

DOI.org/10.52340/PUTK.2024.28.11

სიძულვილის ენა და გენდერი საქართველოში¹ HATE SPEECH AND GENDER IN GEORGIA²

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მიუხედავად იმისა, რომ გენდერულ-ფემინისტური კვლევები მსოფლიოში 1960-იანი წლებიდან საკმაოდ პოპულარულია, ეს პრობლემა ალბათ არასდროს ყოფილა ისეთი მნიშვნელოვანი, როგორც დღეს, ჩვენს რეალობაში. მართალია, ქალი და მამაკაცი, კონსტიტუციის მიხედვით, თანასწორნი არიან, საზოგადოებაში ღრმად ფესვგადგმული სტერეოტიპებიდან გამომდინარე, რეალური სურათი ძალზედ განსხვავებული და საკმაოდ მძიმეა. კერძოდ, საქართველოში ყოველწლიურად იმატებს ქალზე ოჯახური ძალადობისა და სელექციური აბორტის ფაქტები. არანაკლებია ფემიციდის მსხვერპლი ქალების რიცხვიც.

წინამდებარე კვლევა მიზნად ისახავს, დაადგინოს, თუ რა დამოკიდებულება აქვს ქართულ საზოგადოებას სიძულვილის ენასთან მიმართებით, რამდენად ხშირად გამოიყენება ის სოციალურ სივრცეში და გამოავლინოს მისი ენობრივი მახასიათებლები. კვლევა ჩატარდა თვისობრივი და რაოდენობრივი კვლევის მეთოდების გამოყენებით. ემპირიული მასალა შეკრებილია: 1) ელექტრონულად გავრცელებული კითხვარის პასუხებიდან, 2) სოციალური ქსელებიდან (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Youtube). მასალა დამუშავებულია ხელით, რადგანაც, ქართული ენა და სიძულვილის ენა თავისი სპეციფიკიდან გამომდინარე იშვიათად იძლევა საშუალებას, რომ გამოვიყენოთ კომპიუტერული ლინგვისტური პროგრამები. ელექტრონული კითხვარის პასუხებიდან და სოციალური ქსელებიდან ამოკრეფილი ემპირიული მასალის ანალიზის შედეგად

¹ ნაშრომი მხარდაჭერილია საქართველოს შოთა რუსთაველის ეროვნული სამეცნიერო ფონდის (SRNSFG) მიერ (YS-21-339).

² This paper was supported by the Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation of Georgia (SRNSFG) (YS-21-339).

დადგინდა, რომ ქართული საზოგადოება ხშირად იყენებს ქალის წინააღმდეგ სიძულვილის ენას და ეს განპირობებულია განსხვავებული რელიგიური, პოლიტიკური, სექსუალური ორიენტაციისა თუ აზრის მიუღებლობით.

საკვანძო სიტყვები: სიძულვილის ენა, გენდერი, ქალთა მდგომარეობა საქართველოში.

Keywords: hate speech, gender, situation of women in Georgia.

Introduction

Many would argue that women are no longer victims of sexism or misogyny in a modern, progressively-minded society. Moreover, such opinions are frequently based on the fact that the speaker has never become a victim of sexism, or has never insulted someone based solely on their gender. However, the reality is very far from this opinion. To take the example of Georgia, during the last 25 years, more than 31,446 girls were not born due to selective abortion (<https://media.ibsu.edu.ge/სელექციური-აბორტის-სტატ/>); The statistics of femicide are also increasing from year to year (<https://gyla.ge/ge/post/qalta-uflebrivi-mdgomareobis-shesakheb#sthash.zkpgY7JA.dpbs>).

According to patriarchal ideology, women are naturally inferior to men, and people are actively sexist when they adopt the attitude, stereotype, or belief that men and women have different rights (Richardson-Self 2021). According to Sara Ahmed (2015), sexism is a belief that has become so institutionally, and socially acceptable that we already use it automatically. For example, due to the biological differences, women's belonging to the household space, and men's to the social environment are also formed based on sexist beliefs. However, this does not mean that a person who thinks this way is necessarily sexist, as such beliefs have become a fundamental issue in our societies. As argued by Richardson-Self (2021), linguistic choices play a major role in this process. These linguistic choices sometimes are very obvious and easy to notice, but sometimes they can be more difficult to recognize. As an example, the author discusses a widely spread lexical item employed to address a female in the English-speaking community, such as «girl». This address form, at first glance, may not seem negative, and the speaker may not have intended anything bad by using it. However, in terms of content, Richardson-Self considers it sexist for a man to address an adult woman as a «girl». The argument for this opinion is the belief that this address form diminishes a woman's mental abilities, «deprives» her of the status of an adult and reinforces the opinion that a woman is at a lower level of development than a man. Therefore, even though the speaker may not want to insult the addressee or make a sexist remark, these forms may be so ingrained in our worldview or linguistic choices that may even go unnoticed.

Misogyny is a more complicated form than sexism. It believes that men rule and women obey them (Richardson-Self 2021; Tirrell 2019). Therefore, misogyny

is caused by the hierarchical insecurity of society, that is, the fear that men may lose their status as powerful members of society, therefore, all women who pose a threat to this assumption should be punished and humiliated. Misogyny refers to a particularly hostile attitude towards women, which can come from any gender. Women live in a man's world and conform to male standards. Accordingly, misogyny is a force, a power that serves to establish the patriarchal order; whoever violates it, is punished (Richardson-Self 2021).

On the other hand, hate speech is one of the expressed forms of misogyny. As already mentioned above, the language of power is aimed at groups that differ in some way from other members of society, e.g. members of the LGBTQI+ community. Stigma of difference can be considered both synchronic (it affects group members everywhere and all the time) and diachronic (happens over a period of time). Richardson-Self (2021) finds it problematic to distinguish hate speech from other «oppressive» language. The author writes that people belong to several social categories, namely, they have sex, gender, race, and nationality. Therefore, they can become a victim of hate speech in one category, whereas feel quite safe in another. The author cites her own example, namely that she, as a queer woman, can become the victim of anti-feminist hate speech or anti-queer hate speech, but as a white Christian, she can never be the victim of racist or religious hate speech, because these categories do not fall into the list of victims of systemic discrimination. Accordingly, the author introduces the concepts of social advantage and social disadvantage. Members of society «possessing» a social advantage may be insulted in this regard, but they cannot become victims of hate speech. Richardson-Self (2021) further points out that one of the most aggressive forms of hatred is the use of violent language and agrees with Sarah Sorial (2013) that speech can be harmful to a person if it contributes to the degradation of the person, increases hostility, degrades the person, and prevents him/her from behaving in the way, as he had done before.

Thus, although gender-feminist and sociolinguistic studies have become quite popular in the world since the 1960s, this direction in linguistics has probably never been as important as it is in our reality today. It is true that men and women are equal at the constitutional level, but due to deeply rooted stereotypes in society, the real picture is very different. In Georgia, the facts of domestic violence against women and selective abortion are increasing every year, and the number of women who are victims of femicide is no less. In addition, the need for women's education and work is still under question in society, thus, in the end, the patriarchal society blocks the way for women to be free and independent of men.. Accordingly, in the country, in all areas, awareness should be raised regarding this issue. This problem is particularly acute in the twenty-first century when, in the era of technological development, it is easier to reach the masses and spread different ideologies. In this regard, we can highlight the problem of hate speech which is often directed at women. Therefore, it is necessary to know, first of all, what hate speech means, when it exceeds the freedom of speech, who can become its victim and how we can fight it.

Therefore, it is interesting to explore what Georgian society knows about hate speech and whether we encounter it in the Georgian media space or not.

Research and Methodology

This research on employing hate speech in Georgian society was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, through an online questionnaire, 200 respondents were interviewed and invited to express their opinions regarding hate speech. In the second stage of the research, we searched for comments on the same issue posted in the Georgian media space and analyzed them.

In the first stage of the research, as mentioned above, 200 people were surveyed. They expressed their opinion about hate speech through open-ended questions in an anonymous online questionnaire and answered questions, such as what hate speech is, whether they have ever been the addressee of hate speech or if they themselves have used it; who usually used this strategy of expressing their opinion most often and why; who is most often the addressee of hate speech and how we can combat this linguistic phenomenon.

Although the answers provided in the questionnaire are interesting, in many cases, the respondents were not able to distinguish between hate speech and bullying. It should be noted that the participants of the research identified the main theme of hate speech. According to them, a person is the target of hatred mainly around themes such as religion, politics, appearance (weight) and sexual minorities. They also believe that an educated, strong woman who does not behave according to the norms set by society will inevitably become the addressee of hate speech in a patriarchal community. In addition, hate speech is most frequently employed by an uneducated person who tries to establish his/her superiority at the expense of humiliating others.

Below are some of the comments provided by the participants to the question regarding defining hate speech:

[What is hate speech?] Humiliating, insulting words directed at a specific person/persons, often undeservedly. It is most often found in the social network, then at the so-called meetings, in everyday life.

- [What is hate speech?] Georgian media space will serve as a classic example. [Hate speech is] when there is no room for other people's opinions.

- [Have you ever been a victim of hate speech?...]I have also often become the addressee of hate speech. The funniest thing is that mostly, everyone focuses on my physicality.

- [Who are the victims of hate speech?] Any person who lives in Georgia can become the addressee of hate speech. Hate speech can be encountered in private conversations, in the media, and in politics, directed at the general public or against a single individual.

- [Have you ever been a victim of hate speech?] Not me personally, but my journalist friend did experience it, due to making a program on LGBTQ+ which proved to be unacceptable to others.

- [Have you ever been a victim of hate speech?] Yes, it's easy to be the target of hate speech when you say something unpopular; what the masses consider wrong.

- [Who are the victims of hate speech?] In my opinion, women are the victims most often. Maybe it's the fault of patriarchy, they always point fingers at women, but I think that hateful language is used more towards them.

- [Who uses hate speech?] Hate speech is most often used by less educated people because the concept of free speech is alien to them.
- [Why do people use hate speech?] Demonstrating one's strength at the expense of humiliating others.
- [How to tackle the problem] Only by talking about it out loud, raising public awareness and protecting human rights as much as possible. Starting from school, the rights of students should be protected and controlled, in universities and services, laws should not only be written on paper but there should be a controlling body of all of this, which we hope will be protected... If governmental or non-governmental organizations actively fight against this, people's awareness will gradually rise and the problem will be eliminated.

Hate speech spread on the Georgian online platforms also testifies to the same attitudes. The comments collected in the media space (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Youtube) for over a 6-month- period are often addressed to an independent woman who does not want to surrender to the patriarchal order, whether it is breaking up the family or a successful career. Hate comments on social media were collected according to the following principle: the comments were searched manually because there are no linguistic computer programs in the Georgian language. In addition, hate speech does not possess specific and unique linguistic elements, thus it would be difficult for a computer to recognize it. Comments are written on images or posts that refer to women and any controversial topics, for example, family breakups, multiple sexual partners, menstruation, etc. The purpose of the research was to determine who the addressee of hate speech was, what linguistic features it was manifested by and who uses it.

From 500 collected comments, the following topics were highlighted: non-acceptance of non-traditional and transgender women, non-acceptance of divorced women (wives), encouragement of violence against women, femicide, and defamation of strong women.

- Who cares about this man's life? (posted by a female);
- Burn this hybrid (posted by a female). The comments are directed at a trans woman. In the first comment, the author does not support and respect the transition and uses the original gender of the person (this man) and not the chosen one. The second comment is also directed at a trans woman and she is negatively referred to as a hybrid as she, according to the author, is no longer a representative of either gender.
- What a handsome boy! (posted by a female). A teenage girl became popular during the demonstrations in Tbilisi in March 2023 and became known as the girl dancing with the water jet. Due to her unconventional style and, maybe, a controversial political stand not accepted by many representatives of different generations, people started commenting on her appearance. This specific comment is an example of disguised hate speech in the form of irony and cynicism that takes away the right to self-expression and mentally affects not only the addressee but anyone who looks or feels like her.
- Who would ever want to be with a mother of four? (posted by a female);
- If the mother of four destroys her family, she is already dead (posted by a female);

- If I were a man, I would never marry a divorced woman, a widow, or a sexually experienced woman, why would I want someone used by another man?
- Are there not enough virgins out there? (posted by a female).

According to these comments, the woman who divorces her husband is undesirable, even dead to society. Surprisingly, women believe that their gender doesn't deserve a second chance at happiness. Even more, women who have been sexually active, irrespective of whether they have been married before or not, are considered to be "used" and no one should want to marry them again. The linguistic choices in the latter case prove that society objectifies women and can be referred to as used or not used, which are traditionally used towards things.

- Women like her should all be beaten hard (posted by a male);
- If I didn't respect my husband and he hit me like that, I would be grateful that he put me in my place (posted by a female);
- Pitiful. He ruined his life for his whore mother (posted by a male);
- How did the mother make the poor boy bitter like that? (posted by a male);
- Don't give a reason to your husband to be jealous (posted by a male);
- When a wife cheats on her husband, the killer is not always guilty (posted by a female).

Not a month goes by in Georgia without hair-raising news of femicide. In 2020 over 9 months, more than 120 cases of women's abuse or murder were identified (<http://www.femicide.ge/eng/list/show/287-Recent-statistics-related-to-violence-against-women-and-legislative-changes-in-Georgia>). Not surprisingly, murder cases have risen alarmingly in the last three years. Jealous (ex)husbands or sons feel entitled to decide the fate of the women and society does not condone their actions. Even more, apart from encouraging beating the women, they believe that men who have committed the crime were aggravated by women, who brought upon themselves whatever happened to them. They even pity the murderer, who has ruined his life for an undeserving woman. Naturally, these comments reflect the beliefs in society and the attitude towards gender roles. In many cases, as seen from the comments, women are the ones who raise potential future abusers by spreading this violent mentality.

- Don't you have a father or a brother to silence you? Go wash your dirty underwear in public (to the woman who talked about periods and pain) (posted by a male);
- When you get married, your wife should not have any holes, otherwise it will not work (posted by a male);
- A decent and intelligent and praiseworthy girl is the one who has preserved her virginity and innocence (posted by a female);
- You have been a street whore. You served everyone who came your way. Keep going and you might get into the Guinness Book (posted by a male).

Women who are open about taboo topics, like menstrual pains, and the number of their sexual partners often become the addressees of hate speech, as their confidence or freedom threatens the patriarchal society. Women who are not embarrassed to speak about such topics should be "silenced" by the men in their households. A dichotomy between good and bad women also emerged: good women are those who have kept

their virginity, thus their purity and are accepted by society. On the other hand, bad women are the ones who have more than one partner and therefore are frowned upon. The humorous remark in the last comment (...you might get into the Guinness Book) encourages to further deepen the divide between two types of women.

Conclusion

Hate speech and its linguistic peculiarities have never been as timely and popular as in the 21st century. This is partly due to the fact that because of social media, hate speech can spread within seconds and can affect millions of people. Therefore, knowing what the phenomenon is, who becomes the victim and how to tackle it is of utmost importance.

The Georgian society definitely has been exposed to an extensive wave of hate speech in social media and this has been proved both through the questionnaire and the analysis of the comments. Even though people find it difficult to differentiate between hate speech and bullying in some cases, they generally know what hate speech is and how it works. In some cases, they themselves have been the victims too, be that religious, political belonging or non-traditional way of dressing and appearance. Generally, societies have little acceptance of differences. Georgian society is no exception in this case either. Trans women, bold, independent strongly-minded women, sexually active women, divorcees and single mothers are different from the given standards and, thus undesirable to the society. Not surprisingly, they often become the addressees of hate speech and the users of it are mostly women, of their own gender.

In order for society to become more tolerant towards the difference and accept people the way they are, they should learn about the detrimental effects of hate speech. Thus, raising awareness about the issue and teaching young adults about the phenomenon and the ways to overcome it, proves to be the best solution to the problem at hand.

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