

EXPLORING HATE SPEECH ON ONLINE PLATFORMS: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GERMAN AND ALBANIAN LANGUAGES

Anxhela Belkovi

University of Tirana, Albania, anxhela.belkovi@unitir.edu.al

Abstract: This paper explores the pressing issue of "hate speech," a phenomenon that has garnered significant attention across various disciplines in recent years. In linguistics, the focus is particularly on (inter)cultural communication and the linguistic mechanisms through which hate speech manifests. The rise of digitalization and online platforms has amplified the reach and impact of hate speech, transforming it from a rare occurrence in spoken language to a widespread issue in public discourse, especially on social media. This has raised concerns about its effects on generations and their language use. The study examines the linguistic forms and differences in the expression of hate speech, analyzing it as an emotional response through selected online news in German and Albanian, as well as social media posts. The analysis is grounded in theories from cognitive linguistics and linguistic stylistics, aiming to uncover the expressive and stylistic potential of specific phrases within the context of verbal communication where hate speech is prevalent. By intertwining methods and theories from these fields, the research delves into the pragmatic function of hate speech as a genre, highlighting its dominant and evident presence in certain communicative contexts. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions in the humanities about the intersections of language, emotion, and the communication. By analyzing linguistic devices and mechanisms that foreground hate speech, the study seeks to deepen our understanding of negative emotions among people. It also emphasizes the importance of fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and inclusivity, where proper language and communication can mitigate the harmful effects of hate speech and promote the social-emotional well-being of everyone.

Keywords: Emotion, hate speech, communication, linguistic

1. INTRODUCTION

In communication, the central focus lies in the message individuals wish to convey to one another. Interpersonal communication forms the foundation of linguistic interaction, where the primary goal is using language as a tool for mutual understanding. It is crucial, therefore, to clarify how understanding occurs through linguistic communication. This process has become an integral part of daily life, allowing us to express thoughts using facial expressions, gestures, and spoken or written language across various material and virtual networks. The everyday nature of communication is reflected in its study across multiple disciplines, each offering unique perspectives on how it functions.

Participants in communication have the freedom to choose how they engage with one another, determining the mode and style of their interactions. From a linguistic standpoint, cultural differences and intercultural exchanges significantly influence communication styles. In the modern digital environment, networks and social media provide new platforms for emotional expression, including the rapid spread of online discussions and hate speech. Hate speech, particularly when expressed through spoken language, has become a pressing issue in the digital age. Young people and adults are especially vulnerable, as they can be easily influenced to adopt and further propagate such harmful forms of communication.

Hate speech is an emerging field of research that examines its manifestations across various domains. This paper focuses on the structural linguistic level, specifically exploring how hate speech is expressed in phrases and examples in both German and Albanian languages. The study analyzes textual forms of hate speech primarily extracted from online platforms and social media networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. As social media continues to dominate online interactions, concerns have been raised about the potential negative effects of excessive social media use on language and expression.

This study seeks to answer two key questions:

1. What types of hate speech are prevalent on online platforms?
2. What stylistic devices are used to convey hate speech in German and Albanian languages?

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of the theoretical background of hate speech, Section 3 outlines the materials and methods used in the study, Section 4 presents the discussion, and Section 5 contains the conclusion and references.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Hate Speech

Hate speech is a form of psychological violence and an expression of dehumanizing views. It refers to verbal attacks directed at individuals or groups based on their identity, such as race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or beliefs. These attacks aim to belittle and denigrate the targeted groups, often manifesting through language that reinforces prejudice and discrimination (Meinbauer, 2012, p. 10). In addition to individuals, professional groups like politicians and journalists can also become targets of hate speech. According to the United Nations, "hate speech can be conveyed through any form of expression, including images, cartoons, memes, objects, gestures, and symbols, and can be disseminated both offline and online." This broad scope highlights the diverse ways hate speech can manifest, making it a pervasive issue across various platforms.

Types of Hate Speech

According to linguist Jörg Meinbauer (2012), hate speech can manifest in various forms, some of which are not always easy to detect. First, hate speech can be either implicit or explicit in its expression. Implicit hate speech is more subtle and often hidden within language, while explicit hate speech is overt and direct. The second form relates to how hate speech is communicated, either openly in public forums or covertly. Public hate speech is often found in internet forums, where it can attract and incite further hateful discourse, whereas covert hate speech may appear in more subtle ways, such as on TV shows or in discussions that indirectly touch on hate speech topics.

The third type of hate speech involves issues of authority and power, where it is frequently used by the majority to exert pressure on minority groups, or vice versa. The fourth type involves a combination of verbal and physical violence, which can either occur separately or be intertwined. Lastly, the intensity of hate speech can vary, depending on how it is interpreted within different cultural, linguistic, and communicative contexts. In some cases, hate speech may be disguised as humor or presented as a joke, further complicating its detection and impact (Meinbauer, 2012, pp. 1-2).

Hate Speech according to German and Albanian Law

The regulation of hate speech in both Germany and Albania aligns with international standards and is enforced through their respective criminal codes. In Germany, hate speech is addressed by considering racist, xenophobic, and other inhumane or contemptuous motives as aggravating factors when determining sentencing for any crime under the Criminal Code (Art. 2).

Similarly, in Albania, hate speech is regulated under Article 265 of the Criminal Code, which states: "Incitement of hatred or conflicts between nationalities, races, and religions, as well as the preparation and dissemination of articles with such content, is punishable by a fine or up to ten years of imprisonment."

Hate – The express of emotion

In emotional research, hate is classified as an intense negative emotion, with the lexeme "hate" serving as a collective term for strong, aggressive defenses and feelings of hostility. Like all emotions, hate has a cognitive component that can be experienced and communicated. In its affective form, hate is often expressed linguistically as an irrational emotional outburst, manifesting without or before the involvement of cognitive reflection or thought processes (Schwarz-Friesel, 2013, pp. 148-150).

Hate speech linguistic perspective in German and Albanian

Hate speech has been studied across various disciplines such as sociology, law, media, and communication studies by several authors. However, from a linguistic perspective, Gueille-Nieto (2023) points out that it has not yet received sufficient attention as a scientific object of study. In recent years, there has been an increasing focus on the linguistic analysis of hate speech, evidenced by studies like *A Corpus Linguistic Analysis of White Supremacist Language* (Brindle, 2016), *Language and Violence: Pragmatic Perspectives* (Silva, 2017), and *Online Hate Speech in the EU: A Discourse Analytic Perspective* (Assimakopoulos, Baider & Millar, 2017).

Gueille-Nieto also notes that linguistics has advanced by incorporating a combined corpus-based methodology, deep learning techniques, and qualitative linguistic analysis to examine the lexical and grammatical indicators of hate speech (Gueille-Nieto, 2023). She acknowledges that offensive communication is still gaining recognition as a significant focus in language research. In contrast, in Albania, hate speech has predominantly been studied in political communication (Vanoli, 2021) and hate narratives in online media (Londo, 2021), while linguistic analyses of hate speech remain rare. Nonetheless, one important contribution to Albanian language research is Klosi's (2021) analysis of *Social Media Escapism: exploratory study of the use of digital media by Tirana University students of English language* (pp. 196-211).

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative analysis to explore the linguistic forms and expansion of hate speech in both German and Albanian languages. The data are primarily sourced from online social networks, which serve as the

most common medium for collecting qualitative data. Specifically, this includes comments on websites, as well as content from Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Written texts and headlines extracted from these online platforms, particularly from influential figures in sports, entertainment, and journalism, are examined and analyzed. The primary corpus consists of examples gathered from Facebook, Instagram, and online news portals.

Social media has proven to be a significant platform where hate speech is pervasive across various contexts. This paper focuses on specific examples that illustrate hate speech within different social and communicative settings. The selected corpus highlights prominent instances of hate speech, which are then subjected to thematic, stylistic, and semantic analysis, focusing on the German and Albanian languages.

4. DISCUSSION

The discussion section of this paper begins with a thematic analysis of hate speech. The following example, extracted from an online portal and posted on the Instagram account of a German influencer, targets their ex-fiancé. It exemplifies the spread of hate speech, directed not only at perceived immoral behavior but also incorporating verbal violence:

- *Du bist für mich gestorben – You are dead to me* (Eva Benetatou to ex-fiance, posted on Instagram, published on Tag24.de, 21.04.2024)

The stylistic device used here is an idiom, which in both languages reflects the same figurative imagery, making it completely equivalent. Semantically, the expression can be interpreted metaphorically, conveying a strong sense of deep disappointment and anger.

In another example, during a football match, hate speech emerges in response to identity-based discrimination from another speaker:

- *Es gibt überall dumme Leute – There are everywhere stupid* (Niko Williams Fußballer, his statement against the fans, published on newspaper portal Welt.de, 28.04.2024)

From a stylistic perspective, epithets are the most prominent figurative device used in hate speech, emerging from various semantic domains (e.g., De Mauro, 2016; Faloppa, 2020). For instance, the term *dumme Leute* (stupid people) in German, translated as *njerëz budallenj* in Albanian, indicates intellectual disability. The term *dumm* (stupid) is categorized as a vulgar and insulting epithet, deeply offensive when directed at a specific group or individuals.

Another example occurs in the sports realm. When Formula 1 driver M. Verstappen lost a race, rumors began circulating, and he addressed the issue publicly, responding to the situation:

- *Die können sich alle verpissen – they all fuck off / go away* (Formul 1 driver, Max Verstappen addressed his fans about the rumors, published on Sport.de – Instagram, 22.07.2024)

The idiomatic expression used in both languages is notably vulgar, particularly in spoken language. It serves as a harsh insult directed at an individual or group. Semantically, it implies ending a discussion or distancing oneself from a relationship.

The final German example examines a type of wrongful attitude within the context of hate speech.

- *Ihr seid unheimlich – you are terrible* (Sängerin Roan Cappell describes her fans, published on Spiegel.de – Facebook, 20.08.2024)

This expression employs an epithet and reflects a behavioral aspect related to its meaning. It serves as a reaction against individuals who engage in stalking, though the response itself is considered offensive and insulting.

As previously discussed, we have explored various forms of hate speech related to wrongful behavior. We will now examine Albanian cases involving hate speech directed at sexual orientation, women, and the professional dignity of influential individuals.

Hate speech, as defined and analyzed in various studies, is prevalent in public spaces and particularly among influential figures, often concerning sensitive and intense topics. An illustrative example involves a discussion between two journalists during a podcast, with the speech subsequently spreading across online platforms.

- *Debile e niveleve të larta – Idiot of the highest level*
- *Një vjellje e paparë – it throws up* (Journalist Arjan Çani to an other Journalist, published in Tema newspaper – Facebook, 23.08.2024)

In a podcast that was broadcast to a wide audience, a rude and insulting remark was directed first at a woman and then at a journalist. The first expression used an epithet intended to denigrate and imply both physical and professional disability, reflecting a consistent offensive and derogatory intention.

The second expression, while stylistically an idiom, does not have a direct semantic equivalent. It implies that something is so unpleasant or objectionable that it makes someone physically sick to see or hear it.

Turning to the issue of hate speech against sexual orientation, it is important to note that under Albanian law: “Marriage can be concluded between a man and a woman who are 18 years or older” (Family Code, Article 6). Despite this legal definition, a recent incident went viral across online platforms where a priest in Tirana’s town hall performed a marriage ceremony for a same-sex couple. This event provoked significant backlash from various public figures and influencers, who voiced their disapproval:

- *Një turp i madh! Skandal! – It’s very shame. Scandal* (Actor Mehdi Malkaj addressed the couple, published on news portal cna.al, 21.05.2024)

In terms of the semantic field, same-sex marriage is often regarded as shameful both personally and socially. Stylistically, this sentiment is expressed through phrases that reflect a moral judgment or perceived defect. The term “scandal” within such expressions conveys offensive content and promotes hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community and their human rights.

Another area of concern involves the use of pejorative and denigrating language directed at a woman and her lifestyle. The way hate speech is expressed and communicated, including the specific linguistic devices used, can be examined through the following example:

- *Degjenerimi po merr përmasa të mëdha, turp i turpët, që po arrin kulmin, shkatërrojnë familjen për një tjetër. Fëmijët rriten rrugëve jetim – Denigration it expands with huge steps, shame of the shame, it has ritched the highness to destroy a family for an other, the children grow up like orphans.* (Journalist Ola Bruko addressed the viewers of Instagram, published on News Portal Liberale.al, 31.08.2024)

The expressions directed at an Albanian journalist who chooses to live her life according to her own preferences are both offensive and insulting. These expressions aim to denigrate her public image and criticize her personal decisions. The linguistic devices used to convey hate speech in this context include idioms, semi-idioms such as “turp i turpët,” and metaphors like “degjenerimi po merr përmasa të mëdha, shkatërrojnë familjen.” Additionally, the phrase “grow up like an orphan” can be considered a simile in this context. In both languages, these mechanisms and devices are used to express hate speech in ways that are equivalent.

This issue has garnered significant attention across various online platforms, particularly on TikTok. The following example illustrates this trend:

- *Rraha një djalë, e bëra të vdekur –i picked a guy, i made him to die.* (Singer Ronela Hajati to her fans, published on TikTok, 07.08.2024)

This expression originates from a famous singer who publicly disclosed an incident of physical assault. Analyzing this from a thematic perspective, it represents a form of hate speech addressing sexual harassment. Linguistically, the expression employs the idiom “e bëra të vdekur” to signify both verbal and physical violence, as well as to convey humiliation. From a semantic perspective, this statement reflects a negative and inappropriate mode of communication, highlighting the harmful language used by the influencer.

5. CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to identify the types of hate speech prevalent on online platforms and to analyze their manifestations from a linguistic perspective, considering the cultural and linguistic contexts of German and Albanian. The secondary aim was to investigate the role of various linguistic devices in expressing hate speech. The findings reveal that figurative devices, such as epithets, are predominant in conveying negative reactions and hate speech. Additionally, idioms emerge as a significant linguistic tool for expressing emotions and thoughts. Research indicates that the increased use of social media and online platforms is strongly associated with a higher prevalence of hate speech and its linguistic expressions.

The study underscores that, despite both German and Albanian being Indo-European languages with some similarities, they exhibit notable differences in how hate speech is expressed. In Albanian, hate speech often manifests as implicit forms of discrimination based on sexual orientation, race, and insults. Conversely, in German, hate speech frequently involves direct insults, discrimination based on origin, and negative attitudes.

The discussion highlights that digitalization plays a crucial role in the expression and verbalization of emotions within the linguistic realm. By exploring the nuances of emotional language, we have gained insights into its impact and significance. This understanding will guide future research into how emotions are communicated through linguistic devices.

Moving forward, it is essential to remain open to further research on the linguistic aspects of hate speech. This ongoing exploration will deepen our comprehension of its role and enhance our ability to address and counteract hate speech effectively.

REFERENCES

- Assimakopoulos, S., Baider, F., & Millar, S. (2018). Online hate speech in the E.U.: A discourse-analytic perspective. Springer Open. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72604-5>
- Burkart, R. (2021). *Kommunikationswissenschaft*. Böhlau Verlag.
- De Mauro, T. (2016, September 27). Le parole per ferire [Words to wound]. *Internazionale*. [<https://tinyurl.com/2pz5h2xu>].
- Faloppa, F. (2020). #ODIO. Manuale di resistenza alla violenza delle parole [#HATE. Handbook of resistance to the violence of words]. UTET.
- Guillén-Nieto, V. (2023). Approaches to the meaning of hate speech. In *Hate Speech: Linguistic Perspectives* (pp. 1-21). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Karjagdiu, L., Kryeziu, N., & Spahiu, I. (2021). The Reception of Ernest Hemingway's Works in Albanian Literature and Culture. *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies*, 5.
- Klosi, I. (2021). Social media escapism: Exploratory study of the use of digital media by Tirana University students of English language. *Balkanistic Forum*, 2, 196-211. Retrieved from <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=957830>
- Klosi, I., Bezhani, E., & Spahiu, I. (2024). APPLYING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS IN TRANSLATING THE IUCN RESTORATION OPPORTUNITIES ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY (ROAM) DOCUMENTS INTO ALBANIAN. *KNOWLEDGE - International Journal*, 65(5), 571–576. Retrieved from <http://ikm.mk/ojs/index.php/kij/article/view/6963>
- Londo, I. (2021). Hate narratives and disinformation in online media in Albania. *SEENPM*.
- Meibauer, J. (2012). *Hassrede/Hatespeech*. Mainz.
- Retta, M. (2023). A pragmatic and discourse analysis of hate words on social media. *Internet Pragmatics*, 6(2), 197-218. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00096.ret>
- Schwarz-Friesel, M. (2007). *Sprache und Emotion*. Tübingen.
- Schwarz-Friesel, M. (2013). „Dies ist kein Hassbrief – sondern meine eigene Meinung über Euch!“ – Zur kognitiven und emotionalen Basis der aktuellen antisemitischen Hassrede. In J. Meibauer (Ed.), *Hassrede* (pp. 148-150). Gießen.
- Silva, D. (2017). The circulation of violence in discourse. In D. Silva (Ed.), *Language and violence: Pragmatic perspectives* (pp. 107–124). Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Albanian Criminal Code, Article 265. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/ALBANIA_Criminal%20Code.pdf (accessed January 27, 1995)
- German Criminal Code, Article 2. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html#p1333 (accessed May 29, 2020)
- Liberale.al Portal – Instagram. (2024). Retrieved from https://liberale.al/magazine/showbiz/u-kryqezua-per-lidhjen-me-endri-priftin-shperthen-keq-ola-bruko-i108087?fbclid=IwY2xjawFLpU1leHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHUMaaM-XzT46-Unt9gPNHrLnoBkWW5Uk-mIhQugPpsPjzA8G-LC1K9q9Iw_aem_nc5VAfD0nsJbA4yZQqN7jA (generated August 31, 2024)
- Can.al – Facebook. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.cna.al/aktualitet/martesa-e-dy-grave-ne-bashki-turp-i-madh-skandal-i399031> (generated May 21, 2024)
- SPIEGEL.de. (2024). Retrieved from https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/musik/chappell-roan-saengerin-beklagt-sich-ueber-unheimliche-fans-a-1e14481e-b77c-4f1a-ba78-de98914c2aab?utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=facebook%5D&utm_campaign=%5Bspontop%5D&fbclid=IwY2xjawE4L8NleHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHJ9ob311Ano3TsdovWVlLegcI1YqV2rRvDHyb-4v7X6tJHWVwOlqgaGCg_aem_p7VHVcGRurY0yqObLjJYqg#ref=rss (generated August 20, 2024)
- Sportbild – Instagram. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.motorsport-total.com/formel-1/news/koennen-sich-verpissen-was-max-verstappen-alles-auf-die-palme-brachte-24072205> (generated July 22, 2024)
- Tag24.de – Instagram. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.tag24.de/unterhaltung/promis/eva-benetatou/eva-benetatou-mit-hassrede-auf-ex-chris-broy-du-bist-fuer-mich-gestorben-3135321> (generated March 21, 2024)
- Tema newspaper – Facebook. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.gazetatema.net/lifestyle/arian-ani-shperthen-ndaj-grida-dumes-debile-e-niveleve-te-larta-nje-vj-i454145> (generated August 23, 2024)
- Tiktok. (2024). Retrieved from https://www.tiktok.com/@energyalbania/video/7400309970429906182?_r=1&_t=8pAbxcZaVOf (generated August 7, 2024)
- Welt.de. (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.welt.de/sport/fussball/article251260466/Fussball-Rassismus-Vorfall-in-Spanien-Bilbaos-Williams-wird-beleidigt-und-raecht-sich-mit-Tor.html?icid=search.product.onsitesearch&fbclid=IwY2xjawE4LxdleHRuA2FlbQIxMAABHdujJ4MeZ23Ne>

2YwJb43Q65b8ueURNzpFicqFTtC7Z4oC9AnSWnqYHGf8A_aem_GWFmTABJIHhSOT9puIvOBg
(generated April 28, 2024)