

UDC 81'25

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(MIS)TRANSLATING IRONY: CHALLENGES OF RENDERING IRONIC STATEMENTS OF AMERICAN CONFRONTATIONAL POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN UKRAINIAN TRANSLATION

This research addresses the issue of translating irony in confrontational political discourse, focusing on American political texts and their Ukrainian translations. It aims to explore the challenges of rendering ironic statements and the implications they have for political translation. The study relies largely on the method of contrastive analysis of source texts produced by contemporary American politicians and their Ukrainian translations in order to identify the translation strategies and methods used to convey irony in the target texts, as well as to identify any recurring factors and challenges that translators must overcome in order to produce an equivalent translation. The qualitative analysis of the source texts revealed the main markers used to create an ironic effect in political texts. The results of the research have shown that prosodic and syntactic devices, despite being the most effective means of expressing irony in political discourse, generally pose few problems when translated into Ukrainian. The main challenges are posed primarily by stylistic devices such as metaphors, hyperboles, similes and puns, which are largely culturally specific and require in-depth extra-linguistic knowledge on the part of the translator.

Two main sources of translation errors were identified: misidentification and further misinterpretation of the ironic means in the source text, and the dependence of irony on the cultural context. The cases of changing the emotional load of the ironic statements in the translation were also observed, especially the use of stylistic intensification. The study highlights the importance of the translator's pragmatic and extralinguistic competence in recognizing and preserving the ambiguity of irony in the target text. By highlighting the challenges translators face and the importance of cultural context, the study contributes to more effective intercultural communication and a deeper understanding of political rhetoric. It emphasizes the crucial role of translators in preserving the pragmatic purpose and implications of irony, ultimately promoting a better understanding of confrontational political discourse in intercultural settings.

Key words: *irony, political discourse, confrontation strategy, translation strategy, pragmatic competence.*

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ТРУДНОЩІ ВІДТВОРЕННЯ ІРОНІЇ В УКРАЇНСЬКОМУ ПЕРЕКЛАДІ АМЕРИКАНСЬКОГО КОНФРОНТАЦІЙНОГО ПОЛІТИЧНОГО ДИСКУРСУ

Дослідження присвячене проблемі перекладу іронії в конфронтаційному політичному дискурсі і базується на матеріалі американських політичних текстів та їхніх українських перекладів. Автор мав на меті дослідити труднощі, з якими стикаються перекладачі при відтворенні іронічних висловлювань у конфронтаційному політичному дискурсі, та наслідки, які вони мають у перекладі. Дослідження значною мірою спирається на метод компаративного аналізу вихідних текстів сучасних американських політиків та їхніх українських перекладів з метою виокремлення перекладацьких стратегій та методів, що використовуються для передачі іронії в цільових текстах, а також встановлення труднощів, які перекладачі долають для створення еквівалентного перекладу. Якісний аналіз вихідних текстів дозволив виявити основні маркери, що використовуються для створення іронічного ефекту в політичних текстах. Результати дослідження показали, що, незважаючи на те, що просодичні та синтаксичні засоби вираження іронії в політичному дискурсі є найефективнішими, вони зазвичай не викликають особливих проблем при перекладі українською мовою. Найбільші труднощі виникають при відтворенні таких стилістичних засобів, як метафори, гіперболи, порівняння та каламбури, які є культурно зумовленими і вимагають від перекладача глибоких екстралінгвістичних знань.

Виявлено два основні джерела перекладацьких помилок: неправильна ідентифікація та подальша неправильна інтерпретація перекладачем іронічних засобів у вихідному тексті, а також залежність іронії від культурного контексту. Дослідження підкреслює важливість прагматичної та екстралінгвістичної компетенції перекладача

у розпізнаванні та збереженні багатозначності іронії в тексті перекладу. Спостерігалися також випадки зміни емоційного навантаження іронічних висловлювань, зокрема за рахунок використання стилістичної інтенсифікації. Дослідження сприяє ефективнішій міжкультурній комунікації та глибшому розумінню політичної риторики. Воно підкреслює вирішальну роль перекладачів у збереженні прагматичної мети та імплікацій іронії, що, зрештою, сприяє кращому розумінню конфронтаційного політичного дискурсу в міжкультурному середовищі.

Ключові слова: іронія, політичний дискурс, стратегія конфронтації, стратегія перекладу, прагматична компетенція.

Problem Statement. In the realm of language and communication, irony stands as a powerful rhetorical device, capable of conveying subtle nuances, criticizing authority, and evoking laughter. Its potency lies in its ability to subvert expectations, creating a layered and often thought-provoking discourse (Wilson, 2013). Ironic statements play a significant role in political discourse, particularly in confrontational contexts. With the rapid democratization of political communication at the modern stage of its development (Blank, 2013), one of the main features of the genre become its expressive and entertaining character. The extensive use of irony falls within this tendency and serves as a powerful rhetorical tool employed by politicians not only as a means of humor, but also with the aim of shaping narratives, manipulating the public thought, and engaging audience. In confrontational discourse, irony, with its capacity to present ideas indirectly or in a contradictory manner, allows politicians to implicitly mock or undermine the credibility of political opponents and their arguments, while maintaining a level of detachment from the opinions they are targeting.

While being a powerful means of confrontational discourse, ironic language often becomes a subject of misinterpretation or mistranslation which leads to global breakdowns in intercultural communication, especially in such a sensitive domain as politics. Thus, the accurate rendering of ironic statements becomes increasingly significant.

Analysis of research and publications on the topic. Various scholars have extensively analyzed irony as a linguistic phenomenon, exploring its nuances, functions, and implementation in diverse contexts (See, e.g. Crystal, 2018; Hutcheon, 1995; Attardo, 2000 etc). A number of translation studies scholars such as Baker, Hatim and Mason, Nekriach and Kamyansets, and Chakhachiro have also examined its implications in translation.

In this research, we adopt a classic Wilson's definition, understanding irony as a form of expression which is used «to state one thing while actually meaning the opposite» (Wilson, 2013: 1). It encompasses a wide range of linguistic expressions and situational nuances that deviate from straightforward communication, using markers

like questions, understatements, misrepresentation, euphemism, etc. (Hutcheon, 1995).

Regarding the problem of translating irony, scholars emphasize a couple of aspects that complicate the task of a translator. First, it involves a two-step process of recognition and reproduction (Honcharenko, 2013). According to Chakhachiro, accurate translation relies on the translator's ability to interpret and reformulate ironic expressions effectively (Chakhachiro, 2009). Recognizing irony in the source text is crucial, followed by conveying its dual layers of meaning in the target language while preserving the original impact.

It is essential to bear in mind that the outcome of the translation should allow readers to perceive the ambiguity present in the original ironic message. Crafting a text that lacks the ambiguity of the original can be considered a mistake. Mistakes can occur as a consequence of overused literal forms of translation, erroneous interpretation of the source text, or lack of awareness of the principles of translation (Hejwowski, 2006: 125-126). The translation process should aim to effectively convey the layered meanings of irony, ensuring that readers can grasp both the surface-level and underlying implications present in the original text.

Furthermore, translating irony is further complicated by its reliance on cultural context (Kamyansets and Nekriach, 2010: 16). Irony is often deeply rooted in specific cultural norms, values, and references, making it challenging to transfer its full impact to another cultural setting. As with expressions heavily tied to a particular cultural background, the nuances of irony may not fully resonate with audiences in a different culture.

Traditional methods of reproducing irony include literal translation with minor adjustments, antonymic translation, cultural or situational substitutions, and translation commentary (Yashuk, 2012). However, some authors emphasize the need for an individualized approach to translating irony in each case (Hejwowski, 2006).

The relevance of the research lies in addressing a notable gap in the field of translation studies concerning the handling of irony in political discourse, particularly in confrontational contexts. While translation scholars have shown significant interest in exploring irony's nuances and challenges in literary translation, the application of these findings to political discourse has been largely overlooked.

Thus, **this research aims** to explore the challenges faced in rendering ironic statements in confrontational political discourse and their implications. **The research objectives** include: to single out the most common markers of creating an ironic effect in American confrontational political discourse; to analyze the translation strategies used to convey ironic statements into Ukrainian; to identify the factors that lead to mistranslating irony in the Ukrainian translation of American political discourse.

The materials. The research draws upon a collection of texts from American political discourse (source language texts) and their corresponding translations into Ukrainian (target language texts). The source language corpus comprises excerpts from recent public speeches, addresses, and debates and other genres delivered by prominent US political figures (e.g., Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton etc.) over the past decade (2016–2023). In total, there are 31 samples of confrontational rhetoric, with over 60 units of irony being analyzed in the study.

Methodology. The study employed a method of qualitative analysis to identify main linguistic and stylistic means of creating ironic effect in the source texts. The comparative method was used to single out the translation strategies and methods used to convey irony in the target texts, as well as to establish any recurrent factors and patterns, that influence the choice of translator's techniques while dealing with such texts. Given the importance of translator's interpretation and reformulation of ironic statements, we also drew largely on the functional-pragmatic approach to translation, which emphasizes the importance of context and communicative function in translation of political discourse.

By integrating these methodologies, the study aims to offer valuable insights into the intricacies of translating irony in confrontational political discourse. Understanding the translator's role in preserving the pragmatic purpose of irony while considering the context and communicative function of the political text will contribute to more effective cross-cultural communication and a deeper appreciation of the complexities of political rhetoric.

Discussions and results. The qualitative analyses of the texts that constituted our sample let us establish a ratio of the markers of irony that represent the mockery tactics of the confrontation strategy in American political discourse (Fig. 1).

The research findings reveal that the most effective means of expressing irony in political discourse are prosodic (40%) and syntactic devices (29,3%).

Prosodic cues, such as tone of voice, pitch, emphasis, sound strength, pronunciation rate, rhythmic organization, and distribution of pauses, play a significant role in conveying irony's emotional impact on the reader. These means give individual words and phrases a special emphasis, contributing to the creation of an ironic effect, as well as frequently serve as an supplementary means of creating ironic effect.

Among the stylistic devices employed to create an ironic effect in the analyzed sample, rhetorical questions and syntactic parallelism were common. By utilizing these devices strategically, politicians can deliver their messages with a touch of irony, making it a powerful tool in shaping public perceptions and opinions.

Additionally, metaphors, hyperboles, similes, and others stylistic devices (26,7%) contributed to the overall ironic tone of the message, with the most frequently utilized stylistic device for irony being a pun.

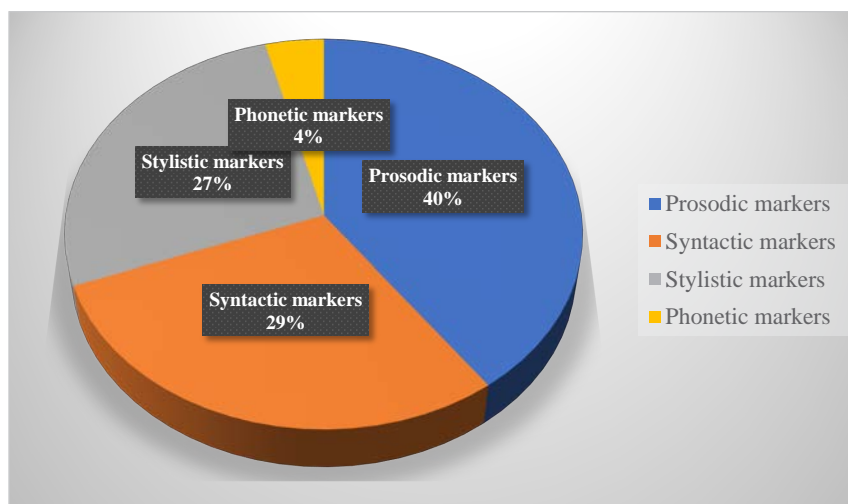


Fig. 1. The ratio of irony markers in American political discourse

On the other hand, the use of phonetic markers (4%), such as sound imitation (onomatopoeia), alliterations, assonance, and rhymes, proved to be less frequent in creating irony in political discourse compared to stylistic and lexical-grammatical means.

A comparative analysis of political texts with their Ukrainian translations has shown that the cases of building irony on prosodic or syntactic means mainly do not cause problems in translation, and therefore will not be analyzed in the paper. The translators are able to render both the literal and layered meanings of original message, given that they managed to correctly identify the irony and its pragmatic function in the source text.

Conversely, a considerable number of translation errors occur when attempting to reproduce irony that relies on cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and shared knowledge of communicators and the audience.

The following fragment is an interesting example of the use of irony built on the cultural reference: *«People look at the Statue of Liberty and they see a proud symbol... a beacon of hope for people around the world. Donald looks at the Statue of Liberty and sees a four. Maybe a five if she loses the torch and tablet and changes her hair.»* (Clinton, 2016) – *«Люди дивляться на статую Свободи і бачать величний символ... промінь надії для людей з усього світу. Дональд дивиться на статую Свободи і бачить четвірку. Можливо, п'ятірку, якщо вона вкине факел, планшет і змінить зачіску»*. Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton mocks her opponent Donald Trump, ironizing that he often objectifies women. According to Clinton, the Statue of Liberty is likened in Trump's eyes to a contestant in a beauty pageant who needs to be judged. To understand the irony inherent in this mockery, it is necessary to know the extra-linguistic context of facts from Trump's biography about his relationship with women, as well as the symbol that Statue of Liberty actualizes in the minds of lay Americans. Reproduction of the irony in this fragment is possible with the use of reproductive strategies. However, the translator needs to first recognize the irony and understand the joke. In case of the incorrect identification, there is a risk losing the expressive color in the translation. It is also necessary to correctly recreate it using the linguistic means of the target language. For instance, in the translation provided above, a translator managed to reproduce the irony in the sentence, however, they made a mistake while rendering the culture-bound reference: the lexeme «a *tablet*» refers to the flat, rectangular object held in the left hand of the statue with the date of adopting the United States

Declaration of Independence. Thus, such equivalents as «*скрижаль*», or «*табличка*» may be more appropriate in this context.

However, the majority of the mistakes identified in the sample were associated with the stages of recognition and later interpretation of the ironic language in the statement. The findings highlight the inherent challenges of effectively understanding and conveying irony, especially in the context of the highly sensitive genre of confrontational political discourse.

A skilled translator must be aware of these nuances to ensure that the translated text retains the desired effect of mockery. The reason for this, we believe, is that translators often fail to recognize irony in a text due to a lack of pragmatic and extralinguistic competence. We believe, that pragmatic competence enables the translator to correctly identify the ironic statement in the source text and then choose suitable linguistic and stylistic devices in the target language to maintain its strategic purpose. The inability of the translator to navigate through these pragmatic nuances in political translation often results in a distortion of the communicative purpose of the statement in translation.

The irony is also employed in the next example, where Hilary Clinton mocks Trump for his permanent questioning of the election fairness: *«You know, come to think of it, **it's amazing I'm up here after Donald. I didn't think he'd be okay with a peaceful transition of power.**»* (Clinton, 2016) – *«Знаєте, якщо подумати, **це добре, що я виступаю після Дональда. Я не думаю, що у нього було б все добре з мирним переходом влади.**»* In the statement Clinton utilizes parallel structures which compare Trump's readiness to admit a peaceful transition of power to his readiness to give her the floor after his speech at the event. The politician humorously points out the contrast between her expectation and the reality of him giving her the floor to speak. In this case, irony is used to convey a subtle, humorous commentary on Trump's behavior. The contrast between the anticipated outcome (Trump not allowing a peaceful transition) and the actual outcome (Trump allowing her to speak) creates a humorous and thought-provoking effect, thus emphasizing her enemy's drawbacks. However, the translator did not manage to capture the implied meaning of the ironic statement. The use of present tense instead of the past, as well as the incorrect choice of the situational equivalents for lexemes «*amazing*» and «*a transition of power*» have distorted the implied meaning. We proposed the following translation on the basis of aforementioned factors: *«Знаєте, якщо подумати, це просто неймовірно, що я стою тут після Дональда. Я не думала, що він погодиться на мирну передачу влади»*.

The next example demonstrates the shifts that occur at the stage of re-expression of irony by means of the target language, even if the speaker's communicative intention is correctly identified: «*I said it the other day, yes, she is a low-IQ individual, Maxine Waters. I said it the other day. High – I mean, honestly, she's somewhere in the mid-60s, I believe that.*» (Trump, 2018) – «Я сказав це днями, так, вона людина з низьким IQ, Максін Вотерс. Я сказав це днями. **Високий** ... я маю на увазі, чесно кажучи, **вона** **десь у середині 60-х**, я вважаю». In this statement, Donald Trump mocks Congresswoman Maxine Waters by using the ambiguity of the number «60» in the context. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as a reference to her age, implying that she is about 60 years old. On the other hand, the number could be interpreted as a hyperbolic reference to her IQ, implying that her intelligence level is extra low. The translator failed to reproduce the ambiguity, having rendered only the literal meaning of the statement, which resulted in the loss of the ironic tone in the translation. The words «у середині 60-х» are interpreted only as an indication of age, losing the implication of intelligence.

Irony can also be employed as stylistic device in political texts within the more serious contexts, serving a powerful means of actualizing confrontation by expressing dissent or criticism. The following fragment demonstrates the use of irony by US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken in the context of condemning Russia's actions in the war unleashed in Ukraine. The politician builds irony on the contrast between the Kremlin's initial claims of military might and its current state of affairs: «*The Kremlin often claimed it had the second-strongest military in the world, and many believed it. Today, many see Russia's military as the second-strongest in Ukraine.*» (Blinken, 2023) – «Кремль часто заявляв, що має другу за силою армію у світі, і багато хто в це вірив. Сьогодні багато хто вважає російську армію другою за міццю після України». The translator failed to recognize the irony, which led to shifts in translation and leveling of its expressive load. We believe that irony can be equivalently rendered by preserving the structure of the sentences, recreating the syntactic parallelism which is in its basis, and partly explicating it by means of addition: «Кремль часто стверджував, що має другу за силою армію у світі, і багато хто вірив у це. Сьогодні ж багато хто вважає її другою за силою армією на території України».

We have also encountered the cases of changing the emotional load of the ironic statements in translation. For example, in the following fragment

Donald Trump uses irony to express frustration or annoyance with Kim Jong-un's insults by mocking on him himself: «*Why would Kim Jong-un insult me by calling me "old," when I would never call him "short and fat"? Oh well, I try so hard to be his friend – and maybe someday that will happen!*» (Trump, 2017) – «Навіщо Кім Чен Ін ображає мене, називаючи "старим", адже я б ніколи не назвав його "товстим коротуном"? Ех, а я ж так намагаюся стати його другом – і, можливо, одного разу це станеться!». The irony is twofold: first, Trump claims he would never resort to name-calling, yet he ends up doing just that by referencing Kim Jong-un's physical attributes indirectly, and second, – despite Trump's assertion of trying hard to be Kim Jong-un's friend, the mocking undertone in the statement doesn't really reflect a sincere desire for friendship but rather a sarcastic remark about the strained relationship between the two leaders. The translator managed to reproduce the ironic layers in the target text. Moreover, the emotional load of the statement was intensified by using the expressive equivalent to the words «short and fat» together with the transformation of transposition – «товстий коротун». The added emotional load in the translation enhances the sarcastic and mocking tone of the statement. It highlights the speaker's attempt to portray himself as above such insults while subtly delivering a counter-insult to Kim Jong-un.

Ukrainian translators occasionally enhance the emotional intensity of the English language ironic statement to amplify the communicative impact of the message, considering the rhetorical purpose of the translated irony. In the following example, Donald Trump makes a derogatory remark about American actor and singer Bette Midler masking it under the guise of being politically correct: «*While Bette Midler is a rather unattractive woman, I refuse to say that because I always insist on being politically correct*» (Trump, 2021) – «Хоч Бетт Мідлер і повне страховисько, я все одно цього не скажу, тому що я завжди намагаюсь бути політично коректним». The translator decides to intensify the irony by applying the antonymic translation to rendering of this statement. In the source text irony is verbalized in the seemingly implicit form, which is even more mitigated with a hedge «rather» («rather unattractive woman»). The Ukrainian expression «повне страховисько» has strong negative expressive and evaluative meaning that is even more reinforced with the help of a diminutive suffix -ськ.

However, it's essential to note that decisions like this may also carry certain risks. Intensifying irony using strong language can lead to potential

misinterpretations or misunderstandings, particularly when cultural nuances are involved. The translator should consider the target audience's sensibilities and ensure that the intensified irony aligns with the intended message without crossing the boundaries of acceptability in the target political culture.

Conclusion. Rendering irony in political texts is a complex and crucial task that demands a deep understanding of both linguistic nuances and the cultural context in which the message operates. The ability to recognize irony, its intended aim and functions, as well as the underlying subtleties of

meaning is of paramount importance for translators. A lack of sensitivity to these aspects can lead to misinterpretations and distorted representations of the original message. Thus, translators must possess a high level of communicative and extralinguistic competence, allowing them to navigate the intricacies of cultural references, and political landscapes. Prospects for further research may include the comprehensive analysis of the translation strategies used for rendering other means of confrontation strategy in the English-Ukrainian translation of political texts.

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