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EMOTIVE LEXIS IN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION: THE LINGUO-PRAGMATIC ASPECT

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Abstract

The study investigates the types of emotive lexis registered in English-language corporate communication, with a specific focus on the linguistic-pragmatic aspect of its use. The author argues that even though emotive lexical units are not the most frequently encountered type of lexis found in corporate communication, they still are present in corporate interaction practices and, therefore, require scientific consideration – all the more so because the current scope of scientific literature lacks studies concerned with the linguistic-pragmatic aspects of emotive lexis used in English-language corporate communication. The study relies on transcripts of negotiations, meetings and in-company conversations in order to determine the place of emotive lexis in today's English-language corporate communication and identify the specific linguistic and pragmatic characteristics that could be attributed to it. Research findings enabled the author to highlight the emotive lexis registered in corporate communication and represented mainly by adjectives, intensifying adverbs, phrasal verbs and metaphors (including natural hazard, health and zoomorphic metaphors), which use in positive or negative connotations is determined by the current state of economic, political and in-company affairs. The study concludes that English-language corporate communication is not devoid of emotive lexis which emerges in the in-company interaction practices for various reasons: being a complex two-way process, corporate communication is determined by a variety of situational factors, and whether these are considered or ignored will directly affect the effectiveness of the interaction.

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Keywords: Linguistic pragmatics, emotive lexis, corporate communication, linguistic-cultural space, emotional impact, emotional-expressive meaning.



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1. Introduction

Issues of linguistic and cultural representation of corporate communication are currently emerging as a subject of meticulous research in the framework of various humanitarian disciplines – including linguistics. One of the key concerns here are the possible ways to ensure the efficiency of corporate communication. While emotive lexis registered in corporate communication has found wide enough coverage in the scientific literature (Agostino, Im-Bolter, Stefanatos, & Dennis, 2017; Andreeva, Makarova, Gorbunova, & Lukina, 2019; Balmer, & Burghausen, 2017; Fuoli & Hart, 2018; Malyuga & Orlova, 2018), the question of its linguistic-pragmatic properties in both spoken and written registers remains understudied.

Emotions are an essential part of various fields of research. Within the realm of language studies, research concerned with emotions predominantly concentrates around verbal and non-verbal language tools of their manifestation in various fields of activity and registers (Barchard, Grob, & Roe, 2017; Konopasky et al., 2019; Lee & Kahle, 2016; Tissari, 2017). Emotive lexis has become all-encompassing and occupies its rightful place in corporate communication as well.

2. Problem Statement

Current scope of scientific literature lacks studies concerned with the linguistic-pragmatic aspects of emotive lexis used in English-language corporate communication. This problem opens up a wide range of research tasks, including identifying the key linguistic tools and ways of expressing emotive assessment during negotiations and business meetings, and establishing the intra- and extralinguistic prerequisites that motivate the emergence and evolution of the informative space within corporate communication in the English language. Thus, the relevance of this research has to do with the significance of the linguistic-cultural characteristics of emotive lexis in corporate communication, as it is important to understand the cultural factors that determine its deployment in speech and written texts. In addition, the analysis of the linguistic and cultural aspects of emotive lexis bearing evaluative potential in corporate communication provides valuable material for business partners working in different linguistic and cultural environments.

3. Research Questions

The study sets forward two key research questions, namely:

- What is the place of emotive lexis in today's English-language corporate communication?
- What specific linguistic and pragmatic characteristics can be attributed to the emotive lexis registered in today's English-language corporate communication?

4. Purpose of the Study

This paper is guided by the purpose that lies in identifying the linguistic-pragmatic factors that characterise the emotive lexis registered in English-language corporate communication. This, in turn, implies addressing the following specific tasks: 1) to define corporate communication and emotive lexis as key objects of this research; 2) to analyse the reasons for the emergence of emotive lexis in corporate

communication and establish its place in corporate communication; 3) to identify the essential characteristics of emotive lexis; 4) to identify linguistic and pragmatic factors prerequisites for the emergence and quantitative representation of emotive lexis in corporate communication.

5. Research Methods

This paper relies on a comprehensive research methodology, including continuous sampling, definitional, textual, componential and complex analysis of vocabulary units. Material for the study is represented by transcripts of negotiations, meetings and in-company conversations.

6. Findings

Corporate communication refers to a modern, more systematic approach to addressing traditional issues of advertising, design, public relations and marketing within a company (Frandsen & Johansen, 2018). Modern communication in general obviously presents a fundamentally novel phenomenon that creates new values, changes technology, product configurations and customer service systems (Brennan & Merkl-Davies, 2018). Companies have always been engaged in communication building a system of interactions around and within themselves, designed to help businesses achieve their strategic and ongoing goals (Lerbinger, 2018).

In their business activity, companies build interaction with six large target audiences: (1) consumers of their product (customers) – people, companies or organisations; (2) their immediate business environment – partners, suppliers, contractors; (3) power structures – state and public organisations performing regulatory or supervisory functions, international organisations, sometimes also legislative authorities – in order to lobby their own corporate or industry-related interests; (4) shareholders and investors – people or organisations that are full or partial owners of companies and receive direct or indirect income from the activities of the company; (5) the inner circle, including both formal and informal, vertical and horizontal, interpersonal and group, direct and indirect interaction within the company; and (6) the general public, mainly through the media or major events (Palmieri & Mazzali-Lurati, 2017). Each of these audiences is independent, has its own interests and information requests, except that some aspects might appeal to everyone (such as issues of trust, for example).

Although emotive lexis is not the most representative type of vocabulary used in corporate communication, it does nevertheless have its place and role to play in the in-company interaction practices.

Under certain conditions, any word can acquire emotional, expressive and evaluative meanings. In other words, every word potentially bears some emotive-expressive connotation (Alba-Juez, 2018). The use of systemic expressive tools and techniques enhances the overall expressive tone, since any technique is an active and serious “game” of meanings that follows a communicative purpose (Lycan, 2018). Expressiveness is achieved through a system of language tools and techniques used in the text, which allows the most expressive presentation of the denotation and pragmatic intention of the addressee, as a result of which it affects the consciousness, behaviour and activities of the addressee (Dewaele, 2019). Obviously, there are certain semantic connections between the meanings of the “keywords” and the name of the

denotation, which the author lays down in the text. Consequently, linguistic means acquire personal significance for the addressee.

As the study has found, the most frequently used emotive lexis registered in corporate communication is represented by adjectives (which establish the overall emotive strain as positive, neutral, or negative), and phrasal verbs (that are strictly divided into positively and negatively charged ones):

*We need to evaluate this presentation with **cold-eyed practicality**.*

*We don't want this project delayed and turned into a recipe for a **frantic** do-over in a couple of weeks' time.*

*If we have stakeholders **lashing out on us** because we had missed the deadline, this isn't going to work.*

The tendency to use positively vs negatively charged lexis in corporate communication is guided mainly by the current state of affairs within the company: the frequency of positive lexis use increases during prosperous times and respectively decreases during unfortunate events, such as crises. Political setting can also govern linguistic choices in corporate communication:

*I believe you will agree that the new tax **frenzy** is something we'll have to deal with to **keep the company afloat** till the next election.*

*If they fail to pass this legislation in the near future, it's going to be **hectic** around here, and we don't need the investors **obsessing** over this just now.*

Emotional-evaluative concepts in corporate communication are also expressed through metaphors that are based on theories (*black swan theory*), similarities with everyday objects (*cappuccino economy*), and economical tendencies taking place during changes (*lipstick effect*). Metaphors describing recession are used in corporate communication more frequently during crises and are very often represented by natural hazard or health state-related expressions:

*Markets are being **run over by a tsunami**, so we'll have to **buckle up** right now.*

*If this tendency happens to keep up, they'll have traders **paralysed**.*

One of the tendencies in English-language corporate communication lies in the growing use of the so-called zoomorphic metaphors that certainly are helpful when it comes to expressing emotion. It is very common for this type of metaphors to be interrelated with animal's behaviour, as is the case with one of the most famous metaphors “bulls and bears” which is used to describe stock market operations. The meaning behind the metaphor “feeds off” behavioural patterns attributed to these particular animals, and particularly – to the way bulls and bears commonly attack (by using horns to *up* the opponent vs by charging *down* with paws). Respectively, referring to the bull market one will associate the conversation with optimistic forecasts and a hike in prices (*up*), while the bear market brings about quite the opposite associations – with pessimistic estimates and a sag in prices (*down*):

*Let's leave it to the Wall Street's **bulls and bears** to battle it out.*

Another example of zoomorphic metaphors used in corporate communication is the one referring to chickens and based on the analogy with fear:

*Let's just hope they won't **chicken out** on this deal.*

Being a complex two-way process, corporate communication is determined by a variety of situational factors, and whether these are considered or ignored will directly affect the effectiveness of the

interaction. An essential component of the language of corporate communication implies the use of linguistic intensifiers (mostly adverbs) that define words without introducing any changes to the propositional meaning of the sentence. Intensifiers are grammatical “fillers” that allow the speaker to add expressiveness to the utterance. Thus, intensifiers directly affect the emotional component of a sentence by capitalising on its actual meaning. As this study has found, the most frequent in English-language corporate communication are intensifying adverbs really, absolutely, immensely, simply, and terribly, as in “*This is an immensely flattering proposition we have received here*”.

7. Conclusion

English-language corporate communication is not devoid of emotive lexis which emerges in the in-company interaction practices for various reasons. The emotive lexis is represented primarily by adjectives, intensifying adverbs, phrasal verbs and metaphors (including natural hazard, health and zoomorphic metaphors), which use in positive or negative connotations is determined by the current state of economic, political and in-company affairs. The way emotions are being reflected in a language is a very interesting field for analysis: using a single word, one can express different emotional states and at the same time, the same feelings are displayed differently. In a certain conversation setting, even neutral vocabulary may acquire an emotional colouring. This direction of research gets all the more challenging and promising if considered within the realm of corporate communication, which is not so replete with emotionally charged vocabulary, but still leaves the room for emotion in one form or another. Besides, the study of emotive lexis of corporate communication is quite consistent with the modern direction and focus of linguistics.

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