Impoliteness strategies in racist comments targeting migrants in Lithuania

Jūratė Ruzaitė

Vytautas Magnus University

This study aims to investigate impoliteness strategies in hostile online comments directed against migrants on Lithuanian news portals. Verbal aggression has been addressed from different perspectives, and recently there has been an upsurge in researchers' concern with impoliteness strategies (e.g. Taylor 2015, Vasilaki 2014, Culpeper 2011). This paper shows that such models can be useful when studying hateful comments, but they need to be adjusted to other languages than English by considering some typological cross-linguistic differences.

This paper poses the following research questions:

(1) What conventional impoliteness strategies are used in Lithuanian?

(2) How much flexibility and creativity do these conventional structures allow for?

(3) What discursive strategies and language-specific features should the impoliteness model be supplemented with?

The data in this study includes 734 comments (51 017 words) written in response to news reports on issues related to migrants. The analysis takes a primarily qualitative approach and applies Culpeper's (2011) paradigm of impoliteness.

The main impoliteness strategies identified in this study are insults, among which the most frequent category is that of third-person negative references. They promote the myth of 'migrants as a threat', include highly degrading vulgarisms, criminalise and dehumanise migrants. Personalized negative assertions (the second most frequent category of insults) are marked by a high degree of structural diversity, which is at least partly predetermined by the high syntactic and morphological flexibility of Lithuanian. Personalized negative vocatives are the smallest but arguably the most face-threatening category, where the *tu/vous* distinction becomes highly important. In Lithuanian as a synthetic language, impolite forms often involve the use of morphological means of expressing hostility, e.g. diminutives in patronising vocatives.

References

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