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Joe Biden's conflict communication discourse with Vladimir Putin: the Geneva case (2021)

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Abstract

The research into Joe Biden's conflict communication discourse with Vladimir Putin is relevant for international geopolitics because it may be identified as a geopolitical conflict. The results of conflict resolution will have a crucial impact, not only on the main parties to the conflict, but also on the security of the EU. Thus, the object of this article is Biden's conflict communication discourse aimed at Putin (2021). The aim of the research is to identify and analyse how conflict communication is manifested in the discourse of two political leaders. Conflict communication enables Biden to attribute positive nominations to himself, as a politician, to the USA and the allies. Putin and his supporters are granted negative nominations and are accused of detrimental actions. The role and functions of contrastive nominations in Biden's conflict communication discourse are aimed to form the intended positive image of Biden and the negative image of Putin.

Keywords: political discourse, conflict communication, semantic fields, nominations

Introduction

Recent years have been marked by an increasing competition between the most significant world powers: the USA, Russia and China. The former US president, Donald Trump, tried to eliminate China from this battle for power by imposing strict economic sanctions and restrictions. Moreover, China's reputation has been diminished by COVID-19 related conspiracy theories. Russia has been treating the USA as its main competitor; thus, the conflict communication discourse of President Joe Biden is aimed at Russia, namely at the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. Furthermore, in the context of global politics, this conflict communication may also be identified as a geopolitical conflict. The parties to this geopolitical conflict are the USA, with its NATO allies in the EU, representing the West, and Russia, representing the East. The results of conflict resolution will have a crucial impact not only on the main parties to the conflict, but also on the

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security of the EU. This geopolitical conflict represents the competition for global influence and power; moreover, it may lead to redrawing the political map of the EU because Russia has its own political and territorial interests in Europe, e.g. the war in Eastern Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea. Thus, the analysis of the linguistic expression of Biden's conflict communication with Putin is extremely significant in disclosing their implicit, explicit aims and attitude to geopolitical issues.

The object of this research is Biden's conflict communication discourse with Putin (2021).

The aim of this research is to identify and analyse how conflict communication manifests itself in two countries with different political traditions and in the discourse of their political leaders. Pursuing the aim, the following objectives have been set:

1. to identify the most significant semantic fields in Biden's conflict communication discourse;
2. to identify and define nominations as a rhetorical means of image formation;
3. to analyse nominations, identify their role and functions in Biden's political discourse.

Political discourse has been a popular field of analysis worldwide; thus, it has been discussed by numerous scholars. van Dijk (1995, 1997, 1998, 1999) analyses it at socio-political and socio-cognitive levels and draws the conclusion that political cognition is very important in the study of political discourse. Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Laclau (1985, 1996) define politics as a method of social world formation, reconstruction and reorganization. Lassan (1995, 2007) emphasises the importance of ideology in political discourse analysis. Different analytical approaches to political discourse have been discussed by Schäffner (2002), Muntigl (2002), Chilton (2004), Landowski (2007), Makarova (2010), Dunmire (2012), Gabrėnaitė (2019).

Conflict has also been within the scope of interest of many researchers. According to Lasswell (1936, 1948), conflict communication is inevitable in political life if a fight for power exists thereby. van Dijk (1995) suggests that, from the ideological point of view, the *us* versus *them* dimensions may serve as the basis for conflict. Sillars (1986) introduced a theory of conflict which has been further analysed by Littlejohn (1999). Gurdjan (2008) stresses the cognitive nature of conflict communication, Smith (1997) emphasises the importance of language and discourse in conflict, Silraungwilai and McKerrow (2014), Chiluwa (2019) analyse conflict discourse and provide modern insights into conflict studies. However, conflict communication discourse and its manifestation in different political cultures has not been analysed.

It is important to emphasise the scientific novelty of the research. Although Biden's political discourse, based on the dichotomy *us* versus *them*, has been analysed by A. Abbas in the article *Joe Biden's Skilful Rhetoric: A Critical Discourse Analysis* (2021), and the critical discourse analysis of Biden's language use and persuasion in presidential debates has been provided by T. Sartika in the

article *Critical Discourse Analysis of Donald Trump's and Joe Biden's Language in Use in the 2020 United States Presidential Debates*, Biden's conflict communication discourse has not been analysed yet. Moreover, the article focuses on the most recent case of Biden's conflict communication discourse aimed at Putin (2021) because the research was conducted immediately after the Biden-Putin summit in Geneva. It has already been mentioned that political conflicts and political discourse have been analysed by numerous researchers; however, the concept of *conflict communication discourse* was defined and analysed in the doctoral dissertation *Conflict Communication Discourse of Political Leaders of Lithuania and Great Britain (1998–2008): Rhetorical–Cognitive Peculiarities* by the author of this article in 2011. The conflict communication discourse of the political leaders of Lithuania, the UK and the USA has been further analysed by the author in different scientific articles.

The research is scientifically relevant because it is focused on the discourse of two current geopolitical competitors, whose political performance is locally and globally significant. Furthermore, it analyses conflict communication, which is one of the main forms of political culture. The analysis of Joe Biden's conflict communication with Putin may be relevant not only for political scientists, linguists, sociologists, but for anyone who is interested in politics and the future of the US, European and Russian geopolitics.

The paper is structured as follows: the introduction defines the aim and object of the research; the data and research methodology are discussed in the methodology part; the theoretical part focuses on the insights of different scholars into political discourse, conflict communication, and introduces nominations and binary oppositions as the main cognitive linguistic concepts in this research; the analysis of Biden's conflict communication aimed at Putin, and conclusions.

1. Methodology

The paper is based on the *Remarks by President Biden in the Press Conference* after the Biden-Putin summit in Geneva on 16 June 2021.[1] The research data on the Geneva summit has been very relevant because this was the first face-to-face meeting of the two presidents and its results should have solved many geopolitical issues. The research has been conducted within the conceptual framework that encompasses political discourse, conflict communication, US relations with Russia and focuses on the significance of this conflict in the geopolitical context.

In the article, the linguistic analysis of the political discourse is combined with the method of rhetorical analysis. This methodology has been used in the research to identify and analyse the communicative behaviour of two geopolitical competitors – Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin in conflict communication, and a rhetorical form of

[1]The data has been taken from the official government website (retrieved from www.whitehouse.gov).

argumentation. Moreover, the analysis of conflict communication in political discourse, based on these research methods, leads to the conclusion that a rhetorical form of argumentation depends on the cognitive conceptions of the speaker – knowledge, intentions and feelings.

Such cognitive linguistic concepts as domain, semantic fields and such linguistic means, as lexical nominations have been identified in Biden's political discourse aimed at Putin and further analysed in the research as rhetorical means of image formation. Moreover, the rhetorical analysis of nominations identified their role and functions in Biden's political discourse and conflict communication with Putin.

The research into conflict communication discourse is an interdisciplinary study because cognitive linguistics, political rhetoric and political science intertwine in it. Biden's political rhetoric is analysed on the basis of the most significant cognitive linguistic concepts. Moreover, this research presents the particularity, goals and relevance of conflict communication in different political cultures.

2. Theoretical background

Political discourse is a broad term because it does not only include discourses of political ideologies, political institutes, political moves, as identified by Rusakova and Spasskiy (2006); furthermore, it has similar features and functions, such as advertising or media discourses. Dunmire (2012) argues that the political discourse analysis is related to multi-disciplinary research aimed at analysing the linguistic and discursive aspects of political texts and narratives. Wilson points out that the term is ambiguous: "first, a discourse which is itself political; and second, an analysis of political discourse as simply an example discourse type, without explicit reference to political content or political context" (Wilson, 2005, p. 388).

The complexity and versatility of the political discourse is also discussed by T. van Dijk. "Discourse and politics can be related in essentially two ways: (a) at a socio-political level of description, political processes and structures are constituted by situated events, interactions and discourses of political actors in political contexts, and (b) at a socio-cognitive level of description, shared political representations are related to individual representations of these discourses, interactions and contexts" (van Dijk, 2002, pp. 204-205).

Moreover, the perception of identity is very important in political discourse. According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), a subject acquires identity through discursive practices. The identity in political discourse and, particularly, conflict communication is based on the binary opposition *we* – *they* because the politicians who position themselves as equal to their electorate tend to gain more votes and form a better image in the eyes of their target audience. Furthermore, the political discourse is a powerful tool that enables politicians to achieve their intended aims and goals and to be re-elected for the next term of office.

Conflict communication is an inseparable, multidimensional part of the political discourse. It encompasses conflict communication between individual politicians, representatives of different political parties and ideologies, discourse of presidents or leaders of different states, international and interpersonal conflicts, etc.

According to Sedov (2002), communicative conflict is based on aggression expressed by linguistic means. However, conflict communication discourse has a dual nature – it may be expressed explicitly or implicitly. Littlejohn (1999) identifies conflict management strategies which are based on Sillars's (1982) research of conflict theory. These strategies include explicit and implicit avoidance, competitive and cooperative behaviours. Competitive behaviour is the most frequently and successfully employed strategy in conflict communication discourse because competition is an inseparable part of politics.

It has already been mentioned that conflict communication is based on the binary opposition *we – they*. Van Dijk (1995) claims that, from the ideological perspective, there are the *us* versus *them* dimensions, "in which speakers of one group will generally tend to present themselves or their own group in positive terms, and other groups in negative terms" (van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). This opposition is generally related to different or opposing political ideologies. Abbas (2021) employs Van Dijk's *us* versus *them* dimensions in the critical analysis of Biden's rhetoric in the pre-election discourse and draws the conclusion that Biden positions *us* as positive and *them* as negative in almost all election campaign speeches.

However, the analysis of Biden's conflict communication with Putin is not based on their political ideologies because they compete as state leaders and not as different political parties' representatives. Biden's conflict communication discourse is related to the political situation in both countries and the world.

One of the objectives of this article is to identify and define nominations. Nominations may be reconstructed on the basis of the *we – they* dimension. *We* or *I* will be attributed to the US President Biden, while *they* or *he* will be related the President of Russian Federation Putin. According to Van Dijk (1995), nominations are generally formed on the basis that *we* are positive and *they* are negative. The prevalent semantic fields in conflict communication discourse are also based on this binary opposition because they enable the researcher to identify the most relevant and problematic areas, winners and losers of the political competition, positive and negative features of politicians or political leaders.

One of the reasons of conflict communication was defined by Lasswell (1948) as: "one ruling element is especially alert to the other, and relies upon communication as a means of preserving power" (Lasswell, 1948, p. 222). Gurdjan (2008) identifies the following reasons of conflict communication: conflict can emerge inside a personality and be expressed by speech, which may be purposefully aimed at a listener or not; conflict can emerge as the result of the listener's disapproval of the ideas expressed by the speaker.

In the article *The Biden-Putin Summit: No Rolling Over, No Rolling Back* (2021), Obe presents his insights into the Geneva summit and the possible reasons of conflict. Obe points out that Biden's strategy towards Russia includes "the leveraging of US global financial superiority against Russian regional military superiority", "a good-faith offer to cooperate in areas of presumptive mutual interest" and "the revival of the Atlantic Alliance"[2]. However, "for Putin, it is a matter of principle not to play by the rules of others. His policy is to look for red lines and subvert them by ridicule and asymmetric attack". Therefore, different political perceptions and goals, or even different political cultures serve as the basis for Biden's conflict communication with Putin. Obe (2021) draws the conclusion that "Russia believes that it is in an existential conflict with the West".

In conclusion, conflict communication aimed at the political opponent is very significant and relevant at the international level because it may evoke and resolve the conflict. Furthermore, it may lead to a declaration of war, ceasefire or end of war; therefore, conflict communication discourse in the form of semantic fields and nominations may become a real weapon in politicians' hands.

3. Joe Biden's Conflict Communication Discourse with Vladimir Putin

Joe Biden was inaugurated as the 46th President of the United States on 20 January 2021; thus, at the beginning of his term, Biden did not have enough experience in this position; moreover, he wanted to assure the electorate that he was the right person for this position because the former President, Trump, alleged voter fraud and claimed that he had won the presidential election. Consequently, Biden wanted to form his own positive image, locally and internationally, he wanted to position himself as a strong and active president in contrast to the former one; therefore, his political discourse, aimed at the relationship with Russia, was rather aggressive. At the beginning of his term, Biden even claimed that "he believes that the Russian leader, Vladimir Putin, is a killer with no soul – and vowed that Putin "will soon pay a price" for interfering in the 2020 U.S. election and trying to boost the re-election chances of the then-President Donald Trump"[3].

However, on 16 June 2021, during the Geneva summit, Biden's conflict communication aimed at Putin becomes milder and more diplomatic, generally focused on *benefit*. This domain includes all the positive and beneficial actions that will be taken in order to protect the USA and its citizens, to regain the title of the strongest global power. One of the broadest semantic fields in this domain is based on the binary semantic field *defender – violator*, where Biden is granted a positive *defender* nomination, while Putin is characterized as a *violator*, a nomination which

[2] International Centre for Defense and Security op-ed, June, 29th, 2021 available at https://icds.ee/en/the-biden-putin-summit-no-rolling-over-no-rolling-back.
[3] Biden at CNBC, March, 17th 2021, available at: at https://www.cnbc.com.

evokes negative connotations in the subconsciousness of the target audience. The *Defender – violator* nominations are based on the *I – he* binary opposition which implies the idea that both presidents are political and even personal opponents.

The direct conflict communication discourse aimed at Putin's detrimental actions as a *violator* may be identified in the following examples:

1) And where we have differences, I wanted President Putin to understand why I say what I say and why I do what I do, and how we'll respond to specific kinds of actions that harm America's interests.
2) I made it clear that we will not tolerate attempts to violate our democratic sovereignty or destabilize our democratic elections, and we would respond.
3) [...]he knows I will take action, like we did when — this last time out. What happened was: We, in fact, made it clear that we were not going to continue to allow this to go on. The end result was we ended up withdrawing — they went withdrawing ambassadors, and we closed down some of their facilities in the United States, et cetera. And he knows there are consequences.
4) I pointed out to him that we have significant cyber capability. And he knows it. He doesn't know exactly what it is, but it's significant. And if, in fact, they violate these basic norms, we will respond with cyber. He knows.

In the above examples, President Biden expresses direct, explicit, personal conflict with the President Putin by employing the personal pronoun *I* to indicate that he is a *defender* and his actions are very beneficial for the state because Biden is going to protect it from the interference of Russia – *why I say what I say and why I do what I do, I will take action.* Biden's personal effort is intensified by the inclusive pronoun *we*, which stands for the whole American nation – *we'll respond to, we will not tolerate, we were not going to continue to allow, we will respond.* The inclusive pronoun *we* does not only express the power of the state, it shows that, although it is Biden's responsibility and credit for protecting and defending the USA from Russia's or, more precisely, its president's detrimental actions, it also enables Biden to form a positive image of himself as a personality and leader, not only in the eyes of his electorate, but also in those of all citizens. In examples 1-4, Biden explicitly indicates the counter-actions that will be taken in order to defend the state.

Biden rarely utters the surname or position of the President of the Russian Federation; it can only be seen in example 1; he prefers using informal and less deferential address in the form of the pronoun *he*. Thus, direct conflict is expressed with the help of this pronoun and intensified by the enumeration of all the actions that will be taken against *him – he knows I will take action, he knows there are consequences, I pointed out to him that we have significant cyber capability. And he knows it.* The direct application of the binary opposition *I/ we – he* in Biden's conflict communication discourse enables the target audience to identify interpersonal conflict because they know there is no democracy in Russia; therefore, President

Putin takes the most important decisions and all the US actions will be taken against him and his supporters, allies, but not against all Russians although these sanctions, restrictions and actions will definitely affect their lives.

Biden's conflict communication is based on the cause and effect concept in examples 4 and 5:

> 5) It was just letting him know where I stood; what I thought we could accomplish together; and what, in fact — if it was — if there were violations of American sovereignty, what would we do.

Here, Biden explicitly contrasts his own actions with the performance of his political opponent and makes use of direct accusations asserting that his opponent violates basic norms and American sovereignty. This enables Biden to position himself as an active, determined and strong leader who will defend his country while Putin is presented as a threat to American norms and values.

The conflict nature of Biden's political discourse is emphasized by persuasive and strong rhetoric – *I wanted President Putin to understand, I made it clear, I pointed out to him.* Such imperative political narrative implies the idea that Biden is a superior member in the *I – he* opposition because he tells his opponent what to do or explains the concepts the latter does not understand or is not aware of. Thus, the conclusion that Biden is the stronger, winning subject in this conflict, could be drawn.

Although President Biden prefers to express his competition with Putin as an interpersonal conflict, he sometimes makes use of the inclusive pronoun *we*, which enables him to position himself as one of the citizens and implies the idea that Biden is not alone in this conflict, that he is supported by the government and the society. This may be identified in the following examples:

> 6) We discussed in detail the next steps our countries need to take on arms control measures — the steps we need to take to reduce the risk of unintended conflict.
> 7) Two, communicate directly — directly — that the United States will respond to actions that impair our vital interests or those of our allies.
> 8) [..] what can we commit to act in terms of anything affecting violating international norms that negatively affects Russia? What are we going to agree to do?
> And so, I think we have real opportunities to — to move. [..] it's in everybody's interest that these things be acted on.

Example 6 depicts a shift from direct accusations to mutual cooperation – *we discussed in detail the next steps our countries need to take* and implies the idea that

conflict may be solved and both parties may benefit from it because *the risk of unintended conflict* may be reduced or even eliminated.

Examples 7 and 8 present Biden as the leader of a strong state and replace *him* with *the United States* or *we* in the *defender's* nomination. Such replacement is really significant in conflict communication because it implies the idea that a vast country, including all its citizens, will fight for their interests. Expressions such as *interests or those of our allies, violating international norms* position Biden as a *defender* not only of his country, but also as a *defender* of the world. This rhetoric enables the political leader to gain more support from international partners and members of different organizations, such as NATO; furthermore, it presents Biden as a superior and more successful member in the *defender – violator* semantic field. Putin is directly granted a *violator's* nomination when accused of impairing the vital interests of the USA and its allies, for *violating international norms.* The possible result of this conflict communication is expressed implicitly by indicating real actions to be taken against the *violator*, i.e. *the United States will respond to actions, I think we have real opportunities to – to move. […] it's in everybody's interest that these things be acted on.*

Although Biden positions himself as an open leader, and direct or explicit conflict communication prevails in his discourse, there are many cases of implied conflict communication in his political narrative:

9) Responsible countries need to take action against criminals who conduct ransomware activities on their territory.
10) We'll find out whether we have a cybersecurity arrangement that begins to bring some order.
11) It was important to meet in person so there can be no mistake about or misrepresentations about what I wanted to communicate.
12) I also told him that no President of the United States could keep faith with the American people if they did not speak out to defend our democratic values, to stand up for the universal rights and fundamental freedoms that all men and women have, in our view.

In example 9, Biden implicitly defines Russia as an irresponsible country which conducts detrimental actions, related to cybercrime, on the territories of other countries. Contrarily, he implicitly indicates that the USA is a responsible country which will fight for its security. This *defender – violator* opposition forms a positive image of President Biden, depicts him as an active leader who may gain more votes in the next presidential election. The *violator's* image is diminished with the help of the same rhetoric means.

The implied image of an untrustworthy competitor, related to the issue of cybersecurity, is presented in example 10 where Biden is not sure whether the arrangement which has been achieved will *bring some order.* Such narrative helps

the US leader to implicitly form a negative image of Putin and thus, gain more support in his conflict communication.

Example 11 implicitly indicates that President Putin has a distorted image of US values and goals; therefore, there is a need for a face-to-face meeting. This utterance enables Biden to counterpose his own and Putin's images, where *I* is presented as a determined and active leader, whereas *he* is not interested or may misrepresent the interests of other nations. Moreover, the image of Biden as a strong leader is implicitly reinforced by the idea of a senior or more experienced person who needs to communicate and explain important ideas to a junior fellow or even a child.

Putin's nomination as a *violator's* is implicitly formed in example 12 where Biden talks about defending US democratic values, universal rights and fundamental freedom. The address *I also told him* implies the idea that the *violator* poses a threat to these values, but the *defender* will protect his nation from such danger. In this utterance, the binary opposition *I – he* enables Biden to contrast his beneficial performance with the detrimental actions of his opponent.

President Biden may not only be perceived as a *defender* of his country, but as a *defender* of the world. The *violator* on the international arena in his conflict communication discourse is still the same –President Putin.

13) So, human rights is going to always be on the table, I told him. It's not about just going after Russia when they violate human rights; it's about who we are. How could I be the President of the United States of America and not speak out against the violation of human rights?
14) And so, at the forum, I pointed out to him that that's why we're going to raise our concerns about cases like Aleksey Navalny. I made it clear to President Putin that we'll continue to raise issues of fundamental human rights because that's what we are, that's who we are.
15) I communicated the United States' unwavering commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.
16) And I shared our concerns about Belarus. He didn't disagree with what happened; he just has a different perspective of what to do about it.

The direct expression of Biden's conflict communication with Putin may be identified in examples 13-14, where the US president explicitly accuses Putin in the name of Russia of violating human rights in relation to his opponent, Aleksey Navalny, and *two wrongfully imprisoned American citizens: Paul Whelan and Trevor Reed.* This narrative is based on the binary contrastive semantic fields *defender – violator* because Biden counterposes Putin's negative, unfair political performance to his own highly positive actions. Moreover, the rhetorical question – *how could I be the President of the United States of America and not speak out against the violation of human rights?* enables Biden to form an image of a stronger

competitor than Putin because he claims that human rights will always be important for him and the USA, and that he is going to defend them globally. Moreover, the constant repetition of such imperative expressions as *I pointed out to him, I made it clear to President Putin* enable Biden to express his superiority as a political leader because the stronger leader explains political issues or communicates information to the weaker or less experienced. Thus, the political rhetoric in example 14 is beneficial for supplementing the already positive political image of the US President Biden and depicts him as the winning part in the conflict.

The international *defender's* nomination is also explicitly and directly expressed in examples 15-16, where Biden speaks about his concerns regarding the political situation in Ukraine and Belarus. This nomination depicts the US president as a reliable politician, political leader thus forming his positive image in the eyes of international society. In example 15, Putin's role in violating *the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine* is expressed implicitly. Although in example 16, Putin is not positioned as being involved in the political chaos in Belarus, a case of conflict communication between the two leaders of the biggest powers of the world may be identified in the following narrative – *he didn't disagree with what happened; he just has a different perspective of what to do about it.*

Biden's conflict communication discourse is not only aimed at emphasizing the beneficial nature of his political decisions and forming a positive image, but also at forming a negative or even detrimental image of his political opponent and competitor in the battle for power. The unidirectional *enemy* nomination is implied in Biden's conflict communication discourse. This may be identified in the following examples:

17) But that does not mean he's ready to, quote, figuratively speaking, "lay down his arms," and say, "Come on." He still, I believe, is concerned about being, quote, "encircled." He still is concerned that we, in fact, are looking to take him down, et cetera.
18) I wouldn't put it that way, in terms of improving the [media] climate. I would, in fact, put it in terms of how much interest does he have in burnishing Russia's reputation that is not — is viewed as not being contrary to democratic principles and free speech.
19) And I think I pointed out to him that Russia had an opportunity — that brief shining moment after Gorbachev and after things began to change drastically — to actually generate a democratic government. But what happened was it failed [...].
20) I'm not confident he'll change his behaviour. [...]I said — what I said was — let's get it straight. I said: What will change their behaviour is if the rest of world reacts to them and it diminishes their standing in the world. I'm not confident of anything; I'm just stating a fact.

Example 17, formed on the basis of such expressions as: *lay down his arms, encircled,* expresses an implicit idea of war and forms an implied *enemy* nomination attributed to Putin. The negative image of the President of the Russian Federation is emphasized by the negative particle *not* in the clause *that does not mean he's ready to, quote, figuratively speaking, "lay down his arms"*. Moreover, the quoted adjective *encircled* enables Biden to position his political opponent as a weaker member of the conflict because he has already been *encircled*; thus, he is almost defeated. Such positioning helps Biden to convey the idea that the USA is a stronger, more dominant political power than Russia.

The negative image of Putin is formed in relation to different issues and his approach to media is not an exception. In example 18, Biden non-aggressively implies the idea that Putin violates *democratic principles and free speech* in Russia; therefore, the most significant consequence on the international political arena is the diminished reputation of Russia. However, Biden expresses doubt in his opponent's interest *in burnishing Russia's reputation* which leads to the formation of an image of a despotic political leader who is not interested in the welfare and reputation of his country. Moreover, the absence of democracy implies the idea of dictatorship.

Example 19 implies the idea that Russia is not a democratic state. Biden claims that Russia had an opportunity, *that brief shining moment after Gorbachev* to *generate a democratic government*, but *it failed.* Gorbachev's successor was Yeltsin, the first democratically elected president in Russia. Yeltsin's successor was and still is Putin; thus, the target audience can draw a conclusion that Putin failed in the process of democracy and therefore, the *violator's* nomination is granted more features, such as a *violator* of democracy, democratic norms and values.

The explicit distrust in Putin's behaviour, expressed in example 20, enables Biden to complement the already negative image of his political opponent and to involve other countries, *the rest of world,* into his conflict communication with Putin. In his narrative, the US president directly indicates the enemy that has to be defeated. The personal pronoun *them* stands for the President of the Russian Federation and his supporters. Contrarily, Biden implies the idea that he is a stronger leader who is supported by *the rest of world*. The explicit nature of conflict is intensified by Biden's call for action – *what will change their behaviour is if the rest of world reacts to them and it diminishes their standing in the world.* Furthermore, the expression *diminishes their standing in the world* discloses one of the most significant goals of Biden's conflict communication with Putin, which is to win the competition for being acknowledged as the most powerful state in the world.

In his political discourse, Biden tries to convey the idea that he is a strong leader not only to Putin, but to the rest of the world; therefore, a semantic field *strong leader – weak leader* may be identified in the *benefit* domain which, as it has already been mentioned, prevails in his political narrative. Naturally, President Biden is attributed the features of a strong leader, whereas President Putin is positioned as a *weak leader*.

There are more cases where the binary semantic field *strong leader – weak leader* is expressed implicitly in Biden's conflict communication:

> 21) Now, I told President Putin my agenda is not against Russia or anyone else; it's for the American people: fighting COVID-19; rebuilding our economy; re-establishing our relationships around the world with our allies and friends; and protecting our people. That's my responsibility as President.
> 22) The bottom line is, I told President Putin that we need to have some basic rules of the road that we can all abide by.
> 23) Over this last week, I believe — I hope — the United States has shown the world that we are back, standing with our Allies.
> 24) [...] it's what the actions that other countries take — in this case, Russia — that are contrary to international norms. It's the price they pay. They are not — they are not able to dictate what happens in the world. There are other nations of significant consequence — i.e. the United States of America being one of them.

In example 21, Biden forms the image of a *strong leader* with the help of significant, relevant and beneficial actions for his nation. Moreover, he is inclined to change the political direction taken by his predecessor, Trump, in *rebuilding our economy; re-establishing our relationships around the world with our allies and friends*. The positive nature of a *strong leader* is reinforced by *protecting our people* without defining the subject they need to be protected from and thus, leading to the conclusion that only a *strong leader* is obliged to protect his nation from all possible threats. Such image is completed by the confident rhetoric *that's my responsibility as President.* In this narrative, conflict communication may be identified in the utterance – *I told President Putin my agenda is not against Russia*, which implies the idea that Biden does not treat Putin as an equal competitor, that he has other priorities, related to the welfare of the USA and its citizens, but Putin is not his priority. Therefore, the implied nomination a *weak leader*, attributed to Putin, may be determined in Biden's political discourse.

In example 22, Biden indicates the necessity for the introduction of common rules. The image of a *strong leader* is based on advice – *I told President Putin that we need to have some basic rules [..] that we can all abide by.* Only a strong political leader may suggest or advise on the introduction of general rules, laws, sanctions or restrictions. Such introduction implies the idea that Putin is a *weak leader* in the eyes of Biden because he needs to be told or advised on political performance. Thus, implied conflict communication is again formed on the basis of counterposing the members of the binary opposition *I – he* and their leadership skills.

In the name of the whole country, the US president forms the image of a *strong le*ader in example 23 – *the United States has shown the world that we are back.* This nomination is implicitly reinforced by an allusion to the former president Trump,

who promised to *make America great again*, but failed in keeping it. A *strong leader*, Biden takes credit for bringing the USA back on the international arena and for rectifying his predecessor's mistakes and detrimental political actions. The image of a *strong leader* is intensified by the expression *standing with our Allies,* which indicates that Biden is not alone in his conflict communication, he is supported by foreign allies. This narrative implies the idea that Putin is a *weak leader* who is already losing the competition for the top power in the world.

The nomination of a *weak leader* may be identified in example 24, where Biden employs strict rhetoric and states that Russia is *not able to dictate what happens in the world.* Such rhetoric reveals the conflict between two political leaders and implies the idea that Putin strives to become the most important political leader in the world and to impose his rules on other political powers. Such assumptions form a negative image of President Putin and involve other countries in the conflict with him, in the name of Russia.

One more semantic field, i.e. *good relations – bad relations* is prevalent in Biden's conflict communication discourse. As President Biden aims to form his positive image in order to win the battle for dominating international politics, obviously, *good relations* are related to his personality, while Putin is associated with *bad relations*.

Firstly, Biden defines politics as a personal relationship:

25) [...] all foreign policy is, is a logical extension of personal relationships. It's the way human nature functions.
26) I explain things based on personal basis.

The approach of politics, especially of foreign policy, as a personal relationship is very significant for the formation of an attractive, positive and beneficial image of the political leader. A *good relationship* with foreign partners implies the idea that Biden is a *strong leader* who cares about friendly and close relationships with other political players and is able to regain the reputation of the USA as a strong and reliable state. Utterance 26 reinforces and supports Biden's perception of politics as a personal relationship.

The following examples are based on the counterposing binary oppositions *I – he, good relations – bad relations:*

27) President Putin and I had a — share a unique responsibility to manage the relationship between two powerful and proud countries — a relationship that has to be stable and predictable. And it should be able to — we should be able to cooperate where it's in our mutual interests.
28) What I'm saying is I think there's a genuine prospect to significantly improve relations between our two countries without us giving up a single, solitary thing based on principle and/or values.

Example 27 expresses an inclusive, friendly rhetoric related to the management of the relationship between the USA and Russia. Here, President Biden strives to show that both leaders can and should be responsible for maintaining a *good relationship*. However, he implicitly claims that that relationship is not as good as it should be because it *has to be stable and predictable* and both leaders *should be able to cooperate*. Therefore, Russia is implicitly granted a *bad relationship* nomination.

The latter nomination is complemented by Biden's utterance *I think there's a genuine prospect to significantly improve relations between our two countries* in example 28. This narrative implies the idea that the relations between the two countries are poor and serve as a basis for conflict. The nomination of a *good relationship* may be identified in Biden's discourse because he positions himself as a negotiator who invites and encourages his political opponent to improve relations.

The following, unidirectional cases of Biden's discourse are aimed at depicting President Putin as responsible for *bad relationship*:

> 29) And now we've established a clear basis on how we intend to deal with Russia and the U.S.-Russia relationship.
> 30) Look, this is not about trust; this is about self-interest and verification of self-interest. That's what it's about. So, I — virtually almost — almost anyone that I would work out an agreement with, that affected the American people's interests, I don't say, "Well, I trust you. No problem." Let's see what happens. You know, as that old expression goes, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." We're going to know shortly.
> 31) [...]I said to him, I said, "Your generation and mine are about 10 years apart. This is not a 'kumbaya' moment, as you used to say back in the '60s in the United States, like, 'Let's hug and love each other.'

Example 29 presents a counter position between the *my/ our – his/ their* relationship. By employing the inclusive pronoun *we*, Biden states that he, together with his nation or their allies, has *to deal with Russia and the U.S. – Russia relationship*. Generally, people deal with problems; therefore, there is an implied case of conflict communication because Russia is perceived as a problem, or more precisely, as an enemy that has to be defeated. Such idea is intensified by the use of the Present Perfect Tense – *we've established a clear basis on how we intend to deal*, suggesting a real result and consequences for President Putin.

In example 30, Biden explicitly claims that he does not trust his political opponent and employs a figurative idiom, *the proof of the pudding is in the eating*, to intensify his narrative. Such direct distrust in President Putin and Biden's perception of foreign affairs as a personal relationship may evoke an implicit

nomination of *bad relationship*, related to Putin in the subconsciousness of the target audience.

Although Biden positions himself as the leader who strives for a *good relationship*, the last example, 31, implies the idea that the relationship with Putin is so bad that Biden is against reconciliation – *this is not a 'kumbaya' moment, as you used to say back in the '60s in the United States, like, 'Let's hug and love each other.'* Such narrative eventually proves the presumption that conflict communication is present in Biden's political discourse and that it is directly or implicitly aimed at his political opponent, the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin.

Conclusions

Based on the Geneva case (2021), the article analyses Joe Biden's conflict communication discourse with Putin and aims at identifying and analysing the expression of conflict communication. The analysis identified the most significant semantic fields: *defender – violator, strong leader – weak leader, good relationship – bad relationship*, related to the *benefit* domain in Biden's political discourse. The positive semantic fields - *defender, strong leader, good relationship* - are associated with the US President, Joe Biden. These semantic fields are contrasted with the negative ones, related to the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin – *violator, weak leader, bad relationship*.

The nominations, attributed to both political subjects, are expressed on the basis of the binary opposition model *I – he, we – they* in Biden's conflict communication discourse. This model enables Biden to attribute only positive nominations and features to his personality, as a politician, the USA and the allies. *He/ they* are granted only negative nominations and are accused of detrimental actions.

The role and functions of contrastive nominations in Biden's conflict communication discourse are aimed to form the intended positive image of himself and the intended negative image of Putin. These nominations enable the target audience to change their attitude towards two competing powers, political leaders, and their performance. The prevailing model *I – he*, which serves as the basis for forming nominations in the conflict communication discourse, expresses Biden's attitude to communication with Putin as an interpersonal conflict and may be beneficial for achieving the main goal of the US president – to win the geopolitical competition for being the dominant political power in the world.

Neither Biden's conflict communication discourse in general, nor his conflict communication with Putin has been analysed yet, which emphasizes the scientific novelty of the research. Moreover, the research has been based on the most recent and relevant data. The analysis of Biden's conflict communication discourse with Putin is not only relevant for the US and Russian citizens, it is extremely significant in the context of European geopolitics because the EU, as the US ally, may be treated

as a party to this conflict. Thus, the management and resolution of the conflict will definitely have an impact, not only on the US or Russian Federation, but also on the geopolitical situation of the EU. Furthermore, the analysis of the linguistic means and cognitive peculiarities of Biden's conflict communication with Putin is significant in disclosing both implicit and explicit expressions of his attitude towards international politics, diplomatic relations and geopolitical issues.

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