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Н. Н. Черник

Белорусский государственный
экономический университет
(г. Минск, Республика Беларусь)

Comparison of key verbal aggression peculiarities in Belarusian, Chinese and Western communicative cultures

Abstract. *The article provides a comparative analysis of verbal aggression in three distinct communicative cultures: Belarusian, Chinese, and Western. The study aims to shed light on the key features characterizing verbal aggression in these diverse cultural contexts. By dissecting linguistic nuances and cultural norms, the article explores the interplay of language and culture in shaping the verbal expression of aggression. The article offers valuable insights into the dynamics in the domain of aggressive communication across cultures.*

Keywords: *verbal aggression; Belarusian culture; Chinese culture; Western culture; communicative culture; cross-cultural communication.*

Сравнение особенностей вербальной агрессии в коммуникативных культурах Беларуси, Китая и Запада

Аннотация. *Статья предоставляет сравнительный анализ вербальной агрессии в трех различных коммуникативных культурах: белорусской, китайской и западной. Исследование направлено на выявление ключевых особенностей, характеризующих вербальную агрессию в этих различных культурных контекстах. Путем анализа лингвистических особенностей*

и культурных норм статья исследует взаимодействие языка и культуры в выражении речевой агрессии. Статья предлагает ценную информацию о вербальной агрессии в сфере межкультурных коммуникаций.

Ключевые слова: вербальная агрессия; белорусская культура; китайская культура; западная культура; межкультурная коммуникация.

In the contemporary societal landscape, there is a discernible intensification in competitiveness, marked unceasing trajectory of change and transformation, which correlates with a heightened incidence of conflict and aggressive behavioral manifestations. The relevance of studying verbal aggression is driven by several trends that have become prevalent in contemporary speech practices, including the general decline in linguistic culture, increase in invective and vulgar language, active infiltration of jargon elements from various domains into normative speech, and weakening of communicative norms used to restrain verbal aggression.

Effective communication is a vital aspect of human interaction, shaping relationships, cultural norms, and societal dynamics. Aggressive communication, characterized by confrontational language and behavior, presents a unique challenge when considered within the framework of different cultural contexts. This article focuses on verbal aggression within the Belarusian, Chinese and Western communicative cultures, aiming to unravel the cultural and linguistic dimensions that influence its expression in speech.

Understanding distinctions between the concepts of a conflict and aggression is crucial in the fields of psycholinguistics and psychology when studying human behavior, communication, and the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Conflict is defined as a state of disagreement or opposition, which may or may not lead to aggressive behavior, while aggression refers to actions that are purposefully harmful or threatening.

Aggression specifically denotes behavior that is intended to harm, injure, or threaten others physically or emotionally. It can be a response to a conflict situation or environment but is not limited to that context.

According to the definition proposed by A. Bass, aggression is any behavior that poses a threat or inflicts harm on others [2]. Renowned expert on this issue, L. Berkowitz, defines aggression as “any form of behavior aimed at causing someone physical or psychological harm” [3]. E. Aronson, when discussing aggression, distinguishes between two types: firstly, aggression as an end in itself, which he labels “hostile”, and secondly, aggression that serves any other purpose, or “instrumental” aggression [1]. Huesmann defines aggression as social behavior aimed at harming or annoying others [12].

All theories of aggression may differ, but they share commonality in meaning. Firstly, aggression is always linked to human activity and

adaptability. Secondly, from a sociological perspective, a person is inherently predisposed to aggression. In the “norm”, this quality is socially acceptable and even necessary. Otherwise, such a person would be pliable, submissive, and passive in their behavior.

In the context of aggression research, verbal aggression has been seen as one of the manifested forms of aggression. The phenomenon of verbal aggression as a subject of study in contemporary linguistics remains relatively unexplored, especially when considering domestic materials. Furthermore, none of the existing scientific concepts that explain the nature of human aggression (ethological, frustration-based, behaviorist, psychoanalytic) treat verbal manifestations of aggression as an independent subject of scientific analysis.

Verbal aggression is defined by Shcherbinina as verbal expression of negative feelings, emotions, intentions in an inappropriate linguistic context [4, p. 15]. In other words, verbal aggression is a form of hostile verbal actions that cause harm to their recipient, in this case, moral harm. Thus, the antisocial nature of verbal aggression becomes evident.

Infante and Wigley [13] introduced the concept of “verbal aggressiveness” as a personality trait characterized by targeting the self-concept or position of others. They exemplified specific verbal aggression as attacking a person’s character, abilities, appearance, background, and personality, as well as behaviors like making threats, shouting, using profanity, rejecting, and refuting.

Aggressive verbal behavior often stems from a combination of psychological factors. High levels of frustration and stress can trigger aggressive communication as a coping mechanism. Individuals may resort to aggression as a way to vent their emotions and regain a sense of control. Aggressive language can serve as a defense mechanism, shielding individuals from perceived threats or criticism. This can create a hostile and uncooperative communication style.

Aggressive communicators often employ various models and strategies in their interactions. Aggressive individuals frequently use blame and accusations to deflect responsibility and shift blame onto others. This strategy can escalate conflicts and hinder problem-solving. The use of derogatory language and personal insults is a common feature of aggressive communication. Such tactics can be hurtful and damaging to relationships. Sarcasm and mockery are often used as a passive-aggressive form of communication, conveying disapproval or criticism indirectly. Aggressive individuals may resort to threats and intimidation to exert control over others, instilling fear to achieve compliance. Manipulative tactics, such as gaslighting, can be employed to confuse, disorient, and undermine the confidence of the other party, making it difficult to challenge the aggressor’s behavior.

As studies show, aggression, and verbal aggression in particular, are ubiquitous aspects of human communication. They are not solely products of individual disposition but are significantly influenced by cultural contexts.

Fung et al. [9] studied reactive and proactive aggression in adolescents aged 11–20 years in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Uruguay, and Spain. This international comparative study of aggression found that among these countries, Uruguayan adolescents were the most aggressive, and that general, proactive, and reactive aggression increased with age, but the age effect differed between countries.

Ersan et al. [8] conducted research on driver aggression, abnormal behavior, and positive driving, revealing country-specific variations in hostile aggression, retaliatory tendencies, and positive motor behavior. These variations were attributed to cultural factors.

Culture has also been observed to influence anger and its management, closely linked to aggression. Boiger et al. [5] surveyed Japanese, US, and Belgian students in response to hypothetical situations evoking anger and shame. The study identified distinct types of anger and shame, primarily predicted by the culture of origin rather than factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, or personality.

Deng and Cheng [7] explored implicit attitudes towards emotion regulation in Chinese and European Americans. Their findings revealed that the Chinese participants held more negative views on emotional expression compared to European-Americans and assigned lower importance to emotional expression.

Kawabata and Ohbuchi [14] conducted a survey using vignettes with Japanese and Russian university students, assessing the effects of reappraisal, suppression, and distraction, which are forms of emotion regulation. The study revealed that these emotion regulation strategies had varying effects on participants' depressive affect in each country.

Ogiermann [16] administered a discourse completion test to university students in the UK, Germany, Poland, and Russia. The results showed variations in linguistic politeness strategies, with the imperative form being more frequently used in Russia, Poland, Germany, and the UK, while the interrogative form was preferred in the UK and Germany. Indirect requests were more prevalent in the UK and Germany, whereas direct requests were common in Poland and Russia.

Zhu & Bao [17] conducted a comparative study on politeness in Western cultures and China. They noted that Chinese politeness principles emphasize distinctions based on social status, whereas Western interpersonal relationships prioritize parallel relationships and do not favor status-based distinctions. Chinese-style modesty was found to be less accepted in Western society.

Hi et al. [11] carried out a questionnaire survey involving Japanese and American university students, focusing on politeness in requesting to borrow a pen. The results indicated the potential influence of culture on distinguishing between polite and impolite behaviors, including verbal aggression.

The linguistic patterns, idiomatic expressions, and communicative norms surrounding verbal aggression exhibit significant variations across cultures. Different societies may employ distinct linguistic strategies for expressing anger, frustration, or hostility. Studies have demonstrated that the choice of words, tone, and non-verbal cues in aggressive communication is deeply rooted in cultural norms and values [15]. Politeness theory [6] further highlights how linguistic politeness norms can mediate the expression of aggression in different cultures.

Cultural factors contribute to the diversity of verbal aggressive strategies. Some cultures may favor direct, confrontational language to express aggression, while others may utilize indirect, passive-aggressive forms of communication. Furthermore, the cultural acceptance of certain forms of verbal aggression may vary, with some societies tolerating more explicit language and others prioritizing indirect communication. Cultural norms regarding “face” [10] play a pivotal role in shaping how aggression is managed within interpersonal relationships.

Cultural norms and values play a crucial role in regulating verbal aggression. The socialization process in different cultures shapes how individuals manage and express aggressive language. Culture can influence the acceptance or suppression of aggressive verbal behaviors and the emotional regulation strategies individuals employ in the face of conflict [7]. Some cultures may encourage the expression of anger, while others emphasize emotional restraint.

Cross-cultural studies conducted within the realms of linguistics and psycholinguistics have unveiled striking cultural variations in the expression and interpretation of verbal aggression. These investigations often employ linguistic analyses and psycholinguistic experiments to uncover the nuances of verbal aggression within specific cultural contexts [9], [17]. Such research underscores the significance of adopting culturally sensitive approaches in the study of verbal aggression.

Considering the relevance of the problem under examination in this article, an investigation was undertaken to scrutinize the key attributes of verbal aggression within the realms of Chinese, Belarusian, Russian, and Western communicative cultures, followed by their comparative analysis.

The Chinese communicative culture is steeped in a rich history that places a strong emphasis on harmony, collectivism, and face preservation. These cultural values significantly influence communicative behavior.

The pursuit of harmony is central to Chinese culture, often leading to the avoidance of direct confrontations and aggressive communication. Individuals may opt for indirect means of expressing their disagreements to maintain group cohesion.

“Face” (面子, miànzi) is a core concept in Chinese culture, denoting one's reputation, dignity, and social standing. Aggressive language that threatens someone's face is deeply discouraged, and strategies are employed to mitigate face loss in conflict situations.

The Chinese communicative culture places a premium on politeness and respect, which are reflected in linguistic choices, such as the use of honorifics and formal address forms, even in confrontational scenarios.

Aggressive behavior is expressed through various communicative models and strategies. Individuals may employ indirect expressions to convey criticism or dissatisfaction, utilizing euphemisms, nonverbal cues, and implicit language. Veiled critique is a common strategy that allows individuals to criticize or disagree with subtlety, using language that requires careful interpretation. Humor and sarcasm can be used to critique or ridicule others indirectly, often with a touch of humor to soften the blow. After a confrontational interaction, individuals may employ strategies of apology and redress to restore harmony and mend relationships.

Regarding the Western communicative culture, it encompasses diverse societies with varying norms and practices, significantly influencing the expression of aggressive behavior.

Western cultures often prioritize individualism, personal autonomy, and assertive expression, leading to more direct and explicit forms of aggression. The freedom of speech, a fundamental right in many Western societies, fosters open and confrontational communication styles, where individuals may express opinions and disagreements with fewer constraints. Open disagreement and debate are generally tolerated in the Western communicative culture, where confrontational language serves as a means to express differing viewpoints.

The encouragement of competitiveness and assertiveness within Western societies can lead individuals to use confrontational language to assert dominance or competitiveness.

Aggressive behavior within this culture is conveyed through various speech models and strategies, including direct confrontation with explicit and unequivocal language to communicate disagreement. Criticism and blame are frequently employed to express dissatisfaction or disagreement, often featuring harsh and accusatory language. Derogatory remarks and personal insults are not uncommon in Western communicative culture, particularly during conflicts. Sarcasm and irony are common tools for conveying criticism or ridicule indirectly, often with humor and subtlety.

Verbal aggression encompasses insults, offensive language, and personal attacks as means of expressing disagreement or hostility.

The Belarusian communicative culture is deeply rooted in a rich history and a unique blend of Eastern Slavic and Western influences. Several cultural factors influence the expression of aggressive behavior.

Belarusian society often values collectivism and indirect communication, which can result in the avoidance of direct confrontations and more subtle expressions of aggression. Belarusian history of political and social complexities has contributed to a culture that values stability, order, and social harmony. Aggressive language that disrupts these norms is often discouraged. The Belarusian communicative culture emphasizes politeness and respect in interactions, with individuals using formal address forms and courteous language even when expressing disagreement.

Aggressive behavior within the Belarusian communicative culture is expressed through various speech models and strategies. Belarusians often employ veiled critique as a strategy for expressing dissatisfaction or disagreement without causing direct offense. This involves using subtle language and innuendos. Passive-aggressive behavior is characterized by indirect expressions of aggression, such as sarcasm, humor, and mockery, often with a touch of ambiguity. Metaphors and allegories drawn from Belarus's historical and political context are frequently used to convey criticism or dissent without overtly stating it.

The preservation of social harmony is a significant goal in Belarusian communicative culture, and individuals may employ linguistic strategies to avoid upsetting this balance.

The results of the comparative analysis show that Belarus, China, and Western countries each possess unique cultural influences that shape the expression of verbal aggression.

Belarus values social harmony, collectivism, and indirect communication, which lead to subtle expressions of aggression. The country's historical and political context impacts the culture's emphasis on stability and order.

Chinese culture prioritizes harmony, face preservation, and indirect approaches in conflicts. Politeness and respect are significant, even during confrontational interactions.

Western societies, characterized by individualism and directness, often embrace straightforward and confrontational communication. The value of freedom of speech encourages open expression of aggressive behavior.

Aggressive behavior within the Belarusian, Chinese, and Western communicative cultures is expressed through various speech models and strategies.

Belarusians often employ veiled critique to express disagreement subtly, using subtle language and innuendos. Passive-aggressive behavior

is characterized by indirect expressions of aggression, such as sarcasm, humor, and mockery.

Chinese individuals may employ indirect expressions, euphemisms, and nonverbal cues to communicate criticism or disagreement. Despite disagreement, individuals often use polite language and honorifics to maintain respect and face preservation.

Western communicative cultures frequently involve direct confrontation, employing explicit language to assert viewpoints and challenge others. Criticism and blame are common strategies for expressing dissatisfaction or disagreement, often involving harsh and accusatory language. Sarcasm and mockery may be used to criticize or ridicule others, often with a touch of humor to mitigate the impact.

This comparative analysis of speech models and strategies of aggressive behavior in Belarusian, Chinese, and Western communicative cultures reveals the intricate interplay of cultural, psychological, and linguistic factors that influence the expression and management of aggression. Understanding these dynamics is essential for effective cross-cultural communication and conflict resolution. By recognizing the unique cultural contexts in which aggression is expressed and managed, individuals and societies can work toward more constructive and harmonious interactions in an increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

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