Title: "Laughter during the War: Russian Aggression in Ukraine in Political Cartoons and Memes"

Summary:

The objective of the research project is to investigate the discursive dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict which began in 2014 and escalated on 24.02.2022 after Russian full scale invasion in Ukraine. One of the ways to implement this dimension is political humor as a form of political discourse. "Political humor" as an umbrella term encompasses any humorous text dealing with political issues, people, events, processes, or institutions. This concept is related with the notion "political satire". Political satire is playful and is designed to elicit laughter, while simultaneously casting judgment. This function of "casting judgment" separates satire from broader notions of political humor. Political satire allows assuming any existing format or genre within which political discourse can be offered. Accordingly, the project aims to analyze the implementation and evolution of the discursive dimension of the Ukrainian-Russian military conflict in political humor (cartoons and memes), taking into account the parameters of target, focus, social acceptability, presentation, and context. As a case study we define conceptual changes both in the «physical» and in the discursive dimension of Russian-Ukrainian military conflict, in particular: a) rapid growth of global interest in Ukraine, after 24.02; b) gradual changes in the attitude of world leaders to the Russian-Ukrainian war, due to public pressure and diplomatic efforts of Ukraine; c) Putin's transformation into a global pariah; d) the evolution of President Zelensky's attitude to ways to resolve the conflict before and after 24.02. We are going to investigate the interdependence of "physical" and discursive dimension of the Ukrainian-Russian military conflict with special attention to similarities and differences in conflict depiction ("self-image" and "external image" of the conflict course, conflict participants, conflict consequences) in political cartoons and memes. Our hypotheses are: 1) The scope and presentation of supportive vs. subversive humor in construction of conflict participant's "self-image" and "external image" as well its social acceptability are different; 2) the choice of plot for a cartoon or meme is determined by the national and/or international contexts. The 4 main research questions (6 totally): 1) Do the supportive vs. subversive humor depend only on the cartoonist's attitude or is it determined also by the social and political context?; 2) What are differences and similarities in implementing of aggression, play, laughter, judgment in political cartoons and memes? 3) Is aggression in political satire/subversive humor always linked with transgression and are they both social acceptable? 4) How the target and focus of political satire affects the choice of its means?

The project proposes a contrastive analysis of the discursive dimension of the Russian-Ukrainian war and its implementation in political humor and relay on significant correlation of the real and discursive conflict dimensions (international military-political assistance to Ukraine and the reflection of this support in the national and international political humor). This correlation is determined by the fact that political humor in the Russian –Ukrainian War is operating in two registers: first supportive for Ukraine (international level), and second, as an invitation to foreign audiences to see the justness of the Ukrainian cause (national level). The project is multidimensional and multicultural. The corpus combines both traditional and modern genres of political humor (3000 cartoons and memes) from North and South America, Australia, Africa, Asia, and Europe (33 countries), represented by the largest number of cartoons and cartoonists. The project is based on "conceptual pragmatism" and combines theoretical and empirical approaches with quantitative and qualitative methods regarding the social context. The methodology includes

Humor and Linguistic theories (Superiority, Incongruency, Relief, Functional Theory of Political Discourse, Multimodality, Transtextuality, Social Semiotics) as well on computer-based content analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and sentiment analysis. This project will explain how Media Linguistics can be related to other disciplines. Results will be disseminated via international conferences, research papers in peer-reviewed journals, on the website with project updates and in social media (Facebook,Telegram, Instagram).