

## Approaches to definition of verbal aggression in political discourse

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to investigation of the phenomenon of verbal aggression and overview of the various approaches to the interpretation of the phenomenon of verbal aggression. Author discusses the correlation of the term "verbal aggression" with related phenomena and conducts its comparison with the concept of "conflict communication". The study of semantics of the key notion is performed for more precise understanding of the phenomenon of verbal aggression.

**Keywords:** *verbal aggression, conflict communication, hostility, verbal behaviour, political discourse.*

The problem of aggressiveness in communication, and, especially, in political discourse, is one of currently important in modern anthropocentric linguistics. It is determined by the fact that political discourse is a public form of people's communication and way of thinking. The most important feature of political discourse is its constant goal, namely a race for power and its retention at any price. The development of mass media communication has given place to the language as the main tool in this race. It has also gained immense significance and certain symbolic, manipulative and aggressive features in recent years. The study of the phenomenon of verbal aggression in political discourse will help to better understand the communicative situation at the level of political discourse and, with the correct approach, perhaps to improve it. The identification of the causes of aggression, forms of expression and human exposure can help decrease the demonstration of violence and the call to it in the media, which is currently considered to be one of the main sources of aggression.

Special attention in the study of the concept of "aggression" should be paid to the works of foreign researchers (K. Björqvist, R. B. Cairns, W. W. Hartup, R. E. Tremblay). These studies present the existence of three components (vectors) when combining, explain the concept of aggression in a broad view. Such vectors are social aggression (aimed at the destruction of self-esteem or social status, or both [21]), relational aggression (behavior aimed at harming others through purposeful manipulation and discrediting equal relationships between people [23]), indirect aggression (behaviour that is socially manipulative and indirect by nature, the essence of which is to spread gossip about another person, etc. [20]). Such vectors do not separately form a holistic notion of aggression, and can only explain the phenomenon of aggression in assembly with other approaches. Thus, the aim of the article is to study various approaches and interpretations of verbal aggression to understand the functioning of this phenomenon in the political discourse.

Verbal aggression can vary in intensity and form of manifestation from the expression of dislike and malevolence to verbal abuse. As L. P. Krysin notes "the level of aggressiveness in the people's speech behavior is extremely high nowadays. The genre of verbal invective is extremely invigorated; it uses diverse means of negative assessment of the behaviour and personality of the recipient – from the expressive words and phrases within literary usage, to roughly slangy words and offensive lan-

guage. All these features are the consequences of the negative processes occurring in nonverbal communication; they are closely related to the common destructive phenomena in the field of culture and morality" [9].

It should be noted that the term "aggression" correlates with related phenomena of aggressiveness and hostility, which, however, are not interchangeable. Therefore, aggressiveness is defined as the mental property of the individual, specific structure, which is a component of a more complex structure of mental properties of the person [15, p. 2]. Thus, aggression is a specific feature of the human psyche, which under certain circumstances (a situation of conflict communication) is implemented in the form of physical or verbal aggression.

It is also necessary to distinguish aggression from hostility. The latter is defined as a reaction, the essence of which is that personality is ranged against others; hidden verbal reaction, which is accompanied by negative feelings and negative evaluation of people and events [15, p. 8]. Therefore, such quality as secrecy distinguishes hostility from aggression, which is "external" in nature that is actively expressed in relation to others.

In our research we follow the theory of K. E. Izard, where hostility is regarded as a complex motivational state, and the aggression is the behaviour resulting from this state [8, p. 302]. Also, the author emphasizes that hostility is a state that does not include speech or physical activity, whereas aggression is a "physical" act, which also enabled speech [8, p. 302]. Thus, aggression is a manifestation, a realization of a certain state (hostility), and certain features of the psyche (aggression) in situations of human interaction.

The problem of determining the status of verbal aggression in modern linguistics has led to the existence of such expressions as *verbal (vocal, language, speech, communicative) aggression, the language of struggle, language extremism, speech conflict*, which have become almost terminological. However, the status of verbal aggression as a linguistic phenomenon is ambiguous. This idea is proved by the following indicators, first, the lack of a clear definition of the concept of aggression; second, a variety of terms (*verbal aggression, speech aggression, vocal aggression, communicative aggression*). In addition, today there are many different definitions and interpretations of the term "verbal aggression", that is evidence that this phenomenon requires a multidimensional study in modern sciences, especially linguistics.

Scientists study verbal aggression in the aspect of ecology of language and as an expression of anti-norm [5, p. 18] as a means of speech clogging [16]. The most common understanding of verbal aggression includes remarks or accusations which discredit important aspects of a man's personality, stipulate a certain way of life. This interpretation is based on component vectors of aggression, namely, the social, relational, indirect aggression, which, depending on the communication situation, will be realizing their potential in verbal expression.

In the traditional assumptions, the term "verbal aggression" is used to refer to the use of linguistic resources for the expression of animosity, hostility; method of speaking that offends human self-esteem, shows disrespect.

The term "verbal aggression" is used today to refer to a range of verbal phenomena:

- the expression of negative emotions and negative and critical attitude [2];
- the application of emotional and mental harm [4], [14];
- replacement of physical aggressive behavior [3].

T. A. Vorontsova uses the notion of linguistic aggression which means purposeful, reasoned, mostly controlling (through deliberate choice of speech strategies and tactics, as well as the selection of language and speech means) verbal behaviour [6]. As T.A. Vorontsova notes, this type of verbal behavior is characterized by a double intention:

- expression of a negative attitude towards a certain person (conventionally, the author defines it as an affective vector of language aggression);
- focus on subject-object type of communication that is manifested in destructive (non-cooperating) language behavior (pragmatic vector) [6].

The outlined above cases of verbal aggression are external formal aspect of the studied phenomenon, in addition to intonation, timbre, speech tempo also includes the specifics of lexical means and speech structures [18, p. 38]. According to Iu.V. Shcherbinina, internal formal aspect corresponds to the analysis of the topic, content, goals of statements [18, p. 38].

This interpretation, in our opinion, reveals the essence of the phenomenon of verbal aggression. However, we consider it more appropriate to use the following notions, i.e. expression plane (external formal aspect) and content plane (internal formal aspect).

Quite often verbal aggression acts as a synonym for conflict communication in linguistic studies (for example, V. L. Marishchuk [11] uses the term "linguistic conflict" and identifies it with the notion of verbal aggression I. M.). As T.A. Vorontsova notes, verbal aggression is a conflictogenic technology of communicative interaction. If the object of verbal aggression is an addressee to be addressed and the addresser attitude towards language dominance, but in cases where the mass addressee is presented, it is not the object of the speaker's aggression. However, the desire of the speaker to direct his negative attitude to the speech object allows suggesting the conflict planning. Therefore, a conflict is the communicative prospect of a verbal aggression if any type of communication and negative attitudes are available [6]. Besides, conflict communication, like verbal aggression, involves the struggle for the values, obtaining a certain status, power

and resources, which can be achieved through the neutralization or elimination of the enemy and inflicting moral damage. Conflict and aggressive communication is a process of struggle between opponents to assert their interests, achieve their goals and is accompanied by negative emotions of adverse parties.

However, the conflict research, interpreted the conflict as a communicative model of individual behaviour, designed to create confrontation in the inter-subject interaction [1] prove a generalization of the concept of "conflict" in comparison with the "verbal aggression" concept. According to I. E. Frolova, the concept of verbal aggression is a narrower term and refers to a "substantial field of conflict," which also includes the notion of communicative failure, communicative conflict, and conflict of communication and violation of the rules of speech behavior [17, p.31]. This interpretation of the phenomenon of verbal aggression and the definition of its position seems to be more balanced and appropriate to the purpose of our study.

For an accurate understanding of the phenomenon of verbal aggression we consider it necessary to study the semantics of a key word to highlight main sememes and lexical-semantic variants, as well as basic and additional semantic components compiling the integration and differentiation sememes. The research is based on the method of Z.D. Popova and I.A. Sternin [13], studies of I.V. Zharkovskaia [7]. So, we study the lexical semantic variations of the lexical unit "aggression" by the analysis and systematization of its dictionary definitions.

On the basis of the component analysis proposed by A. M. Kuznetsov we allocate the minimum semantic components, which can influence the content of lexical unit in different situations. Such components, according to linguistic schools, possess different symbols: a sign, seme, component. We, after I.V. Zharkovskaia, will use the term "lexical-semantic variant" [7]. So our aim for a better understanding of the concept of aggression is to identify all the possible lexical-semantic variants of the lexical unit "aggression", the relations between them, establishing a differential indication. To achieve this goal, we use the method of component analysis (research of content of the meaningful units of language, aimed at the division of meaning at the minimum semantic components [10]) with the procedure of vertical-horizontal analysis (the comparison of meanings of the same level, and meanings, which are at different hierarchical levels and are characterized by hypo-hyponym relations [12]).

Analysis of the dictionary definitions of the lexeme "aggression", conducted on the basis of English and American specialized dictionaries, proves the variability of the meanings from 1 to 5 [28], which caused a certain degree of specificity of the meaning. Our study requires the delineation of characteristics that are necessary to further differentiation of dictionary definitions. With this purpose, we consider the etymology of the lexical unit "aggression".

English noun "aggression" comes from the Latin "aggressio" with the meaning "approach", "attack" ("a going to, an attack" [19]) is a noun of action [19] from the past participle "aggredi" (to approach, to attack).

Thus, on the basis of the above mentioned, we can state the maintenance of a nominal verb seme with the

meaning of movement, action in the direction of someone, something, as evidenced by the prefix *ag-* and preconditions the compulsory object which the action is directed on. This meaning as the basic one is preserved until now (however, with optional explicit reference to an object) and is recorded in dictionaries [19]. As the main and the only one, this meaning is captured by Heine's Newbury House Dictionary of American English: "aggression – unfriendly or harmful action against someone" [24]. Other sources demonstrate the first [25] and the second [27] position of this meaning of the noun "aggression".

The fact of appearance of interpretation of aggression in the psychological aspect in the sense of "hostile or destructive behavior" [19] is very important and it was first recorded in 1912 in works of Z. Freud. This meaning is essential for modern research in the field of communication in general and political one in particular.

However, it is necessary to note the fact that in the study of dictionary definitions that include 2-3 of the lexical-semantic variants we trace their similarity. So, in most cases, lexical-semantic variants implement their primary meanings, i.e. "the act" [25], action [22], "practice" [26], "behavior" [27]. These meanings are basic and are supported by "nuclear" [7] semantic components which differentiate the basic ones. So, in the group of nuclear components we include *aggressiveness, hostility, anger* [7]. All the other components are optional and determine the context dependent lexical-semantic variants (the term of I. V. Zharkovskaia [7]).

For the purpose of comparison and generalization of lexical-semantic variants we analyze the definitions selected by grouping them under duplicate (either fully or partially identical) dictionary meanings. Since the dictionary definitions are characterized by a certain degree of similarity, only comparative analysis will help to reveal the meaning of the unit "aggression" fully and identify its main differential components. For example, one of the Internet sources keeps track of the following meanings of "aggression":

- 1) unprovoked hostile action against a country by another's military forces;
- 2) any offensive action against another;
- 3) the practice of doing such acts [28].

Among these definitions 2) and 3) coincide with a basic meaning "action", "movement", "behavior" + object; the 3) meaning is more inclusive. 1) meaning shows additional components: action refinement (unprovoked hostile action); the specification of the object (...action against a country by another's military forces).

The greatest number of definitions "WordNet 2.0" dictionary registers:

- 1) a disposition to behave aggressively;
- 2) a feeling of hostility that arouses thoughts of attack;
- 3) violent action that is hostile and usually unprovoked;
- 4) the act of initiating hostilities;
- 5) deliberately unfriendly behavior [28].

This list is the most complete and serves as a model (base) for analysis and supplement of definitions from other dictionaries:

1. Basic: behaviour + Additional: the reason: *disposition*; the nature of the behavior: *spoken or physical* [22]; the nature of behavior: *forceful, attacking, either con-*

*structively self-confident and self-protective or destructively hostile* [28]; *hostile and destructive* [27], [28], *angry, threatening* [22].

2. Basic: feelings + Additional: the motivation to attack (*arouses thoughts of attacks* [19]; *makes you want to attack or defeat* [26]).

3. Basic: action + Additional: characteristics of actions: *violent* [27], *forceful* [24], *unfriendly or harmful action* [24], *offensive* [25], *unprovoked hostile* [29]; specified object: *against a country* [29], *an unprovoked attack by one country against another* [28], *violating the rights of another state, particularly its territorial rights* + specified action tool (*by force*) [25]; classification of actions: *invasion* [25], *inroad* [25], *encroachment* [25], *an unprovoked attack* [27], [28], *a military attack* [19].

5. Basic: action + Additional: goal: *initiating hostilities* [19], *the practice of making assaults or attacks* [25], attack + specified circumstances (*attacking a country, especially when that country has not attacked first* [27]), *invasion* [19], *when intended to dominate or master* [28]; the characteristics of the action: *warlike act* + *specified conditions: specifically, the use of armed force by a state in violation of its international obligations* [19], *hostile act* [27], *any offensive activity* [27], *offensive action in general* [25]).

5. Basic: behavior + Additional: characteristic: *deliberately unfriendly* [19], [28], *overt or suppressed* [28] + nature of behavior: *innate or resulting from continued frustration* [24] + direction to someone/ something/ somewhere (*outward or against himself or* [28]).

Some sources demonstrate other lexical and semantic variants that are not listed above: "*forceful playing in sport that is intended to win points*" [22]. The basic component of this variant (*playing*) also corresponds to the activities that can be equated to the basic components of all the above sources, however, an additional component is the implementation of such action – sports – and specific goal is to get the points.

Other lexical-semantic variant that is different from the basic ones, is as follows: "*an angry feeling that makes you want to attack or defeat someone else*" [26]. The basic component of such a lexical-semantic variant is a component of "feeling" which is supplemented by the following characteristic: *angry feeling* + goal: the desire to attack and defeat someone. Such lexical-semantic variant demonstrates the commitment of focus on the object, which is one of the primary components of the noun "aggression".

The above given analysis allows to draw conclusions about the variability of all lexical-semantic variants according to specific components: basic components, "action", "behaviour" are constant for all meanings (with the exception of [26]), however, certain additional components are not found in all lexical-semantic variants, namely: "cause", "nature", "character/description", "target", "object specification". Thus, aggression is the action/behaviour of a certain nature (aggressive) with a specific purpose (attack, approach), focuses on a particular object.

After analyzing and summarizing various approaches to understanding the nature of the problem, we define **verbal aggression as a form of verbal behaviour, which is based on the recognition of both communicants of the subject-object relationship type and nega-**

**tive impact on the recipient, and which is indicated by negative evaluative lexical units.**

The specifics of the verbal aggression in political discourse, from the point of view of linguistic influence, based on the speaker's recognition of his position and the idea that it should be unconditionally accepted by the addressee. The basis of verbal aggression is formed on negatively directed emotional speech influence on the addressee, the implementation of anti-etiquetrical purposes, which contradicts to the positive direction of communication and leads to the destabilization of relations of participants of communication. This type of verbal behaviour is characterized by a double intention. Firstly, it is the conscious orientation of the speaker on subject-object type of relationship that can be expressed both through the content of the statements, and destructive forms of

verbal behaviour. Secondly, aggressive communication is always characterized by the presence of expression of a negative attitude towards the addressee or the subject of speech who is not present during the communication process.

From the point of view of dialogical interaction, verbal aggression in political discourse is the orientation of the speaker to antialogue in the broadest sense, communication failure, deliberately organized by the addresser.

Therefore, the classifications of verbal aggression are correlated with each other, demonstrating a certain degree of overlapping. The diversity of approaches ensures the comprehensiveness of our study in the implementation of verbal aggression in foreign and domestic political discourse, and, therefore, stipulates the relevance of further research.

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