

SECURITY DIMENSIONS
INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL STUDIES
NO. 11; 2014 (115-120)

LINGUISTIC COMMUNICATION IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF POLITICAL INVECTIVE

Malwina Dankiewicz, M.A.¹

Radosława Rodasik, M.A.²

Aleksandra Skórzak, B.A.³

^{1,2,3} Jagiellonian University

ABSTRACT

The paper presents the problem of verbal aggression in the public space, especially in politics, in the context of security culture. The concepts of social communication, including interpersonal and political, and verbal aggression were defined. The sources of aggressive language in political life, the specificity of political invective and linguistic means for insulting political opponent were presented. There were described the social and ethical consequences of using aggressive linguistic means against a political opponent and writing the brutal verbal fight in the ritual of governance. The problem of habituating to the inappropriate linguistic behavior in public space and its influence on young people was emphasized.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history

Received: 08.05.2014 Accepted: 14.06.2014

Keywords

communication, verbal aggression, political invective, security culture

Communication is a term of many definitions. To communicate is usually understood as a transmission – that is an information transfer in a very broad meaning (idea, emotion and skill transfer). Communication is also comprehension – a process, whereby we understand others and try to be understood by them, in other words a process whereby two people reach the same thoughts and feelings. Communication might be also understood as an effect, all the means used to influence one person by another or use of signs and symbols to exercise power. It can also be defined as connecting – a process that connects non-continuous parts of our living surroundings or creating a social integrity of individuals by using language or signs - but also as a social interaction by means of symbols, an exchange of meaning

between people possible equally to their common observations, desires and attitude. Communication is also specified as a part of a social process – communicative act is a mean by which the group standards are expressed, social control is applied, roles are assigned, coordination of efforts is accomplished, expectations are revealed and the entire social process is transferred.¹

Social communication is "a process of creation, transformation and transfer of information between individuals (interpersonal communication), groups or social organizations. The purpose of social communication is forming, modification or change of knowledge,

¹ T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, pp. 42-43.

attitude and behavior accordingly to interests and values of recipients and addressers."² Interpersonal communication is "a process of information transfer between two people or a small group of people that results in a specific actions and feedback"³, whereas political communication is "a space, on which meet various views and standpoints of three groups of actors that have rights to public expression in political issues". Those actors are politicians on the one hand, and public opinion on the other. In between there is a third group – journalists.⁴

Verbal aggression is a linguistic action by which addresser express negative feelings towards recipient and depreciate him at the same time. It manifests in a negative emotional statement evaluating recipient (his actions, skills, and attitudes) and in assessment of the whole of actions rather than exact acts and their results, hence the aggressive statement usually is a negative assessment of everything that concerns the recipient.⁵ According to I. Kamińska-Szmaj verbal aggression is unloading anger, indignation, irritation and other negative emotions towards surroundings as a result of hostile attitude. Acts of speech that are a manifestation of verbal aggression are i.a.: insult, affront, indignity, depreciation, ridicule and curse. The purpose of using them in a communication is humiliation, abasement, dignity violation of person, who causes hostile emotions or is treated by the addresser as a

perpetrator of unpleasant feelings and states⁶, what has an impact on the interlocutors' sense of security.⁷

Verbal aggression according to the classification of M. Peisert is divided into: explicit aggression (direct) and implicit (hidden). Explicit verbal aggression consists on expressing in a direct manner negative content towards recipient by using demeaning vocabulary, but also neutral, e.g. generalization ("you always", "you never...") or speaking in a raised voice. Implicit form of verbal aggression towards recipient can be displayed as a gossip, slander, aspersion or other defaming linguistic actions. It can be expressed in a neutral statements including hurtful and depreciative content, e.g. irony, joke or false compassion. It can also take a form of an implied aggression that cannot be recognized from the content of a message, but concludes of an analysis of context and situation in which the act of a linguistic communication is taking place. An attack on other person's image, causing her mental discomfort, is created by using linguistic and morphological measures or emotional syntax. Among frequently used stylistic measures are: irony, derision, sarcasm and mockery. An audible aggression signal is harsh, directive, raised voice, often rising into scream.⁸

Verbal aggression in public life is directed into specific person or a group and its aim is to dominate or to make a person or a group disappear from the political scene or at least to confine its range of influence. It serves political or ideological purposes, so it's rarely an impulsive reaction, caused by uncontrolled anger. The aggressor is not only up to using disqualifying terms, but also causing hatred; to make the object of aggression being negatively rated by others and the addresser being

² R. Smolski, M. Smolski, E.H. Stadtmüller, *Komunikacja społeczna*, [w:] *Słownik encyklopedyczny. Edukacja obywatelska*, Wydawnictwo Europa, <http://leksykony.interia.pl/haslo?hid=175011> (08.04.2014).

³ W. Głodowski, *Komunikowanie interpersonalne*, Wydawnictwo Hansa Communication, Warszawa 2006, p. 25.

⁴ L. Sobkowiak, *Komunikacja polityczna*, [in]: *Studia z teorii polityki*, A. W. Jabłoński and L. Sobkowiak (eds.), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 1996, p. 165.

⁵ H. Satkiewicz, *Językowe przejawy agresji w mediach*, [in]: *Język w mediach masowych*, J. Bralczyk and K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), *Upowszechnianie Nauki - Oświata "UN-O"*, Warszawa 2000, pp. 28-33.

⁶ I. Kamińska-Szmaj, *Agresja językowa w życiu publicznym. Leksykon inwektyw politycznych 1918-2000*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2007.

⁷ J. Piwowarski, *Fenomen...*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-45.

⁸ M. Peisert, *Formy i funkcje agresji werbalnej. Próba typologii*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2004, p. 31.

rated better than recipient; to make an impression that recipient deserves an insult and that addresser negatively assesses recipient in everyone's best interest; also to explain different kinds of repressive actions.⁹

According to I. Kamińska-Szmaj the sources of verbal aggression in political life should be searched in the ideologies that are based on hatred towards others; ideologies created in the times of changes and revolutions, when hatred is focused on those from whom the power was taken; in the strategy taken by politicians, consisting of creating themselves as fighting against evil – political opponent – and in instinctive actions focused on the fight for the leadership (of politicians who treat politics as a war, not a competition).¹⁰

In a public discourse, particularly in politics, language of aggression is commonly used in a form of invective. An invective described as a verbal insult (impairment somebody's dignity, insult, violation of norms, rules and values or offense against them), invective (offensive word directed to somebody, epithet, affront, demeaning word) or indignity (dishonor, serious insult). An invective is a statement that is: scurrilous, scornful, disdainful, belligerent, sarcastic, ironic, offensive, abusive, defaming, hurtful, disgraceful, slandering, vilifying, irreverent, humiliating, degrading, discreditable, depreciative, discrediting, stultifying, mocking, derogating, disparaging, jeering and scoffing.¹¹

A specific type of invective is a political invective – one of the most commonly used tools of communication in modern politics. It is an intentional verbal act, public and concerning members of political scene, expressing negative emotions of addresser towards a person, group of people or organization, ideology and/or evaluating somebody (something)

negatively using lexical measures functioning in an awareness of certain social community as offensive, that is breaking acknowledged language and cultural rules, or by linguistic measures marked axiologically and/or emotionally, that receive negative characterization only by verbal and communicative context (political, socio-historical).¹²

Communication language based on political invective threatens social security and safety culture. As J. Piwowski stated:

“1. Phenomenon of security is for a certain individual or collective entity:

- desired state without danger or state of satisfying level of control over the threats to the existence of this entity;
- value that meet our needs of lack (basic needs) an higher needs (needs of development – i.e. metaneeds) with self-realization at the top of the hierarchy of needs;
- process of development, which is a meta-need that allows for personal and social increase of the potential that rises self-defense of security subject;
- social construct that is a result of social bond, interdependence, and interactions in certain human collectivity, which is one of subjects of security.

2. Security culture of any specified individual or collective entity is a phenomenon that enables to accomplish following objectives:

- efficient control over possible threats to certain entity, which results in an optimal state of danger to this entity (in certain time and place);
- restoring security of certain subject when it was lost;
- optimization of levels of multi-sectorally formed and examined process of development of security subject, which aims to harmonization of sectors in the context of prioritizing goals of the entity;

⁹ M. Głowiński, *Mowa agresji*, [in]: *Człowiek i agresja*, Ł. Jurasz-Dudzik (ed.), Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2002, pp. 259-272.

¹⁰ I. Kamińska-Szmaj, *Agresja...*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹² *Ibidem.*

- efficient stimulation of consciousness of higher need in both social and individual scale – i.e. the need of self-fulfillment and creation of trichotomous development – a) mental, b) social, and c) material due to supporting beliefs, motivations and attitudes that cause individual and collective actions, which have influence on the increase of potential of autonomic defense (self-defense) of individual and group subjects of security.”¹³

It follows from the above definitions that political invective can be classified as one of the factors affecting sense of security.

There are many linguistic ways to offend political opponent.¹⁴ For this purpose one can use primarily (systemically) evaluative vocabulary (conventionalized lexical measures). Using such words is basic and the easiest, non-requiring high-level linguistic skill, way of affronting, insulting somebody or something. To the most commonly used in political language means belong: names of people of low intellectual and moral level, names of dangerous groups or communities, adjectives negatively evaluating character trait, intellectual level, and predispositions to hold certain public roles, ridiculing appearance, physical disability, manner of acting and speaking and verbs defining blameworthy actions of the opponent. The next category of the measures is connotatively evaluative vocabulary. Those are words secondarily evaluative, which meanings are formed under the influence of the moral system, knowledge and beliefs of the certain community in regards of the designation defined under that name. In a political language negative connotations are activated by: putting the words in purposely chosen contexts, putting surnames of the politicians in negatively evaluated row, referring to stereotypes and

stereotypical traits given to certain names (pejorative overtone is given by the opposition "one's own – stranger" or referring to ethnics stereotypes), using the vocabulary from the animal kingdom in reference to humans and their actions, using the names of diseases in reference to phenomenon of political scene, intercepting words from colloquial Polish and putting words in an intertextual space, e.g. biblical.

Another category is vocabulary derivative from base words of negatively evaluative (systemic and connotatively) meaning. Those are mostly names of representatives of some traits, doers of the activities, names of the activities and names of abstract features.

Among morphological measures commonly used is variety of flexional forms and non-personal form instead of masculine personal form, names of politicians are used in plural, diminutive suffixes are added to bases words, that are not suitable for such changes, as an expression of contempt, attempt at ridicule and diminishing someone's value. The expressive formatives are used to give the words pejorative and/or ironic character, derivatives are being created from the abbreviations of parties or organizations' names, different types of derivatives are being created from the names of people present on the political arena, expressive onomastic derivatives with foreign suffix, word-formative (ironic and malignant) transformation of politicians' names and surnames, expressive compounds, symphysis and contaminations (hybrid of two names).

Another category includes phrasal verbs and their modifications. They are being created intentionally, they reveal negative evaluation of the opponent by deliberate transformation, expanding (completing) fixed affiliations, replacing stylistically neutral words with those of negative marking or by creating new connections disseminated in political communication. Commonly used are also combination (assemblage) of highly negative evaluation (sys-

¹³ J. Piwowarski, *Fenomen bezpieczeństwa. Pomiędzy zagrożeniem a kulturą bezpieczeństwa*, Kraków 2014, pp. 20-21, 44-47.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

temic and connotative). Stylistic device called hyperbole is used to express strong feelings and to create the enemy with exaggerated negative features, very dangerous, despicable and blameworthy.

The last category are visuals, such as the use of the ironic quotation marks, as well as the recall of negative meanings through the use of uppercase and lowercase letters and separable and inseparable spelling (creating neologisms).

Described procedures are commonly used in political and media debates.

SUMMARY

Verbal aggression in a public space, including politics, is an ethical and social problem. It is connected to confrontational attitude and favors uniting against "common enemy", preventing agreement for common good. It's one of the causes of the decline of deeper reflection over reality, criticism based on in-depth analysis of the phenomenon, because it doesn't allow doubt and consideration, being based on impulsive emotional reactions and a need of fast achieving goals. It indicates a lack of knowledge of other action strategies, and thus a limitation of people who use it. In a consequence, an aggressive discourse clearly impoverishes and shallows the reception of reality, what influences social life and as a result – life of every citizen.

Verbal aggression, such as political invective, through being wide-spread in the statements of public personas in media, starts to be noticed as a normal linguistic act, and less frequently as an inappropriate behavior. Social acceptance for verbal aggression increases which seems to be a dangerous phenomenon that should be stopped. Particularly large influence it has on young people who learn social behavior (including linguistic) by observing and imitating adults, as well as those seen in

media.¹⁵ The way of using language to refer to each other, to express emotions, to unload emotional tension, to argue and express critical opinions is based on the way of communicating by public personas, then passing to everyday life and interpersonal communication of everyday people. The way of communication is not only based on attitude and behavior of others but also creates it.

If we assume that effective communication is the foundation of social life, then a positive change of behavior in the communication process may directly contribute to improving the efficiency of public institutions functioning, and thus the functioning of individual citizens.

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¹⁵ Z. Majchrzyk, Z., *O języku agresji*, [in]: *Wybrane problemy komunikowania się i komunikacji w zjawiskach patologii społecznej*, A. Wolska (ed.), AMP Studio Paweł Majewski, Szczecin 2002, pp. 41-58.

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AUTHORS

Malwina Dankiewicz, M.A., graduate of the Faculty of Psychology of the Jagiellonian University, at present Ph.D. candidate in Psychology of the Jagiellonian University.

Radosława Rodasik, M.A., graduate of the Faculty of Polish Philology of the Jagiellonian University, at present Ph.D. candidate in Linguistic of the Jagiellonian University.

Aleksandra Skórzak, B.A., graduate of the Faculty of Polish Philology of the Jagiellonian University, M.A. candidate in of the Faculty of Polish Philology of the Jagiellonian University
