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**“YOU KNOW NOTHING!”:
INCOMPETENCE ACCUSATIONS AS FACEWORK IN FACEBOOK-COMMENTS**

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The given article sheds light on linguistic means and peculiarities of impoliteness as a subtype of facework in the discourse of comments to posts in the groups of Ukrainian-language segments in the *Facebook* social network with resort to the tactic of accusing the interlocutor of being incompetent.

Key words: face, facework, impoliteness, internet-communication, speech strategy.

В статті виявляються лінгвістичні засоби та особливості реалізації невіжливості в дискурсі коментарів до постів у групах україномовного сегменту соціальної мережі «Фейсбук» за допомогою тактики обвинення співрозмовника в некомпетентності.

Ключевые слова: «лицо», «робота з лицом», невіжливість, інтернет-комунікація, речева стратегія.

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У статті проаналізовано лінгвістичні засоби та специфіку реалізації невіжливості як підтипу «роботи з обличчям» у дискурсі коментарів до постів у групах україномовного сегменту соціальної мережі «Фейсбук» через тактику звинувачення співрозмовника в некомпетентності.

Ключові слова: «обличчя», «робота з обличчям», невіжливість, інтернет-комунікація, мовленнєва стратегія.

Digital communication is nowadays attracting researchers who work within the framework of various sciences and use various theoretical approaches. Computer-based communication is developing at a very fast pace, gaining more ground, therefore, studying peculiarities of communicative interaction in the virtual space is becoming increasingly urgent. During such communication Internet users employ various speech tactics as well as strategies, destructive for communication among them, and that enables linguists to analyse users' speech behaviour that exerts disharmonizing influence on the communication and interactants' relations and, in particular, such a communicative phenomenon as impoliteness.

The aim of the present work is to investigate linguistic means and peculiarities of the tactic of accusing the interlocutor of being incompetent as a subtype of facework in the discourse of comments to posts in the groups of

Ukrainian-language segments in the *Facebook* social network.

In this paper we view impoliteness as one of the variants of facework, namely (potential) face-attack, and accusations of incompetence as one of the tactics that realize the strategy of impoliteness. While using the term “face”, we refer to the theory of P. Brown and S. Levinson: the positive face is defined as “the positive consistent self-image or “personality” claimed by interactants, crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of”, whereas the negative face is referred to as “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition” [3, p. 61].

It should be borne in mind that now there emerges an ontological problematisation of face in linguistic studies of facework, since the researcher runs into difficulty defining how and when exactly in his understanding of the notion

of “face” this phenomenon exists, who it is created by and whether it can change. If according to E. Goffman face is assigned to an individual by society [6, p. 10], and according to P. Brown and S. Levinson face is formed by an individual’s needs, according to E. de Kadt it is created both by the addresser and the addressee [9, p. 176]. M. Terkourafi [11] changes the contents of the notion “face” still more radically, claiming that face exists only during communication, it emerges and changes in interaction only and disappears when interaction draws to a close. As D. Bousfield maintains, “we’re moving away from the classic (Brown and Levinson) view of face as a pre-existing static monolith to be threatened, damaged, repaired or enhanced and which is internally generated and projected by the individual into the interactional space between participants, to a more fluid consideration of face, one in which the concept is both dynamic and mobile, and is created, strengthened or weakened in (often extended) interaction” [2, p. 39].

We employ this term in a slightly modified way, in line with H. Spencer-Oatey [10], who states that face is a multi-faceted phenomenon (though, for the purposes of this research we focus on the potential influence of an utterance only on the positive and negative face of an addressee, or, correspondingly, in terms of H. Spencer-Oatey, quality face, based on an individual’s need for being perceived positively, and social identity face, based on an individual’s need for being respected and accepted in social roles).

Of underlying importance in H. Spencer-Oatey’s theory to us is the fact that these needs are connected with social rights, thus, we rule out of focus the issue whether the addresser or the addressee has certain wishes connected with the face (as in Brown and Levinson’s theory) and proceed from the assumption that all these needs are potentially available and – consciously or not – are taken in consideration in communication.

While selecting relevant discursive fragments in which the tactic of accusation of incompetence is realized as a manifestation of impoliteness strategy, we consider the following methodological issues:

1. Definition of impoliteness. The present research belongs to the second-order studies according to the R. Watts theory, i.e. we proceed from the understanding of impoliteness as a purely theoretical construct, irrespective of mainstream perception of the notion *НЕВВИЧЛИВІСТЬ* (impoliteness) in the Ukrainian language (for further details as to the methodological division

of research into first- and second-order studies see [12]). Thus the fragments are selected which axiomatically correspond to the assigned characteristics of the realization of impoliteness superstrategy: utterances, potentially charged with the possibility of aggravating the addressee’s face in the given situational context. It is important to stress that we choose second-order approach as the analytical framework in defining impoliteness, not detecting impoliteness.

2. Establishing the fact of impoliteness strategy realization. Every researcher of face-work encounters this problem: a comment must be characterized by a certain feature which could allow perceiving it as impolite, and this feature is defined in this research as an ability of aggravating the interlocutor’s face (which may or may not lead to actual face damage) in the given situational context. However, debatable remains the question about who can assess if this characteristic is present. We share D. Kadar’s view: “our (im)politeness interpretations need to be guided by the evidence in the text – that is, the hearer/recipient’s evaluation of certain utterances – and not by our intuitions, because those intuitions are likely to reflect our present-day assumptions” [8, p. 18]. We consider such a telltale evidence to be other Internet users’ reactions to the corresponding statement and the situational context rather than the evaluation in situ. As J. Culpeper and C. Hardaker put it, evidence of impoliteness “includes, notably, counter impoliteness (tit-for-tat pairings), but also meta-pragmatic comments (e.g. ‘that was so rude’), indications, verbal or non-verbal, of offence being experienced (i.g. symptoms of emotions as humiliation, hurt or anger). Such actions are part of what constructs impoliteness context” [5, p. 211].

On the other hand, according to A. Grimshaw, “what is in people’s heads is accessible neither to analysts nor to interlocutors (nor even, ultimately, fully accessible to those whose behaviour is under investigation)” [7, p. 281], therefore, we do not aim to shed light on the interactants’ intentions, our attention is focused on the user’s utterances containing impoliteness strategy realization; the addressee’s reaction, evidencing his/her detection of the presence of this strategy in the speaker’s utterances; as well as the communicative situation. As a matter of fact, checking the “black box” is in question in this case: we do not take the interactants’ inner state into consideration, their outer reactions are essential to us.

Thus, the body of the present research does not embrace the utterances threatening the face from addresser’s point of view (as required in



J. Culpeper's impoliteness model [4]) or from addressee's point of view (as required in P. Austin's impoliteness model [1]), but the utterances potentially dangerous for the addressee's face from the standpoint of unfolding discourse (the utterances are identified by researchers and the detection of impoliteness is verified by interlocutors' reactions).

In light of the specifics of communicative situations in the Internet space, with facework underway, there emerges a problem of defining pragmatic and discursive peculiarities of impoliteness strategy realization in the corresponding discourse type. We define Internet-discourse as cognitive-communicative phenomenon, the process and the result of Internet-users' speech activity, which in its exaggerated form reflects overall characteristics of modern postmodern culture: removal of subject-object opposition, masculine and feminine opposition, centre and periphery opposition, world perception as text, citationality, user's schizoid splitting, norms and values deconstruction, pluralism, playfulness, lack of seriousness.

We hold the opinion that the specifics of facework in the Internet space mostly depends on the above-mentioned characteristics, with the Internet-users' comments in popular online-resources (e.g. the *Facebook* social network) being the most relevant material in the present research. The choice of Internet comments as the source of the research material is determined by the following: 1) real-life speech (as opposed to the speech of characters in works of literature which is often used as the research material); 2) hybrid nature of Internet communication (oral and written speech combined); 3) polylogue nature of Internet comments.

Step-by-step methods of research incorporate the following: 1) developing a body of discursive fragments; 2) analyzing it by means of contextual, deductive, inductive, presuppositional, speech act, lexical-syntactic, structural-semantic, logic and semantic, stylistic analysis as well as the method of implicit meaning explicating; 3) formalization and quantitative data analysis.

As the research material we examined comments to posts in the most popular groups of Ukrainian language sector of *Facebook* social network (political, media groups, groups devoted to public figures and outstanding representatives of cultural life, groups about the war in the East of Ukraine, humour groups, groups about cities of Ukraine as well as sports groups). The data for the present work were taken from users' comments to 150 posts in 15 groups (10 posts in each)

in the form of 463 extracts (discursive fragments), each extract consisting of a user's comment containing utterance(s) with explicitly or implicitly expressed meaning "You're incompetent in this topic" and the interlocutors' reactions to the comment. The following discursive fragment may serve as an example (for ethical reasons we do not use users' genuine nicknames, instead, we replace them with User with the ordinal number corresponding to the order of cues in a polylogue):

(1) <User1>: У нас тоже забор с колючкой и ров есть. Муж специально для вас сфоткает на смене. Работы продолжаются. Не знаете-не пишите, знатоки всего и вся. Еще тепловизоры ставят. Харьков.

[In Russian] *We also have a fence, with barbs and a ditch. My husband will take a snapshot of that specially for you when on his shift. Work is still underway. If you don't know a thing about that, you'd better not post anything, you, know-it-alls. Thermal cameras are still being set up. Kharkiv.*

<User2>: В мене чоловік в банку працює. Звідки нам, знаток ви наша всего і вся, знати? Чи подобається казатися розумніше за всіх? Aber somit kommst du mir eben blöd vor.

[In Ukrainian] *My husband works in a bank. How should we know, you tell us, [in Ukrainian transliteration of Russian] know-it-all? [In Ukrainian] Or are you into [in Surzhyk] being cleverer [in Ukrainian] than others? [In German] But I find you dumb as it is.*

(3) <User3>: User2 Про паркан на кордоні з Росією, в Харківській області, що вже добудовується, знає не тільки ця пані, яку Ви називаєте «знаток ви наша всего і вся». З Австрії так далеко бачите?

[In Ukrainian] *Not only this lady who you call [in Ukrainian transliteration of Russian] "know-it-all" [in Ukrainian] knows about the fence on the border with Russia, in Kharkiv region, that is almost ready. Can you see it from Austria so far away?*

The multilingual nature turned out to be characteristic of the discursive fragments that employ the tactic of incompetence accusation: the dialogue between the users is conducted in Ukrainian, Russian and English, a bit more rarely in other languages, and "switching" from one language to another is possible even within one remark.

As the language repertoire that users turn to the use of Surzhyk (mixed Russian and Ukrainian) and the Russian language in the Ukrainian writing style as a stylistic device that is to convey the meaning "my interlocutor only

understands an illiterate language”, appears to be most frequent.

We consider the use of transliteration (writing a remark in Ukrainian but using the Latin alphabet), although frequent in the corresponding discursive fragments, to be not a stylistic device, but a salient feature pre-determined by the technical peculiarities of the social network.

At the lexical level in the corresponding utterances we have found a great number of neologisms and occasionalisms, of pejorative meaning in particular:

(2) <User>: ви не розумієте, на нових виборах люди оберуть таку ж саму брехливу наволоч. Як не ригів, так насінь насінченко, як не симоненко, так фаріонш і т.ін.

[in Ukrainian] *you don't understand, people are sure to elect a similar brazen-faced scum. If not rigs [pejorative for Party of Regions' supporters alluding to "rygat" – "puke"], then nasin nasinchenkys [referring to Semen Semenchenko, a commander-founder of the volunteer territorial defence battalion "Donbas"; this occasionalism is the loan translation of his name and surname from Russian into Ukrainian: Semen->semya->nasinnya (meaning sunflower seeds)], if not symonenkos [Symonenko being the former Communist Party leader in Ukraine], then farionshes [pejorative occasionalism alluding to Iryna Farion, Ukrainian politician famous for her right-wing populist political sentiments] etc.'*

Inherent at the syntactic level are imperatives (3) and rhetoric questions (4):

(3) <User>: Краснодарський Край – це Україна, вчи історію невіглас!

[in Ukrainian] *Krasnodars'kyi Kray (region) is Ukraine, learn history, you ignorant know-nothing!*

(4) <User>: І до речі, ви свій родовід гарно знаєте, там дійсно немає холопів, а всі королі?) Так що ви тоді робите в «БАБА і кіт»? «Обабурилися» трохи, живучи не в «Букінгемському палаці?»)

[in Ukrainian] *And by the way, do you know your family tree well? are you sure there are really no kholops [alluding to "bondmen", "bond slaves"] and all of them are kings?) what on earth do you do in "Baba I kit" [Facebook humor group, literally "old (country) woman and cat"] Have you become a bit obaburena [pejorative occasionalism alluding to "baba", old (country) woman] living not in Buckingham Palace?)*

At the discursive level the absence of anonymity (users that write comments have their profiles in a social network, and though these profiles potentially can contain untruthful infor-

mation, they create a user's personal image) influences the tactic realization: to prove the interlocutor's incompetence in a corresponding topic, an addresser often uses the information presented in the profile. Such conventional absence of anonymity, moderation of comments and possibility of being banned reduce the level of trolling and flaming in Facebook groups, however, incompetence accusations can be observed in flaming discussions that are not related to the post to which the comments are being written (so, for example, under a post with an advertisement for the Bukovels'kyi resort the users begin to discuss the political situation in Ukraine), but the frequency of employing this tactic in flaming is low.

The influence of the Internet contributes to a high frequency of Internet-memes using (5), including creolized ones (so-called "demotivators") (6).

(5) <User1 >: Як яро всі накинулися! Це колективне рішення людей, чого так широко каменуєте? І люди мають право на нього, навіть не питаючи ФБ, уявляєте?

[in Ukrainian] *Everyone has lashed out! This is a joint decision of people, why should you comment on it so sincerely? And one has the right to it, without asking FB, just fancy!*

<User2 >: І хто таке дурне придумав? Інкубатор! Вчителі повинні бути прикладом для учнів. Я розумію, що не в джинсах вчителю ходити на роботу, але і не в цьому «мотлосі».

[in Ukrainian] *Who should have thought of that? Incubator! Teachers are supposed to set an example for pupils. I understand, it's not jeans that teachers should wear at work, but not in that "trash".*

<User3>: И строем обязать ходить тоже. Ура, товарищи!!!

[in Ukrainian] *And make them walk in line as well. Hoorah, comrades!!!*

<User4>: Коментатори! ну що ви там розумієте в міжгалактичній моді...

[in Ukrainian] *Commentators! Whatever you might understand in intergalactic fashion...*



Ще раз лік-без для журналістів:
Немає ніякого Католицького Різдва
25 грудня!
25 грудня є Різдво, яке святкується
всім Світом, а саме:
православними (8 з 12 церков),
протестантами
та католиками!

(6) <User >:



‘[in Ukrainian] *a literacy update for journalists: there’s no Catholic Christmas on 25 December! 25 December is Christmas that is celebrated by the whole world, namely: Orthodox (8 out of 12 churches), Protestants and Catholics!*’

Thereby, incompetence accusations as a tactic of impoliteness superstrategy is employed by users to aggravate the interlocutor’s face and functions as a powerful linguistic means of manipulating and discrediting the interlocutor, potentially influencing the perception of an interlocutor’s social identity by other users and by the interlocutor him/herself. The analysis of impolite utterances in communication in social networks allows us not only to distinguish their lexical-semantic, syntactic and stylistic peculiarities but also determine the influence of situational context and the Internet on the whole on the realization of impoliteness. The prospects of the above research may lie within further analysis of impoliteness tactics realization in different types of digital communication.

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