

Typical tactics of the strategy of offence in the German Internet discourse

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Abstract: This article analyzes the tactics of implementing the offense strategy in the German Internet discourse within the framework of the impoliteness theory. Asynchronous interaction is considered in order to define a set of tactics in initial and responsive utterances and identify specific features in both of them.

Keywords: *impoliteness, Internet discourse, strategy of offence, tactics*

Introduction. Many researchers have focused on the phenomenon of impoliteness (Culpeper, Bousfield, Beebe, Locher, Wichmann, Watts, Leontyev, Rudanko) and the notion of offense (Jay, Labov, Harris, Shakhovskiy, Zhelvis, Kusov etc.) in their studies. We offer an approach, which presents a study of offense using the theory of impoliteness. Due to greater social role of the Internet and boost in network interaction within the last decade, the amount of studies addressing different aspects of both synchronous and asynchronous modes of computer-mediated communication has also increased (Baron, Crystal, Yus, Hardaker, Lutovinova, Sidorova, Goroshko etc.). In this paper we propose a set of tactics for implementation of the strategy of offense based on data obtained from asynchronous Internet-based interaction.

Methods and Data. Our study employs the "discursive, data-driven, bottom-up approach" [10, c. 16]. The analyzed data sets are authentic extracts from threaded discussions of multi-participant Internet discourse. We have included user comments from social network pages like Facebook, Pinterest; multiple independent forums and those attached to news portals like www.yahoo.de as well as platforms like YouTube, etc. The corpus embraces about 2.5 thousand pages and 1.2 thousand active elements. The topics of antecedent events stimulating further interaction include politics and economy (news; political talk-shows; official pages of politicians and political parties on Facebook), sports (official fan pages; broadcasts), fashion (commercials; specialized forums; video-blogs of celebrities; video-interviews), health and travelling (blogs; cooking shows; shows about various countries; cultures and traditions), media entertainment (stand-up shows; sarcastic, parody and comic videos; show business news; movie trailers; videos of music festivals and performances) and others (forums off diverse marginal groups).

We focus our attention on situational factors (i.e. extralinguistic factors, such as social, cultural, or pragmatic), which influence the function of the linguistic sign [2, p. 12-13] considering discourse not only as a result (textual output), but as a process (a form of semiosis), producing meanings in social practices (linguistic and non-linguistic ones) based on ideology or cultural differences [11, p. 1-2].

Results and Discussion. Numerous prior impoliteness studies argued that a further exploration of impoliteness strategies in a wider range of discourse types is needed. Following the idea developed by J. Culpeper, D. Bousfield, A. Wichmann we have moved beyond a single strategy (lexically and grammatically defined) in order to see how impoliteness manifests itself discourse development. Our study focuses on the implementation of the

strategy of offense, which corresponds to the first local strategy of impoliteness according to J. Culpeper's model and is formulated as follows: "*ignore, snub, fail to attend to Hearer's interests, wants, needs, goods etc.*" [9] using data taken from the German Internet discourse. We define impoliteness as intended (or perceived as such) and marked (not conventionalized relative to a certain context or unexpected in a certain situational context) speech behavior which is strategically aimed at the addressee's "face loss" and which may (not) cause a corresponding perlocutionary effect.

This means that we consider offense as a subtype of impoliteness, one of the possible ways to threaten the "positive face" ("the positive consistent self-image" or personality claimed by interactants, crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of [8, c. 61]); as a result the addressee construes the following discursive meaning: "*You are bad. Your views, tastes, interests, achievements, settings etc. are bad*". The strategy of offense is implemented in discourse through various tactics.

Tactics based on means which correlate with breach of the speech norm represent the open confrontation strategy, while tactics based on means demonstrating adherence to the norm represent the hidden confrontation strategy [6]. The offense strategy covers both fields, whereas the set of tactics used for its implementation as well as corresponding verbal means/ indicators (to a degree also non-verbal i.e. paralinguistic clues) totally depend upon the features of a given Internet platform. A varying degree of anonymity as well as different styles of moderation on the sites seem to determine means of implementing the offense strategy on the text level.

The quantitative analysis of our data showed that Internet users are prone to adhere to the speech norm and tend to be more indirect (but not necessarily) on the platforms with a higher level of moderation and a lower level of anonymity (for instance, such networks as Facebook, LinkedIn, Pinterest); and on the contrary, a lower level of moderation and a higher level of anonymity encourage rude expressions, usage of taboo-language, profane language, etc. Nevertheless, neither of the ways of implementation of the offense strategy guarantees the corresponding perlocutionary effect. Unlike politeness, (in)directness does not influence the constitution of impoliteness. In addition, the study also showed that strategic impoliteness and the offense strategy specifically are hardly present in closed Internet communities. Users communicating in a disharmonious way are often identified as trolls and are excluded from communication by being blocked or banned.

Analysis of the data set allowed us to single out the following tactics by the semantic criterion: accusation, advice, demand, humiliation, reproach, threat, rhetoric question, argumentation, hyperbolization, emphasis on nationality/ religion, pointing out mistakes, ignorance or inability, negative criticism, discrimination, discreditation (often combined with self-praise), opposing the hearer to the speaker or an ideal, direct or indirect evaluations (for instance, of intellectual or communicative abilities), irony, provocation, labeling and hyper-generalization, "tracing" and "tit for tat" tactics.

We would like to stress that strategic actions are opposite to algorithmic ones [3], which makes it impossible to fit all possible situations into one formula or one fixed set of tactics.

The cognitive foundation underlying the tactics of discrimination, discreditation, comparison, some cases of negative criticism, hyperbolization, evaluation, irony, and individual cases of the remaining tactics is the binary opposition "we ingroup/they outgroup", which underpins the stereotype "WE ARE GOOD/THEY ARE BAD", or specifically "I AM GOOD/YOU ARE BAD" [5, p. 90-92] resulting in a stereotype of behavior "DISPRAISE THE OTHER", which is one of the means of gaining communicative advantage or leading communicative position.

In the paragraphs below we provide illustrations for some of the tactics.

The tactics of comparison is used in order to highlight differences in the ingroup and outgroup features through opposing views, beliefs, tastes, characteristics, actions, etc. The actualized semantic opposition infers/ implies the notion of semantics specified by culture and society (along with beliefs, values and norms of the dominating ingroup) and not the universal one. In other words, we deal with relative semantics [1, p. 290]. Comparison often occurs in an implicit form and can be derived from discourse as an implicature – either conventional or discursive. The example below demonstrates a conventional implicature with an offensive meaning arising from usage of a comparative degree of the adjective along with profane language:

Bugra Ahmet

+HalfGamers Also gut ich gib auf, ich werde aufhören zu kommentieren, denn danach kommen immer **noch dümmere Idioten** die ihr Wissen preisgeben. +> Ihr seid dumm.

The tactics of argumentation is often used in responsive utterances as an offensive or defensive-offensive counter strategy.

The tactic of criticism is often aimed at communicative actions (expressions, layout, style), mental abilities, professionalism, individual traits of character etc.

AnonymousCowardX

+Insterburg1 Du hast also null Argumente, was mich auf der ganzen Linie bestätigt.

Insterburg1

+AnonymousCowardX Null Argumente - Das beweist doch eindeutig deinen niedrigen IQ, denn Argumente, die dir nicht passen, begreifst du dadurch nicht.

The "tit for tat" tactic is often observed in responsive utterances, which leads to a cycle of exchanges. Lein and Brennis [7] also indicate a possibility of "escalation" ("con-

flict spirals" in the conflict theory), where each speaker uses a stronger strategy than the previous one [7, p. 301]:

1) Steffen Ulbricht Ist das Schlange? Wenn ja, dann ist es zum **KOTZEN! Sorry.**

Lunafreya Nox Fleuret Wie voreingenommen und dumm bist du eigentlich? Du bist zum **KOTZEN. Sorry.**

Steffen Ulbricht Ist es Schlange oder nicht? Wenn ja, dann sind Sie noch viel mehr zum kotzen! Wenn es Imitat ist, ist doch alles ok... die Hitze macht Ihnen wohl zu schaffen?

Steffen Ulbricht **Anonyme Dumpfbacke!**

(<https://www.facebook.com/WolfgangJoop?fref=ts>)

2) Systemrottet

gg als würde ein Disstrack von euch jemanden bei EDEKA interessieren XD Einfach nur lächerlich. Aufmerksamkeitsdefizit?

crushporter

+Systemrottet Glückwunsch. Entweder trollst du oder du bist geistig behindert. :)

Primat City Music

mega wie behindert du bist +Systemrottet

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOolAfjv3xg>)

The tactic of "tracing" is in a way similar to the "tit for tat" tactic, although the latter presents interaction resembling solely a play with form (of expressions) or a "combat" like in children's talk, whereas "tracing" presents, on the one hand, the tactic of replication of the expression from the initial utterance in order to implement the strategy of offense, and, on the other hand, it is an indicator of taking offense due to the presence of this expression in the initial utterance.

Fabian Kluth

+siemensohm Rechts ist ok, nur nicht rechtsextrem.

Schnallst du das nicht?

siemensohm

+Fabian Kluth was willst du denn jetzt von mir? hab ich irgendwann gesagt, dass rechts für mich nicht legitim wäre. rechts ist genauso legitim wie links. dummerweise wird rechts seitens der medien und politik als kampfbe-griff missbraucht. davon abgesehen wird die afd nicht einfach nur als rechts bezeichnet, was ja auch schon falsch wäre, sondern als rechtspopulistisch bis rechtsextrem. eine definition des begriffs rechtspopulismus bleibt man aber schuldig, andernfalls würde vielleicht rauskommen, dass sogar die linkspartei rechtspopulismus betreibt ^^.
"schnallst du das nicht?"

The tactic of irony is implemented in utterances with literal meanings opposite to discursive ones [4, p. 236]. In the second example irony ("ein Autor") is intensified through sarcasm ("Thomas Mann") and citing of the addressee's mistake (the tactic of pointing out a mistake in counter strategies); the responsive utterance contains a sarcastic remark (the contribution contains non-relevant information in order to depreciate the preceding utterance) and the tactic of giving advice in order to implement the strategy of counter-offense.

1) Boah wahn kak labberst du wenn du diese filme verdammt nicht magst dan guck sie dir auh nicht an

Xx The imbuka Xx X

+Jade Edwards Wenn ich ihn mir schon angesehen hab, soll ich ihn mir nicht angucken.. **ach so, natürlich**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1FigL5IGrw>).

2) H. Celine

+Luca Dills **Thomas Mann**, was machst Du denn hier? "**korriegerit**", alles klar, ein Autor. Ich bin Rennfahrer.

Luca Dills

+H. Celine cool, meine ex fuhr auch freizeitmässig rennen. „usst aber auf dein kopf aufpassen, nicht das du noch einen unfall baust.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOolAfjv3xg_)

The example below presents a combination of irony and hyperbolization in the responsive utterance as a counter-strategy.

SuperGayya

du Behinderter mensch kannst du kein biologie. es ist so das wir nur 10 % unserer Gehirnkapazität benutzen können weil nur die 10 % unseres Gehirns unser ganzes Wissen ist und der rest reflektionen usw. Und die kann ja 100 % ihrer kapazität benutzen also nur wissen du schleumeier.

Dufnee D

+SuperGayya Ich hoffe, dass das ein Scherzkommentar sein soll. **Andernfalls haben wir ein Exemplar gefunden, welches nur 0,1% seines Hirns zu nutzen scheint.**

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yhy2nsMWfDw>)

Isolated tactics present a very limited number of cases in our data set. The majority of offensive communicative contributions represent by a combination of tactics. Tactics are often interdependent [1, c. 286] and reflect a certain trend within one individual comment, demonstrating a kind of "tactical arrangement" in implementation of the offense strategy. The trend can be either towards escalation, or mitigation. In some cases such arrangement can be quite chaotic.

The tactics of negative evaluation and criticism are often combined with a sarcastic tone, which is an additional clue in text-based interaction for constituting offence.

***wein* Anhänger aber nicht Wähler wie mir dein Nickname verrät.** Auch Schulabschlüsse sind wohl noch nicht in ausreichender qualität bei dir vorliegend. Du setzt dich selbst spot aus. Lese bitte über die Geschichte Afghanistan`s nach und wer die Taliban sind und woher sie kommen.+> Du hast einen doofen Nickname. Du bist doof und bist nicht in der Lage, selbst zu wählen.Und ich hingegen verstehe alles gut.

The tactic of giving advice provokes counter-offense with gradation of tactics.

Lern mal lesen das steht bis 2014 +> Du bist nicht aufmerksam.

Tony Inhalath

Schön das ihr alle lesen könnt.

Hauptsache haten.

Trottel

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeWkXPAtayQ>).

The tactic of labelling is not always direct, but it is often intensified through allusions and usage of taboo language or comparisons (with the help of ad-hoc metaphors, idioms or clichés) as well as sarcastic tone or association of the addressee with something or somebody negatively marked or perceived, as in the examples below:

1) bergathron

Muß dir nicht peinlich sein...warum hast diesen Dreck-sack nicht denunziert, angezeigt bzw. sofort erschossen.

Kannst du dir vorstellen unter einem Regime dieser Art zu leben? Nein?! du hast aber nichts unternommen um dieses präventöse Schwulen-Gesindel zu verkloppen, oder?! Sei froh daß es dir und deinen Kindern gut geht. Dreck-fresser wie wir haben für den Gewinn der Freiheit das Leben aufs Spiel gesetzt...Reaktionär?!...Ja, gegenüber Kommies instinktiv.

Blubberbernd91

+bergathron

Erst mußt ich lachen, weil ich mir dachte, guter Troll. Aber ich befürchte, du meinst das ernst. Machs doch bitte wie **dein Führer!** +> Wenn man sowas ernsthaft vor sich bringt, dann ist man dumm.Du folgst der nazionalistischen Ideologie.

2) Ares3DA

+theblackqueen777 Ja, bist du offensichtlich laut deinem Namen. Aber du bist ja anscheinend eh eher der Typ, der versucht schnell Off Topic zu gehen, damit er sich nicht ganz blamieren muss. **Mit dir zu diskutieren ist echt wie einem Bayern-Fan Kultur beizubringen. Naja, Kanal wurde geflagt, bb.**+>Du bist zu einer Diskussion nicht fähig.

3) LNhart

+TheTaminoseeck Da du zu ignorant bist um: a) mein Argument zu lesen (nur weil es ein Job ist muss man nicht klammheimlich zu einem Rivalen wechseln um dort noch ein paar Millionen mehr zu verdienen) b) mein Beispiel zu lesen (Wetklo) betrachte ich die Diskussion für beendet da es kein Sinn macht mit dir zu diskutieren, wenn du meine Texte nicht liest.

TheTaminoseeck

+LNhart **HAHA** oh nein lass mich raten **Hobby Psychologe**, 2 Kommentare von mir gelesen und wissen wie ich bin. Kann ich mit dir noch über anderen Problemen die ich habe sprechen^^

The example below illustrates the tactic of discrimination used for implementation of the offense strategy in the initial comment. Discrimination is intensified through the tactics of argumentation, asking rhetoric questions, and accusation. The counter-strategy is implemented with the help of hidden criticism and negative evaluation.

Julian Weber

+Bergatron Menschen die andere als Schwul bezeichnen versuchen meist ihre eigene Homosexualität zu verdecken. Statistisch gesehen ist einer von 4 Männern in Deutschland Schwul. (geoutet oder nicht) redarmyF ist nicht schwul, ONeilTD ist nicht schwul, und ich bin es auch nicht..... bleibst nur du. Und was ist schlimm daran schwul zu sein?!, **drecks homophob**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hTheVwj64k8>).

The examples below present a typical combination of tactics for implementation of the offense strategy, with the tactics of discrimination being the central one: negative evaluation imbedded in the semantics of the pejorative lexemes (suggesting emotional outbursts) and addressed invectives.

1) TinkiWinki62

die meisten moslems sind so gescheit wie drei meter fussweg. durch jahrhunderte lange inzucht degeneriert jedes säugetier.

AnonymousCowardX

+TinkiWinki62 Hier wieder ein klassisches Beispiel **deiner krassen Idiotie**: Es handelt sich hier um die zweitgrösste Weltreligion mit 1.6 Milliarden Anhängern. **Du bist absolut behindert. Du bist nur ein kleiner Rassist ohne Hirn**, das ist alles, während sich die Welt weiterdreht.

3) Insterburg1

+AnonymousCowardX **An Antisemiten und Rassisten wie du einer bist, mache ich mir die Hände nicht schmutzig. Du wirst schon langsam an Gehirnverstepung zu Grunde gehen.** Am besten ist, du gehst zu deinen Terroristenfreunden nach Gaza und rufst herein, wenn mal wieder ein Echo aus Israel kommt.

The following example demonstrates the tactic of giving advice used for implementation of the offense strategy in the initial comment and the tactics of accusation and labeling in a sophisticated "snowball" manner (presumably, in order to demonstrate negative emotions along with hostile attitude) as a counter-strategy in the responsive utterance.

ParzIfal

Lernen Sie doch bitte erstmal richtiges und gutes Deutsch, bevor sie Wörter wie "empirisch", "materialistisch" und "kategorischen imperativ" in den Mund nehmen. Bei Leuten, die solche Begriffe nicht grammatikalisch kor-

rekt aneinanderreihen können, kann ich gar nicht glauben, dass das, was sie äußern, irgendeinen Belang hat.+> Sie können Deutsch nicht. Sie sind auch geistig begrenzt.

MrMajakowski1917

+ParzIfal **Was ist dein problem du Troll? Lerne erstmal die Bedeutung der Begriffe und versuche das mal in deinen engstirnigen, eindimensionalen braven gleichgeschalteten Untertanen Bewusstsein nachzuvollziehen was ich damit bezwecke du einfältiger primitiver denkfauler Mitläufer und Konformist...im Internet gibt es halt solche banalen stumpfsinnigen TROLLE wie Du..das muss man in Kauf nehmen. Die stehlen einem nur die Zeit.**

Summary

Diverse tactics used for implementation of the strategy of offense normally occur in both – initial and responsive utterances, though some of them are typical only for responsive utterances e.g. either offensive or defensive counter-strategies, such as teasing, "tit for tat", "tracing" or negative evaluation. Our analysis has allowed identifying the most typical tactics of offense in the German Internet discourse by the semantic criterion as well as correlations between types of tactics used in initial and responsive utterances.

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