

Original Research

Language aggression in virtual professional communities

by Tatiana V. Dubrovskaya and Elmira I. Yuskaeva

Tatiana V. Dubrovskaya Ural Federal University, Russia gynergy74@gmail.com

Elmira I. Yuskaeva Ural Federal University, Russia elmira.yuskaeva@yandex.ru

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The study focuses on language aggression as it is enacted in virtual professional communities. With the aim to reveal the dominant forms and mechanisms of aggression in the virtual environment, the authors explore data retrieved from Russian social media. Theoretically, the paper is informed by social identity theory and linguistic pragmatics. Adopting a methodology that draws on an inferential model of communication, the study analyses aggressive utterances and their meanings in situational contexts. The findings distinguish between two principal forms of aggression: insulting aggression and aggression of exclusion. Although both perform the function of social control, they differ in terms of triggering situations, pragmatic mechanisms as well as linguistic resources employed. Insulting aggression makes use of dehumanising, negative evaluation, blaming, social deixis, 'reductio ad absurdum' and references to one's emotional involvement in the situation of conflict. Such mechanisms are enacted through the linguistic tools that convey the semantics of aggression more or less directly. These include pejoratives, depreciative epithets, colloquialisms, informal expressions, lexemes with semantics of emotional state, imperatives, means of deontic modality and a shift in using polite/impolite forms of address. On the contrary, aggression of exclusion involves meanings that require inferential efforts of the recipient. The interplay between literal meanings of speech acts and the underlying intentions results in conversational implicatures. Exclusion is manifested through drawing a boundary between 'us' and 'them', terminating a conversation, talking about somebody present in the third person. Its linguistic forms comprise lexemes with semantics of exclusion, lexis with negative connotation, interjections, and irony.

KEYWORDS: aggression, virtual professional community, group identity, social media, linguistic resources



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1. INTRODUCTION

Experts contend that human beings are social species living and interacting in different types of communities (Hofstede, 1984; Yuki & Brewer, 2013). Hofstede (1984) argued that 'some animals, like wolves, are gregarious, and others are solitary like tigers. The hu-

man species should no doubt be classified with gregarious animals, but different societies show gregariousness to different degrees' (Hofstede, 1984, p. 149). People are adapted to living together, which is why they organise themselves into a vast variety of groups – family groups, work groups, national groups, etc.

Owing to the development of modern technologies, thousands of communities have emerged on social networking platforms, which are huge and densely populated. The ability to manage contacts does not protect users from other individuals who can be hostile towards them. Sharing opinions on social media, people risk receiving aggressive comments from other users, proving that *'language use has the potential to be harmful and hurtful'* (Sparby & Reyman, 2020, p. 21). Aggression, hostility, hate speech and harassment in digital spaces are complex communication issues which come under scrutiny by experts working in different fields including philosophy, sociology and linguistics. Because aggression is realised through language, the current study seeks to investigate the linguistic dimension of aggression as it appears in situations of conflict in professional online communities. The aim of the study is to reveal the forms of aggression and the linguistic means of their actualisation in virtual communities.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Virtual communities

As social species, human beings cannot live without grouping. Yuki and Takemura (2013) have argued that groups are crucial 'tools' for human adaptation. In Hofstede et al.'s (2010) research based on the theory of cultural dimensions it has been proved that collectivism dominates in rule in our world.

Grouping is typical of both physical and virtual environments, and experts tend to discuss virtual communities in terms of real groups existing in physical settings (Herring, 2004; Yus, 2011). Virtual communities are defined as *'groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organised way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism'* (Ridings et al., 2002, p. 273). According to Herring (2004), to be categorised as a 'virtual community', a group existing in virtual settings should meet six sets of criteria: (1) active, self-sustaining participation; a core of regular participants; (2) shared history, purpose, culture, norms and values; (3) solidarity, support, reciprocity; (4) criticism, conflict, means of conflict resolution; (5) self-awareness of group as an entity distinct from other groups; and (6) emergence of roles, hierarchy, governance, rituals (Herring, 2004, p. 339).

Some scholars (see Brewer & Yuki, 2013) discuss groups in terms of essentialism and entitativity, which are two dimensions of group cognition. Essentialism is the *'extent to which members of a given social group or*

social category are perceived to have some immutable underlying characteristics ('essence') in common that defines their group membership', while entitativity defines *'the extent to which a particular social group is perceived to be a meaningful, cohesive collective entity (as opposed to a loose aggregate of individuals)'* (Brewer & Yuki, 2013, p. 6-7). In terms of entitativity both physical and virtual communities can be divided into common-bond (members have close interpersonal ties) and common-identity (members are united by the shared collective identity) groups (Carr, 2021; Prentice et al., 1994).

Collective social identity is characterised by the process of depersonalisation (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) or deindividuation – *'the loss of awareness of one's self as an individual, often while in a group'* (Carr, 2021, p. 69). The social identity of virtual group members is constructed discursively, which has already been argued in many studies (see Dubrovskaya & Yuskaeva, 2021; Herring, 2004). Scholars study axiological and linguistic aspects of identity construction (Dankova & Dubrovskaya, 2018; Dubrovskaya, 2019), the genres of association and disassociation in professional online communities (Dankova & Dubrovskaya, 2019) and support exchange strategies (Maestre et al., 2018).

Virtual community is an important source of social support (Carr, 2021; Wellman & Gulia, 1999). However, group interaction is not limited to positive, supportive representations. In the situation of threat to a group, the collective self is activated (Lee et al., 2013; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). As Lee et al. (2013) have argued, *'harm to anyone in one's group is felt as harm to all and motivates the defence of the group through harming an (undifferentiated) outgroup member'* (Lee et al., 2013, p. 248). Protecting one's own and the group's honour is highly important for its members and a reason for consolidation.

2.2. Language aggression

There have been debates concerning the definitions related to research on language and conflict. Janicki (2017) points to *'the lengthy discussions often expressing dissatisfaction and worries concerning the definitions of the central concepts such as conflict, aggression, hate speech and insult'* and argues against the essentialist views that require a single acknowledged definition of any concept (Janicki, 2017, p. 156). Therefore, it would be expedient to specify that in our understanding of aggression, we draw on a claim that it is *'any behaviour directed toward another individual, carried out*

with the proximate (immediate) intent to cause harm' (Anderson & Bushman, 2002, p. 28). Depending on the pragmatic context, aggression may perform various functions: in a right context it is a means of social adaptation. Exaggerated aggression or aggression expressed out of context can be considered as 'pathological' (Bedrosian & Nelson, 2018).

Language aggression as a phenomenon of daily communication has been under scrutiny (Sedov, 2005; Zhelvis, 2001). As Sedov (2005) argued, aggression takes place in situations of conflict and depending on numerous factors it can be expressed in various forms. Sedov's (2005) classification of language aggression types is based on ten binary oppositions, such as verbal vs non-verbal, direct vs indirect, initiative vs reactive, instrumental vs noninstrumental, initial vs reactive, active vs passive, spontaneous vs prepared, emotional vs rational, strong vs weak, hostile vs non-hostile. The nature of language aggression has been investigated in numerous studies which include discussing aggression in the context of digital ethics (Sparby & Reyman, 2020), studying the forms of digital aggression by means of relevance-theoretic approach (Padilla Cruz, 2019), examining aggression within (im)politeness theory (Tenekedzi, 2022). Aggression is intervened in different social practices and takes place in various types of discourse – political, media, family discourse among the rest (Baldi et al., 2018; Georgalidou et al., 2020; Johnson, 2018). It has been argued that offensive language can be a tool of violent rhetoric depicting new symbols and new social sensitivity (Baldi et al., 2018). Some studies (Padilla Cruz, 2019; Steksova, 2013) have been devoted to the linguistic and discursive manifestations of aggression. Analysing different ways of aggression actualisation in online environment, Steksova (2013) concludes that language aggression affects the strategies of communicative behaviour in a negative way and provokes reactive aggressive comments.

3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Professional communities can be studied as the communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) – 'a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavour' (Eckert, 2009, p. 109). In the course of its development a community of practice establishes the ways of doing things together, common values, power relations, attitudes to other communities and ways of talking. A community of practice is the locus of identity and its linguistic construction (Eckert, 2009). Theoretically, the paper is informed by social

identity theory and linguistic pragmatics. Adopting a methodology that draws on an inferential model of communication, we analyse aggressive utterances and their meanings in situational contexts. Thus, we turn to Grice's (1975) cooperative principle, implicatures, and politeness theory. To some extent we also draw on CDA which sees 'language as social practice' and emphasises the crucial role of 'context of language use' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Discourse 'constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people' (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258).

For this study, we have selected 400 posts containing the situations of conflict and aggression published from January to March 2022. These posts were retrieved from three professional online communities established for the collegial communication between teachers in the VKontakte network: (1) *Подслушано у учителей / Secrets of Teachers* (SoT, 2022); (2) *Злой учитель / Angry Teacher* (AT, 2022); (3) *Учителя истории и обществознания / Teachers of History and Social Studies* (THSS, 2022).

Russian speaking audience forms the core of participants in VKontakte communities. We keep the writers' original spelling and punctuation in the original examples while at the same time offering translations of the original posts from Russian into English.

The data are analysed qualitatively, and the analysis consists of the following steps: (1) defining the main actors of professional group communication; (2) revealing the situations that trigger aggressive comments; (3) specifying the forms of aggression actualisation; (4) systematising the linguistic resources of aggression.

4. STUDY RESULTS

4.1. Metacommentary

The individual and collective poles co-exist in the process of group communication. On the one hand, each post is published by an individual who has the right to express their opinion if it does not contradict the basic rules of the community. Members of a given community are fully aware of this fact and may explicitly point it out. The subjective status of personal views is often conveyed through the metacommunicative comments. Following Michael Stubbs, we take metacommunication to be 'verbal monitoring of the speech situation' (Stubbs, 1983, p. 48), which includes speech actions such as controlling the channels of communication and turn-taking, quality and quantity control. In other words, communicants' discourse is the object of

metacommentary. One of the linguistic markers that is indicative of metacommentary is the lexeme ‘opinion’, which is often used to refer to an individual stance in understanding professional issues:

(1) *Такое мое не экспертное мнение [This is my non-expert opinion] (THSS).*

(2) *Моё мнение, что лучше проводить беседы, диспуты, обсуждать что происходит в мире, что происходит в стране. Что в этом плохого? [In my opinion it's better to have conversations, debates, to discuss what is happening in the world, what is happening in the country. What's wrong with it?] (THSS).*

(3) *И учитель тот человек, который сможет авторитетно объяснить многие вещи. Это моё мнение. Вы, конечно, можете иметь своё [And a teacher is a person who can authoritatively explain many things. It's my opinion. Of course, you may have yours] (THSS).*

On the other hand, the collective identity is the phenomenon that keeps the professional community together and is constructed in the course of professional communication. This principle is displayed verbally, as in Example (4), whose author emphasises the collective power drawing a conclusion on the character of relations in the community. In Example (5), when sending congratulations on the professional holiday the writer wishes ‘health and patience to all of us’, thus, constructing a collective identity:

(4) *Прекрасно, так и надо. Вместе мы сила! [Great, that's right. Union is strength!] (AT).*

(5) *Коллеги! С прошедшим! Дай Бог всем нам здоровья и терпения! [Colleagues! Belated holiday greetings! May God bless us all with health and patience!] (THSS).*

Both metacommunicative references to subjectivity of an opinion and discursive indications of grouping help to maintain a harmonious environment. Yet, aggression is not rare in online communities, and in what follows we will reveal its principal patterns. It is important to note that aggressive comments are usually reactive in their nature, since they emerge when a member undermines the basic axiological standards of the community, which leads to an argument. A virtual community as a balanced mechanism embraces a few categories of participants which comprise in-group members including group admins, who moderate the community, and members of out-groups. All of them can become objects of aggression. Our analysis has shown that aggression in professional online communities is shaped predominantly in two ways: through insulting aggressive comments and aggression of exclusion. We discuss them in what follows.

‘In-group member can become an object of assault in case of their violating the norms of the community. In one of the previous studies, it has been shown that competence is one of the key values for teachers’ professional groups. Incompetence is harshly criticised by the speakers, very often in an impolite manner’

4.2. Insulting aggression

In-group member can become an object of assault in case of their violating the norms of the community. In one of the previous studies, it has been shown that competence is one of the key values for teachers’ professional groups (Dubrovskaya & Yuskaeva, 2021). Incompetence is harshly criticised by the speakers, very often in an impolite manner. The comments in Example (6) were posted under a novice teacher’s post who confessed that she did not perform her duties in an appropriate way and had no motivation to teach.

(6) Answer 1: *И как после такого учителей уважать? Я не про всех огульно, а про таких ‘особей’.* Answer 2: *Гнать Вас поганой метлой надо из образования – что государственного, что частного.* Comment 1: *Какая патетика! Там на диване лежало ваше белое пальто.* Comment 2: *И корону не забудьте прибить посильнее – не свои короны обычно падают [Answer 1: And how can one respect teachers after this? I am not talking indiscriminately, only about such ‘species’.* Answer 2: *You should be kicked out of education, both public and private.* Comment 1: *Such pathos! Your white coat was lying on the couch over there.* Comment 2: *And don’t forget to fix the crown better – others’ crowns usually fall] (SoT).*

In terms of language, insulting aggressive comments contain specific markers, including the lexis with negative connotations, deontic modality, dehumanising nominations. All of these can be found in Example (6). The idiom *гнать поганой метлой* (literally – drive out with a filthy broom) is used to show contempt towards the unprofessional group member, to treat her as an unnecessary part of the professional circle. The statement is structured through deontic modality, which indicates an action that is desirable in the author’s view (*You should be driven out with a filthy broom*). The word *особь* (species) is used as a pejorative to dehumanise a colleague and to show disrespect. However, as this community serves as a platform for social support, the victim of a verbal assault is defended by other members of the in-group. This case is illustrated in Comments 1

and 2 of Example (6). The expression *белое пальто* (a white coat – a phrase indicating a person who is trying to look better than others) and the metaphoric expression *прибить корону* (to fix a crown) are used to criticise the teacher who demonstrates her superiority.

Showing off, which contradicts the collective spirit, is tacitly forbidden in the community and, thus, provokes resistance:

(7) Дмитрий, 'я' последняя буква в алфавите (с) [Dmitriy, 'я' is the last letter in the alphabet (c)] (SoT).

(8) Ира, согласна, что учителя сами портят свой имидж и стали вести себя не как когда-то уважаемая интеллигенция, а как базарные халды (простите за выражение) – злобные, заносчивые, всезнающие про других и про другую работу всё-всё. Стыдно за таких коллег [Ira, I agree that the teachers themselves are destroying their image and have begun to behave not like the once respected intelligentsia, but like market shrews (pardon the expression) – malicious, arrogant, omniscient about others and about others' work. I am ashamed of such colleagues] (SoT).

(9) Вы слишком высокого о себе мнения. Вы никому ничего дать не можете, самовлюблённый нарцисс! [You are too high on yourself. You can't give anything to anyone, you self-serving narcissist!] (SoT).

(10) Агата, какая вы невоспитанная. Учите своих детей в классе, а не взрослых незнакомых людей [Agatha, how rude you are. Teach your children in the classroom, not adult strangers] (SoT).

The Russian expression 'я' – последняя буква в алфавите refers to the position of the letter я, which is at the same time a first-person singular pronoun and demonstrates a collectivist approach to group relations. The expression *слишком высокого о себе мнения* in Example (9) is used to remind of the equality principle adopted in a community. The denigrating noun *narcissist* in its meaning referring to Greek mythology in Example (9) is used to criticise a colleague for showing off. A colloquial pejorative *базарные халды* (used for nominating rude, arrogant women in Russian) (8) and depreciative epithets *злобные, заносчивые* (8) give a negative assessment and openly manifest aggression. The author of the comment contrasts rude, illiterate teachers with the respected intelligent elite of the past, while the marker of the emotional state (*стыдно* – ashamed of) indicates the author's personal involvement in the situation. The patronising position (Example 10) is not accepted by the community members. The writer in Example (10) marks a social distance between the group members (*незнакомых людей* – strangers), uses a depreciative epithet *невоспитанная*, and gives a command by means of the imperative sentence.

'The individual and collective poles co-exist in the process of group communication. On the one hand, each post is published by an individual who has the right to express their opinion if it does not contradict the basic rules of the community. Members of a given community are fully aware of this fact and may explicitly point it out. The subjective status of personal views is often conveyed through the metacommunicative comments'

Joining the discussion and not being able to prove one's point of view can be regarded as ignorance and causes harsh reactions:

(11) А: Лида, жду цитату, а не ваши измышлизмы. В: Ирина, жди, я ничего тебе не обещала [A: Lida, I'm waiting for a quote, not your speculations. B: Wait, I haven't promised you anything] (SoT).

(12) Дарья, ну ты и бред сказала, История России – это часть мировой истории, как вообще можно изучать и знать историю России, не зная основ Всемирной истории [Daria, what nonsense, the history of Russia is part of world history, how can one study and know the history of Russia without knowing the basics of world history] (THSS).

A shift in grammatical forms in Russian, specifically the so-called T/V distinction, may signal a change from harmonious communication to aggression. Normally, in Russian academic communication colleagues address each other with a second person plural pronoun *вы* (polite form), while the form *ты* (second person singular) is reserved for informal communication. In Example (11) the teacher insults a colleague using the word *измышлизмы* (the ideas which are untrue) while at the same time keeping the polite form of you. To repel this attack the second teacher shifts from *вы* to *ты* pronoun, which is considered rude and inappropriate in communication between strangers. Similarly, in Example (12) the combination of the impolite *ты* (second person singular pronoun) and a dismissive lexeme *бред* (nonsense) construct an aggressive statement. Thus, the elements of social deixis establish and change social distance as well as the degree of harmony or hostility in communication.

Expressing doubts concerning the intellectual abilities of a member is particularly denigrating in the context of an academic community, where critical thinking and reason are viewed as the main virtues:

'All groups tend to protect their boundaries, and professional online communities are no exception to the rule. If a group member is being offensive or 'toxic', others may try to stop this kind of behaviour, and the person becomes ostracised. Such group behaviour has now received the label 'cancel culture'

(13) *Адекватным должен быть УЧИТЕЛЬ. Вы уверены, что вы такая? У вас, уважаемая, большая проблема: вы хотите денег и комфорта. Но без работы [A TEACHER must be reasonable. Are you sure that you are such a person? You have a problem, dear, you want money and comfort without work] (SoT).*

(14) *Вы о чём сейчас вообще? Вы внимательно читаете комментарии? Речь о том, что бухгалтер не начисляет по журналу ЗП, начисления идут совсем по другим документам, андестенд? [What are you talking about? Are you reading the comments attentively? The point is that an accountant does not charge salary according to school register, but according to other documents, understand?] (SoT).*

In Russian the word *уважаемый* is used when addressing the opponent if a person wants to express a respect. If this lexeme is not followed by a noun, it gains a negative connotation. In the situation of conflict (13) the isolated word *уважаемый* conveys disrespect. The misunderstanding of the topic and teachers' comments is also regarded as a sign of ignorance. In Example (14) a group member blames a colleague in an insulting manner. She marks her opponent's misunderstanding and explains the situation once again. Interrogative sentences in Examples (13, 14) are offensive because they are used to express the doubt that the opponent belongs to the professional group (13) and to emphasise the failure to understand correctly (14).

The language of aggression is often based on flouting the cooperative principle (Grice, 1975), specifically the maxim of quality and the maxim of relation. In Examples (15) and (16), the commentators to the original posts choose the tactic of 'reductio ad absurdum', when the literal meaning of their statements does not meet the criteria of being true or relevant. Therefore, the addressees have to take additional efforts to make the utterances meaningful, and even then, the meanings revealed are not flattering to them. On the contrary, the poignant comments imply a complete absurdity of the original posts. In Example (15), a teacher suggests cancelling the current system of school exams, to which she receives a counter proposal to wear bast shoes:

(15) *А: И ЕГЭ и ОГЭ отменить... Экзамены вступительные как было раньше. В: Людмила, и в лаптях ходить, как было раньше. [A: To cancel The USE (the Unified State Exam) and the MSE (the Main State Exam)... To pass entrance exams, as it was before. B: Ludmila, and to wear bast shoes, as it was before] (AT).*

Apparently, the proposal to wear bast shoes implies getting back to old times, which would be as impossible and meaningless as would cancelling the modern system of school exams. In Example (16), the writer suggests that the opponent should 'wash their brain with water from a well':

(16) *Марина, промойте мозги колодезной водой [Marina, wash your brain with water from a well] (AT).*

To interpret this utterance one needs some insight into Russian folk culture, where water from a well was ascribed healing qualities and the power to exorcise the evil. Apparently, one cannot wash their brain, as it is not physically doable. Yet, taken in the context of background knowledge, the advice conveys in an aggressive form an implicit evaluation of the addressee's poor mental capacities, which need some magic help.

4.3. Aggression of exclusion

All groups tend to protect their boundaries, and professional online communities are no exception to the rule. If a group member is being offensive or 'toxic', others may try to stop this kind of behaviour, and the person becomes ostracised. Such group behaviour has now received the label 'cancel culture' referring to *'the popular practice of withdrawing support for (canceling) public figures and companies after they have done or said something considered objectionable or offensive; generally discussed as being performed on social media in the form of group shaming'* (Ng, 2020, p. 621).

In example (17) a group member is excluded explicitly for being toxic through giving reasons for the following exclusion:

(17) *Это вы засунули свой нос в мой комментарий. Кыш отсюда со своим негативом [It was you who stuck your nose into my comment. Scram with your negativity] (SoT).*

The idiom *совать свой нос* (stick one's nose in) showing disapproval and the interjection *кыш* (which is employed in Russian to shoo birds, animals, etc.) are used to protect the personal boundaries.

While arguing the members use an extended metaphor of political debates:

(18) *Ой, давайте без лозунгов, без вас ораторов хватает [Oh, let's do without slogans, there are enough speakers but you] (SoT).*

(19) *Ваш сарказм не совсем уместен, поупражняйтесь в красноречии в другом месте [Your sarcasm is not entirely appropriate, practice your eloquence somewhere else] (SoT).*

Lexemes with the semantics of disassociation (*без вас, в другом месте*) present the opponents as unnecessary and make them redundant.

The out-group members and their comments are often dismissed as irrelevant to the community, sometimes with an explicit reference to their supposed place of belonging. A direct indication of ‘the parents’ group’ draws a sharp boundary between teachers and parents, constructing the opposition ‘us vs them’:

(20) *Вы можете выражать своё мнение в группе родителей. Меня ваше мнение не интересует [You can express your opinion in the community for parents. I’m not interested in your opinion] (AT).*

If a participant in the discussion is not willing to continue an argument, they put a verbal stop to it through an explicit refusal to be involved: *let’s agree to disagree, отвечать больше не буду (I won’t answer you)*. Imperative structures as part of good wishing followed by hostile remarks gain negative connotations in context:

(21) *Попутного ветра. Только уж не удаляйте больше так трусливо свои сообщения [Wishing you fair winds! Just don’t delete your posts so cowardly anymore] (SoT).*

(22) *А: Выпейте уже чайку и оставьте мою персону в покое, и всё. В: Ой, да и вам счастья-здоровья [A: Have a cup of tea and leave me alone, that’s all. B: Oh, I wish you happiness and health too] (SoT).*

A phraseological unit *попутного ветра* in Example (21) is a case of conversational implicature. The maxim of relevance has been flouted, since the literal meaning of the speech act (wishing good luck) is different from the underlying intention (getting rid of the opponent). Similarly, a polite imperative *выпейте уже чайку* (have a cup of tea) in Example (22) is not a sign of care, but a marker of exclusion, which is correctly interpreted by the opponent who returns good wishes.

Irony is yet another technique that is based on conversational implicatures and often serves as a means of disassociation. According to the classical view, irony can be understood as ‘a special form of language use, by which what is said (sentence meaning) is used to communicate what is unsaid (speaker’s meaning)’ (Giora, 1998, p. 2). The ironic comments in Example (23) were posted as a reaction to a parents’ post about two cards of her child – a banking card and a Pushkin card. The latter contains a sum of money provided by a state, which can be spent on different cultural events. The

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According to the classical view, irony can be understood as a special form of language use, by which what is said (sentence meaning) is used to communicate what is unsaid (speaker’s meaning)’

parent does not understand a difference between the two cards and expresses concerns that the money can be stolen.

(23) *Answer 1: Учителя в розыск. Уверена, что все средства с пушкинских карт выведены в офшоры. Деньги вернуть нереально, опека бессильна. Answer 2: А какое отношение Пушкинская карта имеет к счету в банке и опеке? Comment 1: Ну, видимо, автор боится, что теперь Пушкин понаберёт кредитов, понакупит имений, а платить за это придётся родителям. Comment 2: Точно, про Пушкина я и не подумала) карта же его имени. Comment 3: Бедный Пушкин. Answer 3: Пушкинская карта и счет в банке – это вообще разные вещи. Comment 1: Неважно. Яжмать вспомнила слово ‘опека’ [Answer 1: The teacher should be put on the wanted list. I am sure that all funds from Pushkin cards have been transferred to offshore accounts. It is impossible to return the money, custody office is powerless. Answer 2: [And what does the Pushkin card have to do with a bank account and custody office? Comment 1: Well, apparently, the author is afraid that Pushkin is going to get loans, buy estates, and parents will have to pay for it. Comment 2: [exactly, I didn’t even think about Pushkin. The card wears his name. Comment 3: Poor Pushkin. Answer 3: A Pushkin card and a bank account are absolutely different things. Comment 1: It doesn’t matter. ‘Iamamother’ remembered the ‘custody office’] (AT).*

The members of the in-group interpret the parent’s post as an insulting one. School staff is indirectly blamed for being dishonest and the members of professional community use absurd comments (23, Answer 2) to protect their face. In the comments teachers intentionally attribute potentially criminal activities to the deceased poet. The pragmatic function of such ironic comments is to emphasise the narrow-mindedness of the opponent. Talking about a group member in the third person is the aggressive way of behaviour. It is not appropriate and can be treated as a sign of exclusion. The neologism *яжмать* (used to talk about a mother who

behaves in the arrogant way) in Example (23, Answer 3) emphasises a group member's contempt for this representative of the out-group. These implicit aggressive comments are based on flouting the principle of cooperation.

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis has demonstrated that language aggression is pervasive in professional virtual communities and can be aimed at both in-group and out-group members, who violate the norms of the community based on the shared values and beliefs. In this respect aggression constitutes a form of social control.

Depending on how explicit aggressive comments are, and whether they aggravate argument or put an end to it, we distinguish between insulting aggression and aggression of exclusion (Table 1). The former is usually enacted in a direct way and messages can be easily interpreted by the object of aggression. The main tactics and mechanisms include dehumanising, negative evaluation, blaming, social deixis, 'reductio ad absurdum' and references to one's emotional involvement in the situation of conflict. The linguistic resources that enact these tactics embrace pejoratives, depreciative epithets, colloquialisms, informal expressions, lexemes with semantics of emotional state, imperatives, means of deontic modality and a shift in using polite/impolite forms of address. As for aggression of exclusion, it results in a visible termination of argument. Yet, it happens at the expense of 'cancelling' a group member

through dismissing them as unimportant, unintelligent or not belonging to the community. The following tactics are employed to exclude a member: opposing this member to the group and drawing a boundary between 'us' and 'them', putting a verbal stop to the conversation, talking about somebody present in the third person. Such techniques as irony and 'reductio ad absurdum' reveal their great potential in the aggression of exclusion.

The interplay between the literal meaning of speech acts and the underlying intention results in conversational implicatures, whose interpretation depends on cultural and educational background of the communicants, who tend to exceed the semantic information available and rely on pragmatic clues to a great extent. The linguistic forms of aggression of exclusion comprise lexemes with semantics of exclusion, lexis with negative connotation, excluding interjections, and irony.

Aggression in the virtual environment remains a phenomenon that needs further studies both in terms of triggering situations, people's behaviour and linguistics forms, and we hope that the findings of the present study have contributed to illuminating some of these aspects.

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Table 1

Language aggression in virtual professional communities: Forms and linguistic resources

FORM	AIM	PRAGMATIC MECHANISMS AND TACTICS	LINGUISTIC RESOURCES
Insulting Aggression	to re-establish group values	flouting the cooperative principle; referring to one's emotional state; 'reductio ad absurdum'; deontic modality; social deixis	pejoratives, depreciative epithets, colloquialisms, informal expressions, lexemes with semantics of emotional state, imperatives, modal verbs, a shift in using polite/impolite forms of address
Aggression of Exclusion	to protect group boundaries excluding a member who is being offensive	cancelling an opponent; providing reasons for exclusion; 'reductio ad absurdum'; constructing 'us –them' opposition; conversational implicatures	lexemes with semantics of exclusion, words and phrases with negative connotation, excluding interjections, irony, a shift to the 3rd person

6. CONCLUSION

The study presented in this paper analyses the language aggression in virtual professional communities. These groups are established for constructing, maintaining and defending collective identities. Nonetheless, aggressive behaviour is quite common to community members. The analysis has proved that language aggression in virtual communities may perform the constructive function of social control, which helps to preserve the cohesion of a group.

In the course of online interaction, community members resort to different forms of language aggression. Insulting aggression is implemented to re-establish group values, whereas aggression of exclusion is used to protect group boundaries through excluding a mem-

ber who is being offensive. As can be seen, not only do they differ in the pragmatic mechanisms of their actualisation, but also in the linguistic resources employed.

As virtual communities display high level of aggression, while at the same time remaining loci for unity and solidarity, it would be relevant to investigate the linguistic mechanisms of confronting the aggressive online behaviour as well as the interplay between aggression and communal solidarity.

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TATIANA V. DUBROVSKAYA

Ural Federal University | 619 Mira Str., 620002 Ekaterinburg, Russia
gynergy74@gmail.com

ELMIRA I. YUSKAEVA

Ural Federal University | 619 Mira Str., 620002 Ekaterinburg, Russia
elmira.yuskaeva@yandex.ru