

Cyber aggression in the stance of communicative approach

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Abstract

The article deals with the notion of internet aggression (cyber aggression). It considers the mentioned term from both psychological and communicative approaches. The paper also provides detailed analyses of the cyber aggression in political discourse. The provided examples are taken from the speeches of politicians during the time of Covid pandemic. The author also identifies several types of cyber aggression.

Keywords: aggression, cyber aggression, xenophobia.

The empirical material is represented by English-language texts and text fragments from the political speeches during COVID pandemic.

Methods

- interdisciplinary method is implemented to consider cyber aggression in different fields of science;
- linguo-cognitive analysis focuses on communication aggression triggers;
- functional-communicative method to analyze grammatical, textual, and graphic properties.

General Discussion

The phenomenon of aggression, aggressive behavior of both humans and animals, is characterized by extreme complexity, a large number of factors that determine aggression and its forms; therefore, psychology has always paid considerable attention to their study.

One of the features of modern society is the rapid development of information technology and the creation of the Internet based on them. However, the new virtual environment (cyberspace), significantly expanding the possibilities of interpersonal communication, has led to the emergence of special forms of aggression – cyber-aggression (“cyber-aggression” or “cyber-harassment”) in the Internet.

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Studies of the phenomenon of aggression have always been accompanied by numerous attempts to define it accurately, the introduction of new terms for types and forms (species, subclasses) of aggression, criticism of which continues to this day. At the same time, the diversity and ambiguity of the term “aggression” and its categorical apparatus began to be perceived from the standpoint of pluralism, which, however, causes great difficulties in researching this phenomenon, especially in such little-studied area as cyber-aggression in the Internet.

A large number of monographs, review publications, dissertations are devoted to the study of the phenomenon of aggression and the definitions of this term in psychology. The most complete analysis of the concept of “aggression” and its categorical apparatus is given in the works of D. Richardson, R. Beron, ND Levitov, K. Lorentz, E. Frome, W. Gollicher, D. Dennen, B. Kreikha, K. Butner, T.G. Rumyantseva, M. Ramirez, D. Zillman, S.N. Yenikolopov and others.

Consider the main approaches to the formation and structure of the terms “aggression” and “cyber-aggression”, as well as elements of their conceptual apparatus.

The founders of cyber aggression are Canadian high school teacher Bill Belsey (2005) and Nancy Willard (2003), an American lawyer and executive director of the Center for Safe and Responsible Internet Use who first introduced the term “cyberbullying”.

The conceptual approach proposed in the works of B. Belsey and N. Willard caused an increase in the number of psychological studies of aggression in the Internet (cyber-aggression). A number of foreign authors (for example, M. Taki, P. Sle., S.Hymel, D. Pepler, H. Sim., S. Swearer, J. Raskauskas, A. Stolz, M. Hertz, C. David-Ferdon, especially in the United States) pay great attention to the study of various types (forms) of cyber-aggression; Chait J., Whitty M.T., and Blair C. consider definitions of terms that reflect the categorical apparatus of cyber aggression.

Analysis of publications showed that the terms used to describe aggression in the Internet largely depend on the point of view of the researcher. Therefore, today there is a significant diversity in the structure of the terms of cyber aggression, their definitions and categorical apparatus; and many terms, such as cyberbullying, electronic bullying, online social cruelty, online or internet harassment, online or Internet bullying and others (such as cyber-aggression, cyber-bullying, cyber-harassment, electronic aggression, online-aggression, online-harassment, etc.) are correlated with each other. Such terminological diversity, on the one hand, reflects the novelty of the rapidly developing scientific field, and on the other - significantly complicates the understanding and research of aggression in the Internet, which is also noted in works (McQuade, 2009, P. 17-19).

Difficulties in understanding and interpreting such terms in traditional and electronic forms of aggression of youth were pointed out in the work of J. Raskauskas and A. Stolz, which implies that an analysis of the structure of terms is needed, as well as a more accurate definition of them for cyberspace (Internet social networks).

An analysis of work related to the study of cyber-aggression also shows that the terms, despite differences in structure and spelling, in some cases have very close or identical definitions (e.g., “cyber-aggression”, “cyber-bullying”, “online-aggression”, etc.), while analogues of these terms, as well as their definitions, are practically absent in the national scientific psychological literature.

The 4th, expanded, edition of the great psychological dictionary of B.G. Meshcheryakov and V.P. Zinchenko, published in Russia in 2009, also does not contain any concepts or definitions of cyber aggression. The English-Russian Dictionary of Psychology by E.V. Nikoshkova (2006), which is the first and only attempt at a systematic translation of English literature, contains several terms of the traditional conceptual apparatus of aggression (aggression, antisocial aggression, displaced aggression, physical aggression, self-oriented aggression, verbal aggression, aggressive, aggressiveness, aggression), but the formation of English-language psychological terms, component analysis of their structure in the dictionary is not mentioned, and no terms are given that reflect aggression in the Internet (cyber-aggression).

There are works on the creation of computer terms related to the Internet, but they do not consider the structure and formation of psychological terms of the categorical apparatus of cyber aggression.

Thus, the analysis of the main works on the problem of terminology and definitions of "aggression" and "cyber-aggression" in the Internet (cyberspace) shows that the issue of "cyber-aggression" in foreign psychological research is given much attention, but terminological differences and confusion remain. It was found that in national psychological studies of the phenomenon of cyber aggression in the Internet the problem of terminology and definitions of "cyber aggression" and its categorical apparatus was practically not considered, there is no research on component analysis of the structure and formation of cyber aggression terms, etc. This allows us to say that conducting research in this area is relevant.

From the analysis of the structure and dynamics of the development of English terms of the conceptual apparatus of aggression in the Internet (cyber-aggression) it follows that with the creation of the network there are terms that indicate aggression in it: Internet aggression, aggression in cyberspace. The term cyberspace was coined by the writer W. Gibson to refer to electronic space.

Modern terms of the conceptual apparatus of aggression in the Internet are mostly complex and can be written together, hyphenated or separately, for example: cyber-aggression, cyberbullying, cyber-stalking, electronic aggression, electronic bullying, online harassment, etc.

The given typical examples of English terms of aggression in the Internet show that the way of word formation in the categorical apparatus of cyber aggression is affixation, i.e. new words are created by joining word-forming affixes (Latin affixes - attached) to the creative basis.

Prefixes (Latin prefixes - attached to the front) cyber-, e- (electronic), I- (Internet), which belong to the group of Internet-related prefixes, are mostly used as word-forming affixes in English terms of cyber-aggression and its conceptual apparatus. The terms of the conceptual apparatus of cyber-aggression obtained in this way always have two word-forming elements: the creative basis and the affix. The main word (creative basis) is usually a noun and is located at the end. The words digital, electronic, Internet, mobile, online, virtual are written separately in compound terms.

The general purpose of prefixes is to use them in names and terms denoting electronic, computer products, information technology (Internet, etc.), services, etc. The use of these prefixes in relation to the conceptual apparatus of cyber-aggression is discussed below.

Initially, the prefix cyber- was used to form words related to computers, computer culture, information technology and virtual reality, or to denote certain futuristic concepts. Later, it was used more specifically, in terms of the Internet, online mode, etc. More recently, the prefix cyber- (cyber) also appeared in terms of the conceptual apparatus of aggression in the Internet (cyberspace), to describe suicide (cyber bulicide), when suicide is directly or indirectly related to online aggression, the formation of web-site names (for example, www.cyberbullying.org) and others.

The prefix e- means the word “electronic” and is used to define the terms e-mail, e-commerce, etc. In terms of the conceptual apparatus of cyber-aggression, English terms can be used both without the abbreviation of the word “electronic”, for example, “electronic aggression”, and with the abbreviation – “e-Bullying”.

The prefix I- is not a general prefix, it was originally used to denote affiliation to the Internet, as well as in the branding of individual products, such as iPod, iTunes, iPhone, iLife, etc. In terms of the conceptual apparatus of cyber-aggression, the word Internet is used, as a rule, without abbreviations, for example, Internet aggression (Hinduja, 2008, P. 34).

The term online means electronic, network, non-autonomous mode of operation, when the computer is connected, for example, to the Internet. In terms of the conceptual apparatus of aggression on the Internet, it is also used without abbreviation, for example, online bullying.

The term “virtual” means virtual reality, i.e. imitation of reality. It is also used in terms of the categorical apparatus of cyber-aggression, such as virtual aggression.

The terms digital, mobile, SMS, etc. can be used in the conceptual apparatus of cyber aggression, for example: digital bullying, mobile bullying, SMS bullying.

Today it is safe to say that the 21st century is an era of globalization and multiculturalism. Thus, compared to 2000, the number of migrants in the world increased from 150 to 272 million. The hypothesis that such a migration jump is the result of the benevolent attitude of the population of the recipient countries towards foreigners seems to be true here. However, numerous studies prove that it is wrong. Moreover, today it is safe to say that globalization is contributing to the growth of xenophobia, as it exacerbates the problem of national identity and forces local societies to experience a loss of landmarks for self-identification. In today's globalized world, every society is forced to confront the dangers of others, which is observed both at the institutional level and in the manifestations of “popular anger”. Xenophobic sentiments are most sensitive to media discourses and messages from key communicators.

The global sociological project World Values Survey presented the results of measuring the level of tolerance for various social groups in almost 100 countries (Mesa, 2018). The study showed that every four years the world public opinion about coexistence with people of other races, religions or nationalities changes dramatically. Usually this pattern is due to certain events in human history. For example, the peak of religious intolerance came during the “caricature scandal” of 2005-2006, which exacerbated the confrontation between the Muslim world and Europe.

In 2020, we see a new wave of aggression, namely, increasing xenophobia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is known that the coronavirus infection, the center of which

became the Chinese city of Wuhan, spread rapidly around the world, killing more than 300 thousand people and causing a large-scale economic crisis. Thus, due to the collective fear for their own well-being and the desire to somehow counter the current threat, the world community has resorted to verbal discrimination against Chinese people in the Internet.

Verbal cyber-aggression is a form of psychological violence that manifests itself in the anonymous, public, and systematic use of hate speech against certain groups or individuals in the Internet. Such aggression is very dangerous, because it can lead to further social rejection and self-aggression of victims, to move to the level of physical clashes between persecutors and victims. Thus, such cyber-aggression can significantly affect the relationship that has been established between representatives of different national groups. That is why this phenomenon is studied in various scientific paradigms and planes - socio-psychological, cultural, social and communication. The discursive nature of xenophobia, the dependence of its manifestations on communication practices in the latest and traditional media makes this phenomenon a common object of social communication studies.

United States

On March 17, the President of the United States of America Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump) published the following message on his page:

The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, such as Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before.

The sudden change of the official name “COVID-19” to “Chinese virus” came at a time when the number of new cases in the United States has grown from several hundred to almost two thousand a day. Thus, we can assume that such manipulation, which was expressed in the national labeling of the pathogenic reality, was carried out in order to direct the fire of criticism of Americans not at the actions of the authorities, but at residents and migrants from China.

Trump's strategy was quite successful – 50% of commentators supported the position of their president. This is evidenced by the following posts:

“I can also call it Chinavirus. Which I will #sorrynotsorry”, “I actually prefer calling it the Kung Flu” or “I never thought our death would also be MADE IN CHINA”.

In addition to contemptuous expressions, in the discussion we can also find calls for a complete boycott of any Chinese products and culture in general:

“You need to call it like it is, President. XI is not a friend. He is a killer. There will be millions when this is over that will never visit or buy Chinese again” and “#Chinese Virus #Boycott China #Disgusting Animal Torturers Chinese #Evil Chinese CHINESE HAVE TO PAY”. This indicates the activation of behavioral stereotypes, which, in addition to the negative cognitive component, also contain a pronounced guiding element.

Despite artificially inciting racial hatred, another 50% of commentators were quite negative about the president's words, prompting him to write a new tweet: *“It is very important that we totally protect our Asian American community in the United States and all around*

the world. They are amazing people, and the spread of the Virus is NOT their fault in any way, shape, or form. They are working closely with us to get rid of it. WE WILL PREVAIL TOGETHER". This time, the number of discriminatory comments decreased to 41%, but the questions for the new post have not disappeared. The fact is that the president clearly divided his citizens into two camps: Americans (we) and Americans of Asian descent (they). Trump supporters immediately seized the opportunity, emphasizing the stated difference: "Bravo, Mr. President. It is important that we acknowledge that even though it is a CHINESE VIRUS. We, Christians, have forgiveness in our hearts. And we are willing to forgive them" or "Some Chinese Americans are CCP's supporters, while some are not. Therefore, I think not every Chinese American truly loves America. Many of them don't have any appreciation to America. It's better to have an ideology test or background checking before letting them immigrate to America". The binary opposition We/They, which is fundamental to xenophobia, has worked.

As we can see, the position of those in power as key communicators significantly affects the social orientations of society. If the president, who represents the interests of the state in the international arena, publicly justifies intolerant behavior, then the citizens feel free in its open expression.

In March 2020, the coronavirus was discovered in two of Britain's most influential people – Prime Minister Boris Johnson (@Boris Johnson) and the heir to the royal throne, Prince Charles (@Clarence House). That news shocked the local population, but provoked completely different reactions.

Following the official statement on the health of the Prince of Wales, the Clarence House residence said on its Twitter page that he was very grateful to everyone for wishing him a speedy recovery. Indeed, most of the comments under this post were filled with words of support for a member of the royal family. Moreover, none of them contained accusations against Chinese immigrants.

When Boris Johnson announced that his COVID-19 test was positive, the feedback from the population was virtually devoid of sympathy. The British have called on their prime minister to take responsibility for spreading the virus and take appropriate action to eliminate it. One of the proposed methods of overcoming the coronavirus was the complete cessation of any relationship with China: "*Stop trading with China, sick of their dirty viruses*", "*DO NOT TRUST #COMMUNIST #CHINA. CUT OFF HUAWEI. DEPORT ALL #CHINESE #COMMUNISTS BACK TO CHINA*" and "*Whoever like to be #CCP friends or do businesses with them ... will pay a big price*". However, such discriminatory comments accounted for only 7% of the total.

Therefore, we can conclude that the British population seeks answers not from the population of the country where COVID-19 was found, but from its parliament, the de facto legislature and executive, which failed to keep the virus out of the country.

Canada

On March 30, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (@JustinTrudeau) posted a video message from Teresa Tem (@CPHO_Canada), the country's chief sanitary doctor. In her

speech, she stressed the importance of social distancing in this difficult time for Canada. Despite the relevance of this message, citizens responded negatively. The comment section contained the following: *“Why is there no Canadians speaking for Canadians??? Who is this person?”*, *“Investigate her whether she is a puppet of Chinese government”*, *“Is she a Chicom spook?”*, *“You’re [Trudeau] a douchebag and your libtard government are a bunch of immigrants”*. *“What is the reason for such aggression?”*

The fact is that Teresa Tem has argued for some time that there will be few cases of coronavirus in Canada, so there is no reason to panic and take drastic action. Many have speculated that Tem's inaction is due to a conflict of interest, as she herself is from Asia Minor, British Hong Kong. Then, on January 30, she tweeted, expressing concern about rising xenophobia on social media: *“I am concerned about the growing number of reports of racism and stigmatizing comments on social media directed at people of Chinese and Asian descent related to #2019nCOV # coronavirus... Racism, discrimination and stigmatizing language are unacceptable and very hurtful. These actions create a divide of #Us Vs Them. Canada is a country built on the deep-rooted values of respect, diversity and inclusion”*. Most Canadians were outraged by the behavior of the chief physician, who said they were advocating political correctness instead of addressing pressing health issues.

In addition, commentators described the post as quite offensive, as it indirectly accused Canadians of racism that is not inherent in them. Meanwhile, according to the study, 14% of comments to this post were still discriminatory: *“Canada was not built on diversity. Diversity will destroy it though,”* *“Stop lecturing Canadians about their own country. These are not deep-rooted values... Something you would know if you actually grew up in this country”*, *“It’s silly to go on pretending that under the skin we are brothers”* and *“If China wants us to stop spreading stigma maybe China should stop spreading diseases. We want Japanese and Koreans. We’re not racists – Chinese are just terrible humans”*. As we can see, the above statements contained offensive labels to denote members of a non-ethnic group. Thus, we can say that today, in the era of globalization, issues of race and nationality still play an important role.

During the coronavirus pandemic, verbal cyber aggression, unfortunately, has become a common reality today. According to the study, it manifests itself in various forms (from negative stereotyping, which actualizes the archaic opposition We/They, to discriminatory assessments and xenophobic appeals), setting different national groups against each other. And although the level of intolerance of the English-speaking population does not exceed 50%, the fears of Chinese people are absolutely justified, because in the last three months there have been more than a dozen cases of xenophobic aggression and real clashes between nations.

Now humanity is experiencing only the first wave of the pandemic. We can assume that the data we received are evidence of the beginning of mass discrimination. The higher the level of infection and the more active the economic crisis, the stronger the hatred for the people of the coronavirus country. That is why further monitoring of the online toxicity of the pandemic discourse is very important – both to understand the causes and information of aggression, and to combat it.

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