

“Divorced Women are Like Second-Hand Clothes” - Hate Language in Media Discourse (Using the Example of Electronic Media Platforms)

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Abstract : Although the legal framework of Georgia reflects the main principles of gender equality and is in line with the international situation (UNDP, 2018), Georgia remains a male-dominated society. This means that men prevail in many areas of social, economic, and political life, which frequently gives women a subordinate status in society and the family (UN women). According to the latest study, “violence against women and girls in Georgia is also recognized as a public problem, and it is necessary to focus on it” (UN women). Moreover, the Public Defender's report on the protection of human rights in Georgia (2019) reveals that “in the last five years, 151 women were killed in Georgia due to gender and family violence”. Sadly, these statistics have increased significantly since that time. The issue was acutely reflected in the document published by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, “Gender Hate Crime” (March 10, 2021). “Unfortunately, the rates of femicide are still high in the country, and distrust of law enforcement agencies often makes such cases invisible, which requires special attention from the state.” More precisely, the cited document considers that there are frequent cases of crimes based on gender-based oppression in Georgia, which pose a threat not only to women but also to people of any gender whose desires and aspirations do not correspond to the gender norms and roles prevailing in society. According to the study, this type of crime has a “significant and lasting impact on the victim(s) and also undermines the safety and cohesion of society and gender equality”. It is well-known that language is often used as a tool for gender oppression (Rusieshvili-Cartledge and Dolidze, 2021; Totibadze, 2021). Therefore, feminist and gender studies in linguistics ultimately serve to represent the problem, reflect on it, and propose ways to solve it. Together with technical advancement in communication, a new form of discrimination has arisen- hate language against women in electronic media discourse. Due to the nature of social media and the internet, messages containing hate language can spread in seconds and reach millions of people. However, only a few know about the detrimental effects they may have on the addressee and society. This paper aims to analyse the hateful comments directed at women on various media platforms to determine (1) the linguistic strategies used while attacking women and (2) the reasons why women may fall victim to this type of hate language. The data have been collected over six months, and overall, 500 comments will be examined for the paper. Qualitative and quantitative analysis was chosen for the methodology of the study. The comments posted on various media platforms, including social media posts, articles, or pictures, have been selected manually due to several reasons, the most important being the problem of identifying hate speech as it can disguise itself in different ways- humour, memes, etc. The comments on the articles, posts, pictures, and videos selected for sociolinguistic analysis depict a woman, a taboo topic, or a scandalous event centred on a woman that triggered a lot of hatred and hate language towards the person to whom the post/article was dedicated. The study has revealed that a woman can become a victim of hatred directed at them if they do something considered to be a deviation from a societal norm, namely, get a divorce, be sexually active, be vocal about feministic values, and talk about taboos. Interestingly, people who utilize hate language are not only men trying to “normalize” the prejudiced patriarchal values but also women who are equally active in bringing down a “strong” woman. The paper also aims to raise awareness about the hate language directed at women, as being knowledgeable about the issue at hand is the first step to tackling it.

Keywords : femicide, hate language, media discourse, sociolinguistics

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