Language and conflict: Verbal aggression and strategies for mitigation and resolution in online discourse*

Alla Golovnia[1,*,†], Liana Budanova[2,†], and Yuliia Petrova[2,†]

[1] National Technical University of Ukraine "Kyiv Politechnical Institute," 37 Beresteiskyi ave., 03056 Kyiv, Ukraine
[2] State University "Kyiv Aviation Institute," 1 Liubomyra Huzara ave., 03058 Kyiv, Ukraine

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to analyze the role of the language factor in the formation of verbal conflicts in the modern online environment. Verbal aggression, unfortunately, is a common phenomenon in the digital space, accompanying interpersonal and social communication throughout the entire process of life. The work considers the main strategies for implementing conflict communication, as well as ways to mitigate and resolve it. Based on the analysis of discursive material from modern digital platforms, key linguistic markers characteristic of each of the strategies of verbal aggression, its mitigation and resolution were identified.

Keywords
online discourse, verbal aggression, mitigation, resolution

1. Introduction

Contemporary linguistic discourse is increasingly seen as a privileged space for the manifestation of social, political, interpersonal and ideological conflicts. In the current context of globalization and the rapid spread of information, communication takes on a function that is not only informative, but also deeply conflictual. Currently, conflict and verbal aggression are an integral part of the online environment, and, accordingly, of online discourse. With the help of this tool, an attempt is made to exert psychological pressure on communication participants, to create a negative climate for communication and constructive decisions, which has a negative impact not only on interpersonal communication, but also goes beyond it [1, 2]. Language is no longer simply a means of transmitting meanings, but also a powerful instrument of influence, pressure, manipulation and, at the same time, expression of resistance. On the one hand, conflict discourse can play an important social role: it allows to highlight important issues, mobilize public opinion and stimulate collective debate. On the other hand, however, it can contribute to the escalation of social tensions, fuel hostility and contribute to the radicalization of public narratives. From this point of view, contemporary linguistic discourse is not only a passive mirror of existing conflicts, but also an active actor that can accelerate or weaken such dynamics [3–5]. Therefore, the study of conflict discourses is important for a better understanding of the nature of contemporary social processes and for identifying communication strategies aimed at building dialogue and mutual understanding.

* CPITS 2026: Cybersecurity Providing in Information and Telecommunication Systems, February 28, 2026, Kyiv, Ukraine
[1*] Corresponding author.
[†] These authors contributed equally.
allagolovnia2017@gmail.com (A. Golovnia); liana.budanova@npp.kai.edu.ua (L. Budanova); panijulia.p@gmail.com (Y. Petrova)
0000-0002-0478-264X (A. Golovnia); 0000-0002-4840-6224 (L. Budanova); 0000-0002-3768-7921 (Y. Petrova)
© 2026 Copyright for this paper by its authors. Use permitted under Creative Commons License Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

CEUR-WS.org/Vol-4271/short2.pdf
CEUR Workshop Proceedings ceur-ws.org ISSN 1613-0073
published 2026-09-24

2. Literature review and problem statement

Understanding what is behind verbal aggression, its causes and incentives is an important factor and key to building an effective line of communication and using appropriate strategies [1, 6–8]. Currently, the use of the four C's (communication, cooperation, compromise, and constructive conflict management) and the six C's strategies is considered one of the most effective ways to, if not resolve, then at least neutralize conflict situations in online discourse [9]. With their help, communication in virtual space not only continues, but also develops into a constructive dialogue. Language plays a significant role in this process, serving as a means of expressing thoughts and as a tool for online communication [10, 11]. In the fight against verbal aggression, it is necessary to clearly understand the role of counter-speech, which is designed to extinguish the conflict situation and regulate aggressive verbal manifestations [12].

The characteristic features of conflict discourse include:

- Aggressive vocabulary and rhetoric: conflict discourses tend to use offensive vocabulary, explicit accusations, ideological labels, and sarcastic rhetorical forms. These elements serve as both tools for the speaker's self-affirmation and a means of delegitimizing the interlocutor.
- Violation of communicative ethics: in conflict contexts, there is often a violation of pragmatic norms of communication, such as respect for the turn of speaking, active listening, and the use of respectful language. This manifests itself in the forms of systematic interruptions, ad hominem attacks, and refusal to cooperate in dialogue.
- Manipulative strategies: communicators may use opaque persuasive techniques such as emotional pressure, deliberate distortion of facts, partial selection of information, or strategic shift of emphasis to direct the discourse in their favour.
- Polarization of positions: conflict discourses tend to reinforce the dichotomy between "us" and "them", creating opposing and impenetrable sides. Such polarization significantly reduces the opportunities for dialogue and prevents the achievement of a common consensus.
- Transferring conflict into the public sphere: social networks and digital media facilitate the transformation of private disputes into public debates. This phenomenon contributes to the reconfiguration of public discourse, expanding its scope and social impact [13].
- Genres and platforms through which conflict discourse occurs include: political debates, television talk shows, social media comments, public speeches, interviews, and press conferences. These contexts contribute to the spectacle of conflict and its viral spread.

At the same time, there are conflict mitigation strategies aimed at restoring the quality of discourse and promoting coexistence: these include the use of verbal politeness, the adoption of neutral vocabulary, acknowledging the right of the other to hold a different opinion, reframing aggressive statements in a constructive way, using questions to stimulate dialogue, and using shared values as a basis for mediation.

Online conversations can get pretty intense, showing a wide variety of conflicts that pop up in different ways. Often, we see people getting verbally aggressive, manipulating the situation on purpose, or making emotionally charged statements. These kinds of exchanges can quickly turn into heated arguments, especially on platforms like social media, forums, and comment sections where people share their strongly divided views. Sometimes, these discussions even slide into personal attacks or trolling, which just aims to rile others up. Not to mention, misinformation can spread like wildfire, making it even harder for people to communicate constructively [6, 14, 15].

On the flip side, there are some positive trends in online conversations aimed at reducing aggression. Lots of users intentionally choose to speak politely and constructively, hoping to lower hostility and make the dialogue more respectful. These efforts are important because they help diffuse tension and promote understanding, even in some pretty charged discussions.

Moreover, we've seen various ways to resolve conflicts being woven into online interactions. Encouraging open dialogue allows people in conflict to share their views honestly, while looking for compromises helps bridge gaps between opposing opinions. The role of moderators and community managers can't be understated – they work hard to enforce community rules, prevent abuse, and create a respectful and safe space for everyone to discuss their thoughts. Overall, navigating online discourse is complicated. It's a constant dance between aggressive exchanges and the urge for meaningful dialogue. This balance really reflects what we face in the digital world today, spotlighting both the challenges and opportunities in keeping conversations civil as we become more connected.

3. Verbal aggression strategies

When it comes to verbal aggression online, we can categorize some common strategies that people use. In our research, we identified a few key types of aggressive communication typical in these settings:

- Direct Insults: these aim to humiliate the other person, often using swear words or harsh language to hit their dignity.
- Irony and Sarcasm: this method tries to indirectly ridicule opponents, usually through clever wordplay or double meanings.
- Devaluation: this is when someone aims to make another person's opinions or experiences seem less valid.
- Humiliation Based on Characteristics: this involves targeting someone due to age, race, gender, or other attributes, and is often tied to hate speech.
- Threats and Intimidation: the goal here is to instil fear and silence the other party.
- Trolling: This consists of throwing someone off balance or provoking them to elicit strong emotional reactions.
- Linguistic Manipulation: this is where aggression is hidden behind seemingly neutral or positive phrases.
- Hyperbolization and Generalization: here, individuals create negative stereotypes about entire groups of people.

Several factors can influence how aggressive or tense discussions become online. Anonymity, for instance, often lowers the barrier to aggressive behaviour. Various forms of expression, like emojis or Caps lock, can either amplify or disguise aggression. Recently, memes have become a method to convey aggression humorously or creatively, which can sometimes help ease the tension [15].

The platforms we looked at for this research each have their unique vibe, which affects the way conversations happen. For example, Twitter is all about brevity. The character limit creates a space where users often resort to sarcasm or wit to express themselves quickly. This often leads to sharp, quick exchanges that can escalate quickly.

On the other hand, Reddit encourages deeper discussions. Its structure allows for threaded conversations, where users can present evidence and engage in extensive debates. This format promotes detailed conversations and helps people explore topics from various angles.

Then there's Discord, which feels a lot more casual. It's like chatting with friends in real time, which allows for more spontaneous and personal exchanges. The relaxed communication style fosters a sense of community, making interactions feel natural and relatable.

In summary, these platforms clearly show how the way we talk online is shaped by both the technology we use and the culture of the online spaces we inhabit. They illustrate how we communicate, argue, and connect with each other, revealing the rich tapestry of online discourse.

The Table 1 outlines strategies of verbal aggression, exemplified by instances from various online platforms, and identifies linguistic markers characteristic of aggressive discourse, including lexical, grammatical, stylistic, and punctuation features that serve as indicators of verbal hostility.

Table 1

Aggressive Strategies in Online Discourse

#	Strategy	Platform	Example	Linguistic markers of aggression
1	Direct insult	Reddit	"You're a brainless clown. Just delete your account already."	Derogatory nouns (e.g., idiot, clown); imperative mood (delete); second-person attack (you)
2	Sarcasm / Irony	Twitter (X)	"Oh sure, because you're clearly an expert in economics with your 3 followers."	"Contrastive markers (oh sure), exaggeration, mocking tone, sarcastic emojis
3	Discrediting / Dismissal	YouTube	"LOL, you clearly don't know anything. Go back to school."	Discourse markers (LOL), epistemic verbs (don't know), imperatives (go back)
4	Identity-based aggression	Facebook	"Typical woman logic. You people shouldn't be allowed to vote."	Categorical generalizations (typical), group-based nouns (you people), modal verbs (shouldn't)
5	Threat / Intimidation	Discord	"Say that again and I'll find your IP."	Conditional threat (if... then structure), modal verbs (will, shall), implied violence
6	Trolling	Reddit	"I'm just here to watch you cry after realizing how wrong you are."	Gloating tone, emotive verbs (cry, realize), presupposition of stupidity or inferiority
7	Passive-aggressive remarks	Instagram	"Not trying to be rude, but your whole opinion is kinda pathetic tbh."	Hedge phrases (not trying to be rude), contrastive conjunctions (but), euphemistic insults (kinda pathetic)
8	Generalization / Stereotype	Twitter (X)	"Boomers ruin everything. No surprise you're clueless too."	Collective nouns (boomers), totalizing verbs (ruin everything), adverbs of degree (no surprise)
9	ALL CAPS / Exaggeration	YouTube	"THIS VIDEO IS TRASH!!! DO BETTER!!!"	All caps, excessive punctuation (!!!), extreme negative evaluation (trash)
10	Mocking emojis / memes	TikTok	"You're SO smart"	Emphatic markers (SO smart), sarcastic laughter emojis, mismatched tone vs content

Thus, the typical linguistic markers of aggression in online discourse can be generalized in Table 2.

Table 2
Linguistic Markers of Aggression in Online Discourse

Category	Markers examples
Offensive vocabulary	idiot, moron, clown, trash, loser
Modal verbs	shouldn't, must be, can't believe, will (as a threat)
Imperatives	shut up, go away, delete your account, stop talking
Emotional vocabulary	pathetic, disgusting, stupid, horrible
Stylistic means	sarcasm, irony, repetition, Caps lock, emoji, exaggeration
Discourse markers	LOL, obviously, as usual, no surprise, clearly, like always
Generalisation	everyone like you, all of you, typical X, people like that always...

4. Mitigation strategies

Reducing aggressive language in conversations is really important for having helpful, respectful, and safe communication, especially online. Without body language or tone, things can easily get misinterpreted, which can lead to conflicts. Here are a few reasons why it's beneficial to tone down hostility in our speech.

First, it helps calm situations down. By using less aggressive language, we can avoid conversations turning into verbal fights. Second, choosing polite and neutral words creates a respectful space for everyone involved, making it easier for people to share their thoughts and ideas openly. It's also crucial for maintaining relationships. When we avoid harsh words, we can keep connections with others, even when we don't see eye to eye [16]. This is especially important in diverse online communities where opinions can differ widely. Furthermore, by replacing aggression with clear and respectful arguments, we are more likely to understand each other and resolve disagreements effectively. Lastly, it's worth noting that in many places, using aggressive or hateful speech can lead to serious consequences, like account bans or legal issues [17].

So, working to reduce aggression in our words is not just about being nice; it helps keep our online interactions healthy and constructive.

Let's have a look at language strategies of aggression mitigation in on-line discourse which serve to soften, neutralize or redirect aggressive messages (Table 3).

Table 3
Mitigation Strategies in Online Aggressive Discourse

#	Strategy	Platform	Example	Linguistic markers of mitigation
1	Softening disagreement	Reddit	"I see your point, but I respectfully disagree on this part."	Politeness markers (I see your point, respectfully), contrastive but respectful tone
2	Using hedges	Twitter (X)	"Maybe it's just me, but I think there's another way to look at it."	Hedges (maybe, I think, just me)
3	Apologizing in advance	Facebook	"Sorry if this sounds harsh, but I'm just trying to be honest."	Apologetic markers (sorry if, I don't mean to offend)
4	Using humor to deescalate	Discord	"Okay okay, no need to burn me alive Just saying!"	Hyperbole + emojis for humor, just saying, light tone
5	Showing empathy	YouTube	"I get that this topic can be frustrating. We all see it differently."	Empathic phrases (I get it, we all..., understandably)

6	Self-deprecation	Reddit	"I might be totally wrong here, but here's my take..."	Downtoners (might, totally wrong), soft stance
7	Avoiding second person focus	Instagram	"This idea feels incomplete – maybe there's more to add?"	Passive phrasing (feels incomplete), impersonal subject
8	Agreeing partially	Twitter (X)	"You're right about X, though I see Y a bit differently."	Concession phrases (you're right, though)
9	Inviting dialogue	Reddit	"Curious to hear your thoughts – what do you think about this?"	Questions, open-ended phrasing, curious, thoughts
10	Avoiding exaggeration	YouTube	"Some people might see it differently, and that's okay."	Modifiers (some people, might), tolerance markers (that's okay)

As we can assume from the material above, the most typical language markers of aggression mitigation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Language Markers of Aggression Mitigation

Category	Examples
Politeness markers	respectfully, I understand, I appreciate your view
Hedges (softeners)	maybe, I think, it seems, could be, possibly
Apologetic phrases	sorry if, I don't mean to offend, just being honest
Empathy markers	I get it, that's understandable, I know it's frustrating
Elements of humour	emoji, slight irony, self-depreciation
Partial agreement constructions	you're right about that, true, though...
Invitation to the dialogue	what do you think?, I'd love to hear your view

5. Conflict resolution strategies

Conflict resolution, both in real life and in online discourse, is an effective way to channel conflict into a constructive direction, which makes it possible not only to mitigate the conflict, but also to completely resolve the problematic situation [18, 19]. In online discourse, this is possible through the following conflict resolution strategies (Table 5).

Table 5
Conflict Resolution Strategies in Online Communication

#	Strategy	Platform	Example	Linguistic markers of aggression
1	Acknowledging the conflict	Reddit	"Looks like this thread got heated – let's take a breath and talk it through."	Conflict verbs (got heated, let's talk), inclusive we-form (let's)
2	Reframing the issue	Twitter (X)	"Maybe the real question here is what we're trying to achieve."	Reframing phrases (maybe the real issue is. . .)
3	Focusing on common ground	Facebook	"We both care about the same outcome – we just have different approaches."	Bridging phrases (we both, same outcome)
4	Expressing understanding	Discord	"I get why you feel that way. It's a valid perspective."	Empathic verbs (I get, I understand), validation (valid perspective)
5	Redirecting the	YouTube	"Let's keep this civil –	Tone-setting imperatives (let's

	tone		everyone has the right to be heard."	keep it civil), rights language (has the right to)
6	Using neutral / moderating language	Reddit	"There are clearly strong opinions here – let's try to unpack them calmly."	Neutral adjectives (strong opinions), modal verbs (let's try to)
7	Deescalating through humor	Instagram	"Okay, okay – I think we're two passionate nerds yelling into the void"	Humorous metaphors, emojis, soft irony
8	Agreeing to disagree	Facebook	"We might just have to agree to disagree on this one, and that's totally fine."	Disagreement softeners (agree to disagree, that's fine)
9	Inviting collaborative dialogue	Twitter (X)	"Instead of arguing, what if we tried to find a solution together?"	Collaboration verbs (find a solution together), open questions (what if we...)
10	Ending the discussion peacefully	Reddit	"Thanks for the discussion – I'll leave it here and wish you well."	Polite closing (thanks, wish you well), clear boundaries (I'll leave it here)

Usually, the strategies defined serve to prevent conflict escalation, direct the discussion towards more constructive side, confirm the right of the opponent for the ideas different from yours, find a common ground and put the end to the argument valuing points of view of the parties of the conflict.

Thus, the main linguistic markers of the conflict resolution are presented in Table 6.

Table 6
Linguistic Markers of the Conflict Resolution

Category	Examples
Politeness markers	thank you, please, I appreciate your time, I respect that
Inclusive language	we, us, let's, together
Empathy expressions	I get it, I see where you're coming from, I hear you
Softeners	maybe, might, possibly, just, a bit
Deescalation verbs	clarify, understand, talk through, discuss
Boundary phrases	let's agree to disagree, let's leave it here, I'm stepping away from this thread
Reframing tools	the real issue is, the core question seems to be, let's focus on

6. Conclusions

Modern online discourse is an integral part of the life of almost every person, especially young people, who spend most of their leisure time on social networks and online platforms. Unfortunately, such virtual life does not always have a positive effect on participants in online discourse, since it contains elements of aggressive behaviour and conflict, which are becoming more and more common in the online space. A large role in creating a conflict situation, as well as managing it, is played by the language factor, through which the communication process itself takes place. Research into strategies for creating a conflict, mitigating it, and resolving it is extremely important, since with the help of such strategies it is possible not only to manage a conflict situation, but also to direct it in a constructive direction and bring the conflict to a resolution, while preserving the dignity and own positions of each of the conflict participants.

Linguistic markers of each of the identified strategies help to normalize and neutralize conflict situations and manage aggressive verbal behavior.

Declaration on Generative AI

While preparing this work, the authors used the AI programs Grammarly Pro to correct text grammar and Strike Plagiarism to search for possible plagiarism. After using this tool, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and took full responsibility for the publication's content.

References

[1] C. Bates, Mitig. in Discourse: Soc., Cognitive and Affective Motivations When Exchanging Advice, 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348349709_Mitigation_in_discourse_Social_cognitive_and_affective_motivations_when_exchanging_advice

[2] Y.-L. Chung, G. Abercrombie, F. Enock, J. Bright, V. Rieser, Under. Counterspeech for Online Harm Mitig., 2023. https://aclanthology.org/2024.nejlt-1.3/

[3] Jonas, Build. Bridges: Effective Confl. Resolut. Strategies for Thriving Communities, 2025. https://www.corcoranneighborhood.org/building-bridges-effective-conflict-resolution-strategies-for-thriving-communities/

[4] Chapter 9: Confl. In Relationships – Interpers. Commun., 2023. https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/interpersonalcommunication/chapter/9/

[5] Psico-Smart Editorial Team, What Innovative Confl. Mediation Techniques are Being Utilized in Online Communities, and How Can They Enhance Digital Communication?, 2025. https://psico-smart.com/en/blogs/blog-what-innovative-conflict-mediation-techniques-are-being-utilized-in-on-188018

[6] L. Crowe, Verbal Aggression in the School Environ., 2024. https://effectiveschoolsolutions.com/verbal-aggression/

[7] L. Rosner, N. C. Kromer, Verbal Venting in the Soc. Web: Effects of Anonymity and Group Norms on Aggressive Lang. Use in Online Comments, 2016. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116664220

[8] N. Pereira, et al., Aggressive Commun. Style as Predictor of Cyberbullying, Emotional Wellbeing, and Personal Moral Beliefs in Adolescence, 2022. https://journals.copmadrid.org/psed/art/psed2021a11

[9] Peoplesafe, How to Diffuse Aggression – Confl. Resolut. Tips, 2024. https://peoplesafe.co.uk/blogs/how-to-diffuse-aggression-conflict-resolution-tips

[10] D. Hample, Verbal Aggressiveness, 2008. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecv003

[11] C. Elsaesser, How Soc. Media Turns Online Arguments Between Teens Into Real-World Violence, 2021. https://today.uconn.edu/2021/04/how-social-media-turns-online-arguments-between-teens-into-real-world-violence-2/

[12] Confl. and Interpers. Commun., 2016. https://pressbooks.openeducationalberta.ca/communications/chapter/6-3/

[13] Z. Kaplam, How to Build Confl. Resolut. Skills: Case Studies and Examples, 2024. https://www.theforage.com/blog/skills/conflict-resolution-skills

[14] C. Martin, Verbal Deescalation: Techniques to Prevent Violence, 2023. https://riskstrategygroup.com/verbal-deescalation-techniques-to-prevent-violence/

[15] C. Vain, Effective Commun. Strategies to Manage Challenging Behaviour, 2025. https://cpdonline.co.uk/knowledge-base/mental-health/effective-communication-strategies-manage-challenging-behaviour/

[16] Strategies for Interactive Online Confl. Resolut. Training, 2024. https://compliancetraininggroup.com/2024/03/19/strategies-for-interactive-online-conflict-resolution-training/
[17] S. Mane, S. Kundu, R. Sharma, A Survey on Online Aggression: Content Detect. and Behavioral Analysis on Social Media, 2025. https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3711125
[18] L. O'Brien, Case Study: Success. Confl. Manag. in Workplace Scenarios, 2025. https://cpdonline.co.uk/knowledge-base/business/case-study-successful-conflict-management-workplace-scenarios/
[19] K. Shonk, Confl. Resolut. Strategies, 2025. https://www.pon.harvard.edu/daily/conflict-resolution/conflict-resolution-strategies/