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## DISCOURSE PECULIARITIES OF INTERNET MEMES

**Summary.** The article is devoted to the discourse analysis of the internet memes. It highlights the peculiarities of the internet memes and figures out the features which implement political discourse based on the classification proposed by the Netherland scholar T. van Dijk in his book “Discourse and Power”. The proposed theoretical material has been reworked stressing out the prior directions of contemporary linguistics. Practical material was purposefully selected from official pages of news agencies in social network Instagram among which there are: BBC News, Telegraph, the Independent, and the Times. All the mentioned resources are official representatives in social networks. The aim of this work is based on the process of figuring out discourse peculiarities of internet memes. To achieve the proposed aim there is a need to identify key information concerning internet memes themselves and the way they implement political discourse on the internet. The author proposes basic information concerning the research on discourse, political discourse and internet memes. Moreover, the article points out key classifications on discourse and internet memes. Being based on the classification by T. van Dijk the work analyses pragmatological, lexical, and semantological features which are appropriate for political internet memes. The article figures out separate phrases and word-combinations which express the highest level of emotional marking and implement core intentions posed by news agencies in Instagram. The priority was granted to internet memes which depict political situation in two countries – the United States of America and the United Kingdom. In conclusion the author proposes the results of the comparative analyses which presents distinctive as well as common features of political discourse verbalization of internet memes.

**Key words:** political discourse, internet memes, social networks, comparative analysis, discourse analyses, political memes.

**Introduction.** Means of communication of modern digital interaction continue growing in number. Today it includes numerous features which enlist not only linguistical aspects but also visual units such as internet memes which are integrated into the sphere of politics being bright example of information presentation. Thus, the urgency of this work is formed due to the wide-spread usage of internet memes with political content and their role in implementing political discourse worldwide.

Numerous researchers work with internet memes: P. Davison [1] who describes visual effects of internet memes, R. Dawkins [2] – the scholar who has been the first who used the term “memes”, and A. Kulkarni [3] who highlights core issues connected with political memes; describes political discourse: F. Batsevych [4] who devotes his works to discourse and its classifications, T. van Dijk [5] who works with all spheres of discourse, etc.

The urgency of the work is formed due to the needs of determining political memes as linguistic units which can implement political discourse.

The aim of work is to figure out discourse peculiarities of internet memes.

To achieve the aim there is a need to identify key information concerning internet memes and the way they implement political discourse.

### Results and discussions.

Practical material was purposefully selected from official Instagram pages of British news agencies such as: BBC News, Telegraph, the Independent, and the Times. All the chosen internet memes have political context.

Dr. Richard Dawkins [2] was the first scientist who proposed the concept “meme”. His book “Selfish Gene” which has been published in 1976 highlights that memes are units which have so called replicating element of cultural heritage which, due to its similarity, can be multiplied and transmitted to future generations. Contemporary linguistic views on this concept differs from original one – nowadays memes can include pictures, video-fragments, emojis, and GIFs. However, the term “Internet meme” was firstly proposed by American author Mike Godwin in 1993. In 2012 P. Davison in the article “The Language of Internet Memes” points out that “Internet memes is a unit of culture, mainly a joke, which may have an influential power due to its ability to spread online”. In our article [6] the meme was defined as a cultural, linguistic phenomenon which depends on emotional and educational possibilities of its author and further Internet-users, it is realized as a linguistic unit in the process of digital interaction. Internet memes with political content are not the exception. They are formed not to entertain only, but to inform and share views.

Thus, it is possible to determine that political memes are linguistic and psycholinguistic units of the Internet which narrative is completely based on the political content aimed at the information, disinformation, entertainment, and formation of the required political views [7].

Political discourse is represented in works of the Netherland scholar T. van Dijk who has pointed out in his work “Discourse and Power” that for political discourse it is inherent to have counterarguments, exaggerations and situational semantics, that can work with political memes. “Political discourse can solve the question by itself only, it can depict what is true and what is false. Political discourse declares its ideas to be the best when the ideas of others are the examples of lie” [5]. Discourse is closely connected with context which may represent the background of every situation. It is possible to point out that “context controls discourse by virtue of the definition of context as the definition of the relevant aspects of the social situation” [8, p. 111].

Thus, there is a need to study discourse peculiarities of British internet memes which have been selected due to the typology of political memes:

1) textual memes:

- original (non-manipulated photos with no purposefully incorporated passage) (Pic. 1);
- symbiotic (combination of photo and written passage) (Pic. 2);
- integral (comics-like picture with incorporated picture) (Pic. 3);
- fused (more than one photo/picture, written passage, and visual effects) (Pic. 4);
- phrasal (text only) (Pic. 5);
- 2) non-textual memes:
  - original (non-manipulated photo only) (Pic.6);
  - fused (more than one photo/picture and visual effects) (Pic.8);
  - pictorial (comics-like picture) (Pic. 7);
- 3) animated memes:
  - GIF (rounded animation) (Pic. 9);
  - fragmental textual (video-episode with subtitles, length up to 30 seconds) (Pic. 10);
  - fragmental non-textual (video-episode without subtitles, length up to 30 seconds) (Pic. 11) [7].

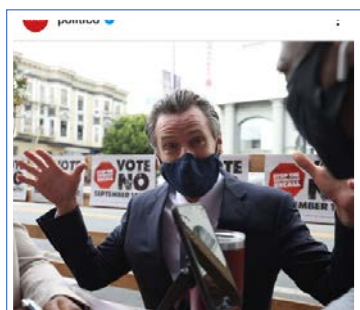
Discourse analysis proposed by scientist Teun van Dijk detects three main aspects of the written passage – pragmatics, intention, and linguistics. Thus, there is a need to determine background information which has influence on the formation of definite memes, to figure out lexical specificity of every unit, and understand the intention of the meme.

Thus, political meme gained numerous ways of representation through internet-memes. To figure out main streams of political discourse verbalized by internet-memes presented in social media there have been analyzed units from several Instagram pages.

One of the most wide-spread topics of contemporary political memes are Covid-related ones (Pic. 12). Many examples were

provided by COP26 (UN Climate Change Conference) which was visited by numerous politicians from the whole world. The meme represents the Prime Minister of Great Britain at the conference without means of protection whereas the United Kingdom has rather high level of patients infected with Covid-19 daily – about 130 000 cases [9]. The passage “*Did Boris Johnson and Sir David Attenborough break face mask rules at COP26?*” is marked with word-combination “to break the rule” that means to do something forbidden. The forbidden thing in this case is absence of medical masks used not to spread the virus which has already turned the world to pandemic. The form of question gives internet-users possibility to think about the answer which is clear. Intention of the author is not to inform, but to show the level of responsibility of the politician who runs the country where people die from coronavirus. As well this meme presents the views of its creator concerning the seriousness of this disease.

Another example (Pic. 13) from COP26 is the meme related to the speech of the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. His passage was fully directed to climate changes. “*To all the young people out there – I want you to stay angry. I want you to stay frustrated. But channel that anger. Harness that frustration. Gird yourself for a marathon, not a sprint.*” The pragmatics of this political meme is to inform the world concerning the danger connected with climate changes which can ruin the way we live. Barack Obama used repetition “*I want you to stay*” which stresses out the importance of his passage. His rhetoric is full of “*I*” that demonstrated his position as influencer and leader. The verbs “*to channel*”, “*to harness*”, and “*to gird*” give strength to the speech. Another means is comparison “*gird yourself for a marathon, not a sprint*” which gives internet-users



**Pic. 1 "Original meme"**



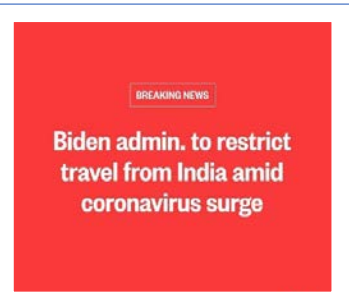
**Pic. 2 "Symbiotic meme"**



**Pic. 3 "Integrated meme"**



**Pic. 4 "Fused meme"**



**Pic. 5 "Phrasal meme"**



**Pic. 6 "Non-textual original meme"**

the possibility to understand that much time is required for changes. Word-combination “*I want*” reflects personal desire of the politician to change the situation for better.

This meme (Pic. 14) demonstrates the saying by Fraser Nelson who is a political British journalist and an editor of *The Spectator* magazine concerning Brexit. The United Kingdom held a referendum concerning its membership of the EU on the 23rd of June 2016. 51.89% of voters voted to leave the European Union. In fact, the UK left the EU on the 31st of January 2020 [10]. Nowadays the percentage 51.89% has slightly decreased. Fraser Nelson has used question “*Was I right to support Brexit? If this is ‘Global Britain’, I’m starting to wander*” that helps to form emotional marking as well as to engage internet-readers into

the process of consideration Brexit-related issues, its pros and cons. Another aspect which attracts attention is “*I’m starting to wander*” which demonstrates opinion of Fraser Nelson. Moreover, the saying shows that his author has already changed his views and wants others to do the same. “*Global Britain*” is used in brackets as if it is a metaphor and according to the opinion of the author – Britain is not global anymore. Conditional “*if this is ‘Global Britain’, I’m starting to wander*” demonstrates hesitation.

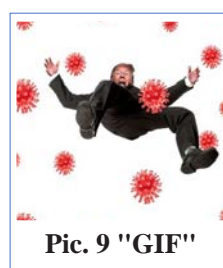
*The Independent* magazine has presented political meme which depicts manipulated photo with a plot based on the Korean serial “Squid game” released in 2021. But the author correlated it with the topic of COP26 and named it “Climate game”. The backstage shows the saying “*World leaders – stop playing climate games*”



Pic. 7 Pictorial Meme



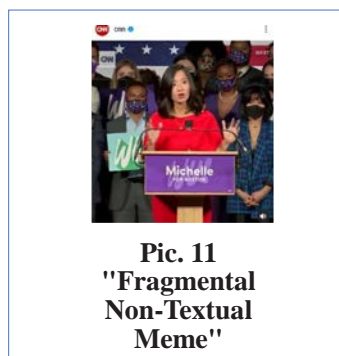
Pic. 8 "Fused Meme"



Pic. 9 "GIF"



"Fragmental Textual Meme"



Pic. 11 "Fragmental Non-Textual Meme"



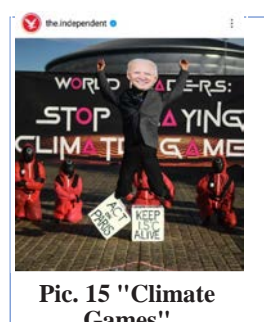
Pic. 12 "Covid-19"



Pic. 13 "COP26"



Pic. 14 "Brexit"



Pic. 15 "Climate Games"



Pic. 16 "Empty Shelves"



Pic. 16 "The Queen"

which is like a call for actions. The front position of meme is occupied by the person with a mask which depicts current President of the United States of America Joe Biden; thus, he is accepted by the author as a “world leader”. The boxes below the have much in common with dices, they say, “*act in Paris*” (talking about the Paris Agreement which legally binds international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at COP 21 in Paris, on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016 [11]) and “*keep 1.5 C° alive*” (talking about the decided increase of this indicator up to 1.8% [12]) and are addressed to politicians worldwide to save the nature and live around. “*Stop playing*” does not leave place for thinking and is used to exaggerate general marking of the meme.

Our next example demonstrates back side of Brexit which turned into empty shelves in stores and supermarkets. Tough situation with import and export, difficulties inside the countries of the United Kingdom related to Brexit, and decreased quantity of people who support exit from the EU has brought controversy to the kingdom. The author of the internet meme uses the passage: “*On the plus side the weights are in imperial*” that reflects all the difficulties inside the country. The meme illustrates the Prime Minister of the UK – Boris Johnson. That means that the author correlates the situation namely with this politician.

The queen of the United Kingdom did not omit the situation connected with COP26. This political meme (Pic. 16) presents an abstract from the speech “*We are doing this not for ourselves but for our children and children's children*”. The bright appeal to family and children, those people whom every individual wants to save and support. Another essential aspect is pronoun “*we*” which demonstrates the desire to cooperate to solve the situation. Elizabeth II uses word “*children*” twice to stress out the importance of the issues.

**Conclusions.** Thus, 2021 had numerous political issues to discuss, but the second part of the year is marked by two big events – UN Climate Change Conference and tough times related to Covid-19 which has not stop its spreading. Political discourse of the analyzed internet memes is verbalized using repetition, appeal to fears and opinions, self-presentation, emotionally marked lexicon, and appeal to family (children). Exaggeration and comparison are other two means of realizing political discourse. Nowadays political issues of the USA and the UK of the second year is almost identical – questions related to climate changes and to world pandemic of coronavirus. Political discourse is widely represented on the internet with the help of internet memes which are turned to inform the users concerning wide range of international affairs being popular variants of multimodal texts throughout digital interaction.

The prospect of this research is to figure out linguistical means which can implement political discourse throughout the internet.

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#### Заботнова М. Дискурсивні особливості інтернет-мемів

**Анотація.** Стаття присвячена дискурсивному аналізу політичних інтернет-мемів. У роботі викладені особливості політичних інтернет-мемів, визначені ключові аспекти, які відтворюють політичний дискурс за класифікацією, що була запропонована нідерландським вченим Теуном ван Дейком у своїй книзі «Дискурс і влада». Згаданий теоретичний матеріал було опрацьовано з наголосом на головних напрямках сучасної лінгвістики. Практичний матеріал було цілеспрямовано відібрано з офіційних британських сторінок новинних агенцій, які представлені в соціальній мережі Instagram, серед них: BBC News, Telegraph, The Independent і The Times. Усі зазначені ресурси мають офіційні представництва в соціальній мережі Instagram. Мета роботи повністю базується на процесі виявлення дискурсивних особливостей англійських політичних інтернет-мемів. Для досягнення поставленої мети було потрібно чітко ідентифікувати основну інформацію, яка стосується як самих політичних інтернет-мемів, так і способів, до яких вони вдаються, щоб реалізувати політичний дискурс в інтернет-середовищі. Крім того, стаття надає класифікацію дискурсу й політичних інтернет-мемів. Розвідка спирається на аналіз прагматичних, лінгвістичних особливостей та інтенцій журналіста, що притаманні політичним інтернет-мемам. Авторка виокремлює окремі вирази й словосполучення, які відбивають найвищий рівень емоційного маркування та відтворюють основні інтенції, які переслідують новинні агенції, що представлені в соціальній мережі Instagram. Пріоритетність надавалась політичним інтернет-мемам, котрі демонструють політичну ситуацію в Сполучених Штатах Америки й Об'єднаному Королівстві. У підсумках авторка виклала результати проведеного дослідження, які демонструють спільні й розбіжні риси, що проявляються в процесі вербалізації політичного дискурсу за допомогою політичних інтернет-мемів.

**Ключові слова:** політичний дискурс, інтернет-меми, соціальні мережі, порівняльний аналіз, дискурсивний аналіз, політичні меми.