

AMURCON 2020
International Scientific Conference**NATIONAL AND CULTURAL SPECIFICS OF HUMOUR IN
ENGLISH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMMES**Elena Yuryevna Antipova (a)*
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**Abstract**

The article is devoted to the study of stylistic means of creating humorous effect in British and American political and economic programmes, reflecting national and cultural humour characteristics. Nowadays people tend to be involved in economic situation; thus, the number of programmes on the topic is increasing both on TV and the Internet. Within cross-cultural communication, the economic sphere often overlaps the political one, so, the majority of programmes are of political and economical character. In the article there is an analysis of economists' and politicians' speeches in political and economic programmes on TV, radio, and YouTube-channels aimed to define stylistic means of creating humorous effect reflecting national and cultural British and American humour specifics (metaphor, understatement, hyperbole, self-irony, sarcasm). The ability to perceive humour and its specifics depend on the culture-bearers' mindset; that's why there may arise challenges concerning humour comprehension if it is created with stylistic means different in two cultures of popular laughter. The author comes to the conclusion that the discourse of British and American political and economic programmes does reflect national and cultural specifics of the nations. It manifests itself in the choice of stylistic means to create humorous effect (understatement, self-irony in British programmes; hyperbole and sarcasm in American ones; metaphor in both). The implementation of the means allows to realize the phatic, persuasive, relief, camouflaging, info-entertaining, purely entertaining, aesthetic functions of humour, helping to reach greater audience including both professionals and laymen in political and economic spheres.

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Keywords: Humour, humorous effect, stylistic means, national and cultural specifics

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1. Introduction

Humour is a complex effect existing in all the cultures. It may be viewed both as a separate phenomenon and as a “tool” for various purposes. Under proper conditions humour may help to draw attention and to stimulate communication (the phatic function), to persuade (the persuasive function), to calm down the audience when some unpleasant things are discussed (the relief function), and to express the speaker’s genuine attitude to something (the camouflaging function) (Malyuga, 2020). However, humour is especially interesting as an element of cultural heritage for its ability to accumulate, keep, and share knowledge and experience of many generations, to reflect cultural norms. As language and culture are interrelated, the language is one of the tools of keeping and transmitting cultural conceptualizations, emerging from the group-level cognition across time and space (Kianbakht, 2020). Thus, in the article special attention will be paid to the study of national and cultural specifics of humour in British and American political and economic programmes.

2. Problem Statement

Humour may be defined from various perspectives. In the present article we use definition of Freidina (2013) from her monograph “The Prosody of Public Speech”,

... Humour may be taken as a reflection of a special state of mind, the speaker’s peculiar way of treating the reality, facts, events. In the sounding text humour performs as a rhetorical device aimed to cause laughter and expressing the comic with various linguistic means, including the phonetic ones (p. 110).

Humour study is always connected with discourse study. Zelentsova (2018) notices that discourse is viewed as “a process of implementation of speech intentions of the speaker and their interpretation by listeners in a specific speech situation, in other words by communicative function of the language” (p. 779) According to the social theory, discourse is a social practice, establishing connection between two different objects (Ramanathan & Tan, 2015); so, it is necessary to study humorous effect immediately within its discourse implementation. Thompson and Mulac (1991) drew attention to the concept of discourse motivation of linguistic phenomena, stating that it is possible to identify distributive models only through everyday speech analysis.

Humour is one the most significant aspects of national identity. Despite its worldwide distribution, it can’t be called universal. The sense of humour is an inborn feature (Martin, 2007), but it is formed under the influence of micro- and macroenvironment, depending on the recipients’ national and cultural peculiarities. As a result, one and the same joke is “killing” in one country and strange in the other. Stankic (2017) stresses that the way how people use humour not only shows their ability “to play with the language” but also lets to learn about communicative norms and style. The diversity of cultural elements, notably the means of creating humorous effect, proves the relevance of linguacultural study of humour.

Nowadays people are involved in local and global economic situations, thus, the number of programmes on the topic is increasing both on TV and the Internet. Within cross-cultural communication,

the economic sphere often overlaps the political one, so, the majority of programmes are of political and economical character. The important social practices and relations frequently become joke targets (Shilikhina, 2013). Moreover, the participants of the programmes often use humour to attract the audience including both professional economists and politicians and laymen. Political and economic texts are source-culture oriented, and they vividly represent the national and cultural specifics. Consequently, the linguacultural approach to study of humour allows to reveal linguacultural similarities and differences which in their turn are essential for building international contacts.

3. Research Questions

Laughter as the implementation of communicative intentions requires a consciously active perception on the part of the audience that should see what's behind the means of creating humorous effect (Shcheglova & Vyrovtsseva, 2020). The ability to perceive humour and its specifics depend on the culture-bearers' mindset. As a rule, funny situations are treated identically well by different nationalities but there may arise challenges concerning humour comprehension if it is created with stylistic means different in two cultures. It may happen even with those speaking similar language (British and American humour, for example). So, we are conducting a research on stylistic means of creating humorous effect in British and American political and economic programmes, reflecting national and cultural peculiarities of national humour.

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, the aim of the research is to study the influence of macroenvironment on humour in British and American political and economic programmes. The tasks of the research are to single out stylistic means of creating humorous effect, similar and different in British and American political and economic programmes, to specify the functions of humour they help to realize, and to work out how they reflect national and cultural peculiarities of humour.

5. Research Methods

The tasks of the article determine the choice of the continuous sampling method, the descriptive and discourse analysis as the main methods to conduct the research.

We study the means of creating humorous effect in political and economic programmes and their national and cultural specifics on the basis of British and American political and economic TV programmes (BBC HARDTalk, the interviews with economists on BNN Bloomberg), the script of interview on economic issues with Donald Trump dated 03/06/2020 during Brian Kilmeade Show on Fox News Radio, the programmes on YouTube-channels of British and American political and economic periodicals Financial Times, MoneyWeek, and Yahoo Finance.

6. Findings

National and cultural specifics of British and American humour reveals itself mainly in stylistic means of creating humorous effect used by the participants of political and economic programmes. On account of the conducted research **metaphor** was distinguished as one of the most frequently used means of creating humorous effect both in British and American political and economic programmes. The mentioned device helps not only to enrich speech and make it clearer for laymen but also to include humour. For example:

1) Financial Times editor Chris Giles comments upon the Great Britain's decision to leave the EU, "The EU withdrawal bill still has to make its way through Parliament and clear a lot of hurdles before *anything* is set on stone." Before, he observes possible Brexit consequences. As they are mostly pessimistic, Mr Giles calms the viewers down, explaining that there are many factors the bill should pass through to be adopted and there are no guarantees it will happen. So, the relief function of humour is realized in such a way;

2) On BNN Bloomberg American economist Nouriel Roubini speculates on the ways of economic recovery after the lockdown, "Essentially, my view is that it's gonna be a U... So, you spend less, you save more, you do less tax, there will be a global investment slump, will be a global savings glut. That's a recipe for very anemic recovery of the US, of Canada, of the global economy." As the economic challenges are caused by the accident in public health sphere, the metaphor "a recipe for very anemic recovery" is relevant. The aesthetic function of humour is realized for the fresh image, and thus the phrase causes smile.

6.1. Understatement and Hyperbole

The found differences in the choice of means of creating humorous effect proceed from the both nations' humour character. Englishmen are believed to be the nation who can't tell jokes all over the world. It is difficult to see English humour because it bears an implicit character. A joke may be camouflaged by a typical phrase; so, as Kate Fox writes in "Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour", the British are "joking but not joking, caring but not caring, serious but not serious" (Fox, 2004). English mindset presupposes self-control, so, they prefer jokes based on **understatement** when the speaker is likely to underestimate the situation (mostly a problematic one) but in fact s(he) knows how serious it is. For example, economist Raghuram Rajan, talking to Stephen Sackur during BBC HARDTalk, comments on the forced lockdown, "The US has issued three trillion dollars worth of debt this year, and you know, a trillion here, a trillion there becomes real money very-very quickly." As trillion dollars is a huge sum already, the economist's remark that the money spent can become "real money very-very quickly" makes the viewers smile. The understatement helps to realize the persuasive function of humour (Englishmen tend to perceive the information presented in a reserved manner better) and also info-entertaining and relief function (humour is added to real unpleasant economic statistics to help the recipient take it easier).

In American humour the opposite tendency of **hyperbole** is observed. In political and economic programmes intentional exaggeration may be reached with the help of other stylistic devices. So, in Donald Trump's answer to Brian Kilmeade during Brian Kilmeade Show on Fox News Radio the effect is created by lexical repetition, "«... We had the best economy ever. We had the best numbers for African-American

on employment and unemployment in history. Best homeownership - best everything. We had the best numbers in everything - not only African-American, but the African-American numbers were great.” The American President dwells on the state of the economy before COVID-19. He does exaggerate saying “best everything”. As Mr Trump doesn’t use hyperbole intentionally to create humorous effect, here is an example of the purely entertaining, not persuasive, function of humour. The listener understands that not everything was successful, so, the repetition of one and the same word in each sentence of quite a short text amuses him or her.

6.2. Irony and Sarcasm

The British sense of humour is responsive to **irony**, especially **self-irony**. The device is most likely to be a way for the British to hide their feelings and emotions. The major topics for telling jokes are their own image, personal problems and achievements, professional duties, conservative way of life. Self-irony creates humorous effect in British economist Roger Bootle’s dialogue with Merryn Somerset Webb, MoneyWeek editor, when he describes the Britain joining the EU, “The European Union was very successful which is the real reason why Britain joined those countries from the late 50s into the 60s – early 70s. It was growing very fast and we thought this was a miracle economic era and we better pitch ourselves to that wagon. Then, as soon as we joined, funny enough, the relative growth performance started to deteriorate.” The scientist jokes delicately, making a link between the fact of British joining the Union and the crisis of the latter and meaning that they were late to join the flourishing association. The self-irony, being a typical feature of British culture of popular laughter, appeals to Englishmen; the phatic function of humour is realized, facilitating its comprehension.

The Americans prefer to use not irony but **sarcasm** as a more explicit way of expressing emotions. Usually, sentences with sarcasm contain criticism and disapproval of something, though it looks like positive or neutral estimates. Like American economist and investor Charlie Munger shares his opinion with Andrew Serwer, Yahoo Finance editor, on Donald Trump’s role in current economic situation, “Well, I think, he deserves some credit but a lot of it just happened. [Economic cycle] and the decisions of his predators... predecessors.” A phonetic pun causes sarcasm as the words “predators” (expressing the speaker’s opinion towards the authorities who were before Mr Trump) and “predecessors” sound similarly. It is a bright example of the camouflaging function of humour. Using the two words in the same sentence and creating an image of a slip of tongue, Mr Munger establishes a basis for humorous effect. The Americans who love sharp comments on politics react with laughter, so, the phatic function of humour is realized.

7. Conclusion

Therefore, in the article we studied stylistic means of creating humorous effect in British and American political and economic programmes, reflecting national and cultural humour characteristics in these two cultures. We singled out metaphor as one of the most popular means that is present both in British and American culture of popular laughter. The current stylistic device is a typical feature of popular political and economic discourse as it simplifies the language of specialized programmes and makes them more

comprehensible for the laymen. As a means of creating humorous effect, metaphor facilitates realization of the aesthetic and relief functions of humour.

The central focus in the article was made on the means of creating humorous effect that are different in the two cultures. We singled out understatement and self-irony in British political and economic programmes. Englishmen tend to use these stylistic devices for their reserved character and wish to hide emotions, as well as due to the implicit character of humour. The implication of the mentioned means in political and economic programmes promoted realization of the phatic, persuasive, info-entertaining, and relief functions of humour. In American political and economic programmes the participants used hyperbole and sarcasm. Unlike with the British, the Americans are more relaxed, they aren't used to hiding emotions, and they express them actively. It explains their preferences in the stylistic devices. As for the functions of humour, phatic, purely entertaining, and camouflaging functions were realized.

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