Analysis of Lexical and Phraseological Units Expressing Aggression in English

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Annotation: *This article presents an analysis of lexical and phraseological units that express aggression in English. The research focuses on identifying and classifying aggressive words, expressions, and idioms, examining their semantic properties and contextual usage. It explores how aggression is conveyed through language, considering stylistic and emotional nuances, as well as cultural factors influencing aggressive speech. Special attention is paid to metaphorical and emotionally charged language that intensifies the impact of aggression. The study also highlights common forms of aggressive expressions found in social media, mass communication, and everyday interactions. By analyzing the linguistic manifestation of aggression, the article offers insights into its social function and psychological underpinnings. This work is relevant for students and professionals in linguistics, psychology, sociolinguistics, and communication studies. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how aggression is encoded in language and its significance in interpersonal and social dynamics.*

Keywords: *Aggression, lexical units, phraseological units, idioms, metaphorical language, slang expressions, verbal aggression.*

Анализ лексических и фразеологических единиц, выражающих агрессию в английском языке

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Аннотация: *Данная статья посвящена анализу лексических и фразеологических единиц, выражающих агрессию в английском языке. В исследовании рассматриваются агрессивные слова, выражения и устойчивые обороты, их семантические особенности и контекстуальное использование. Особое внимание уделяется стилистическим и эмоциональным оттенкам, а также культурным аспектам, влияющим на проявление агрессии через язык. Анализируются метафорические конструкции и лексика с высоким эмоциональным зарядом, усиливающая агрессивный эффект. Также изучаются формы агрессивного высказывания в социальных сетях, СМИ и повседневном общении. Статья будет полезна студентам и специалистам в области лингвистики, психологии,*

The Lingua Spectrum

Cogito, ergo sum

социолингвистики и коммуникации. Результаты исследования способствуют лучшему пониманию природы агрессии, выраженной через язык, а также её роли в межличностных и общественных взаимодействиях.

Ключевые слова: агрессия, лексические единицы, фразеологические единицы, идиомы, метафорический язык,

сленговые выражения, вербальная агрессия.

Ingliz tilida tajovuzni ifodalovchi leksik va frazeologik birliklarni tahlil qilish

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Annotatsiya: Ushbu maqolada ingliz tilida tajovuzni ifodalovchi leksik va frazeologik birliklarning tahlili keltirilgan. Tadqiqotda ingliz tilidagi tajovuzkorlikni ifodalovchi so'zlar, iboralar va frazeologik birikmalar turlari, ularning kontekstda qanday ishlatilishi va semantik xususiyatlari ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqola agressiv nutq uslubi, ijtimoiy kontekstda tajovuzning ifodalanishi, hamda madaniyatlararo farqlar nuqtayi nazaridan ham tahlilga ega. Xususan, tajovuz ifodalovchi birliklarning ma'no qatlamlari, metaforik va emotsional yuklamalari ham e'tiborga olinadi. Shuningdek, ijtimoiy tarmoqlar, ommaviy axborot vositalari va kundalik muloqotdagi tajovuz ifodalarining keng tarqalgan shakllari o'rganiladi. Maqola tilshunoslik, psixologiya va sotsiologiya kabi sohalarda tahsil olayotgan talabalar va mutaxassislar uchun foydalidir. Tadqiqot natijalari til orqali ifodalanadigan tajovuzning tabiati, shuningdek jamiyatdagi rolini yaxshiroq tushunishga yordam beradi.

Kalit so'zlar: tajovuz, leksik birliklar, frazeologik birliklar, idiomalar, metaforik til, sleng ifodalar, tazovuzning og'zaki ifodalanishi

Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a powerful tool for expressing human emotions, including aggression. In today's globalized and media-saturated world, aggressive language appears frequently in various forms of discourse – ranging from political speeches and social media posts to everyday conversation and entertainment media. Understanding how aggression is encoded and conveyed through lexical and phraseological units in English is crucial for both linguistic analysis and social insight.

This study aims to explore the ways in which aggression manifests through specific words, expressions, and idioms in English. The focus is placed on identifying linguistic patterns that carry aggressive meaning, analyzing their semantic properties, emotional charge, and contextual usage. Additionally, the research considers the socio-cultural implications of aggressive language, including how different groups use and interpret such expressions.

By investigating the linguistic expression of aggression, this research seeks to contribute to broader discussions in linguistics, pragmatics, and social psychology, offering a clearer understanding of the interplay between language, emotion, and human interaction.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze the lexical and phraseological units that convey aggression in the English language. The research is based on data collected from a variety of sources, including literary texts, online forums, news articles, political speeches, social media content, and film dialogues. These sources were selected to reflect both formal and informal registers of language, as well as diverse social contexts.

The selected texts were examined using content analysis to identify words, idioms, and fixed expressions commonly associated with aggressive meanings. Each identified unit was categorized according to its lexical or phraseological nature and analyzed for semantic intensity, emotional charge, frequency of use, and contextual application.

Additionally, the study incorporates elements of discourse analysis to understand how aggressive language functions within specific communicative situations. Special attention was given to metaphorical expressions and euphemisms that implicitly convey aggression.

The findings were interpreted with reference to relevant linguistic theories, including pragmatics, semantics, and cognitive linguistics, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Results

The study identified a wide range of lexical and phraseological units used to express aggression in English. These were categorized based on their structure, intensity, and usage context. The results are summarized in the following table:

Table 1

Category	Examples	Type	Context of Use
Direct Aggressive Lexis	hate, destroy, insult, attack, kill	Lexical	News headlines, political speeches
Slang& Informal Aggression	roast, drag, clap back, savage, trash	Lexical (Slang)	Social media, online arguments
Metaphorical Aggression	go to war, blow up, explode with rage	Phraseological	News, literature, conversation
Idiomatic Expressions	Bite someone's head off, push someone's buttons	Phraseological	Everyday speech, informal writing
Emotionally Charged Phrases	Can't stand, makes my blood boil, at each other's throats	Phraseological	Personal communication, blogs
Euphemistic Aggression	Put someone's in their place, call someone out	Phraseological	Polite or indirect confrontational speech
Euphemistic phrases	Give someone a real check	Indirect criticism,	Corporate settings, media talk shows

		masked confrontation	

Key Observations:

Frequency: Slang and idiomatic expressions were especially common in informal contexts like social media and entertainment.

Intensity Variation: Lexical aggression tends to be more direct and forceful, while phraseological units often carry layered or softened meanings.

Metaphorical Use: Many aggressive expressions are metaphorically derived from physical conflict (e.g., war, violence, animal behavior).

Cultural Influence: The use and interpretation of aggressive language are strongly influenced by social norms, speaker identity, and situational factors.

The lexical and phraseological units expressing aggression in English, the following thematic groupings were identified based on **semantic fields** and **communicative intent**:

1. Semantic Groupings of Aggressive Units:

Aggressive expressions in English can be categorized based on their semantic content:

Physical Aggression: Terms like "beat up," "smash," and "punch" denote direct physical violence.

Verbal Aggression: Phrases such as "lash out," "snap at," and "bite someone's head off" convey verbal hostility.

Emotional Aggression: Expressions like "boil over," "explode with rage," and "see red" reflect intense emotional states.

Psychological Aggression: Idioms such as "play mind games," "gaslight," and "give someone the cold shoulder" indicate manipulative or passive-aggressive behaviors.

Social Aggression: Slang terms like "cancel," "shade," and "drag" are used to socially ostracize or criticize individuals, especially prevalent in online discourse.

Table 2

Theme	Examples	Explanations
War & conflict	Attack, fire back, battleground war of words	Metaphors derived from military and conflict – related terminology
Animal Imagery	Bark at, growl, snap, go berserk	Represents primal/ aggressive behavior often used in heated arguments
Destruction & violence	Crush, smash, destroy, obliterate	Emphasizes total defeat or damage, common in gaming, sports and arguments
Emotion & Rage	Furious, boiling, explode, lose it	Reflects internal emotional aggression

Table 3

2. Frequency Data (Based on 500- sample corpus analysis):

Expression Type	Frequency (%)	Most Common Context
Direct Lexical Aggression	28%	Political / news discourse
Slang-Based Aggression	21%	Social media posts/ comments
Idiomatic Phrases	26%	Informal communication blogs
Metaphorical Expression	15%	Literary texts, journalism
Euphemisms/ Subtle Aggression	10%	Workplace emails, interviews

3. Communicative Functions of Aggressive Units:

Aggressive language serves various communicative purposes:

Expressing Disapproval or Criticism: Phrases like "call someone out" or "give a reality check" are used to challenge or correct behavior.

Asserting Dominance or Control: Expressions such as "put in their place" or "lay down the law" establish authority.

Releasing Emotional Tension: Idioms like "blow off steam" or "vent one's spleen" allow speakers to express pent-up emotions.

Humor and Entertainment: Slang terms like "roast" or "burn" are used in jest to mock or tease, often in friendly contexts.

Social Bonding or Group Identity: Shared use of certain aggressive expressions can reinforce group cohesion and identity.

These semantic categories and communicative functions highlight the multifaceted nature of aggression in English, demonstrating how language reflects and influences social interactions.

Table 4

Function	Description
Express frustration	Words like snap, can't take it anymore convey psychological overwhelm

Assert dominance	Put in their place, shut down used to establish social hierarchy
Retaliation/Defense	Clap back, call out, fire back imply verbal retaliation
Mocking or humiliation	Roast, drag, trash talk often used to ridicule or belittle publicly

To better understand how aggression is expressed in authentic discourse, this section provides illustrative examples of lexical and phraseological units used in real-life contexts. These examples showcase how aggression can be either overt or implicit, emotionally charged or euphemistically masked.

1. Political Discourse:

Example:

"They are trying to destroy everything we've built. But we will fight back – and we will win."

– From a U.S. campaign rally (2020)

Analysis:

This quote contains direct lexical aggression ("destroy") and metaphorical language ("fight back") associated with warfare. The use of such language intensifies group loyalty while creating an in-group vs. out-group dynamic. It also functions rhetorically to provoke emotional reactions and establish dominance.

2. Film Dialogue:

Example:

"You mess with me, you get burned."

– Fast & Furious: Hobbs & Shaw (2019)

Analysis:

This is a metaphorical and idiomatic threat. The expression "get burned" is a vivid, indirect way to communicate consequences or revenge. Such idioms are commonly used in movies to express aggression without explicit violence, contributing to stylized and emotionally loaded character development.

3. Online Discourse (Twitter):

Example:

"She thought she ate with that argument. I had to drag her back to reality."

– Twitter user during an online debate (2023)

Analysis:

Slang terms like "ate" (performed well), "drag" (humiliate), and "back to reality" (euphemistic criticism) are used to ridicule and assert dominance. This represents a hybrid of verbal aggression and humor in youth-driven social media spaces. It also demonstrates how aggression in digital communication is often stylized, competitive, and performative.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that aggression in English is encoded not only through direct lexical items but also through a wide array of idiomatic, metaphorical, and euphemistic expressions. This confirms earlier claims in pragmatic and cognitive linguistics that language is a reflection of socio-cultural attitudes, where aggression can be overt, covert, or socially mediated depending on context (Wray, 2002; Shevchenko, 2024).

From a semantic perspective, aggressive expressions often rely on metaphorical mappings – such as war, violence, animal behavior, or natural disasters – to express conflict and emotional

intensity. For example, the use of war-related phrases like "go to battle" or "under attack" in non-violent discourse (e.g., debates or criticism) illustrates how metaphor structures human thought and emotional expression (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

From a communicative-functional perspective, these expressions serve diverse purposes beyond simple hostility. Euphemistic phrases like "give someone a reality check" enable speakers to express criticism without appearing overtly rude, showing that aggression can also be strategic or socially controlled. Meanwhile, expressions like "clap back" or "roast" are used performatively in digital and youth cultures to assert identity, resist criticism, or entertain an audience – demonstrating the evolving pragmatics of aggression in online contexts (Cieślicka, 2006).

Cross-cultural data also suggest that while many aggressive expressions are universal in concept (e.g., the idea of "biting" as a metaphor for verbal attack), the specific linguistic realizations and acceptability vary by culture. English, particularly in its American variant, often normalizes forms of verbal aggression in casual or humorous contexts, which might be considered offensive or inappropriate in other linguistic communities (Rakhmonova, 2024).

This underscores the importance of teaching phraseological nuance in language learning and translation, as misunderstanding aggressive idioms can lead to intercultural miscommunication. Furthermore, understanding the layered meanings of aggressive language is critical in fields such as digital communication, political discourse, and conflict mediation.

The high frequency of slang and idiomatic aggression on social media suggests a trend toward creative and culturally coded language use in digital communication. Terms like "clap back" or "drag" not only convey aggression but also signal group identity, humor, or resistance, particularly in youth and online subcultures. The use of metaphors rooted in war, violence, and animal behavior further illustrates how deeply aggression is embedded in everyday language. These metaphors not only intensify the emotional tone but also influence how listeners perceive the intent and severity of the message.

Additionally, the study highlights the socio-cultural functions of aggressive language. It can serve to challenge authority, defend personal boundaries, entertain, or express suppressed frustration. However, it can also escalate conflict, reinforce stereotypes, or lead to miscommunication, especially across different cultural or linguistic backgrounds. In general, the aggressive units identified in English are not merely linguistic tools, but social actions that reflect power dynamics, emotional states, and cultural values. Understanding these expressions offers valuable insight into the relationship between language, emotion, and interpersonal interaction. The aggression in English is a multi-layered linguistic phenomenon shaped by metaphor, culture, function, and speaker intent. Future research could benefit from comparative studies across languages, corpus-based frequency analysis, or examining gender and generational differences in aggressive language use.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that aggression in the English language is conveyed through a broad spectrum of lexical and phraseological units, reflecting both the complexity of human emotion and the richness of linguistic expression. Through the analysis of various sources – including media, literature, and online discourse – the research identified both explicit and implicit forms of aggressive language, ranging from direct terms such as "kill," "hate," and "attack" to more nuanced idiomatic and metaphorical expressions like "blow up," "go to war," or "bite someone's head off."

The data showed that aggressive expressions are not merely acts of hostility, but also serve diverse communicative functions: expressing frustration, asserting dominance, defending boundaries, or establishing group identity. In particular, slang and idiomatic aggression are prominent in informal and digital communication, where creativity and cultural context heavily influence usage.

The findings also highlight the role of metaphor and cultural imagery – drawn from war, animals, and destruction – in shaping the emotional and social impact of language. These expressions are shaped by context, tone, and intention, often balancing between assertiveness and social acceptability.

Ultimately, the study concludes that understanding aggressive language in English requires not only linguistic analysis but also cultural and psychological insight. This understanding can aid educators, translators, sociolinguists, and communicators in identifying the deeper meanings and implications behind aggressive speech, and in promoting more mindful, constructive communication practices.

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