APPRAISAL FRAMEWORK IN ANALYZING ATTITUDINAL RESOURCES IN VISHAL GARG'S APOLOGY LETTER

Fikry Prastya Syahputra, Fadilla Shafiira

Universitas Sumatera Utara

fikryprastya@usu.ac.id

Abstract

This paper contains a Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) analysis of the apology text of the CEO of Better.com. Vishal Garg. He apologized for his dismissal of 900 staff through a zoom meeting. This analysis is carried out through an appraisal framework to show feelings, judgment or appreciation for things, people, behavior or idea¬¬s expressed by Vishal Garg through his apology letter. The research method used in this paper is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. 23 expressions were used in this analysis, and the majority of the attitudinal resources that are found in the letter is affect (47,83%), then followed by judgment (30,43%), and the least is appreciation (21,74%). As a results, Vishal had shown his positive emotion toward his staff and positive emotion toward his company in the future. Besides affect, Vishal also expresses his emotions through judgment. The comparison of positive and negative judgments shown from the results of the analysis is only one difference. The most of which are positive ones, and the least of which are appreciations which are all positive.

Keywords: Appraisal, Apology Text, Vishal Garg

I INTRODUCTION

Due to Covid-19 outbreak many companies have to shut their business and fired their staffs. The economic sector has become one of the hardest hits since the existence of Covid-19 (Utami et al., 2021). The economy is one of the critical factors in human life, wherein everyday life humans always intersect with economic needs (Hanoatubun, 2020). Likewise, Vishal Garg's company, Better.com, encountered hard-times during this Covid-19 pandemic.

Since 2014, Better.com is working to "improve home mortgages" and finances by allowing people to apply for loans and financing online, instead of going to the bank in person. The company claims to offer adjustable and fixed rate loans for regular loans and large loans for certain types of housing with no commission. Over the years, the company has rapidly expanded its scope of activities, collaborating with various companies in the process. For example, in 2015, the founders partnered with Avex Funding, a California-based company that has specialized in mortgage matching and sizes for over 10 years.

During the pandemic, Better.com paid their Indian employees a Covid-19 allowance of Rs 10,000/month, in addition to the telecommuting facilities. Most of the company's subsidiaries are located in India. No geographic pattern of layoffs has been identified, but some Indian employees also appear to have received pink coupons.

When this happened, Vishal Garg fired more than 900 employees during a quick zoom call last week. Garg cites market efficiency, performance and productivity as reasons for the layoff.

This paper presents the analysis of the CEO of the Better.com letter that he wrote after firing 900 of his staff through a zoom meeting. Although the addressees of the letter were supposed to be his staff, the letter was written and shared openly on the website, until it became a big news that is discussed in various news media, so the interlocutor from Vishal Garg was no longer limited to the staff.

Based on the above explanation, how Vishal Garg shows his approval or disapproval for things, people, behaviour or ideas through his based on attitudinal resources can be analyzed with the appraisal theory. Attitude is used to negotiate positive and negative feelings, judge people's character, behaviour and evaluate the worth of things. The attitude can be divided into three parts, which are affect, judgement and appreciation.

There are many researches using appraisal theory for academic text, newspaper article, and many more (Ertyas, 2011; Pascual & Unger, 2010). However, this time, the theory is used to analyse an apology letter that went viral.

II   MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1   LITERATURE REVIEWS

Halliday's idea classified the way we use language into three different meta-functions. They are ideational (where we construe reality), interpersonal (where we show social relation), and textual (where we create text). The Appraisal framework extends Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) account of interpersonal meaning (see Halliday, 1985; 1994; and Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) to provide a fine-grained description of evaluative language in English.

There are three sub-categories of this framework which are attitude, engagement and graduation. Attitude is used to negotiate positive and negative feelings, judge people's character, behaviour and evaluate the worth of things. The attitude can be divided into three parts, which are affect, judgment and appreciation. Graduation is concerned with gradeability or the way the speaker expresses how strongly they feel about someone or something. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse (Martin and Rose, 2008).

2.2   METHOD

The research method used in this paper is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative method was used to explore expressions categorized into three domains of attitude which are affect, judgment and appreciation. The quantitative method was used in calculating and presenting the frequencies and percentages of the data which are being analyzed (Moleong & Surjaman, 1991).

The data of this analysis was taken from the official apology text on Vishal Garg's website. The analysis is done by dividing the sentences and identifying and categorizing the expression which are used to show feelings (including emotional reactions, judgments of behaviour and evaluation of thing). The data that were analyzed is shown in the form of table including their percentage. The analysis focuses on appraising items which show the attitude that is covering affect, judgment, and appreciation.

III   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned before, a text is analyzed to show attitude that is covering affect, judgment, and appreciation of Vishal Garg's letter. The following is the full text that taken from https://cdn.brandfolder.io/A8SA0YBW/at/ggkbfpsbjbvc335cprpv33bg/A_Message_From_Our_Founder ___CEO.pdf is being analyzed:

Team –

I want to apologize for the way I handled the layoffs last week.

I failed to show the appropriate amount of respect and appreciation for the individuals who were affected and for their contributions to Better.

I own the decision to do the layoffs, but in communicating it I blundered the execution. In doing so, I embarrassed you.

I realize that the way I communicated this news made a difficult situation worse. I am deeply sorry and am committed to learning from this situation and doing more to be the leader that you expect me to be.

At Better, your dedication, focus and expertise are essential in the vital work we are doing to unlock the value, joy and opportunity of homeownership for our customers across the country. I couldn't be more grateful for all you are accomplishing for the customers we serve.

We will talk more at our upcoming All Hands meeting about what to expect for the year ahead. I hope you'll join me for the discussion. We are also taking fast steps to make sure we are very transparent and aligned as a company on the goals for 2022, the metrics that matter most, and how we can all work together even better to serve our customers and achieve our mission.

I believe in you, I believe in Better, and I believe that working together we can make homeownership better together.

Thank you,
Vishal

Picture 1. Vishal Garg Letter

From the letter above, there are 23 expressions that are concerned in this analysis. The data is displayed in pie chart and table to represent their types in attitudinal appraisal. The percentage of the attitudes that were found in the letter are as follow:
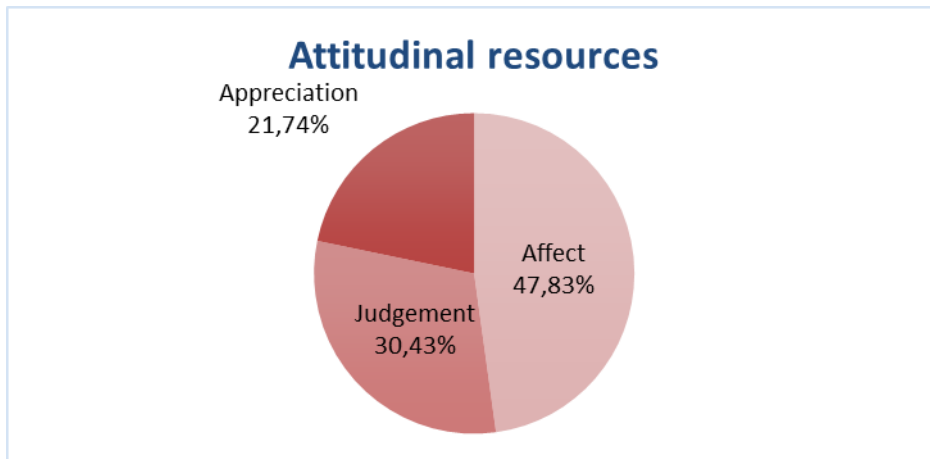

Figure 1. Appraisal results chart of Garg's Apology letter.

3.1 AFFECT

As mentioned in Martin and White (2005), the affect subcategory of attitude regarded with resources for construing emotional reactions. Positive or negative feelings such as happiness or sad, confidence or anxious. It is included in this sub category. The followings are expressions that analyzed through affect.

Category	*Polarity*	*Occurrence*	*No.*	*Samples*
Inclination	*positive*	*2*	*1.*	***I want to apologize*** *…*
			2.	***I hope*** *you'll join…*
	negative	*1*	*3.*	*…the individuals who were* ***affected****….*
Happiness	*positive*	*1*	*4.*	***I couldn't be more grateful****…*
	negative	*1*	*5.*	*I am **deeply sorry** and am committed to learning…*
Security	*Positive*	*5*	*6.*	*I am deeply sorry and am **committed to** learning…*
			7	*I **believe** in you…*
			8	*…I **believe** in Better…*
			9.	*…I **believe** that…*
			10.	*… we can make homeownership better **together**.*
Satisfaction	*Negative*	*1*	*11.*	*… I **embarrassed** you.*

Table 1. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Positive and Negative Affect Parameter

I want to apologize for the way I handled the layoffs last week.

The letter starts with Vishal expressing his feeling of 'wanting to apologise' towards his staff, this is included in inclination.

I hope you'll join me for the discussion.

Another inclination is shown here. Using 'hope', he showed his desire for the team (his staff) to join the discussion that would be held soon.

…for the individuals who were **affected…**

"affected" refers to the staff who feel the negative impact of the dismissal.

I couldn't be more grateful for all you are accomplishing for the customers we serve.

This section shows that Vishal is very grateful, to the fullest, for the work of his staff, but rather than giving value to his staff, Vishal is more likely to express it by showing how his feelings is 'affected' by the work of his staff.

I am **deeply sorry** and am **committed** to learning…

Again, he shows how his feeling towards his staff, he feels sorry, which is a sort of negative form of happiness. Committed here refers to Vishal himself that he must learn to handle the situation ahead.

I believe in you, **I believe** in Better, and **I believe** that working together we can make homeownership better **together**.

He expressed his feelings of 'trust' towards his staff, 'believe' expresses positive feeling, 'together' is the disposition form of security in affect.

…I **embarrassed** you.

This part shows the dissatisfaction that affect the staff because of what Vishal did in the zoom call. From the samples above, the percentages would be served as the following table:

Appraisal	Category	Polarity	Occurrence	Percentage
Affect	inclination	Positive	2	18,18%
		Negative	1	9,09%
	happiness	Positive	1	9,09%
		Negative	1	9,09%
	security	Positive	5	45,45%
		Negative	0	0
	satisfaction	Positive	0	0
		Negative	1	9,09%
Total			11	100%

Table 2. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Affect Percentage

3.2 JUDGMENT

Martin and White (2005) defined judgement as the subcategory of the appraisal that concerned with resources for assessing behaviour according to various normative principles. Judgment deals with attitudes towards behaviour, which we admire or criticise, praise or condemn. The following table would show the judgement released by Vishal Garg in his letter.

Category	Polarity	Occurrence	No.	Samples
Capacity	Positive	1	1.	We are also taking **fast** steps…
	Negative	1	2.	…I **failed** to show…
Propriety	Positive	3	3.	… the **appropriate** amount of respect…

			4.	*... the appropriate amount of **respect**...*
			5.	*...**better** together...*
Negative	2		6.	*... this news made a **difficult** situation worse.*
			7.	*... this news made a difficult situation **worse**.*

Table 3. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Positive and Negative Judgment Parameter

We are also taking **fast** steps…

This implied that he was judging how a pace of step, yet 'steps' here isn't something that could be scientifically counted cause it's about their company's and staff's development.

…I **failed** to show…

This shows his negative judgment towards himself.

… the **appropriate** amount of **respect**…

This shows that Vishal judged how something can be said as respect in a certain count that he said as appropriate. Respect is not something that can be count, so the appropriate amount of respect is just his opinion (judgment) that could be different with other's opinion.

…we can make home ownership **better** together.

… this news made a **difficult** situation **worse**.

How something 'difficult', 'better' or 'worse' would be different with different people. Using these words is clearly showed his judgment.

From the samples above, the percentages would be served as the following table:

Appraisal	*Category*	*Polarity*	*Occurrence*	*Percentage*
Judgment	*Capacity*	*Positive*	*1*	*14,28%*
		Negative	*1*	*14,28%*
	propriety	*Positive*	*3*	*42,85%*
		Negative	*2*	*28,57%*
Total			*7*	*100%*

Table 4. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Judgement Percentage

3.3 APPRECIATION

Appreciation deals with resources for interpreting the value of things, including natural phenomena and semiosis (as a product or process). The following table would serve the appreciation released by Vishal Garg in his letter.

Category	*Polarity*	*Occurrence*	*No.*	*Samples*
Composition	*Positive*	*2*	*1.*	*...we are very **transparent** and aligned...*
			2.	*... we are very transparent and **aligned**...*
Valuation	*Positive*	*3*	*3.*	*... the metrics that **matter most**...*
			4.	*... are **essential** in the...*
			5.	*...in the **vital** work.*

Table 5. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Positive and Negative Appreciation Parameter

We are also taking fast steps to make sure we are **very transparent** and **aligned** as a company…

From that sentence we can see Vishal's vision of how he wants to make the company more valuable, and he shows the value of a company with the words 'transparent' and 'aligned'.

…the metrics that matter most…

'Matter the most' shows how he values some metrics

…your dedication, focus and expertise are **essential** in the **vital** work.

He shows his appreciation towards the staff's dedication, focus and expertise by saying nice thing like 'essential'. This is a kind of positive appreciation. While 'vital' shows how he value a work.

From the samples above, the percentages are repersented in the following table:

Appraisal	Category	Polarity	Occurrence	Percentage
Appreciation	composition	Positive	2	40%
		Negative	0	0
	valuation	Positive	3	60%
		Negative	0	0
Total			5	100%

Table 6. Appraisal analysis result of Garg's Apology Letter in Appreciation Percentage

IV CONCLUSION

Results of the analysis shown that the letter written by Vishal Garg contains all three domains of attitudinal resources in appraisal, which are affect, judgment, and appreciation. The most dominant resources belong to affect (47, 83%). According to Martin and White (2005), affect is the registration of positive and negative emotions (whether we are happy or sad, confident or worried, interested or bored). In this regard, the analysis had shown that Vishal mainly used positive affect, he used 8 positive affects in total. Vishal talks about his staff's contribution during their working period and the future of his company.

Based on that, it can be concluded that Vishal had shown his positive emotion about his staff and positive emotion about his company in the future. Besides affect, Vishal also expresses his emotions through judgment. The comparison of positive and negative judgments shown from the results of the analysis is only one difference with the most positive, and the last one is appreciation which all consist in positive form.

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