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<https://doi.org/10.18778/8220-840-5.07>

Rozdział 6

Corporate Discourse

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1. Introduction

From banking services through on-line shopping to the ubiquity of advertising: whether we like it or not, corporate discourse has become part of our daily existence. Contrary to the common perception that corporate talk is dry and purely transactional, more recent research has shown that corporate discourse can vary considerably across a wide range of different genres. In addition, the many ways in which global corporations communicate tend to depend on particular audiences. This means that companies may adopt different strategies depending on whether they communicate with their employees, a group of investors, or perhaps the general public. At the same time, the use of language in corporate contexts is by no means accidental. In fact, global corporations are beginning to understand and appreciate the importance of language and intercultural communication in corporate life. A fluent knowledge of at least two languages combined with an understanding

of intercultural nuances and strong communication skills represent assets much sought after by HR departments. This chapter introduces the crucial concept of corporate discourse and it attempts to describe its complexity in terms of different levels of communication between the corporation and its stakeholders.

2. What is ‘corporate discourse’?

In order to understand what corporate discourse can mean, it is necessary to shed more light on the concept of discourse. There is obviously very extensive literature on the subject. However, for the purpose of this chapter, we assume that discourse simply means language in action, as distinct from language perceived as a system or structure. Further, discourse is viewed as social practice emphasizing the link between language use and society. The underlying assumption is that discourse organizes important aspects of our social lives. Accordingly, corporate discourse can be understood as a set of social practices. Breeze (2013: 19) defines corporate discourse as “[the] set of messages that a corporation chooses to send to the world at large, and to its target markets or existing customers”. Such messages correspond to a wide range of written and spoken genres that are found in corporate discourse. What seems to be common to all the different genres are the following characteristics provided in (Breeze 2013: 31):

- Corporate discourse is primarily conducted in English. Yet, intercultural differences are considered very important and are taken into account when communication strategies are developed in various business contexts;
- The major goal of corporate discourse is to present the company and its perspective in positive terms;
- Corporate discourse reflects corporate professional practices and processes. This means that corporate practices are also discursive practices;
- Corporate discourse is dialogic. It constructs and projects specific categories of readers or recipients. It tries to attract their attention, win their support and, if necessary, prevent their criticisms or negative reactions;

- Corporate discourse occurs at different levels of communication between a company and a range of different audiences (e.g. employees, investors), also known as ‘stakeholders’, due to their interest in the company’s operations. Thus, stakeholders may range from employees, unions or suppliers through customers who buy from the company to persons and entities linked to the company through some legal or normative relationship (shareholders, regulatory agencies) and, finally, to the general public and the media.

It turns out that corporate discourse should be associated with the overall communicative activity of the company on a variety of levels. It comprises a range of spoken and written genres with certain distinct functions, such as promotional, informative or legitimatory.

3. The notions of ‘corporate identity’ and ‘corporate image’

The concept of corporate identity is somewhat problematic. While it is relatively easy to acknowledge that a town, a city or a region has a certain identity based on their culture, history or geographical location, it may be difficult to accept that a corporation may also have an identity. According to the revised version of the original Strathclyde Statement¹: “Every organisation has an identity. It articulates the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organisation within its competitive environment”.

Corporate identity is now commonly understood as “a multidimensional and dynamic construct that is realized in and through discursive practices of members of business and disciplinary cultures” (Bhatia, Lung 2006: 266). This means that corporate identity is created and then manifested through discourse. Unlike other types of identity (e.g. national or regional), it is constructed deliberately rather than spontaneously. It tends to be controlled by the company itself which aims to establish and maintain favourable reputations with their stakeholders. Worth stressing is that corporate identity is developed over time and it is largely composed of words.

¹ <https://www.icig.org.uk/the-strathclyde-statement> [accessed: 24.05.2022].

Corporate identity should be distinguished from **corporate image**. While the former is perceived in terms of self-understanding or self-reflection (Malavasi 2010: 213), the latter is understood as the outward projection of a company and the way it is perceived by the outside world. Effectively, corporate image refers to the impressions or beliefs that people in general have about a company (Balmer 1998) and to the representation of the company, its actions and products, that is transmitted to internal and external audiences (Topalian 2003). In consequence, this means that the participation of other, external actors in the way the company is represented to the public should be recognised by corporations. For example, it is the journalists that may shape corporate image by writing about a company's successes or failures. Finally, yet another distinction can be made between **image** and **reputation**. While reputation concerns the degree of trust that the company inspires in its stakeholders, an image should be understood as the firm's portrait in the mind of a consumer (Nguyen, Leblanc 2001).

4. Corporate culture and its values

Corporate or organizational culture can be understood as the entirety of shared assumptions, meanings and values which tend to be manifested in the behaviour and discourse of both the corporation and its members. According to Driskill and Brenton (2011), the elements of culture include **symbolic elements** and **interactive elements**. The former consists of stories (narratives at workplace that have cultural or symbolic importance), symbols (physical objects that represent the organization, such as a logo), metaphors (e.g. company viewed as a machine or a jungle), shared linguistic resources (e.g. specialist vocabulary, jargon). The latter is associated with rituals (instances of social interaction), informal rules and organizational communication (preferred channels and modes communication). The symbolic elements are the material or textual manifestations of corporate culture that "offer an insight into the deeper layers of assumptions, values and beliefs" (Darics, Koller 2018: 278). The interactive elements of culture can be found in various interactions between a corporation and its members.

Noteworthy is that a **value** in business contexts is defined as "an enduring belief that one mode of conduct or end-state of existence is preferable to an

opposing mode of conduct or end-state of existence” Rokeach (1973: 5). Although corporate values may vary from sector to sector, managers typically try to define and inculcate a series of values that will underpin the activities of the corporation and its employees. If this proves successful, the corporate culture will be reinforced and the employees will experience a greater sense of identification with the company and its activities.

There are several factors which contribute to the unique nature of corporate culture. First of all, a corporation is not a ‘natural’ community. Rather, its members’ integration is temporary. In addition, the company and its culture are usually controlled top-down. As we noted earlier, the expression of corporate identity remains under tight management control and the same may apply to certain other aspects of corporate culture.

5. Internal corporate communication

Communication between a company and its employees can be regarded as an instance of internal corporate communication. The major text genres which are found at this level of communication include: job advertisements, recruitment processes, induction seminars and guides or videos for new employees, as well as in-house newsletters.

Job advertisements are said to provide the first point of contact for young people with the world of business and employment. According to Breeze (2013), job advertisements in the English-speaking world are clearly marked for two major features: **transactionality** and **impression management**. The former refers to the primary purpose of attracting the most suitable candidates, while the latter means promoting the company’s image in a general way and pursuing a more general public relations goal. These two are obviously closely related. In other words, job adverts or recruitment materials often contain promotional concerns not only informing job applicants about the position advertised but also indicating selected positive attributes of the company. In consequence, the discourse employed in such materials is both informative and it enhances the corporate image. Job adverts may also target more experienced professionals. In this case, they will need to provide a rationale as to why the prospective candidate should change company in mid-career. Still, both types of ads may serve the extra

purpose of bringing the company to the attention of a wide audience. In sum, the discourse of job ads has a dual function: the need to recruit and the need to pursue general public relations objectives.

One very important aspect which occurs at the level of internal corporate communication concerns **building a relationship**. This is usually achieved through the use of specific discursive resources belonging to the categories of **engagement** and **self-mention** to construct the relationship between the corporation and the job applicant. The relationship is constructed around such themes as 'helpfulness', the welcoming 'us' and 'generous offer'.

For example, one corporate website expresses its concern for the employees in the following way:

We are committed to making our employees career goals achievable, and actively promote their development through continuous training and education. As well as providing a wide range of resources that enable our employees to realize their career goals, we also provide a generous rewards package that includes bonus and incentive programs.²

Worth noting is that corporations usually use 'we' to refer to itself: *we are committed, we also provide*. In this case, the corporation makes a promise of 'helpfulness' to the new recruit. Another characteristic of such discourse is a high degree of personalization marked through the frequent use of personal pronouns, as shown in another example below:

Shape **your** world with flexibility, so **you** can enjoy a healthy work life balance. Shape ours by working **your** way to deliver customer focused solutions.³

Finally, it should be noted that discourse found in such employee-oriented material can provide yet another opportunity to enhance the corporate image.

The job interview is regarded as an important corporate genre because it provides a context for the meeting of two discourses: the personal lay language of the candidate and the professional discourse of the company's representatives, i.e. interviewers. This type of interactions is best examined

² <https://www.fujitsu.com/global/about/careers/> [accessed: 24.05.2022].

³ Ibidem.

using the concepts and tools of pragmatics (see chapter 4 on pragmatics). For example, Grice's conversational maxims can be used to identify characteristic features of the language of job interviews. Breeze (2013: 63) shows how Gricean maxim of quantity and Leech's modesty maxim (1983) can cause difficulties for candidates to engage in interactions in English if their linguistic and cultural backgrounds are different from the interviewer being a native speaker from the UK or the USA. It turns out that candidate tend to 'underperform' by being too vague, by saying too little or saying irrelevant things. These issues are usually attributed to insecurity and a misunderstanding of the discursive role they should adopt combined with cultural issues. For example, candidates from non-Anglo-American backgrounds may experience difficulty in engaging in 'ritual boasting', a practice of talking about one's achievements in a suitable way. They tend to be somehow shy about their own achievements.

The testimony is yet another instance of internal communication aimed at new employees. It is said to represent a 'human face' of a future employer, i.e. someone that a potential candidate could relate to. Breeze (2013: 71) argues that testimonies should be viewed as a separate genre as they are characterised by certain genre-specific features. Testimonies are effectively (1) first-person accounts of life within the company which focus on (2) description of day-to-day activities. They provide (3) positive evaluation of in-house training schemes for new employees combined with a (4) description of a project that the writer has completed for the company. Testimonies should also include (5) expressions of satisfaction and personal fulfilment. Below are two examples of testimonials given by employees of Infosys Poland:

Infosys Poland employees possess an in-depth understanding of tax regulations and technology. I feel privileged to be part of projects that help clients to navigate to a digitalized tax world – Krystian Stasiak, Consultant in Tax Centre of Excellence, Infosys Poland

I love working with my colleagues at Infosys Poland. It has helped me to grow professionally. It is a fantastic feeling to observe, learn and be close to experts in your field. I won't change it for anything – Katarzyna Soborowska, Pricing & Customer Assistant Manager for EMEA NA and LA, Infosys Poland

The register is markedly more informal and rather personal mostly due to the use of the first-person singular and some positively-charged lexis (e.g. *I feel privileged, I love working, a fantastic feeling*).

What seems to be common to all the various manifestations of corporate internal communication is an intention to create and maintain a community. Two concepts central to this trend are **employer branding** and **employee branding**. These concepts are of great interest to managers, PR consultants and human resources specialists who look into the connection between the company brand and the company's employees. While employer branding concerns the way that the company itself is seen by its employees, employee branding aims to ensure that employees reflect or embody company values or the company image. It is not surprising that activities related to employer branding revolve around its perception by current or future employees. These two types of branding share an interest in organizational values. It turns out that employees newly recruited tend to work harder for a company whose values they accept. In sum, branding of either employer or employee indicates a clear emphasis on internal public relations (Breeze 2013: 77) which aims to encourage employees to identify with the company. This can only be possible if the company has a strong identity with strong recognizable values (Ashforth, Saks 1996). Ideally, the employees should have the same 'branded experience' through all their dealings with the organization.

6. Communicating with investors

6.1. Annual Reports

Another level of corporate communication involves communicating with investors. This overview (based on Breeze 2013) starts with **Annual Report** as the principal document used by most public companies to disclose corporate information to their shareholders. It has become generally accepted that public limited companies are required to publish and make easily available an Annual Report which includes some basic information about the company, its directors and the audited accounts:

According to the UK's Companies Act of 2006: "A quoted company must ensure that its annual accounts and reports are made available on a website [...] that is maintained by or on behalf of the company and identifies the company in question" (430, 1, 2);

In fact, far more information is usually expected to be released. In the UK, the law specifies that a public limited company listed on the London Stock Exchange must provide the following information:

- 1) main trends and factors which could affect the future development, performance and position of the company;
- 2) information on environmental matters, employees and social issues;
- 3) information on contractual and other arrangements essential to the company's business (Breeze 2013: 84).

The above clearly shows that an Annual Report is legally required to inform shareholders about the company's financial performance, its overall situation, current activities. In other words, annual reports should help the investor to make an informed decision when attending and voting at the Annual General Meeting (AGM).

Interestingly, apart from the informative role, Annual Reports are increasingly viewed as an opportunity to engage in wider corporate communication by shaping company's financial public relations. It should be noticed that their audiences range from shareholders and potential investors to financial experts, employees or anyone else who might have an interest in a company. In keeping with the general principles of corporate communication mentioned so far, annual reports aim to contribute to a strong corporate culture and corporate identity. The underlying goal is to spread a positive image to the many different audiences.

Annual Reports have undergone a substantial change transforming from a relatively short, highly informative document to a long, complex and colourful publication with clear public relations concerns. Thus, Annual Reports have become a hybrid genre where information is combined with persuasion.

In terms of its internal structure, Annual Reports contain sections that fall into two categories: (1) review of the year and (2) the operating and financial review. There is a stark difference between the two parts in terms of

the language used. The first part, which tends to be composed more freely is written in positive light and it includes financial highlights, the Chairperson's letter or statement, the CEO's letter or statement reports about corporate governance, it may contain a section on corporate social responsibility.

The second part relies on more objective and technical language as the operating and financial review consists of balance sheet, income statement, cash flow statement, notes to the financial statement, etc. These may be accompanied by a verbatim statement from the auditors. The former performs a more optimistic, public relations function and it seeks to encourage shareholders to maintain and increase their investments. The latter aims to provide a true picture of the company's performance and general financial situation over the previous year. The public relations purpose can be carried out by relying on colours and visual information. The second, more informative part uses dense text with technical-sounding headings, tables with numbers, etc. Breeze (2013: 89–91) lists several multimodal strategies employed in annual reports: metaphor, iconicity, faces or things, magazine design, highlighting key information, displaying numbers, and photographs of board members.

6.2. The CEO letter

The 'letter to shareholders' issued by a chairperson or CEO (chief executive office) is usually placed near the beginning of the Annual Report. Its main structural characteristics are as follows (based on Bhatia 2004: 16):

- the opening address (e.g. *Dear Shareholder*);
- the body of the letter;
- the closing.

The communicative purpose of this genre is to "inform the readers, who are the stakeholders in the company, about the performance of the company in the past year" (Bhatia 2004: 16). Increasingly, these messages, often referred to as 'statements' are accompanied with visual information, e.g. text boxes with highlights from the text and a photograph of the writer. Hyland (1998) shows how the CEO letters tend to rely on three major strategies drawn from the classical rhetoric:

- *logos* (rational appeal to the reader supported by textual organizers to make the argument clearer and more coherent);
- *ethos* (projecting the writer as credible and convincing);

- pathos (involving and making a positive effect upon the reader through the expression of positive feelings).

The use of these rhetorical strategies has led to some analysts posing questions about the level of objectivity and balance in the letter to shareholders. The dilemma boils down to the fundamental question whether such letters should aim for information or promotion. On the one hand, it is only natural that a company wants to depict itself in positive light but on the other hand, there might be a risk of manipulating the reader and affecting their decision-making.

Another important aspect concerns the extent to which letters to shareholder may address negative issues related to the company. Corporate discourse often employs **legitimation strategies** to justify the existence and operations of a company. This may become a particularly burning issue in case there is a crisis in public opinion, caused, for example, by the exposure of corporate scandals or the occurrence of serious accidents polluting the environment, etc. In such cases, there is an urgent need to save the company's reputation.

Letter to shareholders can be one way of explaining what happened and demonstrating what has been done to compensate the damage and the victims. Due to their personal character, letters to shareholders are said to display a degree of sincerity and authenticity. In addition, it is the CEO that could be held responsible for a corporate disaster. Accordingly, there is a range of justificatory discursive strategies that could be adopted. They result from a need to legitimate itself on a massive scale to the media, to public opinion, and to a range of other stakeholders (current or potential shareholders). This means that legitimation is a complex discursive practice involving a variety of strategies and a combination of different but interrelated discourse. Companies use different channels of communication to present a cleaner image to the public eye. They demonstrate that they have introduced improved safety measures and they stress the companies' positive contribution to their physical and social environment. Breeze (2013: 110–111) lists other examples of self-justificatory activities: press releases, corporate publications, brochures, etc. They are intended to generate a positive evaluation and enhance the public image. As already noted, the language used may combine classic promotional elements (self-praise, positive connotations) with aspects of explanation and self-defence to pre-empt or defuse criticism.

7. External corporate communication

7.1. Advertising discourses

This section (based on Breeze 2013) focuses on **advertising** as “the most emblematic expression of the company’s discursive endeavour towards its markets” (Breeze 2013: 115). Clearly, reaching out to present and future customers remains a priority with most, if not all companies. Advertisements are probably best defined by referring to their function, i.e. persuading a target audience to buy a product or service. More broadly, advertisements may also be used to convince their audiences to support a particular cause (e.g. helping the poor, fight against social injustice) or adopt a type of behaviour (e.g. get vaccinated, reduce meat consumption).

Characteristically, advertising in its various discursive manifestations can have also different discourse functions. Adverts can inform, worry, amuse, flatter, tell stories, raise questions, provide answers, etc. Their actual material form is highly varied and it can be expressed using image, image and word(s) or text, music, voices and video. Advertisements are unique since they can be combined with other artefacts. Consider promotional packaging used for selling commercial products or the ubiquity of advertisements when watching a TV programme, a YouTube film, reading an online newspaper, etc. More importantly, advertisements may imitate discursive conventions from other genres and adapt them in a way suitable for their promotional purposes. One way of examining advertisements is to look at what is advertised. For example, advertising discourse may vary depending on a given product, i.e. whether the advert targets for example cars or perfumes. The former may include more technically-oriented discourse specifying the unique technological features in some detail. However, it is equally possible that a car ad may rely on associations that will appeal to the potential buyer for non-technical reasons. In this case, an advertisement could be designed to promote a particular image – a lifestyle or values that the potential buyer could identify with. The current trend seems to shift from providing information towards creating associations by influencing human emotions. Such association could include family fun, humour, warmth, spending free time together, etc.

Advertising strategies can be radically different in case of products that are intangible, such as perfumes. In this case, positive associations are evoked through metaphor and analogy. Advertising material will focus on associations which the manufacturer believes will make the perfume attractive to its target purchasers. The underlying assumption is that the buyer will want the glamour or other qualities with which the advertisement endows it. Examples include images evoking oriental culture to awaken associations of exotic beauty, dark mystery, ancient wisdom, or mysticism. A different strategy is to show how other people react to the user of perfume and the effect that the perfume will have on other people. Such discourse is inevitably multi-modal as it operates at many levels using association and connotation. What makes advertising particularly entertaining are several possible interpretations of its message. In sum, the main function of a **commercial advertisement** is to send the audience a culturally encoded message about the merits of a product. In order to achieve that goal, it relies on several different **rhetorical devices** such as repetition – alliteration, rhyme, doubling, etc. In addition, it uses figures of amplification, figures of omission, appellation – direct address rhetorical questions, exclamations, etc. The discourse of advertising is characterised by efficiency (nothing is redundant), the need to draw attention to itself and making use of rhetorical devices, as already mentioned.

A major issue related to advertising concerns its geographical and cultural scope. It boils down to the fundamental question whether it is possible to reach out to consumers in different geographical and cultural locations using the same advertising message. In other words, is **global advertising** (understood as connecting with an audience or market as broad as possible to save money and maximize the benefits) feasible? It appears that advertising works best if it is customized to reflect local culture (e.g. de Mooij 2010). This means that it should reflect local habits, lifestyles and economic conditions if it is meant to be effective. Even if people are becoming similar in consumer terms (they expect similar living standards, similar products, such as smartphones or computers), it turns out that there are numerous differences regarding consumer habits, e.g. eating habits, television watching, using smartphones. If an advertisement is intended to cross cultural borders, its elements should have a particular significance in a particular culture. According to Dahl (2000), an advertisement can be effectively decoded in the

culture in which it was coded because decoding is done using the schemata of one's own culture. It should be noted that it is not only the product that is culturally defined but almost any resources used to create the ad may be culturally embedded.

Another feature of advertising discourse is that it engages values by trying to establish links with the **value system** of the target market. Defined as "learned organization of principles and rules to help one choose between alternatives, resolve conflicts, and make decisions" (Rokeach 1973: 5), value systems vary from country to country. Hofstede (2001) identified five factors to account for people's attitudes and assumptions across cultures. These include (1) uncertainty avoidance, (2) masculinity/femininity, (3) power distance, (4) individualism/collectivism, (5) short-term/long-term orientation. This framework can be useful to study communication between advertisers and markets and to analyse how advertising discourse functions.

Advocacy advertising is another form of advertisement which has been envisaged to change the way people think rather than to sell them a product or service. Used mainly by non-profit organizations, it focuses on economic, social, environmental, or political issues. For example, Amnesty International has been well known for using marketing to support a particular message or cause related to human rights (e.g. protecting women against violence) and to alter people's perceptions.

In addition, companies often resort to advocacy advertising if public perception or government policies could negatively impact their ability to operate their business. For example, companies from the oil industry (such as Shell or BP) could use advertising to project a cleaner and environment-friendly image. This type of advertising is also known as **corporate advocacy**. Generally, the aim of such activities is to evoke, among the general public, positive associations with a company that has received negative media attention. Corporate advertising belongs to **discourses of corporate legitimization** which attempt to affect the people's perception of a company by bringing particular aspects of their company and its activities to the public notice.

Advertising discourse includes hybrid genres, such as **advertorial**. It is a type of covert advertisement which uses the space and certain generic features typically associated with informative genres to gain a certain degree of objectivity and an 'independent voice'.

Recently, the concept of **brand** has been gaining in popularity in corporate promotional strategies. Brands can be defined as a network of association in the mind of a consumer, a map of positive or negative associations or a symbolic language (de Mooij 2010: 24). It turns out that there is a connection between certain products and makes and communities of consumers who use them, which could be used to persuade and communicate. In that sense, it is possible to talk about **discourses of branding**. At this stage, it is useful to mention the concept of **communities of consumption**, communities whose members identify themselves by reference to brands or consumption activities. In other words, consumption communities are groups of consumers created and preserved by what they consume.

7.2. Corporate websites

This level of communication does not concern any specific audience. Rather, it aims at anyone interested in receiving some information about a given corporation and its operations. The information sought could be more general than in the case of the other stakeholders already mentioned in the previous sections. At the same time, it could be more varied and specific. For example, some people could be interested in how a company is dealing with environmental issues or they would like to find the nearest shoe shop of a particular brand. Not surprisingly, it is the **corporate websites** that have become a first 'point of contact'. These websites contain both more general parts such as 'about us' section, as well as more specific sections highlighting various aspects of the company's activities. Breeze (2013) points out that the obvious goal of corporate websites is to present the company visually. This is very important since people interested in a company are likely to form their first impressions on the basis of the design and organization of the website. Consequently, such sites must be user-friendly and well-organized, the information should be credible and presented in an attractive manner. It is useful to recall the concept of 'impression management', which is carried out globally using online media. Corporate websites represent an effective tool to coordinate and manage the public impressions of an entire organization.

It should be pointed out that there are other goals envisaged for corporate websites apart from providing and building the corporate image.

They are used to encourage people to use the website to make purchases through it as online sales have become very important in the retail trade. This means that corporate websites are also characterised by both information and interaction.

The positive result can only be achieved if a corporate website is adequately tagged and indexed to facilitate internet searches. Based on Heinze and Hu (2006) eight different features of corporate websites can be distinguished: (1) product advertisement, (2) product information, (3) career opportunities, (4) investor information, (5) online sales, (6) online account access, (7) support contact and (8) customer support.

The underlying goal is to ensure that websites become interactive allowing customers to do things with them. While there is some debate about the precise understanding of the concept of **interactivity**, the prevailing opinion is that interactivity in websites can be identified in six aspects (cf. Breeze 2013: 149): (1) user control, (2) personalisation, (3) responsiveness, (4) connectedness, (5) real-time interaction and (6) playfulness. The presence or absence of these features varies from website to website. Usually, only some of them are found in a given corporate website. There seems also to be a correlation between different types of resource and different types of culture (see Hofstede indices). For example, countries leaning towards more collective culture have been found to prefer customer to customer communication, while more individualistic cultures show preference for consumer-company interactions. Other important aspects of corporate websites revolve around the issues of how information is organized in order to facilitate **user orientation**. The **organization of information** concerns the relations between design and information.

Companies usually use **'about us' sections** to present themselves to the general public. Despite some considerable variation, most companies share the following themes in their sections (adapted from Breeze 2013: 155): company history, company's current status, mission statements, information about senior management, references to corporate social responsibility issues. These sections can also be used to respond to potential criticisms, especially in the case of business sectors whose products or practices have been questioned in the context of climate change. For example Rio Tinto, the third biggest mining company announces in its 'about us' section:

Our materials are essential for the low-carbon transition.

Aluminium for lightweight cars. Copper to help things work more efficiently – from renewables to the power in your home. Iron ore for the steel in our electricity infrastructure. Lithium for electric vehicles and battery storage. And many of the materials we produce are essential for the things in everyday life too: Borates that help crops grow, titanium for paint – and diamonds that celebrate the best things in life.⁴

This text has a clear legitimatory function justifying the company's operations and its usefulness for the society. It also contains strong environmental concerns.

Corporate mission statements are yet another element frequently found on corporate websites. Defined as a “short encapsulation of the company's *raison d'être*”, they usually contain “references to its achievements and aspirations, but also to more abstract entities such as its spirit and values” (Breeze 2013: 162). They are regarded as very important in developing team spirit, corporate identity, and influencing the image of a company. Corporate mission statements are effectively a statement to customers with the company's agenda clearly expressed. They also convey a message to other stakeholders, such as investors, the media and the general public. Swales and Rogers (1995) perceive statements as ‘carriers of ideology’ whose role is persuasive. They are also understood as having legitimatory functions, i.e. justifying the company's actions in the eyes of the world (Mazza 1999). In linguistic terms, corporate mission statements are marked by brevity, i.e. they are brief as writers do not want to waste words. They are designed to be universal, which results in some statements sounding abstract (e.g. *Unlocking the power of food to enhance quality of life for everyone, today and for generations to come*⁵).

Corporate social responsibility reports (CSRs) have evolved from a mere environmental report to a rather complex document demonstrating to the general public how the company's operations meet ethical standards and are beneficial for society as a whole. At present, most major corporations make their reports freely available and the scope and type of information included vary. Typically, corporate social responsibility reports address

⁴ <https://www.riotinto.com/about> [accessed: 24.05.2022].

⁵ <https://www.nestle.com/aboutus> [accessed: 24.05.2022].

issues such as human rights (e.g. equality, diversity and inclusivity), labour standards, bioethical issues and issues related to corporate accountability and transparency. Other major themes include care for the environment, social and community issues, efficiency and sustainability. There is a general consensus that CSRs are gaining in importance as emphasis may be shifted to different issues. For example, the reports are likely to stress what the company is doing to reduce negative impact on climate change by cutting down on the use of non-renewable energy sources such as coal, natural gas or crude oil.

Sponsorship can also be treated as a form of corporate communication designed to project a positive image to a wide range of audiences. It can be defined as “an investment, in cash or kind, in an activity, in return for access to the exploitable commercial potential associated with this activity” (Meenaghan 1991: 238). Breeze (2013: 172) stresses that sponsorship should not be viewed as a form of philanthropy but “a form of giving which brings returns for the giver”. It aims at promoting a company’s image (including its brands) by forging a link between them and “a specific and meaningfully related event, organization or charitable cause” (Erdogan, Kitchen 1998: 370). This link should result in creating positive associations among potential clients. This will be possible if there are values shared between the company or brand and an organization, activity or event and target consumers. Sponsorship is said to exist between the area of public relations and marketing but it is clearly related to both.

8. Researching corporate discourse

Finally, this section looks at some perspectives on doing research into corporate discourse. A purely linguistic approach could initially focus on analysing surface features of text (e.g. personal pronouns; value-laden words), their distribution across different corporate genres or texts and their use and function. This type of analysis could address the issue of **stance** – writer’s textually constructed voice (e.g. I, we) and/or **engagement** – items directed at the reader: (e.g. you, use of imperatives: see, consider, etc.). This type of analysis could combine quantitative, **corpus-based methods** with more qualitative, **discourse analytical approach** to study frequently-

-occurring (and therefore significant) linguistics features in the context of actual texts. The use of **Discourse Analysis** and **Pragmatics** methodologies could be useful to study the roles texts perform in a range of social contexts (e.g. training employees, job interviews). The underlying premise is that discourse both shapes and is shaped by the specific contexts and by the whole society in which it is used. Discourse Analysis in particular aims to identify the ways in which linguistic and other semiotic resources are used, to understand better the patterns that emerge in different contexts, to explore ways in which language is used to serve ideological ends and to trace changes over time.

Potential **research directions** could then proceed from how speech and writing function in different corporate situations to a much wider analysis of the patterns of thought and communication that define different corporate contexts and practices. Text-oriented analyses would inevitably start with a detailed analysis of text to demonstrate how meaning is conventionally made. When analysing specific texts, attention should be paid to the object of analysis, i.e. what is text? Should paralinguistic materials (gesture and facial expression, typefaces, etc.) be also taken into account? Then the choice and organization of language in specific contexts could be investigated.

In this chapter, we encourage taking a **multimodal approach** including visual images, music, interactive elements (such as interactive maps, questionnaires, online purchasing), etc. This type of analysis should explain and interpret the features that are identified and offer in-depth descriptions of texts. **Genre Analysis** which examines types or classes of text used in given situations could also provide useful insights. It has been shown that professional life is organized around recurring situations and typical communicative needs. These recurrent situations give rise to conventional written and spoken forms: business correspondence, annual, reports, memoranda, contracts, job interviews, etc. some of which (e.g. corporate websites) can be interactive and multi-modal. Some aspects of corporate communication lend themselves to analyses from the perspective of **Classical Rhetoric** and the way arguments are constructed (logos), the credibility of the author (ethos), and the effect on the reader (pathos).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers yet another approach to focus on power relations that exist in society and the way that discourse operates ideologically to underpin these invisible power structures (Wodak 2011).

Corporate discourse could be then seen as a “medium of domination and social force” (Habermas 1967: 259) leading to questions addressing the issue of how dominance is legitimated through language.

Core readings

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Darics E., Koller V. (2018), *Language in Business, Language at Work*, London: Palgrave.

Mautner G., Rainer F. (eds.) (2017), *The Handbook of Business Communication. Linguistic Approaches*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.

Study questions:

1. Provide major characteristics of corporate discourse.
2. Compare the notions of ‘corporate identity’ and ‘corporate image’.
3. Provide examples of major corporate genres at different communicative levels.
4. Discuss the relations between ‘transactionality’ and ‘impression management’ in job advertisements.
5. Discuss the concept of corporate culture. What major elements does it consist of?
6. Explain the difference between ‘employee branding’ and ‘employer branding’.
7. Discuss the characteristics and the role of Annual Reports in communicating with investors.
8. How can advertising discourse be defined? Discuss different types of advertising.
9. Discuss the ways in which corporate websites can be used to communicate with the world.

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