

*“I am having quite a good time dodging the shells” – Exploring lexical
emotional perspectives in Scottish war correspondence*

The study of ego-documents has become a staple of linguistic investigation in recent years. However, with a few exceptions (Helmers 2016, Housiel 2014, Sandersen 2007), war correspondence is a domain surprisingly neglected in linguistic research. Based on a corpus consisting of 50 letters written between 1914 and 1918 by a Scottish Gunner, this explorative case study investigates intra-speaker variation in personal correspondence during the First World War.

In particular, this paper aims to diachronically disentangle the illusive nature of emotions as expressed by the complex lexical inventory in private war correspondence. Qualitative and quantitative research designs will be adopted to explore the way in which lexemes express the emotional development of a Scottish soldier during the war, revealing the interplay of national and occupational identity by practices such as labelling, positioning (Bucholtz & Hall 2005), the use of personal pronouns, as well as quoting practices (Arendholz et al. 2015).

Furthermore, Discourse Analysis offers valuable insights into the construction of emotions. Drawing on Bednarek's (2008) model of Emotion Talk and Emotional Talk, this explorative case study demonstrates the manifold ways in which the experience of war is conveyed at different times and to different addressees. Specifically, it will be shown how mitigating strategies and the use of irony play a crucial role in the construction of negative emotions. Further investigation will relate the use of words and phrases to the writer's level of language awareness and proficiency as shown by metalinguistic comments. In sum, this study aims to offer an example of the idiosyncratic communicative practices as illustrated in written personal war correspondence over time in a context of emotional distress.

References

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