

## DISCOURSE AS A TOOL TO COUNTER EXTREMISM: SHAPING METHODOLOGY FOR RESEARCH

<sup>a</sup>ANASTASIA A. ATABEKOVA, <sup>b</sup>NATALIYA M. BELENKOVA, <sup>c</sup>RIMMA G. GORBATENKO, <sup>d</sup>IRINA I. KRUZE, <sup>e</sup>NATALIA N. UDINA

*Peoples' Friendship University of Russia – RUDN University, Miklukho-Maklay str., 6, Moscow, Russia*  
 email: <sup>a</sup>aaatabekova@gmail.com, <sup>b</sup>belenkovam@mail.ru, <sup>c</sup>rggorbatenko@gmail.com, <sup>d</sup>kruseirina@rambler.ru, <sup>e</sup>udinam@gmail.com

**Abstract:** In the modern world, extremism poses a threat to world values, the national and personal security. The purpose of the present study is to specify research frame work including international and national policies, legislation and other measures undertaken in the world, focusing on discourse and linguistic component, to analyze available methodology and to elaborate new approaches to use discursive practices for preventing extremism. Shaping new methodology to deal with the challenges extremism poses to society requires comprehensive studies and contextualization of discourses, discursive practices and social aspects of the phenomena. The research outlines two main areas including global trends in academic research of discourse to prevent extremism and the other targeting specific tasks, communities and outcomes.

**Keywords:** discourse, counter extremism, youth protection, language impact, typology of communication contexts, experimental methodology.

### 1 Introduction

Modern civilizations face various global threats, one of which is extremism. It impedes the progressive development of states and the international community, undermines the foundations of national and international stability.

Under the UNO Agenda 2030 diverse stakeholders at international and national levels draft policies and consider tools to foster peace and justice in the contemporary world community which considers youth generation as a top target audience for protection from all forms of violence and extremism.

The common activities to address this global challenge include international and national policies, action plans, measures and steps regarding security, public awareness raising, education, mass media engagement, fight against extremist propaganda, etc. All these areas include verbal communication issues, and human language is an integral part of the respective activities. Therefore, studies of discourse can view it as a tool to counter extremism.

This angle goes in line with the Academia contemporary perception of discourse as an instrument that could contribute to societal and business solutions, including sustainable development (Wilkins, 2003), management (Darics & Clifton 2018), claims negotiations (Guy, 2018), pedagogical dimensions (Rymes, 2015), national identity issues (Shohamy, 2013), etc.

Lately, some research papers have declared initiatives and perceptions of the need for counter-terrorism discourse (Badurdeen & Goldsmith, 2018). Furthermore, C. Mattsson and R. Säljö (2018) conducted empirical studies on ways for educators and social workers to talk to minors about extremism. However, the comprehensive desk and field studies on discourse as a tool to counter extremism have not been conducted so far, neither specific wording on such a goal or methodology has been introduced for societal or academic considerations.

However, the relevance of the above is determined by the importance of extremism prevention and the need to counter it through all available instruments, including linguistic means of communication.

Therefore, the goal of the present study is to shape a tentative methodology to study discourse as a tool to prevent and counter extremism.

The goal requires two stages of analysis. First, the data background for research methodology will be explored. This stage will cover global and national policy vision of academic research on the discourse role within the extremism challenges to the contemporary world.

Second, the methodology for the specified research area will be designed in terms of identifying particular research tasks, methods and approaches.

### 2 Data Background for Research Methodology

#### 2.1 Discourse Role within the Extremism Challenges: International and National Policy Vision

Combating extremism is one of the critical challenges to the modern multipolar world. The relevant actions are being undertaken by international and national bodies in different fields and directions. Among other issues, the international community lays particular emphasis to the need for targeted communication with society as a tool to counter extremism, that strives to use advanced communication technologies to engage different communities in the extremist networks.

Thus, the UNO Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2016) stresses the urgent need for “community engagement strategies”, “family-based mentorship programmes”, “inclusive dialogue among the community members”, calls the UNO Member States to “promote intercultural and interfaith dialogue” (par. 51), “intergenerational dialogue and youth-adult confidence-building activities and training” (par. 52c). The document pays particular attention to the States cooperation with social media companies to foster national communications strategies, which being based on international human rights standards and tailored to local contexts would “challenge the narratives associated with violent extremism” (par. 55a).

The importance of the above activities is further underlined at the regional level. The Council of Europe Committee of the Ministers Action Plan (The Fight Against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism, 2015) emphasizes the need to “develop a convincing counter-narrative, drawing on grassroots initiatives, spread through the communication networks”, calls for building inclusive societies, “trust among citizens across social and cultural differences”, “support for intercultural communication and skills” (pp. 3-4).

The OSCE argues for a careful use of language and terminology in communication with diverse civil society actors and recommends national governments to refine language to engage potential partners in the capacity building process (The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe, 2018, p. 53).

National domestic laws and activities also take into account the communication issues.

Thus, the UK government delivered a special report on ways to prevent extremism and radicalization globally with a particular focus on the language used in the official media and education domains (Radicalisation: the Counter narrative and Identifying the Tipping Point, 2017, p. 6).

The State members of the Vishegrad Group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovak Republic) laid particular emphasis on preventing radicalization of speech within the discussion on their countries joint policies and tools to prevent radicalization and extremism (Capabilities of the Vishegrad Group in Preventing Extremism, 2017, p. 11).

As for the Russian Federation, apart from the legislation (Law of the Russian Federation "On Countering Extremist Activity", 2002), high ranking representatives of national authorities have repeatedly identified the task "to counter the narrative of violent extremism" as one of the cornerstone activities while "addressing violent extremism when conducive to terrorism" (Statement by Mr. Vladimir Ivanovich Voronkov, 2018).

The ontological grounds for attention to communication issues within international and national policies are rooted in the fact that in the multidimensional space of modern socio-cultural communities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Huntington, 1993), language is one of their essential characteristics, criteria for civilizational identity and tools for its preservation and development.

The above data on the global vision of the language and communication potential to prevent extremism logically leads the society to address scholars and communication specialists the question on particular language and communication tools that can serve as proactive instruments against extremism influence. Therefore, the present research should turn to academic research framework.

## 2.2 Academia Research Areas

Two decades of the third Millennium witness a considerable amount of publications that introduce current topics within studies on extremist language.

Researchers consistently stand on integrated discourse analysis and enhance the array of its tools to explore narratives and communicative device that extremists use in their propaganda aimed at recruiting (Lorenzo-Dus et al., 2017; Macdonald, 2016). Several articles have addressed the extremism verbalization from the standpoint of semiotics (O'Regan & Betzel, 2015).

Some experts strive to distinguish particular strategies within the extremist discourse, including conventionalized impoliteness, threats, condescension and exclusion (Lorenzo-Dus & Macdonald, 2018).

Scholars use corpus-based approach and digital content analysis techniques to identify keywords and concepts, collocations and speech patterns frequency, conduct their concordance analysis to interpret the data and identify extremists' use of language to express themes of morality, social proof, inspiration and appeals to religion, etc. (Brindle, 2016a, 2016b; Prentice et al., 2012a; Rogan, 2016; Testa & Armstrong, 2009; Zeiger, 2016).

This area of studies goes beyond one language and moves to the cross-cultural language analysis. For instance, P. Baker and R. Vessey, R. (2018) implement a corpus-driven comparison of English and French Islamist extremist texts and specify standard and distinct features of messages within bilingual extremist propaganda.

Some investigation on the above topic is related to concrete security goals. Scholars explore the ways to use the corpus linguistics and statistical methods to measure the influence of the extremists' verbal messages in the social media (Marcellino et al., 2017). The corresponding data can help security authorities to enhance counter-messaging efforts against extremist group's recruitment. Moreover, scholars identify those communication tools that enhance propaganda appeal of extremist and terrorist organizations (Milton, 2018).

Researchers also focus on verbal tools that some national communities use as persuasive instruments for religion-based justification of violence against Muslims in society. Such studies have been conducted in different countries including Canada (Ghosh et al., 2017), Malaysia (Yusof et al., 2018), Pakistan (Abbas, 2015), and the UK (Brindle, 2016a, 2016b; Culpeper et al., 2017).

Scholars also focus on the speech patterns of powerful messages that denounce terrorism. Thus, S. Prentice (Prentice et al., 2012b) and her colleagues use corpus-based analysis of counter-extremist messages written by Muslims and the U.K. officials and conclude that counter extremism messages do not form a homogenous phenomenon either in terms of western values perception or in terms of language use.

Another topic that has got experts' attention concerns the role of foreign language learning in education against extremism (Davies, 2008). Scholars underline that enhancing such classes enhance could balance "extreme right political activity, inclusive notion of nationhood, challenge racism in a multicultural society" (Osler & Lybaek, 2014). Multilingual education in the community of mixed descent can enhance tolerance (Bleich, 2012), interest in other cultures with no "otherness" enforcement in society (Thomas, 2016). Researchers further turn to the concept of multiculturalist discourse to include Islam into multicultural ideology through linguistic diversity (Rissanen, 2019).

The literature review further confirms that a significant number of academic papers explore language policy issues, including the discussion of language use within the topics on extremism prevention (Thomas, 2016). Authors underline that a balance is necessary to coordinate the interests of diverse communities within the society. Specific emphasis is laid on the sensitivity of "partnership language" policy and limits for its implementation that arise due to clashes between native and new communities of mixed descent (Abbas & Awan, 2015; Benedikter, 2016). Researchers also turn to narratives in the education area and mention language role in "education for justice and equality in multicultural contexts" (Osler, 2015, pp. 12-13).

The above brief tour across scholarly research reveals that Academia needs to conduct integrated studies to assess "what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how" (Gielen, 2017). Scholars have not provided a comprehensive description of those components that would characterize and confirm society stakeholders' collective preparedness to prevent the extremism among youth (Dryden, 2017).

## 3 Shaping Methodology to Explore Discourse as a Tool for Youth Protection against Extremism

### 3.1 Research Tasks and Their Sequence

The analysis of current trends in legislation, governance and academic research in the field of discourse – related counter extremism activities lays grounds to the identification of particular tasks, cornerstone provisions of the methodology for the analysis of discourse potential as a preventive tool against the influence and spread of extremism.

We consider it essential to design the research methodology concerning various national, institutional, sociocultural contexts, engaging all potential actors as subjects to communication on extremism issues.

The investigation of Academia current trends in the research area under study makes it possible to specify the following research tasks under the earlier specified goal.

The research will require the typology of communicative contexts related to the discussion of the problems of extremism.

Further, the identification of target audiences involved in the discussion of extremism in various sociocultural and institutional contexts should be implemented with a view to the stratification of actors of communication on extremism issues.

Next, the analysis of the discursive practices of various subjects of communication in situations verbalizing the problems of extremism is planned. It will lead to the identification of communicative peculiarities of speech of actors and addressees of communication on extremism issues.

The analysis of characteristics of language perception and impact of the phenomenon of extremism among different social communities is supposed to be the following step.

Besides, particular attention will be paid to the allocation of language means, provoking, initiating and indicating the possibility of committing acts of extremism.

The above tasks completed, the identification of communicative models that provoke the phenomena of extremism will be implemented. This will pave the way to the identification of discursive models for communication between different target audiences in order to prevent acts of extremism.

Finally, the data collected and processed through the above activities will lead to the recommendations for the conceptual actualization of language policy in order to prevent extremism in the interests of the security of the individual, the state, and the international community as a whole.

### 3.2 Research Materials

Materials for the study are supposed to accumulate official international and national legislation, institutional regulations of the bodies that are involved in the counter-extremism activities, including education, mass media, healthcare, social work, communication in the family, communication among young peers, extremist discourse, as well.

The research materials are supposed to be in several national languages from the countries across continents that have suffered for large scale extremist activities during the late 20<sup>th</sup> – earlier 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The research will study speech practices of diverse actors as modern society sub- communities' representatives, taking into account their age, social and professional features.

### 3.3 Research Methods

The implementation of the above research activities is based on the anthropocentric paradigm, the research objectives will require a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis, which is widely practiced in modern research.

Qualitative methods are widely used in the interdisciplinary study of discourse, since they make it possible to reveal the specifics of the communicative behavior of representatives of various social groups in various social contexts.

Particular attention is paid to the case analysis method, which involves consideration of various situations (examples of oral or written speech communication) in order to identify representatives of target audiences, to study specific intentions and patterns of speech behavior of specific participants of communicative situations in relation to the stated scope of the study.

In the course of the study, content analysis of speech patterns of behavior in situations of manifestation and opposition to extremism will be conducted. Using this type of analysis, the linguistic features of the written and oral speech of the subjects of communication on the subject of extremism will be determined.

The listed methods of analysis will allow studying and analyzing documents of government and law enforcement agencies; relevant articles of national legislation; communication patterns of social and professional groups, including information in social Internet communities; narratives of representatives of various sociocultural communities, law enforcement practice on countering extremism.

Qualitative interpretation of the speech behavior of different subjects of different communicative situations in the studied area is based on data from various types of quantitative analysis. So, content analysis and cluster analysis are used to obtain quantitative characteristics regarding the dominant key topics,

subjects of communicative situations and typology of discursive practices in the studied area.

The study should also include conducting surveys in the multicultural environment in order to identify the social perception of the phenomenon of extremism in the community and among the youth representatives, in particular.

Instrumental data processing will be carried out using SPSS, ATLAS, voyant-tools and other digital technologies of textual discourse analysis.

### 3.4 Approaches to Study

The research is supposed to use a number of approaches.

The field approach involves the analysis of oral and written speech communication of subjects of communication on the problems of extremism from various ages, social and professional groups.

Based on an inductive approach, the information will be gathered from various sources, including, but not limited to, government officials, politicians, lawmakers, law enforcement officials, journalists, and other subjects of communication on extremism problems.

The cognitive approach allows the researchers to analyze speech works on the studied issues, based on the individual characteristics of mentality, to conduct the analysis of concepts and frames, mental schemes and tactics of speech behavior in the studied field.

A descriptive approach is aimed at describing and explaining discursive practices on the subject under study, exploring language means that are used by subjects of communication on the subject of extremism.

A critical approach is aimed at identifying linguistic markers in order to identify and prevent possible acts of extremism and ensure the protection of their victims.

A comparative approach involves the identification of national characteristics of perception, language representation and interpretation of topics in the framework of this study.

An interdisciplinary approach is stipulated by the need to integrate data from linguistics, theory, and practice of communication, jurisprudence, pedagogy, sociology.

## 4 Conclusions

The present study findings make it possible to conclude that research methodology for analysis of discourse as an instrument against extremism requires a combination of research on micro- (discourse of various subjects in various communicative contexts of situations on the subject of extremism among young people), macro- (discourse on the subject under study in various national-state contexts) and mega- (discourse on the subject under study at the level of international organizations and international professional associations) levels.

The proposed methodology aims to model discourse in social/national/ international communication contexts for the prevention of extremism in society with particular emphasis on youth generation.

The experimental methodology rests on interdisciplinary research paradigm nature and involves data from discourse theory, communication theory, cognitive science, psycholinguistics, pragmatics, jurisprudence, pedagogy, etc. This methodology envisages a set of interrelated phenomena as objects of research, including communicative contexts, their content, and pragmatics, communication subjects/addressees, their intentions and speech patterns, behavior in situations of verbal communication on issues of extremism.

The methodology framework specified in the present paper tends to add to the scientific novelty of discourse studies. This statement rests on the fact that the problems identified in the project have not become the subject of interdisciplinary research so far. Currently, no attempts have been made to provide an integral comparative analysis of the discursive practices of various subjects of communication on extremism, the speech models have not been studied as a tool to counter extremism in the youth environment, in the verbal communication of the participants of modern society, taking into account their age, social and professional features.

The scientific novelty of the present research angle also stems from the integrated bulk of the goal and tasks, which have no analogs so far.

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