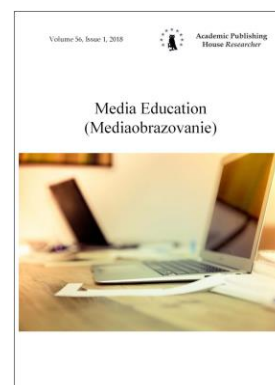




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## Irony vs Invective in Modern Media Communication

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### Abstract

The negative feature of modern public communication and media discourse is invectivization. The problem of language invectivization takes the central place in linguoconflictology, which has become the natural extension and the development of legal linguistics. The pathos of this article is connected with the following statement: it is impossible to avoid the conflict component in many spheres of public communication, but irony can become an alternative to invectives and obscenisms. It will contribute to the cultivation of the Russian communicative space, the harmonization of communication. The use of irony instead of invectives and obscenisms will fill kindness grammar lacunae in the era of sharp changes in communicative conventions. The authors used linguopragmatic and sociolinguistic methods, as well as elements of content analysis of mass communication texts, to investigate the modern public discourse invectivization and prove the advantage of the ironic modality over the invective one. Insult is one of the most widespread verbal offenses. The invective is always violation of ethical and linguistic standards, but it is possible for irony to remain within the limits of normativity. In the modern media space, irony performs a very important social function, acting as an alternative to invective communication, inevitable in the polarized world.

**Keywords:** media communication, legal linguistics, invectives, obscenisms, ethical-speech standard, communication conflict, conflictology, irony.

### 1. Introduction

In recent decades, there has been a great research interest in a new field of Humanities, called linguoconflictology, which has become a natural extension of legal linguistics. Nevertheless, the category of conflict communication is still insufficiently investigated both in theoretical and empirical terms, and methodology for the verbal conflict communication study has not been developed yet. This situation is hardly compatible with the situation of a rapid decline in interpersonal tolerance and a general crisis in speech communication culture (Kulikova et al., 2019). Since communication processes, along with politics and economics, are the most important factors in the regulation of relations between the subjects of society, their study (especially in the aspect of conflictology) is extremely urgent. Only successful communication was the object of traditional linguistic studies before. However, communication failures and speech conflicts held many cognitive things. Speech conflict accumulates a certain socio-cultural state, which means that the study of communication conflicts is significant for the overall characteristics of social life.

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Linguistic conflict is a general term including so-called verbal crimes (defaming, slander, insult), language aggression and language extremism, incorrect strategies and tactics of persuasion (suggestion and manipulative techniques), as well as destructive methods of modern communication, such as trolling, flaming, and so on.

## 2. Materials and methods

The authors used linguopragmatic and sociolinguistic methods, as well as elements of content analysis of mass communication texts, to investigate the modern public discourse invectivization and prove the advantage of the ironic modality over the invective one. Invective is always the ethical and linguistic standards violation, but irony is within the limits of normativity.

## 3. Discussion

Modern linguoconflictology is faced with the task to develop methodological techniques for identifying and calculating all the possible constituents of conflictogenicity, predictive modeling of cognitive structures of conflict communication. According to E.S. Kara-Murza (2014: 55-58), the propaedeutic discipline called linguoconflictology should precede the course of theory and practice of forensic linguistic expertise for students of journalism and law faculties. It is the course of linguoconflictology that should prevent information disputes (Deligiaouri, 2018; Van Duyn, Collier, 2019) in the era of sharp changes in communication conventions. The most obvious negative feature of modern public communication and media discourse is invectivization. "The media language has acquired such "freedom" that not every note can be read aloud" (Alexandrova, Slavkin, 2016: 26). The writer and literary critic, TV host and professor of the Higher School of Economics, A.N. Arkhangel'sky answering the question about the current language situation said that the language was very different in different spheres. In the socio-political sphere, it is disastrous, because it is the language of swearing, aggression, mockery, alienation, violence (*Literary Newspaper*, 18-24.11.2020).

*"When it is necessary, Solovyov looks up at the Sun and never sees any spots on it. Or (and this happens most often) he looks down at the enemies of this Sun, and wets them in full, so monotonously, stupidly and absurdly: "Fool, ineptitude, foreign agent" (Moscow Komsomolets, December 2, 2020).*

In the category "I am perplexed, dear editorial staff!" of *Literary Newspaper* (25.11.-1.12.2020) V. Kirsanova published the material *"Lampoon on the poet. Talk about "ridiculous suspicions" and ignoramuses who trade on great names"*, full of invectives against the authors and hosts of the TV show "A.S. Pushkin. Talk about ridiculous suspicions": *ignorant, immoral and monstrous nonsense*, *"vile lampoon"*, *"talk absurdities"*.

Even the representative of the church and the most famous of the Orthodox preachers Archpriest A. Tkachev allows himself invective in public communication, for example: ... *the main enemy of historical Russia is our television with all its "Field of miracles, which everyone is fed up with* (Father A. Tkachev. "Fashion Verdict" and "Let's get married!" are humiliating shows. *Komsomol Truth*, November 18-25, 2020). And although in fact, A. Tkachev exactly formulated feelings and thoughts of many millions of viewers, however, a conflict form, especially used by a priest, is unacceptable (even in the name of good goals!), because it entails the language environment "pollution" and ethical and speech standard violation (Marlangeon, 2018; Harcup, O'Neill, 2017). Ecological linguistics and legal linguistics investigating violations of ethical and speech standards (Boulianne, 2019; Baek et al., 2019) and offering ways to counteract them study the norm category. "It is the concept of an ethical and speech (or ethical-linguistic) standard that forms the basis for linguistic legal expertise and linguoconflictology" (Golev, Matveeva, 2006: 168-185). Invectives and obsessions are the most obvious violation of ethical-speech standard.

Insult is one of the most widespread verbal offenses. It is interpreted through terms that are considered by jurisprudence to be "evaluative", and therefore they need special comments (Lehmann et al., 2017; Jang, Kim, 2018). The problem of the offensive sound of the utterance has not received a proper linguolegal interpretation yet. N.D. Golev proposed the "project of the legallinguistic dictionary of invective lexicon". According to N.D. Golev and his followers, "frequent reactions to certain language units in the form of resentment and insult should become the criterion of invectivity" (Golev, Golovacheva, 2005: 123-151). It is possible for marks in the linguistic dictionaries such as "abusive" and "offensive" to get clear legal characteristics (qualifications), for example, "defamatory" (Kulikova et al., 2018).

Nowadays, without the deep study of the Russian language functioning in its invective use, it is not possible to determine the solution of issues related to "verbal crimes". Besides, "Dictionary of sentiment lexicon" is very important for "verbal crimes" qualification. On the basis of these dictionary it will be possible to detect the degree of invectivity (Brusenskaya et al., 2018) not only of obscene expressions but also offensive ones without the use of obscenism such as *lapwing*, *chicken* and etc. (Kochergina, 2015: 108). As an object of lexicographic description, invective vocabulary has been considered for quite a long time. It is the tradition, but at the same time the legallinguistic aspect of dictionary definitions is quite new (Golev, Golovacheva, 2005: 123-151). This perspective of the study makes it possible to take into consideration both statistical and experimental approaches, to identify the predicted pragmatic effect of the invectivity category representation, including through grammatical means. Linguists try to integrate the idea about the intensity of an attribute in invectives, the stylistic decline of a particular language unit, as well as the degree of compliance / non-compliance with ethical and linguistic standards. As a result, specific nominations can be qualified as a linguolegal phenomenon (Gattermann, Vreese, 2020; Golan et al., 2019; Tully, Vraga, 2018), that is, they can be consistently used in the legal sphere (both as the formulation of laws and other normative and legal acts, and in the field of law enforcement itself). It is necessary to develop criteria evaluating invectives in terms of linguoecological law. It will make it possible to prove the choice not of the invective itself as connotative linguistic units in a certain type of the text (Hoffmann, Suphan, 2017; Van Duyn, Collier, 2019; Tandoc et al., 2019), but language units that preserve generalized semantics of negative evaluativeness and occupy an intermediate position taking into consideration paradigmatic relations both in the language system and on the evaluativeness scale.

As a rule, such units express negative connotation in a soften form, but regularly create a figure of irony. In the postmodern period of postmodernism (Scharkow, Bachl, 2017; Sengul, 2019; Temmermanet et al., 2019; Wenzel, 2019), a new special way of the world view called ironic was formed. Of course, this is reflected first of all in the media space. It has often been suggested that the media abuse ironic techniques, that ridicule and even mockery are so widespread that they no longer have influence they were intended for (for example G.G. Khazagerov's comparison of modern media with a cat with a tin can tied to its tail: the cat-media would like to get rid of this rattling toy, but it can't; it remains to pretend that it is very fun; see: Khazagerov, 2009).

We believe, however, that in the modern media space, irony performs a very important social function, acting as an alternative to invective communication, inevitable in the polarized world. Of course, this does not exhaust its role in society and culture, but this function seems to be one of the most significant today. The formation of conflict discourse by means of the irony arsenal preserves communication in the field of linguo-ecological thinking: *"The simple-minded literary critic naively believed that when speaking about a book, one should stand, if not on a par, then at least next to its author in terms of understanding the nature of a person and culture itself. This vicious tradition is firmly and irrevocably sent to Google by the new critics. Jumping from one dubious statement to another, allowing for unthinkable distortions and dizzily primitive interpretations, the young criticism presents modern Russian literature as something like a donor's office, from where you can draw limitless amounts of bloody fresh content. Russian authors can only remember with horror the great critic Sharikov from "The Heart of a Dog": "Yesterday the cats were strangled, strangled, strangled, strangled..." (Culture, 25.02.2021).*

The linguoecological approach to communication and text does not exclude acute polemics, but makes it civilized, excluding crude obscenisms and invectives. Therefore, the increasing importance of irony in the texts of modern media, the ever-growing interest in the phenomenon of irony in foreign and domestic studies seem to be natural and positive processes. Let us consider in more detail the alternative possibilities of "replacing the sign", typical for irony, in the modern media space.

#### 4. Results

The phenomenon of irony was studied in ancient rhetoric. For example, the concept of "Socratic irony", called as the method of polemics and dispute. In the modern sense, irony is associated with the semantic shift of the utterance giving rise to ridicule, which is the result of the negative attitude of the speech sender (Matveeva, 2010: 136). From the standpoint of the theory of speech acts irony is an indirect speech act, it is indirect communication. In this type of

communication situation, the listener can subtract much more information than the sender expressed verbally, that is, there is more implicit information than explicit one.

The presuppositions of the speakers, which are mandatory conditions for successful and effective communication play a special role in indirect speech acts (Khazagerov, 2018). Presuppositions are background of communicants that makes them possible to unambiguously perceive the meaning of an utterance / text. Presuppositions are a kind of prerequisites for communication. Being clearly unspoken in the language units, they contribute to the correct use and to the correct understanding of the utterance by the communicants: *"For 10 years, the Moscow Ministry of Education was headed by I.I. Kalina, who went down in history with many "outstanding" reforms. One of them is connected with the merger of 4-5 Moscow schools and several kindergardens into one structure. ... Of course, this is a half-measure, it would be better to attach maternity hospitals, nurseries, clinics and crematoriums to schools. Then there would be a full cycle"* (Tomorrow, 2020. No. 48).

"Irony is an implicative negative connotation derived from the conflict between the pseudopositive illocution of an explicit utterance and the negative extralinguistic parameters of a speech situation" (Sleptsova, 2008: 9). Irony belongs to the categories associated with the implicit information (Utsumi, 2000 : 1777-1806).

A language in social life may contain the conflict potential. For example, the headline: Andrey Pivovarov: *Solovyov, like a mutt, barks at anyone who disagrees with the authorities.*

The lead: *The executive director of "Open Russia" filed a lawsuit for 5 million rubles to the TV host Vladimir Solovyov.*

The article fragment: *It is about the protection of honour and dignity, because Solovyov in the broadcast of "Solovyov LIVE" called him a "nothingness", "doormat for Khodorkovsky", "wretch", "vile bastard" and "cattle" (Interviewee, 2020. 43: 3).*

This is an example of the public communication space invectivization, typical for the modern media discourse. One more example in the same issue (*The Interlocutor*, 2020. 43: 18) in the category "Side view" column by K. Bakanov:

The headline: *Career of Alsu's daughter: the scandal will help*

The text fragment: *The singer Alsu registered trademarks associated with the name of her daughter – "Mikella" and "Mikella Abramova" ... Everybody knows that Alsu is not just any Cinderella. She appeared before our eyes not by chance. Just oil works wonders. ... News about Mikella surfaced in the midst of a new scandal around the show "The Voice", when the program was suspected in judging in favour of one more VIP-participant – the Roman Budnikov's daughter (the "First Channel" host), this time at the stage of blind auditions. At this point, the channel bucked and snapped: they threaten to sue those who are especially zealous in accusing the TV people of dishonesty. Which, against the background of the story with Michella, looks not very good. It is clear: commentators hint at the reigning connections everywhere.*

*And how to be in Russia without connections? If everyone pokes their nose into the pedigree of the TV show participants, and even correlates it with the loyalty of well-paid jury members and pays attention to the results of the audience votes. Is it really a disgrace in their own fiefdom on the eyes of those who takes all this? If your person is invited to a TV show, how can he/she leave it undervalued? In addition, the "commoners" even after the victory have slim chance to win: they have no resource. And who demands justice – this person is just Navalny, rocking the boat.*

Phrases such as *oil works wonders; if your person is invited to a TV show, how can he/she leave it undervalued? Who demands justice – he is just Navalny, rocking the boat* are brilliant examples of ironic statements that are much more informative and effective than direct invectives.

In irony not only it is taken into consideration. What can be called the context, but also the so-called "the broad context of the situation", that is, not only and so much the linguistic, but also the extralinguistic factors of the discourse create irony. In the article by D. Terentyev "There is enough work for everyone", the pathos of which is in revealing modern futurologists, there is not any invective, and persuasiveness is achieved by irony:

*Futurologist Michio Kaku became one of the highlights of the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in the summer of 2018. The audience clearly took over Kaku's fantastic conviction that soon our usual reality will be replaced by cyberreality ... The futurologist prophesies us chips with memories and a complete upgrade of the education system: after all it will be possible to learn mathematics at the touch of a button.*



*And in 500 years, Kaku promises teleportation and a time machine. And how not to remember the inflamed in Vasylki imagination of Ostap Bender with his intergalactic chess tournament. The difference is that respectable listeners of Kaku dream not to play a game with Capablanca, but they dream about a modest thing – about immortality: "I believe that by 2100 we will be able to achieve not only digital immortality, but also biological one" (Arguments of the Week, 2.12.2020).*

In the newspaper *The Interlocutor* there is a column "Sadness for honour" with short ironic materials such as: *Vitali Klitschko. For the debut. The mayor of Kiev became the author of a book of his own aphorisms. The book, as the politician wrote in his FB, is "bright, cheerful and positive". And he didn't lie: it is made in the form of a clamshell, multicolored and with pictures.*

*Vladimir Solovyov. For diversification. The TV host has patented the trademark "Fist of Justice", under which he is going to produce various souvenir products. His show on YouTube where he shows the techniques of martial arts has the same name. We are afraid that now Solovyov will appear not only from every iron, but also from every counter.*

Irony implicitly expresses the connotation in the modality of the meaning created by the author and mainly conveys non-verbally expressed information. Thus, irony itself creates a situation for encoding /interpreting/ decoding the ironic meaning. This is expressed in the familiar disclaimers like: *I'm not speaking ironically, this is not ironic* and etc. For example, the film director K. Gevorgyan, understanding that recipients may not know the text of Gogol's *Dead Souls*, explains his ironic statement:

*Addressing the community of people who call themselves producers, I would like to tell them directly and frankly: do not become "foreigners Ivan Fedorov" (this is from Gogol) (K. Gevorgyan "Producer, go away!" (Literary Newspaper, 11-17.11.2020).*

It is important to remind the situation. The author of the linguistic bestseller "The Russian Language on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" (2008) M.A. Krongauz, was asked in the TV program "Figure of Speech": Is the Russian language still in a state of hysteria? His answer was the following: *Russian is all right, but the irony in the title "The Russian language on the verge of a nervous breakdown" was not understood neither in the first edition nor in the reissues.*

Any language unit may have ironic meaning on any language level, including a particle of speech: *"...and the same Andrey Malakhov or this girl (what is her name? Buzova?) communicate with much more people than the most famous writer" (Z. Prilepin. "I set Navalny up to Limonov..." Literary Newspaper, 11-17.11.2020).*

As we can see, irony is expressed by the words *what is her name? Buzova?*, they form the negative modality of the utterance, and "... the main function of ironic expressions is to indicate the negatively evaluated knowledge or the negative connotation itself" (Hartung 2002: 162). This function can be performed by quotation marks:

*Rogozin supports the president, shows the doll Fedor, for a lot of money they send this toy into cosmos to be disgraced. And they get away with it. And when you write about it, Rogozin takes offense and hires not someone, but the whole Dobrinsky, who was drowning Efremov for six months and who has drowned him, and now this expensive person will defend Rogozin's "good name" (Arguments of the Week, 2.12.2020).*

The paper (Blavataya, 2017) presents an up-to-date understanding of irony. According to this author, this is a deep in the semantic term category, which pushes the boundaries of a stylistic device based only on the relations of antiphrasis. Also the author note such a special function of irony as adjusting disagreements, avoiding excessive categoricity and certainty of evaluation (Blavataya, 2017: 45). For example "...the main function of ironic expressions is to indicate negatively evaluated knowledge or the negative evaluation itself" (Hartung 2002: 162).

Communication, or verbal conflict, being the ultimate case of aggravation of various contradictions, can produce acts of aggression. Therefore, it is important for the stabilization of social relations in general to predict and prevent conflicts in social communication.

## 5. Conclusion

It is necessary to activate lexical and grammaticographic practice, to create dictionaries of connotative lexicon, in which language units would be comprehensively described, taking into consideration all the system characteristics, as well as the existing or potential lacunarity of such elements or their grammatical characteristics in a particular language.

In accordance with the existing typology such dictionaries are considered to be linguolegal. They should include not only conflict language units, but also language units which get such properties in the

context. This will make it possible to use the dictionary materials by experts in judicial practice, and by the author as practical guide in choosing specific language units with evaluative semantics.

Conflict as a clash of points of view, interests and approaches is inevitable and even necessary in public communication, but the most negative attitude to the opponent not always should be expressed by the invective lexicon. In many cases, the ironic modality of the utterance is much more effective because the implicit, not verbally expressed, but implied information also express connotative meaning often more vividly than the explicit, expressed information.

The addressee of the ironic text (statement), criticizing, ironizes about things, that in his/her opinion are imperfect and need criticism, affects the way of thinking and behaviour of the recipients. The efficiency of this communicative influence does not become less because of the implicit information use. It is possible to adequately interpret the irony in the text on the base of the recipient background and extralinguistic factors. In our view irony as an implicit way of conveying negative connotation can help prevent conflicts.

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