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Discursive Strategies in the Personal Discourse of Ksenia Sobchak, Candidate for the Presidency of the Russian Federation

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Abstract. The article examines the main strategies of Ksenia Sobchak’s personal discourse and their linguistic implementation. The study is based on the texts from the electoral programme for her presidential candidacy, posted on the official “Civic Initiative” party website, appearances in debates on various Russian TV channels, and posts on social media accounts during the 2018 Russian presidential election campaign. We develop a corpus that presents communicative, pragmatic, gender-based and linguocultural features of the public speeches of an oppositional female politician. Critical discourse analysis and the linguopragmatic method are applied. The linguistic method she uses to create identity is also analysed. The work explores the discursive strategies and techniques, as well as the linguistic and rhetorical resources, used by the candidate to influence the electorate. The analysis proves that Ksenia Sobchak’s discursive activity is based on word play, which is determined by the communicative objective of her electoral campaign.

Keywords: political discourse, personal discourse, strategies, discourse analysis, linguopragmatic parameters, word play.

Research area: philology.

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Дискурсивные стратегии в политическом дискурсе Ксении Собчак, кандидата в президенты Российской Федерации

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Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются основные стратегии персонального дискурса Ксении Собчак и их языковая реализация. Материалом исследования послужили тексты предвыборной программы кандидата в президенты, размещенные на официальном сайте партии “Гражданская инициатива”, выступления в дебатах на различных российских телеканалах, а также публикации в социальных сетях во время президентской избирательной кампании 2018 года в России. Составлен корпус, выделены коммуникативные, прагматические, гендерные и лингвокультурные особенности публичных оппозиционных выступлений женщины-политика. Применяются методы дискурс-анализа, лингвопрагматический, описательный, позволяющие воссоздать языковую личность политика. Выделены дискурсивные стратегии и тактики, лингвистические и риторические ресурсы, используемые кандидатом для воздействия на электорат. Анализ доказывает, что дискурсивная деятельность Ксении Собчак основана на языковой игре, имеющей коммуникативную обусловленность.

Ключевые слова: политический дискурс, персональный дискурс, стратегия, дискурс-анализ, лингвопрагматические параметры, языковая игра.

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1. Introduction

Politics permeates all spheres of human life, which makes distinguishing political discourse in modern linguistics a topical area of study. The very concept of discourse is directly related to the communicative activity of a politician in all its forms: from goal setting to the choice of adequate linguistic tools when creating a text (statement) and the implementation of a communicative scenario. These largely determine the complex structure of political discourse as a term. The definition by T. A. Van Dijk: “what is said by its actors and authors, the politicians”

(van Dijk, 1999: 12) confines political discourse to the professional activity of an addresser (van Dijk, 1997; 2005). A field approach to the definition of the boundaries of political discourse has also been established: something can be considered as discourse if at least one of its components (the speaker, the addressee or the topic of a statement) belongs to the sphere of politics (Shejgal, 2000). The complex structure of political discourse forms the concept of political language, whose characteristic feature is the adequacy of the choice of linguistic tools to achieve a communicative goal. There are

many works devoted to the analysis of political rhetoric (Billig, 1988; Bitzer, 1981; Clinton, 1988). In recent studies, the emphasis on the genre of political texts has been transferred to the speaker and the author of a statement, which makes discourse analysis topical in terms of discursive strategies (Plotnikova, 2005), with special attention being paid to the characteristic features of female discourse construction (Tannen, 1994 a, b; Strelkova, 2006).

The term “strategy” accompanied by different attributes (discursive, argumentative, of politeness, etc.) has been widely used in linguistic studies to refer to the intentional use of procedures aimed at achieving the communicative objectives set by the speaker (Julio Sal and Silvia Maldonado, 2009). Discourse strategies are locutionary and paraverbal acts (spontaneous or calculated), which the speaker uses to organize and modalize statements and utterances, with the aim of generating or enhancing their illocutionary strength, which tends to produce a perlocutionary effect (Verdugo, 1996: 129–130). For Ruth Wodak, discursive strategy is an action plan, which can be intentional to a greater or lesser degree, which is adopted for a certain purpose (Wodak, 2000). In this respect, when speaking of political discourse, reference is made to different discursive strategies created and used by a speaker or by a particular group in order to influence the electorate they are addressing.

Researching discursive strategies in linguistics (Gumperz, 1982; House, 2000; Tsurikova, 2007) makes it possible to describe the discursive style (manner) of the speaker as a bearer of a certain language culture and the expectations of the addressee, as well as both of their interpretation of a speech, according to speech and cultural stereotypes. Along with the concept of communicative strategy, we will also use the concept of communicative techniques. The concept of strategy is connected to the concepts of communicative intention (defined as “a method of combining theoretical moves into a single whole”) and a communicative goal (defined as “a strategic result, at which the communicative act is aimed”), and the concept of technique, in turn, is associated with the concept of communicative intention (which means the same as “communicative task”), interpreted

as “a tactical move, which is a practical way of reaching the corresponding communicative goal” (Kljuev, 2002: 19). Kljuev’s description, will help us understand that techniques can be understood as the linguistic and rhetorical resources used by the speaker to reach the receiver of the message within the limits of the established strategy. The choice of Sobchak as the subject of our analysis was motivated by the fact that in a society such as Russia, where political discourse has been mostly reserved for men, it is extremely unexpected for a woman to run for the presidency. Considering this fact, we must add that, although there are interesting works devoted to the analysis of Russian electoral discourse (Baghana, Bocharova, 2012; Belenko, 2006; Halatjan, 2011; Levshina, 2006), there are hardly any works that analyze the political figure of Sobchak (Ezhov, 2018; Hui Wang, 2018). In other words, this major event has, for one reason or another, gone unnoticed by linguists and discourse analysts.

In this study, the main discursive strategies of the personal discourse of the Russian presidential candidate Ksenia Sobchak, as well as the linguistic methods used to create these strategies have been identified:

- 1) Analysis of the figure of Ksenia Sobchak and the rationale for her appearance on the political scene.
- 2) Study and comparison of the topics of the election programme texts and public speeches.
- 3) Presentation of the discursive strategies and techniques used by Sobchak to elaborate her discourse, as well as the linguistic (lexical and syntactic) and rhetorical resources associated with them.
- 4) Understanding of the level of comprehension and acceptance of Sobchak’s discourse by Russian people. How do Russians interpret it?

We should note that the study of personal political discourse has its own characteristic features. As a rule, certain political forces, in particular a party, are behind a politician. A politician expresses a group point of view. In addition, political texts are compiled by professionals using certain influencing techniques, and these texts are the result

of a major collective analytical effort of a sociolinguistic nature.

2. Research Methodology

In this article, we are going to analyze the discourse of Ksenia Sobchak and, for this purpose, we are going to focus on her speeches on numerous television programmes. We have made a corpus of her statements, which can be found on different television channels, programmes and websites: *Channel One Russia* (“*First Channel*”), *Russia-1* (RTR), *Russia 24* and *TV centre (TVC)*; the website of Ksenia Sobchak’s political platform: (<https://sobchakprotivvseh.ru/>); her official website (<http://ksenia-sobchak.com>); posts on social media networks: *Vkontakte* (39928 followers), *Facebook*; *Instagram* and *Twitter*; her programme as a candidate for presidency and videos of her public statements, which can be found on the following website: <http://president-rf.ru>. Critical discourse analysis and the linguopragmatic method are applied. The linguistic method she uses to create identity is also analysed. First of all, we have made a frequency analysis of the lexemes used by Ksenia Sobchak in her speech with the help of the “Full Semantic Analysis of a Word” programme (https://miratext.ru/seo_analiz_text), and, afterwards, we have systematized the strategies and techniques used in her speech. When outlining the strategies of Sobchak’s political speech, we have emphasized her personal spontaneous speeches at the presidential candidate debates in 2018. Moreover, the study focuses on her posts on social media networks, where Sobchak repeated what she had said at meetings with voters and other public events.

3. Ksenia Sobchak as the Subject of Political Discourse

Who is Ksenia Sobchak? In the Russian political arena, she is a widely discussed and controversial phenomenon. She is the fifth and the youngest female candidate for the Russian Federation presidency (the «*Grazhdanskaja iniciativa*» “Civic Initiative” party, currently «*Peremen*» “the Party of Changes”), following Galina Starovoytova in 1996, whose candidacy was rejected by the Supreme Court, Ella Pamfilova in 2000 and Irina Khakamada in



2004, Lidia Bednaya and Svetlana Peunova in 2012. The first of these candidates finished in fourth place, and the last two did not make it to the election because their candidacies were rejected by the Central Election Commission. However, for the Russian electorate, Ksenia is famous as a journalist and TV anchor in the following reality shows: “*Дом-2*”/”*Dom-2*” (lit. *House-2*), “*Блондинка в Шоколаде*”/”*Sweet Life of a Blonde*” (lit. “*Blonde in Chocolate*”), “*Последний герой*”/”*Last Hero*”, etc. She is characterized by her provocative discursive behaviour. She disregards all taboos (verbal and non-verbal) and completely breaks the rules of Russian communicative culture.

What does Sobchak’s appearance on the political scene mean?

- 1) An unexpected factor (rumor has it that her candidacy was promoted by the Kremlin).
- 2) Unusual: a woman has never been seen in this position.
- 3) She has been presented to the electorate as an opponent, but the rest of the opponents do not see her as such. They see her as a factor that distracts the attention of the electorate (Navalny, Yavlinsky).

Let’s pay attention to the texts created by Ksenia Sobchak:

The election programme, which is accompanied by the slogan: “*Все только начинается*” // “*Everything is Just Beginning*”, expresses the idea of renewal and reform (in search of the perfect Russian society). Her programme is perceived as a utopia by Russians:

1. The programme does not stipulate a transition period for the ideas it raises (Russia



is a young, 30-year-old democracy that is not prepared to accept these postulates).

2. The main idea of her programme is that Russia is an inseparable part of Europe, with which it maintains historical and cultural ties and an excellent neighbourly relationship. Consequently, and in accordance with the best European traditions, she defends freedom of expression, the welfare of citizens, democracy, equal opportunities and the independence of the different regions of Russia, etc.

Russian people perceive her programme as being completely out of touch with reality (it is as if she lives in another world). This idea is reflected in the idiomatic expression: “выдавать желаемое за действительное” // “wishful thinking”.

Assuming the role of a presidential candidate, Ksenia Sobchak changed her image. We see a politician, and everything feminine is alien to her. Ksenia Sobchak creates her own scenario called “a woman in politics”. As a representative of the “Civic Initiative” party, which nominated Sobchak for presidency, Ksenia plays the role of a woman without any specific characteristics related to gender and age. She is like “the man in the case”, a character created by the Russian writer Anton Chekhov, symbolizing a person hiding his/her individuality and his/her thoughts and views. It is interesting that on her website and social media network pages, she seems to shed this image created by Chekhov, and she appears, once again, as a scandalous media diva.

Not only did she transform her image into that of a politician, but the slogan of her pre-election position also changed. There is a creative slogan “*Everything is just beginning*” posted on the official website of the presidential

candidate, whereas on Ksenia’s social media networks, another one appears: “*Sobchak is against everyone*”, which is repeated as a nickname and hashtag on VK, FB, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

The slogan “*Sobchak is against everyone*” is used by the former Ksenia, who is a great provocateur and a talented TV presenter, shocking the public with her outspoken statements and easygoing attitude.

A nickname and a hashtag are her business cards. She is evolving through her use of internet communication following special laws. Created for a multimillion audience, these tools do not characterize the speaker herself but rather the public image built by a politician who appeals to the public. The images that play an important role in Sobchak’s publications, combined with her nickname and hashtags, allow us to draw an interesting conclusion: the producer of Ksenia Sobchak’s discursive activity has a complex character. There are at least two voices creating the texts, which do not differ greatly in their linguistic structure, but are radically different in value and evaluative components.

Do these two faces and two images of a female politician match?¹ Ksenia Sobchak, as

¹ In the context of Russian politics, there is a precedent when an actress with the dramatic trope of a temptress goes into politics

a candidate for the Russian presidency, speaks on behalf of the opposition party on official political platforms and websites. Ksenia Sobchak as a show-woman addresses her audience in the chronicle of social networks. These are two different worlds and two different communication spaces. One belongs to the opposition presidential candidate, who furiously stigmatizes the Russian government, and the other is used by the media diva.

For example, the pension reform connected to the increase in the retirement age has resulted in strong criticism towards the authorities. While Ksenia Sobchak criticizes the government as an opposition politician, she compares herself to Joseph Brodsky and is ironic about her image of being the one who always disagrees: “One cannot scold the authorities just because it is now convenient to play on this. This is called populism and political conjuncture”.

political programme and political statements. But, in short:

1) I don't adhere to the principle: “If Yevtushenko is against collective farms, then I am for it”. There are many things that I don't like in our country, but it was necessary to increase the retirement age as far back as 5 years ago. This was said by Kudrin, me and even Navalny. One cannot scold the government only because it is “convenient” to play on this now. This is called populism and political conjuncture.

2) The arithmetic is easy: now we have 35 million retired people, if the age does not change, in the 2040s, the number of retired people will be 55 million.

Did the electorate notice the contradictory ideas They undoubtedly did. “LiveJournal” blogger GMICHAYLOV comments: Sobchak has flip-flopped (gmichailov.livejournal.com).



Translation: Instagram post by xenia_sobchak: There are many questions: what do I think about the pension reform? Friends, I want to remind you ONE MORE time: I have my website, Twitter account, and now, I also have the party website, where you can see my

and changes her image finally and irrevocably. This precedent was set by the State Duma deputy Maria Kozhevnikova.

Оппозиционеры поругались из-за Собчак: gmichailov - ЖЖ

gmichailov.livejournal.com

Оппозиционеры поругались из-за Собчак

Нельзя ругать власть

Нельзя критиковать власть

Translation: Oppositionists argued about Sobchak: gmichailov – LJ
 gmichailov.livejournal.com
 Oppositionists argued about Sobchak
 The authorities must not be reprimanded
 The authorities must not be criticized

4. Themes in Ksenia Sobchak’s Discourse

In the Russian Federation presidential elections, Ksenia Sobchak represented the “Civic Initiative“ party (<http://www.grazhdan-in.ru/>), which was deeply involved in the creation of the election campaign of the opposition candidate. Therefore, the programme is not only the text belonging to Sobchak, it is the result of joint discursive activity, which in many respects defines the public speech of the presidential candidate, both thematically and structurally.

On the official website of the presidential elections in Russia, Sobchak identifies the main problem that she is going to solve as the president-elect: “Nowadays, the most serious problem in our country is the irremovability of power, the corruption this generates and, as a consequence, the unfair distribution of public goods, the slowdown in technical and social progress, international isolation and the economic crisis” (<https://president-rf.ru/page/predvybornaja-programma-ksenii-sobchak>). The election programme is the result and ultimate goal of her political activity. The main theses of her electoral programme are as follows: Russia is a part of Europe geographically, historically and culturally; Russia must live according to common European laws and values; Russia is a democratic country, characterized by peaceful and neighbourly relations with other countries. The election programme specifies these theses and goes into detail on them. The main standpoints of the party are stated in the following sections:

- Domestic policy
- Federation
- Legal and judicial reform; the security, defence and law enforcement agencies
- Economic development
- Budget and taxes
- Social politics
- Ecology and health care

- Foreign policy
- Ending undeclared wars and conflicts

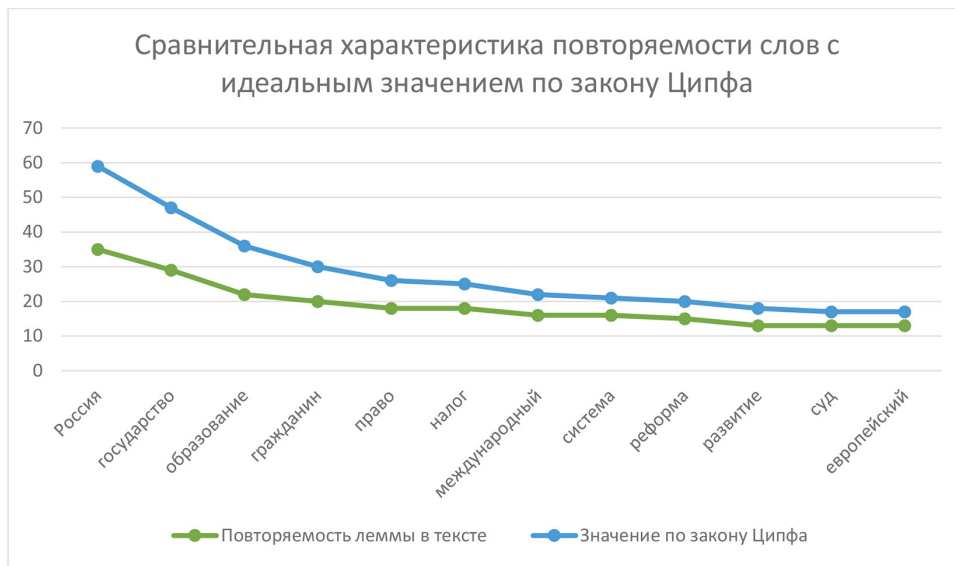
Accordingly, in the *Domestic policy* section, the keywords are *выборы/elections, власть/power, законодательно/legislatively, ограничить/restrict, ограничительный/restrictive, государство/state, Россия (россияне)/Russia (Russians)* with a high-density coefficient² in the text:

Lemma	Repetition (per 531 word in a section)	Density Coefficient
выборы/elections	9	1,69 %
власть/power	6	1,13 %
ограничить/to restrict	5	0,94 %
ограничительный/restrictive	3	0,56 %
государственный/state (as an attribute)	5	0,94 %
Россия/Russia	4	0,75 %

The analysis of the word density of the entire pre-election programme has made it possible to highlight the key (most frequently repeated) words: *Россия/Russia* (0,89 %), *государственный/state (as an attribute)* (0,73 %), *образование/education* (0,56 %), *страна/country* (0,53 %), *граждане/citizens* (0,51 %), *право/right* (0,46 %), *налоги/taxes* (0,46 %), *государство/state* (0,41), *международный/international* (0,41), *система/system* (0,41 %), *реформа/reform* (0,36 %), *российский/Russian* (0,36 %), *развитие/development* (0,36 %), *суд/court* (0,33 %), *европейский/European* (0,33 %), *власть/power* (0,3 %), *отказаться от/to refuse from* (0,25 %), *закон/law* (0,25), *выборы/elections* (0,25 %).

In fact, the density of keywords in the text allows us to identify the main official pre-election standpoint of the opposition “*Civic Initiative*” party presidential candidate. This is the rejection of the existing system and development towards European values with the help of reforms, where the emphasis is placed on education, elections, courts and legislation.

² The analysis of keyword density in the text was carried out with the help of the automated “*Full Semantic Word Analysis*” text processing programme (https://miratext.ru/seo_analiz_text).



The density coefficient of these words emphasizes their importance in the election programme texts, as evidenced by the indexes that exceed average values, according to Zipf's law.

It is interesting to note that the party perceives itself as being the expert on how the situation might be changed, rather than a real political actor in the Russian arena. Subjectification is expressed at a grammatical level in the text: *мы выступаем за/we stand for* (0,15 %), *мы предлагаем/we offer* (0,15 %), *мы считаем/we consider* (0,2 %), *мы настаиваем/we insist* (0,1 %), etc.

For example:

Мы настаиваем на незамедлительном возвращении на родину российских военнослужащих. // We insist on the immediate return of Russian servicemen to their homeland.

Одна из приоритетных задач – упорядочение внешней трудовой миграции. Считая неэффективным введение рабочих виз для граждан СНГ, мы считаем обязательной государственную работу над культурной и социальной интеграцией трудовых мигрантов. // One of the priority tasks is to streamline external labour migration. Considering the introduction of work visas for CIS citizens as being ineffective, we consider it to be compulsory for a state to work on the cultural and social integration of labour migrants.

Политику импортозамещения, ставшую следствием изоляции и контрсанкций, мы считаем стратегически бесперспективной. // We consider the policy of import substitution, which is the consequence of isolation and counter-sanctions, to be strategically unpromising.

Несмотря на общенациональную полемику, мы считаем необходимым сохранение и развитие системы ЕГЭ, ее организационную и технологическую защиту от местничества и коррупции. // Despite the nationwide controversy, we consider it necessary to preserve and develop the Unified State Exam (USE) system, as well as giving it organizational and technological protection from parochialism and corruption.

We should also note the frequent usage of modal words related to necessity: *должный* (должен, должны, должно)/should; *дле*, должно быть/should be, *необходимо/it is necessary*, *следует/should*; *ought*, *необходимый/necessary*, *нужно/it is needed*; *necessary* lemmas.

For example:

Государство должно способствовать расширению инклюзии и активно бороться с дискриминацией и предубеждениями в законодательстве, политике, образовании и государственном устройстве. // The state should support the expansion of inclusion

Lemma	Frequency (per 3927 words)	Density Coefficient
должный (should, due)	70	1,78 %
необходимо (it is necessary)	35	0,89 %
необходимый (necessary)	5	0,13 %
следует (should/ought)	6	0,15 %
нужно (it is need- ed/necessary)	3	0,08 %
должно (should/must)	3	0,15 %
должно быть (should be)	5	0,25 %
должно стать (should become)	3	0,15 %
(Россия) должна ((Russia) should)	3	0,15 %
(реформы) должны ((reforms) should)	3	0,15 %
(государство) должно ((the state) should)	8	0,41 %

and actively fight discrimination and prejudice in legislation, politics, education and state structure.

Должны быть законодательно и на практике ограничены права всех силовых структур. Их руководство и финансирование должно быть максимально прозрачным и подотчетным парламенту и Счетной палате. // The rights of all security, defence and law enforcement agencies should be limited by law and in practice. Their management and financing should be as transparent and accountable to the parliament and the Chamber of Accounts as possible.

Государство должно отказаться от своей нынешней монополии на инструменты пропаганды. Государственное владение

средствами массовой информации должно быть законодательно ограничено как по отраслевому, так и по региональному признаку. // The state must abandon its current monopoly on propaganda tools. State ownership of the media should be legally limited on a sectoral basis, as well as on a regional one.

Let's see to what extent the thematic content stated in the programme is preserved in the personal political discourse of Ksenia Sobchak, the opposition "Civic Initiative" party presidential candidate.

A characteristic feature of Sobchak's personal political discourse is the fact that it functions both orally and in writing. Oral discourse is represented at numerous meetings with voters and at debates with other presidential candidates, including televised debates. In writing, Sobchak communicates with her followers on social networks.

5. Ksenia Sobchak's Personal Oral Discourse

For this article, an analysis of televised debates with other presidential candidates of the Russian Federation was carried out. The topics of these debates are pressing issues of modern Russian society. Sobchak takes part in debates where the following topics are raised: economics and finance, human capital development, education and youth policy, the army and strengthening national defense, threats to modern Russia, foreign policy, public security, police reform and the fight against corruption, health care, culture and art, national identity regional development, demography and migration. As we can see, Sobchak chooses debates whose topics correspond to the statements in the election programme.

Let's see the standpoint of the presidential candidate on the key policy issues.

№№	Date	TV company	Debate topic	The standpoint of Ksenia Sobchak
1	6.01.2018	Russia 1	military-industrial complex	– end the violence by the authorities
2	13.03.2018	Russia 1	culture and art	– against cultural censorship – accuses the candidate Pavel Grudinin of having a mistress

3	14.01.2018	Russia 1	foreign policy	– against the foreign policy pursued by Russia; Russia is the aggressor
4	27.01.2018	PTR (Public Television of Russia)	threats to modern Russia	– lack of competitiveness of the Russian army – criticism of overfunding of the army
5	28.02.2018	Russia 1	the army and strengthening the national defense	– the topic was not covered, the standpoint on this issue was not indicated – a scandal with Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, splashed a glass of water on his face
6	28.02.2018	Channel One (First Channel)	foreign policy	– strengthening of neighbourly relations – uselessness of wars
7	1.03.2018	Russia 1	economics and finance	– criticism of the resource economy, state capitalism and corruption; an offer to reform the economy – suggests taking money from those who do not work and use it for the production of goods – the president should be a woman in order to solve social issues
8	2.03.2018	Russia 24	social mobility (elevator) human capital development	– a scandal with Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, the irony of his son and the LDPR party being a "family legacy" – accusing the candidate Sergei Baburin of simply "swaying Grudinin's votes"; the irony of his admission to the elections according to the order of letters in the alphabet ("B" is the second letter of the Russian alphabet)
9	5.03.2018	Channel One	education, youth policy, human capital and social mobility (elevators)	– violation in the country – policy of intimidation – criticism of the Dima Yakovlev law – garbage disposal problem – treatment of cancer patients – deviation from the topic of discussion, because young people leave the country
10	6.03.2018	Channel One	isolation of the country	– against the isolation of the country, for peaceful coexistence with neighbouring countries – her ironic sympathy for the candidate Pavel Grudinin that he keeps his money abroad
11	6.03.2018	Russia 24	cultural policy	– for free culture criticism of Zhirinovskiy for his lack of polite behaviour
12	7.03.2018	Channel One	health care	– disease prevention – decent remuneration for doctors
13	12.03.2018	Channel One	police	– police reform and anti--corruption measures

14	12.03.2018	TV Centre (TV Tsentr)	public security, counter-terrorism	– justification of the first presidents of Russia Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin – the reform of the courts (rotation and the election of judges)
15	12.03.2018	Russia 24	demography, childhood, migration	– complete freedom of a woman to choose a profession, even a physically demanding one – complete freedom of a woman to abortion
16	13.03.2018	Channel One	regional development	– freedom and independence of the regions – regional financial management
17	14.03.2018	Channel One	national idea	– there is no national idea, there are European values

The analysis of Ksenia Sobchak's language behaviour at the official debates of presidential candidates, the comparison of the topics of the election programme texts and public speeches allow us to highlight the main strategies of Sobchak.

As a rule, Sobchak participates in debates on key points of her election programme and expresses a corresponding opinion. This has happened during the discussion of the problems of public safety, national identity, police and the fight against corruption, etc. Her main strategy is to accurately inform the electorate about the party's standpoint on socially significant issues.

For instance, there was a discussion of regional policy on March 13, 2018, on *Channel One*:

Только в свободе рождается истинный федерализм // Чем больше регионы будут зажимать / тем больше потом будет сила / с которой эти регионы восстанут // <...> Федерализм занимает ключевое место в моей программе // Мы считаем / что / только дав бóльшую свободу регионам / больше денег регионам / больше самостоятельности и больше полномочий / мы добьемся того / что страна начнет развиваться не только в одном центре в Москве / а везде будет равномерное развитие // True federalism can be born only in freedom // The more the regions suppress people /then the greater the strength / with which these regions rise will be // <...> Federalism is a key issue in my programme // We believe / that / only by giving more freedom to the regions / more money to the regions / more independence and

more powers / will we ensure / that the country will begin to develop not only in the centre of Moscow / but an even development will begin everywhere. (<https://clck.ru/bNMZ3>)

However, this strategy is not her only one. Sobchak only partially adheres to her election programme, which reflects the values of the "Civic Initiative" party, and she fills the topics of discussion with her own interpretation. For example, during the discussion of demography, childhood and migration problems, the topic of defending women's rights to freely choose profession (full compliance with the programme) was quickly changed to the topic of abortion.

The strategy of partial reflection on a topic often turns into a substitution of the topic.

The following excerpt is a discussion on the problems of education, youth policy, human capital and social mobility on March 5, 2018 on *Channel One*:

<...> Задышается Тольятти / задышается Челябинск // У нас нет нормальных мусороперерабатывающих заводов / но мы продолжаем бряцать оружием // Togliatti suffocates /Chelyabinsk suffocates// We don't have normal waste recycling plants / but we keep rattling our weapons. (<https://clck.ru/349N3s>)

Her strategy of distracting attention away from the problem raised is another strategy that has been recorded. Accordingly, at the debates on culture (March 6, 2018; "Russia 24" channel), her thesis about free culture went unnoticed, since it was replaced by her thesis about political culture and later by the accusation against Vladimir Zhirinovskiy regarding his boorish behaviour

towards Sobchak, which grew into a verbal skirmish and a scandal on the air.

«Этот человек пытается быть моральным камертоном и говорит про оскорбления? // <...> Женщина не слабый пол. Я не позволю мужчинам вот так по-хамски со мной разговаривать» // “Is this person trying to be a moral tuning fork and talking about insults? // <...> Women are not the weaker sex. I won't let men talk to me in such a boorish way.” (<https://clck.ru/349N4y>)

Another scandal erupted on air, during the debates broadcast by *Russia 24*, on March 2, 2018. She replaced the topic of social mobility (elevators) with an accusation towards Vladimir Zhirinovskiy about helping his son and an illegal attempt to take the hotel owned by the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). She also moved away from the original topic and mocked the presidential candidate Baburin about the fact that he was admitted to the elections on the basis of a letter in the alphabet (letter “Б” (B) is the second letter after “А” in the Russian alphabet) and accusing Baburin of swaying Grudinin's votes.

Zhirinovskiy speaking on social mobility: *У нас целый вуз есть, где ребята учатся* // *We have the whole university where children study.*

Sobchak: *О-о-ох!!!* (демонстрационный вздох) <...> *И вдруг ваш сын становится главой ЛДПР / очень логично!!! Ох-ох-ох!* // (demonstrative sigh) <...> *So suddenly your son becomes the head of LDPR (the Liberal Democratic Party) / it's very logical!*

Zhirinovskiy: *Это нормально все* // *Мы / оппозиционная партия / Нам никто ничего не дает* // <...> *Сейчас моё время / и я говорю про социальные лифты* // <...> *This is all fine* // *We are / the opposition party / Nobody gives us anything* // <...> *Now this is my time / and I'm talking about social mobility* // <...>

Sobchak: *Владимир Вольфович говорит что-то про социальные лифты / хотя на его месте просто надо съезжать с этой темы* // *Его сын / которого он тащит всю свою жизнь / человек / ну который никак не может претендовать с точки зрения своих достоинств / просто посмотрите*

любое его выступление и оцените / насколько он может быть лидером партии / но благодаря Жириновскому он эту партию возглавит // <...> *Жириновский отжал и сейчас пытается отжать гостиницу / которая принадлежит РАН* // *Vladimir Volfovich says something about social mobility / although in his place, I would just move away from this topic* // *His son / whom he has been helping along all his life / is a man / well, who cannot possibly aspire to anything on his own merits his merits / just watch any of his speeches and evaluate / to what extent he can be a party leader / but thanks to Zhirinovskiy he will lead this party* // <...> *Zhirinovskiy got hold of it and he is now trying to get hold of the hotel / owned by the Russian Academy of Sciences.* (<https://clck.ru/349N6d>)

Sobchak's deviation from a topic of discussion is often accompanied by the devaluation of what she said earlier. When discussing the problems of culture and art in the country at the debates on March 13, 2018, right before the elections, Ksenia talks about cultural freedom, the lack of state support for real artistic geniuses and the financing of propaganda in mass media. These are the opinions that resonated in the minds of many Russians, but she immediately changed the topic to “House-2”, a scandalous TV programme, and in this context, as if incidentally, she accused the deputy Grudinin of having a mistress:

«<...> Господин Грудинин женат на одной женщине / от которой двое детей / а живет с другой / которая молодая / и которой 30 и тоже имеет двое детей / и не разводится!» // “Mr. Grudinin is married to one woman / with whom he has two children / but lives with the other one / who is young / and who is 30 and also has two children / and (he) does not get divorced.” (<https://clck.ru/349N8X>).

The strategy of denigrating an opponent is quite frequently used in an election campaign and they yield results, even in Russia. But intimate details of an individual's personal life are taboo in Russian communicative culture. In this respect, the nationally specific idioms should be mentioned: “не выносить сор из избы” (“(not) to wash dirty linen in

public”; lit. “not to take the rubbish out of the house”) and “рыться в грязном белье” (“to dig the dirt”; lit. “to rummage through dirty laundry”). They indicate the disgust felt in Russian culture towards details of personal lives being aired in public. Moreover, negativity is not expressed towards the guilty party, but rather towards the whoever has raised the issue and has made the facts public. What is this strategy? Is it a rhetorical blunder, a deliberate distraction or a devaluation of her own standpoint on the problem? A verbal attack against Grudinin (who was, actually, a weak opponent in the election race) allowed other candidates to create a negative opinion about Ksenia Sobchak:

Yury Boldyrev: *Вот такую культуру они хотят стране / культуру вмешательства в личную жизнь // Это гнусность / гнусность / которой нет оправдания // Это мерзость / Ксения / <...> вы сделали подлую вещь // This is the kind of culture they want for the country / a culture of invasion of privacy // This is vile / vile / for which there is no excuse // This is disgusting / Ksenia / <...> you did a mean thing.*

The host: *Вы меня простите / но в российской политической культуре всегда было не принято трогать личную жизнь // I beg your pardon / but in Russian political culture it has always been unacceptable to go into s personal lives.*

6. Ksenia Sobchak’s audience

Who is the target of Ksenia Sobchak’s discourse? This is quite an important question for political communication. Considering the characteristic features of a potential addressee in depth ensures that a speech effectively makes an impact on the electorate. In the context of modern politics, one of the most important factors is the socio-cultural parameter, which is clearly manifested in precedent phenomena.

The precedent phenomena in a discourse are certain markers with the help of which the author informs the addressee about his or her intentions. These markers abound in Sobchak’s discourse. First of all, this is an election programme, written according to the principles of a classical Utopia, that is to say, with signifi-

cant detachment from the reality of a country as large and diverse as Russia. It should not be forgotten that historically, Russia, its politicians and its people have distanced themselves from everything that they consider “the West”, which encompasses Europe and the USA. The implementation of all the proposals in the programme would make it possible to create an idealistic human (not necessarily Russian) society, where all dreams would come true, where there would no place for the manifestation of evil, and all people would be brothers. Sobchak’s programme is as desirable as it is unrealistic. There is only one way to achieve it: to fall asleep and wake up in another country. The perfection of the programme makes it Utopian and creates associations in the minds of people who are native to Russian communicative culture with a precedent phenomenon, the idiom of “wishful thinking” (*выдавать желаемое за действительное*).

Among all the hashtags we have identified, the most frequent is #собчакпротиввсех (#sobchakprotivvseh; #sobchakagainsteveryone), which evokes another reference in Russian mass consciousness, namely to “Баба Яга против”/“Baba Yaga is against that”, a Soviet animated cartoon.

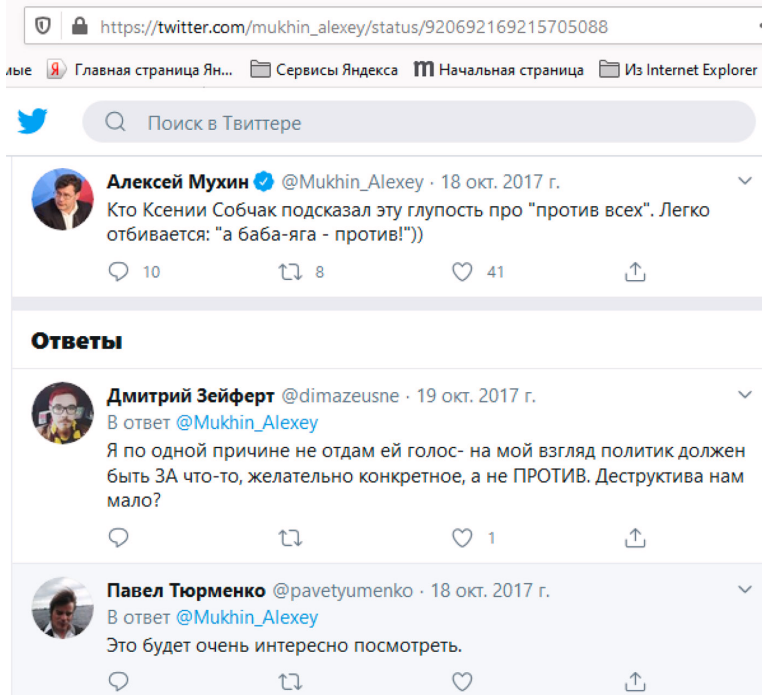
Baba Yaga is an utterly negative female character in Russian folklore who personifies anger, aggression, destruction and perverted sexuality. Nevertheless, the precedent text, taken from the Soviet cartoon, is kind and a bit ironic. In it, *Baba Yaga* acts unreasonably against everything, simply because she is *Baba Yaga* by nature. *Baba Yaga* herself is a funny and ridiculous character.

This slogan, coupled with the visual image, creates a creolized text that gives unambiguous information to the addressee through the use of the Russian linguistic culture: the author of this political text is playing politics.

Is this message clear to the addressee? Yes, it is. The video meme that filled social media networks should be remembered: “Sobchak is against everyone, or *Baba Yaga* is against that” (<https://ok.ru/video/505303926047>). Both on *Twitter* and on *LiveJournal*, bloggers wondered who suggested this slogan to Ksenia Sobchak. The very notion of “against” has

a negative connotation in the Russian linguistic worldview; and it is included in the concept of “destruction” rather than the concept of “creation”.

level. The frequency analysis of words makes it possible to identify the semantic dominants in discourse and the central elements of the text that directly indicate the intention of the



Translation: Twitter:

Alexey Mukhin @Mukhin_Alexey. October 18, 2017.

Who suggested this nonsense about “against everyone” to Sobchak. It’s easy to brush off bounces off: “and Baba Yaga is that”))

Answers:

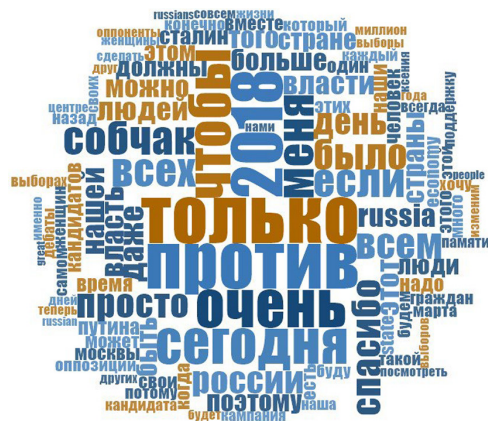
Dmitry Seifert @ dimazeusne. October 19, 2017.

For one reason, I won’t give her my voice. In my opinion, a politician should be for something, preferably something specific, and not AGAINST something. Don’t we have enough destructive things?

Pavel Tuyrmenko @pavetyumenko October 18, 2017.

It will be very interesting to see this.

addresser. The analysis of Sobchak’s texts has made it possible to identify frequency units with the highest frequency indices (see figure below):



7. Political Nihilism as a General Strategy of Ksenia Sobchak’s Discourse

It is well-known that Ksenia’s communicative goal is manifested primarily at a lexical

The following units are the most frequently used ones: наш/our (0,51), Россия / Russia (0,49), власть/power (0,42), против/

against (0,39), сегодня/today (0,31), всех/ everyone (0,24), спасибо/thank(s) (0,21), оппозиция/opposition (0,12), Путин/Putin (0,12), вместе/together (0,11), человек/person (0,11), права/rights (0,1), правда/the truth; true (0,1), ответственность/responsibility (0,1), свобода/freedom (0,07), чиновники/of- ficials (0,07), конституция/constitution (0,06), коррупция/corruption (0,06), уважение/re- spect (0,05), регионы/regions (0,04), война/ war (0,04), насилие/violence (0,04), будущее/ future (0,04), #противвсех/#againsteveryone (0,04), #sobchakпротиввсех/#sobchakagain- steveryone (0,04), сексизм/sexism (0,03), равнодушие/indifference (0,03), #sobchakpro- tivvseh (0,03), #женщинывместе/#women- together (0,03), демократический/democrat- ic (0,02), #партияперемен/#partyofchanges (0,02), #япротив/#Iamagainst (0,02), etc.

The formation of texts, slogans and hashtags on the basis of multiple repetitions of the unit “against” explains the frequency of this word: “against everyone”, “Sobchak is against”, “I am against”, etc. This is not just the motto of Ksenia Sobchak. She plays it up and specifies it in every text that she creates, whatever the context (*Sobchak is against Polonsky, Sobchak is against Shevchenko, Sobchak is against Bortko, against police arbitrariness, etc.*), and it indicates general discursive strategy of political nihilism.

it possible to implement this strategy in texts in general or her texts?

• Declaration of a nihilistic position

This technique is implemented using the unit *against*, which contains the components of “struggle”, “opposition”, “objection” and “negation” in its meaning, and it functions as a predicate, an adverb or a preposition.

Я против всех. // “I am against every- one.”

Я против! // “I am against that!”

This technique is often accompanied by a call for a nihilistic position, expressed by nega- tive modality and imperatives.

Пожалуйста, покажите, что Вы против всех! // “Please show that you are against everyone!”

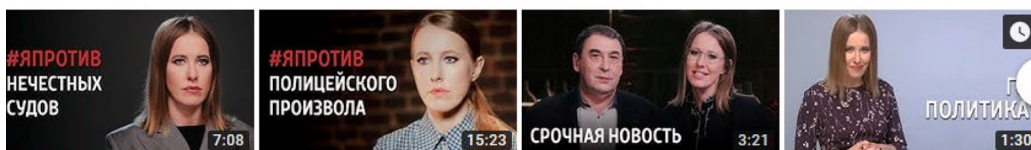
Не надо голосовать за меня. Голосуйте против всех! // “You don’t have to vote for me. Vote against everyone!”

Не надо голосов за Собчак! // “No votes for Sobchak!”

• Denunciation

This is one of her most frequently used techniques, which uses evaluative vocabulary with negative connotations: *deceitful, unjust, vicious, stagnation, decay, death*, etc. A pe- remptory judgement is often made, for example: “This is a lie!”, “This is all not true!”, “The ver-

латформа ВОСПРОИЗВЕСТИ ВСЕ



Translation: (Platform: reproduce all #Iamagainst unfair courts; #Iamagainst police arbitrariness; urgent news; ...)

Political nihilism is the alienation and denial of the political system that has developed in a society, characterized by a complete rejection of power and the socio-political structure. This role underlies the main, and the only, strategy, which is the strategy of denial. Let’s see what techniques and linguistic tools make

tical power hierarchy is vicious!”, “False and unfair sentences!”, “The constitution bears a pronounced presidential nature!” “The Soviet Union is a criminal system” and “Doing business in Russia is dangerous!”, etc. The structure of an accusation may include an indication of the reason (“The country is in the state of stagnation *because of the current politics*”) with elements of prophecy ((these laws) “*Lead to a new disintegration, not of the USSR, but of Russia*”).

В итоге мы разрушаемся! // "We will end up falling apart!"

Будет развал России! // "Russia will collapse!"

This approach is accompanied by the technique of **negative assessment with the simultaneous use of hyperbole** and abundant negative verb forms, pronouns and adverbs.

Никто не готов брать ответственность! // "Nobody is ready to take responsibility!"

Они ничего не делают! // "They don't do anything!"

Нет независимых судей! // "There are no independent judges!"

В нашей стране никто не хочет заниматься бизнесом! // In our country, nobody wants to run a business!

Hyperbolization is also achieved with the help of adverbs of place, time and manner: *везде (everywhere), повсюду (everywhere), всегда (always), никогда (never), нигде (nowhere), никак (in no way), в целом (in general)*, etc.

Повсюду одни силовики! // "Security forces are just everywhere!"

И так всегда! // It's always like this!

У нас никто не готов брать ответственность! // "Here nobody is ready to take responsibility!"

In the texts of Ksenia Sobchak's speeches, the technique of denunciation are reinforced by auxiliary techniques which refer to statistics and confidence:

Я абсолютно уверена! // "I'm absolutely sure!"

Я со всей ответственностью могу сказать... // "I can say with full responsibility ..."

Я это утверждаю! // "I assert this!"

В России нет независимого суда! Я настаиваю! // "There is no independent court in Russia! I insist!"

Я знаю... // "I know..."

99,8 % по экономическим преступлениям и в целом // "99.8 % for economic crimes and in general."

Ksenia's position is also enhanced by categorization technique, expressed by the following units: *единственный (способ) (the only*

(means)), единственно верный (the only true), очень важный (механизм) (a very important (mechanism)).

We should note that the statistical data that Sobchak refers to ("70 % of our economy belongs to the state"; "98 % of convictions", "330 people died") are refuted by other candidates and listeners. The use of such data causes ironic reactions and accusations of incompetence, which remain unanswered by Ksenia.

Denunciation technique is also reinforced by the technique of resorting to historical and cultural facts (remembering J. Brodsky, who was accused in the USSR of (social) parasitism; the shortage of goods in the USSR, etc.). Childhood stories are meant to instill pity in the electorate (for example, the story about her mother who bought pants 5 sizes too large for her daughter, because she knew that she would not be able to buy any other pants). Nevertheless, her childhood stories have a certain artificial nature that causes an ambiguous reaction in those being addressed. Ksenia grew up in the family of Anatoly Sobchak, a Doctor of Law and a professor, a People's Deputy of the USSR and a mayor of Leningrad.

• **Detachment from the current situation and denial of any involvement**

This technique was chosen as a response to the allusion made by many politicians, including candidates for the Russian presidency, to her close ties to the authorities. also alluded to the support given to her for being the daughter of Anatoly Sobchak, the scientific adviser of Dmitry Medvedev, as well as having the patronage Vladimir Putin.

В 1993 году мне было 13 лет. // "In 1993 I was 13 years old."

Я к диким 90-м никакого отношения не имею // "I have nothing to do with the wild 90s"

Ksenia's family and friendships have raised many uncomfortable questions about her presidential candidacy. Her techniques of avoiding direct questions, changing topic, and answering a question with a question have helped Ksenia to save face at debates.

– Считаете ли Вы Бориса Ельцина преступником?... Да или нет? // – В 1993 мне было 13 лет. // “Do you consider Boris Yeltsin to be a criminal?... Yes or no? // In 1993 I was 13 years old.”

Я должна отвечать только за свои оценки в школе. // “I should only be responsible for my marks in school.”

Почему Вы задаете мне этот вопрос? // “Why are you asking me this question?”

The renunciation of previous friendly ties and distancing herself from people who came to power that are close to her, are accompanied by her use of techniques to establish unity with the electorate.

• Unity (identification) with the electorate

In fact, Ksenia Sobchak’s desire to prove to the electorate that she is the same as ordinary Russians makes her resort to the technique of appealing to pity and historical and cultural facts. This makes the addressees react and this reaction could be interpreted as sarcasm. This technique is implemented in her speech with the help of comparison (“Я не знаю этого точно так же, как и вы” // “I don’t know this just as you don’t”), special addressing (“Друзья! Ребята!” // “Friends! Guys!”). The pronoun *we* is extremely prominent in this technique and can be contrasted with the pronoun *they*, mirroring the contrast of “свои” (“own/native/ my people”) and “чужие” (“aliens, strangers, other people”).

В 90-е годы нам было сложно. // “It was tough for us in the 90s.”

Мы это видим. // “We see this.”

Мы все устали. // “We are all tired.”

Мы должны помнить, что тогда было. // “We should remember what it was like was back then.”

Мы все устали, а они в свою очередь... // “We are all tired, and they in turn...”

Они ничего не делают для нас. // “They don’t do anything for us.”

Нас много! // “There are a lot of us!”

Мы не боимся! // “We are not afraid!”

They, “not us”, “strangers” are represented in her speeches *as clowns, nobody, thimblerriggers, etc.* Comparison is usually present

in Ksenia Sobchak’s speech: *other candidates are clowns, the state is a casino, elections are “kind of” elections, what is happening is a theatre and a circus. There is only one example of Ksenia not acting in line with her role of “one of the people”, and she calls the electorate oafs with a subsequent clarification: “you are not oafs, you are being tricked”. In general, colloquial, substandard and vernacular vocabulary are significant characteristics of Sobchak’s discourse:*

Не вешать лапшу на уши. // “Don’t pull (someone’s) leg” (lit. “don’t hang noodles on (someone’s) ears”).

Судьи будут посылать следователей куда подальше. // “Judges will tell investigators to shove off” (literally: “will send far away”).

Адская система совка. // “The hellish system of the scoop.”

In order to convince the addressees, rhetorical questions (*Это нормально?/Is this normal?; Вы забыли, как мы жили?/Have you forgotten how we lived?*), repetitions (*Много раз повторяю!/ I repeat many times!; Не будьте лохаму!/Don’t be oafs!*) and metaphor are used. The most frequently used metaphors are *power as a thimblerrigger who always wins, the country as a circus and a theatre where everyone acts according to the director’s script, and the golden key that can itself open the door to the golden land.*

Не надейтесь выиграть свой золотой ключик! Вы ничего не выиграете у наперсточников! // “Don’t dream of winning your golden key! You won’t win anything from thimblerriggers!”

• Trolling and flaming, provocation

These are techniques that are actively used in internet communication and have been inherited by political discourse. Trolling is seen by most researchers as a form of speech provocation used to escalate conflict, i.e. flaming. Trolling may not turn into flaming if an addressee is not provoked by it. As a troll, Sobchak exploits her opponents’ weaknesses by interrupting them, and she follows this with accusations. She reinforces these techniques with multiple repetitions at different debates:

Почему Вы мне не даете говорить?
// *“Why won’t you let me speak?”*

Почему меня все время перебивают?
// *“Why do I keep being interrupted?”*

Вы специально создаете звуковое окно, чтобы меня не было слышно! // *“You are creating a “sound box” on purpose so that I can’t be heard!”*

Вы не даете мне сказать ни слова!
// *“You don’t let me say a word!”*

Вы перебиваете только меня! // *“You are interrupting only me!”*

One of the ways to make trolling technique work is by getting personal.

(Sobchak to Zhirinovsky) *Из этой пламенной речи не смогла уяснить ничего!*
// *“I couldn’t get anything from this inflammatory speech!”*

(Addressing the audience) *Вы видите, с чем мне приходится иметь дело? В психиатрии – вовлечение в бред!* // *“Do you see what I have to deal with? In psychiatry, this is the involvement of delusions!”*

Не может Жириновский решать за женщину, рожать или нет. // *“Zhirinovsky cannot decide whether a woman should give birth or not.”*

The technique of comparison with metonymy:

Пусть женщина придет и решит, быть ей водолазом или нет... Но это ее решение. Так же, как не может Жириновский...// “Let a woman come and decide whether to be a diver or not... But it is her decision. Just as Zhirinovsky cannot do that...”

• ***Appealing to the “lone victim”, “the weak woman” immersed in a male-dominated world***

This technique is similar to the flaming techniques. This is a way to removing herself from a conflictive situation by presenting herself as an innocent victim.

Sobchak harasses Evgeny Tarko (representative of B. Titov), by repeatedly interrupting him:

Вы не даете мне сказать ни слова!
// *“You don’t let me say a word!”*

Вы перебивайте только меня! // *“You are interrupting only me!”*

Почему Вы все время на меня кидаетесь? Потому что я единственный оппозиционный кандидат? // *“Why do you keep attacking me? Is it because I’m the only opposition candidate?”* (She burst into tears and left the studio).

8. Conclusions

Political discourse is one of the most intensively developing types of discourse in modern communication. This is due both to a society’s political situation and to the influence of other types of discourse, in particular internet discourse. Using the Internet as a space to communicate with the electorate complicates the structure of political discourse. Transformations are applied to the speaker (in addition to a politician’s real personality, a virtual version of a politician is created), the audience (one addressee becomes a group), the text itself (creolized text) and the channel through which information is communicated. All of these aspects create opportunities for politicians to maximize his or her impact on the electorate and to achieve his or her communicative goals.

The discourse used by Ksenia Sobchak, an opposition presidential candidate, the fifth and the youngest woman to run for the Russian presidency, is interesting both in terms of her idea and in terms of its linguistic implementation. The analysis of her texts has revealed her general discourse strategy. This can be defined as political nihilism based on the denial of everything. In order to implement this strategy, Ksenia uses the techniques and language tools that have traditionally been associated with this political current (the techniques of declaring a nihilistic position, denunciation, detachment from the current situation and denial of involvement). She also employs the techniques and tools determined by the socio-cultural characteristic features of Russian voters (an emphasis on the technique of unity (identification) with the electorate), and by using gender stereotypes of female politicians (appealing to weak women and female victims). This is accompanied by the specifics of the communicative behaviour of a showman provocateur (provocation and irony) and even by using the special tools of influence, which are more char-

acteristic of internet communication than of political communication (flaming and trolling). At first, this discourse structure seems natural and effective from an opposition politician. However, it should be noted that Sobchak is a highly educated and cultured person, who fills her speeches with precedent phenomena and discourse markers that are understandable only to a native of Russian linguistic culture. In this way, she creates a subtext that overrides the text itself. Denouncing the authorities, Ksenia Sobchak explicitly aspires to be the president of the country and to create a new society, while implicitly warning the addressees that politics

is a game. Moreover, she uses techniques that have negative connotations in Russian political culture. Denial, nihilism, destruction and opposition are not popular among Russian voters. The memories of revolutionary events and their consequences are still vivid in people's minds.

Accordingly, what goal does Ksenia Sobchak, a presidential candidate of Russia, set for herself? Is it to win and lead the state? If so, her political discourse can be characterized as ineffective, as it does not consider the socio-cultural characteristics of the electorate. Is it designed to make her lose or maybe just to put on a show? This is what she is really good at.

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