’s capacity to convey different emotions and evoke various affective states in listeners, depending on the exact form of irony that is used, illustrates irony’s important role in helping speakers negotiate social relationships and adapt to changing circumstances” (Gibbs, 2012, p. 105).

It has been argued that sarcasm may be face-saving (Slugoski and Turnbull, 1988; Jorgensen, 1996). Jorgensen comes to the conclusion that sarcasm allows speakers to avoid appearing unfair, thoughtless, insulting, or rude. Since subjects often judge sarcastic statements as more humorous, playful, or mocking than literal statements (Kreuz, Long & Church, 1991), it is unsurprising that researchers have argued that an effect of ironic criticism is to soften condemnation (Dews and Winner, 1995; Jorgensen, 1996) and that sarcasm may even be used for the purpose of politeness (Kumon-Nakumara et al., 1995).

However, others have demonstrated that ironic criticism can also be used for the opposite purpose and, therefore, can produce negative affect (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994). For instance, irony has been shown to result in stronger condemnation (Colston, 1997) or mocking (Ivanko, Pexman & Olineck, 2004; Kreuz, Long & Church, 1991). Additionally, irony can distance speakers from listeners (Gibbs & Colston, 2002). These tendencies are closer to the situation observed in the discussions of Ukrainian events; face-saving and politeness did not appear to play a significant role in this sample. On the contrary, the examples used in this paper tended to be highly aggressive and extremely offensive. This effect is not only common, but prevalent in the examples in this paper where the communicators are “attacking” their ideological opponents.

The question why the speakers would choose to use sarcasm, as opposed to a different strategy that might be potentially easier to comprehend, attracted scholarly attention. Despite carrying certain communicative risk (Gibbs & Colston, 2002), utilizing ironic speech might provide the speaker with several potential benefits since “in certain situations verbal irony is a more effective and thus more logical mode of speech than its literal equivalent” (Vance, 2012, p.7). Kreuz, Long & Church (1991), for example, found that ironic statements fulfil more discourse goals than do equivalent literal statements.

Experts have observed that sarcastic communication can create the effect of solidarity in work groups (Seckman & Couch, 1989) and bonding (Gibbs & Colston, 2002). Arguably, irony possesses power to manipulate social bonds. Gibbs and Izzett (2005), for example, suggest that the audience of an ironic utterance can be divided into two camps: those who recognize the use of irony (wolves) and those that do not (sheep) (Gibbs & Izzett, 2005, p.132-133). The wolf group’s goal is to maximize their numbers so that the speaker can bring together certain discourse participants by uniting them against the target of the satire or sarcasm. Thus, as Gibbs and Izzett (2005) explain, irony may play a dual role: on the one hand, it can distance speakers from listeners, and on the other, it may bond the two. Utilizing the methods of sarcasm, the speakers can achieve both the goal of insulting of the opponents and, at the same time, can rally their own supporters. Therefore, it is possible to assert that irony allows users to manipulate social situations to their advantage better than equivalent literal forms of speech.

Still, the question remains why irony is often more effective at this discourse goal than its literal equivalent. If one discourse participant wanted to attack another, why not do it directly by simply stating their criticism and encouraging others in the group to agree with them?

Some of the possibilities are that the creative delivery of their message adds to its rhetorical power, making it more persuasive. Gibbs and Izzett (2005), for example, argue that the extra attention involved in resolving the discrepancy between what is said and what is intended results in the proposition of the

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

ironic statement being more persuasive. Ironic communication may bring the speaker social recognition for the effort of attacking the opponents, for exhibiting the “right” orientation, and for wit and intelligence in expression. It is also possible that ironic speech makes the message more memorable (e.g., Katz & Pexman, 1997; Kreuz et al., 1991). Therefore, one of the reasons to use sarcasm rather than straightforward insult or propaganda could be a highlighted processing effort which would result in higher salience of the utterance being analyzed and, in turn, would stand out and be remembered better than literal criticism.

Extralinguistic Factors in the Production and Comprehension of Irony

Irony is a social phenomenon. It appears to involve a conscious effort on the part of the speaker: “speakers ... take into account the effects of their speech on hearers and shape it accordingly” (Jorgensen, 1996, p. 614). Despite the assertion by R. Gibbs that ironic acts may not be as “deliberate” as is often believed (Gibbs, 2012), it appears that the pragmatic factors, including the qualities of the discourse participants and their communicative goals, play an enormous role in ironic discourse.

For example, Toplak and Katz (2000) found that the role of discourse participant (speaker vs. hearer) can affect perception of and attitude towards the sarcastic utterances: while listeners (or victims) of sarcastic barbs were likely to see them as negative and critical, the speaker was more likely to see them as positive and humorous. The researchers argue that the presence and degree of sarcasm is affected by such stimuli as “exaggeration, nature of the speaker, relationship of speaker to victim, severity of the criticism, and whether or not the criticism is being made in private or in front of an audience” (Toplak & Katz, 2000, p. 1483).

In the examples used in this study, the sarcastic effect is clearly premeditated and intentional. In the examples under analysis, sarcasm often communicates the speaker’s intention to mock and deride the opponents or to rally those who share the speaker’s views behind the opinions expressed in the post. Therefore, the role of communicators themselves is very important since “sarcastic speech requires collaboration – its effect is dependent on the assumed intentions and mutual beliefs held by all dialogue participants” (Tepperman et. al., 2006). To explain it, the analysis must include the qualities of the speakers and the audience in both production and comprehension of sarcasm, and as a consequence, analyzing irony, one must inevitably turn to such elements as the speakers’ attitude, ideology, and their world vision.

Unsurprisingly, extralinguistic knowledge has been proven to be of utmost importance for irony production and comprehension. Researchers have called for looking at sarcasm and irony in larger contexts (Colston & Katz, 2004) and, consequently, against analyzing isolated sentences when working with them (e.g. Filatova, 2012). The examples given in this corpus are a bright example of the vital role of broader context in the production and comprehension of sarcasm and irony. Owing to the importance of broad context and extralinguistic factors in production and comprehension of sarcasm, in this study, multimodal elements are included as constituents of the meaning construction process. Therefore, when visuals are necessary for comprehension of sarcastic utterances, they are included in the analysis.

SARCASM AND IRONY IN DISCUSSIONS OF THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT ON SOCIAL MEDIA

The variety of posts, status updates, memes, and discussions collected for this study exhibited many of the features described in previous research. They displayed pragmatic insincerity of the writers whose

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

assertions and questions were characterized by pretense, and they often included a type of echoing – alluding to some information shared by the discourse participants, often attributed to the opposing side of the political debate, and highlighting an inconsistency between the “echoed” and observed facts, events, or behaviors.

For example, let’s look at the post:

The Ukrainian armed forces have already - destroyed the Pskov, Kostroma, and Ulyanovsk airborne divisions 111 times, - destroyed special forces of GRU [Main Intelligence Directorate] 64 times, - Kantemirovskaya tank division 84 times, - Dzerzhinskiy division 62 times, all the Marines of RF [Russian Federation] 132 time. Khokhols [ethnic slur denoting Ukrainians]! Stop being such beasts! Leave us at least some construction battalions. (Вооруженные силы Украины уже - 111 раз уничтожили псковскую, костромскую и ульяновскую дивизию ВДВ, - 64 раза уничтожили спецназ ГРУ, - 84 раза уничтожили танковую кантемировскую дивизию, - 62 раза дивизию Дзержинского, - 132 раза всю морскую пехоту РФ. Хохлы! Кончай звереть! Оставьте нам хоть стройбат.)

The post exhibits allusional pretense as its author feigns a plea to the Ukrainian military not to kill off the Russian army completely because all of the elite divisions are purportedly being slaughtered. It highlights the ridiculous (in his/her opinion) nature of Ukrainian claims of the losses suffered by the Russian units by “listing” the number of times those units have been reported as destroyed. Those numbers are fake “echoes” of the Ukrainian reports about large numbers of casualties among regular Russian military units accused of participating in the action in the Ukrainian South-East. Extrapolating the situation that the author pretends to believe into the future, he/she asks for the construction battalions to be spared so that Russia is not left without a single soldier. The post carries a clearly negative evaluation of the news spread by Ukrainian media and unmistakably mocks the producers of such reports. It contradicts the general knowledge that people cannot be killed more than once and hyperbolizes the number of times the indicated divisions have been reportedly wiped out.

Interestingly, sarcasm usually does not impede comprehension. Few of the comments posted in response to sarcastic posts included remarks implying confusion or misunderstanding that would require the initial contributor’s correction or clarification. It appears that the people who choose to join particular discussions shared the ideological base and fact stockpile that allowed them to understand each other without difficulty.

Another observation that can be made is that sarcastic posts often prompt sarcastic responses. The abovementioned example, for instance, triggered a few posts asserting that the reports of Russian troops deaths are lies and a disgrace to those who disseminate them. However, at least as many commenters assumed a sarcastic tone similar to that of the post’s author. They pretended to believe the severity of the circumstances and to lament that the Ukrainian army will continue the slaughter the Russian troops until the last soldier standing. This type of response adds an element of echo by referring to the claims they attribute to the Ukrainian side and by occasionally including a Ukrainian word (such as “цэ”- “that” in the next example) into their Russian text.

no, they won't... they are harsher than the ones from Chelyabinsk... (нее,не оставят...они суровее челябинских...)

Brutes (Зверюги)

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

Yes, it will be terrifying if khokhol-warriors will suddenly attack Russia! (Да, страшное дело, если хохловоины вдруг нападут на Россию!)

And with all that they have only lost 820 people wounded. And the dead... fell and hit the head on an oak stump by accident while drunk. (И при этом всем потеряли 820 человек ранеными. А убитые... цэ случайно по пьяне упали головой об дубовый пенё.)

Each post bears mark of multiple aspects contributing to the ironic effect, such as allusional pretense, evaluation, incongruence with the context, a reversal of valence, targeting the people of opposing ideology and opinion, and relevance to the communicative situation. However, those factors are manifest to varying degrees.

Lexical Echoing

Turning to such feature of irony as echoing, the examples collected for this project demonstrate that it falls into three major categories: lexical, genre, and conceptual. One of the frequent techniques utilized to achieve sarcastic effect in online conversations about Ukraine is lexical echoing. The following examples repeat the words or phrases used by the opposing side and play on polysemy or a possibility of reinterpretation of the same word.

Consider the following post from an Anti-Maidan group on Obnoklassniki.ru:

*Maidan yelled about national self-determination, South-East self-determined
Maidan yelled “South-East, stand up”, South-East stood up
Maidan yelled “police should be with the people”, police are with the people
Maidan yelled “achieve your goals by revolution”, South-East is achieving its goals by revolution
So why are they unhappy?*

*(Майдан кричал про самоопределение нации, Юго-Восток самоопределился
Майдан кричал “Юго-Восток вставай”, Юго-Восток встал
Майдан кричал “милиция с народом”, милиция с народом
Майдан кричал “добивайтесь своего революцией”, Юго-Восток добивается своего революцией
Так что им не нравится?)*

The elements of the mini-text are paired: one refers to alleged appeals by pro-Maidan activists and is then followed by a description of South-East reaction to it. The meme’s author pretends to miss the fact that the words in the “echoed” suggestions and the observed reactions describe different actions. For example, Maidan’s idea of self-determination was adopting an anti-Russian and pro-European stance, and this is what the South-East was called to join. Conversely, the position of the South-East (alleged by the author) was self-determination against the Kyiv revolution and a desire to retain close ties with Russia.

Similarly, for Maidan activists, “standing up” meant joining the revolt against President Yanukovich; however, for citizens of the South-East, it meant “standing up” against Maidan. The same word play is employed in the two sentences following it. In doing so, the author highlights the contrast between the

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

two views on the situation and the two interpretations of the events related to the conflict that erupted after the revolution.

The final rhetorical question, “So why are they unhappy?”, is used to express the author’s opinion about the lack of understanding between the warring factions. It pretends to overlook the difference in the framing of the statements and makes it sound as if the anti-Kyiv rebellion in the South-East is the result of Maidan activism. This way, the author tries to affix the responsibility for the separatist movement in the East on the initial uprising in Kyiv. This “naiveté” is obviously insincere because everyone familiar with the situation knows that the calls by Maidan activists had different aims than those referred to by the post’s author. The author chooses to pretend that he/she does not understand and then suggests that the other side exhibits inconsistency or an illogical reaction by being unhappy that the South-East acted in the way they did.

The ironic effect is achieved through the juxtaposition of the contrasting viewpoints and goals of the two opposing groups, combined with the echoing of the lexical elements attributed to one of them and the pretense on the part of the author. The difference in the “echoed” and “observed” meaning is not linguistic – that is, the words “stand up,” “achieve your goals,” etc. are not used in different senses – but rather, the disparity is in the extralinguistic; more specifically, it is in the social and political reference and in the framing invoked in each of the utterances. The initial and the following clauses reflect different ideologies and preferences while using the same linguistic resources.

In addition to direct echoing when the “echoed” words are used in the same sentence, the propagandists engage in referring to the lexis and concepts they have heard from the opposing side in the past. To illustrate, consider the following meme (see Figure 1) that combines an image of a military airplane and the text: “The terrorists of the South-East brutally shoot down the Ukrainian airplanes that are peacefully bombing their cities.”

The meme echoes the common lexis used in the discussions of the conflict in the South-East of Ukraine. The population that opposes the revolution are often labelled “terrorists” regardless of their involvement (or lack thereof) in rebel groups. The suppression operation is named an anti-terrorist operation (ATO), and it is usually presented as a necessary measure to achieve and maintain peace. At the same time, the soldiers’ humane qualities are emphasized and highlighted.

Figure 1. “The terrorists of the South-East brutally shoot down the Ukrainian airplanes that are peacefully bombing their cities” meme



Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

The ironic effect arises from a combination of several aspects. First, there is use of oxymoron in “peacefully bombing” and hyperbole in “brutally shoot down.” “Peaceful” and “shelling” or “bombing” are incompatible in their typical use, and by putting them together, the author shows a dissociative attitude toward the resulting expression and exposes the alleged hypocrisy of the government that supposedly shells civilians while claiming that the ATO has peaceful goals. The adverb “brutally” (in Russian, “zverski”) normally collocates with words denoting killing with a cold weapon, maiming, or torture rather than using firearms. In fact, in the Russian National Corpus, which contains over 300 million words, there is not a single instance of the adverb “brutally” to modify the verb “shoot down.”

The other lexical choices are also loaded with implications. The term “terrorists” often raises objections of the population of the South-East as an unfair slur applied to them simply for disagreeing with the changes propelled by the western Ukrainian factions. While in the view of some people, all of the population of Donetsk and Luhansk regions are indiscriminately “terrorists,” making the term a simple statement of fact rather than an insult, this label is passionately disputed in the South-East. The author of the meme appears to evoke the feeling of offense experienced by the people who are being labeled as “terrorists.” Since the author clearly comes across as having an anti-Kyiv orientation, the use of the word “terrorists” must be an “echo” of the lexical item insulting to the author and his/her group and used by the sources from the opposite side of the conflict’s divide.

The text as a whole appears to be an “echoing” reference to the type of discourse common on the pro-government side: the author mocks the accusations hurled at the population of the South-East and the refusal of the western faction to accept responsibility for the suffering inflicted by the government-controlled military units on the eastern territories. The author pretends to take the western position and refuses to admit that the reason the eastern areas try to shoot down the planes is protection from shelling. He/she also pretends to believe that the government-led operations are constructive and peaceful.

All of this adds up to the sarcastic mocking of the alleged official discourse that supposedly distorts the true picture of the conflict. The comprehension of the author’s message depends heavily on knowledge of the situation and on sharing his/her ideological stance –otherwise, the text not only loses its sarcastic character, it becomes altogether meaningless.

Genre Echoing

Besides lexical echoing, the propaganda enthusiasts of the Ukrainian conflict get creative with genre expectations and achieve ironic effect by combining typically incompatible genres and content. For example, one of the memes posted in an anti-Maidan online community presents an image of a book with a cover featuring a photograph of Oleksandr Turchynov, who was the interim President of the country at the time of the post, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, the Prime Minister of Ukraine, who came to power after the revolution of 2014. Their names are listed on the cover as if they are the authors, and the title of the book appears to be “How to Lose a Country in a Month: A Tutorial for Beginners.” The combination of the image and the textual elements evokes the genre of self-help writing. However, the concept of losing a country, especially expressed by a vulgarism (“просрати” – “lose” semantically related to “shit” instead of the stylistically neutral “згубити” – “lose”) framed as advice, creates cognitive dissonance and an ironic effect.

The use of the Ukrainian language serves the author’s intent to show the top Ukrainian government officials as distant from the population of the South-East, who are largely Russian-speaking. The implication of the alleged fact that they published a book on losing a country in a short period of time is

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

that they are not only incompetent as leaders, but also dim-witted and arrogant enough to be proud of doing so. The discord between the content of the text and its presentation accomplishes the mocking of the politicians.

This genre type of ironic echoing is fairly common in online posts and often takes form of fake advertisements. They use familiar clichés, such as “coming to stores near you” or “already on sale.” The products they purport to advertise are unique to the medium of propaganda and are unimaginable in real commercials. Consider the combination of the image of a cut-out figure of the Russian president Putin with the text: “Already on sale. Air freshener with the smell of pine boards...” (*Вже у продажю. Освіжувач повітря із запахом соснових дощок...*)

Promoting products such as car air-fresheners in the form of an effigy of the Russian president hanging from a noose and promising the scent of pine boards (commonly used for coffins) helps the author express his/her attitude to Putin and entertain the supporters of the pro-Kyiv cause. The contrast between the common vocabulary of the advertisements and uncommon implicature creates the ironic effect and makes the post more memorable than a straightforward statement that the Russian president should be hanged for his role in the Ukrainian crisis.

Another technique is modifying a cadence call, such as in the following example (see Figure 2):

This meme depicts a pro-Maidan group of people with Ukrainian flags with the text “Tili-tili, trail-vali! We have lost Crimea! Five-four-three-two-one – we are going to lose Donbass.” The author references the use of chants during Maidan protests but replaces the content with absurd statements that mock the protesters. According to the author, they are happy to have effectively hurt their country by their activity since Ukraine lost the Crimean Peninsular and is suffering because of the military conflict in Donbas.

Figure 2. “Tili-tili, trail-vali” meme



Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

The ironic effect comes from a combination of factors. One of them is the contrast of the non-lexical vocables from a children's cartoon "tili-tili, trail-vali" with the expletive "proyebali" (a modified form of "lost" with the root of the verb "fuck") instead of a neutral equivalent. Another is the organisation of the chant, with its rhythm and rhyme characteristic of upbeat cadence calls contradictory to its grave message. There is also the pretense by the author insinuating that the people in the picture are happy about their country's problems, an allusion to the type of techniques utilized by the organizers of the protests that led to the Ukrainian revolution, and the incongruity of the meme's content with the aspirations of Maidan revolutionaries to improve the situation in their country.

Conceptual Echoing

Conceptual echoing in sarcasm is the hardest to decode for an outsider unfamiliar with the extralinguistic context of the text. The infamous photo of a riot police soldier set on fire by Molotov cocktail during protests in Kyiv with the caption "Are you upset or something?" is meaningless without knowing that the new Ukrainian government first prosecuted those troops for the crackdown on the Maidan uprising but then called on them to put down the rebellion in the eastern provinces. Such expressions as "Ira, come to eat! – Mommy, I do not want to eat, I want to kill!" also depend on extralinguistic knowledge about Irina Farion and her activism and are nonsensical to people unfamiliar with the politician and her agenda.

Responding to multiple and unfair attacks (in the opinion of the post's author) on Vladimir Putin – who has been accused of interfering in the Ukrainian affairs, stirring unrest, and sending undercover troops to fight in Ukraine – one of the memes reads: "Everything is coming to this – soon [they] will write that John Kennedy in 1963 was killed with a slingshot by an 11-year old Young Pioneer Volodya Putin..." (*Все идет к тому, что скоро напишут что Джона Кеннеди в 1963 году убил с рогатки 11-летний пионер Володя Путин*).

For the conceptual echoing to work, the communicators must share the extralinguistic knowledge base. In the abovementioned example, the readers are expected to know who John F. Kennedy was, in what time period he was killed, and the basic information that the assassination has been surrounded by doubts about the investigation and suspicion that the real culprits were never caught and/or named. Readers are also expected to know that the informal version of the name Vladimir is the diminutive Volodya, and understand the name "Young Pioneer" as a name of the group that used to be active in schools as a social youth outreach by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. They need to know that the U.S. and the Soviet Union were antagonists at that time. Not many people know the exact age of Putin or remember the exact year of Kennedy's assassination, but it might be estimated that young Vladimir was around the age mentioned in the meme. The associations invoked by the fillers of these frame slots add to a complex picture of the politicized youth that could have been accused of involvement in the murder of the American president.

The author of the meme pretends that he/she considers people to be unreasonable enough to believe a conspiracy theory alleging that a young boy from one continent could have been accused of the assassination of a prominent political figure on another continent. In addition to pretending to believe the anti-Putin faction's assertions, the author echoes those assertions (while not mentioning them directly) and extends them along "a slippery slope." This brings in a rather comical interpretation of the tragedy of Kennedy's murder to emphasize that Putin's opponents lose their grip on reality.

The absurdity of the situation described is extrapolated to the accusations of Putin's orchestration of the Ukrainian conflict. The author seems to suggest that the claims about Putin's manipulation of

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

the Ukrainian affairs are analogous to this post: the involvement might be theoretically possible, but the accusations are not based on any concrete facts and artificially assign cause-and-effect relationship to unrelated events. The introductory “soon it’ll come to this...” connects the meme to the real discussions at both the diplomatic and personal levels and establishes the association between the posted text and the claims by anti-Putin communicators. The ultimate goal of employing this strategy seems to be communicating that the accusations hurled at President Putin are untrue. Instead of stating so, however, the speaker chooses a different strategy: the line of accusations is continued and is extended to a false statement that proposes an outrageously implausible event.

The author chose not to refute those accusations directly. Proving that the forces that are at play in Ukraine are independent of Russia’s influence would require facts that the author is unlikely to possess and text so long that the average user of social media would be unlikely to read it. All this makes direct communication ineffective. In this case, the sarcastic analogy proves a much more effective tool: the author negates the opponents’ assertions by mocking them. This way, not only are the accusations countered, but their very value is negated; they are treated as something totally irrelevant, absurd, and unworthy of a response.

Because the poster is witty, the readers are likely to get a smile, whether or not they agree with the author. Humor has been shown to raise the affective segment of communication, so the author expects to raise the salience of his/her message for the readers. While insulting the opponents as unreasonable and unintelligent indirectly and humorously, the author achieves more in both the insult and in the rallying Putin’s sympathizers. The opponents are supposedly not worthy of arguing against (which pragmatically is stronger than saying that their accusations are untrue), and the supporters get a laugh at the expense of the opponents. Their views are upheld and they get another boost to their opinion that they are right and that there are many people who share their view.

Code-Switching as Echoing

An unusual feature of the “echoing” technique that can be observed in some of the sarcastic posts devoted to the Ukrainian crisis is switching between the Russian and Ukrainian languages. The closeness of Russian and Ukrainian allows the communicators to employ this special kind of attribution. They occasionally insert easily recognizable Ukrainian words into their Russian sentences to show that they are “echoing” the statements of the opposing side rather than expressing their own opinions. The resulting texts are still clear for comprehension, but have an additional feature of attributing the expressed ideas to the pro-Kyiv faction and the sarcastic effect.

Some of the Ukrainian words used for this purpose, such as “що” (what or that), make their way into the Russian utterances because they are shared by southern Russian dialects. Others, such as “це” (that), are common enough to be familiar. Others, such as “свідоми” (conscious), “щирі” (real), or “гідність/гідность” (dignity), especially in the expression “революція гідності” (revolution of dignity), became intelligible due to their frequent use in the discussions of the recent Ukrainian revolution.

Code-switching appears to serve the need for the speakers to show their dissociative attitude to the ideas they express and functions as a marker of sarcasm in utterances employing it. For example, in the comment left after a photograph showing a group of Ukrainian military under a Ukrainian flag and a red flag of the Soviet Union, the comment’s author mixes “що” and “це” into her Russian-language post: “And this is the valiant Ukrainian army – don’t make my shoes laugh” (*И шо це доблесная украинска*

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

армия-не смешите мои тапочки). Code-switching allows her to “echo” the statements of the Ukrainian side about their army and to mock them.

Similarly, in a discussion of the news report claiming that a half of a certain Russian military unit was killed by Ukrainian troops, the initiator of a discussion thread is asked what happened to the other half of the unit, the one that is supposedly still alive. Since those troops are alive, they should have been discoverable; however, no one could locate them. Since the commenter believes that the reports of the dead Russians in Ukraine are false, in place of a sincere response, he jokes that they caught “treason disease” and died. To distance himself from the answer he gives and to show that he is being sarcastic, he uses code-switching.

So where do you think the second half got to? (таки куда вы думаете делась вторая половина?)

It got infected with treason and died, obviously. (Заразилась зрадой и вмерла, очевидно же.)

Both the words “treason” (зрада) and “died” (вмерла) are Ukrainian words mixed in with the Russian text. The Ukrainian word for “treason” is different from its equivalent in the standard Russian dialect, but became recognizable to people familiar with the Ukrainian events because it is a common accusation by the pro-Maidan ideologues that anyone disagreeing with them is a traitor. The form “вмерла” instead of the standard Russian “умерла” is distinct enough to be identified as Ukrainian, but is close enough semantically and morphologically to be understood without translation even by Russian speakers who do not know Ukrainian.

By using code-switching, the communicator achieves a double effect. First, he is attributing a preposterous explanation of the problem to the Ukrainian side and mocking it. At the same time, he is distancing himself from it by removing the possibility that the post could be interpreted as his own opinion. So, in the conversations under analysis, code-switching serves as an “echoing” technique and an index of which side of the conflict is likely to express the ideas included in the online posts thus clarifying the target of their sarcasm.

Sarcastic Responses to Sarcastic Posts

Another observation that can be made based on the online conversations dedicated to the Ukrainian crisis is that sarcastic posts often attract sarcastic responses. When Gibbs (2000) quantified the number of sarcastic turns in informal friendly conversations, he estimated that about 8% of those turns involved irony. He also found that an ironic turn was from 21% to 33% likely to elicit an ironic utterance in return across the five types of irony that he studied (p. 23). The same trend can be observed in the conversations discussing the Ukrainian crisis: in the following discussion thread, sarcastic replies constitute 22% of all responses. Take the following example, posted in a conversation thread about the alleged presence of regular Russian troops in Ukraine that starts with a sarcastic assertion:

...when something goes wrong in the Ukrainian military, there appear reports about thousands of dead heavy-armored-horseback Special Forces personnel from Russia. And if earlier everything was limited to murdered Pskov division and a couple of BGT [battalion tactical group], now they are switching to heavy artillery. (...когда у украинских военных что-то идет не так, появляются сообщения о

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

тысячах погибших бронеконных спецназовцах из России. И если раньше всё ограничивалось вырезанной псковской дивизией да парочкой БТГ, то сейчас в ход пошла тяжелая артиллерия.)

The obviously fictional “heavy-armored-horseback special forces” pretends to echo ridiculous reports from the Ukrainian side. It exaggerates those reports as if they announced that the whole division from the Russian city of Pskov had been destroyed. The faked sincere tone with which the author reports the progression from claims about the killing of the Pskov division and “a couple of” Russian BGTs in Ukraine to even more outrageous declarations contributes to the sarcastic effect as well.

The responses to this post are also largely sarcastic. Only one person writes, “There are no Russian troops in Donbass, relax. Why bother countering obvious rubbish?” (*На Донбассе нет русских военных, успокойся. Зачем опровергать откровенную чушь?*) The others play along with the initiator of the thread and develop the suggested direction:

I like their logic – Special Forces lost half of their men, the general came for negotiations. What are they going to negotiate about, reviving the dead or killing off the second half?” (Мне еще логика нравится - спецназ потерял половину, на переговоры приехал генерал. О чем переговариваться будет, о том чтоб убитых воскресили или о том чтоб вторую половину добили?)

Ukrainian bloggers have started destroying ordinary army brigades on a daily basis and more than one)) (Обычные армейские бригады украинские блоггеры уже начали уничтожать ежедневно, и не по одной)))

I am expecting news about a battle between martial bees and walking tanks of Stalin. (Жду новостей о битве боевых пчол с шагающими танками Сталина.)

The latest comment, in turn, prompts a sarcastic response, “New Ukrainian military techno-thriller ‘Bees against Huilo’” (*Новый украинский военный технотриллер “Бджолі проти Хуйла”*) using Ukrainian language words for ‘bees’ and ‘against’ and the vulgarity that has become the all-Ukrainian nickname of Putin.

Soon they will get to [kill off] the Presidential Regiment. [they] Will, so to say, crap right into Putin’s soul. (Скоро и до Президентского полка дойдут. Насрут, так сказать, прямо в душу Путину.)

[they have] Nothing sacred! (Ничего святого!)

Fuck! Only traitors around. Instead of demonstrating to the world community (™) 100500 murdered Special Forces soldiers, they just take them and give them to some dick from the hill. They should get shot for things like that. (Блядь, одни зрадники кругом. Нет бы продемонстрировать мировому сообществу (™) 100500 убитых спецназовцев, так они их берут и какому-то хую с горы отдают. Стрелять за такое надо.)

In the examples quoted above, the commenters exchange increasingly exaggerated descriptions of the situation in their responses. They respond sarcastically to sarcastic posts made by others and employ both pretense and echoing of the words that the opposing side says, is allegedly saying, or would have said

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

based on the current development of their discourse. They utilize various techniques faking attribution to the opponents and mocking their alleged view of the situation and statements. For example, the last quoted comment included a Ukrainian word “зрадники” (traitors) in a Russian sentence as a sarcastic marker. The trade mark sign (™) is also included as mockery of multiple appeals to the international community for help by the pro-Kyiv faction aspiring to join the EU.

The Communicative Purpose of Sarcasm

Odnoklassniki users employ sarcasm and irony in a variety of ways. It appears that these communicative modes afford them with the ability to achieve goals that would not be possible in more straightforward, literal conversations. Such functions, as face-saving or muting of criticism, reported by researchers as prominent or prevalent in other types of discourse, were practically absent from the examples collected for this project. Quite the opposite, the discussions of the Ukrainian conflict on Odnoklassniki.ru seemed to serve as an outlet of anger and aggression and, therefore, were hostile and hurtful.

Attacks and mockery of the opponents are definitely noticeable in the politicized online communication on the topic of the Ukrainian crisis, and many back-and-forth exchanges target other Odnoklassniki users with bitter, sarcastic insults. Utilizing this technique undoubtedly increases the offensive force of the abuse hurled at the rivals. However, it is difficult to believe that anyone would be so naive as to consider that by offending the opposing camp they can help the rivals recognize that their views are erroneous and persuade them to change their opinion. On the contrary, the sarcastic social media posts seem to be more aimed at rallying the supporters of a cause rather than attacking the opponents.

Therefore, it seems that the verbal assaults on the opposing side more often serve the goal of appealing to the members of the communicators' own group. Sarcastic mockery of the opponents allows the posts' authors to bring together the people who share their own beliefs and values. This strategy also may bring the authors the benefit of increased salience and memorability of the utterances and help them elevate their standing within their own faction. Consequently, the communicative function of sarcastic communication observed in the discussed examples appears to be less of the out-of-group insult and more of the in-group unity and enthusiasm about the shared cause.

An important benefit of employing sarcasm and irony, then, is the improved status within the online community of similar ideological views. The humorous aspect of irony makes the posts containing it more exciting and popular with the members of the same ideological bloc. Users of social media interested in the recent Ukrainian events seem to appreciate the posts that exhibit sarcasm and irony. Insulting the other side in an original and creative way appears to help the communicators score virtual points in the eyes of those who share their main beliefs. Irony presents its users with the tools to achieve that goal and enables them to create a certain self-image of a witty and clever person who, in addition to being in the know about the events, possesses the ability to present that information in a memorable way that stings the opponents and unites the supporters of a cause. This is especially important in an online community where “likes” and “shares” determine popularity and status.

Another noticeable advantage of utilizing sarcasm in the arguments about Ukraine is that the technique seems to allow the speakers to dismiss opinions they do not want to discuss or deem ridiculous and unworthy of earnest examination. In the examples under analysis, sarcasm is used, among other situations, when the speakers believe that their opponents communicate “obvious rubbish” that does not deserve countering. Instead of disproving the information, they mock it by sarcastic echoing. They sometimes pretend to go along with statements that are clearly ridiculous to them and take them down the

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

“slippery slope” to an even higher degree of implausibility. Doing so permits them to avoid responding to the opposing side’s assertions with facts and arguments. The attitude that prompts this kind of verbal behavior seems to reflect their disdain of the opponents who do not even deserve a real response. At the same time, it might be employed by a person who does not possess the facts that would prove his/her own opinion.

CONCLUSION

The political and social upheavals recently set in motion in Ukraine affected all aspects of life, including the language. The radical political and social currents that are sweeping the nation have manifested themselves, among other ways, in shaping the informal communications of social networks and raising the number of sarcastic insults to the opponents. Both the “revolutionary” and the “reactionary” factions seem to be equally engaged in the endeavour, and both exhibit the pattern of aiming to insult the opposite side while expressing camaraderie and unity with the members of their own camp.

Communicating on the topic of the conflict, the users of social networks employ a broad variety of tools to achieve the sarcastic effect. The utterances contain hyperbole, oxymoron, uncommon collocations, polysemy, neologisms, and the stylistic contrast of slurs and vulgarisms mixed in with neutral lexis. The main reasons the utterances can be identified as sarcastic, however, is the knowledge about the situation and observable incongruence of the statements and the real situation or the encyclopedic knowledge about the way the world operates. The ironic effect also depends heavily on the perceived feelings and attitudes of the speakers.

The statements are usually very negative in connotation and are targeted at the opposing side of the debate. In the examples analyzed for this paper, ironic statements are usually characterized by pretense and by echoing of what the opposing side says or would have said based on the current development of their discourse. While not the same, pretense and echoing are similar in the sense that both show how the speaker distances himself/herself from an opinion or evaluation expressed in the utterance. This distancing appears to matter the most for the analysis of the examples herein, since the speakers of ironic utterances express a mocking, sceptical, or critical attitude to an attributed utterance or thought. The communicators show their disagreement with the description of the state of affairs presented by the opponents by including their statements into their own discourse, often exaggerating them to the level of absurd.

The dissociative attitude manifests itself in three categories of “echoing:” lexical, genre, and conceptual. Lexical echoing repeats the words or phrases used by the opposing side that have a possibility of reinterpretation; genre echoing combines typically incompatible genres and content; and conceptual echoing alludes to the extralinguistic context of the discourse and is the hardest to process for an outsider unfamiliar with the situation. Occasionally, the “echoing” feature of sarcasm takes shape of code-switching when the communicators mix Russian and Ukrainian words in the same utterance to indicate that the ideas expressed with the help of Ukrainian words come from the pro-Kyiv side and the expressions in Russian signal opinions of anti-Kyiv factions.

One of the conclusions that can be made after analyzing the present material is that, in politically aggressive communication, sarcastic statements were likely to attract sarcastic responses from the readers, where the communicators then exchanged increasingly exaggerated descriptions of the situation, faked attribution to the opponents, and mocked their opponents’ alleged view of the situation and statements. Another point worth highlighting is that sarcasm does not appear to impede comprehension among the

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

interlocutors from the same discourse community. Very rarely comments to posts implied some kind of confusion that would have required the initial contributor's correction or clarification. On the contrary, irony appears to present its users with certain communicative benefits, one of which is the creation of a certain self-image of a witty and clever person who, in addition to being in the know about the events, possesses the ability to present that information in a memorable way that stings the opponents and unites the supporters of a cause.

Sarcasm and irony present their users with communicative tools to let out their frustration and anger by employing sarcastic barbs that antagonize the people of opposing views. However, the much more common function of sarcasm and irony appears to be creating the social bonds and rallying the people who share the speaker's understanding of the state of affairs in Ukraine. The target of sarcasm is always (explicitly or implicitly) present in the sarcastic taunts intended for in-group bonding. Still, they are not treated as real co-communicators, and the goal of sarcastic posts is definitely not out-of-group insult or persuasion of the opponents, but rather, the in-group unity and teaming up with people of the like minds.

REFERENCES

- Attardo, S. (2000). Irony as relevant inappropriateness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(6), 793–826. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00070-3
- Attardo, S. (2013). Intentionality and irony. In L. Ruiz Gurillo & M. B. Alvarado Ortega (Eds.), *Irony and humor: From pragmatics to discourse* (pp. 39–58). Amsterdam: Benjamins. doi:10.1075/pbns.231.04att
- Attardo, S., Eisterhold, J., Hay, J., & Poggi, I. (2003). Multimodal markers of irony and sarcasm. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research*, 16(2), 243–260. doi:10.1515/humr.2003.012
- Bohdanova, T. (2014). Unexpected revolution: The role of social media in Ukraine's Euromaidan uprising. *European View*, 13(1), 133–142. doi:10.1007/s12290-014-0296-4
- Bowes, A., & Katz, A. (2011). When sarcasm stings. *Discourse Processes*, 48(4), 215–236. doi:10.1080/0163853X.2010.532757
- Bryant, G. A., & Fox Tree, J. E. (2002). Recognizing verbal irony in spontaneous speech. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 17(2), 99–119. doi:10.1207/S15327868MS1702_2
- Burgers, C., Van Mulken, M., & Schellens, P. J. (2012). Verbal irony differences in usage across written genres. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 31(3), 290–310. doi:10.1177/0261927X12446596
- Camp, E. (2012). Sarcasm, pretense, and the semantics/pragmatics distinction. *Noûs (Detroit, Mich.)*, 46(4), 587–634. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0068.2010.00822.x
- Campbell, J. D., & Katz, A. N. (2012). Are there necessary conditions for inducing a sense of sarcastic irony? *Discourse Processes*, 49(6), 459–480. doi:10.1080/0163853X.2012.687863
- Claridge, C. (2001). *Approaching irony in corpora*. In *Proceedings from the Corpus Linguistics 2001 at Lancaster University*. University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language: Technical Paper 13.
- Clark, H., & Gerrig, R. (1984). On the pretense theory of irony. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 113(1), 121–126. doi:10.1037/0096-3445.113.1.121 PMID:6242407

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

- Colston, H. L. (1997). Salting a wound or sugaring a pill: The pragmatic functions of ironic criticism. *Discourse Processes*, 23(1), 25–45. doi:10.1080/01638539709544980
- Colston, H. L., & Katz, A. N. (2004). *Figurative Language Comprehension: Social and Cultural Influences*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Colston, R. W., & Gibbs, H. L. (2002). The risks and rewards of ironic communication. *Say Not to Say. New Perspectives on Miscommunication*, 3, 181.
- Currie, G. (2006). Why irony is pretence. In S. Nichols (Ed.), *The architecture of the imagination: New essays on pretence, possibility, and fiction* (pp. 111–133). Oxford, UK: Clarendon. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199275731.003.0007
- Dews, S., Kaplan, J., & Winner, E. (1995). Why not say it directly? The social functions of irony. *Discourse Processes*, 19(3), 347–367. doi:10.1080/01638539509544922
- Dews, S., & Winner, E. (1995). Muting the meaning: A social function of irony. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 10(1), 3–19. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms1001_2
- Filatova, E. (2012). Irony and sarcasm: Corpus generation and analysis using crowdsourcing. In *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 12)*.
- Garrett, R. K. (2006). Protest in an information society: A review of literature on social movements and new ICTs. *Information Communication and Society*, 9(2), 202–224. doi:10.1080/13691180600630773
- Gibbs, R. (1986). On the psycholinguistics of sarcasm. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, 115(1), 3–15. doi:10.1037/0096-3445.115.1.3
- Gibbs, R., & Colston, H. (2002). The risks and rewards of ironic communication, In L. Anolli, R. Ciceri, & G. Riva (Eds.), *Say not to say: New perspectives on miscommunication* (pp. 181–194). Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Gibbs, R., & Izett, C. (2005). Irony as persuasive communication In H. Colston & A. Katz (Eds.), *Figurative Language Comprehension: Social and Cultural Influences* (pp. 131-152). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Gibbs, R. W. (2000). Irony in talk among friends. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 15(1-2), 5–27. doi:10.1080/10926488.2000.9678862
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. (2002). A new look at literal meaning in understanding what is said and implicated. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34(4), 457–486. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(01)00046-7
- Gibbs, R. W. Jr. (2012). Are ironic acts deliberate? *Journal of Pragmatics*, 44(1), 104–115. doi:10.1016/j.pragma.2011.11.001
- Giora, R. (1995). On irony and negation. *Discourse Processes*, 19(2), 239–264. doi:10.1080/01638539509544916
- Giora, R. (2003). *On our mind: Salience, context, and figurative language*. New York: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195136166.001.0001

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

Goban-Klas, T. (2014). EuroMaidan—Symbiosis of Political Protest and Media. *Open Europe: Cultural Dialogue Across Borders*, 169-178.

Howard, P.N. & Parks, M. R. (2012). Social media and political change: Capacity, constraint, and consequence. *Journal of Communication*, 62(2), 359–362.

Ivanko, S., & Pexman, P. (2003). Context incongruity and irony processing. *Discourse Processes*, 35(3), 241–279. doi:10.1207/S15326950DP3503_2

Ivanko, S. L., Pexman, P. M., & Olineck, K. M. (2004). How sarcastic are you? Individual differences and verbal irony. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 23(3), 244–271. doi:10.1177/0261927X04266809

Jorgensen, J. (1996). The functions of sarcastic irony in speech. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26(5), 613–634. doi:10.1016/0378-2166(95)00067-4

Kalbermatten, M. I. (2006). *Verbal irony as a prototype category in Spanish: A discursive analysis* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest. (3225749)

Katz, A. N., & Pexman, P. M. (1997). Interpreting figurative statements: Speaker occupation can change metaphor to irony. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 12(1), 19–41. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms1201_3

Kotthoff, H. (2003). Responding to irony in different contexts: On cognition in conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 35(9), 1387–1411. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00182-0

Kreuz, R. J., & Glucksberg, S. (1989). How to be sarcastic: The echoic reminder theory of verbal irony. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, 118(4), 374–386. doi:10.1037/0096-3445.118.4.374

Kreuz, R. J., Long, D., & Church, M. (1991). On being ironic - Pragmatic and mnemonic implications. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 6(3), 149–162. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms0603_1

Kreuz, R. J., & Roberts, R. M. (1993). The empirical study of figurative language in literature. *Poetics*, 22(1), 151–169. doi:10.1016/0304-422X(93)90026-D

Kumon-Nakamura, S., Glucksberg, S., & Brown, M. (1995). How about another piece of the pie: The allusional pretense theory of discourse irony. *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General*, 124(1), 3–21. doi:10.1037/0096-3445.124.1.3 PMID:7897341

Lee, C. J., & Katz, A. N. (1998). The differential role of ridicule in sarcasm and irony. *Metaphor and Symbol*, 13(1), 1–15. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms1301_1

Leggitt, J., & Gibbs, R. (2000). Emotional reactions to verbal irony. *Discourse Processes*, 29(1), 1–24. doi:10.1207/S15326950dp2901_1

Littman, D. C., & Mey, J. L. (1991). The nature of irony: Toward a computational model of irony. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 15(2), 131–151. doi:10.1016/0378-2166(91)90057-5

Marples, D. R. (2014). Introduction. In D. R. Marples & F. V. Mills (Eds.), *Ukraine's Euromaidan: Analyses of a civil revolution* (Vol. 138, pp. 9–26). New York: Columbia University Press.

Myers Roy, A. (1981). The function of irony in discourse. *Text-Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Discourse*, 1(4), 407–423. doi:10.1515/text.1.1981.1.4.407

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

- Onuch, O. (2015). "Facebook helped me do it": Understanding the EuroMaidan protester "tool-kit". *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 15(1), 170–184. doi:10.1111/sena.12129
- Roberts, R. M., & Kreuz, R. J. (1994). Why do people use figurative language? *Psychological Science*, 5(3), 159–163. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1994.tb00653.x
- Ronzhyn, A. (2014). The use of Facebook and Twitter during the 2013–2014 protests in Ukraine. In *Proceedings of the European Conference on Social Media: ECSM 2014*. Reading, UK: Academic Conferences Ltd.
- Seckman, M. A., & Couch, C. J. (1989). Jocularly, sarcasm, and relationships. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 18(3), 327–344. doi:10.1177/089124189018003004
- Seegerberg, A., & Bennett, L. W. (2011). Social media and the organization of collective action: Using Twitter to explore the ecologies of two climate change protests. *Communication Review*, 14(3), 197–215. doi:10.1080/10714421.2011.597250
- Slugoski, B. R., & Turnbull, W. (1988). Cruel to be kind and kind to be cruel: Sarcasm, banter and social relations. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 7(2), 101–121. doi:10.1177/0261927X8800700202
- Sperber, D. (1984). Verbal irony: Pretense or echoic mention? *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 113(1), 130–136. doi:10.1037/0096-3445.113.1.130
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1981). Irony and the use-mention distinction. *Philosophy (London, England)*, 3, 143–184.
- Sperber, D., & Wilson, D. (1986). *Relevance: Communication and cognition*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Szostek, J. (2014). The media battles of Ukraine's EuroMaidan. *Digital Icons*, 11, 1–19.
- Tepperman, J., Traum, D. R., & Narayanan, S. (2006). "Yeah right": Sarcasm recognition for spoken dialogue systems. In *Proceedings from The Ninth International Conference on Spoken Language Processing: Interspeech*.
- Toplak, M., & Katz, A. N. (2000). On the uses of sarcastic irony. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(10), 1467–1488. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00101-0
- Utsumi, A. (2000). Verbal irony as implicit display of ironic environment: Distinguishing ironic utterances from non-irony. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32(12), 1777–1806. doi:10.1016/S0378-2166(99)00116-2
- Vance, J. (2012). *An evaluative review of the pragmatics of verbal irony* (Master's thesis). University of Sheffield, UK. Retrieved from <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/3383>
- Walton, K. L. (1990). *Mimesis as make-believe: On the foundations of the representational arts*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Whalen, J. M., Pexman, P. M., Gill, A. J., & Nowson, S. (2013). Verbal irony use in personal blogs. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 32(6), 560–569. doi:10.1080/0144929X.2011.630418

Sarcasm and Irony as a Political Weapon

Wilson, D. (2006). The pragmatics of verbal irony: Echo or pretence? *Lingua*, 116(10), 1722–1743. doi:10.1016/j.lingua.2006.05.001

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (1992). On verbal irony. *Lingua*, 87(1), 53–76. doi:10.1016/0024-3841(92)90025-E

Wilson, D., & Sperber, D. (2002). Relevance theory: A tutorial. In *Proceedings of the Third Tokyo Conference on Psycholinguistics*. Tokyo: Hituzi Shobo.

Zaliznyak, Y. (2014). The new media of EuroMaidan: Online instruments to defend democracy in Ukraine. In W. Piatkowska-Stepaniak (Ed.), *Open Europe: Cultural Dialogue Across Borders* (pp. 179-189). Opole: University of Opole.