THE LANGUAGE OF FLAMING

BEKARYAN L. A.
(Republic of Armenia,Yerevan)

The trade of exchanging insults is as old as humanity itself. However, it has only recently found its expression in the reality that exists in parallel with ours, the world of Information Technologies and Communications. Today, the Internet offers a wide range of electronic forums and discussion boards where controversial opinions on a variety of issues may generate heated online debates and arguments. Unfortunately, not all the communication on the net is harmonious and organized. Like face-to-face interaction, virtual communication also implies situations when participants contradict or criticize each other, express their negative attitude and emotions towards each other. In such situations *users* virtually turn into *abusers*.

What is perceived as conflict in face-to-face interaction is known as flaming in e-communication. Flames denote verbal attacks in electronic forms, like via e-mail or in a chatroom, and flamers are people keen on starting fights in virtual reality. The communicative intent of flaming messages is to criticize, offend or insult the user. Usually, flames do not start from scratch but may be provoked by various factors, like the negative disposition of the users or their conflicting views and actions. In some cases, flaming may be a kind of strategy of inviting the attention of other users or aggravating their aggression.

In the second part of the 20th century, linguists started considering the importance of context in the interpretation of sentences. Most of the conventional features of context, which include speakers, hearers, time and setting of communication, lose their value in online interaction and acquire new functions and definitions. Thus, unlike face-to-face interaction, online communication offers us an opportunity to conduct numerous conversations at the same time and with a wide range of addresses. The distinction between a speaker and a hearer may seem very slight here, as users actually do not communicate *with* but *among* each other. In flaming we have *flamers* (those who post aggressive and hostile messages) and *flamees* those who are flamed.

Unlike, traditional forms of conflictual interaction such as arguments, disputes or quarrels, *flaming* takes place in the so-called virtual reality where the conventions of time and space do not work or work differently

for individual users. Therefore, it seems inappropriate to talk about time within the framework of virtual reality as one may join at midnight an e-forum the local users of which have just witnessed the sunrise. However, the space for online communication, as well as for posting flaming messages is always the same, the *cyberspace*, the communicative intent of flaming messages is to attack, insult or abuse the addressee, and the format of flaming messages is mostly that of a chat.

Our study reveals that users tend to be more confident and aggressive in online interaction than in face-to-face situations, because of the distanced and direct nature of the communication and the lack of pressure to conform to norms.

Yet, many channels of communication available in face-to-face encounters are missing on the net. Online communication usually deprives us of the opportunity of registering our interlocutors' prosodic and non-verbal means of communication, unless we have a webcam or a microphone handy. To make up for such missing signals as facial expression, eye contact, and body movement, users take advantage of the visual field of the computer screen to produce new kinds of cues.

Our analysis of flaming messages retrieved from various bulletin boards, forums, and chat parlors has revealed that users may come up with a range of techniques to compensate for this. Thus, to indicate the intensity of their negative emotions supposed to be reflected in their voice pitch, users may type their messages in all upper case to suggest that they are angry and annoyed. Using only capital letters corresponds to shouting loudly into someone's ear and is considered to be impolite in e-communication. For instance, *YOU'RE EVIL!!!!!!*

In 1981, Scott Fahlman, devised the so-called *smileys* for encoding and conveying one's feelings in electronic mail, message boards and Internet newsgroups. Actually, smileys were soon succeeded by emoticons, as some of the emotions denoted by these symbols could in no way be associated with smiles. Today, emoticons make part and parcel of the Internet culture and no wonder that their number increases daily. Our studies have revealed more than 40 emoticons, widely used in flaming messages. It is interesting to note, that in some situations *emotions* may smooth the conflictual interaction between users and prevent further conflicts online. For example, the statement *You're an idiot* ☺*)* looks and sounds less offensive with a smiley than without it.

Another widely-employed trick is excessive punctuation. In e-communication, particularly in flaming messages, punctuation does not simply perform the function of dividing sentences or phrases but may be used deliberately by flamers to signal their disapproval of each other's comments or simply to emphasize how strong their emotions are. One of the

most characteristic features of flaming messages is the undue use of exclamation and question marks, as it is illustrated in the example below:

1. *I h8 umbridge she is ttttttoooooo mean i think she should b dead good!!!!!!!!!!* (Harry Potter Forum)

Frequent are the cases, when the so-called flaming intent of the message can not only be perceived from the content and form of the message itself, but from such extralinguistic factors, as the nicks or colours chosen by the users for chatting online. In this case, the background information of the addresses is to be taken into account. Thus, those who have read *Harry Potter* books may easily guess that the user behind the name *Voldemort* can hardly be supposed to lead a poetry discussion with them, or that the *hellraiser* is definitely not an angel. At the same time, a message typed in all red may prompt that the user is ready to start a flame and make a verbal attack, whereas a message in a colourful format may encourage a positive disposition. For instance, in the following encounter Quitana types her sentence in red signalling her intention to start a flame, whereas, Jenva, her interlocutor, does not swallow the bait and responds with a message, where he deliberately misspells Quitana's name and writes it in low case, indicating his reluctance to get involved into a flame.

2. QUITANA: *Hi everyone, I see that nobody here can talk proper English*

JENVA*: quintana, have you come to teach us how to speak properly?* (ESL Café Forum)

As far as the semantic content of flaming messages is concerned, their characteristic language means may include:

• **Offensive salutations.** Most flamers address their victims as *nerds, geeks or lamers*. Obviously, these salutations achieve the desirable effect on the addressees and the latter swallow the bait.

• **Personalization.** What can be considered rude and impolite in face-to-face interaction gains a touch of individuality and eccentricity in online communication. Thus, most of the users are keen on personalizing their messages, using such starters *as i immensely dislike, i hate*, i *loathe*, etc.

• **Intensifiers.** The examples provided below demonstrate how the intensifiers *utterly, terribly* tend to have a heightening effect on the adjectives they modify and denote a scale upwards from the assumed norm.

4. *Umbridge is **utterly** loathsome! Can you please vote against her on my poll?* (Harry Potter Forum)

5. *It was **terribly** written.* (The Da Vinci Code Forum)

• **Interjections** signal the users' negative emotions and feelings. Among these are *urrrgh*, indicating the flamer's negative disposition or even disgust towards the flamee or the subject of the discussion, *hee hee* mostly used to mock the flamee, *aaah* expressing the speaker's disagreement, etc.

• **Derogatory or insulting words and expressions** express the speaker's critical attitude. Taboo words on the other hand, are not so frequent in virtual reality, as we expect them to be. Netiquette dictates that users should respect each other and restrain themselves from swearing not to be banned from chatrooms and e-forums.

As we can see, the choice of medium used for communication also dictates the way communication should precede. It is not necessary to associate conflicts with political fractions, family scandals or hostile encounters. Today, face-to-face interaction is losing ground to electronic discourse, the language of e-mail, online forums, and text messaging.

Still, we believe, that users might benefit more, should they realize the simple fact, that the battlefield in the cyberspace can easily be transformed into the field for cooperation, where discussion, a productive exchange of opinions or negations can provide and achieve more than   aggression, antagonism and offensive words.

ՀԱԿԱՄԱՐՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԿԱՐՃԱԿԱՆ (ՎԻՐՏՈՒԱԼ) ԼԵԶՈՒՆ

ԲԵՔԱՐՅԱՆ Լ. Ա.(Հայաստանի Հանրապետություն, ք. Երևան)

Ամփոփում

Ներկա ժամանակաշրջանում, գիտության և տեխնիկայի զարգացմանը զուգընթաց, հակամարտության ուսումնասիրությունն արդիական է դարձել նաև, այսպես կոչված, թվացյալ իրականության պայմաններում, որտեղ հակամարտության դրսևորումները հայտնի են *ֆլեյմ* անվանմամբ և մատնանշում են ագրեսիվ բնույթի, զայրույթ արտահայտող հաղորդագրություններ, որոնք ծավալվում են էլեկտրոնային նամակագրության մեջ կամ ինտերնետում ընթացող զրույցի ընթացքում: Ֆլեյմերի հաղորդակցական նպատակն է քննադատել կամ վիրավորել զրուցակցին: Ֆլեյմ-ուղերձները կարող են անմիջականորեն կապված լինել համակարգչչ օգտագործողների հոգեբանական որակների, նախորդ հա-ղորդակցական փորձի հետ և այլն: Համակարգչային դիսկուրսում ֆլեյմ-ուղերձները հիմնականում նշութավորվում են խոսքային (փոխադարձ վիրավորանքներ, անարգանք և այլն) և տպագրական միջոցներով (գույներ, կետադրություն, շղատառ, պայմանական նշաններ և այլն):

ЯЗЫК ВИРТУАЛЬНОГО КОНФЛИКТА

БЕКАРЯН Л. А.(Республика Армения, г. Ереван)

Резюме

Понятие конфликта в последнее время стало применяться в различных общественных сферах: в политике, спорте, деловом и электронном общении и т.д.

Межличностный конфликт в контексте виртуальной реальности имеет свои побудительные причины. Социально-психологические и коммуникативно-прагмалингвистические особенности межличностного коммуникативного конфликта выявляют речевой механизм конфликтного диалога во всемирной сети и электронном общении.