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**ENGLISH PROMOTIONAL DISCOURSE  
OF INTERNATIONAL LOGISTICS COMPANIES:  
STRATEGIES AND MEANS OF SELF-PRESENTATION**

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The article investigates how international logistics companies represent themselves through the use of language on their corporate websites in response to social challenges such as compulsive nature of advertising and promotional activities in business and other areas of social concern, as well as essentially competitive nature of professional activities. The purpose of the research is to identify and describe various tactics and linguistic tools that implement the strategy of self-presentation in the English-language Internet promotional discourse. The current paper explores various approaches to determining the status of promotional discourse, its correlations with related advertising discourse; examines the concept of corporate image and its role in creating a positive image of a company; studies basic features of image discourse, namely: the positive orientation of information that contributes to the formation of a positive corporate image, motivational nature, and a low degree of spontaneity of texts. A review of the current literature and theoretical analysis of the basic concepts of study is followed by the explanatory analysis of the strategy of self-presentation, linguistic means and techniques for its implementation. The authors describe promotional strategies and tactics which international logistics companies use on their official websites to build a favorable image among the target audience, as well as analyze the basic topics and the linguistic means of their verbalization in the English-language Internet promotional discourse. The results of the research show that promotional discourse (or image discourse) constitutes a separate type of discourse which has its own strategies and tactics of self-presentation aiming to construct an image of a successful and prestigious company and a positive attitude of the public and target audience towards the logistics company in question.

**Key words:** promotional discourse; advertising discourse; corporate image; strategy; tactic; self-presentation.

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## **Англоязычный промоционный дискурс интернациональных логистических компаний: стратегии и средства самопрезентации**

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В статье исследуется, какими лингвистическими средствами международные логистические компании представляют себя на корпоративных веб-сайтах в ответ на такие современные социальные вызовы, как навязчивый характер рекламы и рекламных мероприятий в бизнесе и других областях; конкурентный характер профессиональной деятельности. Целью исследования является выявление и описание тактического аппарата и лингвистических средств, реализующих стратегию самопрезентации, в англоязычном промоционном интернет-дискурсе. Рассматриваются различные подходы к определению статуса промоционного дискурса, его корреляция со смежным рекламным дискурсом; раскрывается понятие корпоративного имиджа и его роль в создании положительного представления о компании; изучаются такие основные особенности имиджевого дискурса, как позитивная направленность информации, способствующая формированию положительного корпоративного имиджа, побудительный характер и низкая степень спонтанности текстов. Обзор современной литературы и анализ теоретико-понятийного аппарата исследования сопровождаются пояснительным анализом стратегии самопрезентации, коммуникативных тактик, языковых средств и приемов ее реализации. В практической части статьи авторы описывают стратегии и тактики продвижения, которые международные логистические компании используют на своем официальном сайте для конструирования благоприятного имиджа среди целевой аудитории, а также изучают основные тематические области (топосы) англоязычного промоционного интернет-дискурса и лингвистические средства их вербализации. Результаты исследования показывают, что промоционный дискурс (или имиджевый дискурс) представляет собой самостоятельный вид дискурса, отличный от смежного рекламного дискурса коммуникативно-прагматическими установками и целями: стратегии и тактики самопрезентации, типичные для промодискурса, направлены на построение имиджа успешной и престижной компании, формирование положительного отношения целевой аудитории к данной организации.

**Ключевые слова:** промоционный дискурс; рекламный дискурс; корпоративный имидж; стратегия; тактика; самопрезентация.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past fifteen years, the development of mass media technologies and mass communications has come a long way. Most communication at the moment takes place on the Internet, and obtaining any information has also become possible online. As a result, discourses are becoming more and more mediatized. Media discourse is mainly carried out in the media space, which is understood as a set of subjects of the media sphere, texts transmitted by them and a collective addressee that perceives these texts — a mass audience. D. Crystal emphasizes that the Internet is a linguistic revolution and is interconnected with the language used in the Internet (Crystal 2006: 8). It means that the Internet has developed a unique language belonging only to the cyberspace, which has its own features that combine elements of written and spoken language. The types of media discourse are directly related to the genre and functional features of the media space. N. N. Olomskaya distinguishes several types of media discourse according to their communicative functions, thus identifying journalistic discourse, advertising discourse, and PR discourse (which is also called promotional or image discourse) (Оломская 2013: 253).

At present, promotional genres have undoubtedly become the most versatile and rapidly developing discursive area, since most companies have their own websites on the World Wide Web or pages on social networks, helping the audience to get acquainted with the structure of the company, see the list of services and goods, and obtain contact information. Several factors have been in play here, including 1) the availability of new technology in mass communication and a massive information explosion as a result of this, 2) the compulsive nature of advertising and promotional activities in business and other areas of social concern, and 3) the essentially competitive nature of professional and academic activities.

As a result, the entire gamut of advertising activities has undergone dramatic changes and, in turn, has influenced other forms of discourse which only remotely and perhaps occasionally displayed promotional elements. The discourse of promotion is common in contemporary culture which has even been characterized as a “promotional” or “consumer” culture. The process of marketization and commodification has generalized promotion as a communicative function in society, and this discourse serves as “a vehicle for ‘selling’ goods, services, organizations, ideas or people” (Fairclough 2010: 138). In the current cultural climate, many discursive activities have been influenced by promotional concerns, and thus many institutional genres have incorporated elements of promotion.

There is no universally recognized definition of what constitutes promotional discourse. An analysis of theoretical literature on the subject shows that sometimes the terms ‘advertising’ and ‘promotional discourse’ are used interchangeably and

without precision. Vijay Kumar Bhatia uses the term ‘promotional discourse’ to refer to a discourse that combines several closely related genres with an overlapping communicative purpose of promoting a product or service to a potential customer (Bhatia 2005). Notable examples of promotional genres may include advertisements, promotional letters, job applications, book ads, company brochures, travel brochures, and a number of others. Promotional generic patterns are complex, they mix and embed non-promotional generic elements to achieve promotional goals. Often viewed as a form of discourse designed to inform and promote with the aim of selling ideas, goods or services to a specific group of people, advertising discourse is recognized as the primary and most dominant form of promotional discourse. Variations, in terms of form, medium, range of products, and strategies employed, partly capture the enormous potential that promotional discourse displays in a culture of consumerism. Thus, the author does not differentiate between promotional and advertising discourse and defines advertising discourse as a variety of promotional discourse. Promotional discourse is seen as a constellation of several closely related genres with an overlapping communicative purpose of promoting products and services to potential customers.

Other authors clearly differentiate between promotional and advertising discourses taking into account their functional and pragmatic characteristics. Even though the structure and functions of both PR and advertising discourse reflect the characteristics of public life, they are implemented in different ways. According to G. G. Pocheptsov, the purpose of advertising is “to include us in its structure of meanings, to encourage us to participate in the decoding of its linguistic and visual signs...” (Почепцов 2001: 71), while the purpose of PR communication is “to reach the general public, and not to a narrowly defined circle of consumers” (Почепцов 2001: 459). Thus, the only function of advertising discourse is to persuade people to buy a product or service which is portrayed as good, positive, and advantageous, while the aim of promotional discourse is to portray oneself as good and positive and thus convince people to buy products and services from this particular company.

For E. N. Klimova, promotional discourse (image discourse) means the relationship between the organization and the target audience for the exchange of necessary and sufficient information, ensuring mutual understanding and interaction. The author highlights the following characteristics of this discourse:

1. A common goal in relation to the target audience, namely: to create a positive image.
2. Positive presentation of information, since the purpose of promotional texts is to form a positive opinion among the audience about a particular organization. Even if a company has problems, promotional texts should not accentuate them; they should be written in a lighter mood.

3. Motivational nature of texts, since their purpose is to influence the audience's opinion about the organization. Due to this implied incentive, promotional texts are active and dynamic and seek to accomplish a wide range of tasks such as promoting a brand, informing customers about economic changes, and establishing new contacts with potential customers and partners.

4. A low degree of spontaneity of texts: all promotional texts are carefully planned, edited, and published.

5. Texts of promotional nature can be classified according to their purpose (to draw attention to the business, to interest new customers, to remind the audience about the organization, to influence in a certain way the opinion of the audience regarding this or that subject of economic activity).

6. Operability of the image discourse as it accomplishes a number of pragmatic tasks. The central task is to help people inside and outside the company develop such an image of the organization that would contribute to achieving the management's expressed goals and objectives (Климова 2012: 153).

In the promotional or image discourse (in this paper the terms are used interchangeably), the most relevant concept is the image of an organization or *corporate image*. Several definitions of 'corporate image' have been offered. According to the definition provided by A. K. Semenov, a corporate image is "an image specially designed for the interests of the company, which is purposefully introduced into the minds of the target audience" (Семенов, Маслова 2000: 26). A. V. Karpov posits that the image of an organization is "its image that has developed in the external environment of the organization, based mainly on its specific and positive features" (Карпов 1999: 36). These definitions do not contradict but complement each other, since the former definition emphasizes the procedural nature of constructing the corporate image, while the latter stresses the result of this activity (Кабанова, Календжян 2022: 116).

The corporate image is closely connected to the corporate culture which is described as a complex of material and moral values which indicate the company's characteristics, company's values, philosophies and its self-presentation on the official website, at conferences, interviews, etc.

## 2. Material and Methods

The study data comprise promotional texts published on "About Us" pages on the official websites of the following international logistics companies: *DHL* (an American-founded German logistics company providing courier, package delivery, and express mail service), *FedEx* (an American multinational conglomerate holding company focused on transportation, e-commerce, and business service), *Lineage Logistics* (an international warehousing and logistics management company and an industrial real estate investment trust (REIT)), *C.H. Robinson* (an

American transportation company that includes third-party logistics), XPO (an American transportation company that conducts less-than-truckload shipping in North America) and several others.

The study relies on the following research methods: comparative analysis of promotional texts of different logistics companies; componential and definition analysis; pragmatic analysis; statistics analysis and frequency analysis; word cloud platforms (e.g.: <https://wordsccloud.pythonanywhere.com/>).

### 3. Results and Discussion

A company's official website is one of the most common ways to promote its business and present information about it. In line with the strategy of self-presentation, the most important part of the website is the "About Us" page — the place where companies introduce themselves to the viewers, including potential customers, partners, employees, and supporters. The reader can explore the history, structure, and traditions of the company. By focusing on their history and reputation, companies seek to build their global relevance and market their "products" and "services" to potential purchasers, its diverse national and international audience. This page may be also called "Company" or "Our Company."

The analysis of the promotional discourse of several international logistics companies has proved that *the strategy of self-presentation* is implemented through a number of emotional and rational tactics, using a whole range of linguistic means on the lexical, morphological, and syntactic levels.

*The rational tactic* includes markers of rational self-presentation such as terms and quantitative data (Дзараева, Бороздина 2018: 30):

(1) *With the combination of our multimodal transportation management system and expertise, we use our information advantage to deliver smarter solutions for our 100,000 customers and 85,000 contract carriers* (C. H. Robinson);

(2) *...we're bringing best-in-class cold storage companies into the Lineage family to seamlessly connect the end-to-end supply chain dots for customers* (Lineage Logistics).

In these examples, the use of the terms 'multimodal transportation management' (transportation by mixed modes of transport), 'end-to-end supply chain' (delivery from suppliers to consumers) indicates the company's familiarity with modern logistics terms and techniques, which increases the level of confidence in its work.

Quantitative data: companies seek to create the image of a successful and respected organization by providing numerical data, such as the number of their employees, and by emphasizing their advanced technologies and logistics methods:

(3) *Our networks reach more than 220 countries and territories, linking more than 99 percent of the world's GDP* (FedEx);

(5) *Our unique network of 24 ferry routes on a fixed schedule, 55 ferries, 8 port terminals, 9,000 trailer and container units, and 8,000 + local ferry and auto logistics experts across the EU & UK will secure on-time delivery, every time* (DFDS);

(6) *The Rudolph Logistics Group is an international logistics service provider with approximately 5,200 employees working at 45 locations in Germany, Europe, the United States and the Arabian Peninsula* (Rudolph Logistics).

In the examples above, references to a large number of countries to which transportation is carried out, the number of employees working in the organization, as well as the number of different modes of transport, create the image of a solid and successful company.

The markers of *emotional tactics* of self-presentation are metaphors:

(7) *By joining the team, you can plant the seed for a career that helps both you and Lineage grow* (Lineage Logistics);

(8) *If we fail to keep the products we handle safe, it's our families and communities who pay the price* (Lineage Logistics);

(9) *They're the key to our unique culture and our ability to deliver performance and growth for everyone that we serve* (XPO);

(10) *This is what fuels our commitment to being a sustainability leader as we move the world forward by delivering what matters* (UPS);

(11) *It's part of our DNA to go above and beyond, day in, day out* (DHL).

In the examples above, the 'plant the seed' metaphor invites people to join the company in order to create a reserve for the future; 'pay the price' plays on the double meaning of the phrase, indicating that people literally pay for the delivery of a damaged or otherwise unsafe product, and figuratively pay for this delivery by suffering the emotional damage from this unsatisfactory episode; 'the key' compares employees to the core of the organization's particular culture; the verb 'to fuel' is used to create a sense that the company is like an automotive mechanism which does not work without the energy enhanced by the company's desire to become a leader; the use of the biological term 'DNA' gives an impression that the company has an inborn desire for constant improvement, pursuit of excellence being an indelible part of its identity.

*The tactic of self-praise* intensifies positive qualities of the company with the help of gradable adjectives in the superlative degree and non-gradable extreme adjectives containing the idea of excessive quality / degree in their semantics: *cutting-edge (advanced), up-to-date (actual), best-in-class, great, best, highest, biggest, largest, fantastic, up-to-date, cost-effective, outstanding, excellent, high-tech, exceptional, leading*.

(12) *As one of the **largest** providers of freight transportation, we have capacity as it's needed* (XPO);

(13) *Innovative technology, streamlined operations and a global network of facilities combine to form one of the world's **most dynamic** companies in temperature-controlled logistics* (Lineage Logistics);

(14) *We are the world's **most powerful and most connected** logistics platform* (C. H. Robinson);

The superlatives of the adjectives *the largest, most dynamic, most powerful and most connected* are used to give the company an image of progressiveness and innovation.

**The tactic of implicit self-presentation** is expressed indirectly, without a direct indication of the object of positive evaluation, and it presents the company in a generally attractive, favorable light:

(15) *Learn more about how XPO delivers customized transportation solutions to the most successful companies in the world* (XPO);

(16) *We are honored when the companies we work with recognize our superior service* (C. H. Robinson).

**The tactic of rapprochement with the addressee** involves creating the atmosphere of intimacy. Companies build relationships with the public and potential customers using the personal pronouns 'we' and 'you.' Companies are presented as one living organism where the work of the employees influences the work of the whole organization, so that if one component goes missing or does not work properly, the whole system is going to crash:

(17) *Working at C. H. Robinson, **you** can connect the world through technology and innovation* (C. H. Robinson);

(18) ***Our** job is to help **you** succeed* (XPO);

(19) *At FedEx, **we** believe that a connected world is a better world, and that belief guides everything **we** do* (FedEx);

(20) *Together, **we** are an organization that is deeply rooted in generations of cold storage expertise* (Lineage Logistics).

Companies mostly address themselves as 'we' throughout discourse which constructs the same-level personal relation with the reader and also emphasizes the idea of the company's teamwork.

Logistics companies usually make a list of their most recent awards and achievements, using such words as 'to be proud,' 'to be recognized,' and 'recipient.' **The tactic of appeal to international fame, awards, and certificates** increases the credibility of a company, since awards are concrete evidence of the company's strength and success. Companies are committed to providing reliable and safe transportation services, thus they maintain the highest standards of quality and compliance and obtain certifications and accreditations in the transportation industry



which demonstrate their dedication to safety, environmental responsibility and customer satisfaction:

(21) *We're proud to be one of the most admired brands in the world and one of the best places to work* (FedEx);

(22) *We are constantly pushing ourselves and the broader industry to do things differently and do things better — and we are proud to be recognized for our leadership* (Lineage Logistics);

(23) *DHL is a proud recipient of prestigious awards for outstanding achievement in sales and customer service — a testament to the customer-centric mindset at the heart of every shipment we deliver* (DHL).

Partnerships with different communities and charitable organizations expand the positive image of a company and enhance the probability of choosing this particular corporation by a potential customer over others.

(24) *Our partners inspire us to keep pushing forward, always think ahead and work to solve our industry's toughest challenges* (Lineage Logistics);

(25) *Working with two established partners — Teach for All and SOS Children's Villages — GoTeach helps us to give back to the communities we serve in a lasting, meaningful way* (DHL).

Since modern companies cannot succeed without the work of the staff who constitute the essence of the organization, companies tend to stress the relevance and value of their workers using such words as 'believe,' 'support,' 'symbol,' and 'core,' creating the image of a friendly company:

(26) *We firmly believe that it's our people that make us great* (DHL);

(27) *We support the causes our people are passionate about and deepen their impact* (C.H. Robinson);

(28) *It is also symbol of the collective strength behind our company — our people* (Lineage Logistics);

(29) *Our customers and, of course, our employees are at the core of the company and are actively involved in all decision-making and implementation processes* (Duvenbeck).

**The tactic of implicit obligation** presupposes that with the help of the modal verbs 'can,' 'need,' and 'should' companies show their concern towards customers' rights and choices, while avoidance of explicit obligation is a distinctive feature of promotional discourse. It demonstrates a marked shift in the authority relations between companies and potential customers who have more options in choosing the products (Hoang & Rojas-Lizana 2015: 12):

(30) *You can use FedEx® Sustainability Insights to track and help reduce shipping emissions* (FedEx);

(31) *Through our seamless, multimodal set of global services, you can reduce the need for multiple providers* (C.H. Robinson);

(32) *That's why you **need** a powerful, international network to manage your supply chain* (DHL);

(33) *...everyone **should** have the same opportunities* (DFDS).

**The tactic of attracting attention** indicates that companies seek to build up a friendly relationship with potential customers through direct and rhetorical questions and exclamatory sentences. Thus, the company reduces the distance between itself and the reader, making them feel that it is interested in their opinion:

(34) *W*

*a* (35) *W*

*h* (36) *F*

*a* To analyze the most common topics present in promotional discourse, we have used a word cloud platform (<https://wordscound.pythonanywhere.com/>) which indicates frequency of individual words. The analysis of the factual material shows that key topics emphasized when creating the corporate image of international logistics companies are the following: reliability, devotion to their customers, dynamism, success, innovative nature of technologies, global reach, a leading role among other enterprises, a high quality of services provided, exclusivity, and professionalism.

*w* DHL emphasizes its global reach by a range of synonyms like ‘international,’ ‘world-class,’ ‘worldwide’ (see Fig. 1). The company seeks to declare its international importance by promoting the image of a global organization:

*b* (37) *We facilitate **international** trade, we support businesses to go **global** and we help ensure the world stays connected* (DHL);

*h* (38) *Such **world-class** events enhance the profile of our brand and provide an excellent platform for people to experience DHL logistics “live”* (DHL);

*p* (39) *A company that pioneered cross border express shipping in 1969 and now operates in more than 220 countries and territories **worldwide*** (DHL).

*b*  
*ф*  
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Figure 1. DHL

FedEx accentuates its cutting edge technologies by implementing words like ‘*highly-advanced,*’ ‘*innovations,*’ ‘*collaborative*’ (see Fig. 2). Companies constantly compete with one another, and, as a result, a lot of attention is paid to creating and strengthening the image of the organization, which is reflected in the developing of most current technologies:

(40) *FedEx Ground has recently undergone a transformation, investing in **highly-advanced technology and innovations** that have resulted in one of the **most automated networks** in the industry (FedEx);*

(41) *This **collaborative** technology is among the first of its kind in the logistics industry (FedEx);*

(42) *FedEx sees benefits of next-generation **innovation** for our team members and operations, including computer-assisted vehicles, **artificial intelligence, robotics and drones** (FedEx).*

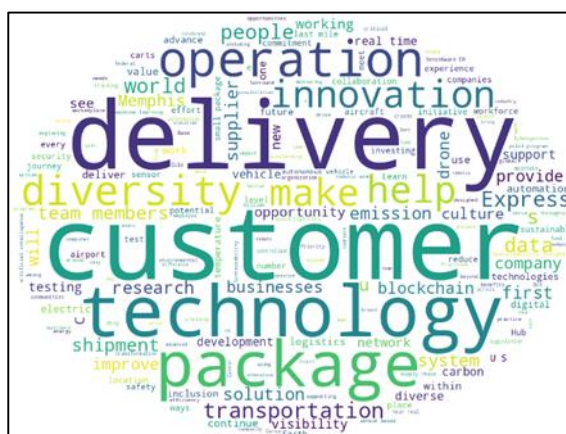


Figure 2. FedEx

C. H. Robinson highlights the importance of its employees by using words like ‘*strength,*’ ‘*inclusion,*’ and ‘*to commit*’ (see Fig. 3). The company demonstrates diversity and equity when it comes to its workers. The frequent use of personal and possessive pronouns of the first person plural ‘*we*’ and ‘*our*’ emphasizes the idea of close and friendly relationships within the company as well as its friendly, service-oriented attitude towards consumers:

(43) *We are one of the World’s Most Admired Companies and the **strength of our people** is our Leading Edge (C.H. Robinson);*

(44) *When it comes to diversity, equity, and inclusion, we strive to create **a culture of belonging, core to our values,** that embraces the unique experiences and diverse backgrounds of our people to create **a stronger, more innovative, and successful team** (C.H. Robinson);*

(45) *Discover the ways we are committed to **servicing our communities, environment, and people** (C.H. Robinson).*



Figure 3. C. H. Robinson

The analysis of the linguistic material shows that logistics companies have their own set of key values which help to create a unique image of the company. At the same time, there are typical semantic dominants of responsibility and tradition which emphasize professionalism, success in the company’s specific sphere, and the fact that the company’s products and services have stood the test of time.

#### 4. Conclusion

Companies construct their global identities as a response to the process of globalization and marketization which have great impact on the society. As a result, shaping global identities and nurturing a relationship with potential customers are considered as essential strategies for companies to remain competitive and relevant. Websites of international companies have been strongly affected by the advertising genre, resulting in the adoption of promotional discourse which they use to promote their prestige in order to attract more customers and other resources.

The main function of promotional discourse — a new hybrid genre within advertising discourse — is to create a positive impression of a company. This process results in forming a corporate image which has multiple definitions. The company’s corporate image is the way it presents itself in public using different strategies and tactics of self-presentation.

The “*About Us*” page contains promotional discourse where companies enhance their reputation and build their national and international relevance. It provides information about the company’s history, its philosophy and corporate values, the data about its structure and its staff, its leaders’ profiles, a list of awards and international certificates as well as information about the latest news and upcoming events, materials about current partnerships, and reports on the environmental and social impact of the company.

The logistics companies have come up with unique ideas to make their websites stand apart and to attract the attention of national and international audiences. In most cases, companies adhere to the emotional tactic of self-presentation strategy using metaphors, evaluative vocabulary, transposition of personal pronouns, direct and rhetorical questions, and exclamatory sentences. Companies also appeal to awards, stress partnerships with international brands, and emphasize the importance of their employees and customers. In line with its basic functions, promotional discourse covers a variety of topics including “Responsibility,” “History,” “Environment,” and “Advanced Technologies.” Companies appeal to their duty towards the society and indicate how proud they are to be a company with deep roots. They also seek to communicate their concern about the impact they have on the environment and the imperative to develop technologies which would both reduce the carbon footprint and ease the work of their employees. The niche topic of “Professionalism” is generally avoided, since most people are not acquainted with logistics terminology, and its excessive use might confuse potential customers.

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