

From Euphemism to Verbal Aggression in British and Armenian Cultures: A Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Perspective

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Abstract

The topic of the present article concerns verbal aggression and focusses on the verbal expression of the emotional mind; specifically, the expression of negative feelings, emotions and attitudes. Since computer-mediated communication is widely used to shape and reshape public opinion, the analysis of hate speech on the material of internet discourse may shed light on the manipulative communicative tactics that are used in online media and social networking sites to spread hostility and negativity globally. Hence, the examination of the language strategies and tactics that are used to formulate hate speech becomes essential in communicatively oriented linguistic studies.

The present article provides a comparative analysis of manifestations of hate speech and euphemisms in Armenian and British online media outlets and social sites targeted towards people's sexual orientation. The aim of the paper is to show the close connection between hate speech and culture. The research, which embarks on two basically different cultures – British and Armenian – is carried out within the framework of cross-cultural pragmatics and discourse analysis. A qualitative research method is applied to analyse samples of hate speech. Social sites and online media outlets were searched through search engines, using certain keywords (LGBT, sexual minorities, etc.). For the purpose of the study, language resources from English and Armenian – words, expressions, constructions, speech acts expressing hostile attitudes towards sexual orientation – have been picked out and analysed.

Introduction

Communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is established to express what language users think and feel. Since people are social creatures, the expression of the human mind, both rational and emotional, is done through the prism of socialising. Language use undoubtedly reflects certain social norms and values established moral codes and conventions, and it undergoes certain changes when these general standards get modified in the course of time.

Aiming to show the close connection between hate speech and culture, the present paper studies the differences in the communicative strategies used to express hate speech. The research embarks on two basically different cultures – British and Armenian – by comparing Armenian texts from Armenia with English texts from Great Britain. In particular, it aims to study how the language strategy of veiling negativity through euphemistic expressions is being replaced by overt expressions of hostile attitudes and negative feelings in British and Armenian cultures. The analysis is based on the assumption that as a result of certain worldwide geopolitical, cultural and technological transformations in the social life of the human community, the negative emotional mind is becoming more and more active, exteriorising a great deal of criticism, hatefulness, malice and aversion overtly via speech (Fink, 1968).

The theoretical framework of the present research is based on the foundations of discourse analysis where contextual study of language data is carried out from a pragmatic perspective (Dijk, 1981; Herring et al., 2013; Leech, 1983; Verschueren, 1999; Yus, 2011). Discourse is treated as a coherent and cohesive sequence of utterances where speaker-utterance and interpreter-utterance relationships are more important than the relationship of one utterance to another (Brown & Yule, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994; Widdowson, 2004). Hate speech is seen as a kind of conflict talk where the emotional mind shapes the communicative context and contributes to the verbalisation of the speakers' negative emotions (Kakava, 2003; Paronyan, 2009; Paronyan & Bekaryan, 2013; Paronyan & Rostomyan, 2011).

To collect language data, social sites as well as several Armenian and British online periodicals were selected for monitoring. The sources have been selected considering the prevalence (dissemination) among readers or viewers, as well as the incidence of hate speech in media outlets. The cases of hate speech were classified by sources, authors or comments. The following criteria have been taken into account: the presence of hate speech, the attitude of the comments towards that phrase (criticism, consent or neutral), the author of the hate speech (journalist, politician/state official, scientist/expert, NGO representative/public figure, international/foreign organisation representative, etc.) and the source of the information containing hate speech. Furthermore, according to the degree of gravity, they were classified into three groups: actual hate speech, hedged hate speech and euphemistic hate speech. The social sites as well as online periodicals were searched through search engines, using certain keywords. Several Armenian and English social sites (Facebook and Twitter) and online periodicals (the following newspaper websites: 168.am, aravot.am, hrparak.am, theguardian.com, stonewall.org and stonewallscotland.org) were selected for monitoring.

Language as a Means of Expressing Emotional Attitude

Conveying one's feelings via communication is one of the purposes of language. In traditional linguistics, the analysis of the functions of language, or communication functions, is largely based on R. Jakobson's six-part model, with emotive function being part of it (Jakobson, 1960). This function, which is also called an 'expressive function' (Leech, 1974), is used to convey data about the speakers' inner state, to express their feelings and attitudes. In fact, the main motivation for a person to use the symbolic system of language is the need to convey meaningful information. The conveyance of the speakers' feelings is usually done in addition to the informative message. With the development of discourse analysis, when the factor of the language user and interpreter became important, the interactional and

transactional views of language use were indicated (Brown & Yule, 1983). Hence, the process of communication embraces not only the conveyance of factual data, but also some socially important information. The view of language as a mental ability that expresses the cognitive and emotive mind of the speakers has already been discussed (Heritage, 2005; Paronyan & Rostomyan, 2011; Verschueren, 1999).

The emotional world of human beings, which is expressed in the process of communication, comprises two opposite feelings: positive and negative. The present study focuses on the verbalisation of negative emotions, which often arise from the speakers' negative personal stance. They result in a specific form of verbal interaction, which has certain forms of realisation, such as quarrels, argumentations, rows, etc. (Paronyan & Bekaryan, 2013). With the accumulation of negative emotions and the exteriorisation of negativity publicly via the internet, a new type of conflict talk has recently been formed, known as hate speech. The most precise definition of hate speech can be found in the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, where it is specified as 'public speech that expresses hate or encourages violence towards a person or group based on something such as race, religion, sex, or sexual orientation (the fact of being gay, etc.)'.

The interrelation between conflict and speech, the expression of hatred via social interaction, has appeared in social studies because hate speech involves the expression of a negative attitude towards a group of people based on their social characteristics (Fink, 1968; Grimshaw, 1990; Henry & Tator, 2002). With language being an essential tool of social activity, it has become necessary to explore this type of verbal interaction also from the linguistic perspective.

Communicative Strategies of Veiling Emotional Attitudes

Acknowledging the fact that language is a kind of tool for humans to socialise with one another, it should also be stated that the human mind, which has the abilities of abstract thinking and creating an imaginary reality, tends to 'hide' part of communicative meaning. Thus, a great portion of mutually-known background knowledge, that is, information that can be understood or inferred without making it explicit, as well as factual information that can be deduced from the linguistic and situational context, remains unsaid. This part of communication is usually omitted for the sake of precision and economy of time (in the case of oral communication) and space (in the case of written communication). The same communicative tactics, hiding some part of meaning/content, can be said in the case of conveying emotive information – expressing the speaker's positive or negative attitude in the process of communication. Anyhow, in this case, the motives of the speakers are quite different, and we cannot speak about the intentional ellipsis of language units that can be reconstructed in the reader's/listener's mind, or the omission of some meaningful information that is apparent in a particular speech event. Instead, we can speak about the deliberate and conscious forging of some private, individual information to veil the emotions of the speaker. The motives in doing so can be personal, situational or socio-cultural (e.g., to escape personal or social conflict, disguise one's real feelings, manipulate the public opinion, be polite and so on). Interestingly, veiling positive emotions is rarely done, which can be explained by the social need of mankind to experience themselves in a friendly and amiable communicative environment.

Meanwhile, the case of conveying negative emotions is different. Traditionally, different communicative strategies of veiling negativity are used in speech. For example, the strategy of mild or soft wording, such as euphemistic speech, can be mentioned, which is the tendency to replace words having a strong negative meaning or connotation with weaker ones, rewording the negative attitude by using stylistically and emotionally more neutral words and expressions. Another example of a communicative strategy that aims at minimising the negative effect of speech can be rambling speech; that is, tending to use a digressive manner of language, expressing the speaker's feelings in a roundabout way by hinting or implying

something. It is also worth mentioning the politeness strategy; that is, minimising the negative effect of the illocutionary force by using indirect speech acts (Galperin, 1975; Gomes, 2009; Paronyan, 2012; Yule, 1996). As we can see, all these communicative strategies are aimed at veiling the negative impact of communication and avoiding contradictory interactions. These strategies are mainly socio-cultural since they are motivated by extralinguistic factors – the need to be polite, to be socially and culturally accepted, to hide one's hostile attitude, to meet the needs of public opinion and so on.

Conflict Talk and Hate Speech

Negativity in general – for instance, venomous social attitudes, hostile feelings and emotions, words and expressions having opposing and antagonistic meanings or connotations, speech acts having a critical element in the illocutionary force content – has already been discussed from different standpoints in linguistics and specifically in axiology, lexicology, grammar, stylistics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and so on. Studying the expression of antagonistic attitudes via language behaviour, we have to admit that modern communication technologies and means of communication make it possible for the spread of the negative impulses of the human mind at a quicker rate so that the offensive, prejudiced and derogatory content becomes easily publicised. This can be proved by the fact that recently, new terms naming the expression of verbal aggression, especially that unleashed via the internet, have been coined, such as trolling, flaming, cyber-bullying and hate speech.

On the one hand, the tendency to see the bad side of the existing reality – negativity and pessimism – has always existed in the human mind. On the other hand, in the recent past, ways and forms of expressing hateful, unfavourable or threatening attitudes have undoubtedly been controlled by certain social norms, especially those that have required considering the faces of the interlocutor and avoiding apparent verbal actions.

With the creation of technological societies, where electronically mediated communication overcomes physical and spatial barriers, the paradigm of speakers, the social context of interaction and the language culture of message input changes, enabling interlocutors to express their opinions more openly, without caring for each other. The interlocutors of social networking sites, for example, who send messages to unknown interlocutors, fail to meet the etiquette of civil interaction, the so-called netiquette, which requires saving the face of the interlocutor. The result is conflict talk; that is, communication during which speakers express their counteractive verbal behaviour openly, without using any communicative strategies to veil their negative emotions.

The following types of conflict talk in electronically mediated communication can be mentioned: flaming – hostile expression of emotions; trolling – harassing or causing offence; cyber-bullying – pestering and intimidating. As we have already stated, the present article focuses on one type of conflict talk: hate speech. The latter can be described as abusive or threatening speech or writing expressing prejudice against a particular cultural group. Hate speech is not a specific type of electronically mediated communication; it appears in different types of communication media, such as newspapers, television, radio, printed matter and social media (Cortese, 2006; Gagliardone, 2015; De Smedt et al., 2018). It should be admitted that hate speech is especially of common use in social networking sites, where it is more hard-hitting and inflammatory, tends to excite anger, disorder or the senses of the internet media community. This fact, as we have already stated above, can be explained by the contextual characteristic factors of the online platform, where the message has a loose addressee and the communicative target is often unknown.

Hate Speech and the LGBT Community in Britain and Armenia

The content of the present cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of hate speech is restricted to the expression of verbal aggression on the account of sexual orientation. Conducting hot

disputes about the private and public life events of LGBT community members (e.g., the organisation of public events like gay parades, publicising LGBT celebrities, opening public places like bars and clubs) and discussing the laws and legislative acts that regulate their relationship within the rest of the community are examples of issues that give rise to different feedback and comments in the British and Armenian public, varying from reserved, tolerant comments using euphemistic speech, to angry and hysterical outcries expressing explicit verbal abuse.

Armenia itself is a small monoethnic and monocultural country, where around 97–99% of the population are Armenians. As a result of fighting for survival for centuries, they have become mostly intolerant to diversity and display a xenophobic attitude to foreign influences and ways of life. Problems like language and identity, religion and national identity, preserving social norms and values and moral norms are of great importance for Armenians (Soghomonyan, 2013). As it is, even the smallest question that concerns the LGBT community is mostly seen as a threat to the Armenian national identity and arouses huge public denial. One of the recent examples of discriminatory public behaviour in Armenia was the xenophobic outburst against the decision of the Ministry of Culture of Armenia to fund a film about the life of transgender weightlifter Mel Daluzyan, formerly Meline Daluzyan.

The recent attempts of the Republic of Armenia, as an independent country, to integrate into the EU and the European community naturally implies the adoption of certain European values, such as denial of discrimination. Since the Velvet Revolution in April 2018, the newly formed government has been trying to reduce tensions among different groups of society based on discrimination. As a result, the question of tolerating diversity in sexual orientation is being politicised by the former ruling circles and political parties who, being in opposition, are trying to accuse the present government of encouraging deviant sexual orientation practices and their representatives. This manipulative tactic is used to arouse hate speech in two directions – towards sexual-orientation minorities and towards the newly formed, progressively oriented and open-minded government.

The situation is different in Great Britain, where the multicultural community and the government are tolerant towards the LGBT community and, therefore, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is not encouraged.

Cross-Cultural Pragmatic Analysis of Hate Speech in the Armenian and English Languages

Before proceeding to the analysis of hate speech, we think it is necessary to categorise it into language units that have different degrees of gravity. In the present study, the examples of verbal aggression that contain incitement to hostility, discrimination or violence towards certain groups and can be considered a criminal offence¹ by their abusive, insulting or harassing nature are referred to as 'actual hate speech'. Those which can be considered harassment, even though they do not contain direct incitement of violence, discrimination or hostility, are referred to as 'hedged hate speech'. Finally, the examples that implicitly promote intolerance are referred to as 'euphemistic hate speech'. Our hypothesis is that the degree of gravity of verbal aggression depends to a great extent on the context of the situation (a parliamentary or official speech, online media, social sites, etc.) and on the socio-cultural parameters of the speakers (social status, national identity).

Our study of the expressions of verbal aggression will be carried out from two communicative perspectives. First, the content of the public speech of the speakers will be evaluated as communication that incites their audience to hostility, discrimination or violence. The social

1 <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/hate>
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/1/contents>
<https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2019/08/14/Justice-Ministry-hate-speech/2153118>

status of the speakers, their authority or the possible persuasive impact of the speech on the audience will be taken into consideration. For example, the speech of a politician, a political party leader, a public official or any other person who can have a lower status target audience (e.g., a boss, a teacher or a religious preacher) may exert a strong influence over the audience. Meanwhile, the aggressive speech of common or ordinary people in the community may be less influential.

Second, the response of the target audience will be analysed. These are the readers and/or listeners to whom the speakers addressed the speech to, and as a result incited them to give hostile feedback or express a negative stance. The analysis done from this perspective will enable us to reveal the degree of vulnerability of the target audience, i.e. to what extent the speaker can incite others to express hostility, discrimination and violence towards a specific group of people.

Hate speech, like any other form of language, has a cultural mindset at its background and, therefore, it may have both similar and distinct realisations in different languages. Expression of hatred, hostility and xenophobic attitudes depends on the core cultural values and traditions of a national group as well as on the cultural-value orientations, like cultural dimensions, as proposed by G. Hofstede, E. Hall, Lewis and many others (Hall, 1989; Hofstede, 2010; Lewis, 2006). This means that the expression of verbal aggression, even on the same issue, may be different, depending on how challenging that particular issue is interpreted by the members of this or that community. Hence, we assume that the attitude of the Armenian and British communities concerning the group of people called LGBT (at present, this acronym has extended its content to include 'intersex' as well, and is often used as LGBTI) is different. To prove this assumption, let us examine cases of hate speech in Armenian and British cultures separately. The examples will be arranged according to the social status and communicative role of the speaker and according to the gravity of the expression of verbal aggression. We shall examine samples of hate speech in the Armenian context first.

The following Armenian online periodicals were selected for monitoring: the newspaper websites 168.am, aravot.am and hraparak.am. As we have already stated, Armenia is known to be a monoethnic country where collectivistic cultural value orientations are dominant. Most Armenians are pessimistic about changes in lifestyle, they tend to preserve their language, culture and traditions and they mostly keep close ties with extended families. They are eager to retain the traditional hierarchical family structure and ascribe social roles for family members according to their sex and age. Hence, they see the social roles in LGBT families as the biggest threat to traditional Armenian family values. Let us examine the following examples. Phrases of hate speech have been bolded. The first one is taken from the speech delivered during an Armenian Parliament Session:

- 1) Yes, the economic, political monopoly is a threat to our statehood and national security, yes, we have non-secure borders, but in my deepest conviction **the biggest threat for us is the possible ruin to our traditional family...** But there is **one revolution**, Mr. Pashinyan (the prime minister), where **I personally see danger**; that is **the revolution in the manners of our traditional family**. I ask once more that we combine our forces and do everything legally and permissibly possible depending on us towards ensuring our families **from that destructive process**. (Gevorg Petrosyan, MP of the Prosperous Armenia Party)²

2 Available in Armenian at <https://168.am/2018/10/24/1030671.html> («Այո, մեր պետականության և ազգային անվտանգության համար սպառնալիք է տնտեսական, քաղաքական մենաշնորհը, այո, մենք ունենք ոչ անվտանգ սահմաններ, բայց իմ խորին համոզմամբ՝ մեզ համար ամենամեծ սպառնալիքը մեր ավանդական ընտանիքի հավանական խոյահարումն է: Ես էլ եմ ողջունում հեղափոխությունը, որը դեռ ավարտված չէ, ցանկացած հեղափոխության մեջ մարդիկ փնտրում են ավելի լավը, քան կա: Բայց կա մի հեղափոխություն, հարգելի պարոն Փաշինյան, որի մեջ անձամբ ես վտանգ եմ տեսնում, դա հեղափոխությունն է մեր ավանդական ընտանիքների բարքերում: Նորից եմ խնդրում, որ բոլորս համատեղենք մեր ուժերը և

- 2) Concerning the issue of sexual minorities, we often see that **our national traditions have another nature**, which is **not in harmony with the traditions of sexual minorities**; consequently, they must adapt to our national traditions. I am **strongly against such artificial equalities**. This is not equality; this is a **severe conflict of interests**. There are interests of children and parents. If we legalise the marriage of homosexuals, we violate the rights of children.
(Gevorg Danielyan, member of the Professional Committee on Constitutional Amendments connected to the president of the Republic of Armenia)³

In these examples, where the speakers have a high social status and possibility of influence, several cases of verbal aggression can be traced. The speakers obviously interpret the deviations from traditional sexual orientation negatively: *'the biggest threat for us is the possible ruin to our traditional family, that destructive process'*, *'the revolution in the manners of our traditional family'*, *'I personally see danger'*, *'national traditions...not in harmony with the traditions of sexual minorities'* and *'strongly against'*.

Further, their speech, which is under the restrictions of the social context and the status of a parliamentary speaker, contains mainly veiled forms of hate-speech language units. Thus, the speakers address the problem of 'sexual minorities' and 'homosexuals' without attributive adjectives that may create figures of speech. Instead, they describe their harmful effects by using expressions that have negative connotations, such as *'biggest threat'*, *'possible ruin'*, *'destructive process'*, *'danger'*, *'severe conflict of interests'* and *'artificial equalities'*. This is obviously a manifestation of hedged hate speech. Furthermore, the political figures also use euphemistic hate speech; thus, when they have to name the object of hate speech, they avoid doing so by replacing it with deictic markers and paraphrasing expressions, such as *'that'*, *'another'*, *'such kind of'*, *'one revolution'* and *'the revolution in the manners of our traditional family'*.

We have to admit that the examples above cannot be considered a direct call for discrimination or violence. Nonetheless, in a community where the authority of the speakers and their influence over the audience are high, their speech may deepen homophobic attitudes. They can incite common members of the community to hostility and worsen discriminatory practices. As such, the magnitude of the masked call in the first example, which was also published in a prominent Armenian online magazine (168.am), was so high that it evoked a great wave of angry comments from the readers and, consequently, the International LGBT Christian Forum, scheduled to take place in Armenia in 2018, was cancelled.

Being in constant threat from neighbouring countries like Turkey and Azerbaijan, Armenians have developed a specific sensitivity to certain cultural values like language and religion. Faith (Armenia is considered to be the first country to establish Christianity as its state religion in 301 AD) is the cornerstone of Armenian identity. Having been massacred throughout their history because of being Christian and having suffered the most atrocious genocide in 1915, Armenians see diversity in sexual orientation as a threat to Christian values, the Armenian Apostolic Church and national identity. Let us examine some examples of hate speech in which the LGBT community is seen as a threat to Christian values in general, and Armenian Christian values in particular:

Իրականացնենք մեզանից կախված ամեն օրինական և թույլատրելի հնարավորը՝ մեր ընտանիքներն այդ պետականակործան գործընթացից ապահովագրելու ուղղությամբ»)

3 Available in Armenian at <https://www.aravot.am/2014/07/10/478774/> (Ինչ վերաբերում է սեռական փոքրամասնությունների հետ կապված խնդրին, ապա մենք հաճախ տեսնում ենք՝ մեր ազգային ավանդույթները այլ բնույթ ունեն, դրանք համահունչ չեն սեռական փոքրամասնությունների ավանդույթների հետ, հետևաբար, պետք է հաշվի նստեն մեր ազգային ավանդույթների հետ: Կտրականապես դեմ եմ այդ բնույթի ձևական հավասարություններին: Սա հավասարություն չէ, այլ շահերի լուրջ բախում: Գոյություն ունեն երեխաների և ծնողների շահեր: Եթե համասեռամուլների ամուսնության իրավունքն ենք օրինականացնում՝ երեխաների շահերն ենք ոտնահարում:)

- 1) I take very seriously that we are representatives of Christian civilisation, and I deeply believe that **Sodom sins are very serious sins**. I am a normal woman. I consider the '**homo-addicted**' man to be a **woman's enemy**. **I can't accept them by my instinct**. (Alvard Petrosyan, Armenian Revolutionary Federation Party MP)⁴
- 2) **Let all the Conchitas⁵ go to hell**. (Hayk Baboukhanyan, MP)⁶
- 3) I will do anything possible in order **to prohibit** the **spread of metastases** in Armenia. I say this openly and publicly. Unlike many of my colleagues, I do not suggest that **they [LGBT people] should be burned over a fire or marginalised from society**, but I directly accept that as long as our society remains free of **such perversion**, we will be able to preserve our nation's moral and ethical character. For me, all of **that is absolutely unacceptable**. I know that there is a natural law, the law of God, commandments, and the class that will go against the commandments of God **will receive God's punishment**. Yes, perhaps among **them** there is **a class that is genetically sick, another class that has mental deviation**, but we should not give **them** tribute. (Naira Zohrabyan, Prosperous Armenia Party MP)⁷

In these examples, LGBT people are seen as sinners who go against the natural law, the law of God, and God's commandments. It is noteworthy that in the context of religious topics, the aggressive tones in the speeches of the MP during parliamentary sessions is stronger, and the following examples of actual hate speech can be indicated: '*homo-addicted man*', '*woman's enemy*', '*I can't accept them*', '*let all the Conchitas go to hell*', '*in order to prohibit*', '*they [LGBT people] should be burned over a fire or marginalised from society*' and '*absolutely unacceptable*'. As we can see, the comments are full of actual hate-speech language units with aggressive and insulting expressions, words that contain negative denotational and connotational meaning. They contain speech acts like statements, suggestions, blamings and complaints by which the speakers intend to impart criticism on the illocutionary level and irritation on the perlocutionary level. Admittedly, these actual hate-speech language units are more or less restrained in the context of formal speech and do not contain direct incitement to violence. Anyhow, they do express a call to action: banning the phenomenon of sexual deviation through legislative acts and official impeachment. This is seen as a God-pleasing action that will prevent Armenians from sins and preserve their national identity.

In the stretches of talk presented above, examples of hedged hate speech as well as euphemistic hate speech can be found. The speakers express denunciation publicly without making the target explicit. The expressions '*will receive God's punishment*', '*genetically sick*' and '*mental deviation*', which refer to members of the LGBT community indirectly, obviously contain elements of hostile stances and should be considered manifestations of hedged hate speech. The language units that illustrate examples of euphemistic hate speech are the pronouns '*such*' (*such perversion*), '*that*' (*that is absolutely unacceptable*) and '*them*' (*among them; give them tribute*). A special pragmasylistic effect can be ascribed to the speech act of condemnation: '*Sodom sins are very serious sins*', where the euphemistic reformulation of hateful speech is performed via allusion to the Bible.

Needless to say, the speech of these MPs and other public officials creates public opinion, as their authority or influence over the audience is great in a high power-distance cultural community like Armenia. Besides, the comments are published in prominent Armenian online

4 Available in Armenian at <https://www.aravot.am/2004/10/02/803340/> (Շատ լուրջ եմ վերաբերվում, որ մենք քրիստոնեական քաղաքակրթության ներկայացուցիչներ ենք, եւ խորապէս հավատում եմ, որ սոդոմական մեղքերը շատ լուրջ մեղքեր են: Ես նորմալ կիւն եմ. ես համարում եմ՝ արվամուլ տղամարդը կանանց թշնամիւն է, ես բնագրով չեմ կարող նրանց ընդունել:)

5 See in <https://en.wikipedia.org> Thomas Neuwirth is an Austrian singer and drag queen who is known for his stage persona Conchita Wurst (also known mononymously as Conchita)

6 Available in Armenian at: <https://hraparak.am/post/591facc7e3d84d0d37fd3baf> (Թող գրողի ծոցն անցնեն բոլոր կոնչիտաները:)

7 Available in Armenian at <http://goo.gl/xwRS0I> on YouTube.

magazines (aravot.am, hrparak.am) and YouTube. All this adds to the magnitude of expressions, thus inciting others to hostility or violence and deepening homophobic attitudes and discriminatory practices.

Let us proceed to the study of hate-speech display on social networking sites. These examples present comments from the general public, common Facebook users, who read some material from social media and comment on it. The personal identity of Facebook users is distinctive. While some users present their social status, position, job and so on, others present their names only. Facebook users may also use different pictures to present their 'face' on the screen, which may be their personal as well as invented pictures.

Moreover, the other end of the message, the receiver, is also unknown and unpredictable. This communicative situation leaves great space for the free expression of aggression, without feeling any restraint and responsibility for one's words. Thus, on the one hand, it is difficult to say whether this public outburst of negativity will have a persuasive impact on the audience or not. On the other hand, we cannot but agree that the explicit expression of violence and the incitement to hostility and discrimination may create public opinion.

Our analysis proves that even on Facebook, if the social status or position of the users is available, they tend to use more hedged than actual hate-speech language units. To prove this, let us analyse the speech of a Facebook user:⁸

In the National Assembly, a **transgender** spoke. **As long as they exist, our dream homeland will not exist.** Who brought him to the National Assembly, who let him speak, what was the purpose of **the action** really? Well, the purpose is clear: another attempt to discredit the Prime Minister and the new government. Why did **this** happen, and what did **this** transgender reveal? WHO is a **transgender**? A man who seems to have one sex but is actually different and does it to satisfy his or her own pleasure. An official who should serve the people, but is actually robbing, a doctor who should cure but is actually killing for money, a President who should protect his people, but is actually leaving them to be robbed and killed, the General who is empowering the army, a robbing judge, a police officer, a prosecutor who is about to do justice but sows injustice and impunity, the clergyman who instead of serving God has turned the house of God into a business – **these are all transgenders.** Because they have to do something, and they actually do the opposite, just like transgenders, who are physically men, but they are actually women.

In this example, the use of the word '*transgender*' reveals the speaker's negative attitude, who wants to highlight the person's sexual orientation to show that deviation from traditional orientation is a threat to Armenia: '*As long as they exist, our dream homeland will not exist.*' According to him, the appearance of the transgender in the National Assembly discredits the Prime Minister and the new government of Armenia. The Facebook user expresses his obvious hatred towards LGBT people by attributing the word '*transgender*', which has become an

⁸ The internet link to the Facebook quotation is not provided due to ethical matters. («Աժ ում ելույթ ունեցավ տրանսգենդերը: Քանի դրանք կան կառավարման համակարգում, չի լինի մեր երագած Հայրենիքը: Ո՞վ բերեց նրան Աժ, ո՞վ թողեց խոսա, ի՞նչն էր իրականում ակցիայի նպատակը: Դե նպատակը պարզ է. Վարչապետին և նոր իշխանությանը վարկաբեկելու հերթական փորձ: Ի՞նչու դա տեղի ունեցավ և ինչ էր բացահայտում այդ տրանսգենդերը: Ո՞վ է տրանսգենդերը մարդ, որը առերևույթ ունի մի սեռ, բայց իրականում այլ է և դա անում է իր անասնական հաճույքը բավարարելու համար: Պաշտոնյան, ով առերևույթ պիտի ծառայի ժողովրդին, բայց իրականում թալանում է, բռնիքով որ պիտի բռնի, բայց փողի համար սպանում է, Նախագահը որ պիտի պաշտպանի իր ժողովրդին, բայց թողնում է որ թալանեն և սպանեն, ՊՆ Նախարարը, Գլխավոր Շտաբի պետը, գեներալը ով բանակը հզորացնելու փոխարեն, թալանել է, դատավորը, ռատիկանը, դատախազը ովքեր պետք է արդարադատություն իրականացնեն, բայց անարդարություն և անպատժելիություն են սերմանում, հոգևորականը որ Աստծուն և մարդուն ծառայելու փոխարեն Աստծո տունը բիզնեսի է վերածել սրանք բոլորը տրանսգենդերներ են: Քանի որ նրանք պետք է ինչ-որ բան անեն, բայց իրականում անում են հակառակը, ճիշտ այնպես, ինչպես տրանսգենդերները, ովքեր ֆիզիկապես տղամարդ են, բայց իրականում կին»):

offensive word itself in this context and has gained a negative connotation, to a doctor who is killing for money, to a general who is empowering the army, to a robbing judge, etc. The speaker addresses the problem of transgenders using expressions that have negative connotations, such as *'killing'*, *'robbing'*, as well as figures of speech, such as *'to sow injustice and impunity'*, *'turn the house of God into a business'*, etc. The analysis of the example shows that the speaker uses mainly veiled forms of hostility, which is obviously a manifestation of hedged hate speech and does not contain direct incitement to violence. Cases of euphemistic hate speech, the use of deictic markers and expressions such as *'they'*, *'this (this transgender)'* and *'these (these are all transgenders)'* can also be observed, which express the speaker's silent but extremely disrespectful attitude towards the social group under question.

Even if we admit that the wording of this Facebook post does not contain a direct call for discrimination or violence, the feedback of the readers, that is, the comments of the Facebook community, is quite unpredictable. Especially when a Facebook post is being reposted and shared and reaches an infinite socio-cultural variety of Facebook users, its influential power can never be predicted. In most cases, the use of metaphoric comparisons, euphemistic sarcasm and other stylistic devices that make the speech impressive deepen the homophobic attitudes of the target readers and incite many of them to hostility. The following comments posted on Facebook prove that, in reality, the piece of neutral and moderate hate speech was influential and evoked a great wave of angry comments from other Facebook users⁹:

- 1) **Burn the degenerates** of our nation; they are **evil** for our nation...
- 2) Now any **wicked creature** will come up, and get on our nerves, until when? Azerbaijan is preparing for war, and you are promoting the rights of **the perverted. Deplorable situation.**
- 3) Whoever defends **them**, let them **take them out of Armenia** and go to **Gayeurope.**
- 4) What **these animals** (I cannot call **them** otherwise) do is beyond God's laws. And our country is a Christian country and they **should be thrown out of our holy land.**
- 5) **Gays, whores, mutants**, do **you have a right to breathe?**
- 6) You need to **be burnt** and **we will burn you**, along with those who tolerate you...

As is shown, the comments contain more severe expressions of actual hate speech, which serves as proof that hate speech generates anger, homophobia, discrimination and hatred in society. The comments are full of actual hate-speech language units with aggressive and insulting expressions, words that contain negative denotational and connotational meaning: *'burn'*, *'evil'*, *'degenerates'*, *'wicked creature'*, *'animals'*, *'perverted'*, *'deplorable situation'*, *'Gayeurope'* (coinage from the words *'Gay'* and *'Europe'*), *'should be thrown out'*, *'gays'*, *'whores'*, *'mutants'* and *'have no right to breathe'*. They contain speech acts, like statements: *'Now any wicked creature will come up'* and *'deplorable situation'*; suggestions: *'they should be thrown out of our holy land'* and *'let them take them out of Armenia and go to Gayeurope'*; blamings: *'do you have a right to breathe?'*; calls for action: *'You need to be burnt and we will burn you'*; insulting expressions: *'Gays'*, *'whores'* and *'mutants'*, as well as euphemistic hate speech expressed by deictic pronouns: *'them'*, *'you'* and *'these'*.

By all these, the speakers intend to impart criticism on the illocutionary level and irritation on the perlocutionary one. As we can guess, the social status of the comment writers is not

⁹ The internet links to the Facebook quotations are not provided due to ethical matters. (1. ՎԱՌԵԼ ԱԶԳԻ ՎԻԺՎԱՏՔՆԵՐԻՆ ԴՐԱՆՔ ՉԱՐԻՔ ԵՆ ԱԶԳԻ ՀԱՄԱՐ... 2. Հիմա ինչ ճղճիմ արարած կա կիելնի ու մեր նյարդերը կքայքայի, մինչև երբ: Աղորբեջանը պատերազմի է պատրաստվում, սրանք այլասեռվածների իրավունքներն են առաջ քաշում: Ողբալի իրավիճակ է: 3. Ով դրանց պաշտպանում է, թող նրանց վերցնի ու դուրս կորի Հայաստանից դեպի գեյրոպա: 4. Էն ինչ էս կենդանիները (այլ կերպ չեմ կարող դրանց անվանել) անում են, դա Աստծո օրենքներից դուրս է: Իսկ մեր երկիրը Քրիստոնեական երկիր է և դրանք պետք է դուրս շարտվեն մեր սուրբ հողից: 5. Գեյեր, պոռնիկներ, մուտանտներ, դուք իրավունք ունե՞ք շնչելու: 6. Ձեզ պետք է այրել, և մենք ձեզ կվառենք. ձեզ հետ միասին նաև նրանց, ովքեր հանդուրժում են ձեզ:)

'visible' or apparent and their authority is also doubtful. Moreover, the personality of the comment writer is often unknown to the audience, and they feel free to use non-standard and abusive language and directly incite the members of the community to violence.

Research and reports show that LGBT people are among the most discriminated groups in Armenia. A study conducted by the NGO Pink Armenia, titled 'From prejudice to equality: a study of societal attitudes towards LGBTI people in Armenia', revealed that 95% of respondents expressed homophobic views¹⁰. This high percentage of homophobia has not been without its consequences. There are dozens of reported cases of human-rights violations on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity each year. A vivid example of this was an incident that happened in one of the Armenian villages. In the summer of 2018, nine young people, including LGBT activists, were vacationing in a home in Shurnukh. A group of Shurnukh and Goris residents gathered at the house to attempt to provoke a conflict with the owner of the house. They assaulted the guests with swear words, calling them 'faggots' and demanding that they leave the village. When the young people left the house, the townspeople continued harassing them with swear words and physical attacks, punching and throwing stones at them. The young people attempted to flee to protect themselves. The offenders pursued them, throwing stones at them, punching them and kicking their suitcases. The victims suffered multiple bodily injuries, including a wound to the head, an injured nose, battered legs and chests and battering caused by stones. This proves that hate speech, if not prohibited, can incite acts of violence.

To summarise, it should be mentioned that hate crimes, hate-motivated incidents and human-rights violations on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity in Armenia are of great concern. The presented cases show that hate speech displayed by state officials has not only persisted, but has become widespread over the years. Over these years, Armenia has failed to elaborate legal mechanisms to combat hate speech, while its officials have promoted hate crimes and discrimination. None of these officials have lost their posts as a result of their speech inciting or justifying hate-motivated crimes or discrimination. The state has shown that it has no political will to fight against such dangerous phenomena.

The situation outside of Armenia is quite different. According to the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, discriminatory and prejudicial policies and practices against LGBT people in different parts of the world often reinforce contempt for sexual minorities in society, and as a consequence, LGBT people are frequently targeted by 'hate speech'. This occurs in various contexts, including the media, political debates or counter-demonstrations at public LGBT events such as pride parades. Too often, in these statements, LGBT persons are depicted negatively, for example, as 'unnatural, diseased, deviant, linked to crime, immoral or socially destabilising'¹¹. According to a *Guardian* analysis, homophobic and transphobic hate crimes, including stalking, harassment and violent assault, have more than doubled in England and Wales over five years. The rate of LGBT hate crime per capita rose by 144% between 2013–14 and 2017–18. In the most recent year of data, police recorded 11,600 crimes, more than doubling from 4,600 during this period¹². Let us consider the following examples:

- 1) Someone described their intention to **slit my throat** and **kill** me. They went on to say no court would convict them for **killing 'the queer bait'**. (Ava, 56, London)
- 2) Someone called me a **faggot** on the street. He offered **to replace my cigarette with his genitals**. (Fergus, 22, Scotland)

¹⁰OSCE ODIHR, hate-crime reporting, Armenia, available at <http://hatecrime.osce.org/armenia>

¹¹European Union Fundamental Rights Agency, Homophobia and Discrimination on Grounds of Sexual Orientation in the EU Member States: Part II – The Social Situation, 31 March 2009, p. 11.

¹² <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/jun/07/two-women-left-bloodied-in-homophobic-attack-on-london-bus>

- 3) I was verbally assaulted, called a '**tranny**', '**shim**', '**he/she**', '**pussyboy**', groped and had someone try to **yank my binder** outside a nightclub and this all on the same night. (Sean, 23, South West)
- 4) I was called '**gay bastard**' by a priest when visiting my parents' grave. (Daniel, 24, Wales)¹³
- 5) A group of young people started yelling things like '**Oh look at this dyke**', 'You look like a man...wait, is that the point, you **tranny**?' at me as I walked past. (Michael, 23)¹⁴

In the examples above, we detect some slurs and expressions that are used very often as generalisations to refer to LGBT community representatives, like '*tranny*', '*dyke*', '*gay bastard*', '*faggot*', '*shim*', '*pussyboy*', etc., as well as offensive words, like '*toxic*', '*freak*', '*nasty*', '*queer bait*', '*damaged*' and words calling to violent actions, such as '*slit my throat*', '*kill me*' and '*killing the queer bait*'. Of course, these words are rude and have a direct influence on people belonging to this social group. By such insults, people try to show their negative attitude towards the members of this community, which can also be interpreted as loathe or hatred. These are obviously manifestations of actual hate speech.

Besides the stereotypical and lexical markers expressing hatred against the LGBT community, we also see expressions of euphemistic hate speech expressed by deictic markers, such as '*this*' ('*this dyke*'), '*he/she*', '*you*', etc. In the examples above, the negative stance towards LGBT people is expressed implicitly, which is considered to be detrimental to the feeling of self-worth of the members of a minority group. All this can be viewed as a direct call for discrimination or violence, as well as may deepen homophobic attitudes and incite the common members of the community to hostility and violent actions. For example, two women recently needed hospital treatment after they were attacked on a bus in a homophobic assault. *The Guardian* blames a rise in right-wing populism for growing hate crime and has called on people to stand up for each other. Politicians roundly condemned the attack:¹⁵

- 1) This was a **sickening attack**, and my thoughts are with the couple affected. Nobody should ever have to hide who they are or who they love, and we must work together to **eradicate unacceptable violence towards the LGBT community**. (Theresa May)
- 2) We must not, and will not, accept this **homophobic and misogynist violence** in our society. Solidarity to Melania and Chris, and to all in the LGBT+ community for everything they endure for simply being who they are. (Jeremy Corbyn, Labour Party leader)
- 3) **Disgusting, misogynistic attack** to come forward. Hate crimes against the LGBT+ community will not be tolerated in London. (Sadiq Khan, the London Mayor)
- 4) I was appalled to see this kind of homophobic violence in the UK. There's no place for this kind of **vile behaviour** in our society. (Penny Mordaunt, the Women and Equalities Minister)
- 5) Horrified to see this homophobic attack against two women simply trying to enjoy a night out in West Hampstead. There can be no excuses, no space, for such **obscene behaviour**. My full solidarity is with these women and the UK's LGBT community. (Tulip Siddiq, the Labour MP in whose West Hampstead constituency the attack took place; on Twitter)

As we can obviously see from the comments of the politicians, they openly condemn hate crime, seeing it as a threat to their society. They comment on hate crime using expressions

¹³ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_britain_hate_crime.pdf

¹⁴ https://www.stonewallscotland.org.uk/system/files/lgbt_in_scotland_hate_crime_-_web_use.pdf

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/14/homophobic-and-transphobic-hate-crimes-surge-in-england-and-wales>

that contain negative denotational and connotational meanings, such as *'unacceptable violence'*, *'disgusting'*, *'misogynistic attack'*, *'vile behaviour'*, *'obscene behaviour which needs to be eradicated'*, etc. Unlike in Armenia, public officials in the UK openly express their negative opinions against manifestations of hate speech and crime, which should not have a place in their society. Needless to say, the speech of these MPs and other public officials influences public opinion, as their authority or influence over the audience is great. Besides, the comments were published in a prominent British online newspaper (theguardian.com) and Twitter. Hopefully, this will eradicate discrimination and violence, as well as homophobic attitudes towards the LGBT community, and will call the community for combating hatred, racism and xenophobia.

Conclusion

Cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of hate speech proves that due to some semantic-pragmatic features of the online-communication context, with its specific relationship between sender and receiver, the expression of language abuse has changed in terms of politeness and face-saving acts. Thus, languages like Armenian and English, reflecting different cultural values, norms and social codes, express aggressive language behaviour differently.

No doubt, the present analysis of hate speech concerning sexual orientation does not enable us to draw generalised conclusions because of the limitations of the collected data. Still, we suppose that the language resources and communicative strategies that are used to word or reword verbal aggression may be socio-culturally bound. Hence, we may assume that, being more multicultural and open to diversity and otherness, more or less restrained in showing their emotions openly, British people might express their negative attitude towards specific individuals more than groups of people.

Even in this individualistic and tolerant culture, online hate speech is still prevalent and can be easily detected on different platforms. Armenia, which has traditionally, even in Soviet times, been monoethnic, shows less tolerance and more discriminatory behaviour towards otherness. The community sees LGBT people as a threat to Armenian culture, religion and family traditions. Hate speech on Armenian social-networking sites is being politicised by a group of people who try to manipulate public opinion by creating a negative public image of the Velvet Revolution of 2018 in Armenia. Based on the findings of this study, we can state that there are many expressions of hate speech in various Armenian media, and they prevail on social sites as well. The amount of hate and dangerous speech increased sharply in April 2019. The authors of hate speech in the media are mostly politicians and public officials. 'Voxpopuli'¹⁶, public figures, scholars, experts and representatives of international organisations and religious organisations comprise a lower percentage of the sources of hate speech.

The present study has discovered the amount and nature of hate speech and can help Armenian and English media and social sites to significantly reduce or refrain from using it. The study shows that, on the one hand, the media reflect the intolerance that exists in society, and on the other hand, hate is propagated by the mass media and social sites and is transmitted to the public. In any case, the position of the media is important, and they can play a significant role in minimising intolerance and hatred in society. All of this reaffirms the view that the media and journalists, if they are willing and able, can minimise expressions of unnecessary hatred, thereby alleviating intolerance in society.

¹⁶ According to Oxford Dictionary 'Voxpopuli' means the opinions or beliefs of the majority.

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