

STYLISTIC VERBAL MARKERS OF THREAT IN PUBLIC STATEMENTS OF SOCIAL NETWORK TWITTER

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Abstract:

The article examines a number of social, communicative and linguistic factors related to the threat as a speech strategy, reveals the ways of functioning of these markers within the Internet discourse. The aim of the study is to reveal the features of lexical and grammatical verbal markers of threat in the texts of public messages of the English-speaking segment of the social network Twitter. The scientific novelty of the study lies in the study of language tools that function as verbal threat markers in the English-language social network Twitter. As a result of the study, it was determined that the English-language media text has a high degree of implicitness, evaluativity and expressiveness. Verbal markers are endowed with a number of communicative functions and are the most important element in the text system of Internet messages.

Keywords: verbal marker, discourse analysis, public statement, public discourse, social network, internet communication

Introduction

The study of the processes of representation of various phenomena of the modern world community, which are reflected in the Internet communication of social networks, is one of the key problems of the cognitive-discursive paradigm. For this reason, lexical units that reflect the features of the worldview of social network users and mark the main strategies of their interaction are at the centre of public discourse research.

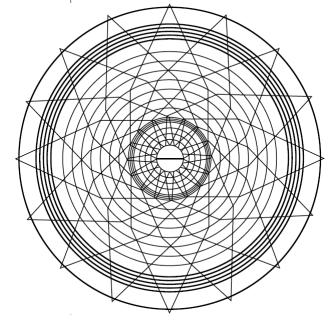
The relevance of the research topic is due to its direct connection with the range of problems outlined by modern discursology, including the theory of speech communication in the context of the language of Internet messages. At the moment, there is an increasing need to compile an individual linguistic profile of the author of messages based on verbal markers in order to form mechanisms for assessing the behaviour of a person, in particular,

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ways to assess the potential danger of his messages containing threats. In addition, the phenomenon of speech aggression in the context of the public discourse of social networks requires scientific understanding, as well as the study of the means of linguistic objectification and the description of the semantic scope of concepts that relate to the basic linguistic and cultural concepts of modern English. So, the aim of the study is to reveal the features of lexical and grammatical verbal markers of threat in the texts of public messages of the English-speaking segment of the social network Twitter.

The object of the study is the texts of messages representing a generalized threat to an indefinite person or a clear threat to a certain addressee. The subject of this study is various linguistic means that are verbal markers of threat in English-language public discourse. The material for this study was 520 English-language texts of open messages on the social network Twitter selected by random sampling.

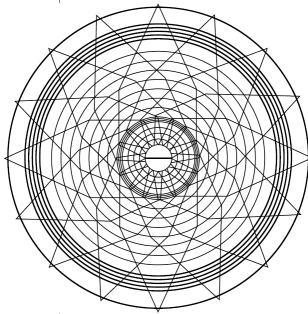
To achieve this research goal, it is necessary to solve the following tasks: firstly, to clarify the features of the threat as a communicative strategy; secondly, to describe the expressive and stylistic verbal markers of the threat; and, thirdly, to analyse the modal-evaluative verbal markers of the threat.

The practical significance of the research lies in the fact that the features of English-language communication disclosed in this article can be used in universities of the humanities in the study of special courses and special seminars on the theory of speech communication, intercultural communication, theory and practice of translation. The obtained data can be used in comparative studies of language and culture.

Reference framework

Conflictology defines a threatening statement as a verbalized, written or electronically transmitted message that contains a direct or indirect indication of an event, the consequences of which will have a negative impact on the addressee or other persons associated with him (Fraser, 2008). Verbal markers act as an indicator of the addressee's position (Gingiss, 2018), i.e. with their help it is possible to determine to what extent a written or oral statement is perceived by the addressee as a direct or indirect threat.

The illocutionary function of a threat as a communicative strategy can be summed up as an attempt to intimidate the addressee by informing him that the threatening person intends to cause him some serious harm. The conditions for the success of a threat as a communicative strategy are based on the analysis of what primary communicative task a speech act has (Small, 2013). Thus, threats are a social phenomenon, acts of institutionalization that involve conflicting relationships between participants based on verbal aggression. Indeed, the communicative effectiveness of these performative



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utterances cannot be separated from their social context, which determines the conditions that must be met in order for the communicative task of the threat to be fulfilled.

The material for this study was the texts of public messages selected by random sampling of the English-speaking segment of the social network Twitter.

The theoretical basis of the research was the work of foreign researchers H. Limberg (2019), B. Fraser (2008), P. Gingiss (2018), devoted to the distribution of verbal markers, as well as the works of linguists in the field of discourse research (J.R. Searle (2014), G.S. Small (2013), Matheson (2018) and communication studies (J. Brynielsson (2012), S. Harris (2014), J. Meloy (2015).

Methodology

For many social networks, the threat is prohibited. However, due to the huge number of messages on these sites, manually marking and responding to threatening formulations presents significant difficulties for moderators, which has led to the emergence of mathematical linguistic approaches to identifying threats. Research of this kind focuses on the development of software tools that will be able to identify a threat based on linguistic markers (Limberg, 2019).

To identify verbal markers, various research tools are used, for example, statistical calculation of the frequency of certain lexemes, translation method, analysis of the tonality of the text, sentiment analysis, profiling of the author of the message or mapping sites (Searle, 2014; Davison et al., 2015).

Descriptions of threatening language in scientific research and threat assessment protocols are limited. However, there are some generalizations that can be made about what language tools were used to assess the likelihood that a threat would be carried out.

First, sociologists and behavioural psychologists have investigated the pragmatic and social nature of threats. In these works, it is argued that the more detail or specificity used in a threat, the higher its level of danger; and vice versa, the more general or vague language means used in a threat, the lower the level of its potential danger (Milburn, 2011; Dahlin, 2016).

Secondly, threat assessment researchers refer to common language features this type of statements that can be used as indicators of a potential threat (Harris, 2014; Normand, 2011).

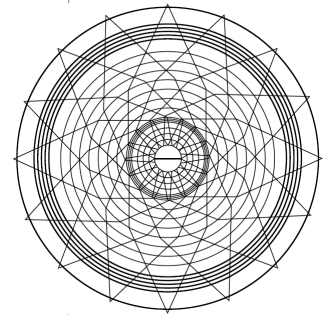
Verbal threat markers as a phenomenon are defined by linguists in different ways, and the variety of linguistic means nominating the threat is called. Linguistic studies of the threat are mainly focused separately either around the metalanguage features of communication, such as the method and method of communication (Harris, 2014; McCroskey, 2017), or around its thematic features, such as the repeated repetition of a

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certain vocabulary, or the analysis of the thematic content of grammatical constructions (Van Hee et al., 2018; Muresan et al., 2015). Despite this, since the act of threat is a social phenomenon in which the act gives the addressee power over the addressee (Rezaeinia, 2018), it is important to consider the language of threat as a socially conditioned genre, because it is thanks to the analysis of the combination of language structures and social contexts of the genre as a whole that we can conclude that the communicative act of threat It is a socio-linguistic phenomenon where the intentions and expectations of speakers are interpreted individually depending on the language means used (Brynielsson et al., 2012).

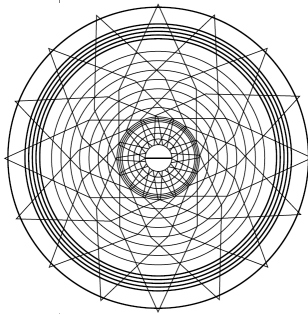
The choice of research methods was predetermined by the nature of the phenomenon studied. The following research methods are used to analyse verbal threat markers in message texts – discursive, linguo-stylistic and contextual analysis. When generalizing, systematizing and interpreting texts as objects of research, a descriptive, logical method was used, as well as general scientific methods of linguistic analysis: generalization and comparison.

Analysis of the results

In this study, we have attempted to analyse the conceptosphere of the threat, based on the fact that the threat has a clearly defined illocutionary goal. According to A.S. Rancer, there are no words isolated semantically in the language; each word is connected by dozens and hundreds of threads with the meanings of many others (Rancer, 2016). Thus, any lexemes belonging to the threat concept are endowed with the property of influencing the occurrence of certain emotions in the addressee, for example, fear, aggression, a sense of danger.

According to our hypothesis, at the moment in English-speaking social networks, the leading strategy of interpersonal interaction is speech aggression, which determines the choice of the addressees of the speech genre of the threat and determines the use of linguistic and extralinguistic (images and GIF animations) means in the texts of messages. In our research, we turn to the analysis of exclusively linguistic means used by addressees in the texts of their messages on social networks, while we include texts integrated into images in the research corpus, since we refer them primarily to linguistic means.

The criterion for selecting statements of public discourse in which the concept of threat is actualized was the presence in them of verbal markers belonging to the following lexical categories: threatening verbs; auxiliary modal verbs with the meaning of the future, present and past tense; proper names (including addresses); evaluative adjectives; personal pronouns of the first person plural and personal third person plural pronouns. This criterion also formed the basis for the first classification of verbal markers according to their belonging to a particular part of speech.



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The research corpus includes 520 posts on Facebook and Twitter and is only part of a broader database collected from English-language social networks, and thus can be considered as the basis for a more extensive study on this topic. The number of views, likes and comments to the messages was not taken into account by us, since statements containing threats have both high and low popularity among users of social networks, which is not related to linguistic factors. The data collection period is from June 2019 to the beginning of April 2021.

Public messages on social media pages, i.e. publicly available texts, are interesting for research for two reasons. Firstly, the affiliation of the mentioned statements to public discourse means that users are fully aware that the content is in the public domain. Secondly, the messages are emotional statements, contain various linguistic means of a threatening orientation and have a fairly wide range of topics raised by the addressees. The main topics that concern users and are the object of their verbal aggression are: migration, social inequality, racism, police lawlessness. Accordingly, we are attempting to classify verbal threat markers, including on a thematic basis. This may be of interest for observing how racism and, for example, anti-immigrant discourse collide in public discourse with other key areas of social life, such as the economy, the financial crisis and anti-establishment themes.

Examples of threatening statements discussed in this study have been identified as the most representative strategies of public discourse. All texts of messages are reproduced in the form in which they were originally presented on Facebook and Twitter, including spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.

The threat, an example of which is the text below, is usually presented as a proposal that depends on the addressee performing the requested action. Depending on the plausibility of the threat, the depth of planning and detail indicated by verbal markers expressed by various linguistic means, among other threat factors can be assessed as more or less serious:

(1) Im very Very sorry for you, is a pity that this is how your life is going to end is a pity but I will like to give you some chance to help your self if you will like to.

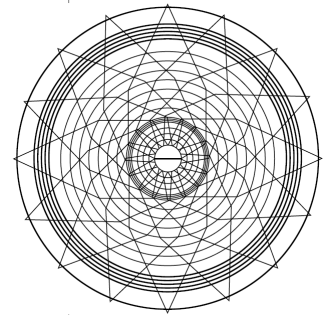
Certain verbal markers may signal the addressee's intention to carry out an aggressive act directly and to carry out the threat. Thanks to the analysis of verbal markers, it is possible to assess the threat level as high, medium or low and classify statements containing a threat into three categories, depending on the probability of threat fulfilment. A low-level threat is a threat that poses little risk to the addressee and/or others. Markers of such a threat can be lexically softened means of language, subjunctive mood (for example, perhaps I might...), description of implausible actions (for example, I will blow up

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every building on campus at the same time ...) and lack of details about the time, place or person the threat is directed at (for example, You better watch out or else...). There are the greatest number of such threats.

(2) *I'll be damned if some man tries to do some shit to me with this whole April 24 bs. I carry for a reason. I will shoot your legs off*

A medium-level threat is a threat that, in general, is more realistic and plausible, but still implies some aspect of doubt about a person or place as an object of aggression or the likelihood that the threat can be carried out. Threats of this category usually demonstrate a certain level of preliminary planning and foresight in describing how the threat will be carried out, and provide more specific and descriptive lexical means that primarily mark the purpose of the threat. At the same time, such threats often include tokens that explicate the validity of the addressee's intention (for example, This is no joke):

(3) *Take me serious, I mean it*

Finally, a high-level threat is very credible, and the facts stated in it can be implemented. These threats usually contain detailed descriptions of how the threat will be carried out, who or what is the target and how the addressee will achieve this goal (Tausczik et al., 2016). In addition, when the threat level is high, the period during which the threat will be carried out is often indicated. In addition, verbal markers of a high-level threat are threatening verbs (for example, shoot, kill, execute, lynch, do away, etc.):

(4) *I will shoot him between the eyes.*

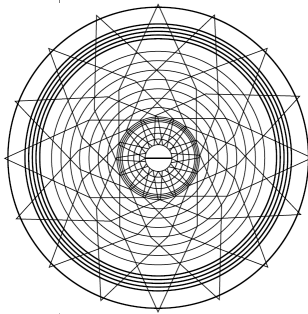
The threat in messages can manifest itself to varying degrees through the use of profanity or other emotionally coloured language means.

(5) *Cuomo is a dumbass. dude can't keep his hands to himself. All he had to do... besides his job*

The author of this message uses the emotionally expressive lexeme dumbass, which belongs to the vocabulary of the reduced register and functions as a verbal marker of aggression, as in the following message:

(6) *Dude is so stupid all he had to do was take the virus seriously and we would've had to deal with 4 more years of his Bullshit*

In both cases, the speakers resort not only to emotional colloquial vocabulary, but also to informal appeals to the addressee, expressed by the noun dude. This familiarity marks a threat by representing the difference in the social status of the speaker and the addressee.



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(7) Bro? You good? What a psychotic example, we were talking about global warming

The address bro (brother) indicates that the addressee's assessment of his social and age status is higher than that of the addressee.

During the analysis of threatening messages, we paid attention to the verbal context (Meloy, 2015). Here, the lexemes used by the authors, which are verbal markers of threat, are offensive, derogatory expressions that, according to the expectations of the speakers, more successfully convey the intensity of their feelings and emotions. For example, a threat with the insult you ass in combination with an auxiliary verb of the future tense indicates the seriousness of the threatening person's intentions, and makes it more likely that the conflict will escalate and the exchange of counter-threats:

(8) You complete ass, and I'll have you thrown in jail

Therefore, derogatory expressions and offensive nominatives, such as dumbass, bullshit, which are perceived as direct insults in English-speaking culture, are qualified by us as verbal markers of threats. At the same time, threats are not necessarily and not always characterized by unpleasant or offensive expressions, although in 60.4% of cases the threat contains obscene vocabulary. Based on the analysis of user profiles, the absence of profanity in the threat is true for messages whose authors are women. So, this phenomenon confirms the fact that male and female authors may differ in the use of emotional profanity when writing a threatening message. Based on our data, male authors use profanity more often than female authors.

(9) STOP THE MADNESS I say my rights and voice will NOT be silenced

The speaker demonstrates a negative attitude to the situation, calling what is happening madness. Moreover, using such a graphic tool as capital letters, the author imitates a statement uttered in a raised tone (scream). The graphic tool can function as a verbal threat marker, emphasizing certain words and phrases that the speaker considers important, and which also mark the speaker's frustration or anger. Another verbal threat marker in this message is the modal verb will, which demonstrates the seriousness of its statements (Cohen et al., 2014). Through the use of these negatively colored lexical and grammatical markers, the speaker clearly expresses his position – he has negative feelings towards the addressee and a certain situation, and wants his feelings to be taken seriously.

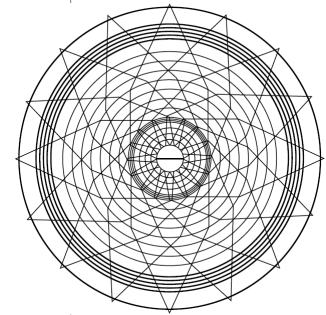
Verbal markers are second-person pronouns, proper names, addresses and names of social groups; threatening verbs, especially in combination with nouns indicating an act of aggression.

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(10) *He said the land that his house is being built on NO ONE should be on the street and the moment someone comes on his land he will shoot first and ask questions later. I'll definitely always call him before popping up*

The most common verbs are shoot and kill in their main meaning to take life (136 and 128 times, respectively), the verbs execute in the meaning to put to death and hang in the meaning to take life by hanging (56 and 44 times). The threatening component can also be acquired by verbs for which this meaning is not initially characteristic. Thus, of all the meanings of the verb burn, none contains definitions directly related to the threat concept sphere, but in the following text we observe a contextual meaning close to destroy, indicating a threat in this message:

(11) *Burn it all down. The system is broken.*

So, we have considered expressive-stylistic verbal markers of threat, which endow these statements with a high degree of implicitness and expressiveness, and further it is necessary to pay closer attention to the ways of explication of evaluativity in the texts of messages with a threat.

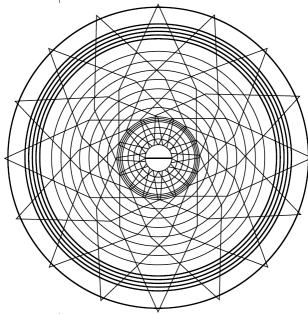
Discussion and conclusions

Thus, the analysis of verbal markers based on a sample of data from the English-language social network Twitter allowed us to draw the following conclusions.

Firstly, the threat as a communicative strategy depends on the illocutionary force or intention with which it is pronounced. Based on the communicative functions and linguistic features of direct and indirect types of threats, the risk of threat realization is usually classified as low when the threatening utterance contains subordinate clauses, modal verbs, while the risk of threat realization, on the contrary, is classified as high if the utterance contains linguistic means of expressing communicative intent.

Secondly, expressive-stylistic verbal markers of threat in public discourse messages endow these statements with a high degree of implicitness, evaluativity and expressiveness. Expressive-stylistic verbal markers have a number of communicative functions and represent the most important constructive element in the text system of Internet messages.

Thirdly, modal-evaluative verbal threat markers determine the specific grammatical form of statements containing a threat, which in itself is a verbal threat marker, since it is from the combination of the linguistic structure and the social context of the genre that the addressee builds his own impressions, interpretations and expectations from the addressee. From the point of view of solving a communicative problem, both explicit and implicit forms of statements containing a threat have the same effect on the addressee,



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since the decisive factor for the addressee is his own perception of certain language forms as markers of threat.

We see prospects for further research of the problem in a more detailed study of verbal markers of the conditions for the success of a verbal act of threat and an assessment of the likelihood of a threat based on the analysis of verbal markers, as well as in the formation of a thematic classification of verbal markers of threat based on the topics addressed by the authors of Internet messages containing a threat.

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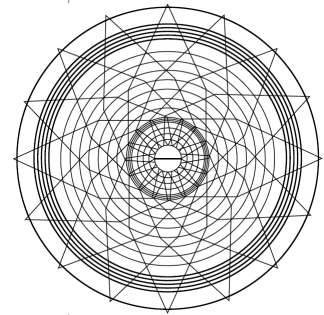
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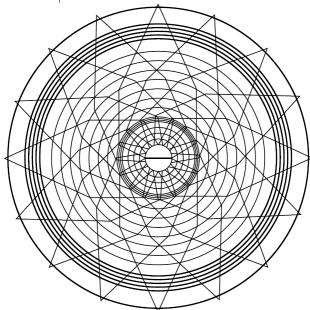
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СТИЛИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ВЕРБАЛЬНЫЕ МАРКЕРЫ УГРОЗЫ В ПУБЛИЧНЫХ ВЫСКАЗЫВАНИЯХ НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОЙ СЕТИ «ТВИТТЕР»

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Аннотация:

В статье рассматривается ряд социальных, коммуникативных и лингвистических факторов, связанных с угрозой как речевой стратегией, а также раскрываются способы функционирования упомянутых маркеров в рамках интернет дискурса. Научная новизна исследования заключается в комплексном анализе языковых средств, функционирующих как вербальные маркеры угрозы, и их грамматических и лексико-коммуникативных функций в рамках когнитивно-дискурсивной парадигмы, и в выявлении связи между индивидуальным способом оформления высказывания и его общим значением. В результате анализа англоязычного публичного дискурса социальной сети сделан вывод о высокой степени имплицитности, оценочности и экспрессивности англоязычного медиатекста. Вербальные маркеры наделяются рядом коммуникативных функций и представляют собой важнейший конструктивный элемент в системе текста интернет-сообщений.

Ключевые слова: высказывание, вербальный маркер, публичный дискурс, коммуникативная лингвистика, социальные сети, интернет-коммуникация