

# Pragma-communicative organization of intolerant discourse: creating images of out-group and in-group

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## Abstract

In recent years, hate speech has rightfully received worldwide attention from researchers in numerous spheres, including those of sociology, psychology, jurisprudence, political science, etc. Meanwhile, the very essence of the phenomenon as well as the component *speech* in the term itself necessitate the studies of hate speech from the perspective of language science, and namely – due to the character of the phenomenon – pragmalinguistics. In this light, my article is aimed at identifying core communicative strategies and tactics used by the speaker in the framework of intolerant discourse. The research is based on Belarusian online users' comments on news covering gender issues. Since hate speech is based on the fundamental friend-or-foe opposition, I focus not only on the tactics of creating a negative image of the out-group but also on the ways the speaker elevates the image of the in-group. The study reveals that the speaker's hostile attitude towards the addressee is chiefly manifested in the use of the communicative strategy of discrediting, the tactics of which can be conditionally divided into four groups: tactics aimed at belittling a social group (insult, humiliation, mocking, and understatement or denial); tactics aimed at defaming a social group (accusation, attributing hostile intentions, forecasting, and polarization); tactics aimed at justifying intolerance (forced intolerance, legitimization of intolerance, precedent, and appeal to authority); and tactics aimed at encouraging intolerance (appeal, inducing intolerance, and threat). The creation of a favorable image of the in-group is mostly achieved with the help of the communicative strategy of positive self-presentation that is implemented in intolerant discourse through shielding (quasi-concession, quasi-denial, quasi-apology, and shifting) and flaunting (exemplification and conforming) tactics. Although the research is confined to the Belarusian gender-based case study only, the fact that hate speech is always a reflection of the we-versus-they dichotomy innate to the participants of intolerant discourse regardless of the language of communication allows me to nevertheless presume that the findings may be extended to other discourse communities and applied to the analysis of other types of intolerant discourse.

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## 1 Introduction: key terms and methodology

Ever since (im)politeness studies became a separate field of pragmalinguistics, numerous attempts have been made to develop a nomenclature of communicative strategies and tactics that formalize polite and impolite speech behavior (cf. e. g., Haverkate 1984; Brown/Levinson 1987; Culpeper 2011). Considering that the study of hate speech as a component of intolerant

discourse has only recently separated from the linguistic study of impoliteness and is becoming more and more relevant as an independent direction (cf. e. g., Stollznow 2020; Knoblock 2022; Brown/Sinclair 2023), I believe that there is a need to develop a specific classification of communicative strategies that verbalize hostility towards certain social groups.

My article focuses on the two main communicative strategies of intolerant discourse, i. e. discrediting and positive self-presentation. Namely these two strategies serve as the pragma-communicative framework of intolerant discourse since they naturally represent the underlying cognitive basis of intolerant discourse – we-versus-they opposition. The aim of the article is to provide a brief overview of the most significant speech tactics actualizing these two strategies within gender-biased online hate speech.

The research is based on Belarusian internet users' comments on online news related to LGBTQ+ people and women and published in the Belarusian segment of the web from 2015 to 2019. For ethical reasons, I do not provide any information on the comments or commentators. Nevertheless, the list of the online news articles with comments that served as a source of factual material is stored in a separate database available for experts. For the selection of factual material and its categorization, cf. Vasilenko 2022: 116–123. The conducted language analysis is greatly influenced by pragmalinguistic works by Boris Norman (cf. e. g., Norman 2018).

I shall now briefly focus on the meaning of the key terms.

I understand *intolerant discourse* as a type of discourse of power that represents an intergroup conflict of values (we-group, or in-group, versus they-group, or out-group) and is based on hostility as a reflection of social stereotypes in the minds of its subjects (cf. Vasilenko 2022: 58–63).

*Hate speech* is viewed as the verbal component of intolerant discourse, being “a set of language means expressing a negative, based on stereotypes or prejudices, attitude towards the addressee as a carrier of values different from those of the addresser and, as a result, verbalizing one or another type of discrimination or intolerance” (Vasilenko 2021: 561).

A *communicative strategy*, as proposed by Oksana Issers, is a set of speech actions that aims at achieving a communicative goal and includes planning the process of speech communication depending on the specific conditions of communication and the personalities of communicants, as well as the implementation of this plan (cf. Issers 1999/2017: 54).

The implementation of a communicative strategy in speech is carried out with the help of *speech tactics* understood as sets of practical moves in the real process of speech interaction (cf. Klyuev 2002: 18).

With that said, I shall proceed with a brief outline of the key strategies and tactics constituting the pragma-communicative framework of gender-biased online discourse.

## **2 An outline of the basic speech tactics of intolerant discourse**

As I have already mentioned, the we-versus-they dichotomy finds its reflection in the two central communicative strategies of intolerant discourse, the strategy of discrediting and the strategy of positive self-presentation. The strategy of discrediting manifests the speaker's hostile

attitude towards the out-group, while the strategy of positive self-presentation seeks to create a positive image of the speaker or their social group.

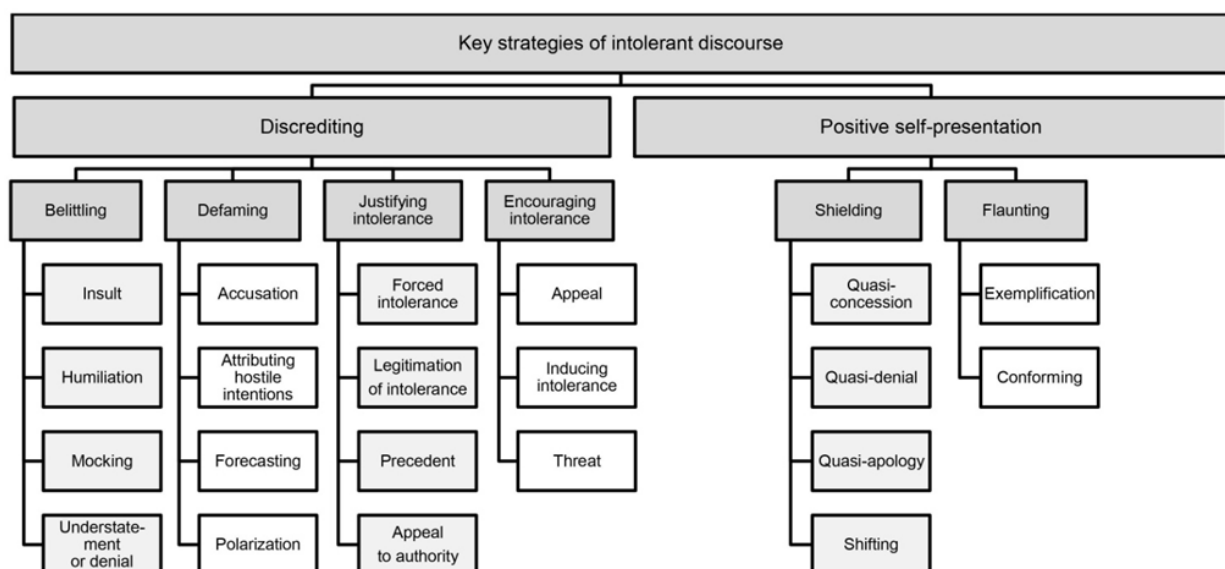
The main tactics implementing the strategy of discrediting (*downplay* in Larson's 1973/2013 classification) have been described in a range of linguistic papers (cf. e. g., Issers 1999/2017; Romanova et al. 2017). The analysis of the factual material allowed me to identify several tactics not mentioned in the previously published papers and to conditionally divide all the tactics implementing the communicative strategy of discrediting into four groups:

- (1) tactics aimed at belittling an out-group, i. e. the tactics of insult (including labeling), humiliation, mocking, as well as understatement or denial;
- (2) tactics aimed at defaming (creating a negative image of) an out-group, i. e. the tactics of accusation, attributing hostile intentions, forecasting, and polarization;
- (3) tactics aimed at justifying intolerance, i. e. the tactics of forced intolerance (or intolerance against intolerance), legitimization of intolerance, precedent, and appeal to authority; and
- (4) tactics aimed at encouraging intolerance, i. e. the tactics of appeal, inducing intolerance (often entailing the use of force), and threat (both direct and indirect).

The strategy of positive self-presentation within intolerant discourse is understood as a positive presentation or raising the image of the in-group. The strategy is implemented through two groups of tactics (cf. here, e. g., van Dijk 1987; Lee et al. 1999):

- (1) shielding tactics, i. e. tactics aimed at defending the speaker's image, namely the tactics of quasi-concession, quasi-denial, quasi-apology, and shifting; and
- (2) flaunting tactics, i. e. tactics aimed at demonstrating the speaker's merits, namely the tactics of exemplification and conforming.

The pragma-communicative framework of intolerant online discourse is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Key strategies and tactics of intolerant online discourse**

In the following sections, I shall present the models actualizing speech tactics used by online users within intolerant gender-based discourse and briefly consider some of the most common

linguistic ways of their verbalization (for a more detailed description cf. Vasilenko 2022: 149–191).

In all the models given below, X is always understood as a vulnerable social group, and Y – as a dominant social group. The value of other variables is specified on a case-by-case basis. The *addressee* stands for either direct or indirect, as well as either collective (a social group) or individual (a representative of a social group) addressee.

I must underline that one tactic can be presented by two or even more models as in some cases models stand for exact speech patterns used by the commentators. At the same time, some tactics can be formulated in a more abstract way since sometimes the meaning of the speech act can only be derived from the general context.

For the most part, the given examples preserve the speaker's spelling and punctuation, while the translation is slightly adapted for a clearer understanding. I do not provide word-for-word translation as it seems to be irrelevant for the current research purposes; however, I try to keep the translation stylistically close to the original text.

### **3 The strategy of discrediting**

Since intolerant discourse is inherently evaluative, grounded in we-versus-they distinctions, and shaped by entrenched social stereotypes, it is unsurprising that its primary communicative strategy is one of discrediting. This verbal expression of a speaker's hostile attitude toward an out-group manifests itself through efforts to belittle and defame the out-group, as well as through rhetoric that justifies or even actively encourages intolerance toward its members. Let me now examine more closely the specific tactics that constitute the strategy of discrediting on the basis of my factual material.

#### **3.1 Tactics aimed at belittling an out-group**

##### **3.1.1 Insult**

The tactic of insult consists in a humiliating assessment of the addressee. A most general legal interpretation of an insult can be that of a deliberate infringement of another person's honor expressed in an indecent form. In accordance with the above definition, the criteria for classifying an utterance as insulting are 1) infringement of an individual's honor, 2) an intentional character of the infringement, and 3) an indecent form of the utterance.

However, it is difficult to explain what exactly is meant by an indecent form of the utterance. Even labels provided in dictionaries (such as *rude* or *vulgar*) cannot always serve as a basis for recognizing the word insulting since they, as stated in Izotova/Kuznetsov/Plotnikova (2016: 22), firstly, are presented in dictionaries inconsistently and, secondly, cannot be viewed as an unconditional marker of the offensive meaning while any evaluative meaning is always derived from the context, and even “neutral” – from the speaker's point of view – words include an evaluative component disclosed in the context.

In this light, I adhere to a broad interpretation of insult as an intentional humiliating assessment of the addressee that is generally (but not necessarily) verbalized with the help of rude, vulgar, obscene, or suchlike words.

The tactic of insult can be revealed through two main models.

Model 1: 'Being X is bad' is verbalized with the help of negatively connotated lexico-semantic units denoting something unpleasant, for example:

- (1) *Парад уродства и противоестественности который вызывает у нормального человека только одно чувство. Чувство омерзения и отвращения. Фу... такими быть.*  
 [Parad urodstva i protivoeestestvennosti kotoryy vyzyvayet u normal'nogo cheloveka tol'ko jedno chuvstvo. Chuvstvo omerzeniya i otrashcheniya. Fu... takimi byt'.]  
 'A parade of ugliness and unnaturalness that causes only one feeling in a normal person. A feeling of loathing and disgust. Yuck... to be like that.'

Model 2: 'X is bad' is verbalized with the help of pejorative nominations, for example:

- (2) *Геі гэта вырадкі. Псіхічна хворыя.*  
 [Gei geta vyradki. Psikhichna khvoryya.]  
 'Gays are freaks. Mentally ill.'

Insulting metaphorical nominations can also serve as a marker of this tactic. In this case, insult can be presented in the form of Model 3: 'X is similar to A', where A is a nomination related to the source sphere of the metaphorical model. For example, the zoomorphic metaphor of a rooster acts as a label to denote homosexual men in the Russian and Belarusian languages:

- (3) *Если назвали петухом – надо бить, и бить сильно.*  
 [Esli nazvali petukhom – nado bit' i bit' sil'no.]  
 'If they call you a rooster – you should beat them, and beat them hard.'

### 3.1.2 Humiliation

The tactic of humiliation is similar to the tactic of insult as it also verbalizes a humiliating assessment of the addressee and is represented by the models Model 1: 'Being X is bad' and Model 2: 'X is bad'. However, this tactic implies an **indirect** insult expressed with the help of “softer” linguistic means and techniques, i. e. with the help of the so-called contextual hate speech – as opposed to the textual hate speech that is expressed by signs with stable negative meanings (cf. Sychev/Koval'/Zhadunova 2018: 809). This tactic is actualized by linguistic means of expressing disdain, contempt, disgust, and other similar states which are difficult to differentiate even given a full context.

Thus, instead of nouns and adjectives containing a negative assessment, other linguistic units can be used as pejorative nominations of a person (Model 1: 'Being X is bad'). For example, referring to homosexual men, the author of comment (4) uses a negatively connotated phrase *не пойми кто* 'a god-knows-who', the semantics of which is revealed when being contrasted to the noun *парень* 'guy':

- (4) *Приходишь к доктору не пойми кем, пьешь микстурку и выходишь парнем.*  
 [Prikhodish' k doktoru nepoymi kem, p'esh' miksturku i vykhodish' parnem.]  
 'You come to the doctor being a god-knows-who, take medication and leave as a guy.'

Neutral and positive evaluative vocabulary can also be used as a pejorative nomination of a person, as it acquires negative evaluative connotations in a certain communicative situation, including that of sarcasm:

- (5) *Я тоже не хочу жить рядом с ЛГБТ. Не нравятся мне эти существа.*  
 [Ya tozhe ne khochu zhit' ryadom s LGBT. Ne nrayatsya mne eti sushchestva.]  
 'I don't want to live next to LGBT either. I don't like these creatures.'

Even the correct name of a social group can serve as a marker of the speaker's intolerant attitude to the social group. As a rule, such statements are constructed according to Model 4: '(Because) You/He/She/They is/are X'. For example, in comment (6), the speaker expresses a demonstratively condescending attitude towards a representative of the out-group in a remark containing the presupposition "All women slander":

- (6) *...и ни одна из ваших клевет не обоснована ничем, кроме того что вы так думаете. но вам простительно, вы женщина.*  
 [...i ni odna iz vashikh klevet ne obosnovana nichem, krome togo chto vy tak думаete. no vam prostitel'no, vy zhenshchina.]  
 '...and none of your slander is justified by anything except the fact that you think so. but you can be forgiven, you are a woman.'

Model 5: 'X is X' possesses similar semantics; however, X is usually (but not necessarily) expressed by the pejorative nomination of the out-group:

- (7) *Нечего садомию защищать. извращенец, он и есть извращенец, генетический или только морально.*  
 [Nechego sadomiyu zashchishchat'. izvrashchenets, on i est' izvrashchenets, geneticheskiy ili tol'ko moral'no.]  
 'Don't defend sodomy. a pervert is a pervert, whether genetic or just moral.'

In some cases, when language units acquire a negative connotation in the sarcastic context, the tactic of humiliation converges with the tactic of mocking. These two tactics may differ in that humiliation contains a direct nomination of a social group or its representatives, e. g. in the form of deliberately incorrectly spelled names:

- (8) *Таких лгбд или как их там, нужно током лечить, говорят помогает! З.Ы. фу фу таким быть.*  
 [Takikh lgbd ili kak ikh tam, nuzhno tokom lechit', govoryat pomogaet! Z.Y. fu fu takim byt'.]  
 'Such lgbd or whatever they are called need to be treated with electric current, they say it helps! P.S. yuck. yuck to be like that.'

### 3.1.3 Mocking

The tactic of mocking is also a form of indirect insult and, as a rule, consists in making an offensive joke or giving fictitious praise to someone in order to expose them to ridicule. This tactic can be presented in the form of Model 6: 'I am surprised that Z', where Z contradicts the surprise expressed in the first part of the statement, for example:

- (9) *Ой боже мой, мне должно стать стыдно, что я с нормальной ориентацией?*  
 [Oy bozhe moy, mne dolzhno stat' stydno, chto ya s normal'noy orientatsiey?]  
 'Oh my God, should I be ashamed that I have a normal orientation?'

The tactic of mocking is often verbalized by the method of extending to absurdity. For instance, the author of comment (10) exaggerates the concept of LGBTQ+ tolerance, giving an example of a social group whose struggle for their rights seems blatantly absurd to the reader:

- (10) *я в ее репортаже не увидел главного – защиты прав торфоразработчиков. она осознанно ушла от обсуждения этой животрепещущей темы или это неразвитость общественной позиции ее и ее окружения? почему люди, вынужденные 30 лет проводить в грязных рукавицах и болотных сапогах лишены возможности в своей привычной одежде посетить тематические биенале?*

[*ya v ee reportazhe ne uvidel glavnogo – zashchity prav torforazrabotchikov. ona oso-znanno ushla ot obsuzhdeniya etoy zhivotrepeshchushchey temy ili eto nerazvitost' obshchestvennoy pozitsii ee i ee okruzheniya? pochemu lyudi, vynuzhdennye 30 let provodit' v gryaznykh rukavitsakh i bolotnykh sapogakh lisheny vozmozhnosti v svoey pri-vychnoy odezhdе posetit' tematicheskie bienale?*]

'I did not see the main thing in her report – the protection of the rights of peat developers. did she deliberately avoid the discussion of this burning topic, or is it the underdevelopment of her and her circle's public position? why are the people who are forced to spend 30 years in dirty mittens and waders deprived of the opportunity to attend themed biennales in their usual clothes?'

One more model actualizing the tactic of mocking is Model 7: 'I agree that Z' presented in comment (11). Here, Z can be expanded as 'A is bad because they allowed B', where B is an anti-discrimination statement on X, and A stands for those who agree with this statement:

- (11) *согласен – дебилы – пустили баб за руль.*  
[*soglasen – debily – pustili bab za rul'.*]  
'I agree – they are morons – to have let women drive.'

### 3.1.4 Denial and understatement

The tactic of understatement or denial is frequently used when disclosing the sub-topic "Their problems are unimportant/exaggerated" (on the cognitive and thematic organization of intolerant discourse cf. Vasilenko 2020; Vasilenko 2022: 123–148). The speaker may deny an existing problem (12) or established scientific facts (13) in order to defend their views. Such comments are based on Model 8: 'Z is a lie', where Z is a positive characteristic of the out-group or a statement about its discrimination, for example:

- (12) *Если бы реально зарплаты женщин были ниже зарплаты мужчин за одинаковую работу и ее объем, то никто бы никогда не брал на работу мужчин. зачем мужчинам платить за любую работу больше, если женщинам можно заплатить меньше на 25%. Экономия для предприятия и частника была бы колоссальная.*

[*Esli by real'no zarplaty zhenshchin byli nizhe zarplaty muzhchin za odinakovuyu rabotu i ee ob'em, to nikto by nikogda ne bral na rabotu muzhchin. zachem muzhchinam platit' za lyubuyu rabotu bol'she, esli zhenshchinam mozjno zaplatit' men'she na 25%. Ekonomiya dlya predpriyatiya i chastnika byla by kolossal'naya.*]

'If in reality women's salaries for the same work and its volume were lower than men's, then no one would ever hire men. why pay men more for any job if women can be paid less by 25%? The savings for the enterprise and the private owner would be enormous.'

- (13) *Лженаука. Гомосексуальность надо искать в социальной среде и воспитании человека. Чаще всего – это просто распушенность.*

[*Lzhenauka. Gomoseksual'nost' nado iskat' v sotsial'noy srede i vospitanii cheloveka. Chashche vsego – eto prosto raspushchennost'.*]

‘Pseudoscience. Homosexuality should be sought in the social environment and the person’s upbringing. Most often it’s just promiscuity.’

### 3.2 Tactics aimed at defaming an out-group

#### 3.2.1 Accusation

The tactic of accusation consists in attributing guilt to someone. Despite the fact that accusation, unlike insult, requires justification and evidence (Romanova et al. 2017: 164), within intolerant discourse, accusation may be unfounded and groundless. This tactic can be presented by Model 9: ‘X is to blame for problem A’, for example:

- (14) *Если он толстый, и сынишка в папу, то виновата жена. Кормит их бесполезной пищей, а сама, видать, на диетах сидит.*  
 [Esli on tolstyuy, i synishka v papu, to vinovata zhena. Kormit ikh nepoleznoy pishchey, a sama, vidat', na dietakh sidit.]  
 ‘If he is fat, and the son takes after the dad, then the wife is to blame. She feeds them unhealthy food, while she herself, apparently, is on a diet.’

Comment (15) below clearly demonstrates the connection between the tactic of accusation with the next tactics – the tactic of attributing hostile intentions and the tactic of forecasting:

- (15) *В целом считаю ЛГБТ не может объявляться государством, как норма. Кто будет решать демографическую проблему? Рано или поздно, это поколение ЛГБТ или следующее, приведут к остановке прироста населения. И кто будет платить пенсии старикам? Кто будет развивать страну под следующие поколения? Культивирование ЛГБТ – есть продвижение стерилизация страны.*  
 [V tselom schitayu LGBT ne mozhет ob'yavlyat'sya gosudarstvom, kak norma. Kto budet reshat' demograficheskuyu problemu? Rano ili pozdno, eto pokolenie LGBT ili sleduyushchee, privedut k ostanovke prirosta naseleniya. I kto budet platit' pensii starikam? Kto budet razvivat' stranu pod sleduyushchie pokoleniya? Kul'tivirovanie LGBT – est' prodvizhenie sterilizatsiya strany.]  
 ‘In general, I think LGBT people cannot be declared by the state as a norm. Who will solve the demographic problem? Sooner or later, this LGBT generation or the next one will lead to a halt in population growth. And who will pay pensions to the elderly? Who will develop the country for the next generations? The cultivation of LGBT is the promotion of the sterilization of the country.’

#### 3.2.2 Attributing hostile intentions

To indicate an unfavorable scenario for the in-group in case of an extension of the out-group’s rights, online users resort to two interrelated tactics – the tactic of attributing hostile intentions and the tactic of forecasting – both of which represent an **indirect** accusation and reveal the topic “They threaten our traditional way of life”.

The tactic of attributing hostile intentions is aimed at constructing a negative image of the out-group by attributing them malicious intent and plans that are destructive to the established order (Model 10: ‘X will do Z’, where Z is undesirable actions for the we-group), for example:

- (16) *Мерзко читать об этих «сексвойнушках». Феминистки-фурии скоро влезут на трон и всех мужиков потащат на кастрацию. Фу!*

[*Merzko chitat' ob etikh «seksvoynushkakh». Feministki-furii skoro vlezut na tron i vsekh muzhikov potashchat na kastratsiyu. Fu!*]

‘It’s disgusting to read about these “sex wars”. Feminist furies will soon climb onto the throne and drag all the men to castration. Yuck!’

### 3.2.3 Forecasting

The tactic of forecasting also allows the speaker to project their negative attitude towards the social group into the future, but unlike the tactic of attributing hostile intentions, it emphasizes the negative consequences of changing the traditional way of life for the in-group **without** attributing negative intent to the representatives of the out-group (Model 11: ‘The promotion of X’s rights will lead to Z’, where Z stands for undesirable consequences for the we-group), for example:

- (17) *Чтобы мы стали вымирать как толерантные немцы или французы? А кто вам в старости воды подаст?*

[*Chtoby my stali vymirat' kak tolerantnye nemtsy ili frantsuzy? A kto vam v starosti vody podast?*]

‘So that we become extinct like tolerant German or French people? And who will bring you a glass of water when you are old?’

The tactic of forecasting can also verbalize the sub-topic “Their rights are unfairly placed above ours” as clearly demonstrated by comment (18):

- (18) *Пройдет еще немного времени и самым ущемляемым в мире будет белый мужчина гетеросексуал.*

[*Proydet eshche nemnogo vremeni i samym ushchemlyaemym v mire budet belyy muzhchina geteroseksual.*]

‘It will take a little more time and a white male heterosexual will be the one most infringed in the world.’

### 3.2.4 Polarization

Of all the tactics implemented within intolerant discourse, the tactic of polarization most clearly embodies the we-versus-they opposition – the cognitive foundation of intolerant discourse, being expressed by Model 12: ‘They, X, are bad; we, Y, are good.’ As a rule, this tactic is verbalized by the pragmatic opposition – sometimes implicit – of the first- and third-person (in some cases second-person) personal and possessive pronouns, for example:

- (19) *Это люди с проблемами! Мы их и так терпим. Так они теперь и публично решили доказывать непонятно что?*

[*Eto lyudi s problemami! My ikh i tak terpim. Tak oni teper' i publichno reshili dokazyvat' neponyatno chto?*]

‘These are people with problems! And we tolerate them. So now they have decided to publicly prove God knows what?’

- (20) *Нет уж, раз вы все такие равноправные и хотите одинаковых прав, свобод и прочего наравне с мужиками – тогда перестаньте при каждом удобном случае давить на то, что вы “слабый пол”...*

[*Net uzh, raz vy vse takie ravnopravnye i khotite odinakovykh prav, svobod i prochego naravne s muzhnikami – togda perestan'te pri kazhdom udobnom sluchae davit' na to, chto vy "slabyu pol" ...*]

‘No, since you are all so equal and want the same rights, freedoms and other things on a par with men – then stop putting pressure on the fact that you are the “weaker sex” at every opportunity...’

### 3.3 Tactics aimed at justifying intolerance

#### 3.3.1 Forced intolerance

The tactic of forced intolerance (or intolerance against intolerance) demonstrates the speaker’s position, according to which hostility towards a social group is caused by the behavior of the social group itself (cf. the tactic of accusation in 3.2.1 above). This tactic can be presented in the form of Model 13: ‘X is to blame for the fact that we, Y, treat them badly’, for example:

- (21) *Женщин бить это отвратительно! Но я вот считаю что женщины сами виноваты что таких выбирают. вечером получил а утром как не в чем не бывало. Рабство ведь отменили или многие женщины не слышали?*

[*Zhenshchin bit' eto otvratitel'no! No ya vot schitayu chto zhenshchiny sami vinovaty chto takikh vybirayut. vecherom poluchil a utrom kak ne v chem ne byvalo. Rabstvo ved' otmenili ili mnogie zhenshchiny ne slyshali?*]

‘It’s disgusting to beat women! But I think that women themselves are to blame for choosing such people. You got beaten in the evening and in the morning you behave as if nothing happened. Slavery was abolished, huh, or many women haven’t heard of it?’

#### 3.3.2 Legitimation of intolerance

The tactic of legitimation of intolerance manifests itself in justifying and supporting sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, and suchlike views and conduct. It also involves a negative assessment of the activity aimed at eliminating discrimination (Model 14: ‘Intolerance towards X is normal/good’):

- (22) *Вы говорите “сексизм” как будто это что-то плохое!*

[*Vy gorovite “seksizm” kak budto eto chto-to plokhoe!*]

‘You say “sexism” as if it’s something bad!’

- (23) *Это не гомофобия! Это – нормальное общество, с нормальным и естественным отношением к ненормальным отношениям между людьми!*

[*Eto ne gomofobiya! Eto – normal'noe obshchestvo, s normal'nyu i estestvennyu otnosheniem k nenormal'nyu otnosheniyam mezhdu lyud'mi!*]

‘This is not homophobia! This is a normal society, with a normal and natural attitude to abnormal relationships between people!’

#### 3.3.3 Precedent

When the justification of intolerance is based on a certain pattern, usually historical, i. e. it consists in appealing to the traditionally justified cases of discrimination and violence on this ground, the tactic of precedent is actualized (Model 15: ‘There are historical examples of Z’, where Z is a description of intolerant behavior towards X), for example:

- (24) *Нужно на государственном уровне, без оглядки на какой то там Евросоюз или США, закрепить уголовную ответственность за пропаганду ЛГБТ движения! Так, как это было в СССР.*

[*Nuzhno na gosudarstvennom urovne, bez oglyadki na kakoy to tam Evrosoyuz ili SShA, zakreplit' ugolovnyuyu otvetstvennost' za propagandu LGBT dvizheniya! Tak, kak eto bylo v SSSR.*]

‘It is necessary to consolidate criminal responsibility for the propaganda of the LGBT movement at the state level, not paying attention to some European Union or USA! The way it was in the USSR.’

As seen from the example, besides the presupposition “It used to be like this”, the tactic of precedent also contains the presupposition “It used to be good”. In case when this judgment is supplemented by the proposition “If it gets different, it will get bad”, the tactic of forecasting is actualized (see 3.2.3 above).

### 3.3.4 Appeal to authority

To justify their position, the speaker can also appeal to authority (Model 16: ‘A says that Z’, where A is an authoritative source – as a rule, the Bible, and Z is a description of intolerant behavior towards X), for example:

- (25) *...Бог в Библии недвусмысленно, много раз, прямо называет гомосексуализм грехом. Покайтесь и одумайтесь, пока не поздно.*

[*...Bog v Biblii nedvusmyslenno, mnogo raz, pryamo nazyvaet gomoseksualizm grekhom. Pokaytes' i odumaytes', пока не поздно.*]

‘...In the Bible, God explicitly and directly calls homosexuality a sin many times. Repent and come to your senses before it’s too late.’

- (26) *Женщина раз и на всегда потеряла право голоса после того, как из-за её действий людей из рая выгнали.*

[*Zhenshchina raz i na vsegda poteryala pravo golosa posle того, как iz-za ee deystviy lyudey iz raya vygnali.*]

‘Woman once and for all lost the right to vote after people were kicked out of paradise because of her actions.’

## 3.4 Tactics aimed at encouraging intolerance

### 3.4.1 Appeal

The tactic of appeal is addressed directly to the out-group and, like other tactics aimed at encouraging intolerance, reveals the topic “They must know their place”. This tactic can be presented by Model 17: ‘X, do Z’, where Z is the behavior approved by the in-group, for example:

- (27) *Женщины никогда не забирайте у мужчин инструмент, мы же не забираем у вас тряпки, кастрюли.*

[*Zhenshchiny nikogda ne zabirayte u muzhchin instrument, my zhe ne zabiraem u vas tryapki, kastryuli.*]

‘Women, never take tools from men, after all, we don’t take rags and pots from you.’

As a rule, this tactic is verbalized by the imperative mood of the verb or alternative ways of expressing the speaker’s will (such as modal verbs, infinitive constructions, subjunctive mood, etc.). The same language means are used to actualize the tactic of inducing intolerance.

### 3.4.2 Inducing intolerance

The tactic of inducing intolerance converges in its meaning with the tactic of appeal. But statements implementing the tactic of inducing intolerance are addressed to third parties and can be presented in the form of Model 18: ‘Y urges (A) to do Z’, where Z is an intolerant action against X, and A (if specified) is the person/people addressed by Y, for example:

- (28) *Пропанганда гомосексуализма. Отправитъ их к психиатру.*  
 [*Propaganda gomoseksualizma. Otpravit' ikh k psikhiatru.*]  
 ‘Propaganda of homosexuality. Send them to a psychiatrist.’
- (29) *Если ущербность доказана на все 100%, как минимум стерилизовать и никак не платить пособия.*  
 [*Esli ushcherbnost' dokazana na vse 100%, kak minimum sterilizovat' i nikak ne platit' posobiya.*]  
 ‘If the defectiveness is 100% proven, they at least need to be sterilized and not paid any benefits.’

I should also emphasize that a negative judgment can be expressed in the form of a slogan, which is one of the most powerful methods of implementing the tactic of inducing intolerance, for example:

- (30) *П#дорасне – бой!*  
 [*P#dorasne – boy!*]  
 ‘Fight f#ggotry!’
- (31) *нет извращенцам.*  
 [*net izvrashchentsam.*]  
 ‘no to perverts.’

### 3.4.3 Threat

The tactic of threat targets the out-group, but the speaker does not necessarily address its representatives directly. To present the model of this tactic I adapt the interpretation of the speech act of threat proposed by Anatoliy Baranov (2014: 140f.) to the discursive conditions under analysis: Model 19: ‘Y threatens X that they will do Z because Y does not like X’, where Z is an intolerant action against X.

In the given context, the tactic of threat, similar to the tactic of inducing intolerance, consists in describing the measures that, in the speaker’s opinion, should be applied to representatives of a particular social group in order to “correct”, isolate, or even annihilate them. The tactic of threat contains no appeal to they- or we-groups in any form, and the alleged perpetrator of the threat is the speaker themselves or the group to which they relegate themselves, for example:

- (32) *Я бы таких отправлял дороги строить (принудительно), – и дурь в головы лезть не будет, и плакаться перестанут, что без работы.*  
 [*Ya by takikh otpravlyal dorogi stroit' (prinuditel'no), – i dur' v golovy lezt' ne budet, i plakat'sya perestanut, chto bez raboty.*]  
 ‘I would send such people to build roads (forcibly) – then nonsense will not get into their heads, and they will stop crying that they are out of work.’

- (33) *встретил бы после игры, да по почкам настучал. равноправие, так равноправие :D*  
 [vstretil by posle igry, da po pochkam nastuchal. ravnopravie, tak ravnopravie :D]  
 ‘I would meet her after the game and punch her in the kidneys. Equality means equality :D.’

#### 4 The strategy of positive self-presentation

As mentioned above, besides discrediting the out-group, online users resort to a number of shielding and flaunting speech tactics (cf. van Dijk 1987; Lee et al. 1999) aimed at creating a positive image of themselves as members of the in-group. These tactics are meant to disguise a hostile attitude towards they-groups. However, they clearly demonstrate that the speaker attributes themselves the right to impose their views from the position of power. Let me now examine more closely the tactics that make up the strategy of positive self-presentation in online comments.

##### 4.1 Shielding tactics

###### 4.1.1 Quasi-concession

The tactic of quasi-concession is used by the speaker as a means of avoiding explicit generalizations in order to look more objective. The tactic is expressed in the form of Model 20: ‘Of course, not all X are bad but ...’, for example:

- (34) *Женщины более эмоциональны и более зависимы (не все, конечно :)), чем мужчины. Отсюда и более длительный срок реабилитации.*  
 [Zhenshchiny bolee emotsional'ny i bolee zavisimy (ne vse, konechno :)), chem muzhchiny. Otsyuda i bolee dlitel'nyy srok rehabilitatsii.]  
 ‘Women are more emotional and more dependent (not all, of course :)) than men. Hence the longer recovery period.’

Such attempts to disguise intolerance are meant to elevate the speaker’s image in the eyes of the addressee, to present the speaker as an unbiased person accepting different viewpoints. This position allows the commentator to take an unassailable winning position in case of a dispute: “I told you that not all X are bad”. Meanwhile, the meaning of the utterance remains intolerant.

###### 4.1.2 Quasi-denial

The tactic of quasi-denial is also intended to create a more tolerant image of the speaker in the eyes of the listener due to the assertion of their impartiality. This tactic can be expressed by Model 21: ‘I am not racist/sexist/homophobic etc. but...’, for example:

- (35) *я конечно не гомофоб, поскольку мне гомосексуализм уж точно не грозит, но как-то если честно не по себе. ...будут они счастливо совокупляться друг и с другом гомосексуально в итоге, а мне в этом жить.*  
 [ya konechno ne gomofob, poskol'ku mne gomoseksualizm uzh tochno ne grozit, no kak-to esli chestno ne po sebe. ...budut oni schastlivo sovokuplyat'sya drug i s drugom gomoseksual'no v itoge, a mne v etom zhit'.]  
 ‘I’m certainly not a homophobe because I definitely don’t risk becoming a homosexualist but somehow, to be honest, I’m not at ease. ...in the end, they will be happily copulating with each other homosexually, and I will have to live amongst this.’

### 4.1.3 Quasi-apology

Another tactic aimed at mitigating the degree of hostility of the statement is the tactic of quasi-apology expressed by Model 22: ‘Excuse me, but ...’, for example:

- (36) *вы меня извините, но тайм-менеджмент женщин заканчивается там же, где и начинается: на уровне интеллекта.*  
 [yu menya izvinite, no taym-menedzhment zhenshchin zakanchivaetsya tam zhe, gde i nachinaetsya: na urovne intellekta.]  
 ‘well, excuse me, but women’s time management ends where it begins – at the level of intelligence.’

In such comments, it is impossible to identify the direct addressee of the apology, it is “impersonal”. These apologies are ostensible: the speaker does not feel guilty or awkward; they are only trying to create a more favorable impression of themselves.

### 4.1.4 Shifting

The tactic of shifting allows a commentator to shift responsibility for an intolerant attitude towards a social group to other people. The speaker does not necessarily admit that they share these views: Model 23: ‘I am not the only one who is against X’:

- (37) *...ЛГБТ у нас много кто не любит, в том числе и я.*  
 [...LGBT u nas mnogo kto ne lyubit, v tom chisle i ya.]  
 ‘...There are a lot of people here who don’t like LGBT, including me.’

## 4.2 Flaunting tactics

### 4.2.1 Exemplification

A more obvious imposition of an in-group member’s views on the representatives of the out-group is actualized with the help of the tactic of exemplification: Model 24: ‘Even I, Y, do what X should do’ (or: ‘Though I am Y, I do not behave the way X dare’):

- (38) *Я же не хожу в майке с надписями как я люблю и кого люблю иметь? Потому что это интим. А семья это мужчина и женщина и их дети. Пусть связь друг с другом по другому называют и не нервируют. Хотят совместное хозяйство? есть доверенности и завещания.*  
 [Ya zhe ne khozhu v mayke s nadpisyami kak ya lyublyu i kogo lyublyu imet'? Potomu chto eto intim. A sem'ya eto muzhchina i zhenshchina i ikh deti. Pust' svyaz' drug s drugom po drugomu nazyvayut i ne nerviruyut. Khotyat sovmestnoe khozyaystvo? est' doverennosti i zaveshchaniya.]  
 ‘Well, I don’t wear a T-shirt with the inscriptions of how I love and whom I love to bang, huh? Because it’s intimate. And the family is a man and a woman and their children. Let them find a different name for their affairs and not make us nervous. They want a joint household? Powers of attorney and wills do exist.’

The tactic of exemplification can expand its agentive range. Thus, when talking about women, male commentators can refer not to their own experience, but to that of some particular women. This technique allows online users to make their position closer to the out-group:

- (39) *Ни моя мать, ни жена, ни дочь с такой проблемой не сталкивались...*  
 [Ni moya mat', ni zhena, ni doch' s takoy problemoy ne stalkivalis'...]  
 'Neither my mother, nor my wife, nor my daughter has faced such a problem...'

#### 4.2.2 Conforming

The tactic of conforming, i. e. of relegating oneself to a positively perceived group, is similar to the previous tactic. Although while also setting themselves as an example, the speaker here is not a representative of the in-group, but a member of the out-group, who demonstrates their support for the in-group's views in the form of Model 25: 'Being X, I behave the way Y approves of'. For example, comment (40) is left by a user with a female nickname:

- (40) *Дорогие женщины! Сейчас так много так называемых “мужчин” (женщин в мужском теле), поскольку очень много мужиков в женском теле. Мужчина – это такое создание Бога, которое априори хочет чувствовать себя главным, нужным и самым умным. Поэтому позволяйте мужчинам так думать, не соревнуйтесь, не спорьте с ними в этих вопросах и все станет на свои места.*  
 [Dorogie zhenshchiny! Seychas tak mnogo tak nazyvaemykh “muzhchin” (zhenshchin v muzhskom tele), poskol'ku ochen' mnogo muzhikov v zhenskom tele. Muzhchina – eto takoe sozdanie Boga, kotoroe apriori khochet chuvstvovat' sebya glavnyim, nuzhnym i samym umnym. Poetomu pozvol'yayte muzhchinam takumat', ne sorevnuytes', ne spor'te s nimi v etikh voprosakh i vse stanet na svoi mesta.]  
 'Dear women! Nowadays there are so many so-called “men” (women in a man's body) because there are so many men in a woman's body. A man is such a God creature who a priori wants to feel the most powerful, the most necessary and the most intelligent. Therefore, let men think so, do not compete, do not argue with them in these matters, and everything will fall into place.'

Despite the author's desire to get closer to their social group – women, the call for discriminatory behavior discloses the online user's desire to be approved by representatives of the dominant group. I should also note here that, due to the anonymity of online communication, it is impossible to establish whether the author of this comment is really a woman.

## 5 Conclusion

This is a very brief (and rather conditional) overview of the key speech tactics implementing the two core strategies of intolerant discourse, namely the strategy of discrediting and the strategy of positive self-presentation. The opposition of these two strategies directly reflects the cognitive semiotic we-versus-they dichotomy – the foundation of this type of discourse.

For obvious reasons, within intolerant discourse, the strategy of discrediting is presented by a much wider range of speech tactics all of which can be conditionally divided into four groups: (1) belittling an out-group (insult, humiliation, mocking, and understatement or denial); (2) defaming an out-group (accusation, attributing hostile intentions, forecasting, and polarization); (3) justifying intolerance (forced intolerance, legitimation of intolerance, precedent, and appeal to authority); and (4) encouraging intolerance (appeal, inducing intolerance, and threat).

A second most important communicative strategy within the framework of intolerant discourse, the communicative strategy of positive self-presentation, is presented by (1) shielding tactics

(quasi-concession, quasi-denial, quasi-apology, and shifting) and (2) flaunting tactics (exemplification and conforming).

With that said, I should mention here that other communicative strategies, such as manipulation, persuasion, speech provocation, etc., can also be (and frequently are) used by the speaker within intolerant discourse in order to influence the addressee's discourse picture of the world.

In conclusion, I should note that although the research is confined to the Belarusian gender-based case study, I presume that the proposed approach – with some appropriate alterations – may be applied to the analysis of other types of intolerant discourse as well as extended to other discourse communities (cf. e. g., Tarasova 2022; Palagina 2024) since hate speech is always a reflection of the *universal* semiotic we-versus-they opposition that is innate to the participants of intolerant discourse regardless of the language of communication.

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