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VERBAL AND PARAVERBAL CRITICISM: A DISCURSIVE STUDY OF GERMAN AND UKRAINIAN ELECTORAL SPEECHES

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Abstract

The article examines the role of verbal and paraverbal means in conveying critical evaluation, based upon electoral speeches of German and Ukrainian politicians. The paper contains an overview of the types, forms and functions of criticism in political discourse. The study highlights the linguistic and, in a narrower context, discursive contrasts detectable in German and Ukrainian political criticism. Furthermore, the kinetic means of highlighting critical statements in the electoral debates under analysis are specified.

Key words: co-speech gesture, kinetic means, political discourse, political criticism, Germany, Ukraine.

1. Introduction

The language of politics and ideology has dual nature, which is a prerequisite for democracy. This duality consists in the existence of the ruling party and the opposition, each expressing acceptance and criticism through a system of pro- and counter-arguments in their speeches (Diekmannshenke, 2002; Grünert, 1974; Girnth, 2002; Klein, 2016). One of the elements of this dual system is *evaluativity* (Prihodko, 2016; 2019), which is a prominent feature of criticism in political discourse and is related to the fact that voters have the right and want to critically evaluate all the abilities of a potential winner in the race, even if they already relate to the latter (Ananko, 2017, p. 128-137; Didenko, 2009, p. 63-70).

Depending on the political position of the speaker, positive and negative evaluations occupy different places in his/her speech. Representatives of the ruling elite are primarily inclined to a positive assessment of their own group and actions within the *insider-outsider* framework. The opposition, on the contrary, resorts to an ample use of negative evaluation, i.e. chooses criticism, denial and attack as its main strategies, while subordinating the positive to the negative (Nass, 1972, p. 153). *Criticism* is understood as an act of saying that something or someone is bad (Cambridge advanced learner's dictionary, 2008). According to Kamenskaya, *political criticism* is defined as a tool for manipulating the opponent's mind that is extensively used during electoral campaigns for the negative evaluation of the opponent's qualities (Kamenskaya, 2010, p. 13).

The **aim** of the article is to determine the role and function of verbal and kinetic means of criticizing the political opponent in the electoral speeches of Ukrainian and German politicians. The **object** of the study is German and Ukrainian electoral speeches. The **subject of analysis** in this paper is the verbal and paraverbal means of political criticism in the afore-mentioned electoral speeches. My special concern is analyzing the interaction of the verbal and kinetic means, such as head movements, hand/arm movements, mimics or co-gestures (Kita, van Gijn & van der Hulst, 1998) in critically assessing the political opponents at electoral debates. The study presupposes the following

objectives: (1) overview of the types, forms and functions of criticism in political discourse; (2) collection of the data and specification of the phases of the experiment; (3) identification and description of the conceptual differences between German and Ukrainian political criticism; (4) specification of the kinetic means of highlighting critical statements in the electoral debates of Ukrainian politicians Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskyi as well as German politicians Angela Merkel and Martin Schultz.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Criticism in the verbal dimension

Criticism as a form of political communication is based on the systemic, strategic and tactical levels (Slavova, 2016). At the systemic level, criticism is defined as a secondary reactive means of persuasion. At the strategic level, elements such as the situation, the status of the speaker, the type of the audience and the commitment to both physically present and non-present addressees (Woolard, 2007, p. 189). At the tactical level, the peculiarities of the functioning of criticism in live speech are determined (Anisimova, 2002, p. 36-37). It should be emphasized that the purpose of criticism is precisely the fixation and further correction of errors, shortcomings and violations. Thus, the main *strategies* of critical discourse are associated with (1) control, (2) evaluation and (3) information. The strategy of control in critical discourse is implemented through the tactics of establishing the compliance/non-compliance of the opponent's actions with the rules adopted in society or within a particular institution (Sheigal, 2004). At the same time, the mechanism of criticism begins to operate precisely when the category of discrepancy between the evaluative and normative system is actualized (Babyeva, 2003, p. 85). The evaluation strategy is implemented in the critical plane through the tactics of analyzing the available information and establishing its place on the evaluation scale in accordance with the values and stereotypes prevailing in the society. The information strategy provides tactics for reporting the results of controlling and critically evaluating the object as well as indicating the causes of the deficiencies (Varetska, 2019b).

The objectives of political communication, especially during electoral campaigns, presuppose two strategies of criticism – constructive and destructive (Bohart, 2001). The purpose of *constructive criticism* is to establish the status quo and improve cooperative understanding between political opponents. The addresser's constructive criticism is implemented through the tactics of (1) proclaiming one's opinion and political position; (2) indicating the specific details of the negatively perceived action of the object of criticism; (3) substantiating one's critical position; (4) providing examples based on a wide range of background knowledge of the linguistic personality of the politician under criticism (Slavova, 2014, p. 126), (5) pointing to the positive aspects of the opponent's actions, etc. The addresser of criticism speaks confidently, being an expert in the field criticized, and the critic does not interfere in the personal space of the person he/she criticizes, taking to task not the person themselves but his/ her opinions, words or actions. A tactical marker of constructive criticism is primarily the interest of the addresser of criticism in developing a new decision/approach to correct the error. Thus, constructive criticism sounds friendly, being usually expressed in the form of wishes and recommendations (Varetska, 2019a, p. 4).

Destructive criticism is formed by the conflicting strategies of aggression and manipulation which are aimed, on the one hand, at satisfying one's own emotional needs to chastise a political opponent, and, on the other hand, at indirectly coercing the latter to do what the addresser wants or to feel guilt and shame. The addresser's destructive criticism is implemented through the tactics of (1) positioning oneself as the "ultimate authority", whose statements cannot be questioned, (2) criticizing everything without referring to anything specific, (3) highlighting trifles, (4) humiliating and insulting the opponent. Destructive criticism is unfavorable, being implemented in the form of reproach, condemnation or defeat (Varetska, 2019b, p.67).

Criticism in political communication in Germany and Ukraine is characterized primarily by the conceptual differences in the attitude of Germans and Ukrainians to disapproval. The German-speaking culture is characterized by a focus on the content of the task and its successful implementation. Therefore, the pre-established form of the critical dialogue is the norm between politicians and other public figures, where neither/none of the communicators takes it personally. Furthermore, the German concept of *KRITIK* does not have such a negative connotation as in Ukrainian, because criticism is defined as a competent evaluation indicating shortcomings and analyzing them.

The German concept of *KRITIK* ranges from positively motivated (*konstruktiv/constructive, berechtigt/justified, handfest/firm, helfend, hilfreich/helpful, nützlich/useful, sachlich/factual*) through neutral, weak (*maßvoll/moderate, lau/lukewarm, zahm/tame*) to negatively motivated (*destruktiv/destructive, kleinlich/petty, herablassend/condescending, vernichtend/devastating, ätzend/caustic*) criticism. Criticism is also distinguished by its degree (*scharf/sharp, harsch/harsh, heftig/violent, hart/hard*) and extent (*breit, breit gefächert/broad*) (Grydyushko, 2019, p. 287).

In Ukrainian, the concept of CRITICISM (*Ukr. КРИТИКА*) is also associated with the meaning of evaluation of someone or something in order to identify and eliminate their defects or flaws, but it has an additional shade of negative judgment about something. The attributes of the Ukrainian concept of *КРИТИКА* range from positive, useful (*доброзичлива/friendly, ділова/business, конструктивна/constructive, аргументована/substantiated, здорова/healthy, підбадьорлива/encouraging, справедлива/fair, неупереджена/impartial*) through neutral (*помірна/moderate, слабка/weak, боязка/timid*) to negative (*гостра/sharp, уїдлива, дошкільна/caustic, нищівна/derogatory, розгромна/devastating, вбивча/murderous*) criticism (*ibid.*).

A differential marker of constructive criticism is the presence of certain suggestions for improvement in the evaluative commentary (Franz, 2000). German political discourse gives preference to the positively motivated form of criticism-persuasion, which is the basis of democratic speech and belongs to the arsenal of influence used by politicians, who can professionally criticize and persuade while at the same time accepting harsh criticism and responding to it (Fries, 1991, p. 7), for example: *Ger.* – "*Seit Union und SPD vorigen Freitag ihre Eckpunkte für den Klimaschutz präsentiert haben, stehen die Pläne in der Kritik. Zunächst von Wissenschaftlern und Umweltschützern, im Bundestag dann durch die komplette Opposition. – Diese Kritik, sagt Brinkhaus, "nehmen wir sehr ernst"* (Im Ernst). *Eng.* – "Since CDU and SPD presented their key points for climate protection last Friday, the plans have been criticized. First by scientists and environmentalists, then in the Bundestag by the entire opposition. – **We take this criticism very seriously**, says Brinkhaus" (URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/cdu-spd-klimaprogramm-opposition-kritik-1.4617808>). In this case, the personal negative attitude to the actions of the opponent is separated from his personality.

On the contrary, in Ukrainian political discourse, criticism in the form of negative judgment is the basis of *provocation*, which is not focused on analyzing a mistake in the actions of the opponent, but pursues the goal of causing maximum harm to the political opponent. Furthermore, a differential feature of Ukrainian politicians' critical strategizing is the active use of pejoratives which cannot be found in German political discourse even in the harshest criticism (Grydyushko, 2019, p. 290).

A historical feature of criticism in German political discourse is the use of the so-called *NS*-lexicon or *NS*-comparisons (where *NS* means *National Socialism*) to negatively assess the actions of a political opponent, for example, comparisons with infamous Nazi criminals (*Hitler, Goebbels*), methods (*Gestapo, Anschluss*), institutions (*SA, SS, Wehrmacht*), crimes (*Konzentrationslager, Euthanasie*) or territorial claims (*Großdeutschland*) (Klein, 1989, p. 270). Such "Nazi reproaches" are used not only as legitimate "quotation words" with a warning or critical interpretation of the dark past, but may also be expressed intentionally to attract media attention and harshly criticize or even discredit a political opponent – his/her position, program or actions. For example, in the televised

debates on May 12, 1985 Willie Brandt criticized CDU Secretary General Heiner Geisler for his statement: *Ger.* – "*der Pazifismus der 1930er Jahre hat Auschwitz erst möglich gemacht*", *Eng.* – "this pacifism of the 1930s made **Auschwitz** possible", called him *Ger.* – "*Ein Hetzer ist er seit Goebbels der schlimmste Hetzer in diesem Land*", *Eng.* – "the worst agitator in our country **since Goebbels**" (URL: <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/zum-tode-von-heiner-geissler-der-general-der-seiner-zeit-voraus-war-1.3659375-2>).

2.2. Criticism in the paraverbal dimension

Paraverbally, criticism commonly manifests itself through gestures and mimics. A gesture is an action or movement of the body through which one individual signals other individuals about his/her presence, his/her intentions regarding objects (Mueller, 1998). The gesture representation of certain utterances is functionally deterministic, and the relationship between gesture and speech is twofold. Ensuring, on the one hand, the self-regulation of the communicative act, emphasizing gestures accompany speech while simultaneously performing a communicative function (Kendon, 2004). Three main classes of gestures can be distinguished: 1) gestures of independent lexical value, capable of conveying meaning regardless of the verbal context, 2) gestures accompanying specific speech or other communication fragments, and 3) gestures controlling the communicative process, i.e. establishing, maintaining and terminating communication (Kreidlin, 2005).

3. Research data and methodology

3.1 Corpus

The main corpus of linguistic material consists of videos featuring political speeches in German (A. Merkel, M. Schulz) and Ukrainian (V. Zelenskyi, P. Poroshenko), totalling five hours for each language. Through the identification experiment, *critical discourse fragments* of 500 units for German and Ukrainian were extracted from the said corpus, using the continuous sampling method. Overall, 340 relevant co-speech gestures were identified in these fragments and described according to the following parameters: (1) type of co-speech gesture, (2) hand shape, (3) palm orientation, (4) movement direction, (5) movement trajectory.

3.2 Methods

This study relies primarily on the methods of (1) perceptual experiment, which includes an auditive and visual perception of the recipient and allows localizing criticism in a political speech, its form and content, involving native German and Ukrainian speakers, as well as (2) computational analysis of 100 minutes of video clips, using the video processing software Sound Forge 9.0. The sound footage extracted from the video is processed in PRAAT 5.04.43 (P. Boersma, D. Weenink).

The co-speech gestures in the critical discourse fragments of German and Ukrainian politicians were annotated in the ELAN software package (Nijmegen: Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics), which allowed visualizing all the elements of the analysis of the critical discourse fragment as a single verbal-gesture complex. All the English-language designations and abbreviations of the annotation levels of the critical discourse fragments in German and Ukrainian political discourse are proposed by the author. The types and methods of the annotation of hand shapes, palm position, gesture movement directions and their trajectory were borrowed from (Karpinski, 2015, p. 163).

4. Results and Discussion

To illustrate the verbal means of criticism in German and Ukrainian political discourse let us consider two critical discourse fragments from the electoral debates of Ukrainian politicians Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskyi (Zelenskyi and Poroshenko, 2019) and German politicians Angela Merkel and Martin Schultz (Merkel and Schultz, 2017), which were singled out by the auditors during

the identification experiment and labelled as "self-criticism", i.e. a special kind of explicit criticism when the addresser and the addressee of criticism is the same person reflecting on his/her own mistakes and admitting them, for example:

Zelenskiy to Poroshenko:

Ukr. – "І в чому **головна помилка** ... я вам скажу ... ми з вами голосували за одного **Порошенка**, а обрали іншого... це правда" (1) **Eng.** – And what is the **main mistake**... I will tell you... we voted for one Poroshenko, but elected another... it's true (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9V6WC-eqZI>).

Schultz to Merkel:

Ger. – "...denn dass wir den **Fehler** gemacht haben unsere europäischen Nachbarn **nicht vorher einzubeziehen sondern sie hinterher vor vollendete Tatsachen zu stellen**" (2) **Eng.** – "we made a **mistake** by not involving our European neighbours **in advance** but presenting them with a fait accompli" (URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDXEjSN0MOY>).

While explaining to those present at the debate where it was that Zelenskiy and the Ukrainian people made a mistake by trusting Poroshenko during the previous election ("I will explain where we made a mistake... a big mistake"), Zelenskiy accompanies the following parts of his speech with right-hand gestures, namely (1) "**main mistake**" (right hand gesture (One Hand, Right Hand Used) with the hand formed into a fist with the index finger (One Finger) directed upward (Up), the trajectory of the gesture is an arc (Arc) and (2) object of criticism – "Poroshenko" (right hand gesture (One Hand, Right Hand Used) with an open palm (Open Palm), the outer side of which is turned inward (Outside Up) – from himself to the object of criticism (Away From Self), the trajectory of the gesture is an arc (Arc) (see. Fig. 1).

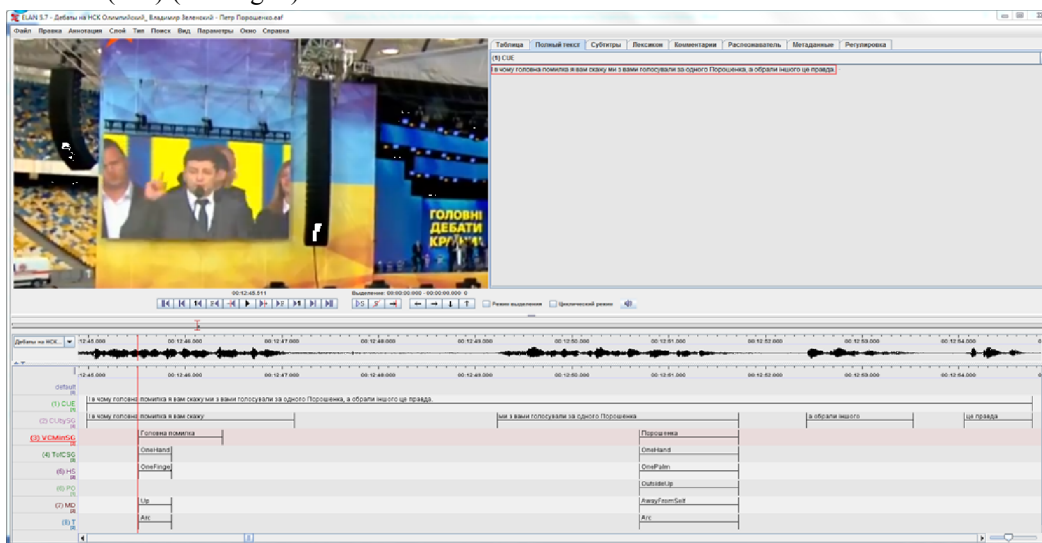


Figure 1. Annotation of the critical discourse fragment and the included co-speech gestures of V. Zelenskiy at the debate with P. Poroshenko (processed with the help of ELAN)

In turn, Martin Schultz criticizes Angela Merkel for the untimely involvement of European neighbours in the problems with migrants in a similar way: he admits his mistake along with other politicians, while he emphasizes the following sections of the critical discourse fragment with nods and right hand gestures: (1) "**Fehler/mistake**" (head shake nod) and (2) "**nicht vorher/in advance**" (right hand gesture (One Hand, Right Hand Used) with an open palm (Open Palm), the outer side of which is turned inward (Inside), movement direction – towards himself (Towards Self), the trajectory of the gesture is an arc (Arc) (see Fig. 2.).

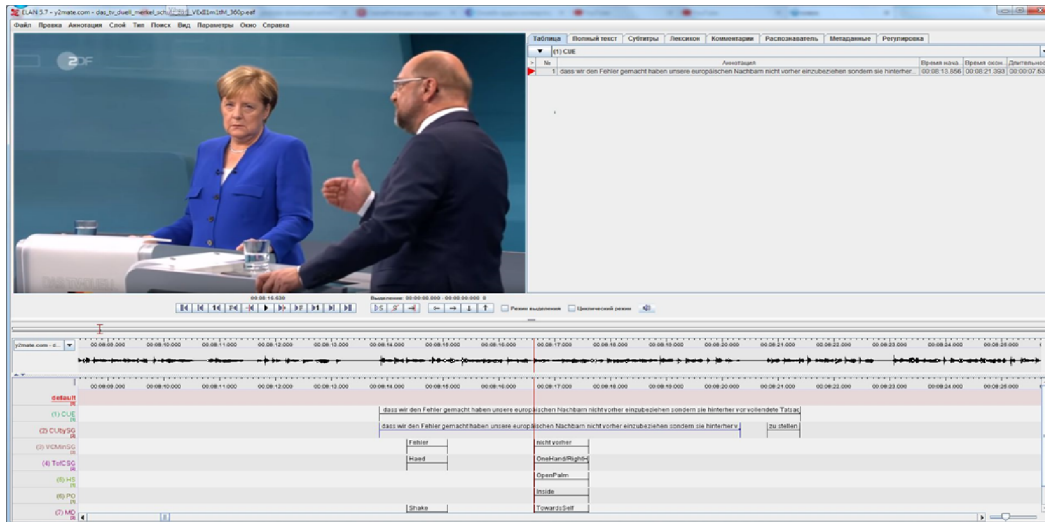


Figure 2. Annotation of the critical discourse fragment and the included co-speech gestures of M. Schultz at the debate with A. Merkel (processed with the help of ELAN)

Thus, the perceptual experiment and the computational analysis of the co-speech gestures of criticism in the electoral debates of Ukrainian politicians Poroshenko and Zelenskyi as well as German politicians Merkel and Schultz allow interesting observations. As we can see, the gestural accentuation in the critical discourse fragment is made on semantically independent units – the key words of criticism (**Ukr.** – *неправильно, хибно, помилка*, **Eng.** – *incorrect, erroneous, mistake*; **Ger.** *Fehler, falsch, unrichtig*, **Eng.** – *mistake, wrong, incorrect*) and the proper name that denotes the object of criticism (Poroshenko). At the same time, we can also identify words that are semantically dependent, which are not purely markers of criticism, but they indicate the cause of the error (combination of a negative pronoun and an adverb, as in **Ger.** *nicht vorher*, **Eng.** *in advance*). This demonstrates the independence of gesture emphasis from the morphological nature of the key lexical items of criticism, but we observe the use of gestures by politicians who point at the object of criticism, usually with the right hand holding up the index finger or showing an open palm.

Political communication is characterized by accentuating co-speech gestures that represent movements of the body, especially the arms/hands, through which the speaker explains, complements his/her words, highlights the key points, emphasizes or amplifies a verbal utterance. Gestures make the speaker more "visible", contributing to his/her image. They are perceived by the addressee as a 'kinematic' form of verbal messages through which the addresser exercises his/her influence on his/her opponents, encouraging them to perform actions aimed at achieving a particular purpose (Petlyuchenko and Artiukhova, 2015).

The critical utterances in both languages are accompanied by the co-speech gestures of the criticism addresser, which are focused on the content of the critical utterance and reinforce the explicit (direct/indirect) verbal markers of criticism by means of synchronizing with the main stressed syllables (Varetska, 2019a). Such gestures include movements of the right or left hand clenched as a fist, holding up the index finger, and holding the palm wide open. Such movements are usually impulsive in nature; they are directed towards the addressee of criticism and may exceed the shoulder line of the addressee of criticism.

Based on the audiovisual analysis of the electoral debates of German (Merkel and Schultz, 2017) and Ukrainian (Zelenskyi and Poroshenko, 2019) politicians, the paper calculates the following criticism-accompanying co-speech gestures that are common to both groups of the politicians:

1) hand/arm movements (right, left, both), 2) head movements (up-down, left-right, towards the opponent), 3) body movements (forward/backward tilts, turns towards the opponent), 4) mimic movements (smile), 4) proxemics (departing from the stand, approaching the opponent, jumping up and down). The frequency of these co-speech gestures is given in Table 1:

Co-speech gestures	Angela Merkel	Martin Schultz	Petro Poroshenko	Volodymyr Zelenskyi
head movements	74.7%	35.5%	6.9%	10.3%
hand/arm movements	14.8%	51.3%	70.3%	62.8%
body movements	4.2%	9.9%	20.8%	16.6%
mimics	6.3%	3.3%	0%	7.7%
proxemics	0%	0%	2%	2.6%

Table 1. The frequency of co-speech gestures in electoral debates of German and Ukrainian politicians

In the electoral debates, the German and Ukrainian politicians use different co-speech gestures involving the left/right hand. For instance, when pointing at the object of criticism, Ukrainian politicians actively use impulsive right or left hand gestures with a fist+index finger configuration (71.2%), less often an open palm (28.8%), while German politicians tend to point at the opponent with light nods/head turns (86.6%) or arched movements of one hand with an open palm (13.4%). This suggests that the gestures used by the Ukrainian politicians to support critical utterances are more impulsive, with the main gesture pointing at the object of criticism, that is, the opponent. With the German politicians, the gestures of criticism are actually focused on the topics that are being discussed and criticized, and characterize these politicians as more polite and restrained.

4. Conclusions

Thus, the study of verbal and paraverbal criticism in German and Ukrainian electoral speeches reveals that in electoral debates Ukrainian politicians are more emotional and support their critical rhetoric with impulsive co-speech gestures using one or both hands, nods, body movements, and pointing their index finger directly at their opponent. At the same time, German politicians display a calmer paraverbal behaviour, attaching more importance to the verbal component of their criticism.

Such differences can be explained by the cultural traditions of political criticism in Germany and Ukraine: they depend on the mental and cultural characteristics of politicians, their motivational guidelines for critical rhetoric as well as on the personal rhetorical competence of the speaker, the degree of eloquence of his/her speech, etc. For instance, in German political discourse, preference is given to a positively motivated constructive form of criticism, which belongs to the arsenal of influence used by politicians who are able to professionally criticize, accept criticism and respond to it. The marker of constructive criticism is the presence of any suggestions for improvement in the critical comment. In Ukrainian political discourse, on the contrary, the most typical way of critical expression is criticism in the form of a negative judgment, which, unlike in German political discourse, is focused not on the analysis of errors in the opponent's actions, but on a negative assessment of his/her personality. The discursive contrasts of criticism as a form of electoral communication in Germany and Ukraine are determined at both the strategic (constructiveness vs. destructiveness) and tactical (persuasion vs. provocation) levels.

The comparison of verbal and paraverbal means of expression/formalization of criticism in German-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking political discourses is based on the status of the speaker, type of audience, nature of criticism, background knowledge and linguistic personality, which may constitute the object of future studies of political criticism in non-closely related languages.

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Résumé

The article represents a discursive study of verbal and paraverbal means of conveying critical assessment based on electoral speeches of German and Ukrainian politicians. The paper contains an overview of the types, forms and functions of criticism in political discourse. The study highlights the linguistic and, in a narrower context, discursive contrasts detectable in German and Ukrainian political criticism. Furthermore, the kinetic means of highlighting critical statements in the electoral debates under analysis are specified. The study corpus includes overall 10 hours of the video featuring electoral speeches in German (A. Merkel and M. Schulz) and Ukrainian (V. Zelenskyi and P. Poroshenko). Through the identification experiment, 500 critical discourse fragments were singled out in German and Ukrainian, containing 340 relevant co-speech gestures supporting critical utterances in the two languages; they were analyzed in terms of the types of co-speech gesture, hand shape, palm orientation, movement direction, and movement trajectory. The study reveals that the Ukrainian politicians are more emotional in electoral debates and support their critical assessments with impulsive co-speech gestures using one or both hands, nods, body movements and pointing the index finger directly at their opponent. At the same time, the German politicians display a calmer paraverbal behaviour, attaching more importance to the verbal component of the critical assessment. Such differences can be explained by the cultural traditions of political criticism in Germany and Ukraine: they depend on the mental and cultural characteristics of politicians, their motivational guidelines for critical rhetoric as well as on the personal rhetorical competence of the speaker, the degree of eloquence of his/her speech, etc.

Key words: co-speech gestures, kinetic means, political discourse, political criticism, Germany, Ukraine.

Анотація

У статті представлено дослідження вербальних і паравербальних засобів критичної оцінки на матеріалі передвиборчих промов німецьких та українських політиків. Описано види, форми і функції критики в політичному дискурсі. Дослідження презентує мовні та, у більш вузькому контексті, дискурсивні контрасти, які виявлені в німецькій та українській політичній критиці. Крім того, у передвиборчих дебатах проаналізовано кінетичні засоби, які супроводжують критичні твердження. Мовний корпус містить відеозаписи з політичними промовами німецькою (А. Меркель, М. Шульц) та українською (В. Зеленський, П. Порошенко) мовами. У результаті ідентифікаційного експерименту було виокремлено 500 фрагментів критичного дискурсу німецькою та українською мовами, що містять 340 мовленневосупроводжувальних рухів, які супроводжували критичні висловлювання двома мовами й були проаналізовані з урахуванням типу руху, форми руки, форми долоні, напрямку та траєкторії руху. Дослідження показало, що українські політики є більш емоційними в передвиборчих дебатах і супроводжують свої критичні оцінки імпульсивними рухами однієї чи обох рук, голови, тіла, звертаючи вказівний палець прямо на свого опонента. Водночас німецькі політики використовують спокійніший паравербальний апарат і приділяють більшу увагу вербальному складнику критичної оцінки. Такі відмінності можна пояснити культурними традиціями політичної критики в Німеччині

та в Україні, які залежать від ментальних і культурних особливостей політиків, мотиваційних настанов щодо критичної риторики, а також від особистої риторичної компетентності оратора, ступеня красномовності його / її промов тощо.

Ключові слова: мовленнєвосупроводжувальні рухи, кінетичні засоби, політичний дискурс, політична критика, Німеччина, Україна.

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