Discourse Recognition and Analysis of Ethnic Hate Speech in Social Media

GUAN Yudong, ZENG Xianghong
University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Based on the proposal of freedom of speech, hate speech has become more and more widespread, especially in the past decade. Generally, the constituent elements of hate speech are mainly manifested in four aspects (Jiang, 2015): the way of expression, the object, the intention of expression, and the harmful consequences. Through these four aspects, hate speech can give a heavy blow to the stability and security of the whole society with the help of social media. Hence, this paper puts forward an analysis method of the recognition and resistance to hate speech from different conditions.

Keywords: hate speech, social media, ethnic, expression, recognition

Introduction

Before discussing hate speech on the Internet, a comprehensive understanding of its definition, characteristics, and elements is a prerequisite for a full understanding and analysis of its role and influence. In general, hate speech is a term used to refer to any kind of offensive material, i.e., verbal, nonverbal, symbolic, or communicative actions that are deliberately used to denigrate and belittle members of a particular social group based on their membership (Simpson, 2013). Online hate speech expresses hatred of a collective that is different in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, political views, or other traits (Hawdon, Oksanen, & Risanen, 2017).

Hate speech does not mean that the motivation of this speech act is out of hatred. In fact, it also contains more reasons, such as fear, jealousy, boredom, isolation, psychological and economic interests. Based on one or more of these factors, hate speech attacks others or other races through verbal offence, dignity violation, emotion injury, psychological shadow of victims, and destruction of the social stability and unity. In addition, the expression of hate speech can also be humorous.

Taking China as an example, on February 3, 2021, China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) officially released the 47th Statistical Report on the Development of China’s Internet. As of December 2020, the number of Internet users in China has reached 989 million, an increase of 85.4 million compared with March 2020, and the Internet penetration rate has reached 70.4%, an increase of 5.9% points compared with March 2020. The particular reason for the circumstance is that everyone has the right to freedom of speech, which actively demonstrates that everyone can speak freely on the Internet. With the rapid growth of the
number of Internet users, hate speech also shows a positive correlation growth trend. When people express their opinions and speeches on social media, they are seen as an anonymous state (or forgery). When they discuss in social media, they usually cannot see another person’s face and reaction. Therefore, hate speech takes advantage of this favourable one to spread, which means that we must prevent hate speech from its preliminary.

**Significance of the Paper**

The target of this paper is to try to figure out the connection of social media and ethnic hate speech combined with the four aspects mentioned above. What’s deeper importance is to recognize ethnic hate speech, which we should prevent from spreading then.

**Theory Framework**

Speech act theory is a linguistic theory proposed by Austin and developed by Searle et al., which includes three aspects: the locutionary act, the illocutionary act, and the perlocutionary act. The locutionary act expresses the literal meaning through syntax, vocabulary, and phoneme. The illocutionary act expresses the speaker’s intention. It is the act performed when saying something. The perlocutionary act is the act performed by some words or caused by some words, which means the consequence brought about by the speech act.

In Gelber’s empirical research in 2016, he explicated that for the victims of hate speech, they would be impaireed from political debate on radio or television, or the comments they receive on public transport, in schools and universities, at workplaces, at community events (Gelber & Mcnamara, 2016). The reasons for such incidents were first skin color, closely followed by religion and ethnicity, sexuality coming last. The next part of this paper would focus on discourse analysis of ethnic hate speech on social media (mainly in USA). The content of it would be divided into three parts: political discourse, multimedia news, Internet comments of Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

**Discourse Analysis of Hate Speech on Social Media**

Under the influence of a series of international issues, hate speech on social media is a real problem with real consequences (Ștefăniță & Buf, 2021). Nevertheless, the United States, as the most “liberal” and “democratic” country, said that the American government would work with other countries’ governments to fight against cyber terrorism. And the United States, which advocates “tolerance”, however does not agree with the regulation of “cyber hate speech”. The United States has no laws to regulate hate speech on the Internet. The last President Donald Trump of the United States has made a lot of unfriend comments on racial problems on Twitter. This cognitive difference has caused great divergences on hate speech in the United States, which makes it difficult for the US Internet to deal with hate speech overnight, and the social harm brought by cyber hate speech is also increasingly significant. Hence, this paper focuses on the discourse analysis (including political discourse, multimedia news, Internet comments) of ethnic hate speech inside and outside the United States combined with speech act theory.

**Political Discourse**

On June 24, 2020, the United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo denounced Chinese Xi Jinping with a dishonest and radical speech: “real transparency and accountability for the PRC’s role in unleashing this deadly virus”.

The intention of his locutionary act is obviously aimed at the Chinese contribution to the virus managements. In his understanding, China is unable to handle things well, and fails to report the progress of
things truthfully. He deeply questioned China’s ability of solving problems and integrity. From his words, we can sum up his discrimination against Chinese people. He intended to create public opinion pressure in the international community and point the spearhead at China.

As a notorious anti-China personage, the last president of the United States Donald Trump is even more astonishing, who has brought the issue of racial discrimination to a new height. On March 17, 2020, Trump posted a political tweet: “The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!”

He used a noun phrase “Chinese Virus”, whose illocutionary act would be attempting to connect virus with China so that as long as virus is mentioned by the American people that it is spread from China in the future. The deep racial discrimination against China makes him feel that the Chinese themselves have the virus. And another intention of his speech is to put all the blame on China, which means that he wants to make China be the target of public criticism. After he made this statement, the consequence was a sharp rise in anti-Asian violence, and the basic reason of those who committed the crime was to expel the “virus” (imply Chinese people in America).

Donald Trump is not only against China, but also against immigrants from other countries. On 1 November, 2017, Trump said in a Tweet: “Chain Migration must end now! Some people come in, and they bring their whole family with them, who can be truly evil. Not Acceptable!”

As a practitioner and believer of white supremacist groups, Trump has called for a “merit-based” system of allowing people into the country. He thinks that people of inferior ethnicities will only bring evil things. Combined with the speech act of his tweet, it can be seen that he strongly wanted to stop the chain immigration, and he actually issued an immigration forbiddance. The consequence of his speech act is disdain for immigrants and even more violent behavior came from his followers. Then the worse consequence is that the number of illegal immigrants arrested on the southern border of the United States is higher than in any of the past 21 years, with more than 35,000 unaccompanied minors having to cross the border at the risk of extortion and gang trafficking.

**Multimedia News**

NFL owner Robert Wood Johnson faced an investigation for the exact purpose of his private racist sound recording reported by The Associated Press on 23 July, 2020. He questioned “why the Black community celebrates Black History Month”. Although as a league boss with many black players, he made such improper racist remarks. The intention of his speech act would be suppressing the black subordinates and players. And the immediate consequence of his speech was that his political career was pushed to a cliff edge for the leakage of his secret hate speech. And another sport event should be mentioned afterwards.

On 19 February, 2018, the 76ers star score guard J. J. Redick had a hate speech in a spring festival blessing video. He said that “all of the NBA chink fans of China”. He used a word “chink” which is obviously considered as a discriminatory word for Chinese.

On 2 November, 2018, the television host of Tuesday night’s *Outsiders* program, Cameron made an amazing speech: “If you go to the Disneyland in Shanghai on any typical morning of the week you’ll see 20,000 black-haired, slanty-eyed, yellow-skinned Chinese desperate to get into Disneyland”. From his speech, we can see that he discriminated against the Chinese people in two aspects: countenance and behavior. The countenance part can be seen from the noun phrase he emphasized while the behavior can be seen from the
word “desperate”. His emphasis exposed his ridicule of the Chinese people’s appearance and belittled the Chinese people’s attempt to squeeze into Disney. Hence the consequence of his hate speech is that his statement was removed on Friday afternoon and he apologized on the network’s behalf for the totally unacceptable speech.

Internet Comments

Different from political speech and multimedia news, ordinary online comments are less likely to have illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Next, I’ll list some hate comments on the Internet then. Due to the hate speech management function of Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook, the comments that can be found are relatively early.

On 22 August, 2015, an account that have been cancelled said “can’t even speak and understand kimchi”, and on 12 September he/she made similar comment “I really wanna stan bts why are jhope and rapmon so ugly”. It is worth noting that “stan” means the combination of “stalker” and “fan” which is used frequently. This user tried to express his derogatory and injurious emotion about the Korean and BTS (a South Korean boy-band). The intention of this comment is to taunt Korean and their looks. In the end, this comment did no influence but the account was written off.

On 20 July, 2014, someone called Hamas Palestine commented that “Let’s kill Jews and kill them for fun”. The locutionary act of his speech can be seen easily that he has a great hatred of Jews literally and has the intention and possibility to hurt the Jews.

On 21 May 2021, an American comedy writer and actor named Tony Hinchcliffe made a verbal attack on a Chinese we media blogger with a passage “Shameful chink. I’m a cracker with chink friends”. He even used the word “chink” twice in such a short sentence. In his locutionary and illocutionary act, he deeply thinks that making friends with Chinese people would be a ludicrous thing to be talked about and he wants other people not to be friends with the Chinese by using his pathetic influence. And the bad consequence of his exposed private message is that some of his white racist fans did follow suit.

Conclusion

At present, hate speech on social media has not received adequate attentions, and the historical background and practical influence of the group contradictions and collisions of hate speech have not been given due attentions as well. No matter what causes the hate speech on social media, the difference between the online hate speech and the real-world hate speech lies in its concealment. The anonymity and fluidity of the Internet make the hate speech senders able to cover up their hate nature by using the relevant alternative language and the seemingly legitimate domain name and website name, thus contributing to the formation of prejudice. Due to the wide range, deep degree and lack of transparency in the process of communication, it is often difficult to grasp the internal operation process of network hate speech. Analyzing hate speech from four aspects mentioned above is helpful and significant for us to recognize hate speech and fight back and resist it while we are looking up information, watching news, or surfing the Internet.

References

China Internet Information Center. (2021-02-23). The 47th statistical report on China’s Internet development. Culpeper, J. (2021). Impoliteness and hate speech: Compare and contrast. Journal of Pragmatics (prepublish). Gelber, K., & McNamara, L. (2016). Evidencing the harms of hate speech. Social Identities, 22, 324-341.
Hawdon, J., Oksanen, A., & Rasanen, P. (2017). Exposure to online hate in four nations: A cross-national consideration. *Deviant Behavior, 38*, 254-266.

Jiang, Y. (2015). The study on hate speech and its regulation (Master’s thesis, Tsinghua University, 2015).

Ștefăniță, O., & Buf, D. M. (2021). Hate speech in social media and its effects on the LGBT community: A review of the current research. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations, 23*(1), 47-55.

Simpson, R. M. (2013). Dignity, harm, and hate speech. *Law and Philosophy, 32*, 701-728.