

# Towards a typology of humorous wartime tweets: the case of Ukraine 2022

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## Abstract

*The idea of this research was born on 26 May 2022. The following day, we saw Elon Musk's tweet from 26 May 2022: 'Politics is a sadness generator'. We accepted the challenge to refute the statement and to prove that there is much space for humour in the political discourse. The study focuses on humorous tweets produced in the period of the first 100 days of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and the criteria according to which they may be classified for further analysis. The literature overview proves that humour has been extensively approached by different researchers from a multidisciplinary perspective; in particular, numerous attempts were made to classify humour and its manifestations. In this research, we approached the Twitter activity of Ukrainian politicians as fragments of political discourse. In particular, we extracted humorous tweets and organised a sample that underwent further categorisation and interpretation with reference to existing typologies and theories of humour. The study discusses the roles the politicians assume while producing and spreading humour on Twitter, features the key subject fields and objects of ridicule in the wartime tweets, gives an insight into the communicative value of such tweets and suggests potential readership classes. Finally, the study seeks to prove the flexibility and adaptability of humour styles to the socio-political context and wartime communication that project public aggressiveness, self-relief and self-enhancement.*

**Keywords:** *Twitter, humour, wartime humorous tweets, Ukrainian politicians, typology criterion.*

## **1. Introduction**

Crises, conflicts and wars constitute a significant part of the world's history. Unfortunately, these are also the actuals of our time. Last year, the world witnessed the climax of the Russian-Ukrainian “unproclaimed” war which is the social context of this study. Unleashed already in 2014, it turned into a full-scale invasion of a free European democratic state on 24 February 2022 and catalysed an unseen-before Ukrainian resistance on multiple fronts: in heads and hearts, on real battlefields, on the home front, on digital fronts, on diplomatic fronts, on media and communication fronts etc. In their efforts to influence the developments and to speak to the world, common Ukrainians, celebrities and even politicians resort to generating loads of humour, chiefly where their voices can be heard and the ideas shared by the masses – on social media platforms. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022 has boosted the Twitter activity of Ukrainian political figures since they began to produce and reproduce a lot of wartime content.

This study focuses on the wartime humorous tweets produced by Ukrainian politicians within the first 100 days of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Since tweets are “public messages sent and received via Twitter that are limited to no more than 140 characters and can include links to blogs, web pages, images, videos and all other material online” (Maclean et al. 2013: 295), we regard the wartime humorous tweets as messages posted by Twitter users in the wartime period which contain text (verbal block) and/or an image (photo, screenshot, picture, GIF, emoji, etc.) or a videoclip (nonverbal/multimodal block) touching upon some aspect(s) of war and ridiculing them for a special communicative purpose. A distinguishing feature of wartime tweets is that they build up the timeline of the events (i.e., reflects the events in development). Another feature which is extremely important for wartime humorous tweets is that they exhibit communicative effectiveness immediately at the time of their appearance since it may weaken or fade away in the course of time.

War is no laughing matter; however, humour can play an essential part in preserving morale among soldiers and civilians in wartime. In the existing studies, the wartime humour legacy was probed from several angles. World War I and World War II were the milestones that gave rise to extensive wartime humour research since humour began to be regarded as “a significant catalyst for social mobilisation and the imaginative life of peoples at war” (Holman & Kelly 2001: 254). Being present on all fronts in warfare, humour becomes a weapon or a strategy in the fight, either offensive or defensive. In this light, wartime humour is traditionally treated either as a form of resistance or as a tool of political agitation. In the attempts to resist the enemy, the destruction and grief, humour and laughter, on the one hand, proved to be a good strategy for survival (Le Naour 2001; Carpenter 2010; Üngör & Verkerke 2015) and a means of self-protection (Robertshaw 2001; Dunne-Lynch 2007). On the other hand, humour was widely studied as a means of increasing recruitment and civilian involvement in the war, i.e. in propaganda (Merziger 2007; Lyczba 2015; Ristovic 2020).

These two vectors of research also mark the two main dimensions of humour under study: the “official humour”, introduced by the ruling regime, and the “urban humour”, so often controlled and levelled by the regime but still more widespread and in demand. However, we failed to trace any work that would consider the third dimension of humour – the one produced by the statesmen and politicians close to the regime and still willingly shared within the civil population. Another point of novelty of this research is the discourse type. Although contextualising the use of humour in wartime within political humour, most of the researchers turn to investigating its cultural representations such as cartoons and caricatures in media and literary works (Hewitson 2012; Dickason 2015; Milne 2016; Anderson 2019), images in films and songs (Delporte 2001; Lloyd 2001; Mullen 2015; Webb 2019).

At the same time, wartime humour has not been studied as a phenomenon of political discourse, which is identified by its actors or authors, viz., politicians (van Dijk 1998: 12). Thus, by this article we attempt to fill the niche and analyse the extensive appeal of the Ukrainian politicians to the audience worldwide through humouring on Twitter. The research question is: Can wartime tweets be categorised as a unique type of humorous tweets and what is their typology? To answer the question, we assign a set of subquestions to find answers to: (1) Who contributes to the creation of wartime humorous tweets? (2) What are these tweets about? (3) How are the political opponents marked? (4) What are the pragmatic intentions of wartime humorous tweets? (5) Who are the potential recipients of the tweets? In the results, we expect to outline a set of interrelated criteria according to which wartime humorous tweets may be classified. By analysing the contents and the specifics of humour used in these tweets, we aim to trace the prevalence of particular humorous styles and the deviations from their traditional interpretations.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

Humour is inherent in society; its fundamental discursive calling is to reflect contradictions of the real world, both verbally and non-verbally. Numerous theories, approaches and typologies appeared in attempts to conceptualise and categorise humour in its communicative manifestations. Generally speaking, the main metatheories approach the nature of humour from the linguistic perspective, among which three are the most prominent: incongruity theory, superiority theory, and relief theory (Kuczok et al. 2020). The incongruity theory, or so-called contrast theory, arose from understanding humour through the discrepancy between reality and expectation (Morreall 2020) and was later developed by Attardo (1994) into the theory of conceptual incongruity. The superiority theory explains the phenomenon of humour through the superiority of laughter towards some objects, with mockery, ridicule and laughter being central to every humorous case (Lintott 2016). The relief theory presents the idea that humour releases psychic tension and liberates people from restraints caused by laws and conventions (Krikmann 2006). Indeed, the theories described contribute to a better understanding of humour's nature and its different cases, giving impetus to further investigations of humour and the humorous.

Among the most significant findings of the last decades is the typology of humour styles introduced by Martin et al. (2003). The researchers distinguish among four humour styles: affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive and self-defeating. Individuals use affiliative humour to say funny things, tell jokes, and engage in spontaneous, witty banter to amuse and laugh with others. This style of humour is related to extraversion, cheerfulness, self-esteem, intimacy, relationship satisfaction and predominantly positive moods and emotions (Martin et al. 2003: 53). Self-enhancing humour suggests a humorous outlook on life even in the face of stress and a tendency to be amused by the incongruities of life. Such humour serves as a coping mechanism for emotion regulation. The aggressive style of humour speaks for itself: it is a hostile, aggressive and angry form of humour in which an individual finds it difficult to resist the impulse to say funny things that are meant to hurt others by using sarcasm, teasing, ridicule or derision. Self-defeating humour, which relates to self-disparaging humour, on the contrary, aims at making fun of oneself for the amusement of others or at laughing together with others when being made fun of.

Ruch et al. (2018), referring to the eight comic styles suggested by Schmidt-Hidding (1963), supplement these styles with a group of lower-level styles which include humour, fun, nonsense, wit, irony, satire, sarcasm, and cynicism. Sarcasm, cynicism, satire and irony are considered "dark" as they constitute a family of mockery or ridicule. These four styles are easy to misidentify or confuse since they overlap and have much in common. Smith (n.d.) points out

that “irony and sarcasm are used to portray meanings that differ from the literal meaning of an utterance; many times this can be an opposite or hyperbole”; however, sarcasm, unlike irony, is an aggressive and often hostile type of humour (Norrick 2003). As to satire, it is a “critical impulse manifesting itself in some degree of denigration, almost invariably through attempted humour” (Condren 2012: 392). Kuipers (2015: 21) neatly observes that “the humour in satire serves to attack: to collectively ridicule opponents, to mock their beliefs, and if possible, to compromise their dignity”. Satire utilises both irony and sarcasm, often in a humorous way, imitating people in ways that reveal their stupidity or flaws. Cynicism is “depreciating commonly acknowledged values, ridiculing the weaknesses in the world and disdaining moral concepts, which are considered ridiculous” (Mendiburo-Seguel & Heintz 2020: 382) which makes it “the darkest” style. The lighter styles – fun, humour, nonsense and wit – express benevolence, positive emotions and cognitive capabilities. However, *wit* does not fully correspond to the lighter styles since “it can be seen as part of the lighter styles despite also containing elements characteristic of the darker styles” (Ruch et al. 2018: 4).

In her extensive research on gender and humour in spontaneous New Zealand English, Hay (1995) proposes another taxonomy of types of humour. Since “some categories were unnecessary, some were collapsed, and some categories were expanded” (Hay 1995: 64), she modified the existing taxonomies considering the focus of her research and distinguished such types of humour: anecdotes, fantasy, insult, irony, jokes, observational, quote, roleplay, self-deprecation, vulgarity, wordplay and category “other” (humour that does not match any of other eleven types).

In a study of conversational humour, Dynel (2009a: 1284) offers “a list of verbal humour types/categories known in linguistics rather than their clear-cut taxonomy”. In particular, she describes such semantic-pragmatic categories as lexemes, phrasemes, witticisms, retorts, teasing, banter, putdowns, self-denigrating humour and anecdotes. Witticisms and other main humour types are categorised according to stylistic figures, puns, allusions and register clash on which they operate. Among stylistic figures, she considers simile/comparison, metaphor, hyperbole, paradox, irony, and sarcasm. Again, Dynel (2009a: 1296) claims the lack of clear borders between the categories of humour since they “are not mutually exclusive and thus, certain overlaps between them can be observed, and the categories can be combined in particular instances of humour”.

The listed typologies and taxonomies prove that humour is a complex phenomenon whose strict categorisation is hampered by the overlapping of its categories. None of the above-mentioned approaches in their original volume and interpretations could satisfy the needs of the current research. However, they were considered and adopted for this study. Four dimensions relating to individual differences in humour use suggested by Martin et al. (2003) are applicable to our typology of humour in politicians’ tweets since every humorous tweet implies one of the four allotted humour styles (affiliative, self-enhancing, aggressive or self-defeating). Among eight comic styles (Ruch et al. 2018), five of them, namely wit, irony, satire, sarcasm and cynicism are used in our own system as a form of humour expression. Category “humour” as a comic style is rejected in this study, since we consider humour in a broader sense actualised by means of wit, satire, irony, sarcasm, cynicism and others. Current research rests on Hay’s (1995) taxonomy of humour types since through anecdotes, fantasy, insult, irony, jokes, observational, self-deprecation, vulgarity and wordplay humour may either be explicitly or implicitly shown on the level of humour coding and encoding. Moreover, Dynel’s (2009a) taxonomy facilitates the formation of our own typology, where some of the semantic-pragmatic categories such as lexemes, phrasemes, witticisms, teasing, putdowns, and anecdotes are presented. Stylistic figures, according to which she categorised main humour types, are presented as the form of humour expression in our study. The remaining categories such as fun, nonsense, quote, roleplay, retorts, banter, and self-denigrating humour are rejected in this research for the fact

that cases of their use were not detected in our research data. At the same time, to move on there is a need to delineate the notion of “humour”.

Holmes (2000: 163) defines humour as the “utterances which are identified by the analyst, based on paralinguistic, prosodic and discursal clues, as intended by the speaker(s) to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some participants.” According to Crawford (1994: 57), humour is any communication that generates a “positive cognitive or affective response from listeners”. Romero & Cruthirds (2006: 59) suggest that humour is an “amusing communication that produces positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group, or organisation”. However, humour has the opposite effect since it “also seems to have different “flavours”, such as bitter, salty or dark” (Ruch 2008: 21). Relying on these definitions, we conclude that humour reflects something funny that is caused by the contradiction between what an individual expects and what occurs in real-life situations with a tendency to evoke laughter or mock and is perceived as humorous by at least some recipients. In this study, humour is distinguishable from satire, irony, sarcasm, cynicism, joke, etc.; we argue that all these categories can contain humour. Humour implies its use in a speech for a particular purpose, thus, humorous utterances possess “pragmatic intentions” in terms of Austin’s tradition (Austin 1962). He introduced the term illocutionary act i.e., “utterances which have a certain (conventional) force” (Austin 1962: 108) known as the illocutionary force that refers to a speaker’s intention in delivering the utterance. It accomplishes some actions whether greeting, insulting, complementing, appraising, informing, etc.

### **3. Methodology**

In this linguistic study, tweets were used for factual material for several reasons. Firstly, the number of Twitter daily active users continues to grow (between 2017 and 2022 it doubled at the minimum) which means the social network currently enjoys wide popularity and represents a relevant anthropocentric space for research. Secondly, tweets have proved to be productive for interdisciplinary research, especially in the domains of politics, communication science, linguistics, social psychology, etc. Twitter users have an opportunity to create tweets, read the tweets on trending topics, follow other users, and engage in discussions by replying or retweeting (re-posting) their posts. Along with posting a text message, users can attach other forms of media content (links, images of different formats, videos), and supply the tweets with emojis and hashtags. All these options contribute to establishing multi-layered communication (interpersonal, follower-followee and hashtag-based exchange; Bruns & Moe 2014) which is fundamental for recognising Twitter as a powerful tool for political and crisis communication and information dissemination. Finally, Twitter remains on the list of most popular platforms for academic research since it provides the researcher with access to its data through some Application Programming Interfaces (API).

In pursuit of compiling a sample of humorous tweets, we performed a preliminary evaluation of the content of tweets posted by the Ukrainian politicians who within the studied period were most active in the information space mainly targeting overseas recipients, i.e., predominantly writing in languages other than Ukrainian. The content analysis helped us to select the accounts that would satisfy further research needs. At this stage, we had to refuse to consider the Twitter accounts activity of some politicians, including that of the Ukrainian president, since they represent little or no relevance to humour research. Such limitations as the language of tweets and the presence of tweets realising humorous effect became the critical factors for selecting Twitter accounts to form the corpus.

After preliminary evaluation, we selected nine Twitter accounts of Ukrainian politicians of different ranks. These range from government officials (ministers) to envoys, advisers and presiding officers (see Table 1 in the Results section). Using Python 3.10 and a *twarc2* – a command line tool and Python library for archiving Twitter JSON data – we extracted the tweets from 24 February to 3 June 2022, which equals the first 100 days of the full-scale Russian invasion. After obtaining the necessary Twitter archive data through Academic Research, we performed the filtration to get the final sample for this research.

Typically, Twitter users distinguish between standard or general tweets, mentions, replies and retweets. Standing on their own, standard tweets appear in the home timeline of all followers of the sender. We considered such tweets either formally or formally and factually “authored” tweet type, so they were included in the sample. Mentions are tweets containing another account’s Twitter username preceded by the “@” symbol, and replies – marked by “Replying to” in the timeline – are direct responses to the tweets from other accounts. Because of the limitations imposed by Twitter on the visibility of mentions and replies (see about Replies and Mentions n.d.), the sample entered only those tweets that appear publicly and are freely accessed by any of the sender’s followers in their home timeline.

Retweets refer to re-posting the tweets created by other accounts. Unless it was a Quote Tweet complemented by the sender’s personal comment, it was not regarded as an “authored” tweet type, and thus, it was excluded from the sample. We also excluded broadcasting tweets for their non-standard form which requires applying somewhat different study methods and independent research.

Each tweet of the initial sampling was coded for the language (see Table 1 in the Results section for comprehensive statistical data on the distribution among the accounts and languages). In this research, firstly, we focused on the tweets posted in either English or German, since these are two languages actively ‘operated’ in Ukraine’s external and transatlantic political discourse in the long run. Moreover, they are the most widespread languages in Europe and around the globe in the fields of diplomacy, international communications, media and the Internet. The category *other languages* entered the tweets in languages other than English and German or the ones where the language could not be detected (e.g., a short video clip capturing the weapon use).

Finally, we organised a final sampling which entered the tweets selected by analysing the thematic and humorous content. In other words, to be considered a wartime humorous tweet the tweet had to meet both requirements: to touch upon any aspect of the Russian-Ukrainian war and to produce any humorous effect on at least two of three selectors. In the next stage, we analysed the structure and the semantics of the tweets to determine the levels of the authors’ personal engagement in wartime humorous tweets creation and the potential readership of these tweets. After that, we applied the elements of content analysis, which is a mixed methods approach according to Mayring (2014: 6), to make qualitative inferences by studying the meaning and key semantic elements of politicians’ utterances. It helped us to define the key subject fields (*what* were the tweets about) and the key targets of humouring in tweets (*who* was the humour in tweets about). The final selection underwent further distribution in terms of existing typologies of humour found in Dynel (2009), Hay (1995) and the Theory of humour styles (Martin et al. 2003), which were crucial for categorising the nature of humour in the tweets. The principles of Speech Act Theory (Austin 1962) guided the study of the pragmatic stimuli to the appearance of wartime humorous tweets in the timelines of the Ukrainian politicians.

## 4. Results

Within this study, 3727 tweets produced in different languages by nine prominent present-day Ukrainian politicians of different ranks were selected for the initial sampling and only 254 of them entered the final sample of wartime humorous tweets (see Table 1). The results of categorising wartime humorous tweets are given in Table 2.

Table 1. Tweeting activity of Ukrainian politicians examined

Politician's name, Twitter ID and position (as of June 2022)	Followers (as of June 2022)	Tweets in En\De\other (total)	Humorous tweets
Mykhailo Fedorov / @FedorovMykhailo Ukraine government official: Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine and Minister of Digital Transformation of Ukraine	298.3K	277\0\3 (280)	10
Anton Gerashchenko / @Gerashchenko_en Advisor to the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine	70.1K	908\0\1 (909)	35
Dmytro Kuleba / @DmytroKuleba Ukraine government official: Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine	906K	389\0\39 (428)	5
Sergiy Kyslytsya / @SergiyKyslytsya Ukraine government official: Permanent Representative of Ukraine in UN	73.6K	440\4\100 (544)	60
Andrij Melnyk / @MelnykAndrij Ukrainian diplomat and international lawyer / Ukraine's Ambassador to Germany	137.9K	40\309\1 (350)	85
Mykhailo Podolyak / @Podolyak_M Advisor to the Head of the Office of President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky	300.6K	282\1\311 (594)	32
Oleksii Reznikov / @oleksiireznikov Ukraine government official: Minister of Defence of Ukraine	393.1K	114\1\9 (124)	10
Ruslan Stefanchuk @r_stefanchuk The Chairperson of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine	16K	123\5\138 (266)	7
Andriy Yermak @AndriyYermak Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine	30.7K	119\0\113 (232)	10
Total	2 226.3K	2692\320\715 (3727)	254

Table 2. Typology of wartime humorous tweets

Criterion		Type of humorous tweet	Form of humour (humour expression)	Style of humour
1	Authorship of humorous tweets	self-made	wit irony satire sarcasm cynicism anecdotes fantasy insult irony jokes observational self-deprecation vulgarity wordplay lexemes phrasemes witticisms teasing putdowns	affiliative self-enhancing aggressive self-defeating
		shared (transmitted)		
		collaborative (complemented)		
2	Expected recipients of the tweets	complex target		
		tweets targeting the general public		
		particular bodies		
3	Targets of humour in tweets	(with) explicit target		
		(with) implicit target		
4	Subject field	(about) Ukraine in wartime		
		(about) Armed Forces of Ukraine and military help		
		(about) the “Russian world”, Russia’s policy and positioning in the world		
		(about) the world’s reaction to Russia’s deeds		
5	Pragmatic intentions of humorous tweets	factual-informational		
		anecdotal		
		observational		
		thanksgiving		
		criticising		
		insulting		
		inspirational (self-enhancing)		
		promotional		
self-relieving				

The typology of wartime humorous tweets opens the category of authorship of humorous tweets which estimates the grade of personal contribution to the overall humorousness of the tweet and its dissemination. From the perspective of information construal and sharing, the communicative roles assumed by the politicians on Twitter are generator (produces self-made humorous tweets), facilitator/mediator (embeds humorous elements authored by someone else) and collaborator (shares and complements the existing tweet, gives it a second life).

Over 20 subjects (topics) related to wartime issues were detected in the final sample for this research. These were systematised into subject (thematic) fields treated as a category on the whole. Tweets focusing on the “Russian world”, life in Russia, Russia’s policy, propaganda and attitudes to the outer world dominate (56,3%) followed by tweets featuring the world’s reaction to Russia’s deeds (20,9%). Equal coverage (11,4% each) in humorous tweets gets the subjects of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and military help and life in Ukraine in wartime.

Table 3. Quantitative distribution of subject fields within the sample

Subject field	Politician's Twitter ID									Number of humorous tweets (%)	
	@FedorovMykhailo	@Gerashchenko_en	@DmytroKuleba	@SergiyKyslytsya	@MelnykAndriij	@Podolyak_M	@oleksiireznikov	@r_stefanchuk	@AndriyYermak		
1	The "Russian world", Russia's policy and positioning in the world	3	8		46	65	7	4	4	6	143 (56.3)
2	The world's reaction to Russia's deeds		2	5	14	20	5		3	4	53 (20.9)
3	Armed Forces of Ukraine and military help	4	10				9	6			29 (11.4)
4	Ukraine in wartime	3	15				11				29 (11.4)

Notable for the wartime humorous tweets is the variety of targets of the humour. These constitute political opponents, also including immediate Russian adversaries. The analysis shows that some of them are explicitly marked and are easily recognised as objects of ridicule in the text, whereas some of them are not directly mentioned or addressed, so decoding the message requires from the recipients some extra knowledge.

During analysis, we noticed that the intention to post, to repost, amplify or reply to an existing tweet and the expectations to reach certain recipients are governed by the communicative purposes of the Twitter user. According to the pragmatic criterion, we distinguished nine classes of wartime humorous tweets each performing certain informative, expressive and social functions. The wartime tweets under study were produced or reproduced to inform, tell a story, comment, express criticism or hurl insult, often in the search of self-enhancement and self-relief.

Wartime tweets are produced or reproduced by Ukrainian politicians in the domain of political discourse. Unexpectedly, the subject fields of political discourse get visibly extended as we witness the diffusion of the political discourse in its traditional understanding with what we call everyday discourse. This fact enables politicians to attract a wider audience, that goes beyond politicians, envoys, political experts and statesmen. The analysis proved that wartime humorous tweets vary according to the classes of potential readers which range from the general public to particular persons and combined.

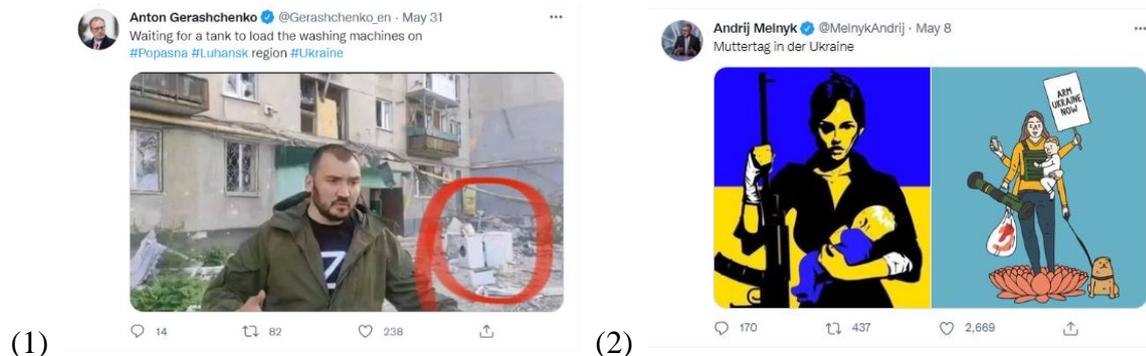
On analysing the tweets from the sample, we concluded that the self-enhancing style has adapted to the conditions of wartime rhetoric on Twitter and developed its specifics. On the one hand, it continues to serve its inspiring and motivational purposes but on the other, it obviously draws together with black humour since the main sources of inspiration in the tweets of the Ukrainian politicians are the losses, failures and faults of the opponents and adversaries.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Authorship of humorous tweets

Twitter is a highly appropriate environment for humour to function. Although concise technically, tweets leave much space for humour creation, complementation and sharing. The humorous effect may be realised in any block of the message, either in the author's block or the quoted one. This allows us to reflect on each Twitter user's role in this process, ranging from creator to collaborator and further to mediator. The way Twitter users organise and share information relates to the types of tweets and their structural organisation.

The type of tweet that prevails on Twitter is a tweet containing *self-made humour*. We imply that self-made humorous tweets are the original messages created individually by the author and posted on the Twitter user's profile page and home timeline. By posting an original (self-made) tweet the author initiates the communicative act and the use of humour contributes to the engagement of their readership (which is wider than "followers"), thus, creating a platform for discussions, debates, opinions and emotion sharing. An example of a self-made wartime humorous tweet is the tweet by A. Gerashchenko (1) which features a photo of a man, presumably a Russian soldier, wearing a Z-logo shirt and standing against a bombed-out and ransacked flat building. Behind him, there is a collection of stolen washing machines presumably to be loaded and taken away. In the associated verbal block of the post, A. Gerashchenko suggests a sarcastic title to the photo that exposes such vices of the Russian army as looting and banditry – the wartime fact fervently refuted by Russian propaganda. The photo is presumably a screenshot from a video taken from social media and edited by A. Gerashchenko himself. In such case, both visual and verbal blocks of the message are considered authored by a fully-fledged author of the humorous tweet.



Attaching different media files to text messages is a typical form of sharing humour on Twitter. We imply that a *shared humorous tweet* incorporates humour transmitted from other sources. Such type of tweet structurally rests on embedding into the tweet humorous elements (text, image etc.) authored by someone else. In A. Melnyk's tweet on the occasion of International Mother's Day 2022 (2), the overall bitter irony comes to light through the discrepancy between the sense of Mother's Day and the aggressive reality the mothers of Ukraine face. The post offers the recipients both to bite one's lip and to smile. In particular, the image on the right, which is a work by a modern Ukrainian artist O. Grekhov, features a godlike omnipotent multitasked Ukrainian mother who 24/7 has to manage all the housework, take care of children and pets, be abreast of the latest developments, to defend her house and family and to appeal to the world for help. In complex, A. Melnyk shares with his wide readership, among whom there are lots of German politicians and statesmen and -women, an aggressive, self-enhancing but still humorous conceptualisation of the woman's burdens of wartime.

A particularly significant case of a humorous tweet is the one we label *collaborative* or *complemented*. To be classified as such, two conditions are to be fulfilled: 1) at least a dual authorship of the tweet (the quoted and the quoting authors), 2) complementary content within the blocks of the message just as in (3) where A. Melnyk quotes @tagesschau citing its online article headed (translated): “Baerbock in Tallinn: The situation in Mariupol is almost unbearable”. The humorous effect comes from A. Melnyk’s acknowledging the same state of affairs far from occupied and suffering Mariupol, in Berlin. Being a “soldier at the diplomatic front” as he calls himself (Andrij Melnyk, April 14, 2022), A. Melnyk has been practising “pure war diplomacy” (Andrij Melnyk, March 23, 2022) and sharp criticism towards the German government.



The ironic effect of the tweet is achieved through A. Melnyk’s comparing the way of hopelessness the people in Mariupol and A. Melnyk personally in Berlin share, although in different contexts: there – under the rule of occupants, here – under the rule of ‘exemplary’ European liberals. Noteworthy is that the contents of both parts of the tweet complement each other, i.e., form an adjacent pair that engenders overall irony.

## 5.2. Subject field

The *subject field* is another criterion for humorous tweets classification. In this research, we performed qualitative content analysis and distinguished four dominant subject domains that the Ukrainian politicians mocked and joked about on Twitter.

Among 254 humorous tweets in the sample, the most common subject is *The ‘Russian world’, Russia’s policy and positioning in the world*. Eight out of nine politicians appealing to this subject refer to Russian propagandist doctrines, the blatant lies spread by the Russian officials, current events in Russia, the stupidity and narrow-mindedness of folks living in this country, looting of the Russian soldiers and touch upon the personality of the Russian president V. Putin, S. Lavrov, V. Nebenzya etc. Let us consider the following examples:

(4) The russians destroyed the museum of Gregory Skovoroda. This year we will celebrate the 300th anniversary of our Genius. After that, those who consider themselves the owners of Pushkin’s legacy must clearly understand that, in fact, you all are descendants of Bulgakov’s Sharikov.

(@r\_stefanchuk, May 8, 2022)

(5) I thank @NewYorker for a perfect alternative to the russian ambassador drivel of tommyrot in today’s meeting of the UN Security Council. Special thanks to @stephenwitt Great article! [one image attached].

(@SergiyKyslytsya, May 12, 2022)

The allusion in (4) rests on the references to famous writers S. Pushkin and M. Bulgakov. While the Russian propaganda promotes the exceptionality of the Russian culture, the Russian army destroys the cultural heritage of Ukraine which makes them primitive and indecent people, just

as in Prof. Preobrazhensky's infamous experiment described by M. Bulgakov in "Heart of a Dog". Thus, the allusion applied underscores the inconsistency between what is said and done, i.e., realises ironic effect.

The same subject chooses S. Kyslytsya's in (5). As a PR of Ukraine to the UN, he demonstrates a peculiar sense of refined diplomatic humour based on a profound knowledge of history, international law, UN documents etc. S. Kyslytsya's humour is aggressive: he often appeals to sheer sarcasm, bitter irony, sarcastic observation, black humour and even vulgar jokes. Although S. Kyslytsya employs aggressive humour by insulting V. Nebenzya ("russian ambassador drivel of tommyrot"), the overall irony reveals through the incongruity between the expected and the actual behaviour of the Ukrainian envoy in the context. The tweet features an image of S. Kyslytsya himself demonstratively reading the article about the Turkish drone Bayraktar TB2 that helps to combat the Russian invaders on the battlefield right during the Russian ambassador's speech at the UN meeting on "denazifying" Ukraine. Verbal offence, non-verbal behaviour, the seriousness of the context – all these factors catalyse the final humorous effect of the tweet.

In their Twitter timelines, the Ukrainian politicians also speculate a lot on *the world's reaction to Russia's deeds*. This subject field incorporates such subjects as sanctions, presumable punishment, criticism of connections with Russia, inaction and uncertainty ascribed to some governments and organisations which delay supporting Ukraine. The most severe criticism of their political opponents was detected in the Twitter activities of A. Melnyk and S. Kyslytsya.

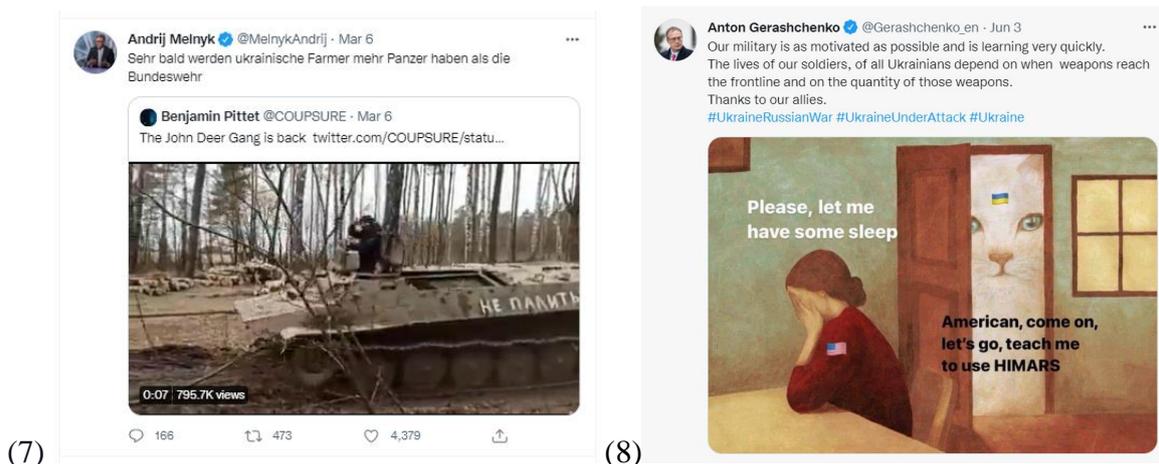
A. Melnyk, Ukraine's Ambassador to Germany, is widely known for sarcastic criticising of the German government and many German politicians for the unwillingness to split bonds with V. Putin and supply heavy weapons to Ukraine. Within the first 100-day period of Russian full-scale invasion, in his timeline appeared especially heavy criticism and mockery of O. Scholz and F. W. Steinmeier for their procrastination, fear and unwillingness to lose profit. His criticism sounds very emotional and harsh, and it often contains aggressive humour, just as in (6).

(6) (translated) "Massive" (Flag of Germany) help to Ukraine? Miss. Germany thinks of itself first and foremost. Cheating takes place: A crushing analysis by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW) on the results achieved by the traffic light coalition. Truly disappointing" [one link and one image attached].

(@MelnykAndrij, Apr 24, 2022).

Wordplay lies in the heart of humour embedded in the tweet: resorting to military jargon ("Fehl-anzeige" lit. "miss"), A. Melnyk's targets the German government ("Deutschland", "Ampel" lit. "traffic light coalition") and derides the actual level of Germany's military help to Ukraine. He exposes the incongruence between what is declared by the German government ("massive help") and the reality ("miss"). The reversal of valence between the literal and intended meanings is complemented using inverted commas.

The least popular within the sample and among the politicians whose Twitter activity we analysed are the topics of *the Armed Forces of Ukraine and military help* and *life in Ukraine in wartime*. Two examples of tweets covering these topics are (7) and (8).



In (7) A. Melnyk ironically comments on B. Pittet’s tweet, who posted a video with a Ukrainian farmer drawing a Russian tank: “Very soon Ukrainian farmers will have more tanks than the Bundeswehr”. Obviously, the politician pursues two goals: on the one hand, with self-enhancement, he derides the paradoxes of wartime life in Ukraine where farmers turn to real suppliers of tanks; on the other hand, the irony is addressed to the German allies as a reproach for not having kept their promises.

Another example is A. Gerashchenko’s tweet (8) featuring a comic meme in support of the wartime Ukrainian trend “Feline Defense Force”: a cat symbolising the Ukrainian army asks a crying woman, who personifies the American army, to teach him to use HIMARS. In a joking way, the politician highlights the great enthusiasm and tirelessness of the Ukrainian warriors and the urgency to supply weapons to help Ukraine to win.

The commonality in key subjects of humorous tweets expresses the union of the Ukrainian politician’s rhetoric and main concerns regarding wartime issues. Humouring on each of the detected theme matters reflects the results of individual comprehension of the realia and the personal positions and spheres of competence of the twittering politicians. Focusing on the blatant, absurd and illogical actions of the Russian government, as well as criticism of Western allies, politicians are pursuing their goals. They tend to draw attention to the problem and influence both the general public and the global establishment.

### 5.3. Targets of humour in tweets

Apart from covering particular subject matters, wartime tweets as an element of political discourse focus on personalities a lot. These people who are deliberately mocked, derided, ironised etc. in tweets we call the *targets of humour*. Peculiar of the wartime humorous tweets is that the politicians usually target other participants of political discourse, primarily, political opponents. In this study, we consider a political opponent any author or follower of the ideas, values and policies that arouses disagreement and denunciation in Twitter posts by the selected Ukrainian politicians.

In the course of the analysis, we noticed that these targets are sometimes not easily identified. In most tweets, the targets are directly indicated. These tweets we classified as tweets with *explicit targets*. Let us consider some examples:

(9) First, the Russian missiles hit the place where the Babyn Yar memorial complex is. Now the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov is comparing Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Hitler, who murdered 6 million Jews. Because, according to Lavrov, “Jews are usually the fiercest anti-Semites”.

(@AndriyYermak, May 2, 2022)

(10) (translated) Hello Ex-General Vad, as Merkel's "military strategist" you personally prevented Ukraine from joining NATO in 2008 & in this way made today's war of annihilation of Russia possible. Your "advice" is absolutely useless. Better enjoy your pension [one image attached].

(@MelnikAndrij, May 21, 2022)

In the ironic tweet (9), the Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine focuses on S. Lavrov – Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs – and exposes the paradoxes in his argumentation that speak for the overall absurdity of Russia's narratives. In (10), A. Melnyk addresses German Ex-General Erich Vad, sarcastically underrating his false and biased judgements concerning Ukraine in 2008 and 2022 and suggesting him to enjoy his retirement and abstain from any further "advice" concerning the issue. In both discursive fragments, the targets are lexically marked (personal names and position indication) but it is not a usual case for the Twitter environment. More often, the targets of humour are *hybridly marked*, namely by a combination of a tag, a personal name, other particularising words, an image, a photo, an external link, a hashtag, a GIF, an emoji etc. The target of humour in (11) is a Russian soldier accused of looting in Bucha. The tweet contains his personal name (*Shchebenkov Vadym*), his personal photo and a hashtag *#russianlooters*:



(11)

The photo features a typical street mugger of the 1990s called *gopnik* in the post-Soviet countries. The man is sitting in his family circle, at a festive table presumably celebrating something. M. Fedorov derides him by including a sarcastic inscription "I stole 100 kg of clothes" which tells the truth of real services this soldier rendered to his country, about his achievements and war trophies. The incongruence between what the recipient sees and what they learn results in surprise, at first, and transforms into laughter. However, by this multimodal marking M. Fedorov primarily pursues putting the target of ridicule in the outmost vulnerable position online.

Many tweets, however, do not have a clearly defined target of humour as in the following set of tweets:

(12) [As] one of mine colleagues after the last Security Council session said, "You know, it looks like a group therapy. We are all here trying to bring to sanity one member".

(@SergiyKyslytsya, Mar 8, 2022)

(13) (translated) [quoting @POLITICOEurope] No fundamental change in the times. Just trivia. As always.

(@MelnykAndrij, Apr 10, 2022)

(14) [quoting @POLITICOEurope] Europe has already seen the most devastating examples of “peace deals” ... apparently some politicians have topical amnesia or blindness. Full support of [@krisjaniskarin](#)s thoughts on the matter [two images attached].

(@SergiyKyslytsya, May 31, 2022)

In (12), S. Kyslytsya obviously applies the so-called *implicit targeting*: by using a direct citation of one of his colleague’s words, he shares the insulting humour aimed at his favourite object of criticism – V. Nebenzya, the PR of Russia to the UN. The same does A. Melnyk (13) as he reproaches O. Sholz for the absence of the proclaimed fundamental change in the times (“Zeitenwende”) and ironically calls it trivia (“Klein-Klein”) instead. Apparently, the humorous effect of both tweets is reached if the recipients share this background knowledge and recognise the authors’ implications.

Generalising is another technique used for “blurring” the targets of humour. In (14), S. Kyslytsya exercises sarcasm as he ascribes “topical amnesia or blindness” to some politicians eager to pursue peace at any cost. The Ukrainian PR to the UN does not specify the objects of his sarcastic criticism, and it helps to retain focus on the “serious” part of the tweet.

#### 5.4. Pragmatic intentions of humorous tweets

Pragmatics is deeply rooted in any form of online or offline communication and political discourse is not an exception. Politicians of all ranks use the power of language and laughter to influence the thoughts and actions of the public. This occurs for multiple reasons which we, following Austin’s tradition, call “pragmatic intentions” (Austin 1962: 108). According to the different illocutionary force of the utterance, we suggest distinguishing between factual-informational, anecdotal, observational, thanksgiving, criticising, insulting, inspirational (self-enhancing), promotional and self-relieving tweets.

*Factual-informational* humorous tweets focus on reporting some developments, facts or any other sort of evidence. Usually, such informational block is followed by an observational one that sparks humorous effect just as in this tweet:

(15) Russian Foreign Ministry stated that “Israel mercenaries are fighting alongside the Nazis in Azov”. In April, 3.5 tons of cocaine smuggled into Russia were seized in Estonia. It seems that the cocaine shortage has forced the Foreign Ministry to move on to something heavier.

(@Podolyak\_M, May 4, 2022).

Technically, M. Podolyak introduces two separate ideas – the statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the information about preventing contraband – and performs their synthesis, draws a cause-effect chain in the form of a sarcastic observation over the absurdity of the statement.

*Anecdotal* humorous tweets also rest on the events from real life. They are told as true reports of funny events experienced by the teller and are usually explicitly prefaced (Norrick 2003: 1339). J. Hay calls the anecdote “a story which the speaker perceives to be amusing” (Hay 1995: 65) and which may consist of several funny points or several subplots (Hay 1995: 65). The case to be described below proves that anecdotes may migrate from colloquial to online discourses and adopt new forms.

In May 2022, A. Melnyk reacted sharply to O. Scholz’s statement on his visit to Kyiv being unreasonable at that moment, taking into consideration the refusal of Kyiv to welcome the German president F. W. Steinmeier just a month before. A. Melnyk called the German Chancellor an “offended liver sausage” (*beleidigte Leberwurst*) which caused both condemnation and support at all levels, including media and social networks. As expected, the Twitter timeline features a story of support: some of the German butchers decided to play on words and engage themselves in advertising their products (liver sausage):



(16) and (17) come from a series of tweets on “the liver sausage case”. This formality supports the thesis that an anecdote is a sequence of several ‘subplots’ within one story. By the first tweet in the series, A. Melnyk triggers the memory of the source humorous incident, so that “the whole audience can laugh at it and enjoy the humour again” (Hay 1995: 66). Alongside, having fun with his supporters, A. Melnyk continues ironising the German politicians’ misdeeds (17).

An *observational humorous tweet* entails commenting on what was said or done previously. It features incongruity which results in humorous effect. Consider a funny observation that suggests O. Reznikov as he comments on a Russian propagandists’ video of a Russian helicopter “mastery avoiding” a Ukrainian missile:

(18) On 26th day of war, russian ministry of “defence” was finally able to film a video of russian helicopter evading Ukrainian Stinger. Previous 121 unsuccessful takes remained forever in the Ukrainian land. #UArmy #FightLikeUkrainian.

(@oleksiireznikov, Mar 21, 2022)

Information block of the message puts a recipient in some communicative expectation (“defence” taken in inverted commas and the lexeme *finally*). The humorous effect itself is activated in the second part of the message which is a witty observational comment to dubious progress of the Russian army on the battlefield.

*Thanksgiving humour* is concerned with how a politician expresses his gratitude, empathy, appreciation or sense of debt on Twitter after benefiting from something. An example of thanksgiving humour can be this tweet:



(19)

In (19), A. Gerashchenko applies thanksgiving and shared humour as he quotes A. Tapinas’s tweet while expressing gratitude to the Lithuanian people and personally to the influencer. Humorous effect is activated by a hilarious meme which mocks the governments worldwide who are afraid to supply the Ukrainian army with necessary weapons. At the same time, by contrast, the meme accentuates the boldness and resoluteness of the civil Lithuanians to help Ukraine. Though humour concentrates in the second part of the tweet, in general, we consider it to be thanksgiving and the whole tweet humorous by far.

Besides being a reporting platform, Twitter gives politicians extra space for practising political *criticism*. Expectedly, the wartime period intensifies this practice quantitatively and qualitatively. In particular, criticism on Twitter has become more aggressive, less diplomatic and increasingly humorous. To some extent, Section 5.2 and many of the previously discussed tweets highlight A. Melnyk among the main producers of scathing criticism against everyone who acts against Ukraine’s current interests and needs. The Ukrainian envoy actively subjects to criticism not only top German politicians (O. Scholz, F. W. Steinmeier, A. Merkel, Ch. Lindner, M. Kretschmer, etc.) but also many of the “experts” from various fields and “bad journalists” who are influencers to some extent in their communities (E. Vad, P. Widmer, H. Kissinger, etc.). His *criticising humour* ranges from light mocking as in (13) to knocking out sarcasm as in (36 and 10), from jeering (36 and 10) to insulting and deriding (16 and 17).

Russia, the Russian army, Russian representatives in any field and anyone empathising with V. Putin (“Putin-Versteher”) get a hail of criticism and condemnation from all Ukrainian politicians on Twitter. Under the attack are the Russians’ cultural and historical legacy, philosophy, worldview, values – everything is socked in sarcasm:

(20) The Russian artist Aivazovsky is actually Armenian Aivazian. Artist Malevich, writers Gogol and Bulgakov are Ukrainians. “Soviet” inventors of the first helicopter – Sikorsky, satellite – Korolev and plane – Tupolev were repressed Ukrainians. (1/2) Even the Soviet cult song “Arise, Great Country” (1941) is the (Flag of Ukraine) “Arise, my people” (1919). The whole (Flag of Russia) history is stealing someone else's work. It’s not surprising that the (Flag of Russia) army takes home appliances from (Flag of Ukraine) kitchens and sends them home. This is the “great (Flag of Russia) culture” (2/2).

(@Podolyak\_M, Apr 23, 2022)

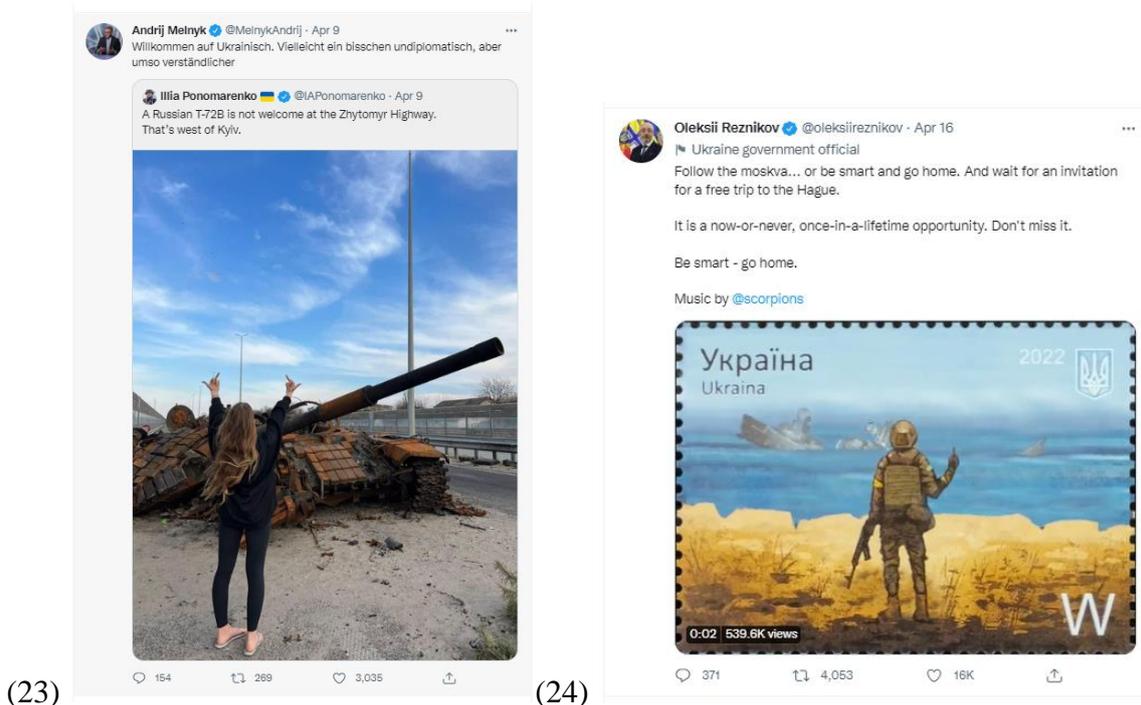
(21) Meanwhile, Finland is going to build a wall on the border with Russia. Well, the wall of misunderstanding between Russia and the civilized world has already been built.

(@AndriyYermak, May 2, 2022)

(22) In the center of Krasnoyarsk city, “Western garbage” containers were installed where residents throw out things produced by brands that have seized business in Russia. What about a special bin for planes, trains and cars? [#UkraineRussiaWar](#) [#Propaganda](#) [two images attached].

(@Gerashchenko\_en, 25 May 2022)

In their criticism coming from righteous anger for all the deaths and ruination, Ukrainian politicians, though not often, resort to vulgarities, insults and threats, expressed both verbally and non-verbally. A couple of tweets to consider the use of *insulting humour*:



In (23), A. Melnyk quotes the post with a girl showing her middle fingers to a destroyed Russian tank and sarcastically entitles it “Ukrainian-style welcome”. Alongside, he acknowledges that such an obviously insulting post may still be “a bit undiplomatic” on his part. Still, this boldness adds to self-enhancement of the readership and realisation of the humorous effect.

(24) features a postmark issued by Ukrposhta (Ukrainian post) and dedicated to the drowning of the Russian flagship *Moskva*. It also involves the same insulting element addressed to Russian soldiers left on the battlefield. The gesture is accompanied by the wartime euphemisms “follow the Moskva” and “be smart and go home” and a sarcastic promise to send an invitation to Hague tribunal.

Perhaps, inspiring people around and self-enhancement are the dominating functions of wartime humour. Inspirational or self-enhancing humour is about staying positive throughout all life situations and hardships. Together with affiliative one, self-enhancing humour belongs to positive humour styles since it helps to overcome stress, discharge emotions, wander off all troubles and establish emotional contact with other people having similar needs or expectations.

(25) On this day 77 years ago, Hitler committed suicide in his Führerbunker. Great date. Good tradition. We are waiting ... I also hope that each dictator has a separate bunker-boiler in the hell.

(@r\_stefanchuk, Apr 30, 2022)

(26) UEFA banned Russian clubs from participating in next season's European Cups, and excluded Russia's team from the League of Nations. The ball appears to be on our side, because Russia's got no ball at all.

(@AndriyYermak, May 2, 2022)

(27) Ryazan, Nizhnevartovsk, Mordovia, Ivanovo region – military registration & enlistment offices in (Flag of Russia) suddenly began to ignite. Burning from shame? (Flag of Russia) continues special demilitarization operation of... its own army. Is it still according to the plan or should we help speed it up?

(@Podolyak\_M, May 15, 2022)

Notable transformations occur when the self-enhancing style of humour adapts to the environment of wartime rhetoric on Twitter as may be traced in (25), (26) and (27). Primarily, self-enhancement in the politicians' posts correlates with inspiration as it is about maintaining motivation to keep together in the face of the enemy and keep fighting. Secondly, the self-enhancement detected in humorous tweets is not egocentric anymore: in wartime communication, "self" transforms into "we-referencing" (*we are waiting, the ball appears to be on our side, ..or should we help speed it up?*). Furthermore, among the primary sources for inspirational humour in Ukrainian politicians' tweets are the opponents' drawbacks, misfortunes or failures.

We also noticed a tendency to express self-enhancement through fantasy. According to Hay (1995: 68), fantasy is the construction of humorous imaginary scenarios or events, a product of a collaborative activity in which the participants jointly construct a possible or impossible series of events. A typical example of fantasy is a live polylogue on some fictitious developments which is born at a party. However, this is not the case on Twitter. In our opinion, fantasy has also adapted to the Twitter environment and undergone some changes as compared to the original concept described by J. Hay.

We agree with J. Hay that all examples of fantasy will involve the construction of imaginary circumstances or happenings. However, it is not necessary any more to produce "a lot of collaborative humour" (Hay 1995: 70) in this process; Twitter communication ideally allows individual fantasy formation. Let us consider examples:



(28)



(29)

In the focus of (28), there is an image with the sarcastic inscription on V. Putin being “NATO salesman of the year” for his catalysing the processes of the NATO enlargement of 2022. Our concerns around the true authorship of the image give grounds to regard the tweet a product of joint fantasising (the case of collaborative humour discussed in Section 5.1). The sarcasm of the inscription is supported and intensified by A. Gerashchenko’s comment that suggests a scenario of awarding V. Putin a deserved prize and provides its details: he metaphorically conceptualises V. Putin’s future as an individualised sea voyage (“cruise in one man cell”) that is expected to be continuous (“lifelong”), but still meant to get him to the final destination point (“the Hague Tribunal”). Another scenario of the upcoming events (29) – organising diving tours to the sunken Russian warship *Moskva* – is suggested by O. Reznikov. His post is a sparkle of positive irony and self-enhancement: he mocks the loss of the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, shares his strong belief in returning Crimea soon (speaks of one more diving spot as an already accessible one), and expresses his readiness to check the war trophy personally. He crowns the tweet by a small report about his own experience with scuba and provides a photo proof. All this amuses the readers, makes them smile and enjoy the fantasy together.

Another type of humour in politicians’ tweets according to their pragmatic intentions is *promotional one*. Such tweets primarily highlight positive sides of the Ukrainian government, society, culture and the country itself. Promotional tweets are designed to increase the country’s popularity in the eyes of potential supporters as in this tweet:

(30) What can I add? Guys haven’t seen yet our Diia. Digital Signature and tax payments in a few clicks [one image attached].

(@FedorovMykhailo, May 22, 2022).

In fact, M. Fedorov responds to the text message from a certain Pavlo Martynov embedded into the image attached to this tweet: “The car of our friends was taken in Belgium to the impound lot. They came to the police and showed the documents in Diia app. And half of the department came to look at the Ukrainian documents on the smartphone (grinning face emoji)”. Commenting on P. Martynov’s anecdote, M. Fedorov puts a seemingly rhetorical question but

answers it immediately, thus, ironising the immaturity of digital services for everyday use in progressive Belgium. Thus, the Minister of Digital Transformation openly vaunts digital innovations in Ukraine and promotes them.

Humour has long been viewed as a means of emotional ventilation, tension release, relaxation and even a method of adjustment to certain life conditions (Bizi et al. 1988). By posting humorous *self-relieving tweets*, Ukrainian politicians, as well as other people, get a chance to vent strong emotions into the public space and launch emotion sharing with other people. Consider the following tweets by A. Melnyk who is vexed with the German government that seems to be more discouraged by the alleged threats to their well-being through the energy embargo rather than the atrocities committed by Russia in Ukraine:

(31) (translated) What are you talking about? Killing civilians? Mass graves on the outskirts of Kyiv? Rapes? Bullshit! Our (Flag of Germany) WELLBEING is at risk! Have a nice Sunday @c\_lindner [one image attached].

(@MelnykAndrij, Apr 9, 2022)

(32) (translated) [quoting @tagesthemen] Embargo for (Flag of Russia) gas: THE dilemma for the traffic light coalition: “Human lives in Ukraine OR a bit of growth in Germany”? The clock is ticking.

(@MelnykAndrij, March 30, 2022)

Humour expressed in (31) and (32) serves for self-relieving purposes as the author sarcastically refers to the desire of the German government and people to distance themselves from the horrors of war in Ukraine. His indignation and disappointment hit the ceiling as he applies vulgarisms and capitalisation elements; however, a touch of bitter irony is perceived at the end of each tweet in his wishing C. Lindner “a nice Sunday” and a kind reminder to the German government that time and tide wait for no man.

## **5.5. The tweeting audience**

Political communication in any form serves the only goal of a politician - to gain or retain power and influence on the vast masses. Twitter provides the politicians with quick and stable access to a wide readership whom we call the tweeting audience. These are seen as targets of the intended communicative effect. According to this criterion, we distinguish tweets targeting the general public, tweets targeting particular bodies and combined.

Tweets *targeting the general public* address a broad audience, i.e., the individuals, groups and communities that may become interested in the tweet content. Let us study some of the cases:

(33) Everyone wants Putin to die. Until this happens, we give Ukrainians and the whole world a unique opportunity: to send Putin to Jupiter. Donate \$2.99 for a rocket. All funds will be directed to the restoration of the destroyed infrastructure! <https://putler.io> [one image attached].

(@FedorovMykhailo, Mar 1, 2022).

(34) Russian propaganda has long been @ 0 level of credibility, yet it keeps diving thru the floor: state TV aired 9th of May themed concert with pictures of “Soviet couples” separated by war incl Bonnie and Clyde. Where Parker and Barrow soviet operatives? OMG [one link attached].

(@SergiyKyslytsya, May 10, 2022).

The goal of most tweets addressed to a wide readership is to exert influence and catalyse decision-making. In (33), Minister M. Fedorov announces the Ukraine government’s fundraising campaign and appeals to the Ukrainians and the whole world to donate to Ukraine.

To amuse and attract a wider audience he suggests a humorous imaginary scenario: to donate \$2.99 for a rocket to send Putin to Jupiter, which is a euphemism for “to send to hell”. An attached picture of Putin in a shuttle enhances the humorous effect.

In (34) we witness another type of appeal. S. Kyslytsya calls to approach all Russia’s words and deeds critically. He ridicules Russian propaganda and their stupidity (or their conviction that the whole Russian folk is stupid?) over the incident at the concert devoted to Victory Day in Russia 2022.

Among the targets of the politicians’ tweets are also *particular bodies* that are clearly defined, as a rule. For example, S. Kyslytsya usually addresses Russia’s officials and representatives to the UN directly. Below is the reaction of S. Kyslytsya to the tweet by the Russian Embassy, UK on requesting an emergency meeting of the UN on the situation in Bucha immediately after the same had been done by Ukraine:

(35) [quoting @RussianEmbassy] Attention Russia embassy in U.K.: how to book your appointment with a mental health service provider in London in London: book in through NHS e-Referral Service line on 0345 60 88 88 8, open Mon to Fr, 8am to 8pm and from 8am to 4pm on weekends & bank holidays.

(@SergiyKyslytsya, Apr 4, 2022)

In (35), the PR to the UN directly addresses the Russian embassy in the UK by practising deadpan sarcasm. Responding to their demands that the UK as the current UNSC president must fulfil its duty, S. Kyslytsya in a quite serious tone suggests consulting a mental health service provider.

Most tweets in our sample feature what we call *a complex target*, i.e. the authors address their tweets to particular persons and the public simultaneously. For example, (36) features the Ukrainian envoy’s reaction to the interview of P. Widmer with the German media *Welt*:

(36) (translated) Mr. Docent Widmer gives from his comfortable sofa at the university in peaceful (Flag of Switzerland) St. Gallen his “professional” advices on how the real diplomacy should look like. Old school, indeed. Unfortunately, your dusty “Manual” is out of fashion. Outdated. In simple words. [two images and one link attached]

(@MelnykAndrij, Apr 2, 2022)

A. Melnyk responds with a filigree satire where irony and sarcasm go hand in hand. Under his attack are “Dozent Widmer” in person, his ease in talking about the war when lying on “a comfortable university sofa in peaceful St. Gallen” and his moot professionalism in the sphere of diplomacy (*old school halt, staubiges “Handbuch”* lit. “dusty ‘Manual’”, *aus der Zeit gefallen* lit. “outdated”). The tweet is obviously intended to reach those who might consider P. Widmer an expert. At the same time, A. Melnyk crowns the tweet with a final pinch: a modified colloquial phrase in Swiss German *Auf gut Schwyzerdütsch* meaning “in simple words” which also makes P. Widmer a supposed recipient (intended reader) of the message.

Noteworthy is that constructing particular targets in humorous tweets (the tweeting audience) implies the use of nomination or referential discursive strategy which, after Reisigl & Wodak (2009: 95), serve “discursive construction of social actors, objects/phenomena/events and processes/actions”. In the case of wartime humorous tweets, this strategy is implemented through linguistic units denoting persons, objects, groups, communities and institutions. Thus, particular targets of the tweets are mostly constructed using proper names (*Widmer, Erich Vad, @stephenwitt, @NewYorker, Frau Merkel, @Bkerrychina*), deictics and phoric expressions (*you, they everyone, he, your, us, together we, [let] us*), titles and professional anthroponyms (*professor, Dozent (docent), Ex-General, influencer*), kinship anthroponyms (*your family, bro*)

and political anthroponyms (*gentleman in the Soviet seat*). Generalising anthroponyms (*folks, the whole world*), ideological anthroponyms (*the owners of Pushkin's legacy, descendants of Bulgakov's Sharikov*), choronyms and ethnonyms (*Europeans, Russians, Ukrainians, American, US*), collectives, including metonymic toponyms (*Russian Embassy, EU, UN Secretariat, Putin's diplomats*) and the tactics of implied reader whom we consider a hypothetical reader with presumably different ideas and attitudes as those of the actual reader (*auf gut Schwyzerdütsch* [to Docent Widmer], *Be smart – go home* [to Russian soldiers], *What about a special bin for planes, trains and cars?* [to Russian people], *Stop making a joke of yourself* [to Russian delegation]) are common tools for discursive constructing generalised targets.

## 6. Conclusion

Political discourse is the environment where function all forms of political communication. Wartime communication performed by political figures and between the participants of political discourse is a part of this environment. Over the last decade, Twitter has proved its great potential for hosting all sorts of political interaction, even in wartime. Among the aspects of wartime communication that get vast coverage in interdisciplinary research is wartime humour. Wartime humour on Twitter is a distinctive feature of wartime communication nowadays. This research was conceptualised as an attempt to outline the peculiarities of wartime humorous tweets and to outline their typology as a separate class of tweets.

In pursuit of answering the research question, we found answers to its subquestions and distinguished five unique categories of the wartime humorous tweets produced by a group of Ukrainian politicians which include authorship of humorous tweets, subject field, targets of humour in tweets, the pragmatic intentions of humorous tweets and tweeting audience.

The category of *authorship* exposes the levels of contributing to the creation of wartime humorous tweets. Self-made, shared and collaborative types of humorous tweets represent this category. The next issue for our analysis was the qualitative evaluation of the politicians' contributions, i.e., the topics they cover in their tweets. Content analysis helped us to qualify a set of typical *subject fields* which lists "Ukraine in wartime", "the Armed Forces of Ukraine and military help", "the 'Russian world', Russia's policy and positioning in the world", and "the world's reaction to Russia's deeds". Close to this issue is the question of objects of humouring in tweets and the levels of their recognisability for other discourse participants. Thus, it turned out that according to the criterion *targets of humour*, it is possible to speak about wartime humorous tweets with explicit and implicit targets.

Since wartime humorous tweets possess definite illocutionary force and socio-political impact on different recipients, we can categorise them according to their *pragmatic intentions*. Thus, we discriminate factual-informational, anecdotal, observational, thanksgiving, criticising, insulting, inspirational, promotional and self-relieving types of wartime humorous tweets. Politicians' pragmatic intentions are meant to change the thoughts and deeds of their audience, so it was necessary to define the potential readership of these tweets. Accordingly, we detected tweets addressing the general public, particular bodies and those with complex targets. We do not claim the completeness or exhaustiveness of the typology suggested; thus, it may be further expanded.

Each type of humorous tweet can be further classified within the existing typologies of humour types, whether wit, irony, satire, sarcasm, cynicism (Ruch et al. 2018), anecdotes, fantasy, insult, irony, jokes, observational humour, self-deprecation, vulgarity, wordplay (Hay 1995), lexemes, phrasemes, witticisms, teasing, putdowns or anecdotes (Dynel 2009). Moreover, each type of humorous tweet can be characterised in terms of the Theory of Humour Styles suggested by R. Martin et al. (2003), thus proving that our typology of wartime humorous tweets

fits in with the existing approaches to humour typology. Furthermore, the typology of wartime humorous tweets suggests a new perspective on wartime humour since this type of humour, technologically upgraded over the last decades, has migrated from the pages in humorous-satirical magazines, chants and cartoons to the timelines on social media. The surge of wartime humour among Ukrainian politicians, particularly on Twitter, on the one hand, demonstrates laughter still being a natural reaction to the atrocities of war, while on the other hand, implying its reasoned application through a vast array of humorous tweets.

The given findings should be interpreted with caution due to some limitations of this research, but they encourage prospects towards analysing the volume of humour in tweets, the levels of humour coding and decoding, mode of communicative coding and emotional load in humorous tweets, i.e., studying how politicians convert their emotional responses to the current developments into humour to get emotional support from the readers and affect the actual targets.

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