

**FaR 2021****International Forum “Freedom and responsibility in pivotal times”****FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION: THE CASE OF MITIGATING AND  
AGGRAVATING IMPOSITION**

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**Abstract**

The case of linguistic imposition is of great importance in all spheres of communication. Internet communication in the form of comments allows users to a) hide their identity either in being an unauthorized user or pretending to be a different kind of user; b) freely communicate to people of different ages, social status and other social characteristics. This allows breaking conventional rules of politeness. Thus the issue of mitigating and aggravating communicative imposition within Internet communication is studied on the basis of a Russian talk-show ‘Sunday night with Vladimir Solovyov’. A total of 5000 comments were analyzed using a continuous sampling approach; later, pragmatic analysis was applied to identify the most productive strategies of aggravating and mitigating behaviors. Among most productive aggravating techniques are you-communication, rude vocabulary, allusion to physiological processes, derogatory diminutives (both in lexis and semantics). Productive mitigating means are lexemes with positive evaluation, inclusive we and lexical/semantic means expressing the idea of solidarity. The results indicate the prospects of further research: study of mitigation and aggravation in regional blogs and in blogs of certain people where commentators are supposed to know each other at least virtually; another prospect is to identify how the topic of an Internet post influences the quality of comments.

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## 1. Introduction

Expansion of the Internet leads not only to the creation of absolutely new speech genres and new spheres of communication, but it has also led to, at least, two little-studied topics. The first is the study of genres based on the Russian language and describing its peculiar features and the second, which is more relevant to the current research, is the study of pragmatic peculiarities of Internet-mediated communication. Still even having a relatively new area of study, researchers have already invented a necessary and effective inventory of methods to study the data of this type. However, the emerging Internet genres are hardly possible viewed using algorithms designed for directly oral and written communication. This practice inevitably leads to omission of important details that are an integral part of the phenomenon under consideration. For example, Taboada and Mann (2006) and Wang (2013) mention the presence of a completely different verbal-non-verbal communication system. The topic of Internet communication is becoming more and more discussed in scientific circles, which leads to the emergence of a larger volume of literature related to identifying the features of this type of communication. Goroshko (2006) talks about the formation of the "linguistics of the Internet". It is precisely American and Western European experts who are pioneers in this field, and in their works, special attention is paid to precisely the concept of genre.

According to Rogacheva (2009), in Internet communication one can distinguish three main areas of research:

1. Description of the features of Internet communication from the point of view of two language modes (writing and speech).
2. Researching various aspects of Internet communication and its speech means.
3. Classification of genres of the communicative space of the Internet (p. 56).

Within the framework of our research, of greatest interest is the second since we strive not only to consider Internet commentary as a special kind of speech genre "commentary" but to describe its pragmatic characteristics within anonymous and authorised users. Goroshko (2006) also notes that "the communicative space of the Internet became a kind of genre-generating environment that contributed to both more intensive development of genre studies in general, and the emergence new genres peculiar only to this information environment and the emergence theory of virtual genre studies" (p. 37). It is important to take into account a number of special parameters to classify internet genres. The researcher highlights the following:

- 1) hypertextuality (the way text is read and the nature of hyperlinks);
- 2) ability to create creolized texts, and use of multimedia;
- 3) interactivity of the environment, which often leads to a certain the degree of multiple genres;
- 4) synchronicity / asynchrony (timing parameters);
- 5) frequency information updated;
- 6) addressee of the electronic text;
- 7) author of the text (features of the linguistic personality, plurality / uniqueness of authorship of electronic text and communicative goals of the author / authors); this feature is being the most crucial for this research;

8) geography of the Internet.

Genre diversity of Internet communication remains rather unsystematic. The previously mentioned factors influence to the same extent the differing terminology in texts of works of individual researchers.

Based on the classification of genres as suggested by Baranov (1997), the genre of Internet commentaries can be attributed to the group of primary (complex) speech genres, considering some similarity of Internet commentary to a dialogical text. The division presupposes the following types:

1) primary (simple) speech genres are close to speech acts;

2) primary (complex) speech genres are equal to the dialogical text as they are reactions to another comment;

3) secondary (simple) speech genres - functional and semantic elementary texts - description, narration, etc.;

4) secondary (complex) speech genres - texts, including lower speech genres in a transformed form (Baranov, 1997, p. 8).

We can find a lot in common between genres of Internet communication and 'real-life' genres. The main means and purposes would coincide. Some features of Internet communication that are present in oral communication are its monologous and dialogous/polylogous manner, personal and public character of communication, communication for information or 'just because' (phatic), communication with familiar people and people you do not know.

Being a rather new and poorly studied phenomenon, Internet communication is of particular interest for research of not only such genres like blog and advertising, but also the emergence of completely different directions communication, for example, comments, the place in the genre classification of which has yet to be determined.

## 2. Problem Statement

Internet communication conditions provide excellent opportunity to express a linguistic personality (within both anonymous and authorized communication). However, due to poor control compliance with the norms of speech, interaction on the Internet may manifest signs of emotional aggression that is unacceptable in direct communication. Online commentators can be very impositive, inflict such insults that in real life are tabooed. Dementyev (2010) explains the presence of speech aggression by the presence of such a phenomenon as "a principled attitude towards frivolity". He notes that in the context of Internet communication, communicants perceive what is happening as a "make-believe" phenomenon (p.123). There are various approaches about aggression, and they characterize it in their own way. For example, R. Haydn defines aggression as a "category of behaviour" or "motivational state". Speech aggression can certainly be attributed to action in the field of speech behaviour, which is caused by the aggressive state of the speaker (as cited in Zhu et al., 2015). Some researchers classify aggressive speech act as a tool for creating social hierarchy, motivated by the establishment of a social differentiation, as well as the desire to assert itself by expression of aggression through verbal channels. Kozhina (2006) comes to a definition of speech aggression as "the usage of linguistic means to expressions of hostility; a manner of speech that offends someone's pride and dignity" (p. 340). This definition describes verbal aggression in relation to the usage of stylistically threatening means of expression. Even though speech aggression in the media is a tool

that leads to manipulation of mass consciousness, in the Internet comments the studied phenomenon takes on a different role. Users involved in Internet communication use speech aggression solely for the purpose of broadcasting their emotions and feelings, expressing their attitude to the world and others. There are several means by which aggressive tonality of a statement can be expressed. For example, these are imperatives with a tinge of categoricity, specific addressing (as opposed to collective addressing). It should be noted that verbal aggression is significantly softened by irony, which shifts attention from political, social, or personal content of a statement to its witty design. Humour smooths out sharpness and rudeness of an aggressive phrase. However, one cannot fail to notice that aggression in Internet comments to news articles not only has not reached its peak but continues to grow in due to the nature and relevance of the subject matter of the articles, as well as ambiguity of the events described in them. Some other means of expressing aggression might be noticeably abundant use of metaphors, sarcasm, and similes (Steksova, 2015, p. 77). Speech aggression is in many cases an indicator of motivational state of the interlocutor, as well as a means of social differentiation and building a social hierarchy. Commentators deliberately resort to the use of separate stylistic means to assign yourself a certain status in the context of Internet communication and separate yourself from some by uniting with others. Finally, the most obvious function of speech aggression becomes the expression of emotions: resentment, irritation, anger, rage. Thus, speech aggression in the Internet commentaries on news articles performs mainly an emotive function - the function of expressing emotions, feelings, attitudes to the described phenomenon, event, and maybe expressed by such means as emotionally coloured vocabulary, phraseological units, metaphors, comparisons, irony and sarcasm.

### **3. Research Questions**

Within the topic or research, we can state the following research questions:

- Is there a difference between Internet commentaries made by anonymous and authorized users?
- What linguistic means of aggravating and mitigating imposition are most frequently applied by the two categories of users in Internet commentaries?
- What are the prevailing linguistic means in expressing imposition in anonymous and authorized users? Is there any correlation between them?

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the present study is to identify main linguistic means of mitigating or aggravating imposition within the genre of Internet commentary. Further, the authors are to identify whether the described means depend on a commentators being anonymous or authorized or not.

### **5. Research Methods**

In accordance with the goals and objectives of the study, the following methods of linguistic analysis were applied:

1. The collected data was further analysed with the help of structural analysis, the techniques and linguistic means of expressing both imposition and non-imposition in anonymous and authorised commentaries was used.

2. General elements of linguistic and stylistic analysis were used to describe the reasons and conditions for using the language in authorized in anonymous Internet commentaries.

3. Pragmatic analysis was applied to interpret the motivational means of expressing imposition and non-imposition.

3. The method of sentiment analysis (analysis of the sentiment of the text) allowed recognizing and interpreting the opinions of commentators based on analysed texts.

4. For a quantitative study of the frequency of occurrence means of expressiveness, the method of content analysis was implemented.

## 6. Findings

Imposition being a type of a persuasive action is performed by a directive strategy in plentiful discourses. It is realized with the help of various transactional and transformational tactics and certain communication steps which vary in their quantity and differ within their linguistic coding.

Using continuous sampling method of research, we have searched for TOP YouTube videos trending in Russia on 08.02.2021, one of the top videos was a talk-show Воскресный Вечер с Владимиром Соловьевым [Sunday Evening with Vladimir Solovyov] (Sunday night..., 2021) with practically 1 mln. views and 5 thousand comments. It turned out that there is no dramatic difference between anonymous and authorized comments but there appeared a group of bot-generated comments with identic messages. Still the messages are not of any particular interest within the scope of our study. So, the research pays special attention to techniques aggravating and mitigating imposition.

Strategies of aggravating imposition:

Ты-communication (You-Sg communication). Generally, the choice of the form ты/Вы depends on various factors which can be subdivided into subjective and objective. Some of objective factors are communication environment, age of interlocutors, duration of acquaintance, social status, regularity. Subjective factors include sympathy, antipathy, speaker's emotions, purposes, etc.

Within the context of commentary-communication it turns out that most of the users do not know each other's background, age and other objective factors that might influence real-life communication. Subjective factors overlap objective ones, which lead to aggravation:

Так признавай, кто ж тебе мешает?

Now admit, who's stopping you? (all the translation of examples are word-for word and do not necessarily convey the exact pragmatic meaning – I.K., E.Ch.)

The example demonstrates Ты-communication to a previously unknown person with a speech act further aggravated with Так признавай and interrogative form which traditionally might be treated as a means of mitigating imposition, but the sum of Ns-form and general aggravating slant makes the comment defiantly imposing.

Сходи к проктологу. Он тоже делает бо-бо.

(See a proctologist. They also can hurt you)

Here, with the implemented usage of Ты-form other aggravating means are added, among them are imperative *сходи* (go and see) (which generally is not treated as rude/impolite but with the combination of a 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular pronoun the imperative becomes rude). Some other aggravating means are reference to a proctologist, which is unacceptable and tabooed in communication with unknown people. The comment ends with a boo-boo phrase usually applicable to children but not to unknown people interested in politics.

- Usage of low-flown, impolite, rude, and aggressive vocabulary, slang and argot.

*@Скоба Апокалипсиса поджорает, шумер? Ну прям обделался от счастья, что смог что то выжать из прямой кишки! Убоженький! Весь уровень развития налицо!*

*(@SkobaApokalipsisa burning up, Sumer? Have you swelled up with happiness being able to squeeze anything from the rectum? Wretched! You show your education level here!)*

Here we not only see the allusion (based on doublespeak and substitution) to physiological processes expressed in slang (*обделался от счастья – swell up*), direct allusion to the process of defecation (*выжать из прямой кишки - rectum*) but also non-progressive views of a commentator, stating their ‘ancient’ character (*шумер - Sumer*).

*@Григорий Мелехов это твоя бабка подтирала, ты думай что ты пишешь*

*(@Grigory Melechov it was your grandmother, think twice before writing)*

The above example illustrates aggravation based on using the idea of not only physiological processes and Ты-communication but a reference to the elderly relatives which in many cultures (Russian as well) in such a context becomes unacceptable (Hunston, 2011).

Another dysphemistic topic is death:

*К ритуальщикам лучше сходи, пора уже*

*(High time to go to the funeral services)*

‘It’s high time to go to the funeral services’ describes negative perception of a person and their ideas expressed in comments.

Derogatory diminutives of various kinds. Under the notion of a diminutive, we mean not only linguistic means of expressing the idea of smallness but semantic representation:

*@Вячеслав Герасимов Смелый, ты наш, из какой крысиной норки угрожаешь?*

*(@Vyacheslav Gerasimov You are so brave in what rat hole are you sitting?)*

*@Руслан Табас Ты в каком классе учишься, Русланчик?*

*(@Ruslan Tabas What grade are you in, Ruslanchik?)*

*Крысиная норка (rat hole)* is not only associated with size of the place (*норка* has a diminutive suffix -к- denoting smallness) but a reference to a small animal – rat, associated with something coward and unpleasant.

Then, the next example illustrates both semantic and linguistic diminution as well: on a lexical level there is a diminutive suffix *-чик-* in the proper name which might be treated as an act of arrogance from speaker’s side as it is obvious that the commentator, he is talking to is not a child. On a semantic level the comment contains lexeme *класс* (school class) hinting at the idea that the commentator is not mature enough and produces unwitty comments.

Still, together with techniques aggravating communicative imposition there are techniques mitigating it the most frequent being:

#### Positive evaluation

*Метко замечено, отлично сказано!*

*(Aptly noticed, well said!)*

Evaluation, both positive and negative is traditionally associated with subjective attitudes (Wiebe & Riloff, 2005) and has not only linguistic representation but psychological and sociological backgrounds and effects (Asher et al., 2009). Here we have strong adverbials of positive evaluation (Biber & Finegan, 1988).

Inclusive 'we' or other contextual means expressing solidarity

*Владимир, как я с Вами согласен! Там не только ТВЦ, но её притащили и на 1-й, и на 2-й.*

*Позорище!*

*(Vladimir, I do agree with you. There's not only TVC, but she's also been on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> channel.*

*Shame!)*

Though the example above does not contain neutral or positive vocabulary only (e.g. There are lexemes of the kind *притащили* (*coll. sit. She's also been*), *позорище* (*coll. shame*)) they do not refer to the speaker or their actions but to the discussed situation in general (Martin, 2000).

*Ребята, а что ей горе? Это счастье без ума! Ни ума ни образования, а в верхушке! Чем больше без ума, тем больше счастья*

*(Guys, what's her grief? She's so happy! She's stupid and has no education still has a high rank.*

*The less knowledge the more she is happy)*

The example above though does not illustrate the idea of solidarity (adversative conjunction as a marker) still on the lexical level it has a vocative *ребята* (*guys*) which is polite and positive.

## 7. Conclusion

Aimed at answering the research question, we have come to the following conclusions:

Within the present scope of research, it turned out practically impossible to differentiate between anonymous and authorized comments. Still, a group of bot-generated comments was pointed out though not analyzed as the purpose of such comments was mainly to spam the analyzed thread.

Linguistic means of aggravating imposition are presented predominantly by ты-communication which is generally unacceptable with unknown interlocutors. Negative subjective evaluation presented both by semantic and lexical means is as well of high frequency. Dysphemisation, using unacceptable and tabooed ideas (reference to physiological processes, death, relatives, etc.). Another frequent feature is the usage of derogatory diminutives bot semantic and morphological lexemes or non-neutral connotation (low-flown, offensive, rude lexemes).

Linguistic means of mitigating imposition are presented mainly by means of subjective positive evaluation, inclusive we, lexemes or ideas expressing solidarity (which might be expressed in negatively coloured vocabulary but the negativeness would rather describe the situation in general not the commentator or their ideas).

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