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## MENTAL SPACES AS A WAY OF MEMES' IMPLEMENTATION IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

*The article is devoted to the mental spaces as a way of memes' implementation in political discourse. It highlights the specificity of analyzing mental spaces as well as the contextual component they represent in the process of verbalizing Internet-memes in political discourse. The article is aimed at distinguishing main principles of forming mental spaces in memes with contextual component in political discourse basing on the presidential elections in the United States of America 2020. The urgency of the article is formed due to the challenges which may arise in the process of interpreting Internet-memes which are involved into verbalization of political discourse. The author points out the core aspects of mental spaces, Internet-memes and political discourse including detailed analyzes of the latest researches in the mentioned fields. To achieve the aim of the article there have been distinguished the correlations between mental spaces and political discourse, the peculiarities of contextual component of the Internet-memes and direct interactions between mental spaces as well as Internet-memes. The author highlights six types of mental spaces. The article presents a number of practical examples of Internet-memes with contextual component which illustrates the presidential elections in the United States of America 2020 and is devoted to the confrontation between the representative from the Democratic Party Joe Biden and current President of the United States of America Donald Trump from the Republican Party. All the practical material has been purposefully selected from official news agencies presented in social network such as Instagram: BBC, Fox News, ABC, and CBS. Additional attention has been paid to comparison of posted in the mentioned resources Internet-memes to distinguish the difference between contextual components chosen to be presented by different news agencies. In conclusion the author has stressed on the possibility of contextual component of Internet-memes to form the mental spaces.*

**Key words:** *Internet-memes, mental spaces, political discourse, presidential elections 2020, contextual component, news agencies.*

**Description of the problem.** The number of means which are used to cooperate on the Internet constantly increases. This area of communication eases the process not just of individuals' chatting, but of political interaction. People throughout the Internet learn about the politicians and their campaigns from the information gained from cyberspace, mainly from numerous official sites as well as from ordinary Internet-users. The core means of this information presentation are memes which may have contextual component to inform the worldwide community. This contextual component of Internet-memes which implement the political discourse may be interpreted as mental spaces.

**The urgency** of the article is formed due to the challenges which may arise in the process of interpreting Internet-memes which are involved into verbalization of political discourse.

**The analyses of recent researches on the topic.** Numerous scientists have devoted their works to Internet-memes (R. Dawkins [9], P. Davison [8], etc.), political discourse (T. van Dijk [16], A. Kulkarni [14],

etc.), and mental spaces (G. Fauconnier [14], Todd Oakley and Anders Hougaard [15], etc.).

The concept "mental spaces" has been firstly introduced by G. Fauconnier in 1985 in his book "Mental Spaces". The scientist pointed out that "mental spaces – the connections linking them, the linguistic, pragmatic, and cultural strategies for constructing them – are a significant part of what is happening backstage, behind the scenes, in the cognitive background of everyday speaking and commonsense reasoning" [12, p. 19]. Later in 2008 Todd Oakley and Anders Hougaard in their work "Mental Spaces in Discourse and Interaction" highlighted that "mental spaces represent distinct physical, social, and/or introspective scenes and situations where attention is focused on a few salient elements therein" [15, p. 29]. The researchers have distinguished that mental spaces are essential part of on-going discourse.

Mental spaces, which are formally depicted as well-ordered factors with the elements as well as correlations among them, are opened to be added

with new elements as well as correlations relatively, they help to organize the whole process of mental building of political discourse. From the contextual point of view mental spaces are the model of discourse understanding which are created, clarified and are constantly changed in the process of communication on the Internet. Mental spaces are not stable and they are not to keep the sequence namely that reflects the specificity of human communication and allows to modulate the process of language understanding in more adequate way. G. Fauconnier and M. Turner [11] stressed on the fact that communication involves numerous aspects not just linguistic means – everything is connected and to get to the core of each utterance (oral or written) it is quite important to see and comprehend all the levels and features which may influence the meaning and understanding of this meaning. Thus, mental spaces are correlated with discourse due to the multitude of aspects they have in common in the process of implementing interaction.

Mental spaces are fundamental means of modern political discourse. In the core of political discourse there is 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 [16, p. 220–222] 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 namely its ideas to be the best when the ideas of others are the examples of lie” [1, p. 142]. Digital interaction on the Internet can be divided into mental spaces that will definitely ease the interpretation of the discourse component of the communicative process. According to G. Fauconnier and M. Turner [11] linguistic units which represent contextual component of memes throughout the Internet discourse implementation are the instructions and due to them it becomes possible to carry out any mental building of the situation: real, hypothetic or imaginary (for example, contextual basis of memes, political video-fragments, etc.). D. Crystal in his work “Language and the Internet” sets out that the peculiarity of Internet interaction is: structural organization of the text which is highlighted from the side of such factors as: consequence, urgency, paragraph structure and logical way of idea spreading [7]. All above-mentioned is an essential part of Internet-memes which have become a vital element of political campaigns and politicians’ “wars”.

The first definition of the concept “meme” has been proposed by the English ethologist Dr. R. Dawkins on biological level. In his work “Selfish Gene” in 1976 the scientist has pointed out that meme is a unit which has the replicating element of cultural heritage which, due to its similarity, can be multiplied and transmitted to future generations. Modern philological view on this concept significantly differs from the first one – memes have become an essential part of the Internet and includes not only pictures, but also video-fragments, emojis, and GIFs. Later P. Davison in his work “The Language of Internet Memes” highlights 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 papers of 2017 [17], we propose to define memes 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.

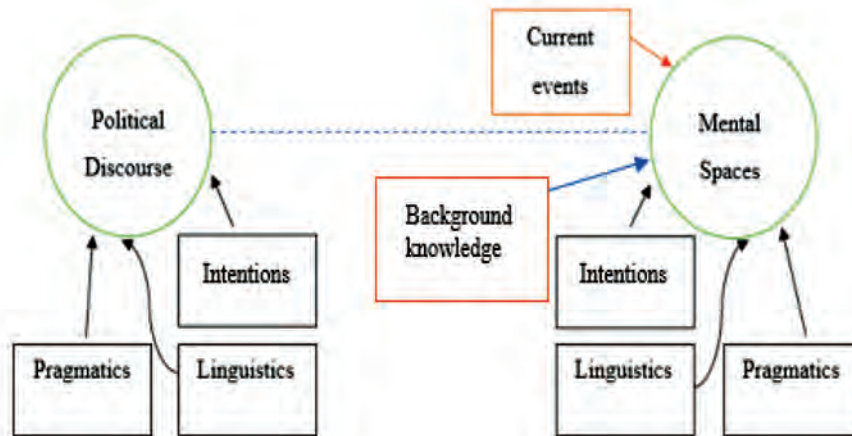
**Task posing.** The goal of this work is to distinguish the main principles of forming mental spaces in memes with contextual component in political discourse basing on the presidential elections in the United States of America 2020.

To achieve the goal of the article there have been worked out the following **tasks**:

- 1) to distinguish the correlations between mental spaces and political discourse;
- 2) to figure out the peculiarities of contextual component of Internet-memes;
- 3) to highlight direct interactions between mental spaces as well as Internet-memes.

Practical material has been purposefully selected from Instagram official news agencies such as BBC, Fox News, CBS, and ABC.

**The main body of the article.** Mental spaces and political discourse have quite common model of analysis. They can be discussed paying attention to three main features: pragmatic aspects, intentional aspects and linguistic aspects which will be represented by the contextual components of Internet-memes. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that mental spaces are not stable and can be easily changed by any current event both linguistic and pragmatic as well as by any differences in recipients’ background knowledge. Thus, it is possible to consider that spaces are broader than discourse itself (pic. 1) due to the fact that discourse analysis is to be conducted using the implemented unit when mental spaces’ analyses will vary from day to day, from one researcher to another because of scholars’ individual factors which can influence the final outcome.



Pic. 1. Correlations between mental spaces and political discourse

Nowadays plenty of news agencies address their readers on the Internet using memes which can provide the audience with vital political information as well as background pictures at the same time. Such units are mostly neutral, but sometimes there may appear the situation when Internet-memes are purposefully presented in negative or positive way.

According to Danish scientist L. Brandt [5] there are 6 components of mental space:

- semiotic space that is understanding of symbols;
- presentation space which replaces symbols/signs with definite objects, situations, etc.;
- reference space which correlates objects from the presentation space with the same objects in reality;
- virtual space which slightly combines semantic components of semiotic space as well as of presentation space;
- meaning space which represents latent semantics of the virtual space;
- relevance space which is an interpreter him/herself and his/her surrounding at the definite moment of time.

Pragmatically aspect of Internet-memes represented in this article is realized being based on the presidential election in the United States of America in 2020. This run up has occurred between Joe Biden who is the representative from the Democratic Party and the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the USA Donald Trump. Intentions of Internet-memes provided by the English-speaking news agencies vary due to the view they support. That can be seen from the range of features detected from the chosen practical material: graphics, emotions reflected on the character that is depicted on the memes' backgrounds, contextual component which illustrates politicians' words, accurate information as well as hidden political position of news agencies.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of November official page of BBC News in Instagram has posted informative memes (pic. 2) which represent the words of congratulation to the recently elected President of the USA Joe Biden.



Pic. 2. BBC News [3]

Both memes consist of background and contextual components. They depict famous politicians – Boris Johnson who is the current Prime Minister of Great Britain and Barack Obama – the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the USA. Even if the contextual component is connected directly with Joe Biden, the background can be easily correlated with Donald Trump – Boris Johnson due to the similarity in appearance (pic. 3) and Barack Obama due to the great differences in political activity (pic. 3). Thus, meaning space can be bound not just with the key figure of mentioned Internet-memes, but with his opponent due to memes created earlier and which reflect the similar as well as different features of the politicians.

Internet-memes from BBC News with Boris Johnson represent only the short abstracts from the congratulation letter which includes the direct addressing to Joe Biden and to new Vice-President of the USA Kamala Harris. The positive appeal of the meme is realized with the help of nouns:

“congratulations” and “historic achievement”. The word-combination “historic achievement” applies to gender as well as to the color of skin since Kamala Harris is the first dark-skin woman who has occupied this position. Internet-meme with Barack Obama provides the users with the short passage which has words directed to the winner of the presidential election. Moreover, Barack Obama addresses to recently elected President “Joe” without using his last name that shows personal relations with Joe Biden. As well the contextual component has the phrases “got what it takes to be President” and “already carries him that way”. These statements help to interpret the message from the positive side due to the presentation space which illustrates to Internet-users the assurance in the future President because this passage is presented like: “Joe carries himself as the President”.



Pic. 3. Similarities between Donald Trump, Boris Johnson [4] and Barack Obama [10]

Another example of Internet-memes devoted to the presidential election in the USA is presentation of information by news agency Fox (pic. 4). Memes presented below have occurred on the official page of Fox News. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of November there was posted meme concerning the coronavirus vaccine and on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November the page presented meme on the veterans devoting it to the Veterans Day on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November.



Pic. 4. Fox News [13]

Both memes have been posted after the official announcement of the victory of Joe Biden

(the 7<sup>th</sup> of November), but news agency still uses signing “President” addressing to Donald Trump waiting for inauguration on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January that will be the official end of the presidential tenure of Donald Trump. Nevertheless, some other news agencies (BBC, CBS) present Internet-memes with Donald Trump addressing to him using only his last name. Contextual component of both memes is presented in more official style. The meme on coronavirus vaccine is made in inspiring as well as informative way – “on my watch”, and “great discoveries” – both statements create relevance space which is to be interpreted as if Donald Trump is responsible for health matters of his nation and does all his best to succeed in this issue. Relevance space can vary from one user to another due to his/her attitude to the politician and circumstances under which he/she gets familiar with this post.

Internet-meme which represents an abstract from the speech of Donald Trump devoted to the Veteran Day (pic. 4) is formed using the bright statement: “We enjoy the privileges of peace, prosperity, and freedom because of our veterans, and we are forever indebted to them beyond measures”. The passage consists of numerous words which create positive atmosphere around the speaker: “privileges of peace”, “prosperity”, “freedom”, “forever indebted”, and “beyond measures”. As well, Donald Trump twice uses personal pronoun “we” that appeals to his unity with the nation and veterans respectively. Moreover, not the last role is given to the chosen background – both memes present Donald Trump as a serious politician especially that has positive effect with news concerning the vaccination.

Internet-memes which have been proposed by CBS (pic. 5) news agency on the 22<sup>d</sup> of November and on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November, demonstrate two urgent pieces news – coronavirus vaccine and recounting of election results in Pennsylvania.



Pic. 5. CBS News [6]

These examples address Donald Trump using only his last name that may influence the formation of relevance space, because the position “president”

is omitted and that shows the personalized attitude to the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the USA, at the same time CBS addresses Joe Biden using his full name (pic. 6). Both memes (pic. 5) represent negative pieces of news – the first one gives negative information directly to the politician, the second one shows personal attitude to the current Governor of New York – Andrew Cuomo, who has bad relations with Donald Trump. Such presentation of meme’s contextual component creates negative sense of political suicide by Donald Trump – “*but not to New York*” demonstrates that personal arrogance is more valued by the politician than the wealth of nation (this informative meme differs from the one presented by Fox (Pic. 4)). Another aspect of this meme is graphics – all letters are capitalized that forms semiotic space and adds emotional marking. The phrase “*Judge dismisses Trump campaign’s latest attempt*” uses semi-official style, but it has much in common with black humor and can be compared with the saying: “*you can’t make up for lost time*”.



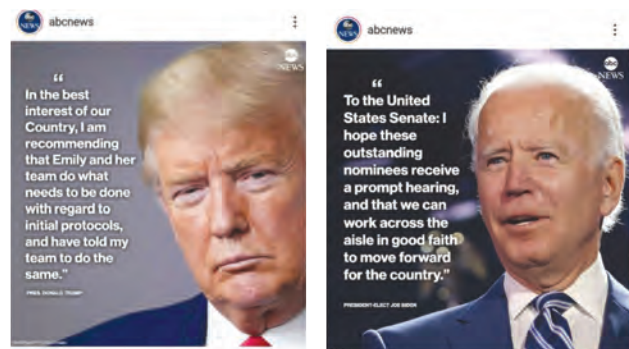
Pic. 6. CBS News. Joe Biden [6]

CBS News agency demonstrates Internet-memes with Joe Biden which differ from their posts devoted to Donald Trump. They present direct addressing to Joe Biden using “*President-elect Joe Biden*” as well as full name “*Joe Biden*”. Another essential aspect of the meme’s contextual component is repetition: “*I am not going to shut down the economy. I am going to shut down the virus*”. Moreover, this passage has two nouns which have become so urgent in the world of pandemic: “*the economy*” and “*the virus*”, these words can themselves build reference space as well as relevance space. The second meme strengthens the positive appeal to the politician stressing on “*Joe Biden the winner of the Presidential election*”, that is such a word-game. Thus, comparing CBS News which addresses to Joe Biden and Donald Trump it is possible to highlight that all political memes reflect the agency’s attitude to the politicians that influence the process of mental spaces creation and the way people interpret them. Choosing background pictures

for Internet-memes with Donald Trump and Joe Biden there is a need to stress on the fact that the recently elected politician is presented as soft person what cannot be said about the 46<sup>th</sup> President of the USA.

The last examples (pic. 7) we would like to work out are the Internet-memes posted by ABC News agency. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of November and on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November they have presented memes which contain abstracts from the direct speeches of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. News agency uses official signings for both politicians such as “*Pres. Donald Trump*” and “*President-elect Joe Biden*”.

ABC News forms all its Internet-memes following official style and chooses abstracts with neutral presentations of the politicians. But looking inside the communicative means of the speakers it is seen that Donald Trump more often uses the pronoun “*I*” while Joe Biden uses “*we*” stressing on the cooperation.



Pic. 7. ABC News [2]

Donald Trump verbalizes his ability to do everything by himself: “*I am recommending*”, “*I have told my team to do*”, when Joe Biden is in for collaboration “*we can work*”, “*move forward for the country*”. Such speech presenting forms completely different mental spaces due to the differences in political intentions and views.

**Conclusions and propositions.** Social media has to be neutral, but it seems that it is not. All the analyzed Internet-memes have different intentions formed by news agencies. In the frames of presidential election in the United States of America in 2020 it turned out that for social media it is quite hard to be neutral and not to show personalized attitude to any of the politicians. Such approach to presenting informative memes makes it possible to create and change mental spaces depending on definite attitude. Thus, only two agencies (BBC, ABC) of four discussed (BBC, Fox News, ABC, and CBS) have proposed neutral approach to memes’ formation. Mental spaces are to be interpreted and understood basing on the general presentation of Internet-memes.

Internet-memes can verbalize political discourse and, at the same time, can have influence on the process

of mental spaces creation. That happens due to the way social media produces news and the attitude to the politicians they show. Number of linguistic means is used to form a required mood in the nation: appeal to cooperation, appeal to unity, repetition, personalized response to the medical challenges

of 2020, etc. Nevertheless, there is a need to pay attention not just too contextual component, but to the graphics – background pictures, form of letters (capitalization, etc.), dominant colors (bright, soft, dark, etc.). All those factors influence the formation of reference, meaning, and relevance spaces.

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#### Заботнова М. В. МЕНТАЛЬНІ ПРОСТОРИ ЯК СПОСІБ ВІДТВОРЕННЯ МЕМІВ У ПОЛІТИЧНОМУ ДИСКУРСІ

Стаття присвячена ментальним просторам як способам відтворення інтернет-мемів у політичному дискурсі. У статті висвітлено особливості дослідження ментальних просторів і контекстуального змісту, який вони реалізують у процесі вербалізації інтернет-мемів у політичному дискурсі. У роботі поставлено за мету визначити основні принципи формування ментальних просторів у мемах з контекстуальним компонентом у політичному дискурсі з огляду на президентські вибори у Сполучених Штатах Америки у 2020 році. Актуальність статті зумовлена викликами сучасності, які виникають у процесі тлумачення інтернет-мемів, що залучаються у відтворення політичного дискурсу. У статті зазначено ключові аспекти ментальних просторів, інтернет-мемів і політичного дискурсу, включаючи деталізований аналіз останніх досліджень у зазначених сферах. Для досягнення мети встановлено зв'язок між ментальними просторами й політичним дискурсом, виявлено особливості контекстуального компоненту інтернет-мемів, визначено прями відносини між ментальними просторами та інтернет-мемами. Авторка висвітлює шість типів ментальних просторів, розглянувши ключові аспекти кожного з них. У статті представлено практичні приклади інтернет-мемів з контекстуальним компонентом, який ілюструє президентські вибори у Сполучених Штатах Америки 2020 року, які присвячені конфронтації між представником демократичної партії Джо Байденом і чинним президентом Сполучених Штатів Америки від Республіканської партії Дональдом Трампом. Увесь практичний матеріал вибрано з офіційних новинних сторінок соціальної мережі Instagram, а саме BBC, Fox News, ABC і CBS. Додаткову увагу у статті приділено порівнянню інтернет-мемів зазначених ресурсів задля виявлення різниці між контекстуальними компонентами, вибраними для публікації новинними гігантами. У висновках авторка наголосила на можливості контекстуального компоненту інтернет-мемів формувати ментальні простори.

**Ключові слова:** інтернет-меми, ментальні простори, політичний дискурс, президентські вибори 2020, контекстуальний компонент.