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The “Lost Generation” as a Discursive Outcome of Verbal Aggression

Abstract: *The article examines the phenomenon of verbal aggression in contemporary public and youth communication and its role in shaping the notion of the so-called “lost generation.” The theoretical framework of the study is grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of speech genres, according to which language is realized through historically formed and socially conditioned communicative forms. The analysis demonstrates that aggressive discursive practices, widely disseminated in media, political discourse, and digital communication, are gradually normalized within primary, everyday speech genres and significantly influence the linguistic socialization of younger generations.*

The study draws on key theoretical classifications of verbal aggression proposed by Arnold Buss and Yulia Shcherbinina, enabling the identification and functional interpretation of various forms of aggression, including active and passive, direct and indirect, as well as explicit and implicit manifestations. It is argued that verbal aggression can no longer be viewed as an individual or incidental deviation from communicative norms but rather as a socially legitimized communicative strategy employed for self-assertion, dominance, and emotional release.

The findings suggest that the normalization of aggressive speech leads to the erosion of dialogic communication, a decline in empathy and communicative responsibility, and the strengthening of conflict-oriented interactional models. Within this framework, the concept of the “lost generation” is interpreted not as a deterministic label but as a discursive warning that points to the potential erosion of linguistic culture and dialogic sensitivity. The article concludes that understanding verbal aggression as a social and pragmatic phenomenon is essential for critically assessing contemporary communicative practices and for developing alternative, ethically grounded, and dialogically oriented models of interaction.

Keywords: *verbal aggression; youth communication; aggressive discourse; “lost generation”.*

Introduction

Language does not exist in the abstract – it is always realized in specific utterances, and these utterances are organized into speech gen-

res. Each genre is formed according to human activity within a particular sphere (everyday conversation, science, politics, media, literature, etc.) (Bakhtin, 1986). Bakhtin distinguishes three main components in the classification of speech genres:

- Thematic content – what we say (what the subject and meaning of the speech are);
- Style – how we say it (the vocabulary, tone, evaluation, and emotionality);
- Compositional structure – how the utterance is organized (how the text begins, develops, and ends).

These three components are interconnected and determined by the specific social conditions of communication, which include the communicative sphere, the social roles and status of the participants, the communicative purpose, the situational context, and the linguistic and cultural norms established within a given society.

Bakhtin distinguishes between primary, or simple, genres (everyday, spontaneous speech: dialogue, family conversations, arguments, jokes, exclamations) and secondary, or complex, genres (established written and institutional forms: scientific texts, literature, political speeches, media discourse). It should also be noted that primary genres are often incorporated into secondary ones, which, in turn, leads to transformations in speech forms (Bakhtin, 1986).

Theoretical background

According to Bakhtin, speech genres are historically formed, relatively stable communicative forms that reflect the conditions and purposes of specific social spheres. At the same time, he emphasizes that each historical period develops genres that shape the overall tone of literary and public discourse. Particularly important is Bakhtin’s observation that primary, everyday oral genres – such as dialogue, family and intimate conversations, as well as social and political-philosophical communication – gradually enter written and institutional discourse and transform it.

In this context, verbal aggression can be viewed not as an accidental or individual deviation from the norm, but as a discursive practice that forms part of the dominant primary genres of a particular historical period. When aggressive, polarized, and emotionally charged speech becomes normalized within media space, political discourse, and digital communication, it also finds its way into everyday conversation and exerts a particularly strong influence on young people, whose

“speech experience” is shaped within these very genres. As a result, verbal aggression not only alters young people’s linguistic choices and communicative strategies, but also enters personal relationships – shaping forms of conflict resolution, styles of self-expression, and levels of tolerance toward others.

Thus, the theory of speech genres proposed by Bakhtin provides a solid theoretical foundation for understanding how verbal aggression becomes normalized in contemporary youth communication and what risks this process may entail from both linguistic and social perspectives.

What is a verbal aggression?

Verbal aggression is a form of aggressive behavior that is realized through language and communicative actions and is directed toward discrediting, humiliating, controlling, or exerting psychological pressure on the addressee. It is not limited to explicit insults and threats; it also includes indirect, implicit, and non-verbal manifestations, which makes it a multilayered and complex linguistic phenomenon.

One of the fundamental theoretical models of verbal aggression is the classification proposed by Arnold Buss, according to which aggressive acts are defined along three intersecting dimensions: physical/verbal, active/passive, and direct/indirect. The combination of these dimensions yields eight categories of aggression, four of which belong directly to verbal aggression.

Active direct verbal aggression is characterized by overt hostile intent, including threats, insults, and categorical demands, and is considered the most widespread form in contemporary public and everyday discourse. Active indirect verbal aggression is realized through slander, gossip, and discreditation and usually develops without direct communicative contact. Passive direct verbal aggression manifests itself through refusal to engage in dialogue, ignoring the interlocutor, or terminating communication; despite the absence of a verbal act, it expresses an aggressive stance. Passive indirect verbal aggression, in turn, is associated with the deliberate avoidance of providing explanations, stating one’s position, or offering a verbal response.

The further development of the concept of verbal aggression is supported by Yulia Shcherbinina’s classification, which analyzes aggression according to several criteria. In terms of intensity, weak and strong forms are distinguished, where strong aggression includes swearing, obscene vocabulary, threats, sarcasm, and loud or categorical

demands, while weak forms manifest through indirect insults and refusal. According to modes of expression, explicit aggression is distinguished – characterized by obvious and overt verbal attacks – and implicit aggression, which is based on irony, hidden threats, and context-dependent meanings (Shcherbinina, 2004).

According to the object of aggression, Shcherbinina distinguishes between transitive and intransitive verbal aggression. Transitive aggression is directed toward a specific addressee, whereas intransitive aggression involves general, unfocused verbal abuse and the expression of negative attitudes.

In addition, a distinction is made between instrumental aggression, which serves the achievement of a specific goal (pressure, manipulation, domination), and non-instrumental aggression, which results from emotional release and affective reactions (Shcherbinina, 2004).

The realization of verbal aggression occurs through both verbal and non-verbal means. At the verbal level, it is expressed through evaluative and invective vocabulary, jargon, and the use of stylistically reduced or non-standard language, while at the non-verbal level, it can be conveyed through gestures, intonation, and even silence. This demonstrates that verbal aggression is not merely a linguistic violation, but also a social and pragmatic phenomenon closely linked to power, context, and communicative goals.

The multifaceted classification of verbal aggression shows that this phenomenon is not merely the result of individual emotional expressions, but a socially and culturally conditioned communicative practice that actively shapes the speech and behavioral patterns of young people. The typologies proposed by Arnold Buss and Yulia Shcherbinina allow us to see how aggressive speech transforms into a norm of everyday communication and how it moves from public discourse into personal interactions.

Contemporary young people are constantly exposed to an aggressive communicative environment – media, social networks, and political discourse frequently disseminate patterns of active direct and indirect verbal aggression, such as insults, mockery, sarcasm, threats, and discreditation. Through their regular repetition, these forms become normalized in the consciousness of young people and are perceived as acceptable communicative strategies (Fairclough, 1995). This highlights one of the main driving factors of verbal aggression – the social legitimization of aggressive language and its perception as an effective means of self-expression.

Particularly noteworthy is the spread of implicit and passive forms of aggression in youth communication. Irony, hidden threats, ignoring, silence, and refusal to engage in dialogue are often no longer perceived as aggressive acts, yet they are no less harmful in terms of psychological impact. Under such conditions, young people learn not constructive approaches to conflict resolution, but rather how to mask it through indirect pressure, which negatively affects their socialization and emotional intelligence.

Instrumental forms of verbal aggression in youth environments are often used for self-assertion, domination, or gaining status within a particular group. The use of aggressive vocabulary, jargon, and stylistically reduced language becomes part of identity construction (Karaulov, 2010), whereas non-instrumental aggression serves as a means of emotional release (Buss, 1961). As a result, aggressive speech gradually alters dialogical interaction, reduces levels of empathy, and reinforces conflict-based communicative patterns.

The impact of verbal aggression on young people's personal lives is also manifested in the degradation of relationships, the decline of trust, and the devaluation of communicative responsibility. Frequent use of verbal aggression fosters the entrenchment of hostile attitudes and a loss of tolerance toward differing opinions; thus, verbal aggression is no longer merely a linguistic issue – it becomes a social and ethical challenge that threatens the development of young people's communicative culture and dialogical interaction (Razmadze, 2019).

The regular exposure to and use of aggressive forms of speech among young people not only becomes normalized, but gradually shapes the overall communicative style of the generation. Daily contact with aggressive discourse (through social networks, media, and personal interactions) predisposes young people to perceive aggression as a normal, acceptable, and effective communicative strategy. As a result, they prioritize insults, mockery, sarcasm, and covert manipulation over dialogue and constructive conflict-resolution principles¹, using these strategies to assert their opinions and positions (van Dijk, 2008). This process contributes to the emergence of the so-called “lost generation.” This concept is used primarily in relation to historical and social processes, when the socio-political conditions of a society (wars, post-war

¹ **Constructive principles** in conflict resolution involve dialogical, well-reasoned, and mutually respectful communication, focused on the substance of the problem, reducing emotional tension, and achieving mutual understanding, rather than on discrediting the opponent or gaining symbolic power.

periods, dictatorship, etc.) prevent one or more generations from realizing their potential. As a result, their abilities and development are hindered, and their talent and opportunities for self-actualization are obstructed. As for the role of linguistic aggression in generational degradation: the social, political, and economic conditions of society contribute to linguistic degradation, including forms of aggression that exceed acceptable limits and become destructive, thereby negatively affecting the next generation. Young people who forget literary norms come to perceive aggressive speech as a standard of everyday communication, and over time, it becomes normalized. In such cases, their interactions are based on confrontation, and in extreme instances, on humiliation and rudeness, which, in turn, has a serious impact on their personal lives, affecting relationships with family members, friends, and classmates.

Methodology

To examine how verbal aggression operates in contemporary Georgian discourse and its presence in youth communication, this study employs a *qualitative discourse analysis* framework informed by critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). The data corpus consists of media texts (from leading news portals like “*Interpressnews*” and “*Netgazeti*”), public social media posts (specifically from high-engagement *Facebook* discussions), political statements, and public reactions collected between 2019 and 2023. The criteria for selecting these examples were based on their high visibility, frequency of circulation (virality), and the presence of specific linguistic markers such as evaluative language, moral dichotomization, or narrative polarization. This selection process ensures that the analyzed texts are representative of the dominant communicative trends in the Georgian digital and public space.

Discourse analysis allows examination of micro-semantic features (how single words/phrases carry evaluative meaning) and macro-narratives (how these aggregate into broader social stories). Instances of verbal aggression were categorized according to Buss’s (1961) and Shcherbinina’s (2004) typologies, enabling systematic comparison. van Dijk’s sociocognitive model of discourse and ideology guided the interpretation of how language shapes group boundaries and social cognition (van Dijk, 2008).

Analysis and Discussion

Case Studies of Verbal Aggression in Georgia

Regular exposure to aggressive discourse *suggests a potential trend toward* the normalization of verbal aggression, which may shape the communicative style of youth. In Georgia, crises such as the Covid-19 pandemic, Ukraine-Russia war, and delays in EU candidate status procedures produced discourses featuring moral dichotomies, micro-semantic markers, and narrative polarization:

- June 21, 2019 (the so-called “Gavrilov Night”) – protests and a crackdown in Tbilisi, triggered during the session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, when Russian Duma deputy Sergey Gavrilov occupied the chair of the then Speaker of the Georgian Parliament and conducted the session in Russian within the Georgian Parliament. The following are *representative formulations* of the public sentiment circulating at the time: “Anyone who allowed this humiliation is a traitor and deserves to be removed from public life”; “This is not politics anymore – it is betrayal of the nation”. From a discourse-analytical perspective, such utterances employ strategies of delegitimization² and moral absolutism³ to transform political disagreement into a polarized, moral confrontation. By invoking concepts of “betrayal” and “national humiliation,” the addressee frames the opposition not as a legitimate alternative position but as a threat to collective identity.

- 2020 – the Covid-19 pandemic: Humanity faced the unprecedented challenge of the global spread of Covid-19, which in turn triggered widespread fear, suspicion, social withdrawal, and the beginnings of remote, virtual lifestyles. During this period, *direct quotations from public social media comments* included: “People like you are spreading the virus and should be isolated from society”; “If you don’t follow the rules, you are irresponsible and dangerous”. These examples illustrate biased moral branding: terms like “irresponsible” and “dangerous” constitute evaluations of the individual’s moral character. Elements of passive aggression are present: “should be isolated” implies the consequences of behavior, exerting control over actions. The overall tone is categorical – right/wrong, safe/dangerous – which resonates with fear-

² **Delegitimization** is a discursive strategy aimed at undermining or completely denying the legitimacy of a particular person, group, or position in public communication.

³ **Moral absolutism** is a discursive strategy in which a social or political issue is presented in a univocal manner – as either absolutely right or absolutely wrong – without any nuance, context, or alternative perspective.

based rhetoric. Additionally, micro-structures of social discourse are evident: the phrases construct a “social threat” and divide groups (us vs. them), despite the statistical realities of the pandemic.

- February 2022 – the Ukraine-Russia war and related campaigns: For illustration, consider the following examples: “Anyone who questions this position is supporting the enemy”; “Neutrality is just another form of betrayal.” In these cases, terms like “supporting the enemy” and “betrayal” reflect a moral dichotomy⁴, which restricts the communicative space for expressing alternative opinions and takes the form of either “advice” or prohibition. From the perspective of polarization structures, these phrases operate within an “us vs. them” schema, which linguistically establishes functional differentiation between groups⁵ and creates a rhetorical conflict⁶.

- May 2022 – Georgia’s EU candidate status procedures and the negative public reaction to the rejection: This event triggered *paraphrased summaries of widespread messages* such as: “They have robbed the country of its European future”; “This decision proves incompetence and moral failure”. These metaphors of a “lost future” directly contribute to the discursive construction of a “lost generation” identity. Here verbal aggression is not only emotional but also structurally creates a narrative that reinforces national and collective sentiments. The author employs emotional verbalization through intense metaphors like “robbed” and “failure”. Additionally, a narrative aggression technique is used – “European future” – which constructs the concept of a “lost future.”

Statement by the Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, regarding the decision of the Georgian Dream party not to initiate negotiations for EU accession and to refuse EU financial support until 2028. This statement provoked public protest, which subsequently escalated into internal conflicts within the country. Examples circulating in relation to this event include: “This is an open rejection of the people’s will.” “Those who made this decision have isolated the country

⁴ **Moral dichotomy** is a speech strategy in which actions, positions, or individuals are classified into two extreme categories (right/wrong, good/violent, patriotism/betrayal).

⁵ **Functional differentiation of groups** reflects a process in which discursive groups are distinguished according to specific functions or roles. Linguistically constructed “us vs. them” boundaries help identify different groups and also define their social functions.

⁶ **Rhetorical conflict** is a discourse structure in which words generate confrontation, which in turn reinforces polarization and evokes moral or emotional reactions.

from its future.” These utterances employ the language of institutional distrust, with micro-semantic structures⁷ such as “rejection” and “isolated.” They feature moral accusations emphasizing the responsibility of specific individuals, while the emotional tone – “people’s will,” “country’s future” – reflects collective aggression.

The analysis reveals that the narrative of a *lost future*, often invoked in political and media discourse (e.g., regarding EU accession), is directly reflected in the speech patterns of Georgian youth; They often perceive the future as doomed or restricted, which *may lead to* the adoption of monolithic and negative communicative patterns. In this sense, the “lost generation” is not merely a social label but a narrative identity embedded within speech structures and triggered by the persistent exposure to aggressive crisis-discourse.

Impact on Youth Communication

Language thus becomes not only a communication tool but also an instrument of social control and narrative construction, shaping youth as emotionally reactive and socially fragmented. Implicit and passive aggression – irony, covert threats, ignoring, silence – is especially concerning as it often goes unrecognized but deeply affects socialization and emotional intelligence. Instrumental aggression in youth serves status assertion, dominance, and identity construction, while non-instrumental aggression functions as emotional discharge (Buss, 1961; Karaulov, 2010). Consequently, verbal aggression undermines dialogicality, empathy, and communicative responsibility. Conflict resolution favors confrontation, sarcasm, and discreditation over constructive engagement, reinforcing the “lost generation” narrative. This term reflects not only a socio-political condition but also a discursive pattern embedded in speech.

The regular use of verbal aggression creates conditions for the neglect of literary norms, the decline of linguistic culture, and the erosion of communicative ethics, resulting in personal interactions gradually falling within the boundaries of aggressive speech. The “lost generation,” in an effort to avoid physical violence, begins to employ equally hostile verbal and indirect communicative forms, which ultimately increases the frequency of conflicts and negatively affects trust and empathy. These dynamics are precisely what underpin Bakhtin’s

⁷ A **micro-semantic structure** in linguistics refers to the division of meaning at the smallest, most elementary level – that is, determining how the meaning of a single word, phrase, or other minimal unit is represented.

theory of dialogicality, Buss’s classification of aggression, and Shcherbinina’s typologies of verbal aggression.

How do instances of verbal aggression originating in the Georgian socio-political space and later disseminated through the media affect the speech of the contemporary “lost generation,” and what potential risks do they entail? Verbal aggression in modern crisis events – such as the pandemic, war, or delays in obtaining EU candidate status – linguistically constructs micro-semantic structures, triggers group differentiation, and produces narrative polarization. In the case of Covid-19, fear-based statements (“You are spreading the virus”) illustrate how an individual becomes emotionally and socially isolated. In the case of the Ukraine war, phrases such as “Anyone who questions this position is supporting the enemy” reinforce moral dichotomy, restrict discourse, and create opposing groups (“us vs. them”). Regarding EU-related issues, statements like “They have robbed the country of its European future” directly invoke the narrative of a lost future, which in the Georgian socio-political context is linked to economic, political, and moral disappointments. Linguistic analysis shows that these narratives are directly reflected in the speech of young people. They often perceive the future as doomed, restricted, and controlled, which is accompanied by heightened fear, dissatisfaction, and a negative emotional tone. Under such conditions, language becomes not only a tool of communication but also an instrument of social control, narrative construction, and the shaping of the archetype of the so-called “lost generation.” Linguistically, the “lost generation” is not merely an emotional or socio-political concept but a narrative embedded within speech structures. In the speech of Georgian youth, these narratives produce emotional, negative, and monolithic communicative patterns, indicating that verbal aggression is not simply a social reaction.

The verbal aggression exhibited by the “lost generation” is likely not a temporary phase that will simply pass; it often stems from deeper roots formed during the early stages of a child’s development (Lehman, 2022). Notably, such behavior sometimes manifests as an attempt by the child to gain power and control over older generations. It is concerning that, in these situations, the child may feel powerless or lack sufficiently developed problem-solving skills, which are necessary to cope with disappointment. They do not know how to resolve issues through socially accepted means. This may be related to problems in educational institutions, family tensions and chaos, or individual tem-

perament. As a result, such young people become emotionally overwhelmed and experience intense frustration. To cope with these and similar unpleasant emotions, they resort to aggression, insults, threats, and verbal violence toward those around them.

Patterns observed in Georgia mirror international trends. Studies in Europe and North America show aggressive language in digital spaces reduces dialogical skills and reinforces affective polarization (Androutsopoulos, 2020; Hochschild, 2016). National crises, such as Brexit or migration debates, similarly produce emotionally charged narratives and moral absolutism (Wodak, 2015; Brubaker, 2017). This confirms that verbal aggression is part of broader global communicative phenomena.

Some may argue verbal aggression is temporary, reactive rather than formative. While some aggressive utterances are situational, repeated exposure — especially through media and institutional channels — stabilizes these behaviors. Not all strong language is harmful; some may serve critical or mobilizing functions. The distinction lies in whether it promotes dialogue or exclusion. The analyzed Georgian discourse consistently exhibits exclusionary patterns.

Conclusion

The analysis presented *suggests* that verbal aggression in contemporary society is no longer merely an individual reaction but *appears to develop* as a socially and discursively normalized practice. According to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory, these *primary, everyday forms of speech* are particularly sensitive to dominant tendencies, which *may facilitate* the stabilization of aggressive speech in personal interactions.

The classifications of verbal aggression by Arnold Buss and Yulia Shcherbinina discussed in this study demonstrate that aggressive speech is a multi-layered and functionally loaded phenomenon, which can manifest in direct or indirect, active or passive forms. Of particular concern is the spread of implicit and passive aggression, which often goes unnoticed yet exerts significant psychological and social influence on communication participants. In youth environments, the instrumental use of aggressive language develops as a means of self-assertion and domination, while non-instrumental aggression serves as a form of emotional release.

The findings *point to a potential risk* where the normalization of such speech *could lead* to the erosion of dialogic communication and a decline in communicative responsibility. Instead of concluding that this

is an inevitable outcome, the concept of the “lost generation” should be understood as a *discursive warning* or a signal of risks to linguistic culture.

The analysis of the examples we presented shows that verbal aggression in contemporary crisis discourse does not affect only individual emotions or societal attitudes; words and phrases construct narratives based on fear, moral judgment, and polarization, portraying the new generation as both emotionally reactive to crises and socially fragmented in terms of future prospects. In this way, verbal aggression functions as an effective instrument for social control, moral discourse, and the construction of future-oriented narratives.

In conclusion, understanding verbal aggression as a socially, pragmatically, and culturally conditioned phenomenon is essential for a critical assessment of the contemporary communicative environment. Strategies to resist aggressive discourse should be based not only on linguistic norms but also on the development of dialogical skills, ethical responsibility, and critical discursive awareness. This, in turn, can become an important prerequisite for strengthening the communicative culture of young people and humanizing social interactions.

Verbal aggression is a socially and culturally conditioned practice tied to media, political rhetoric, and discursive power structures. It operates at micro-semantic and narrative levels, shaping collective imaginaries about identity, threat, and future. Addressing aggressive discourse requires not only linguistic correction but also dialogical competence, ethical communication, and critical awareness among youth. These strategies can disrupt cycles of polarization and contribute to resilient communicative cultures.

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