

Stages of linguistic analysis underlying the study of aggressive communicative-pragmatic intentions in the English-language political discourse of mass-media

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Abstract: The article views the phenomenon of speech aggression from the rhetorical perspective and outlines its distinguishing features. The procedure for the study of instances of speech aggression in the English-language political discourse of mass-media is elaborated

Keywords: speech aggression, invective, invecteme, mediatized political discourse, predispositions, aggressiveness.

Within the context of larger concepts of communicative competence, communicative effectiveness, the influence of language and political communication the article seeks to expand the investigations conducted in the preceding researches on the effects of performance on certain language patterns to include aspects of aggression. While the study of aggression has a rich and productive history in psychology and other social science disciplines, the study of aggressive communication by a pleiad of eminent linguists has come a long way from the analysis of the inventory of swear words, insults, and discriminatory grammatical structures that various languages have developed as their arsenal to conduct verbal aggression (V. Zhelvis, I. Bublyk, O. Golod, Yu. Shcherbinina) to the study of aggression as a speech act that finds its way in all types of communication: interpersonal, public, mass (H. Zavrazhyna, T. Vorontsova, O. Sheigal, Ye. Sarasova, R. Bart).

The study of the concept “speech aggression” as conceived and defined by linguists, who dismissed the term verbal aggression on the basis of its redundancy [1, 48], reveals complex nature of the very notion that tends to encompass a multiplicity of communicative situations aimed to inflict harm. In this sense, the notion covers comments which are registered to differ in the level of intensity, character, direction, force, number of participants involved in the communicative situation. Irrespective of the type of communication, despite lack of unanimous approach towards phenomena attributable to the category of destructive verbal communication as well as, terminological versatility that hampers a comprehensive and unified conception of the phenomenon for the study of aggressive communication (*verbal aggression, linguistic aggression, language*

of aggression, communicative aggression, speech aggression, destructive communication, pathogenic communication, destructive speech behavior, disharmonized speech area, verbal attack, verbal abuse, destructive verbal communication, intimate violence, nonphysical abuse, maltreatment, psychological aggression, verbal aggression, emotional abuse, controlling behaviors, competitive behaviors and psychological torture), an aggressive speech behavior is commonly viewed as “the use of linguistic means to express unfriendliness, hostility; a manner of speaking that threatens one’s self-respect and wounds one’s self-esteem” [19, 340], “the tendency to attack the self-concepts of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication” [16, 21], “a communicative action determined by intent to induce negative emotional and psychological states (anger, frustration) in the individuals subjected to language influence” [5, 200]. Since negative attitude towards the referent of the utterance constitutes the frame of the speaker’s pragmatic intention, speech aggression as communicative behavior represents a manner of conflict management through escalation and deharmonization of communication that comes to light within certain communicative moves targeted at inflicting psychological pain to an object of speech aggression. Numerous studies of speech aggression bear witness to the versatility of these communicative moves as well as their dependence on the sphere of communication they apply to (H. Zavrazhyna, T. Vorontsova, O. Sheigal, Ye. Sarasova, R. Bart). Moreover, the interplay of contextual factors that give rise to verbal acts of violence in cases where linguistic system does not possess a prefabricated arsenal should be considered.

This creates the dire need and thus the **aim** of this research to elaborate the procedure for the study of instances of speech aggression in separate spheres of communication, i.e. in mediatized political discourse. Thus, criteria for detection of the transferred aggressive impulses onto the linguistic system within discursive boundaries define **the subject** of this research, while stages of linguistic analysis underlying the study of aggressive communicative-pragmatic intentions determine its **object**. Political media texts were selected as **source material** to meet the set objective. The **topicality** of this work lies in the fact that having determined contentious issues and central difficulties related to selection and analysis of instances of speech aggression we suggest certain stages of analysis and guidelines to overcome the setbacks.

Pragmatic studies of discourse with the integrated cognitive approach, as I. Shevchenko concludes, though diversified, centre around meaning as constructed by both an addresser and a recipient of the message and realized in a definite speech act. Bound by set conditions and presuppositions, the speech act, which is cognitively, informatively, psychologically and socially charged, constitutes a unity of form, meaning and a socially valid verbal action determined by the sphere of communication, values, social norms, social practice influenced by authority in a community and historic processes [8, 106]. Since we study speech aggression in political discourse of media-texts, our survey is conducted within the realms of cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics and pragmatics, and an act of speech aggression is viewed as a complex lingual, cognitive and communicative activity that is strategically defined as: a means of mind manipulation, a means of shaping convictions in the context of mediatized political communication (cognitive aspect), a means of ideological indoctrination (socio-pragmatic aspect).

Strategic speech aggression differs from trait speech aggression in three very important ways [2, 6].

Strategic speech aggression involves the **conscious** and selective use of verbally aggressive messages to achieve specific goals and objectives of the source. Trait verbal aggression may or may not have desired outcomes, and may not be under conscious control.

An important component of strategic verbal aggression is the **intent** of the source. Strategic verbal aggression is rhetorical in nature and therefore it is always used in a goal-directed fashion. In some cases, strategic verbal aggression might be utilized for the purposes of making an irritating individual go away. In other cases, strategic verbal aggression could be used by a source for the purpose of moti-

vating someone to alter their behaviors, attitudes, or self-concepts. Strategic verbal aggression might even be used for the sole purpose of causing psychological pain. The possible intentions of the source of strategic verbal aggression are infinite, yet the possible outcomes are somewhat dichotomous: success or failure in achieving the goal.

Third, strategic verbal aggression assumes a **logical progression, the consideration of a variety of tactics** that could lead to the goal of the source, and the selection of a verbally aggressive message as the tactic most likely to be successful. In this sense, strategic verbal aggression can be considered as simply another tool in an individual's repertoire of compliance-gaining strategies. Like many other compliance-gaining strategies, the use of strategic verbal aggression and its effectiveness are likely to be dependent upon the perceived characteristics of the source, receiver, message, and the context in which the strategy is implemented.

Strategic verbal aggression assumes both the existence of a variety of available tactics, as well as the conscious selection of verbal aggression as the most viable tactic. In order for a verbally aggressive act to be considered strategic, one must select a tactic by eliminating alternatives that are thought to have a higher probability of failure. Furthermore, there is no single behavioral alteration technique that will lead to the desired outcome in every situation. Thus, when a source engages in strategic verbal aggression, s/he does so because speech aggression is believed to have the highest probability of success.

A key element in the conceptualization of speech aggression and strategic speech aggression is that the source must attack the self-concept of the receiver, a system of learned beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that each person holds to be true about his or her personal existence. Self-concept is differentiated from self-esteem in that the latter generally refers to how people feel about themselves, or how much they value themselves. Given the nature of the self-concept, any attack is likely to be perceived negatively.

Speech, in M. Bakhtin's view, is manifested primarily in the choice of a particular speech genre. This choice is determined by the specific nature of the given sphere of speech communication, semantic (thematic) considerations, the concrete situation of the speech communication, the personal composition of its participants, and so on. And when the speaker's speech plan with all its individuality and subjectivity is applied and adapted to a chosen genre, it is shaped and developed within a certain generic form. Such genres exist above all in the great and multifarious sphere of everyday oral communica-

tion, including the most familiar and the most intimate [11, 68]. We speak only in definite speech genres, that is, all our utterances have definite and relatively stable typical forms of construction of the whole.

The study of strategic speech aggression in Russian and Ukrainian scientific circle doesn't rely that heavily upon the content analysis but instead applies its merits for the in-between analysis which aims to examine the linguistic essence of the phenomenon on the basis of verbally aggressive message attacks a source conceives while displaying his attitude. Among such works mention should be made of E. Vlasova, T. Vorontsova, A. Yevstafieva, E. Bulyhina, T. Steksova, O. Sheigal who foster further analysis of speech aggression as a goal-seeking, conscious, strategic and controlled defamation and alienation of an object under certain cognitive scenario mindful of pragmatic presuppositions.

In recent years there has been an increased interest in studying the concept of verbal aggression from different perspectives what resulted in a wide spectrum of theories [4]. Our research has been undertaken to study the lingvo-rhetorical aspect of the phenomenon marked by the use of strategically chosen and organized language means of escalating conflict and expressing one's negative attitude towards the subject of speech.

According to O. Sheigal [9], V. Tretjakova [7] and H. Zavrazhyna [2] we find the aggressiveness of an utterance to be a variable dependent upon the in-jectiveness of linguistic means, the addressor who assigns a meaning to an utterance, the perlocutionary effect of an utterance, ethnocultural traditions of assessment criteria, multifaceted contextual parameters.

For the purpose of identifying aggressive speech acts it stands to reason to consider another intensively studied aspect of destructive behavior such as imposture of foregone assessment. Above-mentioned studies unanimously claim that evaluating utterances in service of speech aggression imply intrusion into the axiological mindset of the recipient. Such claims trigger the question of criteria that tend to allocate negative evaluating utterances into the category of utterances through which speech aggression manifests itself. In fact, an imposed assessment constitutes an essential feature that distinguishes negative assessment from speech aggression, influences recipients' axiological preferences and, above all, gives sufficient grounds for regarding speech aggression as a phenomenon of persuasive communication and linguistic manipulation, as the use of language to exert control over the recipient. When used efficiently, language is thus a powerful tool and probably the most powerful when used implicitly.

All in all, speech aggression sends out a signal of intolerance, whereas intolerance marks one of the constituents of binary opposition tolerance/intolerance and assumes tangible forms in dichotomies language of aggression/ language of tolerance, speech (or communicative) aggression/ speech (or communicative) tolerance. Still, speech aggression stands in contrast to speech tolerance when it comes to defining the nature of communicative behavior. A communicative strategy that finds its way in tolerant speech patterns seeks to resolve the conflict by suppressing the explicit expression of negative attitude and is treated by Yu. Yuzhakova, L. Yenina as a supplementary technique, a means of reaching a communicative goal [10, 20]. Furthermore, Yu. Yuzhakova made an observation that is of crucial importance for our research. She came to conclusion that "explicit expression of tolerance conceals implicit aggression on the deep level". Thus, speech tolerance should be identified as a manifold of language patterns that indicate the conciliatory, liberal attitude towards the "other", while speech aggression shows signs of belligerent and patronizing attitude.

To sum up speech aggression is defined as the use of words determined by the pragmatic function of producing pejorative expressive effect, attaching negative connotations by means of speech and rhetoric devices.

Here is an account of suggested procedure for the linguistic analysis of an aggressive communicative behavior in the mediatized political discourse:

- 1) an analysis of semantic potential of speech structures.

At this preliminary stage invectemes are being identified, detached from informemes [3, 120] and author's predispositions analyzed. Following the contentions made by professors D. Infante, R. Gass and A. Rancer, that studied psychological and cognitive aspects of interpersonal communication, assertiveness and argumentativeness attest addresser's constructive predispositions in favor of conflict resolutions.

Assertiveness is conceptualized as "a constructive communication trait (a personality-related trait that deals specifically with human symbolic behavior) because it involves using verbal and nonverbal symbols to exert control, to obtain justified rewards, and to avoid violation of one's rights. Assertive individuals stand up for their rights and express their thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in an appropriate ways which do not violate another person's rights. Other assertive behaviors include, but are not limited to, openness, refusal of unreasonable requests, absence of interpersonal anxiety, initiation of requests, spontaneous expression of one's feelings, re-

fusal to be intimidated, outgoingness, willingness to take initiative, and active versus passive disagreement” [15, 77].

Like assertiveness, argumentativeness is also considered a constructive communication trait. It involves the use of reasoning to defend personal positions on controversial issues while attacking the positions of adversaries. In their conceptualization of the trait, D. Infante and A. Rancer defined argumentativeness as “a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual in communication situations to advocate positions on controversial issues, and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on these issues” [17, 14].

Hostility and verbal aggressiveness are regarded as destructive predispositions.

Destructive symbolic aggression is classified as hostility. Hostility manifests itself in interpersonal communication when individuals use messages to express irritability, negativity, resentment, and suspicion and is accompanied by an aggressive speech behavior [12, 264], [13, 272].

Verbal aggressiveness is defined as “the tendency to attack the self-concepts of individuals instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication. When people direct their attack on the person’s self-concept, (“*You are such a liar!*”), they are engaging in verbal aggression. A study by Kinney suggests there are three broad domains of self-concept attack: group membership (e.g., “*Your family is a bunch of psychos!*”), personal failings (e.g., “*And how could we forget that business you ran into the ground five years ago!*”), and relational failings (e.g., “*Maybe your ex-husband wasn’t so weird after all.*”)” [16, 21].

When the attack is on the other person’s self-concept, it is considered a verbally aggressive attack.

We take the term invective as the basis and use it to study the expression and potential of speech aggression in certain type of discourse, which is the study of the invective use of linguistic units. Within this approach invective turns out to be interchangeable with the notion of **aggressive strategy** as goal-determined weighting of decision-affecting factors and conceptualizes “any verbal expression of aggression or stylistically coloured, emotive, also evaluative speech referred to the addressee, subject, situation, topic or process of social interaction” [6, 53]. It stands to reason that an invective aggressive strategy correlates with violation of an ethical norm brought about by the vocabulary the extreme examples of which are even taboo.

While incorporating information into the text as a structural construct with the hierarchally organized semantic structure of its components the defining

role in discretization of information continuum is set hardly on the succession of information units (informemes) arranged in micro- and macrostructures of a text and viewed in itself but rather on the functional component of information units. Thus, the analysis of textual invective implies finding key semantic components, that is, generators of potentially offensive information – invectemes [3, 120]. Noteworthy, the functional-semantic category of invectiveness provides for a varying degree of aggressiveness of destructive information. Drawing upon the study of A. Korjakovcev, we contend that invectiveness viewed as a category holds its own internally structured and organized functional unit. Having singled out invectemes in words, word combinations, sentences, mindful of their polysituational meanings within various contexts, we manage to identify “signs” of speech aggression [9] in a certain communicative-pragmatic situation.

Since communicative situation of speech aggression correlates with categorical means of invectiveness, the study of conflict potential of mediatized political discourse relies heavily upon the analysis of textual invectiveness. For this reason in the first stages of the study a thorough review of an internet media project inoSMI was made to pick out a range of topics that have generated wide coverage in foreign mass media. The service (*inosmi.ru*) monitors and translates into Russian articles, mainly analytical, published in foreign and Western media. On completion of this preliminary phase, these selected highlights were traced and their coverage analyzed in British and American press. Hence the study of conflict potential calls for a search for invectemes, as a rule key words, sources of destructive information marked out on the lexical level. Markers of speech aggression are identified in the process of singling out means generating invectiveness which are either structural components of the text or its semantic entity.

For this reason, to identify invectemes and differentiate them from other units the subsequent questions must be addressed:

- if there are any pseudo-arguments targeted at an object of an utterance;
- whether an utterance conveys any demeaning information about a person or a group.

*But with the racism shoe on the other foot, Team Obama and its media water-carriers are exhibiting the very **racial cowardice** <...>.*

*The common theme of the Cameron attack was that the Prime Minister was **incapable of “being straight with people”**.*

*Prime-time, liberal **comedians** have it made.*

2) text tonality is observed, means creating negative tonality singled out.

Considering the aggressiveness of invective is an example of gradable value [9, 171], that finds its way on all language levels [3, 68], while the linguistic concept of the notion “offence” is far broader than its juridical counterpart [3, 30], we find it reasonable to study a range of means carrying invective semantics in its relation with text tonality.

Close ties between tonality of an utterance and social-communicative situation made I. Tarasov place neutral tonality and communicative situation complying with norms on the sole neutral axis. Respectively, any movement on the axis swings the pendulum towards “exalted, pathetic, familiar or further vulgar tonality” [3, 69]. Noteworthy, S. Doronina concluded in her research, that the dependence between perlocutionary effect and the level of expressiveness is hardly absolute, since texts reflecting emotionally bland tonality are reckoned as offensive [3, 69]. Following this, the decision about invectiveness of an utterance is made after the following criteria are addressed:

- if there are any units in the utterance that impinge upon social and moral norms;
- functional and semantic load of lexical units in the word combination, sentence or text;
- functional and semantic load of an utterance;
- whether information is communicated in a vulgar form;
- if language units fall into at least one group of invective lexemes.

While the first fragment contains a nonce word “*Obamorons*” generated in the process of contamination of antroponym with the stylistically marked unit “*moron*”, the second example generates aggressive semantics by means of stylistically neutral unit.

*So why did the article previewing the book so enrage the White House and the **Obamorons**?*

On the international stage, one big-name loser could be John Bolton, the combative US ambassador to the United Nations who was put in place by Mr. Bush as a «recess appointment» after failing to secure ratification by the Senate.

3) components of communicative structure are analysed

At this stage cognitive structure of utterances realizing aggressive communicative-pragmatic intentions is considered. An analysis of propositional

structure of invective utterances involves marking out its components, studying peculiarities of their functioning and identifying types of invective situations. In other words, we observe components (arguments) of author’s self-identification, of object (a victim of speech aggression) reference, components identifying the secondary addresser of speech aggression and invecteme (the subject of aggression)

Having analysed 420 utterances in terms manifestations of aggressive communication in mass-media texts with account of their polyphonic structure, studied introductory syntagms pertaining to constructions with reported speech we conclude that outer addressers are less common among institutional (43,8% (184)) than non-institutional (56,1% (236)) social actors. Far less occurrent are generalized (27,8% (117)) as well as collective (31,1 % (131)) subjects of speech aggression.

4) communicative structure of utterances is looked into from the perspective of their segmentation and modeling (type of invecteme (assessment, fact, opinion), the way actants are introduced, shift of actants; language peculiarities of destructive, demeaning and discrediting sentences are examined.

The findings of our research have revealed that superficial, non-motivated use of offensive nominations serves as reasonable grounds to debase an aggressor.

*For good measure, he suggested that the Queen should ‘sell a couple of her properties’ and called for a different public holiday instead of ‘celebrating **vermin**’. There is, of course, a perfectly respectable debate to be had about the Crown. Calling the Queen ‘vermin’ has no place in it. <...>That is what we need to bear in mind next year when the likes of Mr. White are urging us to scrap the Crown. Don’t call him **vermin**. Call him wrong.*

Thus, this way we set out to shed some light upon the ways aggressive speech utterances are coded in political discourse of the mass media. Having determined units of speech aggression viable for the research, we set our objectives upon studying the aspects of their realization, peculiarities of their cognitive essence revealing themselves in political discourse of mass-media in a form conceptual frames.

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Кузык О. А. Этапы лингвистического анализа реализации агрессивных коммуникативно-прагматических намерений в англоязычном политическом дискурсе масс-медиа

Аннотация: В статье рассматриваются аспекты феномена речевой агрессии как лингвориторического явления и изучаются его отличительные черты. Описаны этапы лингвистического изучения случаев речевой агрессии в англоязычном политическом дискурсе масс-медиа.

Ключевые слова: речевая агрессия, инвектива, инвектема, политический дискурс масс-медиа, предрасположенность, агрессивность.