MEANS OF VERBALIZING THE BASIC EMOTION OF "FEAR" IN THE AMERICAN TV SERIES "STRANGER THINGS"

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The emotion of fear is one of the fundamental psycho-emotional states inherent to human nature, which accompany humanity throughout its history. Researchers have persistently explored this phenomenon since the appearance of ancient philosophical theories. The relevance of studying fear in today's media context underpins the necessity of the analysis of language means by which it is expressed, particularly in English-language television discourse. The purpose of this article is to identify the linguistic mechanisms of fear verbalization in the TV series "Stranger Things", based on the speech of American teenagers and their families. The study employs a continuous sampling of linguistic material from the scripts of all four seasons of the series, amounting to a total duration of 33 hours. The methodology combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis of fear-related verbal markers within psycholinguistic and cognitive frameworks. The research focuses on phonetic and lexical features of fear expression, as well as stylistic means that intensify emotional impact. The findings demonstrate that fear is verbalized by means of raised tone, shouts, accelerated speech, and set phrases. Linguistic instruments include interjections, exclamations, direct forms of address, emotionally coloured vocabulary, obscenities, references to religious symbols, and repeated negations. Stylistic devices encompass comparisons, metaphors, hyperboles, and euphemisms, all of which contribute to a elevated emotional background and immerse the audience in a tense atmosphere. The analysis confirms that language functions as a powerful tool of conveying fear within the series. Characters convey fear through highly emotive language, where changes in speech pace, frequent outbursts, and imperative forms reflect strategies of either

confronting or avoiding perceived threats. Thus, the linguistic representation of fear in "Stranger Things" has shown to be an interdisciplinary phenomenon, integrating both social and affective dimensions. The study concludes that the verbalization of fear in the series is implemented in a complex interplay of phonetic, lexical, and stylistic means, all of which serve as integral components of the overall narrative and emotional effect on the viewer. Future research could explore fear expression in the context of intercultural communication, as well as conduct comparative analyses of emotional representation in both fictional and cinematic discourse.

ЗАСОБИ ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЇ БАЗОВОЇ ЕМОЦІЇ СТРАХУ В АМЕРИКАНСЬКОМУ ТЕЛЕВІЗІЙНОМУ СЕРІАЛІ «ДИВНІ ДИВА»

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Ключові слова: *емоція, емотивна лексика, емоційна насиченість, кінодискурс, лексичні засоби, страх.*

Емоція страху належить до базових психоемоційних станів людини, що супроводжують її з давніх часів. Від античних філософських концепцій до сучасних лінгвістичних підходів дослідники неодноразово зверталися до аналізу цієї емоції. Актуальність дослідження страху в сучасному медійному просторі зумовлює необхідність аналізу вербальних засобів його вираження, зокрема в англомовному телевізійному дискурсі. Метою роботи є встановлення мовних механізмів вербалізації страху у серіалі «Stranger Things» на матеріалі мовлення американських підлітків та членів їхніх родин. У дослідженні застосовано суцільну вибірку мовного

матеріалу зі сценарію чотирьох сезонів серіалу загальною тривалістю 33 години. Методологія включає кількісний та якісний аналіз вербальних засобів, що маркують страх, із використанням психолінгвістичного та когнітивного підходів. Проаналізовано як фонетичні, так і лексичні засоби вираження емоції, а також стилістичні фігури, що підсилюють емоційний ефект. Виявлено, що вираження страху реалізується через підвищення тону голосу, крики, прискорене мовлення та сталі звороти. Лексичні засоби представлені вигуками, окликами, звертаннями, емоційно забарвленою лексикою, лайливими словами, зверненнями до релігійних символів та повторенням заперечень. Стилістичні засоби включають порівняння, метафори, гіперболи та евфемізми, які створюють емоційне тло та занурюють глядача в атмосферу напруги. Результати аналізу підтверджують, що мовні засоби в серіалі є потужним інструментом формування атмосфери страху. Персонажі передають страх через мову з високою емоційною насиченістю. Зміна темпу мовлення, часті вигуки й наказовий стан відображають стратегії боротьби із загрозою або її уникнення. Таким чином, лінгвістичне оформлення страху у серіалі є міждисциплінарним феноменом, який об'єднує соціальну та афективну сфери. Аналіз мовних засобів демонструє, що вербалізація емоції страху в серіалі «Stranger Things» реалізується через комплекс фонетичних, лексичних і стилістичних засобів, які функціонують як складники загального наративу та емоційного впливу на глядача. Перспективним напрямом дослідження є подальше вивчення вербалізації страху в контексті міжкультурної комунікації, а також порівняльний аналіз засобів вираження емоцій у художньому та кінодискурсі.

Background. Rooting in the ancient philosophers' views and continuing to the present day, interest into human emotions has always been in the focus of scientific research. In the middle of the twentieth century, Paul Ekman identified six basic emotions that are universal and, thus, inherent in every individual (joy, sadness, fear, disgust, surprise, pleasure). The investigations of fear have won close attention due to the dramatic events of modern history. It has become especially important to acquire the skill of recognizing fear and identifying its causes.

Fear is one of the primary human emotions, which is an internal tension associated with real or imagined danger [Ekman]. The emotion of fear is one of the most studied, which can be explained both by the strength of the emotion itself and by the human tendency to explore the dark, dangerous and forbidden. The causes and mechanisms of fear have been studied by scientists since ancient times. Thus, one of the first researchers of this inherent human emotion was the ancient Greek scientist Plato. According to his doctrine, fear is the darkness that a person overcomes while searching the truth, i.e., according to Roments V. A., fear is directly connected with ignorance [Роменець, 2003, p. 510]. The establishment of psychotherapy in the nineteenth century as a treatment for mental disorders, foster the appearance of a large number of works dedicated to the mechanism of fear. For instance, the American psychologist R. Maurer argued that fear is associated with the anticipation of pain [Maurer, 2016]; the Austrian researcher S. Freud

discovered the bond of fear and past traumatic experiences [Фройд, 2021]; the American psychologist K. Horney emphasized that the emergence of a sense of fear is associated with unresolved internal conflicts and basic needs, which have not been satisfied [Horney, 1945]. Modern researchers pay close attention to the causes of fear in general [Clark, 2020] and within a particular social group: adolescents [Рябовол, 2016]), students [Блохіна, 2021; Spielberg, 1995]), women [Horney, 1945], etc.

The linguistic aspects of fear research are mainly concentrated within the paradigm of psycholinguistics, which focuses on the ways of expressing the emotional state of the speaker. Within this approach, researchers also try to determine the causes of fear through linguistic markers, for example, to identify the ways of verbalization of sacred fear of God [Ботвин, 2021], to study the verbalization of the concept of FEAR [Підгорна, 2017; Шкута, 2019].

The study of the lexical and semantic field of fear in English shows its versatility. Words such as fear, terror, dread, panic describe different shades of this emotional state [Wierzbicka, 1999]. The study of English-language fiction discourse shows that authors use fear to create a tense atmosphere by describing physical reactions (e.g., "her heart froze with terror") [Гнезділова, 2007].

Ovcharenko I.B. & Kalinichenko V.I. conducted a quantitative analysis of emotive vocabulary, revealing that emotional expressions related to the emotion of fear are widely used in American English, namely,

42 of them, or 9.6% of the total sample. A structural analysis of the emotive vocabulary in the Ukrainian language was also carried out, presenting a large set of emotional expressions related to the verbalization of the emotion in question, and ranking it the fourth having the share of 12.8 %. Among the feeling studied were anxiety as a feeling of worrying that has no significant consequences; dread as a great fear or apprehension; panic as a sharp fear in a stressful situation that often leads to uncontrollable behaviour; terror is a feeling of significant, severe fear; nervousness is fear based on nervousness [Овчаренко І. Б., Калініченко В. І., 2019].

Z. Kövecses's work focuses on the linguistic expression of emotions; he noted that many figurative phrases used to express emotions are either metaphorical or metonymic in nature. From the point of view of cognitive linguistics, the fact that emotional expressions are metaphorical indicates a metaphorical structuring of emotions at the conceptual level. Z. Kövecses lists the following common metonymies related to fear with fear: physical arousal, increased heart rate, blood draining from the face, skin wrinkling, hair straightening, inability to move, drop in body temperature and inability to move, inability to breathe, inability to speak, inability to think, bowel or bladder emptying, sweating, nervousness in the stomach, dry mouth, screaming, change of gaze, drop in body temperature, fright, and running away. It quickly becomes apparent that these metonymies are all based on physiological or behavioural bodily responses to the experience of fear [Kövecses, 2000].

U. Oster also investigated fear metaphors in English using corpus linguistics and found that the conception "fear is something inside the body" is a common conceptualization, given the prepositions and adverbs that often follow language means of expressing fear, such as "strike fear into", "fear inside", or "fear within" [Oster, 2010]. Thus, the study of the emotion of fear is relevant, as evidenced by numerous studies in various fields of linguistics, such as cognitive linguistics, text linguistics, and the discourse approach.

Thus, studying the language means of expressing fear as a universal emotion still remains relevant, being facilitated by the necessity to establish sustainable intercultural connections on a large scale, and to provide understanding of peculiarities of expressing basic emotions by English-speaking community, on a small scale. This preconditions **the purpose** of the following analysis – to identify the linguistic means of expressing fear among American English-speaking teenagers and their families following the **objectives** to reveal phonetic and lexical items that verbalize fear in the American TV series "Stranger Things", and to analyze the stylistic means of the expression of fear.

Therefore, the object of our study is the basic emotion of fear as a universal feeling encompassing individuals regardless their cultural and social background, and the subject – its language representation in the vocabulary of American English-speaking teenagers and their families. The material for the analysis is represented by the script of four seasons of the American TV series "Stranger Things", which became a cult in a rather short time, with a total duration of 33 hours.

Results and Discussion. "Stranger Things" by the Duffer Brothers is an American sci-fi series created for the Netflix VOD service that immerses the viewer in the atmosphere of the 1980s. A group of teenagers experience terrifying events that have a connection to a parallel world. The language means used to express fear, that were extracted from the script of TV series "Stranger Things" by continuous sampling, can be categorized as phonetic and lexical. The phonetic means signifying fear vary according to changes in tone and speed of speech.

Tone of voice. Very often, when people experience fear, a defensive reaction is triggered and their voice is raised. This way, they start screaming involuntarily, not always to protect themselves, but also as a reflex:

(1) (Script) Steve: Oh shit.
Everybody: AAAH
Dustin: Shit! Shit!
Steve: WE ARE GOING DOWN! WE ARE GOING DOWN!
Robin: Yeah, no shit Harrington?
Dustin: WHY IS THIS BUTTON LOCKED!?
Erica: PRESS THE BUTTON!
Dustin: I've already pressed it a hundred times!
Steve: PRESS IT! DO SOMETHING! JUST PRESS THE BUTTON

Screaming not only expresses fear, but also signals danger to others. The abstract given above shows shock and fear of the unknown that the children are experiencing. The exclamation «AAAH!» is a typical example of a person raising their voice. The change in tone is accompanied by the imperative mood, which also urges a frightening situation.

Raising the pitch of the voice is due to the fact that by screaming we instinctively try to attract the attention of other people, hoping for their help. Sometimes screaming can be an expression of helplessness and despair when a person feels that they cannot cope with the situation on their own.

Speed of speech. Fear significantly affects the pace of speech, speeding it up or slowing it down. It often causes disruption of speech fluency, which is manifested in changes in the pace and rhythm of speech. For instance, the acceleration of speech in the state of fear when the body activates flight response. It makes us speak faster because we want to say something as soon as possible and get away from the danger.

(2) (Script) Joyse: Will, Will. Listen. Listen. D*o you know who I am? Do you know who I am?*

Will: You... you... you are мит.

Joyse: Hold him down.

Will: No! No! Look out! No! Let me go! Let go! Let me go!

Joyse: Sorry. I'm so sorry.

Will: No! No! Let me go! Let go! Let go! Let me go! No! Let go! Let go! Let me...

In this scene, Will is reluctant and afraid of his mother's sudden decision to inject him with a sedative. His body reacts accordingly: his breathing becomes faster, and he is clearly worried. As a result, speech becomes rapid and intermittent, as the brain tries to convey as much information as possible in a limited amount of time.

Depending on the situation, people can speak either faster or slower. This reaction to fear is caused by the body's fight-or-flight mode. The fear hormone adrenaline speeds up the brain, and thus the work of thoughts and the speech apparatus. While slowing down occurs when the cognitive system can be overloaded in a stressful situation, especially if a person is trying to find the right words to describe the situation.

Lexical means of expressing the emotion of fear help to convey the tension and reaction of the characters in critical situations. High tone and exclamatory sentences that structure the verbal reaction, bring about such lexical means as interjections and vocabulary denoting appeal.

The characters actively use exclamations interjections to enhance dramatic moments and immerse the viewer in an atmosphere of fear:

(3) (Script) Heather: Help me.

Eleven: AAH!

Heather: AAH! Help me!

Fear is often associated with the vocabulary that has negative connotation and that often belongs to the semantic field of "fear" manifesting hypothetical triggers:

(4) (Script) "This place is a nightmare" або "The Upside Down feels like death."

Proper nouns denoting first and second names of characters as well as nicknames, which are mostly used as a warning about the danger or as a sign of despair:

(5) "Mike! Mike!", "Nency!", "Honey", "Steve" – the characters shout out the name of their friends or family members to check if they are okay or to call for help.

Negation in the form of the adverb "no", that can be repeated multiple times to strengthen the effect of terror:

(6) Joyce: No! No! Bob! No! Bob!

Obscenities showing disappointment or hopelessness in a situation:

(7) (Script) «Yeah, no shit Harrington?»

Vocabulary covering the appeal to Biblical characters:

(8) (Script) Joyce: Oh my God. Not breathing! Not breathing!

Vocabulary encompassing verbs of call for actions:

(9) (Script) "Run! Run!" – Doctor: You are almost home free, alright Bob?

Set phrases or exclamatory sentences revealing anxiety:

(10) (Script) «What is that!?»

Max: Oh, God, he is slimy!

Lucas: Oh, it is like a living booger!

Will: Oh God!

Mike: What is he?

Dustin: My question exactly.

At the same time, communication under fearful conditions presupposes that characters try to mitigate the effect reassuring the addressee using friendly colloquial address:

(11) (Script) "Kiddo, it's going to be okay."

Language means manifesting fear in the TV series can be categorized into two main spheres – reason of (Fig. 1) and reaction to fear (Fig. 2) where reason of fear as a part of a semantic field of the notion "fear" includes incomprehension of the situation or an object that can be potentially dangerous, and identification of the reason, which is associated with a particular object known as dangerous and described as such; which include active response to a fear stimulus in the form of shouts that can be represented as both meaningful vocabulary denoting particular or abstract notions, and interjections as a cry of fear. Besides, reaction presupposes both the appeal to deal with the situation and reassurance to mitigate the effect of the emotion.
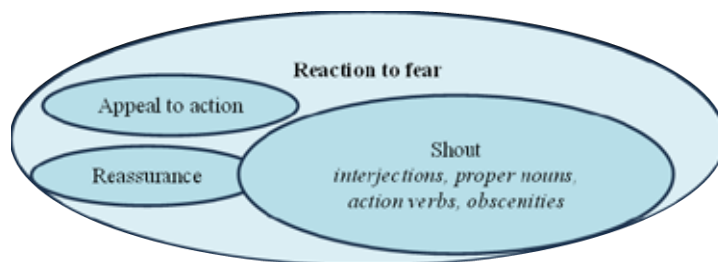

Figure 1. Reason of fear

Figure 2. Reaction to fear

The analysis of the script also highlighted stylistic of expressing the emotion of fear.

<u>Comparisons.</u> Only negative lexemes are used for comparisons, as they help convey feelings and attitudes more efficiently. The characters use comparisons with monsters, natural phenomena or disasters, their own emotions or feelings, for instance:

(12) (Script) "The Upside Down feels like a storm that never ends".

"It's like the ground is alive".

<u>Hyperbole.</u> The characters used deliberate exaggerations to attract the viewer's attention. In this way, the level of tension and anxiety increases at a certain point in the series.

(13) (Script) "We're all going to die!" The characters used this phrase whenever they were attacked by monsters, even when the situation was not that dangerous.

<u>Metaphors.</u> Through metaphors, the viewers immerse themselves in the inner world of the characters in Stranger Things, feeling their fear, anxiety and bewilderment at unexplained phenomena.

(14) (Script) "It's a black hole pulling everything in". Will Byers, one of teen characters, draws a parallel to a black hole from outer space, explaining how powerful and dangerous the Mind Destroyer is to the residents of Hawkins.

<u>Euphemisms.</u> Euphemisms are less used in the TV series Stranger Things, however, they serve to mitigate the horror of what the characters see, so as not to frighten and disappoint others too much. Euphemisms in the series often arise from avoiding direct descriptions of what is happening and causing pain and fear. This makes the dialogues more realistic and emotionally deeper.

(15) (Script) Hopper: Murray, everyone set down there?

Murray: All set but I've got <u>some company</u> which I'd love you to obliterate.

Hopper: We'll do. Hang tight.

In this scene, Murray was under siege by monsters, although he had «reduced» them to «some company». In Stranger Things, characters sometimes use euphemisms in moments of fear to mitigate the seriousness of a situation or to hide their true level of anxiety. This adds to the realism of their behaviour, showing how people try to cope with their experiences without directly admitting their emotions.

Conclusions and perspectives. To sum up, the TV series which is positioned as a horror movie approaches its goal to evoke fear with the viewers using not only visual effects but also carefully directing the play of the actors in terms of verbalizing experienced fear. The phonetic features of expressing the emotion of fear help to draw the viewer's attention to the event in the series and to decorate the atmosphere of a particular situation. The lexical means in the series

are powerful tools for improving the impact of fear. With the help of dialogues, addresses, exclamations and emotive vocabulary, the authors create a unique atmosphere of anxiety and tension that immerses the viewer in the world of the unreal. The stylistic means of expressing fear help to turn an ordinary story into a colourful and emotionally enriched one. Both comparisons, hyperbole, metaphors and euphemisms play the role of psychological tools in the context to emphasize the situation and fascinate the person on the other side of the screen. Studying the means of verbalizing fear suggests that forming the semantic field of the relevant concept and studying its core and peripheral zones as well as research at the verbalization of fear in intercultural communication and identifying strategies of creating the effect of fear in both film discourse and fiction appear to be a relevant continuation of this investigation.

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