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## WHAT IS HATE SPEECH AND WHY SHOULD WE STUDY IT?

### Abstract

Together with technological advancement, communication has become easier. However, that also entails that some negative information has become easily available. Hate speech is definitely one of the forms of communication that people often resort to without knowing the harmful effects it might have on the addressee and on the whole community. Even more, some people might not even know what hate speech is or how to identify it when exposed to it. Therefore, it is important to raise awareness about the issue and teach people the coping mechanisms to fight against it. This article aims to help raise awareness about hate speech and accompanying problems based on several fundamental theories exploring this significant issue.

**Keywords:** *hate speech, awareness, discourse, sociolinguistics, speaking back*

### 1. Introduction

In the 21st century, when technology is at its peak of development, it has never been easier to share and spread one's ideas and thoughts. Unfortunately, apart from the advance in technologies, some threats have also appeared. Hate speech, as one of the forms of verbal or non-verbal communication, has also found its way into our everyday lives through technology and not only. Despite its detrimental nature, hate speech might be challenging to identify and can sometimes easily mask itself as a humorous insulting remark or even a meme. However, being continuously exposed to it has destructive and long-lasting effects on people. Thus, it is of utmost importance to raise awareness about hate speech, its repercussions and how to fight against it. This article aims to help raise awareness about hate speech and accompanying problems based on several fundamental theories exploring this significant issue.

## **2. What is Hate Speech?**

Hate speech is any form of verbal or non-verbal communication containing threatening or discriminatory views against different groups in society. The most frequent target groups of hate speech are people of various races, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or age (Nakaya, 2021; Rusieshvili-Cartledge & Dolidze, 2021). Hate comes to life in our language and actions, and it can be claimed that it has a universal character that can even turn into planned and coordinated genocide. Unfortunately, hate has no geographical boundaries or nationality (Waltman & Haas, 2011). In addition, hate speech can be expressed not only verbally, but also through non-verbal media, such as drawings or photos. The swastika has become one of the most recognizable symbols of hate speech, the use of which is considered illegal in Germany (Nakaya, 2021).

Hate groups can be considered subcultures in society because they have their own beliefs, goals, and unique views about race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation. These are expressed and explored through language (Perry, 2001; Waltman & Haas, 2011). It should be noted that the ideology of hatred is diverse. However, in the end, it serves one purpose, the subordination of one group to another. Such ideologies include religions, white supremacists, xenophobes, sexists, and many others (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

It is hard to offer a comprehensive definition of hate speech, although it is clear that it should not be confused with verbal abuse. According to Richardson-Self (2021), hate speech, regardless of whether or not directed at a particular individual, ultimately hurts every member of a particular group/society. For example, if hate speech, for instance, in the online space, is directed at a particular woman, it is classed as verbal discrimination, ultimately directed at all women and creating a negative online space for them. More specifically, when a woman is reprimanded for doing something not "liked" by a patriarchal society, it sends a warning to other women that if they do the same, they too will become targets of hate speech. In addition, hatred should not be confused with the emotions of irritation and anger because, as Aristotle points out, hatred is a more long-lasting and dangerous emotion and is characterized by fewer elements of empathy than anger, which slows down over time. If hatred is reflected in the language, it means that it exists in the human mind, one of the expressions of which is stereotyping. It is through language that the threatening narratives and cultural mountains of hatred are manifested, transmitted from generation to generation and inculcate this feeling (Waltman & Haas, 2011).

It is believed (Nakaya, 2021; Richardson-Self, 2021; Gelber, 2002; Waltman & Haas, 2011) that hate speech has a considerable and long-lasting negative impact on all individuals who come into contact with it, regardless of whether they are the target of hate speech or not. As the ADL website notes (as cited in Nakaya, 2021), people are willing to change their lifestyles and habits to avoid the

hate speech directed at them. And this ultimately leads to the deterioration in the quality of life, be it online or in real life. Naturally, the targeted group faces more problems. Hate speech directed at them negatively affects their emotional, mental and physical health. Moreover, the victim's self-esteem may be lowered dramatically. Moreover, victims of hate speech may harm themselves or even commit suicide. The ADL also claims that hate speech is so damaging to society that it makes relationships difficult, and people lose their sense of empathy.

### **3. Freedom of Speech vs Hate Speech**

Freedom of speech is one of the fundamental pillars of a modern democratic society. Therefore, it is almost impossible to discern the line between hate speech and free speech.

The first amendment of the US Constitution refers to the freedom of speech, which includes not only verbal but also non-verbal media, such as, for example, pictures, videos, etc. Under the law, the US government has no right to prosecute a person even if he commits something that most people consider offensive. The First Amendment gives people the right to use their wisdom to judge whether or not this or that information is acceptable to them. Also, when it comes to hate speech, everyone can respond to it appropriately. However, there are exceptions to the law, US government can restrict hate speech (for example, messages that contain threats) when it can lead to a crime. Although the US Constitution is naturally a part of American law, the majority of countries in the world face the same problem and cannot clearly state what exceeds freedom of speech (Nakaya, 2021).

Strossen (2018), in her work "Hate: Why We Should Resist It with Free Speech, Not Censorship", notes that, although most Americans support free speech, they believe that the frequent use of hate speech is bad for society and thus favour censorship. Therefore, society may simultaneously manifest two incompatible views on freedom of speech.

Gelber (2002), in her book on the free speech and hate speech debate, agrees that it is difficult to resolve the dispute because when the state tries to protect people from hate speech, it is in direct conflict with free speech and vice versa. To solve this problem, Gelber suggests a speaking back tactic, which involves raising awareness among target groups of hate speech and verbally defending oneself, that is, responding. Since the use of hate speech aims at establishing certain norms and, to some extent, discriminating against people, it is necessary to eliminate it in time. The technique of speaking back aims at hate speech, which makes the victim lose the ability to speak, especially with a heavy emotional impact.

Waltman and Haas (2011) also support the employment of speaking back tactics to eliminate hatred. However, as the authors argue, to properly use anti-hate rhetoric, we need to understand the

harm that hate speech brings about. According to the authors, any constitutional idea, such as, for example, the freedom of the individual, is really in great danger when it becomes the addressee of hate speech. Accordingly, we should make our physical or verbal action the antithesis of such action.

It is important to study the consequences of the influence of hate speech on the addressees. Therefore, the best way to do this is to survey minority victims of hate speech. Using in-depth interviews, Gelber and McNamara (2015) talked to the members of various minority groups in Australia. Of the 101 respondents, 32 were official representatives of minorities, and 69 were ordinary members of minority society. The interviews were anonymous and confidential. They were not selected based on whether they had personal experience of hate speech used against them. They were asked whether they were aware of incidents concerning hate speech in their local community. 42 of the interviewees were women while 59 were men, and the interviews were conducted in 7 different languages besides English. The majority of respondents reported that they are either personal victims of hate speech or knew someone who had suffered from the incident. According to the interviewees, the incidents happened in different environments, be it school, university, public transport or others. Gelber and McNamara's research showed that the use of hate speech against the participants of the research, their loved ones, or a member of the community evoked different emotions in the respondents :

- 1) **Distress:** *'It is very rude and affects me badly and causes emotional distress.'* (29a)

*'Although I'm not a mosque visitor or mosque goer, it upsets me when I see on TV people protesting because they don't want a mosque in their community.'* (33)

- 2) **Existential Pain:** *'It was like crushing emotionally and spiritually. And physically.'* (1)

*'You can never, you can never repair damage in that content once it's been put out there. It lingers, it stays, it smells, it hangs around. You can't get rid of it, and racism is racism. It builds and feeds on that.'* (3)

- 3) **Fear:** *'When you see the infection of that kind of hate, that's scary stuff.'* (4)

*'Why is it that our Turkish school on Saturday is the only school that has to have a security guard on Saturdays? Because we're fearful of attack.'* (44)

- 4) **Depriving of rights:** *'The vilification laws in Australia are not useful because to protect the community that has been vilified you've got to have resources.'*

5) **Depriving people of expressing themselves:** When a guest speaker at a community event, speaking about her national sport, the audience teased the interviewee and made jokes *'which affected me very badly. I tried to be proud of myself ... but it wasn't possible to keep going and continue my presentation.'* (29)

6) **Fear to speak up:** *'Some people do ignore things ... they never report incidents related to racism. The problem is that they think they will not succeed even if they report them. They believe that cases related to them will not be taken seriously.'* (24b)

7) **Silence and withdrawal as tactics to avoid hate speech:** *'They give you a hate speech, okay, just who cares. Just run away.'* (15) *'It is better to ignore them and not waste our time.'* (28)

8) **Exclusion:** *'It was just because of that fear of being judged, of that fear of being sort of like prosecuted, being excluded from the nation's society.'* (18)

*'The media plants seed of doubt and question marks, which leads them to fear us'* (32b)

9) **Dehumanization:** *Being racially abused on a train and in a supermarket, 'In both incidents, I deeply felt my human right as a citizen or simply a passenger was violated.'* (13)

10) **Anger:** When people experience hate speech *'they do nothing. They just feel angry. When they come back home after that thing, they think about it. Again they feel very desperate, frustrating.'* (15)

11) **Loss of religious or ethnic identity :** *'You didn't want to be identified as a Vietnamese person.'* (18)

*'Those women wearing hijab are targeted by young people ... some women even desperately avoid wearing hijab.'* (29)

Gelber and McNamara's research presented the problem of target groups of hate speech and showed, from their perspective, the negative consequences that hate speech can have on both the individual and society.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The issue of hate speech is especially acute in the twenty-first century when, in the era of technological development, it is easier to reach the masses and spread different ( frequently, detri-

mental ideologies. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to be aware of, first of all, what hate speech constitutes when it exceeds freedom, who can become its victim and how we can fight it.

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