

Verb-centered means of expressing self-presentation in the English-language job-hunting discourse

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ABSTRACT: This article presents a semantic, syntactic, and contextual analysis of the language means of self-presentation, conceptualized as the dominant speech strategy in the job-hunting discourse. The scope of our research is limited to the written variety of texts expressed via the genres of CVs/resumes and cover letters. The material was taken from English-language job-hunting resources: Balance, Career Addict, Career Blog, Indeed, Resume.io, StandOut CV, and Zety. It is stipulated that self-presentation can be viewed as a system of interrelated speech tactics: self-nomination, self-description, presentation of professional achievements, description of professional responsibilities, and identification with an ideal candidate type. Each tactic has its unique semantic profile. All self-presentation tactics roughly fall into two major categories—nominative and verb-centered. The latter category, which incorporates the tactics of presentation of professional achievements and description of professional responsibilities, was the primary focus of this research. A careful semantic and syntactic analysis revealed that active verbs with two-complement (in some cases, three-complement) valency are the core of the aforementioned tactics. This leads us to believe that the actant situation almost always includes the agent and theme, sometimes the benefactive. As a result of semantic analysis, lexical units were classified according to their sentimental modality—positive, negative, or neutral. Our research documented the prevalence of positive evaluation semantics in self-presentation units. A syntactic analysis was employed to identify the formal aspects of sentences containing self-presentation. The analysis showed that most sentence structures fall into three basic types of syntax reduction: a) subject omission (*[I] perform regular check-ups*); b) omission of the subject and the link verb (*[I am] professionally trained*); c) the omission of the subject and the verb of possession (*[I have] numerous awards*). The authors conclude that the self-presentation blueprint of verb-centered constructions identified in this article persists across all verb-centered tactics proving to be an effective means of constructing written job-hunting discourse.

KEYWORDS: speech strategies; speech tactics; CV; resume; cover letter

1. Introduction

Today, studying the job-hunting discourse is becoming increasingly important. With the advent of the Internet and social media, there have sprung many studies analyzing the discourse and language of self-presentation in person-to-person online communication (Alassiri, 2018; Bondarkova, 2014; Liu et al., 2016; Orehek and Human, 2017; Rasmussen, 2020) and in business discourse (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Fortanet-Gomez, 2008; Ivanytska and Tereshchenko, 2022; Kang et al., 2016). The written variety of this discourse is presented via the framework of two intertwined genres—CVs/resumes and cover letters. The content of both genres can be defined as self-presentation. This speech strategy enables a candidate to express eagerness to acquire a job or corporate position and present themselves in the most favorable light. In job hunting, self-presentation is largely shaped by corporate discourse and can be viewed as a transaction between a job candidate and their potential employer. The relevance of linguistic research on self-presentation comes from its importance in job-hunting discourse and the lack of knowledge of how self-presentation functions and what language means of expression are the most effective in business discourse. To the best of our knowledge, no attempts have been made to compare the features and the functioning of this speech strategy in different genres within the job-hunting discourse.

The goal of our research is to identify the language means of expressing the speech strategy of self-presentation in two genres of the job-hunting discourse (CVs/resumes and cover letters), as well as to describe similarities and differences between those genres regarding self-presentation. The following research questions arise from this goal: 1) Does self-presentation dominate the content of the genres? 2) Do means of expressing self-presentation vary across the two genres? 3) What is the basic communicative structure of self-presentation in both genres, and can it be broken down into smaller units (speech tactics)?

2. Theoretical background and literature review

Self-presentation has been the focus of study for many branches of humanities, including philosophy, psychology, sociology, and linguistics, etc. The term was first introduced by Canadian-American sociologist Goffman (2021) in his work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, where self-presentation is viewed as a key paradigm of social interactions, giving rise to the concept of social dramaturgy, i.e., the notion that social interaction follows the logic of a theatrical act.

Numerous studies on different aspects of self-presentation confirm people's interest in ways of presenting their personalities and prove the relevance of this study (Lasén, 2020; Liu et al., 2016; Ivanytska and Tereshchenko, 2022; Kang et al., 2016). Nowadays, some analyses of the methods and ways of self-presentation are conducted in psychology and sociology (Atman, 2011; Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Fortanet-Gomez, 2008; Orehek and Human, 2017).

Psychological and sociological analysis of self-presentation in a modern society of marketing and consumption is a relevant aspect of studying the ways of self-presenting. Liu et al. (2016) analyze how consumers manage their everyday self-presentation to express themselves. The study is conducted through the lens of consumption and contributes to understanding the link between individuals and their everyday interactions. The authors study methods of people's self-presentation by identifying and developing a typology of well-being challenges and how they are managed in a variety of social contexts. The research findings present opportunities for social marketers to promote consumers' positive experiences in the marketplace (Liu et al., 2016).

Internet communication and self-presentation on the Internet inspire many scholars to deeply investigate the subject. Many publications are aimed at studying different aspects of self-presentation on

social media. Orehek and Human (2017) examined whether self-expression on the social media platform Twitter elicits positive and accurate social perceptions. Srebryanskaya (2019) studied the factors of perception and interpretation of the information presented by person about him/herself. To interpret the information in a self-presentation given by a certain person, the factor of the recipient of this information is important. The subjective factors of interpretation are the following: parameters of the recipient's inner world, environment, social status, emotional attitudes, personal goals, etc. (Srebryanskaya, 2019).

Bukeeva (2013) notes that online (self-)presentation involves “special verbal and non-verbal means of influence in communication, a system of special semiotic characteristics of communication, and special language features”. Another important feature of self-presentation, according to Jones and Pittman (1982) and Rhodewalt and Agustsdottir (1986), is intentionality (hence the name “strategy of self-presentation”).

According to Dovi (2007), presentation (the process of creating a structured cluster of information) can be repurposed in other contexts. Dovi calls this phenomenon *representation*. The representation of other people can be negative or positive. Self-presentation in most types of discourse is overwhelmingly positive.

Self-presentation has the same cognitive basis as representation. Fodor (1975) notes that (self-)presentation is built upon a pre-existing mental image of reality. The very semantics of the word “presentation” steers us towards believing that there has to be something there to represent. However, reality exists within the confines of language and discourse, so self-identity is not just represented but created via language means.

Scholars actively investigate psychological, social, gender, and other aspects of self-presentation on the popular network Facebook. Alassiri's research (2018) is devoted to self-presentation on the Facebook social network used by Saudi Arabia University students. Facebook is mainly used for interacting with online members, getting information, and sharing knowledge. The author unveils the way students represent themselves online while socializing with online friends. He analyzes the psychological and sociological consequences of communication through Facebook, considering genuine and fake self-images and self-presentation to attract other users, and makes conclusions about the consequences of interacting through Facebook. “The insight from the consequences of the usage pattern of Facebook is very helpful and serves as a caution to prevent misuse of personal information by unknown users.”

In the paradigm of self-affirmation theory, Toma (2013) studies the influence of Facebook self-presentation on the writers' implicit self-esteem and their ability to perform cognitive tasks. The study registered a rise in the participants' perceived self-esteem after they were given an opportunity to study their own Facebook page and found a drop in their consequent performance on a serial subtraction task due to the decrease in the intrinsic motivation to complete it.

Virtual means of communication with the help of gadgets spark the interest of sociology and psychology professionals. Lasén (2020) writes that “mobile communication entails multiple ways of representing the self: of depicting, performing, and making oneself present, to ourselves and to our significant ones, as well as to different connected audiences.” The author informs that “special attention is given to the choreographic aspect of these performances, for instance in how gender and race are performed in mobile mediated forms of self-(re)presentation, with aesthetic and ethical implications. These choreographies are forms of digital labor, where the production of images and visibility prevails in mobile practices such as the taking and sharing of selfies and the uses and practices around mobile apps.”

Virtual self-presentation imposes certain terms and conditions on virtual communication.

Rasmussen (2020) explores how people understand themselves and their digital identities on social media. The author presents an analysis of the way communicators treat their online public personas and tries to articulate a theory of self-presentation on the Internet.

This review of the ways of self-presentation on the Internet is relevant for our research since we are interested in the ways of self-presentation in the virtual employment discourse, i.e., CVs and resumes on the Internet.

There are many instructions and recommendations on writing resumes and CVs. Stafford and Day (2004) give useful recommendations on how to produce a favorable impression of oneself in CVs and resumes and create a pleasant emotional atmosphere during interviews or with an effective resume. They analyze the reasons for resume turn-ons and turn-offs. No doubt the book is interesting and useful, but it is far from a linguistic analysis of strategies in job-hunting documents.

Self-presentation in resumes has been researched in a number of studies. Bremner and Phung (2015) compared rhetorical moves and discursual units in resumes found on LinkedIn and job application letters, concluding that they shared a number of rhetorical moves, namely establishing credentials, identifying the target market, and detailing service. The difference in the moves, according to the research, was that personal branding was restricted to resumes only, while job application letters also employed the following discursual units: indicating the value of candidature, offering incentives, enclosing documents, using pressure tactics, and soliciting a response. The authors claim that a job application letter uses similar rhetorical moves or discursual units to those of a sales promotion letter. They perform the same distinct communicative functions. The moves include introducing candidature, establishing credentials, essential detailing of candidature, indicating the value of candidature, offering incentives, enclosing documents, using pressure tactics, soliciting responses, and ending politely.

Analyzing presentation of self in resumes, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Fortanet-Gomez (2008) used the intercultural approach in comparing Peninsula Spanish and American English resumes, finding a significant difference in the type of personal information provided, the order of presenting qualifications, job experience, as well as education and linguistic devices used by candidates to “distance themselves from their achievements”.

Kang et al. (2016) studied the practice of “resume whitening”, which includes “concealing or downplaying racial cues in job applications” when racial minorities attempt to avoid anticipated discrimination in North American labor markets. The use of the tactic, including changing the presentation of the name and modifying the description of their professional and especially extra-professional experience, was found to be less common when candidates applied for positions in organizations that described themselves as pro-diversity, where, the researcher claims, they still faced discrimination (Kang et al., 2016).

Most scholars view self-presentation as a strategy for creating a curated self-image. Bolotnov (2012) takes a different approach by distinguishing two separate strategies: auto-presentation (controlled and carefully presented utterances) and self-presentation (spontaneous verbal actions). Delineation between two phenomena remains unclear, though, and requires methodological tools far beyond those of pragmatics or traditional linguistics.

Among linguistic investigations into the strategy of self-presentation in the employment discourse, the genre of “job advertisement” is of special interest. However, it is not the job seeker’s strategies that have been analyzed but those of the companies seeking employees. Ivanytska and Tereshchenko (2022) claim that “the problem is relevant for linguistic research due to globalization changes in the labor market,

which will change the communicative roles and tasks of the addresser and the addressee. The intensification of network communication specifies a virtual dialogue between employer and employee and predominates strategies and tactics to achieve communicative goals.” The authors consider the cross-cultural pragmatic profile of a company’s self-presentation strategy in Ukrainian and English job advertisements. The authors claim that the company’s self-presentation strategy encompasses the following communicative and pragmatic tactics: 1) appealing to reputation and stability; 2) proactivity; 3) appealing to expansion; 4) appealing to product quality; and 5) positive working environment (Tereshchenko, 2022). Using quantitative methods of analysis, they established that the company’s self-presentation strategy has the advantage of verbal expression on the Ukrainian website. Ukrainian employers tend to resort to the tactics of a positive working environment in the company, proactivity, and expansion. British companies present themselves with excellent reputations, stability, and international expansion (Tereshchenko, 2022).

In linguistics, self-presentation is often defined as a speech strategy (or a communicative strategy); sometimes it is viewed as a speech tactic. Thus, self-presentation plays a primary or secondary role depending on the type of discourse that governs self-presentation. In the framework of this research, we do not seek to determine the status of self-presentation (speech strategy or speech tactic); we consider it counterproductive to pinpoint the exact discursive role of self-presentation. It is context-dependent; therefore, the “strategy-or-tactic” question should be solved on a case-by-case basis. In the genres of resumes and cover letters, the phenomenon of self-presentation represents a significant part of the textual content, which allows us to view self-presentation as a speech strategy.

To understand the functions of self-presentation in the written job-hunting discourse, it is necessary to provide a broad and narrow definition of a speech strategy. Broadly, it is defined as “the implementation of a series of goals; the process of structuring communication”. The narrow definition specifies the role of language in constructing a speech strategy: “a speech strategy is a chain of decisions the speaker makes, a series of choices pertaining to language means” (Makarov, 2003). Speech strategies can be studied not only as a linguistic phenomenon but also as a cognitive function (Tedeschi and Riess, 1981; van Deik and Kinch, 1988).

Zhura (2007) describes a speech strategy as “a line of verbal behavior presented as an organized sequence of verbal actions aimed at achieving the speaker’s goal”. The author identifies two types of speech strategies: semantic (also referred to as cognitive or informative) and interactive. The first group of strategies is “a series of cognitive operations that modifies the discourse participants’ perception of the speaker or events”. Interactive strategies are aimed at “changing the conditions of the interaction between participants in a discursive event”.

Goikhman and Nadeina (1997) describe speech strategies as “the speaker’s general view of a communicative situation, a way of directing the communication process in one’s favor”.

Parshina (2005) believes that speech strategies can “determine the line of verbal behavior in order to achieve communication goals”. A speech strategy normally incorporates speech tactics, which are defined as “a specific step in implementing a certain strategy” (Parshina, 2005).

The terms “speech strategy” and “communicative strategy” are often used interchangeably. Some scholars do make a point to delineate the two phenomena. Vishnevetskaya et al. (2017) define a communicative strategy as a combination of verbal and non-verbal behavior.

The strategy of self-presentation is a subject of research in political discourse, on the basis of which many successful definitions of the mentioned strategy have been put forward. So, Atman (2011) views

self-presentation as: “impression management attempted by a politician in order to exert influence on the audience; strategic self-portraying; a verbal demonstration of the speaker’s personal qualities”. Atman’s definition is also helpful in understanding self-presentation outside of politics.

Some definitions view self-presentation not only as a process of identity construction but also as a result of this process: “self-presentation is a textual unity, the main communicative purpose of which is to convey relevant information in order to form a certain impression about the author based on the text” (Bondarkova, 2014).

Bondarkova (2014) offers an alternative view on the nature of self-presentation as a linguistic phenomenon. She considers self-presentation to be a genre of communication. In her framework, genres can be divided into two interrelated types: genres of discourse formation (structural and compositional frame of a text) and discourse-acquired genres (fixed conventional unities used to express the speaker’s intention). Bondarkova places self-presentations into the latter category based on the following factors: 1) the speaker’s intention is easily identifiable (the purpose of self-presentation is to provide favorable information about oneself and create a positive impression); 2) conventional language means with identifiable linguistic patterns are used to convey the speaker’s intention; 3) it can function within a genre of discourse formation (for instance, self-presentation occurs in the genre of a resume, and cover letter, etc.).

However, this interpretation has a major point of sensitivity: the linguistic patterns of self-presentation are not always fixed. On the contrary, language means of self-presentation are discourse-sensitive and comprise vastly different variations of texts that can hardly be viewed as the same genre of communication.

In the framework of this research, we view self-presentation as a speech strategy based on the following assumptions about the way it functions: 1) the choice of language means shows signs of pre-planning. The implementation of self-presentation is governed by external factors, i.e., the need to get a job or acquire a more favorable position in a company, the desire to be liked by people, etc.; 2) self-presentation is flexible, and it functions differently depending on the type of discourse. In a word, there are multiple manifestations of self-presentation, just as there are different strategies for achieving the same goal.

Delving into the problem of self-presentation in the job-hunting discourse, we analyzed more than 400 English-language CVs/resumes and cover letters.

3. Data and methods

Our data include 315 CVs/resumes, 287 cover letters, and 268 recommendation letters, and 6010 speech fragments (words or phrases containing self-description or the description of one’s professional achievements). The sources included the following English-speaking job search websites: Balance, Career Addict, Career Blog (2023), Indeed, MyPerfectCv, Prospects, Resume.io, StandOut CV (2023), Zety, and Jobzilla. The aforementioned websites were chosen because of their popularity among job-seekers. These sites upload English-speaking job-seekers’ CVs/resumes examples organized into several groups according to the professional field (accounting, IT, creative fields, etc.). Websites and samples were extracted using the continuous sampling method. Our research methods include pragmalinguistic, semantic, syntactic, and contextual analyses.

A pragmalinguistic analysis describes the relation between a text’s linguistic form and the extralinguistic context in which it exists. When analyzing the material from the angle of pragmatics, we

identified the roles of communicators (the addresser, i.e., a job seeker, and the addressee, i.e., their potential employer). The extralinguistic goal of job-hunting documents has been identified as gaining the desired employment position. Therefore, the pragmatic goal of the text is to exert influence over one's potential employer by presenting favorable information about oneself. This communicative goal is non-uniform and is achieved through several minor goals: asserting one's professional identity (through self-nomination), describing one's positive qualities (the tactic of self-description), and presenting one's achievements and professional responsibilities.

A contextual analysis was used to uncover the relation between the linguistic form and the broader contextual framework. Drawing on the research findings of Garcés-Conejos Blitvich and Fortanet-Gomez (2008), we regard the English-speaking employment business culture as part of the utilitarian discourse which channels the following values: individuality, empiricism ("proving" one's achievements), rationality, and politeness of solidarity (minimizing the social distance between the two major parties of the job-hunting discourse). These values are expressed in varying degrees in the texts of CVs/resumes analyzed in the article. For example, presenting one's professional achievements is the primary means of expressing the value of empiricism, as the authors of CVs often give examples of their achievements or refer to recommendation letters from their former employers as proof.

A semantic analysis helped to identify the evaluative modality of self-presentation means. Lexical units were classified according to their sentimental modality—positive, negative, or neutral. Our research documented the prevalence of positive evaluation semantics in self-presentation units (for example, the use of adjectives like *effective*, *reliable*, and *talented*, etc.). Lexical units with negative semantics are restricted to verbs denoting a negative dynamic (*decrease*, *lower*, *cut down*) and the nominal actants of those verbs (*costs*, *losses*, *employee turnover*, etc.). Negative semantic modalities of the verb and its actant cancel each other out and create a positive effect (*decrease costs*, *lower losses*, etc.).

A syntactic analysis was employed to identify the formal aspects of sentences containing self-presentation. Syntactic patterns vary across the genres. Self-presentation tactics in CVS are characterized by ellipsis. Most sentence structures fall into three basic types of syntax reduction: a) subject omission (*[I] perform regular check-ups*); b) omission of the subject and the linking verb (*[I am] professionally trained*); c) the omission of the subject and the verb of possession (*[I have] numerous awards*). In cover letters, the syntax of sentences containing self-presentation is almost never reduced. The use of complex and compound sentences is a prevalent feature of self-presentation tactics in the genre of cover letters.

4. Results

The genre of CVs/resumes can be described as "a short account of one's career and qualifications prepared typically by an applicant for a position" (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Matveeva (2010) defines it as "a genre of business communication containing a brief self-description".

The speech strategy of self-presentation in the texts of the English-language CVs/resumes is expressed through a set of tactics, i.e., communicative steps through which the self-presentation strategy is implemented. We have identified four tactics within the framework of self-presentation: 1) self-nomination; 2) self-description; 3) presentation of one's professional achievements; 4) description of one's professional responsibilities.

The first two tactics are expressed through nominative units, while the other two are verb-centered.

4.1. The tactic of self-nomination

Self-nomination is an explicit declaration of a candidate's professional identity. It is comprised of the names of jobs and professions, as well as substantive lexical units *professional* and *specialist*:

- [1] *Professional actuary* with 3+ years of experience in life insurance services [Source: Zety (2023c)].
- [2] Service-minded and team-focused *boutique facilitator* with 5+ years of experience in a luxury retail environment [Source: Zety (2023q)].
- [3] As a certified *EMT*, I have hands-on knowledge in handling medical emergencies and complications due to chronic/severe illness, including strokes, seizures, diabetic comas, cardiac arrests, fractures, poison ingestion, burns, drug overdoses, and injuries [Source: Resume Genius (2023a)].
- [4] As a recent *graduate* from the University of Rochester with a B.S. in Computer Science, I'm confident that my knowledge of Linux systems, experience in backend coding, and precise attention to detail would make me an asset to the team at Mayflower [Source: Resume Genius (2023b)].

The core lexical items of this tactic have a significant overlap in the genres of CVs/resumes and cover letters. The main point of difference is the syntactic structure of sentences containing self-nomination. Examples [1] and [2], which are taken from CVs, reveal elliptical syntax where the subject *I* and the link verb *am* are reduced. The syntax of cover letters tends to be non-reduced, as evident from examples [3] and [4]. The most prevalent structure used in cover letters when expressing self-nomination is "as [a specialist in some field] I have achieved something/have certain qualities." Cover letters are much more narrative-driven compared to CVs, which is reflected in the syntactic structures of those two genres.

4.2. The tactic of self-description

The lexis of self-description is represented mostly by ameliorative adjectives: *efficient*, *passionate*, *dedicated*, *energetic*, *experienced*, *detail-oriented*, *personable*, *accomplished*, *skilled*, *effective*, *motivated*, *talented*, *friendly*, *creative*, *organized*, *collaborative*, *accurate*, *goal-oriented*, *hard-working*, etc.

- [5] *Detail-oriented* accounting manager with 4+ years of experience in managing accounting departments [Source: Zety (2023b)].
- [6] *Dependable* and *cheerful* busser, seeking to make servers and managers happy at Chili's [Source: Zety (2023g)].
- [7] As a *performance-driven* store manager with 10+ years of experience in fast-paced, dynamic retail settings, I'm confident that my hands-on administrative, strategic, and leadership skills will help [Company Name] improve customer service and profitability [Source: Resume Genius (2023e)].
- [8] As a *dependable* waitress and manager with seven years of experience running the front-of-house in a 5-star restaurant, I was happy to see your ad for a waitstaff manager at Legal Seafoods [Source: Zety (2023s)].

Both genres reveal the choice of adjectives with positive semantics and considerable overlap in lexical units used to express the tactic of self-description. The main point of difference is the syntactic forms. Self-description is normally used in conjunction with self-nomination, and the choice of syntax follows the same logic: elliptical forms for the brief and to-the-point CVs and non-reduced syntax for the narrative-driven cover letters.

4.3. The tactic of presentation of one's professional achievements

As action-focused genres, CVs and cover letters are centered on conveying the idea of proactive involvement and demonstrating achievements. Therefore, the most important speech tactics are verb-centered.

The tactic of presenting one's own professional achievements is expressed through the following verbs: *achieve, develop, create, maintain, implement, increase, design, identify, reduce, raise, save, find [mistakes], contribute, resolve, be awarded, boost, deliver, earn, decrease, facilitate, introduce, etc.*

- [9] *Redesigned* the company's strategic approach to billing, resulting in boosting [Source: 365 Data Science (2023)].
- [10] *Awarded* annual bonus for meeting 100% of financial goals in 2018 and 2019 [Source: Zety (2023j)].
- [11] *Designed and executed* a highly effective CEO campaign, which resulted in over one million page views per month on the company's website [Source: Indeed (2023a)].
- [12] *Awarded* Firefighter of the Year in 2007, 2010, and 2015 [Source: Resume Genius (2023c)].

All the examples above are taken from CVs/resumes.

Semantically, the verbs of this tactic fall into the following categories:

1) Verbs that express the idea of the positive dynamic of a work-related process: *increase, raise, boost, grow, skyrocket, and double*:

- [13] *Doubled* revenue in 18 months by restructuring the teams for more team-directed work [Source: Zety (2023m)].
- [14] *Raised* attendance by 85% in three months [Source: Zety (2023u)].
- [15] In previous roles, reduced account receivables by 18% by improving billing strategy, as well as *boosted* sales by 15% through recommendations on process improvements [Source: Zety (2023f)].
- [16] Grew sales by 125% through improvements in writing quality and engagement with target audience [Source: Zety (2023p)].

Examples [13] and [14] are extracts from CV texts, and [15] and [16] come from cover letters.

2) Verbs that express a negative dynamic of a negative process or an undesirable effect: *reduce, decrease, lower, eliminate, and cut down*. The overall influence on the candidate's work performance is positive, as those types of contexts create the effect of semantic "double negation".

- [17] *Reduced* waste output by 18% [Source: Zety (2023i)].
- [18] *Cut downtime* by 25% and costs of warranty by up to 45% [Source: Kamerpower (2023)].
- [19] *Eliminated* 50% more food waste with a new serving strategy [Source: Zety (2023h)].
- [20] *Lowered* the year-end tax bill of a key client by 20% by identifying relevant deductible expenses under state tax regulations [Source: Zety (2023t)].

All the examples are taken from CVs.

3) Verbs that express the idea of one's achievements being recognized in the work environment: *win, be awarded, be nominated, be elected, and be granted*:

- [21] *Nominated* to "Digital Art Awards 2018" for creating unique winter environments [Source: Zety (2023o)].

[22] *Won* the 2018 Best Data Visualization Webby Award for HealthFirst.com [Source: Zety (2023d)].

[23] During my career as an electrician prior to my graduate studies, I *was elected* Chairman of the Executive Board, where I sat as the union's representative to the apprenticeship advisory board [Source: Balance (2023)].

[24] *Granted* "Construction Safety Excellence" award by CMAA for 2018 [Source: Zety (2023k)].

Examples [21] and [22] are excerpts from CVs and examples [23] and [24] are taken from cover letters.

4) Verbs that express the agent's direct positive influence on the theme: *achieve, develop, create, maintain, implement, design, save, contribute, deliver, introduce, eliminate, find, modify*, etc.

[25] At InnerVista, I *created* an in-house graphic design department, saving clients \$450K per year and growing the client base by 27% in 14 months [Source: Thai.Resume (2023)].

[26] *Developed* and *implemented* a transcript-free editing method with bubble-sorted clip bins [Source: Zety (2023u)].

[27] *Saved* more than 700 people from certain death, serious burns, and severe injuries [Source: Indeed (2023b)].

[28] Fortunately, I quickly *found* the source of the problem and *fixed* it. The principal was relieved the students were safe [Source: Zety (2023n)].

All the examples above come from cover letters.

As evident from examples [9]–[28], there is a significant overlap in lexical resources used by CV and cover letter authors—active verbs dominate both genres. The most significant difference is in the choice of syntactic constructions. Elliptical constructions are predominantly used in CVs/resumes (the most predominant elliptization scheme is the omission of the subject *I*. In cover letters, elliptical constructions are sometimes used (typically as bullet points), but most letters have non-reduced syntax: complex sentences are often found in cover letters; homogeneous predicates often appear too (*I found the problem and fixed it*).

4.4. The tactic of the description of one's professional responsibilities

The other verb-centered tactic is the description of one's professional responsibilities. It is centered around active verbs: *run, develop, manage, perform, ensure, assist, provide, help, maintain, prepare, collaborate, conduct, supervise, operate, organize, work [with], analyze, coordinate, monitor, identify, train, and oversee*:

[29] *Performed* weekly check runs for 230+ vendors [Source: Zety (2023a)].

[30] *Helped* customers open and close checking accounts, credit cards, savings accounts, personal loans, and mortgages [Source: Zety (2023e)].

[31] I am more than able to *investigate* several forensic examination processes and *monitor* security systems for multiple Fortune 500 companies [Source: Mind Sumo (2023)].

[32] *Overlooked* the team of six planners, three assistants, as well as contract workers and vendors [Source: Resume Genius (2023d)].

Examples [29] and [30] come from CVs/resumes, and [31] and [32] are taken from cover letters.

The description of one's professional responsibilities is also expressed through non-finite verb forms: *managing, developing, maintaining, monitoring, preparing, evaluating, running, ensuring, assisting, supervising, organizing, planning, training, performing*, etc.

[33] Focused on *ensuring* the social and emotional development of adolescent students; cooperated

closely with the school psychologist [Source: TeacherOn (2023)]—from CV.

[34] I am relied upon for *maintaining* inventory levels, *performing* preventive maintenance checks, *inspecting* and *monitoring* work areas to ensure safety, and *supervising* and training project employees, including in-house, external contractors, and sub-contractors [Source: CourseHero (2023)]—from cover letter.

The predominant formula of syntactic arrangement is Subject-Verb-Object: *I performed certain tasks*. In CVs/resumes, the subject *I* is often omitted (sentence [29] is a classic example of this). Another widely used formula is gerund-based: *my responsibilities included performing certain tasks* (examples [33] and [34]).

The verbs that are used in the English-language CVs/resumes and cover letters are either two- or three-valency verbs. The crucial role is that of the agent. The agent often undergoes the syntactic process of elliptization, especially in CVs/resumes (examples [29], [30], and [32]):

For two-valency verbs, the theme almost always occurs alongside the agent:

[35] Reduced reconciliation *discrepancies* [Source: Zety (2023a)].

In example [35], *discrepancies* are the theme, the agent (*I*) is syntactically omitted.

Some contexts include the benefactive (mostly for three-valency verbs):

[36] Maintained records for 70+ *clients*, including ledger accounts [Source: Zety (2023a)].

In example [36], the subject is again omitted; *records* can be interpreted as the theme, and *clients* are the benefactives. So, the recurring theta roles for verbs used to express self-presentation in CVs/resumes or cover letters are limited to the subject (obligatory role), theme (obligatory), and benefactive (optional, as fewer contexts demand its use).

The two verb-centered tactics (resenting professional achievements and describing professional responsibilities) share some lexical units (and often the same theta roles), creating a possibility of interpretational overlap. Contextual and pragmalinguistic analyses enable the correct interpretation.

[37] *Maintained* an upsell rate 17% higher than the department average [Source: Zety (2023r)].

Example [37] can be interpreted as a presentation of professional achievements. The main communicative goal of this textual excerpt is to show the candidate's outstanding performance throughout their professional career.

[38] Organized and *maintained* corporate financial records for more than a dozen companies [Source: Zety (2023l)].

[38] is an example of the tactic of describing one's professional responsibilities. The candidate aims to give a general idea of their professional competence and the work they can do.

4.5. Tables

The frequency of all speech tactics in CVs/resumes and cover letters was calculated. The total amount of documents analyzed is the following: 315 CVs/resumes and 287 cover letters contain 4220 speech fragments.

Table 1 shows a quantitative representation of all the speech tactics in CVs/resumes within the strategy of self-presentation. The figure in the 2nd column gives the amount of usage of the tactic's CVs/resumes. The figure in the 3rd column shows the percentage of specific tactics used in CVs/resumes. The table demonstrates that the most frequent tactic used in CVs/resumes is the description of one's

professional responsibilities. The least frequent tactic in this genre of documents is that of self-nomination.

Table 1. The quantitative representation of each self-presentation tactic in CVs/resumes.

Self-presentation tactic	Amount of tactics in CVs/resumes	Percentage of CVs/resumes
Description of one's professional responsibilities	113	36%
Self-description	95	30%
Presentation of one's professional achievements	91	29%
Self-nomination	16	5%
Total	315	100%

Table 2 below shows a quantitative representation of speech tactics in cover letters within the strategy of self-presentation. The table demonstrates that the most frequent tactic used in cover letters is self-description. The least frequent tactic in this genre of documents is that of self-nomination.

Table 2. The quantitative representation of each self-presentation tactic in cover letters.

Self-presentation tactic	Amount of cover letters	Percentage of cover letters
Self-description	93	32%
Presentation of one's professional achievements	77	29%
Description of one's professional responsibilities	83	27%
Self-nomination	34	12%
Total	287	100%

Both tables demonstrate that quantitatively, verb-centered tactics (presentation of professional achievements and description of professional responsibilities) are represented on a bigger scale. Verb-centered tactics make up 65% of all self-presentation tactics in CVs/resumes and 56% in cover letters. The least commonly occurring tactic for both genres is self-nomination. Despite being the least popular tactic quantitatively, self-nomination is an integral part of the genres of CVs and cover letters and an important speech tactic that helps job candidates express and declare their professional identity.

5. Discussion

The findings confirm the importance of conducting further studies into self-presentation in Internet genres in different spheres and situations. They are consistent with the opinion of psychologists that self-presentation is of crucial importance in the modern world. The sphere of job hunting may be viewed as a market through the lens of consumption (Liu et al., 2016). Our findings indicate that correct self-presentation on the Internet is a marketing ploy in a job-hunting market. They contribute to the ideas of the above authors (Liu et al., 2016). The same idea of marketing traits in the sphere of job application is supported by (Bremner and Phung, 2015). They found similar rhetorical moves or discursal units in letters of job application and those of sales promotion.

Our definitions of self-presentation and speech strategies are well supported by most scholars who study language through the paradigm of communicative linguistics, or pragmatics. A speech strategy is the act of formulating one's communicative intention by choosing contextually appropriate language. In cognitive linguistics, however, strategies can be viewed as a monolith, which is acquired by language users as an uninterrupted textual unit and reproduced as a whole (van Deik and Kinch, 1988). Differences in scientific approach or research objectives can recontextualize the understanding and definition of

strategies.

Self-presentation is defined as “a speech strategy that enables a candidate to express eagerness to acquire a job or corporate position and present themselves in the most favorable light”. This definition highlights the core properties of self-presentation: “intentionality, eliciting (positive) reaction, and the use of emotionally charged vocabulary” and falls in line with modern scholars’ views on self-presentation (Atman, 2011; Bondarkova, 2014; Ivanytska and Tereshchenko, 2022; Parshina, 2005).

The results of this research support the conceptualization of speech strategies as a system of communicative steps (Atman, 2011; Boris, 2018; Dayneko, 2010; Dubskikh, 2008; Klyuyev, 2002; Makarov, 2003; Parshina, 2005; Vorozhtsova, 2011; Zhura, 2007). The speech tactic of self-nomination, an integral element of our research, is described in scientific literature as one of the major tactics in corporate image-based discourse. It is defined as a tactic for declaring one’s professional identity (Boris, 2018). Our conceptualization of self-nomination in the job-hunting discourse is largely the same. We contextualized self-nomination in the job-hunting discourse as a part of the self-presentation system.

Self-presentation of a job candidate was studied by Bremmer and Phung (2016) using structural analysis of LinkedIn summaries. Their research identified several rhetorical moves used by resume writers. Bremmer and Phung’s paper revealed considerable similarities between the rhetorical moves used in different texts that belong to the same genre—resumes, proving the existence of a strong link between genre conventions and the rhetorical structure of texts. Our own research relied primarily on the methodology of pragmalinguistic analysis. The basal elements of self-presentation we have identified in this research (speech tactics) are based on a resume writer’s communicative intent rather than the structural properties of the text. This research didn’t look into the possibility of genre conventions modifying the communicative intent, even though we did reveal some differences and similarities in self-presentation language in different genres of the job-hunting discourse (CVs/resumes and cover letters).

6. Conclusions

Self-presentation in written English-language job-hunting discourse can be conceptualized as a series of nominal and verbal speech tactics that work together to create a cohesive positive impression of a job-seeker. The two major nominal tactics are self-nomination and self-description. The verbal tactics form the backbone of the two genres of the job-hunting discourse. The two major verb-centered tactics are the presentation of one’s professional achievements and the description of one’s professional responsibilities. Those two tactics uncover a semantic model of a standard work process that includes the agent (the job-seeker), the theme (an object or work process that is transformed by the agent), and sometimes it also includes the benefactive (somebody who benefits from the agent’s actions).

Self-presentation in the genres of CVs/resumes and cover letters creates a twofold model of reality: 1) static, image-based reality (expressed via nominal tactics that are used to convey a job-seeker’s constant and unchanging positive qualities); 2) dynamic reality (expressed via verb-centered tactics that model a work process and show how a job-seeker can influence and improve it).

There are virtually no differences in the lexical system of self-presentation between the two genres (CVs and cover letters). The lexis of the self-description tactic has the semantics of positive evaluation. The two verb-centered tactics (presentation of one’s achievements and description of one’s responsibilities) are dominated by verbs with active semantics. Self-nomination in both genres functions as a declarative tactic.

Syntactic analysis revealed an important difference between self-presentation in CVs/resumes and

cover letters. All the tactics in CVs are expressed via reduced syntactic models (with the exception of the *Professional Summary* section, which is close in its function to a cover letter), whereas cover letters tend to have non-reduced syntax. We attribute this difference to the communicative functions of CVs/resumes and cover letters. A CV mainly contains brief factual information and is not addressed explicitly to a specific person, which allows for the use of cropped syntax. A cover letter is narrative-driven and, like any letter, addressed to a person.

Knowing how self-presentation functions is crucial for job-seekers when writing a CV or cover letter. Being able to use all the tactics correctly and appropriately from a semantic and syntactic point of view can aid in making a good impression on potential employers. Understanding the communicative aspect of self-presentation is much more important than memorizing the list of verbs and adjectives. Our research has helped to uncover the inner logic of self-presentation in the genres of CVs/resumes and cover letters.

Author contributions

Conceptualization, IK; methodology, IK; data curation, IK; writing—original draft preparation, IK; writing—review and editing, NS, IB and NI; visualization, NS; supervision, NS, IB and NI; project administration, NS; funding acquisition, IZ. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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