Bachelor's Thesis

Title: The effect of expressing uncertainty in communication

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Abstract

This study explored the effect of certainty and uncertainty markers used in an email on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager. This was made possible through an online survey that included three different versions of the email from which the participants were randomly assigned and read one version of. The different versions of the emails contained only certainty markers, only uncertainty markers and no markers at all respectively. The participants evaluated the authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager that supposedly composed that email. After reading the email, participants filled out a questionnaire using a seven-point Likert scale. The evaluations did not differ between the groups that were exposed to the different versions of the email. This showed that certainty and uncertainty markers had no significant effect on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager.

Keywords: certainty markers, uncertainty markers, authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence, sociability, manager, email

Introduction

Rapid development of communication technologies has caused the need of implementation and adaptation of different modes of interaction used in modern societies (Volckaert-Legrier, Bernicot, & Bert-Erboul, 2009).The most outstanding, popular and widespread development, which is frequently used in both economic and scientific communities, is electronic mail (email) (Volckaert-Legrier, Bernicot, & Bert-Erboul, 2009). For the purpose of this study, it is intended to concentrate on the use of email in economic communities, more specifically in multinational companies. Email is an appealing medium for companies, since it provides instant notification of important matters to employees. Other than a condensed time frame, there are three other aspects of email that motivate companies to use it as a medium of communication. These aspects are; cost efficiency, convenience and the user-friendly design (Parker, 1999). Most companies prefer to create emailing guidelines that require planning and education of email use and can be accepted by the company as an emailing policy (Parker, 1999). The lack of an emailing policy can cause emails that are offensive, provocative and of course not efficient within the company. Thus, it is advised for companies to implement emailing policies, especially for the managers that address multiple employees at once (Parker, 1999).

Many variables of language can change and guide perceptions of the message and of the communicator of the message (Hovland, Janis, & Kelly, 1953). Speech style is one of the linguistic dimensions that strongly affect the attitude of receivers (Bradac, Hemphill, & Tardy, 1981). The concept of 'Speech style' was introduced by Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978). They divided speech style in two categories: the powerful and the powerless speech style. According to them, powerless speech style was characterized by several language features which are uncertainty markers (sort of, kind of), certainty markers (really, very), hesitations (um, er), polite forms, formal forms and deictic phrases (over there). In previous literature, uncertainty markers are also referred to as 'hedges' and certainty markers are referred to as 'intensifiers'. The powerless speech style is used by people who are in a low power position. The powerful speech in contrast, was characterized by not containing any of the language features mentioned above. In their research Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978) analyzed reactions to trial testimony. They created different testimonies that used powerful and powerless speech styles and asked participants to evaluate how they perceived the speaker. The powerless speech style was created using uncertainty markers, certainty markers, rising intonations, formal forms and polite forms. The powerful speech style did not contain any of those features. They found that the credibility and the attractiveness of the

speakers were affected significantly by the speech style they used. Their results showed that when the speaker used the powerful speech style he was found more credible and also more attractive than when he used the powerless speech style.

Hosman's (1989) research, which was again in a court setting, contained defendants' responses to the attorney's questions concerning an auto accident. Adding to Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr (1978)'s research, he created different messages including high/low use of certainty markers, high/low use of uncertainty markers and high/low use of hesitations and compared all of the messages to one generically chosen powerless message which contained all of the markers that creates the powerless speech style. He asked the participants to evaluate the speakers on the perceived authoritativeness, competence, character, attractiveness and sociability aspects. The aspects that were impacted significantly were perceived authoritativeness or power, sociability and character. As the character aspect, he referred to trustworthiness and honesty. The research revealed that when the speaker used a low level of uncertainty markers, compared to a higher level, he was perceived more authoritative. Similarly low use of hesitations also resulted in a more authoritative perception compared to a higher use. The use of certainty markers had no significant effect on perceived authoritativeness. Concerning the perceived character, when the speaker used a lower count of uncertainty markers, he was evaluated more trustworthy compared to a higher count. Same again for hesitations, when they were used in a lower count the speaker was found to be more trustworthy and honest compared to a higher count. Certainty markers showed no significant effect on perceived character. For sociability, when hesitations were used in a lower count the speaker was evaluated as more sociable compared to a higher count. Certainty and uncertainty markers had no significant effect on sociability.

Bradac and Mulac (1984) also compared the different markers that create the powerless speech but instead of comparing them to one generic powerless speech style, they compared the powerlessness markers to each other. The different powerlessness markers that they used were; uncertainty markers, tags, certainty markers, polite forms, hesitations and deictics. There was also one message that contained no markers, and this message was called the powerful statement. The participants were told that these messages were the responses given in a part of a job interview. This means that the participants have read the responses that were supposedly given by someone in a relatively lower power position. They asked participants to evaluate each message depending on if the speaker appears to be powerful or powerless. They found that the statement which used a powerful speech style was evaluated as powerful as the statement which contained polite words. This is a contrast to earlier

research where polite words had been considered part of the powerless speech style in earlier research. And from the rest of the markers, certainty markers scored relatively higher in the aspect of power compared to other markers which scored in the middle or relatively on the lower half of the scale. They also asked the participants to answer whether the messages would fulfill the intention to appear authoritative and sociable. When certainty markers, tags and hesitations were used, the speaker was found likely to appear sociable but not so likely to appear authoritative. The powerful statement was found to fulfill the intention to appear authoritative more than it would fulfill the intention to appear sociable. However in conclusion, the powerful speech was found to be evaluated the best in both aspects; sociability and authoritativeness. For both aspects, certainty markers were ranked in the second place, so in the higher half of the spectrum concerning the perceived power. This contradicts the study by Erickson et al. (1978), which classified certainty markers to be one of the markers that created the powerless speech style.

Hosman and Siltanen (2011) investigated the effect of uncertainty markers and tag questions that are used in arguments that are in favor of an idea on the perceived speaker power and competence. Their findings showed that the use of uncertainty markers did not have any significant effect neither on perceived speaker power nor on the perceived speaker competence. This contradicts the previous research that is discussed above in which uncertainty markers had negative effects on perceived power and competence. They suggested that the findings of Durik, Britt, Reynolds, and Storey (2008) could explain this. In their research, Durik, Britt, Reynolds, and Storey (2008) found that the effect of the uncertainty markers depended on whether a statement was qualified as a statement of an opinion or of a fact. If the uncertainty markers were used with a statement that is a fact, the statement was evaluated to be less professional compared to when it was used in a statement that is not a fact but is open for interpretation. Since Hosman and Siltanen (2011) used uncertainty markers in a context where the statements were based on opinions and not strongly on facts, it could be that the uncertainty markers were not evaluated negatively concerning the perceived competence of the speaker based on the context they were used.

In our study, we intend to focus on the way managers are perceived by their employees concerning the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability when they use certainty markers, uncertainty markers or no markers at all in their communication. This is going to be investigated by proposing different versions of an e-mail composed by an imaginary manager and asking participants to evaluate the characteristics of the manager.

There have been several motivations to conduct this study. First, the contradicting findings concerning the way that certainty and uncertainty markers affect the perception of the speaker. Second, the previous research mainly concentrated on the way that people in a low power position were perceived when they used the different speech styles. With this study, we aim to investigate the way a manager, thus someone in a high power position, is perceived when he uses different speech styles. For managers, there might be situations where they prefer to use powerless speech intentionally. According to Bradac and Mulac (1984), in some circumstances it is possible to use powerless speech style in our favour, for example to appear more approachable. Knowing the differences between the different types of powerlessness markers and their effect on perception can help managers to communicate more efficiently. For companies, who will be creating e-mailing policies, it can be beneficial to determine which markers to use depending on the goal of the message that will be transmitted to their employees in order to maximize the outcome.

Our intention is to investigate the effect of speech style in the context of English as the main language of communication (lingua franca). For this reason, this study was conducted in English. It is also important to stress that English is becoming the dominant global lingua franca during the past few decades and every year more and more companies adopt English as the main language of communication (Chen, 2016). The findings of this study can be used in the emailing policies created by companies because with this study it is intended to investigate the effect of the speech style used in emailing on the perception of the manager's characteristics.

The following research question was formulated for this study:

RQ: What is the effect of certainty and uncertainty markers used in an email from a manager on perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager ?

Hypotheses:

Concerning certainty markers, in his research Hosman (1989) found that certainty markers had no significant effect on authoritativeness, on trustworthiness or on sociability. Adding to that, competence scale was not significantly affected by any of the markers. However in their research Bradac and Mulac (1953) found that certainty markers scored higher in sociability scale when compared to the statement with no markers. These contradictory findings about the perceived sociability is preventing us from creating a hypothesis

concerning the effect of certainty markers on sociability compared to the email that contains no markers. Based on these findings,the following hypotheses were formulated:

(1) The version of the email that contains certainty markers will not differ from the email that contains no markers concerning the perceived authoritativeness and trustworthiness.

(2) The three different versions of the emails (certainty markers, uncertainty markers, no markers) will not differ from each other concerning the perceived competence.

Concerning uncertainty markers, Hosman (1989) found that a low level of uncertainty markers resulted in a more authoritative and a more trustworthy perception of the speaker compared to a higher use of uncertainty markers. Adding to that, Bradac and Mulac (1984), found that the statement that contained uncertainty markers scored the lowest compared to the statements that contained certainty markers and no markers at all concerning authoritativeness and sociability. The highest score belonged to the message that contained no markers in both scales, followed by the statement that contained certainty markers. Concerning the competence scale, there were no significant findings in either of the studies mentioned above. The following hypothesis was formulated based on these findings:

(3) The version of the email that contains uncertainty markers will result in a perception of less authoritativeness, trustworthiness and sociability than the emails that contain certainty markers and no markers.

Method

Materials

The stimulus material consisted of three different versions of an e-mail written by a manager in an imaginary multinational company that uses English as the main language of communication. There were three different versions of the e-mail .The first version contained uncertainty markers, the second version contained certainty markers and the last version contained no markers. The placement of the markers was the same in the first and second version of the e-mail. Other than the markers, everything was kept the same. Uncertainty markers used in the email were; could, possibly, probably, potentially, might, and may.

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Certainty markers used in the email were; surely, definitely, certainly and clearly. The 'No markers' variable is especially chosen as a control group. The email was about the possible consequences of Coronavirus (COVID- 19) for the company and the actions that the employees can take. All three versions of the email can be found in the appendix.

Subjects

Ninety seven university- student volunteers aged between nineteen and twenty seven who have English as their second language participated in the study (58 females, 39 males; $M =$ 21.62 years; $SD=$ 1.63). From all of the participants, thirty of them were exposed to the email that contained no markers (17 females, 13 males; $M=$21.50; $SD=$ 1.28), thirty three of them were exposed to the email that contained certainty markers (23 females, 10 males; $M=$ 21.36, $SD=$ 1.62), and thirty four of them was exposed to the email that contained the uncertainty markers (18 females, 16 males; $M=$ 21.97; $SD=$ 1.88). The participants for this study were recruited using social media, and our personal network.

Design

A between- subjects design was used. One third of the participants were exposed to the first version of the e-mail (certainty markers), one third of the participants were exposed to the second version of the e-mail (uncertainty markers) and one third of the participants was exposed to the third version of the e-mail (no markers). The group who was exposed to the third version of the email was the control group since the third version of the email was not manipulated. Our study had one independent variable, speech style (three levels: uncertainty markers, certainty markers and no markers).

Instruments

Four dependent variables were used. To measure each variable, a questionnaire that contained several statements was proposed. A likert scale that is composed of seven degrees (varying from I totally disagree to I totally agree) was used in the questionnaire. First dependent variable was authoritativeness. The components chosen for this variable were power, authoritativeness, confidence and strength.. The second dependent variable was trustworthiness. The components chosen for this variable were trust, reliability and honesty. The third dependent variable was competence. The components chosen for the variable were competence and knowledgeability. The fourth and the last dependent variable was sociability.

The components chosen for this variable were to be pleasing, likeability, being good-natured and sociability. The statements used in the questionnaire can be found in the appendix.

For the authoritativeness variable, a modified version of the authoritativeness scale of Hosman (1989) was chosen. In his study he associated the following components with authoritativeness: power, competency, authoritativeness, being dominant, strength, aggressiveness and confidence. We chose to only use authoritativeness, strength and confidence to keep the survey shorter.For the trustworthiness variable, we chose to modify the character scale used by Hosman (1989). Firstly, the name of the scale seemed too broad. So, it was changed from 'character' to 'trustworthiness'. Secondly, the reliability component was added to the honesty and trustworthiness components that were originally used in the scale. For the sociability variable, the sociability scale of Hosman (1989) was used without any modifications. For the competence variable, a modified version of the Speaker Competence scale of Hosman and Siltanen (2011) was used. They used likeability, competency, knowledgeability and trustworthiness as components of the Speaker Competence scale. We had used likeability components in the sociability scale and trustworthiness in the trustworthiness scale beforehand and thus, it was decided to keep only competency and knowledgeability as the components of this scale. The name of the scale was changed from 'speaker competence' to 'competence'. The reliability of 'authoritativeness' comprising four items was good $\alpha = .86$. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'authoritativeness', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'trustworthiness' comprising three items was good $\alpha = .84$. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'trustworthiness', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'competence' comprising two items was good $\alpha = .85$. Consequently, the mean of the two items was used to calculate the compound variable 'competence', which was used in the further analyses. The reliability of 'sociability' comprising four items was good $\alpha = .90$. Consequently, the mean of all four items was used to calculate the compound variable 'sociability', which was used in the further analyses.

Procedure

Participants were assigned randomly to one of the three conditions: uncertainty markers, certainty markers and no markers at all. After being randomly assigned to one of the three different levels of the independent variable, participants received an online survey, which contained only one version of the email. At first, they got informed about the study and asked to give consent for the use of their data. After giving an informed consent, they were told that

they will soon read an email that is composed by a manager and sent out to his employees. They were informed that after reading the email, they will be asked to evaluate the manager. Additionally, it was asked for them to imagine that they are one of the employees that received that email when evaluating the manager. To maximize the motivation of the participants, there was not a certain time limit to read the email. Thus, they could read the email as many times as they deemed necessary. After reading the provided version of the email, they encountered thirteen questions to evaluate the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager using a 7 point Likert scale (varying from I totally disagree to I totally agree). Once they had started answering the questions, the email was no longer visible on the same screen however they could go back to the email if they deemed it necessary. At the end of the survey they were also asked to evaluate their own English level, to evaluate the English level of the manager, if the email sounded natural to them and if they had any comments that they would like to share. They could indicate their level of English and the level of English of the manager on a scale 1 to 10 (1= very poor, 10= native) and to answer if the email sounded natural to them simply by 'Yes' or 'No'.

Statistical treatment

The research question was examined by comparing the responses of the three groups to each other. A one-way univariate analysis of variance was performed on the dependent variables; the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager. Post- hoc tests were conducted using the Tukey test. The same test was performed to investigate if the groups differed in the way they evaluated the English level of the manager. To investigate if there was a significant difference between the responses of the three groups concerning if the email sounded natural to them, a Chi-square test was conducted.

Results

To answer our research question 'What is the effect of certainty and uncertainty markers used in an email from a manager on perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager ?', a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to compare three groups concerning the dependent variables; 'authoritativeness', 'trustworthiness', 'sociability' and 'competence'. One of the participants that was exposed to the email that contained the uncertainty markers did not complete the survey, so his responses were not valid for the analysis.

Authoritativeness.. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of marker type on authoritativeness ($F (2, 94) = 1.86$, $p=.160$). The mean scores and the standard deviations can be found in table 1.

Trustworthiness. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of marker type on trustworthiness ($F(2, 94) = 2.04$, $p= .136$). The mean scores and the standard deviations can be found in table 1.

Sociability. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of marker type on competence ($F (2,94) = 2.12$, $p = .125$). The mean scores and the standard deviations can be found in table 1.

Competence. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of marker type on sociability ($F(2,94) = 1.81$, $p=.168$). The mean scores and the standard deviations can be found in table 1.

Based on these findings, the first hypothesis which suggested that there would be no differences between the email that contains no markers and the email that contains certainty markers concerning the perceived authoritativeness and trustworthiness and the second hypothesis that suggested that the three different versions of the email would not differ concerning the perceived competence are supported by the results. The third hypothesis which suggested that the version of the email that contains uncertainty markers would result in a perception of less authoritativeness, trustworthiness and sociability than the emails that contain certainty markers and no markers was rejected since the three different versions of the email did not differ in any of the aspects mentioned.

Table 1. Means and standard deviations (between brackets) of the perceived qualities of the manager depending on the marker type used in emails.

	No markers *n*= 30 *M (SD)*	Certainty markers *n* = 33 *M (SD)*	Uncertainty markers *n* = 34 *M (SD)*
Authoritativeness	5.27 (.93)	5.06 (1.24)	4.73 (1.18)
Trustworthiness	5.54 (.68)	5.30 (1.16)	5.06 (.95)
Competence	5.30 (1.20)	4.98 (1.25)	4.63 (1.41)
Sociability	5.23 (.95)	4.74 (.97)	4.86 (1.17)

In addition, to investigate if the groups differed on the way they evaluated the English level of the manager, a one-way analysis of variance was carried out. A one-way analysis of variance showed no significant effect of marker type on the evaluated english level of the manager $F(2,92) < 1$. Means and standard deviations can be found in table 2.

Lastly, to further investigate if the versions of the emails that contained different types of markers differed a Chi-square test was carried out. A Chi-square test showed a significant relation between the version of the email and if the email sounded natural or not ($\chi^2(2) = 6.22$, $p = .045$). More participants perceived the email that contained certainty markers to sound less natural (54.2%) compared to the email that contained uncertainty markers (29.2%) and the email that contained no markers (16.7%). The emails that contained uncertainty markers and no markers did not significantly differ from each other. Vice versa, the emails containing uncertainty markers (37.0%) and no markers (35.6%) were found to sound more natural than the email that contained certainty markers (27.4%). The emails that contained uncertainty markers and no markers did not significantly differ from each other. The percentages can be found in table 3.

Table 2. Means and standard deviations of the evaluated english level of the manager depending on the marker types used. (1= very poor, 10= native).

	No markers $n = 30$ *M(SD)*	Certainty markers $n = 33$ *M (SD)*	Uncertainty markers $n = 32$ *M (SD)*
English level of the manager	7.63 (1.56)	7.36 (1.22)	7.59 (1.46)

Table 3. Percentages of if the email sounds natural depending on the markers used.

	No markers $n = 30$		Certainty markers $n = 33$		Uncertainty markers $n = 34$	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Does the email sound natural to you?	35.6%	16.7%	27.4%	54.2%	37.0%	29.2%

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of certainty and uncertainty markers used in an email on perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager.

Based on the results of this study, the use of neither certainty nor uncertainty markers had an effect on perceived authoritativeness, perceived trustworthiness, perceived competence and the perceived sociability. The evaluations made by the participants did not significantly differ on any of the versions of the email. Before the study we suggested three hypotheses. Two of the hypotheses were supported by our finding and one of them was not.

The supported hypotheses were the first and the second hypothesis. The first hypothesis was that the version of the email that contained certainty markers and no markers would not differ concerning the perceived authoritativeness and perceived trustworthiness. This hypothesis was supported by the fact that the email that contained the certainty markers did not differ from the email that contained no markers in any of the aspects mentioned previously. These aspects are the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability. This finding also supported the second hypothesis which suggested that concerning the perceived competence, the three different versions of the email would not differ from each other.

The hypothesis which was not supported by our findings was the third hypothesis. Since the three different versions of the email did not differ in any aspect that is mentioned previously, the third hypothesis which suggested that the version of the email that contains uncertainty markers would result in a perception of less authoritativeness, less trustworthiness and less sociability than the emails that contain certainty markers and no markers was not supported by our findings.

Discussion

Our study found that certainty and uncertainty markers had no effect on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence or sociability.

First, concerning the certainty markers, our findings were consistent with the findings of Hosman (1989). In his study, Hosman (1989) also found that certainty markers did not have any significant effect on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence or sociability.

Second, despite the fact that the difference between the three different versions was too small for a significant difference, the email that contained no markers was evaluated as the most authoritative, the most competent, the most sociable and the most trustworthy

amongst all. This finding is consistent with the findings of Bradac and Mulac (1984), which found that the 'powerful message' that contained no markers, was the message that was evaluated as the most sociable and authoritative compared to the other messages that contained markers.

Third, concerning the uncertainty markers, our findings were consistent with the findings of Hosman and Siltanen (2011) which showed that the use of uncertainty markers did not have any significant effect on the perceived speaker competence and power. We addressed 'power' as authoritativeness in our study. However our findings contradict with the findings of Hosman (1989) because in their study they found that when the amount of uncertainty markers was increased, the less authoritative and the less trustworthy the speaker was evaluated. The research of Durik, Britt, Reynolds, and Storey (2008), which found that the effect of uncertainty markers depended on whether they were situated in a statement of fact or of an opinion might explain these controversial findings. According to the findings of Durik, Britt, Reynolds, and Storey (2008), the uncertainty markers result in a more negative perception of the speakers' competence, when they are placed in a statement of fact and not in a statement of opinion. In the email that we created, the placement of uncertainty markers were always in the statements where the information was based on opinion since the email was composed about the further possible consequences of coronavirus (COVID- 19) for the company whereas in the research of Hosman (1989), which was done in a court setting, when speakers were defending themselves, thus the placements of uncertainty markers were in the statements of fact.

Our study had two limitations. Firstly, our participants were recruited from social media using our personal network. We aimed to find participants amongst the students who are using English in their student life already in order for them to find the topic relevant to them. In previous studies, the relevance of the topic was found to have a positive impact on the participants' motivation and willingness to pay attention when they make evaluations (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). However, this meant that the participants were not randomly selected and the diversity of the participants was limited. Secondly, the email that we used was not composed by a native speaker of English which could imply that the structure or the possible grammatical impurities could have impacted the way the manager was evaluated.

As a future suggestion, different cultures can be studied. The results that are obtained in different cultures can be compared to see if cultural differences also play a role on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager.

This study demonstrated that the use of uncertainty markers and the certainty markers in email communication had no significant effect on the perceived authoritativeness, trustworthiness, competence and sociability of the manager. This might indicate that the perception of the manager goes beyond the linguistic markers that he uses when communicating. The effect of the uncertainty markers previously was found to depend on the context of use. For companies that will prepare emailing policies in the future, it can be beneficial to keep in mind that perception of their managers does not depend only on the markers that are used when communicating but also on the context and how they use those markers.

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Appendix A

Email with no markers

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this has consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will be:
- Flights are cancelled, which means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels

What we can do internally:
In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we have to take some measures. Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities. Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will be able to continue most operations.

We will not be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

Appendix B

Email with certainty markers (the certainty markers are highlighted)

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this ==surely== has consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will ==definitely== be:
- Flights are cancelled, which ==certainly== means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will ==definitely== lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels.

What we can do internally:
In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we ==clearly== have to take some measures. Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities. Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you ==surely== already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will ==definitely== be able to continue most operations.

We will ==definitely== not be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

Appendix C

Email with uncertainty markers (the uncertainty markers are highlighted)

Dear colleagues,

The situation:
The outbreak of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) has become a worldwide pandemic. The authorities have ordered far-reaching protective measures to slow the spread of COVID-19 until at least mid-April.
For our travel agency, this ==could== have consequences, both internally and externally. The external consequences will ==possibly== be:
- Flights are cancelled, which ==probably== means that we will lose clients.
- Given that most hotels are currently dealing with a very high cancellation rate, we will ==potentially== lose a large part of the reservations costs already paid to hotels

What we can do internally:
In order for this crisis to pass as quickly as possible, we ==might== have to take some measures.
Encounters/meetings with more than 2 persons are prohibited by national authorities.
Considering this and other lockdown conditions, we are all asked to contribute to the decrease of the infection rate by staying at home – as you ==may== already know.

How to conquer the challenge:
Please take any chances during your home office time to stay interconnected and to stay in touch with our customers and business partners.
For that, please make yourself familiar with virtual communication tools, such as WebEx, skype business, MS Teams, …
Please make sure to contribute in your regular online team meetings and share relevant information. This way we will ==probably== be able to continue most operations.

We ==will probably not== be getting back to normal work any time soon.

Please feel free to contact me in case you might have any questions or ideas on how to improve and overcome the current challenge.

Thank you for your contribution and your comprehension.

Sincerely,
[Name of the manager]

Appendix D

Statements given in the questionnaire

Authoritativeness

- The manager seems powerful.

- The manager seems authoritative.

- The manager seems confident.

- The manager seems strong.

Trustworthiness

- I trust the manager.

- The manager seems reliable.

- The manager seems honest.

Competence

- The manager seems competent.

- The manager seems knowledgeable

Sociability

- The manager seems pleasant

- The manager seems likable

- The manager seems good-natured

- The manager seems sociable