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**Article:**

Baumgarten, N., Bick, E., Geyer, K. et al. (7 more authors) (2019) Towards balance and boundaries in public discourse : expressing and perceiving online hate speech (XPEROHS). RASK: International Journal of Language and Communication, 50 (Autumn 2019). pp. 87-108. ISSN 0909-8976

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## **Towards Balance and Boundaries in Public Discourse: Expressing and Perceiving Online Hate Speech (XPEROHS)**

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### **Abstract**

This study presents an overview and preliminary findings from the XPEROHS-project on hate speech in online contexts. The data is extracted from large-scale Facebook and Twitter corpora, while comparing linguistic instantiations of hate speech in the Danish and German languages. Findings are based on four subprojects involving the semantics and pragmatics of denigration, the covert dynamics of hate speech, perceptions of spoken and written hate speech, and rhetorical hate speech strategies employed in online interaction. The results demonstrate both overt and covert hate speech towards minority groups, especially Muslims, that are symptomatic of larger societal othering processes and stigmatization.

### **1. Introduction**

Hate speech is a growing source of concern. Particularly in online contexts, increased incidences of hate speech involving ethnicity, nationality, and religion have been observed (Foxman & Wolf 2013). Yet, the very notion of hate speech remains highly controversial; there is a lack of consensus about its definition and impact, while the motivation and justification for its criminalisation and regulation are inexorably caught between the need to protect human rights of equality and dignity and the civil liberty of freedom of expression (Herz & Molnar 2012). Considering the pressure that hate speech exerts on the pillars of modern civilization, it is striking how little is known about the linguistic and communicative mechanisms underlying the expression and perception of hate speech. This gap applies, in particular, to written online communication on media platforms such as Twitter or Facebook, but also to actual spoken communication in everyday offline interaction (Assimakopoulos et al. 2017). Even less is known about how the mechanisms underlying the expression of hate speech are perceived by ordinary language users; do they operate in similar ways in both written and spoken language? Can speakers in oral communication always argue that everything was not meant seriously and literally? Or is it possible to define acoustic indicators that unmask hate speech reliably?

The XPEROHS project, funded by the Velux Foundation (project no. 95-16416), aims to fill some of these gaps for the Danish and German languages; the project is divided into four interconnected sub-projects employing radically empirical approaches which address hate speech from the perspectives of production and perception. Sub-project 1 focuses on the use and perception of slurs, dehumanising metaphors and metonyms in Danish and German. Sub-projects 2 (for Danish) and 3 (for German) are concerned with a wider range of subtle mechanisms for expressing hate

speech; they focus on morphological, syntactic and discourse level phenomena and include large-scale corpus analyses of Danish and German as well as a smaller ‘case study’ investigation of rhetorical strategies in the comment sections of two Danish news providers. Sub-project 4 uses perceptual experiments to investigate how various social groups judge, and are affected by, expressions of hate speech.

While definitions of hate speech are subject to specific and more locally defined cultural notions, the working definition adopted here is from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance in its General policy recommendation No. 15 (2015).

[T]he advocacy, promotion or incitement, in any form, of the denigration, hatred or vilification of a person or group of persons, as well as any harassment, insult, negative stereotyping, stigmatization or threat in respect of such a person or group of persons and the justification of all the preceding types of expression on the grounds of ‘race’, colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, age, disability, language, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics or status.

We have selected this broad definition as it captures the heterogeneity of the hate speech concept, which Brown (2017) argues does not exhibit the simple compositional semantics of hate + speech (cf. Perry 2005); it is best understood in terms of Wittgensteinian family resemblances, encompassing a multiplicity of meanings and forms of expression: thus Haas (2012: 130) sees hate speech, stereotypical talk, and prejudiced communication as a “family of concepts”. The use of a working definition, however, does not exclude sensitivity towards the socio-cultural nature of hate speech as a product of, and a practice embedded within, specific historical, political and societal processes.

In the following, Section 2 describes the design and compilation of the project’s Danish and German social media discourse corpus. Section 3 discusses a selection of preliminary, corpus-based descriptions of linguistic and communicative characteristics of xenophobic, mainly online hate speech in Danish and German found in the sub-projects; these findings constitute the basis for our further analysis. The section also presents the conceptual and methodological bases of the approach to the perceptual analyses of hate speech. Section 4 contains the Conclusion.

## **2. Data sources and corpus compilation**

For qualitative and quantitative purposes, the project collects social media data for both Danish and German from two of the largest players in this domain, Facebook (FB) and Twitter (TW).<sup>1</sup> Data acquisition is carried out continuously, using the official APIs provided by these services, and the harvested data is stored on secure university servers. For both social media, data space is automatically restricted by a seeding process, but while FB uses seed pages, TW works with individual seed word forms, and the two data sets are therefore quite different. Thus, we used a list of political parties, news media and public figures for FB, while for TW we used a combination of highly frequent words (e.g.

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<sup>1</sup> Other social networks were also considered, but they turned out to be either irrelevant to the topic or to suffer from a lack of accessible data; alternatively, data harvesting was hampered by technical/legal restrictions.

for Danish *og* ‘and’, *eller* ‘or’, *har* ‘has’, *er* ‘is’, and correspondingly the equivalent *und*, *oder*, *hat*, *ist* for German) and hate-speech specific words (e.g. for Danish *muslimer* ‘muslims’, *perker* ‘immigrant’ (a standard derogatory term), *indvandrere* ‘immigrant’, *skide* ‘shitty’, matched by the equivalent *Moslems*, *Kanacke*, *Immigrant*, *scheiß* for German), as well as particular inflected forms, such as the more frequent plurals of person nouns. As a consequence, our FB corpus is by design more topic-restricted than the TW corpus; the latter comes closer to a general social media corpus. In addition, thanks to another very useful difference, the two corpora supplement each other in many ways. For instance, TW utterances are typically short, public and sender-driven, while FB's posting culture is rooted in ‘friend’ networks with a two-way communication channel. TW uses hashtags that can be useful for topic-filtering, but it is text-only, while FB contains pictures and longer posts, or even turn-taking comment chains, with room for argumentation and illustration.

Within the project, our corpus fulfils multiple functions. First of all, it is a source of hate speech examples for qualitative analysis; also, it is of use in the interview and experimental subtasks. Second, it helps identify slurs and linguistic patterns typical of hate speech; and third, it allows for statistical evaluation and comparison with background data. In order to support all these tasks and make efficient use of the corpus, the raw text data had to be filtered, linguistically processed, and turned into a searchable database with a user interface.

## **2.1 Preprocessing and Filtering**

Apart from obvious filtering tasks, especially in the first phase of the project (e.g., eliminating items that were neither Danish nor German along with non-textual data or source anonymisation), we also tried to constrain content, by creating smaller sub-corpora in order to facilitate inspection. For this purpose, we applied a boot-strapping approach with lists of key wordforms or stems (minority groups, slurs, and “negativity” words); here, new trigger words would be found and added to known trigger words found in previously analysed sentences. Given the low inter-annotator agreement of human hate-speech classification (Ross et al. 2016), we are taking care not to exclude data prematurely; the original corpus is maintained for further inspection, as well as for contextual verification of material stemming from, for instance, interviews, external sources, and introspection. Current corpus sizes are 1,300 million and 200 million tokens for German and Danish TW, respectively, and 200 million and 60 million for German/Danish FB.

## **2.2 Linguistic annotation**

By far the most challenging task in dealing with a corpus is the linguistic annotation which is necessary to allow corpus-linguistic methods of knowledge collection (e.g. Baker et al. 2013) – in our case, this is the identification, quantification, and interpretation of linguistic vehicles of hate speech. Because of the enormous size of the corpus, annotation must be performed on a high-performance computer cluster (such as SDU’s Abacus) rather than on individual machines. We use well-established NLP tools for these tasks, the DanGram parser for Danish ([visl.sdu.dk/da/](http://visl.sdu.dk/da/)) and GerGram for German ([visl.sdu.dk/de/](http://visl.sdu.dk/de/)). Both are using the Constraint Grammar (CG) formalism (Bick & Didriksen 2015), and perform lemmatization, morphological analysis, syntactic disambiguation, dependency parsing and semantic annotation of named entities and semantic noun classes. Even though both parsers have been used in numerous corpus and applicative tasks before, they were not

built with social media data in mind; hence, features such as incomplete sentences, spoken-language traits, orthographical errors (or creativity), compounding and smileys/emojis pose problems for standard parsers, built for genres such as news texts and literature. This genre challenge is one reason why using CG parsers is a good idea: Being rule-based and lexicon-driven, they are easier to modify and adapt purposefully, compared with statistical systems that would face a serious lack of data suitable for training, both in Danish and German.

In the Danish example below, each word token is followed by various tag fields, covering lemma [...], part of speech and inflexion (e.g. V PR AKT for verb, present tense, active), compound analysis (e.g. <N:lort~e+racist>), syntactic function (e.g. @SUBJ for subject and @ACC for accusative object), semantic role (e.g. §AG for agent), verb frame (e.g. <fn:teach>), dependency links (#n->m) and secondary tags such as <interr> (interrogative) semantic class (e.g. <Hideo> for “ideological” human):

I	[I] PERS 2P NOM @SUBJ> §COG #1->2
ved	[vide] <fn:know> <mv> V PR AKT @FS-STA #2->0
intet	[intet] <quant> INDP NEU S @<ACC §SOA #3->2
om	[om] PRP @<PIV #4->2
\$,	[,] PU @PU #5->0
hvordan	[hvordan] <interr> <amod> ADV @ADVL> #6->10
kvinder	[kvinde] <fem> <H> N UTR P IDF NOM @SUBJ> §AG #7->10
i	[i] PRP @N< #8->7
Mjølnerparken	[Mjølnerparken] <top> <Lh> PROP NOM @P< §LOC #9->8
opdrager	[opdrage] <fn:teach> <mv> V PR AKT @FS-P< §TP #10->4
deres	[de] <poss> PERS 3P GEN @>N #11->12
børn	[barn] <Hbio> N NEU P IDF NOM @<ACC §PAT #12->10
\$,	[,] PU @PU #13->0
lorteracister	[lorteracist] <N:lort~e+racist> <Hideo> N UTR P IDF NOM @VOK #14->10

[You know nothing about how women in Mjølnerparken educate their children, fucking racists]

### 2.3 Corpus search interface

The linguistically annotated corpus, in anonymous form and password-protected, has been made accessible for project members at the CorpusEye site ([corp.hum.sdu.dk](http://corp.hum.sdu.dk)), through a tailor-made graphical user interface (GUI), internally using the Open Corpus Workbench / CQP query language (Evert & Hardie 2011). Apart from traditional word form searches, the CorpusEye GUI (Bick 2005) allows regular expressions and provides menu-driven access to features such as lemma, syntactic function, and semantic class. For the current project, new features were added (Bick & Didriksen 2017-), for instance, subsearches, where the main search is performed on the output of another (filtering) search. Thus, it is possible, for instance, to search for adjectives linked to the semantic class of “nationality nouns” in a sentence set pre-filtered for swearwords. Results are first shown in classical concordance format, but can then be expanded, quantified or sorted for absolute or relative frequency of target search fields. The example (Table 1) shows the top-ranking adjectives associated with a number of minority nouns, as well as a list of derogative adjectives (in italics) found high on the correlate list.

Concept noun	associated adjectives (FB)
indvandrer [immigrant]	FB: ikke-vestlig, kriminel, illegal, vestlig, muslimsk, utilpasset TW: ikke-vestlig, illegal, arbejdsløs, vestlig, muslimsk, kriminel tyvagtig, hjernelam, pædofil, fucking, satans
flygtning [refugee]	FB: såkaldt, syrisk, økonomisk, ægte, kriminel, muslimsk, palæstinensisk TW: syrisk, palæstinensisk, sårbar, grisk, nytilkommen, såkaldt, mindreårig fucking
udlænding [foreigner]	FB: kriminel, højtuddannet, hård, uintegreret, såkaldt, herboende, ikke-muslimsk TW: kriminel, højtuddannet, hjemløs, middelmådig, højtlønned, ikke-vestlig satans, fucking, fæl, væmmelig, forpulet, morderisk
muslim	FB: rettroende, dårlig, kær, ekstremistisk, ubeviselig, ikke-vestlig TW: religiøs, kær, moderat, sekulær, rettroende, frafalden fucking, ulækker, syndsyg, forbandet, satans, rådden, hjernedød, bindegale

Table 1: Adjective collocates of immigrant minority nouns

The lists provide a rough idea of the mental space associated with the person concepts in question: While the first three are all perceived as potentially criminal, this is most prominent for the concept of foreigner, while immigrants are categorized on a western/non-western axis and refugees according to their legitimacy and provenance. The concept of Muslim evokes degrees of faith, extremism, and the ironic kær ‘dear’. Muslim also attracts the largest number of defamatory adjectives in the top frequency ranks, while refugee almost goes free. Though simplifying and without context, even these short lists show how simple statistical corpus findings can prompt further qualitative research. For instance, there is a hint that foreigner is associated with danger (kriminel ‘criminal’, hård ‘ruthless’, fæl ‘sinister’, morderisk ‘murderous’), something that conflicts with the competing “educated resource” concept (højtuddannet ‘well-educated’, højtlønned ‘well-paid’), and therefore would warrant further inspection in context.

### 3. Production and perception perspectives

The XPEROHS corpus data described above is used for a number of different subprojects for both languages, investigating both the most targeted and lexically local expression of hate speech, slurs, as well as more complex linguistic constructions and rhetorical strategies of online hate speech. Finally, the corpus provides a point of departure for the interviews, questionnaires and experiments used in the empirical part of the project.

#### 3.1 Subproject 1: Semantics and Pragmatics of Denigration

Ethnic slurs such as Kike for Jews, Gypsy for Romani people, and the infamous N-word for Blacks are well-known terms for expressing linguistic aggression. In accordance with the narrow definition in the current study, ethnic slurs are derogatory nouns intended to refer to members of distinct ethnic groups; sadly, the use of such terms is widespread. Referring to the category as ethnophaulisms, Rice

et al. (2010) present more than two hundred English slurs targeting a variety of different European nationalities, and examine how informants judge the degree of negativity associated with the terms.

In Danish, the two most common slurs are *neger*, a term for Blacks, and *perker* (most likely constructed from the words *perser* ‘Persian’, and *tyrker* ‘Turk’), a derogatory term for non-Jewish people of Middle Eastern or North African descent. An important difference between these terms is that *neger* has the non-derogatory counterpart *sorte* ‘black people’, to refer to the people targeted by the slur, whereas *perker* does not seem to have such a counterpart.

Our Danish Facebook data reveal further interesting differences. One significant observation is that 9.7 percent of the 258 occurrences of the base lemma *perker* in the sub-corpus are preceded by the adjectives *fucking* ‘~fucking’, *skide* ‘~shitty’, *forpulede* ‘~fucking’, *forbandede* ‘~damned’, or the prefixoid *lorte-* (‘~shit-’) used as a separate word, all expressing irritation, anger or contempt towards the (intended) denotata of the noun modified. In contrast, only one of the 438 occurrences of *neger* in the corpus is preceded by such an expression of a negative attitude (*skide*). Consequently, while both terms are slurs, our corpus indicates a considerable difference with respect to how strongly they are associated with negative appraisals. Another substantial difference relates to the distinction between use and mention (see Cappelen, Lepore & McKeever 2019). For *neger* and *perker*, this distinction corresponds to the difference between occurrences where the expressions are applied to people (use) versus occurrences referring to terms applied to people (mention). Out of the total number of occurrences of *perker* in our corpus, the proportion of mentions is much lower, 7.8 percent, compared to occurrences of *neger*, 20.7 percent, measured by the proportion of occurrences within quotation marks (“”), forms of the verbs *sige* ‘say’ and *hedde* ‘be called’, or of the noun *ord* (‘word’). One explanation of this difference is that *neger* is frequently mentioned in exchanges where the appropriateness of using the term is debated, and often defended. Such debates regarding the appropriateness of saying *perker* are absent in our corpus. Awareness of the severely derogatory opinion communicated by the term plausibly prevents typical language users from considering discussions of this kind worthwhile.

In the German data, the same tendency can be observed: Whilst *Kanake*, approximately corresponding to Danish *perker*, is hardly discussed in terms of appropriateness (the exception is its use in its original meaning where *Kanake* designates the indigenous people of New Caledonia), by contrast we find many instances of meta-linguistic discussions about the meaning and use of the word *Neger* in the corpora (e.g., *Wort* ‘word’ being the most frequent left collocate besides the definite article, in absolute numbers FB 33, TW 65); even so, the “use”-occurrences, just like in Danish, by far outnumber the “mention”-occurrences. Roughly the same applies to *Zigeuner* ‘gypsy’, cf. the following examples<sup>2</sup> (1) and (2):

- (1) Die Sinti und Roma heißen im Volksmund Zigeuner. Was Zieh Gauner bedeutet.  
‘The Sinti and Romanis are called Zigeuner (gypsies) in common parlance. Which means traveling crooks.’

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<sup>2</sup> All examples are taken from the corpus and reproduced verbatim.

- (2) Derzeit kursieren Zigeuner ohne Kenntnis der Ortssprache auf Bahnhöfen mit Bettel-Zettel und hohler Hand und belästigen die Bahnfahrer.  
'At present, Zigeuner (gypsies) not knowing the local language are running around on railway stations with a begging slip, their hands cupped, and harassing the passengers'

The meta-linguistic discussions found in our corpora fit within a broader ongoing debate in German society (see e.g. Tlusty 2018) about the appropriateness of slur terms, for instance, in compounds such as Negerkuss, Mohrenkopf 'whippet cookie, lit. negro's kiss, blackamoor's head' or Zigeunerschnitzel, Zigeunersauce 'spicy cutlet, sauce; lit. Gypsy style cutlet, sauce', or occurring in older children's literature. The significant observation is that in our FB hate speech sub-corpus, we almost exclusively find statements doubting the denigrating status of these expressions whereas the general discussion has tended to be much more nuanced (see e.g. Neufeld 2013); even so, the expressions in question have largely disappeared from public language use.

Regarding the German ethnophaulisms, we aim to analyse the whole inventory in terms of meaning and use of such expressions. They can be identified with respect to the targeted groups: thus, in addition to foreigners in a more general sense, the targets are people from other European nationalities, along with Asians, Blacks, Middle Easterners etc., but also groups of German speaking people like Austrians or East (vs. West Germans). Some ethnophaulisms are mentioned in older descriptions<sup>3</sup>, whereas those ethnic "insulting words" (Beleidigungswörter) identified as empirically prominent in German by Technau (2018), (e.g. Polacke 'Pole', Dönerfresser 'Turkish person; lit. eater of döner kebab') all prove to be prominent in our data as well. The different morphological (e.g., Nafri from Nordafrikaner 'person from Northern Africa') and semantic patterns of word formation (e.g., Froschfresser 'French person; lit. frog eater' (cf. Frog); Schlitzauge 'East Asian person'; lit. slit eye' (cf. Chink) require a more in-depth analysis. What can be stated already now is, however, that apart from the rather mild slur Ami 'US-American', which is the one most often occurring in both the TW and the FB corpora (> 10.000 occurrences), the most frequent and most varied ethnophaulisms are those referring to (Muslim) people from the Maghreb and the Middle East. Amongst the semantic sources of Anti-Muslim ethnophaulisms are those referring to religious (e.g. Mullah, Ayatollah, Mufti) and societal (Scheich 'sheikh', Sultan 'sultan') functions, in addition to common names (Ali), stereotypically associated occupations (Teppichhändler 'carpet dealer', Dattelpflücker 'date picker', Kameltreiber 'camel driver'), or ethnophaulisms referring to sexual intercourse with typical animals from the region or culture (Ziegen-, Schafs-, Esel-, Kamelficker 'goat-, sheep-, donkey-, camelfucker'). When dealing with expressions like Mullah, the challenge is to discern whether or not for each occurrence, in the specific context in which it occurs, the word is used as a slur or in its common denoting function; cf. examples (3) and (4):

- (3) Ein Mädchen-Killer steht auch ganz unten in der Hierarchie der Gesellschaft, aber Merkel beharrt ja darauf die Mullahs mit ihrer Frauenfeindlichkeit massenhaft ins Land zu lassen!

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<sup>3</sup> e.g. Böhmak 'person from the Bohemia region', Pachulke 'Russian' (Winkler 1994).



‘A girl killer likewise ranges at the very bottom of the societal hierarchy, but Merkel [Angela Merkel, the German Federal Chancellor] insists on letting hordes of Mullahs with their misogyny slip into the country.’

- (4) Zweitens ist auch der Kampf gegen den fundamentalistischen Fanatismus der Anhänger des Al-Qaida-Netzwerks und des Mullah Omar noch nicht gewonnen  
‘Second, the fight against the fundamentalist fanaticism of those supporting the Al Qaeda network and Mullah Omar is not won yet.’

In addition to slurs, dehumanizing metaphors and metonyms are also part of online immigration debates (see, e.g., Böke 1997; Demjén & Hardaker 2017; Kałasznik 2018), which is why these expressions are also analysed in our project.

Immigrants, refugees, Muslims and other groups are constructed in terms of dehumanizing conceptual metaphors that appeal to source domains of animals (e.g. svin / Schwein ‘pig’), (mental) illness (e.g. syg / krank ‘ill’ or mentalt forstyrret / geistig gestört ‘mentally impaired’), infestations (e.g. pest / Pest ‘plague’; cf. examples (5) and (6)), scum (e.g. affald / Abfall ‘waste’ or skidt / Dreck ‘dirt’), and natural disasters (e.g. oversvømmelse / Flut ‘flood’).

- (5) Pesten Islam bringer død og ødelæggelse hvorend den får lov at florere.  
‘The plague of Islam brings death and destruction wherever it is allowed to develop.’
- (6) Wenn ich sehe, wie in Deutschland sich die Islampest verbreitet und wenn ich diese Pest überall in den öffentlichen Verkehrsmitteln sehe, steigt Hass und Wut in mir auf.  
‘When I see how the Islamic plague is spreading in Germany and when I see this plague everywhere in public transportation, hate and fury rise up in me.’

### **3.2 Sub-projects 2 and 3: The Subtle Dynamics of Hate Speech in Danish and German**

In order to allow a comparison, 2 and 3 follow the conceptual and methodological organization of sub-project 1; as their only difference is in the languages, they are described together. As with sub-project 1, sub-projects 2 and 3 address all three of the project’s overall aims, but they are concerned with a wider range of subtle mechanisms for expressing hate speech, inasmuch as they focus on the levels of morphology, syntax, and discourse. The specific aims of the sub-projects are

- a) to identify, based on corpus and interpretative analyses together with user perceptions, a core (prototypical) repertoire of interactional meanings and patterns for hate speech in the two languages;
- b) to distinguish between this ‘indisputable’ hate speech and interactional meanings and patterns that can be considered as less clear cases of hate speech – or even, depending on the context, as not being hate speech at all (Meibauer 2012).

In particular, sub-project 2 represents the first in-depth pragmatic investigation of this kind of hate speech for Danish, while sub-project 3 builds on existing work in German but develops this further, moving beyond explicit anti-Semitic and ethnic pejorative expressions.

Both in Danish and German, we observe parallel means of expression at various linguistic levels. These recurring expressions can be conceived of as constructions (see Geyer 2018). An example with a high recognition factor is the I am no racist, but ...construction (*Jeg er ikke racist, men ... / Ich bin kein Rassist, aber ...*)<sup>4</sup> that combines two statements expressing adversative meanings, where the first statement serves to signal the speaker's pretended reflecting mind, and thus hedges the second statement (whose completion may turn out to be quite offensive). In terms of quantity, the number of occurrences of this pragmatic construction is comparable in the two sub-corpora: 190 examples were found in Danish (FB: 81 TW: 109) and 340 in German (FB: 84, TW: 256). Some examples follow:

- (7) Jeg er ikke racist, men realist. Hvad gør Danmark for de ældre på plejehjem, som igennem tiderne har slidt sig selv op ved hårdt arbejde og har opbygget vort velfærdssamfund? Hvad har de såkaldte flygtninge bidraget med til samfundet. Kriminalitet i rå mængder.  
 'I'm not a racist, but a realist. What does Denmark do for the elderly in nursing homes, who over the years have worn themselves out by hard work and have built up our welfare society? What have the so-called refugees contributed to society? Crime in raw quantities.'
- (8) Ich bin kein Rassist aber ich bin strikt dagegen das Ausländer im Ausland in die Politik aufgenommen werden. Egal welches Land das bringt nur Unheil mit sich.  
 'I am not a racist but I am strictly against foreigners abroad being allowed to engage in local politics. No matter in which country, this only brings disaster.'

Another, similar construction which seems to be a common strategy for disseminating negative stereotypes is the phrase *Jeg har ikke noget imod ..., men / Ich habe nichts gegen ..., aber* ('I have nothing against..., but'). In Danish, there are not many examples with regard to Muslim (FB: 4; TW: 2) or jøde 'Jew' (FB: 2; TW: 0). By contrast, this construction is found far more often in German.

- (9) Jeg har ikke noget imod muslimer, det har jeg vitterlig ikke. Men jeg er virkelig træt af at de skal særbehandles ud fra deres religion. Hvis vi nu vendte fortegnet, ville vi så også få særbehandling i deres hjemland?? NEJ! Så hvorfor er det så, så svært at forstå? De lever og ånder for deres religion. Vi lever og ånder for vores principper, værdier, lovgivning, traditioner, og ikke mindst det åbne samfund, hvor vi respektere hinanden på en præsentabel måde. (Facebook)  
 'I don't mind Muslims, really I don't. But I am really tired of their being preferentially treated because of their religion. Putting it the other way 'round, would we too get preferential treatment in their home country?? NO! So why is this so, so hard to understand? They live and breathe for their religion. We live and breathe for our principles, values, laws, traditions, and not least an open society, where we respect each other in a respectable way.'

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<sup>4</sup> Other expressions filling the slot occupied by racist in the canonical construction are fremmedhader 'xenophobe' or radikal 'radical' in Danish, and Antisemit 'anti-Semite' Hater 'hateful person', or Rechter 'right-winger' in German.

(10) Was muss eigentlich noch passieren das Deutschland aufwacht??!!! Bald liegt hier alles in Schutt und Asche... das sollten wir uns mal in anderen Ländern erlauben da wirst erschossen... Ich habe nix gegen Ausländer aber dieses Pack kann wegen mir wieder dahin wo se her komm...

‘Really, what more has to happen to awaken Germany??!!! Soon everything here will be in ruins and ashes... imagine we would allow ourselves to behave like this in other countries, you would get shot ... I have nothing against foreigners but, as for me, this pack can go back to where they came from...’

In German, the most frequently mentioned target group in this construction is Ausländer ‘foreigners’ (FB: 65; TW: 42), followed by Juden ‘Jews’ (FB: 33; TW: 24) and Flüchtlinge ‘refugees’ (FB: 27; TW: 11). Examples with Muslime ‘Muslims’, as in (9), are comparatively rare (FB: 7; TW: 8).

(11) Ich habe nichts gegen Moslems, so lange sie nicht in Deutschland leben. Überall in der Welt, sorgen sie für Unfrieden.

‘I have nothing against Muslims, as long as they do not live in Germany. Everywhere in the world, they cause discord.’

In German, this construction is predominantly used to express negative attitudes, especially against people with a different ethnic origin, against dissenters, and against homosexuals.

Another research objective in sub-projects 2 and 3 is to study the use of irony. Here, we analyse the different ways the opposite of a literal expression is conveyed. An example of irony is the construction *die ach so / de åh så* (‘the oh so’) + (often positive) adjective + noun. While it is used quite often in German, it is rarely found in the Danish corpus (12 results in total). In addition, the use of this combination (adjective + noun in the oh so-construction) is quite specific in German: the noun most commonly used is Flüchtlinge ‘refugees’, primarily combined with the adjective *arm* ‘poor’ (FB: 16 occurrences; TW: 14 occurrences), as in example (12):

(12) Diese ewige Diskussion hier über die ach so armen Flüchtlinge die eigentlich keine Flüchtlinge sind. Wenn illegale das Land zu verlassen haben, dann haben die der Aufforderung Folge zu leisten. Punkt aus... dann soll die Polizei ihre Dienstwaffe benutzen... *So einfach ist das.*

‘This never-ending discussion here about the oh so poor refugees who are not really refugees. If illegal [immigrants] have to leave the country, then they must follow that order, period [and] then the police should use their service weapon ... It’s that simple.’

Another relatively frequent occurrence within the *ach so*-construction is the combination of the adjective *friedlich* ‘peaceful’ together with the nouns *Islam* (FB: 7 hits; TW: 20 hits), *Muslime*, or *Moslems* (‘Muslims’), as in *die ach so friedliche Islam* or *die ach so friedlichen Muslime* ‘the ever so peaceful Islam/Muslims’ (FB: 2 hits; TW: 6 hits). The speaker’s intention is to create a general association between Muslims and the Islamic religion on the one hand, and terror and violence on the other.

In addition to the hate speech examples, one also finds the oh so-construction used in ‘counter speech’ (i.e., to counter a claim), as in (13) and (14):

- (13) Grænsekontrollen koster 250 millioner kroner om året og har kun reduceret tallet af asylansøgere en 1/4 del. Tror du kun det er de åh så skrækkelige udlændinge der skal igennem den? Nej, det er også danskere som mig der bor i udlandet. Super brug af de mange penge!  
‘The border control costs DKK 250 million a year and has only reduced the number of asylum seekers by one-fourth. Do you think it's only the oh so horrible foreigners who have to pass it? No, it is also Danes like me who live abroad. A terrific use of those huge funds!’
- (14) Ihr regt euch über die ach so bösen Moslems auf denen ihr immer unterstellt in die Opferrolle zu gehen dabei seid ihr es doch  
‘You are nervous about the oh-so-evil Muslims and take it that you always have to assume the role of the victim – which of course in fact you are’

A related construction (FB: 67; TW: 107) is die so genannten Flüchtlinge ‘the so-called refugees’ which occurs frequently in German. It occurs also in Danish de såkaldte flygtninge on Facebook and Twitter, but not as often as it does in German (FB: 6; TW: 4); the use of so-called downplays the status of the refugees as a group.

We also find expressions in both languages stating that foreign groups should leave the country. In Danish as well as in German, a very common collocate of ud / raus (‘out’) is the word udlændinge / Ausländer ‘foreigners’. Thus, in our corpus, the combination udlændinge ud ‘out with the foreigners’ occurs 53 times in the Twitter section and 22 times in the Facebook part. The German Ausländer raus is also very frequent (FB: 212; TW: 305; cf. (15)), though considering the larger German corpus, not significantly so. The related flygtningene ud / Flüchtlinge raus ‘out with the refugees’ (overall results in Danish: 49; in German: 185) or muslimerne ud / Muslime raus ‘out with the Muslims’ (overall results in Danish: 85; in German: 108) can also often be found in both languages. Common usage also includes constructions with verbs such as smide ‘throw’ or sende ‘send’, especially for Danish like in (16):

- (15) Alle Ausländer raus hier geht euer land aufbauen Ihr kommt doch nur her weil es geld gibt und bitte nimmt eure kopftuch mädels mit  
‘All foreigners get out of here. Go and build up your country. You only come here because there is money. And please take your headscarf girls with you’.
- (16) De høre ikke til her, vi vil ikke have blandet hverken blod eller religion. Og vi vil slet ikke have deres krig. Smid dem ud hurtigst mulig inden de overtager vores land  
‘They do not belong here, we do not want to blend blood or religion. And we definitely do not want their war. Throw them out as fast as possible before they take over our country’

While *Ausländer raus* has established itself as a slogan or catchphrase, there is another syntactic construction, in German as well as in Danish, in which the adverb *raus* is combined with a prepositional phrase identifying the target group, as in *Raus mit den Flüchtlingen* ‘Out with the refugees’. However, such constructions (with target groups like *Flüchtlinge* (22), *Ausländer* (12), *Migranten* (11), *Asylanten* (8) etc.), are poorly evidenced in our corpus. In this context, an often used noun is the pejorative *Pack* ‘vermin’ (FB: 268; TW: 283); compare also other compound nouns with *Pack*, in particular *Dreckspack* ‘pesky varmint’ (FB: 54; TW: 25).

In Danish, the noun *pak* itself as well as compounds with this word (as in *rakkerpak* ‘outcast’) are less common. We obtained 8 results for expressions like *Ud med det pak!* and 12 results for *Ud med det rakkerpak!* The most frequent combination in Danish is *Ud med det lort!* ‘Out with that shit’ (FB: 90; TW: 4). Unexpectedly, for German only 4 results can be found for the analogue example *Raus mit dem Scheiß!*

In summary, it can be stated that in German and in Danish, similar incentives can be found, irrespective of their syntactic construction. Only in particular contexts, the group which is supposed to leave the country is specified. In many of the examples, the concrete appeal only contains the abusive terms (e.g., ‘shit’ or ‘vermin’), and not the target group itself; the equating of ‘shit’ with, for instance, Muslims is left to the context; the respective group is considered to be inferior and not worthy of staying, and is treated as such.

### **3.3 The Ph.D.-project: Rhetorical Strategies in Danish Online Hate Speech**

The Ph.D.-project focuses on the dynamics of hate speech and strategies for constructing evidentiality. One crucial research question is whether the presentation of certain topics seems to initiate hateful comments. A report from PET’s Center for Terroranalyse (2008: 5) concludes that stereotyping of minority groups and emotional metaphors (e.g., ‘holy warrior’, ‘martyr’) in online contexts seem to provoke hateful speech that might lead to real-world violent hate crimes. In 2017, the Danish Institut for Menneskerettigheder (‘Institute for Human Rights’) derived equivalent conclusions in a report on the initiation and dynamics of hate speech observed on the Twitter and Facebook pages of the Danish media channels DR TV and TV2 News (Zuleta & Burkal 2017). The institute registered that especially topics on religion, faith, refugees, equality, politics, and integration triggered hostile rhetoric. The Ph.D.-project elaborates on these observations, but incorporates more specific linguistic perspectives in order to gain a deeper insight into the dynamics of the recontextualization processes of hate speech, especially with regard to the commentators’ use of evidentiality. (In this connection, evidential strategies are defined as the commentators’ ‘I have heard’, ‘I saw’, and other such expressions as legitimizing their statements; Mushin 2013).

In online hate speech, hyperlinks are often used as an evidentiality tool. By using this strategy, the author removes the focus from the utterance to the content of the link, which leads to a complication of the communicational context. Furthermore, the hyperlinks referred to are often either ‘blind’, or the reader may not be able to activate or check them, such that a false ‘documentation’ can occur.

The overall organizational patterns of online communication are of certain interest for several reasons (here, the project also focuses on the role of ‘counter speech’, see above). First and foremost, these patterns are determined by the affordances linked to the medium (Jensen 2014), but -

in addition to the technical restrictions and facilities – it is hypothesized that especially sensitive topics (e.g., religion, ethnicity) have a co-determining influence on the organization of the dialogue and the way the participants position themselves and are positioned (~~i.e., the addressee(s) and the target groups~~) grammatically, semantically, and pragmatically. Thus, recent research has already pointed out that the cooperative maxims are flouted in online hate speech communication (Jensen 2014).

The dynamics of hostile rhetoric and the complexity of the online dialogues are exemplified in the example below. The comments were posted in relation to a documentary about people smuggling on DR's TV channel (the parentheses in the left-hand column indicate speaker initials):

<b>(TS)</b>	<p>vi skal ikke have Isis eller andre kriminelle ind i Europa. De er økonomiske migranter der tager vores penge. Dem der vil hjælpe dem kan tage ned og hjælpe dem i deres land. Europa er ikke et toilet som neger og muslimer bare kan komme og skide i. Og det er problemet med de fleste indvandrere, De har ingen respekt for at Europa er for europæer. (...) <i>Ham der + kriminelle indvandrere skal smides ud af Europa.</i> _ Hvorfor tror I det kun er de hvides lande der skal være multikulturelle ? Do the research and you shall find ..</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmDuPccLON4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmDuPccLON4</a></p> <p>'we don't want to let ISIS or other criminals enter Europe. They are economic migrants who take our money. Those who want to help them can go and help them in their own countries. Europe is not a toilet that negroes and Muslims can just come and shit in. And that is the problem with most immigrants, they do not respect that Europe is for Europeans (...). That guy + criminal immigrants should be thrown out of Europe. Why do you think that it is only the white people's countries that should be multicultural? Do the research and you shall find ...</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmDuPccLON4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kmDuPccLON4</a></p>
<b>(IA)</b>	<p>Det beviser igen at de ( skider ) på reglerne ,</p> <p>'That shows again that they shit on the rules'</p>
<b>(KID)</b>	<p>Hvem er "de"? 😏 det virker som om du er en, der generaliserer...</p> <p>'Who are "they"? 😏. It seems like you are somebody who generalizes ...'</p>
<b>(IA)</b>	<p>nej ,talemåde 😊</p> <p>'no, a way of speaking 😊'</p>
<b>(SJP)</b>	<p>og det gør de jo også her i DK de har deres egne regler 😏👤♀👤 flok bastarder hele bundet</p> <p>'and they do that as well here in DK they have their own rules 😏👤♀👤 pack of bastards the whole lot'</p>

In the extract, the organization of the dialogue and the lack of cooperation makes it possible for a participant to ignore a withdrawal (nej, talemåde 'no, way of speaking') and resume the hostile rhetoric. In the example above, the ambiguity of hostile content uttered by (TS) is contextualized by (IA) in terms that might lead to escalation (de 'they') but is contested by (KID)'s objection criticising

the generalization. (IA) then cooperates and defuses his/her contribution. The next turn then, however, uttered by (SJP), flouts the Cooperative Principle, as the commentator both overrides the withdrawal and defuses the hostile rhetoric – but in an escalating way, so that the road is open again for hateful comments. At the same time, the extract exemplifies the difficulties encountered when analysing online comments as if they were dialogues: we cannot be sure if (IA)s comment addresses the content of the hyperlink, but since he/she does not defend the generalizing comment, we deem it probable that ‘they’ relates to the comment itself. In the above example, a link to a video on You Tube is used as an evidential strategy. The video will – according to TS – ‘prove’ that foreigners do not respect European countries, and this is the reason why only these countries are becoming multicultural.

The PhD project in question is based on the theory of integrative pragmatics (Culpeper and Haugh 2014) but incorporates elements from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA; Fairclough 1992, Wodak 2007, Wodak & Reisigl 2015). The CDA methods have been taken aboard in order to turn the attention to the relationship between discursal and social changes and the potential consequences of hate speech for individuals and groups. Social isolation and loss of dignity in society are considered (Nilsen 2014: 8) as well as the potential connection to hate crime and terror (Center for Terroranalyse / PET 2008). Finally, further issues to be addressed in the project involve censorship, freedom of speech, and the democratization of discursive rights.

### **3.4 Sub-project 4: Instrumental approaches to perceptions of spoken and written modes of hate speech**

Hate speech is not exclusively a matter of written language, although much of the current research is focused on written hate speech – particularly so in the social media discourse. At the same time, much of the current research focuses on the production of hate speech, although its reception by readers and listeners is arguably just as important. Contrastive and perceptual analyses of spoken and written hate speech are, therefore, necessary to provide a more accurate and comprehensive description of the nature of the phenomenon: for instance, what people react to specifically when they read or hear hateful messages, where they place the boundaries between hate speech and ‘acceptable’ forms of negative expressions, and whether or not the written mode (i.e., reading) creates a personal detachment from perceptions of the hatefulness of the content that does not exist in the same way in the spoken mode (i.e., listening). Gaining these insights will enable us to describe and theorize the interdependence of the linguistic, communicative, and perceptual dimensions of hate speech.

Two main questions are addressed in the sub-project: First, is the perception of hate speech similar across written and spoken language? And secondly, is it primarily the words that determine the perception of hate speech or does prosody (i.e. speech melody and voice quality) play a role as well, e.g. to the extent that written hate speech becomes acceptable in spoken language, or conversely, that acceptable written language becomes hate speech in spoken language? We approach these questions through an innovative multiple methods design that combines implicit and explicit instrumental measurements as well as quantitative and qualitative analyses.

It is known that prosody (often called people’s oldest means of acoustic communication, cf. Gussenhoven 2004) is directly linked to listeners’ interpretations of speaker traits, attitudes, and emotions (Bänzinger & Scherer 2005; Da Silva & Barbosa 2017; Niebuhr 2017; Neitsch 2019). As Cabane (2012:136) puts it: “Speech melody is hardwired in our brains.” If meanings conveyed by

prosody contradict those conveyed by words, listeners give melodic meanings priority over lexical ones and interpret the corresponding verbal utterances as non-sincere, i.e., ironic or sarcastic (Landgraf 2014). Hence, it is reasonable to assume that, depending on how prosody interacts with the coinciding words (supports or undermines them), we will find significant differences in what is perceived as hate speech in written and spoken language. In spoken language, it seems possible to manipulate prosody to downplay written hate speech to the extent that it is not even rated as hate speech anymore; even so, it is likely that there is a limit for this manipulation to be possible. The limit may be determined by the semantic content and the emotional load of particular key words expressing hate (epithets, swearwords etc.), by the societal sensitivity of the topic that is referred to and/or by the recipient, their age, gender, personality (i.e., the “big 5”; John et al. 2008), language background, and social status.

The two questions raised above are addressed based on empirically-derived stimuli of written and spoken hate-speech tokens from the other project modules. The stimuli set includes lexical, grammatical, semantic, propositional and rhetorical variants which are specific to particular target groups, variants that occur with different groups, and variants on a scale from ambiguous to extreme. We start from a broad set of authentic written stimuli (approx. 150 tokens, max. 170 characters long) that undergo iterative testing for perceptual effects (Figure 1). Stimuli are used in both their original and manipulated forms (e.g., exchanging key words or changing local and global prosodic characteristics towards and away from hate speech). The spoken stimuli are produced by trained actors. Prosody manipulation is done by PSOLA resynthesis (Moulines & Charpentier 1990) on the basis of existing knowledge about the phonetics of negative emotions and expressive lexical stress, impoliteness, dominance, and irony (Poggi & D’Errico 2018; Niebuhr 2010; Neitsch, 2019).

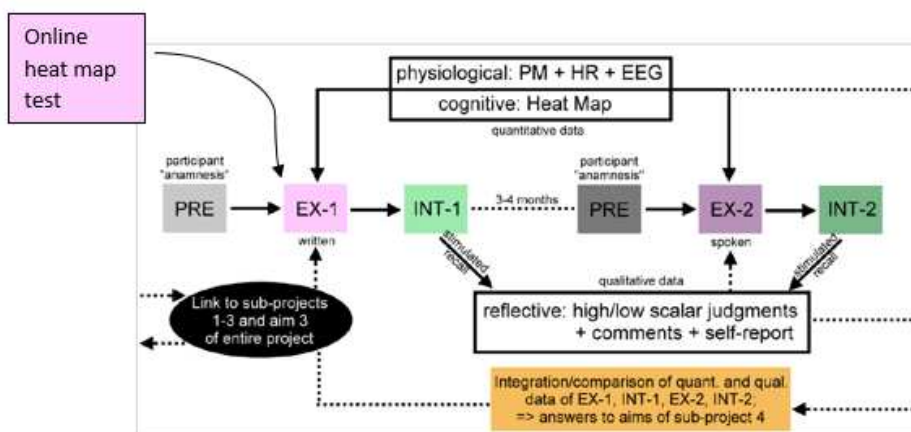


Figure 1: A test sequence.

The ‘online heat map test’ is an explorative pretest analysing a large stimuli set for perceptual effects on the basis of a heat map (Figure 2). From this test, a smaller stimuli set for tests with combinations of physiological and cognitive measurement is derived. The latter experiment stage consists of two tests (EX-1, EX-2), each followed by a stimulated recall interview. EX-1 presents stimuli in modality A (written), whereas EX-2 presents equivalent stimuli in modality B (spoken). In the interviews, participants are asked to recall and comment on selected ratings and the rating process. This provides



a third dimension of hate speech perception through reflective accounts of exposure to hate speech, which may or may not coincide with the experimentally elicited cognitive and physiological responses.

Four different test variants are conducted, one with written and spoken language, one with the inverse order of modalities, and two further variants in which the two orders of modalities are cross-combined with two different types of tests. One test measures the perceivers' implicit reactions to the stimuli, whereas the other takes explicit measurements based on a rating task in a 2D heat-map setting (Figure 2). By clicking on the heat map, the perceived degree of hate speech is measured in terms of the combined attributes "dislike" (x-axis: eliciting judgments of individual affect) and "unacceptable/not-licenced" (y-axis: eliciting judgments of how tolerable a stimulus is with reference to the perceivers' understanding of operative societal norms, conventions and values; Martin & White 2005). Perceivers will represent a cross-section of society in terms of age, gender, and education.

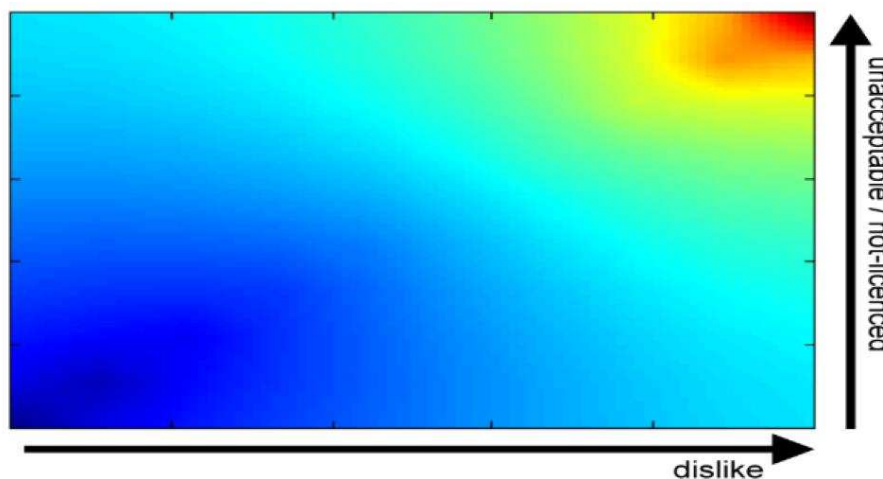


Figure 2: Two-dimensional heat map used for explicit ratings.

By combining implicit physiological measurements (i.e., heart rate (HR), breathing patterns and amplitudes using Respiratory Inductance Plethysmography (RIP)) with explicit ratings, we cover two different reaction types to hate speech that people are confronted with in everyday life. More specifically, we investigate spontaneous and evolutionary 'hardwired' reactions after (incidentally) observing or reading hate speech, as well as conscious reflections and judgments on hate speech that involve given word labels and social and cultural conventions. Hence, our experiments are the first to determine if and how the mere action of explicitly dealing with hate speech already changes people's perception of, and reaction to it, and whether the order in which the two reactions are elicited – first implicit, then explicit and vice versa – matters as well. Both are important aspects that can help explain why established instruments of the social sciences (e.g., surveys, interviews) increasingly and often fail to predict people's opinions, attitudes, and behaviour (compare the Brexit vote, or the latest (2016) US presidential elections).

EX-2 specifically investigates the perception of a subset of clear and borderline hate speech stimuli by using pupillometry based on eye-tracking. Unlike RIP/HR, pupillometry shows in more detail for which words within the written stimuli hate-speech reactions were triggered and gives,

independently of the stimulus modality, better temporal resolution of participants' hate-speech reactions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The XPEROHS project offers a comprehensive, empirically grounded, multi-method and bilingual approach to hate speech in online media. In this article, we have described how a text corpus built from Facebook and Twitter data can be used to discover linguistic patterns and expressions of hate speech. Thus, we have presented a list of typical stereotypes and metaphors contributing to slur words targeting minority groups (e.g., dehumanization, illness, stupidity, pest and other animals). In addition, more subtle and indirect mechanisms, working above and beyond the word level, were also investigated. In the experimental section, we discussed how graded example stimuli for interviews and questionnaires are used to examine the perception side of hate speech by ordinary language users. We argue that various non-literal and non-verbal factors, such as modality and prosody, have an influence on the perception of hate speech, and can be captured objectively using heat maps and physiological measurements.

Both types of data – corpus-linguistic and experimental – are evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. For instance, we are identifying not only the range of demeaning attributes, slurs, and othering mechanism used in minority-targeting discourse, but also their relative distribution against each other and background data. While much of the data is stored and explored with only a linguistic context in mind, one sub-project, in particular, transcends this scope, examining entire comment threads in their original setting, including pictures, layout, and counter speech, trying to identify rhetorical strategies in online hate speech discourse.

It is an important aspect of the entire project that it is systematically bilingual for Danish and German, allowing us to directly compare and contrast the mechanisms, lexical spread and severity of online hate speech in these linguistically and culturally closely related languages. In our contribution, we have identified such parallels for areas such as the use of irony, adversative expressions, derogatory expressions and “leave the country” imperatives.

During the project, we hope to lay a foundation not only for a better linguistic and communicative understanding of online hate speech, but also for a more informed treatment of its various manifestations in terms of policy, societal harms, and pedagogics.

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