

# **Verbal Irony as a Communicative Mode of Persuasion**

**by Silvana Neshkovska**

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## **Abstract.**

The general pervasiveness of politics in modern society renders political discourse susceptible to analysis by many different profiles of researchers, especially linguists.

This particular paper attempts to shed light on the usage of verbal irony in political discourse. The premise we put forward here is that politicians in their political speeches purposefully employ irony in order to enhance the persuasiveness of their speech. Moreover, we believe that the enhancement of persuasiveness is in a direct correlation with the pragmatic functions of verbal irony. To put it differently, 'seasoning' political speeches with ironic statements which evoke either humor; or express mild ridicule, or harsh criticism at the expense of the political opponent, is what makes them truly persuasive.

The corpus compiled for the purposes of this research comprises political speeches delivered by American politicians in the course of the 2016 U.S. presidential race.

The results obtained primarily confirm the relatively high incidence of verbal irony in political speeches; then, they also point to the relatively high degree of persuasion attached to irony in general and its association mainly with expressing mild ridicule and harsh criticism.

**Key words:** political discourse, verbal irony, meta-discourse markers

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## **1. Introduction**

This study is concerned with the intricate interaction between political discourse and verbal irony. Political discourse used by politicians in the ‘political arena’ is normally associated with using formal register and stating truthful data and facts. In contrast, the pragmatic phenomenon, verbal irony, has little to do with facts and truthfulness. Quite the contrary. It is usually defined as saying one thing and implying something different, even the complete opposite (e.g. “Well done!” – addressed to someone who failed to do what was expected of him/her). Thus, at first glance, ironic utterances seem completely incompatible with formal factual political statements, however, a careful deliberation reveals that they are as tight-knit as they could be. In other words, even a short observation of almost any politician’s discourse suffices to note that practice beats the odds, and more often than not verbal irony appears to be deeply ingrained in political discourse.

Many researchers so far have tried to make a real breakthrough in analyzing political discourse (Hillier, 2004; Stenbakken, 2007; Wanjala, 2014, etc.), but still a literature overview reveals that the usage of verbal irony in political discourse remains seriously under-investigated, and urgently requires further analyzes and unraveling of novel insights.

With this in view, this particular research aims to make a small contribution and shed light on the usage of verbal irony in political discourse. More precisely, the study at hand offers a close inspection of a particular type of political discourse - political speeches delivered by politicians in the midst of an election campaign - and its relation with verbal irony. This type of political discourse is considered a particularly conducive environment for verbal irony due to its binary nature, i.e. the evident inclination of politicians to praise their positions, and at the same time, to undermine their opponents', their ultimate goal being to persuade the electorate to vote in their favor.

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The premise we put forward here is that politicians in their political speeches purposefully “breach the norm” intersecting their formal political speech with ironic remarks, in order to enhance the persuasiveness of their speech. We believe that the enhancement of persuasiveness is in a direct correlation with the communicative goals, i.e. the pragmatic functions of verbal irony. In other words, 'seasoning' political speeches with ironic statements which evoke either humor, or express mild ridicule or harsh criticism at the expense of the political opponent, is what makes them truly persuasive.

## **2. Theoretical background**

The following section offers a brief overview of some of the basic features of political discourse and verbal irony, respectively.

### **2.1 Political discourse**

In modern society, politics literally lurks at every corner of human existence – education, health care, employment, etc. It is impossible to disregard its pervasiveness in people’s daily affairs. To say the least, they are continuously bombarded with political news, speeches, lobbying, campaigns, etc., and are, consequently, expected to decide whose political ideology they would uphold.

Being the principal actors in the domain of politics, politicians are the main medium for generating and disseminating political discourse. This is particularly the case when they are engaged in passing laws, making decisions, negotiating and signing treaties, campaigning, releasing statements for the press, etc. Apart from their political resourcefulness and determination, their verbosity is their main tool of trade. Partington (2007) confirms this by stating that the lack of proficient verbal skills makes politicians appear “shallow and inept”, and, in contrast, those who “use language all too well” can become “skilful and dangerous manipulators of the mind”.

Persuading the electorate is central to politicians’ job and their discourse. To politicians’ mind, hearers, viewers and readers must be convinced to accept a specific ideological position; they must endorse their actions and reject the ones of their political adversaries. This is especially important during election campaigns when winning the constituents’ trust and, consequently, their votes is of paramount importance. To that end, their discourse assumes a very specific binary nature. On the one hand, they

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try to present themselves and their stance in positive ways, and, on the other hand, they attempt to portray their political opponents negatively (van Dijk, 1984; Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). In addition, politicians resort to employing many different linguistic strategies such as, for instance, a very carefully chosen lexis (Hillier, 2004); or various figures of speech such as metaphors, metonymy, verbal irony (Partington, 2007; Stenbakken, 2007), etc.

## 2.2 Verbal irony

There is no one singular way of defining this multifaceted phenomenon called verbal irony. Many researchers have offered various definitions of verbal irony underlining the conditions that utterances need to meet in order to be interpreted as ironic.

One of the very first linguists who have attempted to delineate this intricate pragmatic phenomenon was Grice (1975). He defines it as flouting or blatantly breaching the conversational maxim of quality (“Do not say what you believe is false and for which you lack adequate evidence”). Leech (1983:15) looks at irony as a politeness strategy which combines the art of attack with an apparent innocence as a form of self-defense. For Utsumi (2000:1778) verbal irony presupposes a proper situational setting described as ironic environment that consists of the speaker's expectation and the incongruity between that expectation and the reality as well as the speaker's attitude towards this incongruity.

More recently, Partington (2007) insists that irony occurs when there is a mismatch, a radical difference, between the evaluation expressed in what is actually written or said (‘dictum’) and the evaluation that is really intended (‘implicatum’). Very often, the implicatum is the exact opposite of the dictum (e.g. “Politician X is a genius! He’s managed to upset both the trade unions and big businesses.”). According to Wilson and Sperber (2012), verbal irony is a form of echoic interpretation of someone’s thoughts, utterances, expectations or cultural norms from which the speaker dissociates himself/herself, accompanying it with ridicule or scorn. Bryant (2012: 674) asserts that figurative language such as verbal irony is an extremely powerful tool of communication since it allows the audience to derive certain unstated meanings relying on their inferential abilities.

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Generally speaking, the use of verbal irony is marked with quite a high incidence in oral speech. Gibbs (2000), for instance, examined irony in talk among friends and established the fact that ironic language constituted about 8% of all conversational turns in the corpus of conversations he analyzed, which is a rather significant percentage.

Researchers attribute the frequent usage of irony principally to the numerous pragmatic functions it can perform. According to Gibbs (1986), and Kreuz and Glucksberg (1989) verbal irony is mainly associated with expressing intensive negative feelings towards somebody or something. Consequently, humiliating, ridiculing, blaming, or criticizing somebody are, in fact, the most common pragmatic functions of verbal irony. Expressing humor is also one of the commonly mentioned pragmatic functions of verbal irony in literature (Littman & Mey, 1991; Kreuz & Long, 1991; Long & Kreuz, 1991; Roberts & Kreuz, 1994; Matthews et al., 2006 etc.). Ironists employ it when they pretend that they are not upset by what has happened and that they feel comfortable enough to even joke about it (Roberts & Kreuz, 1994).

Although infrequently, ironic expressions are utilized to provoke somebody's reaction; to attract somebody's attention and to steer or domineer the conversation (Kreuz and Long, 1991; Long and Kreuz, 1991). Verbal irony is also sometimes used for social hedging and instructional goals (Littman and Mey, 1991 in Rosolovska, 2011); clarifying and organizing the discourse (Roberts and Kreuz, 1994 in Rosolovska, 2011); expressing surprise (Colston & Keller, 1998); establishing social distance and superiority (Dews et al., 1995); creating solidarity, increasing memorability, being polite etc. (in Wanjala, 2014).

In the context of political discourse, the ironic utterances of politicians are also used to achieve various communicative goals. Partington (2007: 1554) notes that the function of verbal irony in political discourse is to control and manipulate the behavior of other people by subtly imposing a particular system of values on the interlocutors. Ironic statements in political discourse according to Kreuz et al. (1991: 161) are more persuasive as they are much more easily memorized and retained in people's memory longer than straightforward, literal statements. In addition to that, Giora (1995) claims that

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ironic statements in political discourse compared to the literal ones are much more informative. Mills (1997) states that “an important role of irony in political discourse is to form a certain image of an event, situation, person or facts in the mind of the audience.”

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 The aim of the research**

The aim of the research is to prove the hypothesis that that political persuasiveness is greatly enhanced with verbal irony. Political speeches delivered at political rallies prior to elections are meant to be intrinsically persuasive, but the fact they are intersected with ironic utterances whose communicative goals are essentially to make fun of, ridicule or criticize the opponent, is an additional trigger which makes them even more convincing.

### **3.2 Corpus and research stages**

For the purposes of this study, two authentic political speeches delivered by two American presidential candidates involved in the 2016 U.S. presidential race, Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton, were subjected to analysis. What made the political discourse of these two politicians particularly enticing and suitable for analysis was the differences in gender, background and career paths of the two presidential candidates. All these serve as abundant sources from which verbal irony can stem in order to emphasize even more the differences in the political orientation of the political opponents as well as to diminish the opponent’s quality, values and validity of political platform. Moreover, it is worth highlighting the fact that the selected speeches were delivered at political rallies towards the end of the election campaign, which added to the exigency “to strike an efficient final blow” to the opponent which will blemish his/her reputation irreparably. That, in turn, led inevitably to frequent fierce verbal attacks full of negative emotions, disparagement and disapproval, which are indisputably at the core of verbal irony itself.

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**The research was conducted in three stages.**

The analysis at the initial stage was directed towards confirming the presence of verbal irony in the selected corpus, i.e. the focus was on identifying the ironic statements and separating them from the non-ironic ones. Here it is worth mentioning that the ironicalness of the selected sentences was determined in complete accordance with the parameters proposed by previous researchers in their attempt to define verbal irony (see 2.2.).

The second stage of the research targeted the communicative goals, i.e. pragmatic functions and the persuasiveness of a selection of the ironic statements whose ironicalness was determined unanimously by all parties involved in the research stage. Therefore, a tailor-made questionnaire consisting of twelve ironic statements – six of which were extracted from Trump’s and six from Clinton’s speech – was chosen as the main instrument in this research (see Appendix). The content of the questionnaire, in fact, was greatly determined by our initial hypothesis that in the battle for the presidential “seat” and in their attempts to boost their persuasiveness and prospects for winning, politicians employ ironic statements whose communicative goals are directed either towards invoking humor at the expense of their political adversary; or towards expressing mild ridicule, or, sometimes, even harsh criticism in cases when the ironist is particularly upset with his adversary. These three specific pragmatic functions were put in the focus here because they are all based on the same thing – conveying negative emotions towards their opponents. Evidently, with the choice of these three specific pragmatic functions, a progression from less pronounced negative emotions on the part of the ironist in the case of humor, to the most pronounced ones in the case of harsh criticism, was taken into consideration. More precisely, it was assumed that humor is conveyed via irony when the ironist wishes to slightly ‘sting’ his opponent and, perhaps, defuse subtly the tense and gloomy atmosphere he/she creates with his constant attacks on the adversary. Mild ridicule is expected to occur when politicians’ rebuke their opponents for some minor transgressions either in speech or actions, whose effects are not that far reaching after all, but whose public condemnation is worth one’s while as it might prevent their re-occurrence in the future. Harsh criticism is obviously expected when the ironist is particularly upset with the opponent and with what

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he/she says or does. Bearing these basic caveats in mind, each of the 12 ironic statements in the questionnaire was followed by two close-ended questions. The first question was targeting the three proposed functions of irony (humor, mild ridicule and harsh criticism), but it also left room for the respondents to disagree with the proposed functions and to choose a fourth option – none of these. The second question sought to ascertain the degree of persuasion respondents attach to each of the selected ironic statements by marking them as non- persuasive, slightly persuasive, quite persuasive or extremely persuasive.

The last stage of the research involved analyzing the respondents' answers; summing up the results, and drawing relevant conclusions.

Finally, in terms of the research methodology it is worth noting that the study was primarily based on qualitative analysis since it focused on the use of verbal irony in a rather limited corpus of political speeches. Nevertheless, efforts were made to complement the qualitative analysis with quantitative findings where possible.

## **3.3 Respondents**

Macedonian university professors of English and graduate students of English Language and Literature from three different higher education institutions in the Republic of Macedonia (Faculty of Education – Bitola at “St. Kliment Ohridski” University; Faculty of Philology – Skopje at “St. Kiril and Methodius” University; South Eastern European University – Tetovo), fifty in total, agreed to be part of this research and filled in the questionnaire.

This particular group of informants was targeted for two primary reasons. Firstly, even though Macedonian professors and students of English followed closely the unraveling of the election campaign in U.S., as did the rest of the world, for that matter, still, not being bound by political affiliation to any of the political candidates, they could be considered as completely unbiased respondents. Secondly, despite the fact these are non-native speakers of English, their high language proficiency as well as their solid familiarity with the cultural and social context in which the speeches



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were delivered, enabled them to spot and grasp the subtle nuances of meaning, which is pivotal in correctly interpreting the ironic intent of the ironists.

Prior to filling in the questionnaire they were briefly instructed on the differences between the three pragmatic functions (humor, mild ridicule and harsh criticism) and were cautioned to assess the persuasiveness of the statements objectively on the basis of the extent to which they were convinced in the validity of the arguments laid out in the given statements.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 General observations**

The corpus being specifically compiled for this research consisted of the transcripts of the two speeches, which lasted approximately one hour and a half in total, i.e. 88 minutes and comprised about 8000 words. Namely, the transcript of Donald Trump's 42-minute speech consisted of 3888 words; whereas, the transcript of Hilary Clinton's 46-minute speech contained 4200 words.

The preliminary inspection of both speeches yielded 23 instances of Verbal Irony (VI), 10 of which were within Trump's speech and 13 in Clinton's speech. The almost equal number of ironic instances in both speeches points to a somewhat similar tendency when it comes to how often these two politicians resort to using VI. Furthermore, the approximately equal time span of the analyzed speeches indicates that, on average, VI recurred every 3 to 4 minutes in both speeches. This undoubtedly reaffirms the claim that political discourse is, in fact, quite a natural and welcoming environment for VI.

### **4.2 Pragmatic functions of verbal irony in political discourse**

Once the presence of irony in the corpus had been established, the next important step was to determine how people perceive these ironic utterances. More to the point, the aim was to determine whether the respondents interpret them as utterances invoking humor; expressing mild ridicule, or harsh criticism at the political opponent's expense.

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In that respect, the results obtained (Chart 1) suggest that verbal irony in political discourse is principally associated with either harsh criticism or mild ridicule. In fact, two thirds of the ironic statements (8 out of 12) were marked by the majority of the respondents as statements conveying predominantly harsh criticism; whereas one third (4 out of 12) were labeled as conveying mainly mild ridicule. None of the ironic statements in the questionnaire was marked as humorous by the majority of the informants.

Observed independently, Hilary Clinton’s ironic statements were predominantly assessed as harsh criticism (5 out of 6), with only one statement marked as mild criticism; whereas, half of Donald Trumps’ ironic statements were marked as harsh criticism (3 out of 6) and the other half as mild criticism (3 out of 6).

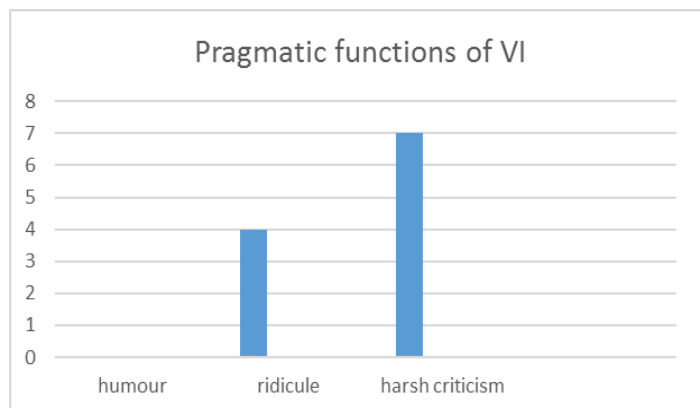


Chart 1 Pragmatic functions of VI

The reason why a very small and insignificant number of informants interpreted the selected ironic statements as humorous could be attributed to the fact that these speeches were delivered at the very final stage of the campaign, when jesting and making humorous remarks were no longer considered sufficiently ‘lucrative’ in striking the final blow on the opponent’s repute.

Similarly, none of the respondents stated that the three pragmatic functions offered here (humor, mild ridicule and harsh criticism) had anything to do with the given ironic statements. This finding provides a direct confirmation that in political speeches delivered at political rallies, from the vast pool of

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pragmatic functions of verbal irony, the functions which are mainly associated with conveying negative feelings towards and disapproval of the political adversary prevail.

### **4.2.1 Instances of VI conveying harsh criticism in the analyzed corpus**

The ironic statement (1) below is a clear-cut case of an ironic statement expressing harsh criticism inasmuch as it was rated as such by the majority of the respondents (86%). This statement is obviously one of Hilary Clinton's statements in which she echoes a rather controversial opinion made public previously by her counterpart regarding women and their role in society. Hilary Clinton manifestly disapproves of and disassociates herself from the disgraceful and disrespectful treatment of women proposed by Donald Trump. Moreover, she defends women and their rights, depicting them as an indispensable driving force of America over the past 40 years. Thus, she creates a sharp contrast between Donald Trump's position, on the one hand, and her own, on the other hand, hoping to appeal primarily to female constituents and to convince them to support her candidacy instead of Trump's.

(1) "He once called pregnant employees and I quote "an inconvenience". He says women will start making equal pay as soon as we do as good a job as men as if we weren't already. These are the words not of someone who thinks highly of women who work or who cares about helping parents balance work and family but instead he clearly doesn't know much of how we have grown the economy over the past 40 years which is largely thanks to women getting into the workforce and adding to family incomes."

According to the respondents' ratings, the second ironic statement which manifestly conveyed harsh criticism was one of Trump's ironic statements (2).

(2) "The other candidate in this race (Hilary Clinton) has spent her entire life making money for special interests and I will tell you she has made plenty of money for them and she has been taking plenty of money for herself. Hilary Clinton has perfected the politics of personal profit and theft. She ran the State Department like her own personal fund doing favors to repressive regimes and many,

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many, others in exchange for cash. Pure and simple folks.”

With this ironic statement Donald Trump openly blames Hilary Clinton for misusing her position and for pursuing her own vested interests instead of taking care of urgent state affairs. The condition that this ironic statement meets is incongruity between the speaker’s expectations (Hilary was elected to work for her country’s well-being) and the actual reality (she was dishonest and made herself rich by cooperating with repressive regimes and by treating the State Department like her own personal fund). By creating an image of Hilary Clinton as an outright usurper of her position as Secretary of State, he actually hopes to deter people from electing her president.

## **4.2.2 Instances of VI conveying mild ridicule in the analyzed corpus**

Although expressing mild ridicule via ironic statements just like expressing harsh criticism is based on intense negative emotions and disapproval of the opponent, still mild ridicule can be considered as somewhat less severe compared to harsh criticism. In political discourse, in particular, mild ridicule is expected to occur when politicians’ rebuke their opponents for some minor transgressions either in speech or actions. Even though the effects of those transgressions are not that far reaching after all, still the politicians deem it worthwhile to publicly condemn them in order to prevent their re-occurrence in the future.

The ironic statement in the questionnaire which was assessed predominantly as a mild ridicule by the majority of the respondents (62%) was Hilary Clinton’s ironic statement (4).

(4) “Second, there is Donald Trump’s approach to our national debt. Well I have a plan ... Donald Trump has a different approach. He calls himself the “king of debt” and his tax plan sure lives up to that name.”

Here Hilary draws a parallel between herself and her political adversary in terms of how each of them plans to deal with their national debt. In that context, she tries to present herself in a favorable light claiming that she has a solid and sustainable plan, while at the same time she pokes fun of, or ridicules

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her adversary's plan. More specifically, what she purports here is that if Trump is elected president, he will definitely wreak havoc upon the country's economy. To support her argument she ironically echoes his own reference to himself as "the king of debt", which is of course taken out of its original context, and purposes that considering his proposals, he surely will deserve that title if he becomes president. Logically, since his 'transgressions' rest only on words not deeds, at least up to that point, the irony used in this context serves merely the purpose of conveying mild ridicule.

In Trumps' corpus, three of his ironic statements were assessed as statements conveying mild ridicule. That was confirmed by about 60% of the respondents for each of these statements in turn. The ironic sentence (5) was one of them.

(5) "Hillary Clinton, as you know, as many people know, is a world class liar. Just look at her pathetic email server statements or her phony landing in Bosnia where she said she was under attack and the attack turns out to be young girls handing her flowers."

In his attempt to wreck Hilary's reputation and present her as untrustworthy as possible, Trump starts this statement as a direct offense calling Hillary a world class liar. Then, he swiftly changes the course and mitigates it slightly by employing verbal irony with which he ridicules her habit of deceiving the public every time she believes she can gain something out of it. In that context, he briefly recalls a funny incident that happened to her at the airport in Bosnia when she allegedly mistook the act of girls handing her flowers and welcoming her to Bosnia for an outright assault targeting her. Again, the bottom line message he tries to convey with this ironic statement is that the electorate should not vote for her because of her inconstancy and dishonesty.

### **4.3 Persuasiveness of ironic statements in political discourse**

Having established the predominant pragmatic functions of the ironic utterances in the analyzed corpus of political speeches, the analysis was directed at determining the persuasiveness of these political statements.

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In that respect, as Chart 2 below shows, 7 ironic statements out of 12 in total were assessed as quite persuasive; 4 ironic statements were marked as extremely persuasive and 1 statement was marked as slightly persuasive by the majority of the respondents. None of the ironic statements were marked as not persuasive.

Evidently, a high degree of persuasion was discerned in almost all of the ironic utterances in the corpus of ironic statements presented in the questionnaire. This result is also in line with our initial hypothesis that the usage of verbal irony in political discourse is predominantly related the persuasiveness of political speech in general. Namely, verbal irony by means of its pragmatic functions – mild ridicule and harsh criticism, markedly enhances the persuasion of political discourse.

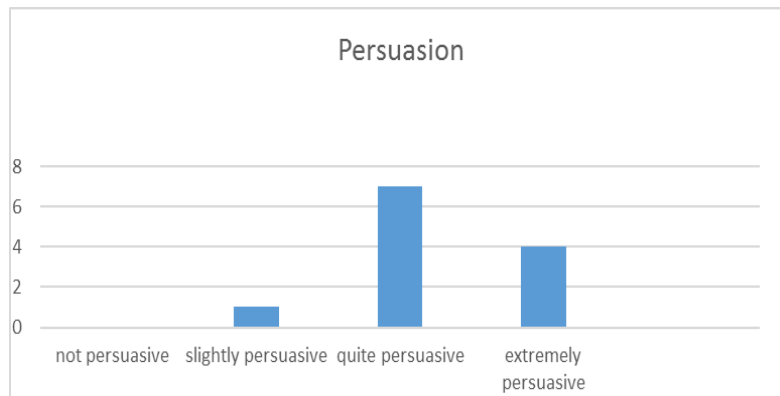


Chart 2 Persuasiveness of VI

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Furthermore, if we compare the results obtained regarding the persuasiveness of the ironic statements of each politician separately (Chart 3), it turns out that Hilary Clinton’s statements were evaluated as more persuasive as 3 of her statements were marked as extremely persuasive and the other 3 as quite persuasive. None of her statements was assessed as not persuasive or slightly persuasive. On the other hand, 4 of Donald Trump's ironic statements were marked as quite persuasive, 1 as extremely persuasive and 1 as slightly persuasive.

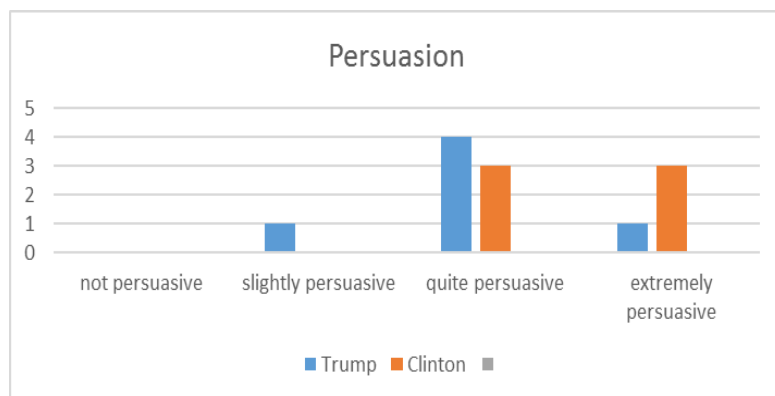


Chart 3 Persuasiveness of H. Clinton and D. Trump’s ironic statements

Out of Hilary Clinton’s three extremely persuasive statements, the ironic statement (6) below was marked as extremely persuasive by the largest number of respondents (81%).

- (6) “Donald Trump stood on a stage in November and said that wages are too high in this country. He should say that to mothers and fathers who are working two jobs to raise their kids.”

Here Clinton uses verbal irony in an attempt to expose the absurdity of Donald Trump’s earlier proposal that wages in America should be lowered as they are too high. Being aware of the fact that no American would like that, and that there is a mismatch between what people normally expect (improved economic conditions and, consequently, a better salary) and what Donald Trump pledges to deliver (lower salaries), Hilary Clinton seeks to turn his statement strongly against him in her attempt

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to dissuade the voters from casting their ballots in Trump's favor. By making an ironic suggestion that he should try to propose that to the families struggling to make ends meet and to the parents who make great sacrifices to provide their children with decent education, she, in fact, attempts to discredit Donald Trump in the eyes of the electorate beyond repair.

The only statement from Donald Trump's set of ironic statements that was labeled as extremely persuasive according to the majority of interviewed students (67%) was statement (7) below.

(7) "She believes she is entitled to the office. Her campaign slogan is "I am with her". Know what my response is to that? I am with you - the American people. She thinks it is all about her. I know it is all about you."

In this statement Trump builds the ironicalness of his utterance gradually by creating and emphasizing a marked contrast between what his opponent Hilary Clinton and he himself stand for. Namely, while alluding to Hilary's selfishness and self-centeredness which, according to him, is bluntly revealed in her campaign slogan - "I am with her", he concurrently accentuates his own selflessness and resolve to help the American people by clearly stating "I am with you". Approached from another perspective, the irony in this statement stems from the fact that there is an evident incongruity between what is normally expected (politicians are expected to be with their people and to help them improve their living standard) and what actually happens in reality (a politician is asking the people to be with her and help her become the most influential person in the country).

Indeed, the finding that all of the analyzed statements were labeled either as quite or extremely persuasive strongly confirms the contention that verbal irony is an indispensable part of political discourse in as much as it intensifies the effect of persuasion this kind of discourse has on the audience.



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## **5. Conclusion**

Our small-scale research reiterates the close relation that exists between verbal irony and political discourse. In fact, it goes a bit further and brings it to the forefront the fact that verbal irony despite its seeming mismatch with political discourse is, in fact, its constant and frequent companion. Namely, politicians rely on verbal irony much too often, especially during election campaigns, as they either consciously or intuitively know that verbal irony not only upholds, but also reinforces the effect of persuasion they ultimately want to achieve with their constituents.

The results also indicate that the pragmatic functions verbal irony performs in political discourse are primarily directed at expressing either harsh criticism or mild ridicule towards political opponents. Humor, or poking fun of the opponents, seems to be a rather neglected pragmatic function, for understandable reasons, though. It is hardly surprising that little room is left for humorous remarks at the end of the campaign when the rhetoric of both presidential wannabes towards each other becomes quite aggressive and offensive. Nevertheless, since all of the analyzed ironic utterances, irrespective of whether they conveyed harsh criticism or mild ridicule, were marked either as quite or as extremely persuasive, the study confirms our initial hypothesis that it is for reason of achieving a higher degree of persuasion that politicians in their political speeches resort to ‘seasoning’ their discourse with ironic utterances.

As to the limitations of the study, it is fair to state that its scope was rather limited as it was based on a corpus consisting only of two political speeches delivered by two political figures. A future study of this issue should include a greater variety of sources, i.e. a greater number of politicians, a greater linguistic corpus, and, of course, a greater variety of different types of political discourse. Furthermore, as persuasiveness of political discourse depends on many other factors such as the choice of lexis, the usage of other figures of speech such as metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, etc., a more comprehensive study would incorporate the presence and usage of all of these in political discourse, in order to come up with more sustainable insights.

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# **Verbal Irony as a Communicative Mode of Persuasion**

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