

Editorial

The goal of the *Journal of Language Aggression and Conflict* (JLAC) is to create a unique outlet that publishes cutting edge research, and has a format, content and structure that reflect the rapidly growing interest in studies that focus on the language of aggression (also referred to as incivility, rudeness, impoliteness, vulgarity, etc.) and conflict.

This growing interest in verbal aggression appears to be quite interdisciplinary. A recent paper that prefaces a special issue on language aggression published in the *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, Hamilton (2012, 7) included a chart that reflects the staggering increase (with frequencies ranging from 1 in the 1950s to 65 in the mid-2000s) in scholarly work focusing on verbal aggression/aggressiveness, impolite/rude behavior and aggressive/opinionated/offensive/vulgar language. Most of this work, however, has been conducted under the auspices of other social sciences such as psychology, sociology, communications, etc. rather than linguistics (see among many others Smith et al 2010; Rancer and Avtgis 2006; Kowalski 2001). Consequently, these studies have seldom concentrated on actual language use per se, or provided the type of micro-analysis that characterizes discursive or other linguistic approaches. This poses some problems for the advancement of our knowledge of these phenomena because, although aggression and conflict may manifest themselves through other means, they are fundamentally linguistically realized. For that reason, a thorough understanding of conflict and aggression needs to be anchored in an analysis of actual discourse.

Linguistics, for its part, is also catching up with this trend. There are clear signs that “trying to come to terms with language aggression and conflict” is becoming a scholarly priority. The growing academic interest in different forms of linguistic aggression and incivility was already evident in the 90s and early 2000s — years that witnessed the publications of works by, among others, Allen Grimshaw’s *Conflict Talk* (1990), Karen Watson-Gego and Geoffrey White’s *Disentangling* (1990), Deborah Tannen’s *The Argument Culture* (1998), and Robin Lakoff’s *The Language War* (2000). Nonetheless, as pointed out by Goodwin and Alim (2010, 183) the widespread assumption in the analysis of conversation or other forms of (non)institutional interaction has been that the main goal of participants is to “... organize talk in ways that preserve social solidarity while avoiding conflict (Heritage 1984) despite numerous studies of conflict talk by sociologists and

anthropologists". This has certainly been the assumption underlying the massive amount of scholarly work, considered a movement within pragmatics, triggered by Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, profoundly influenced by Grice's views on cooperation. Along those lines, it has been argued that Gricean pragmatics depicts a somewhat idealistic picture of communication, guided by the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. For example, Kecskes (2010) argued that most current research in pragmatics focuses on the positive, social features of communication, such as cooperation, rapport building, common ground, or politeness. Thus, pragmatics scholars' emphasis on the decisive role of context, socio-cultural factors and cooperation is overwhelming. Conversely, the role of the individual's prior experience, existing knowledge, egocentrism, salience, or aggressive (rather than cooperative) behavior is almost completely ignored.

Probably due to this widespread assumption, it has only been relatively recent that scholars have started to look at language aggression in its own right. A good example of this trend is the burgeoning field of impoliteness research (e.g. Culpeper 1996, 2011; Bousfield 2008) which started in the late 1990s and established itself during the late 2000s. Sifianou (2010) recently referred to 2008 as "the year of impoliteness". Researchers have been trying to come up with models specifically devised to explain impoliteness, moving towards abandoning the long held belief that instances of conflict at the personal, institutional, intracultural or intercultural level needed to be explained away as peripheral oddities, and not as central (and often essential, even beneficial) to communal life. This contraction, as pointed out by Pagliai (2010a, 63) certainly needs to be addressed:

... we are surrounded by disputes all of our lives, and yet arguments have often been rendered invisible in scholarship as aberrations or problems suited for psychological counseling, rather than as active resources for communicating and constructing agency. Disagreement has been seen as a problem that language users must overcome, as marked, as something requiring explanation, as the abnormal in respect to the "normal" flux of cooperation and construction of agreement. Argumentative forms such as verbal duels have often been explained away as displays of (male) aggressiveness or seen as a "security valve" that serves the status quo.

Thus, the centrality of different forms of aggression, including language aggression, in humans' daily life is undeniable. As some studies have shown, conflict is ubiquitous in children's as well as in adolescents' interactions (Corsaro and Rizzo 1990; Goodwin and Alin 2010; Bucholtz 2011; Georgakopoulou 2013), and certainly much more needs to be investigated about the functionality of aggression in adults' discourse at both the institutional and non-institutional levels (Beebe 1995, Kienpointner 1997, 2008).

The special focus on language proposed for JLAC aims at helping to: resolve the impasse between scholarly attitudes and assumptions; focus on the pervasiveness of conflict in real life; and give language aggression and conflict the pre-eminence they deserve as core phenomena of human communication, which are not always toxic but can be constitutive of communal life (Garcés-Conejos 2009; Pagliai 2010a). It should also be noted that a more thorough understanding of how aggression and conflict are discursively constructed and perceived can lead to better ways of, if necessary, managing or avoiding aggression and conflict.

Although conflict has been a staple in human life since its inception, there are current innovations, circumstances and developments that would further justify scholars' giving more attention to the linguistic manifestations of conflict and aggression. For one, new technologies have provided us with unprecedented access to ways in which to communicate with different levels of anonymity — which has been linked to aggression and polarization (Lee 2007; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010) — and allow us to publicly vent frustrations (personal, political, etc.), or actively participate in discussion with (sometimes millions of) unknown interlocutors. Unfiltered, for the most part uncensored, public manifestations of aggression are now a constant, almost inescapable presence, in citizens' engagement with the new media (Herring 1994; Lorenzo-Dus et al 2011; Lange 2006; Papacharissi 2004).

Along those same lines, we have recently witnessed the establishment of conflict as spectacle in traditional media (Lorenzo-Dus 2009) with the world wide dissemination of different genres of reality TV (Culpeper 2005, Culpeper and Holmes forthcoming; Lorenzo-Dus et al 2013) in which language aggression is pervasive, and has been tied to high audience ratings as a powerful attention gathering device (Reeves and Nass 1996; Mutz and Reeves 2005; Mutz, 2007). Language aggression, however, has not circumscribed its ascendancy to reality TV or certain talk shows (Tolson forthcoming): it has progressively trickled into "serious" TV genres such as news commentary and news interviews, especially in partisan cable news and radio. Aggression to those interviewees or third parties representing ideological positions different from those of the target audience seems to be a strategy that has secured ratings and catapulted channels and news personalities to fame (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2009; Hutchby 2011).

Furthermore, the relationship between language aggression, emotions, ideology, and identity construction emerges as meriting further academic inquiry and evidences the need for an interdisciplinary approach to advance our understanding of language aggression related phenomena (Joseph 2013; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2013; Locher and Langlotz 2008, Kienpointner 2008). Clearly, language aggression is often used in constructing the other (from the point of view of political and sexual orientation, culture, race, or country of origin, such as in a homophobic,

racist or anti-emigration discourse) and in constructing the other we construct ourselves. Further research on the role that verbal aggression plays in processes of (dis)affiliation and in/out-group formation is also needed.

In addition, while conflict mediation and resolution have received considerable attention from psychology, micro-analysis — such as the kind undertaken by discourse analysts — could be extremely beneficial in unveiling what linguistic strategies are proven to be most effective in aiding mediation and advancing resolution (Littlejohn and Domenici 2001, Moore 2003). Due to the ubiquity of aggression and conflict in a globalized world, broadening our knowledge in the realm sounds like a pressing necessity.

Another interesting focus of research in relation to aggression and conflict can be tied to the close monitoring of social practices or genres in which they emerge. Identifying the societal and practice specific norms (“stabilized for now” in genres see Schryer 2002) whose breach is often associated with inappropriateness can lend powerful insights into the underpinning of conflictive linguistic behavior, and help us better understand when this behavior is used to foster positive change, as effecting changes leading towards a more egalitarian society (Fairclough 2003; Pennycook 2010) .

Continued studies on the use of insults or taboo words, even if insulting is ritualistic and mostly used to create in-groupness, are still needed (see Jay 1992; Tetreault 2010; Pagliai 2010b; Mateo and Yus this volume), as well as research that can lead to a deeper understanding of the interpretations and consequences of verbal aggression by those who are its targets in cases of domestic violence, gender violence, racist or homophobic discourse, face to face and cyber bullying, trolling (see Hardaker this volume), among others. Metaphorical (Domaradzki this volume) and narrative uses of aggression (see Georgakopoulou 2013; Norrick this volume) can also help us come to grips with the fundamentality of conflict in our lives as well as of its multifunctionality.

In conclusion, JLAC aims to be a forum for researchers who are looking for new tools and methods to investigate and better understand the language of aggression and conflict. As such, JLAC is multidisciplinary in nature and aims to encourage, support and facilitate interaction and scholarly debate among researchers representing different fields including, but not limited to linguistics, communication, pragmatics, psychology, anthropology, bi- and multilingualism, business management, gender studies, etc.

We are especially interested in publishing articles and research papers that:

- address major issues for developing linguistic theories and models of aggression and conflict;
- explore different ways to extant theoretical constructs to explain conflictive or aggressive language behavior;

- analyze the ways in which aggression and conflict play a role in constructing gendered and other types of identities;
- focus on aggressive communication traits, in particular, argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, bullying, mobbing or trolling;
- attempt to come to grips with strategic or instrumental uses of conflictive or aggressive language, and how these may be related to power;
- investigate and interpret the oral and written linguistic realization of real-life (face to face, mediated -both traditional and new media-, interpersonal, institutional) conflict situations and happenings to create opportunities for more productive ways to navigate and resolve conflict;
- study the bases underlying or influencing linguistic behaviors generally regarded as aggressive and conflict generating, and;
- identify areas where further research is needed.

We hope that JLAC will become the “go to” forum for all of those interested in this emerging and intriguing field of research.

The Editors

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