Discourse, Communication and the Enterprise
Discourse, Communication and the Enterprise: Where Business Meets Discourse

Edited by
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and Walter Giordano

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CHAPTER ONE

DISCOURSE, COMMUNICATION AND THE ENTERPRISE: DEVELOPMENTS AND ISSUES.
AN INTRODUCTION

GIULIANA ELENA GARZONE AND WALTER GIORDANO

Introductory remarks

This volume collects research studies that investigate various aspects of corporate communication from the viewpoint of language and discourse, giving special attention to emerging issues and recent developments in times of rapid sociotechnical evolution. Its chapters are loosely based on a selection of the papers presented at the DICOEN VIII Conference, held in Naples in June 2015, on the theme of “Language, discourse and action in professional practice”.

“DICOEN” stands for “Discourse, Communication and the Enterprise”. This is the name of a global informal research network, comprising scholars from all continents working in a variety of disciplines – linguistics, discourse analysis, communication studies, organisation and management studies, economics, marketing, accounting, etc. – who are

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interested in the relevance of discourse and communication to the world of business and organizations. Researchers belonging to this informal network meet every two years to discuss the results of their investigations, exchange views on research methods and analytical tools in light of the latest developments, pinpoint topical issues and research themes to which the attention of the discipline is currently addressed and debate them collaboratively.

The choice of the aspects to be dealt with in the various chapters was made with a view to covering a range of issues and topics that is as wide and representative as possible, providing a broad outline of ongoing research in the area of business and corporate communication.

The resulting collection includes studies that are diverse in their outlook, analytical procedures and objects of enquiry, spanning various areas of corporate communication, both external and internal: corporate image and reputation management, various forms of corporate behaviour, branding at different levels including employer branding, recruiting, consumer reviews, etc. Similarly diversified are the settings, genres and media analysed (from face-to-face interaction to communication through the press, from traditional websites to social networking sites). But, in broad terms, all the studies presented in this volume are set in a discourse-analytical framework and share the ultimate purpose of providing new insights into the latest evolutions of communication and discourse practices in the corporate environment, taking account of the most important issues that have attracted researchers’ interest and are still open to debate.

The volume is organized as follows: the chapters in Part I focus on business communication on the Web, an area that has received intense scholarly attention on account of the dramatic impact that the spread of Internet usage has had on the overall constitution of corporate communication leading to the migration and adjustment of traditional genres and the rise of new web-native genres. The focus in Part II shifts to corporate reporting, and in particular to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports, an area of research on corporate communication that has seen a surge of interest in the last three decades. Finally, the studies featured in Part III look at a variety of different discourse practices deployed both in internal and external communication, giving special attention to strategies enacted by companies for purposes of branding and corporate-image construction.
Contents of the book

The book opens with a section entitled “Business Communication on the Web”, that focuses on different Internet genres, at a time when web-mediated communication has seen its relative importance grow exponentially, favoured by technological advances and their increasing pervasiveness (cf. e.g. Georgakopoulou and Spilioti 2016).

In this context an especially prominent role has been recently played by Social Networking Sites (SNSs), that is, web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within that system, and form relationships with other users of the same Web site (cf. e.g. boyd and Ellison 2007). Social media networks are a major resource for businesses that want to promote their brands on the Internet, enhance their reputation and connect with customers. Among them, LinkedIn distinguishes itself for being tailored to the workplace environment. In particular, it is specialized in the offering of career content, and has recruitment as one of its most important functions (cf. Garzone forth).

In the first chapter in this section, Giuliana Elena Garzone focuses on job ads published on LinkedIn, which in spite of their apparent similarity to announcements posted on other recruitment platforms or in newspapers have been shown to be communicatively more complex and take full advantage of the options made available by the SNS where they are posted, displaying various additional features that contribute to setting job advertisements within the context of the SNS, i.e. of a virtual community of practice (cf. Garzone forth). Garzone’s study has its starting point in the analysis of a corpus of job ads posted on LinkedIn and discusses the use of evaluative language, a feature that is especially prominent today. At a time when promotional messages play a crucial role in corporate communication, the migration of this genre to the web has freed it from constraints in terms of text length (number of words and characters) that traditionally applied to ads published in newspapers and has given ample scope for the components that go beyond the basic recruiting message and largely consist of evaluative language. In particular, the study focuses on positively charged lexis, identifying recurrent patterns in its use, and maps its quantitative distribution with regard to the main actors involved. The analysis demonstrates that recurrent recourse to positively charged language is not only a way to realise employer branding strategies (as some scholars have argued), but it is also used – and more prominently – to refer to the ideal candidate and to the position being offered, sometimes contributing to setting very high, even seemingly unrealistic requirements.
for the potential candidate. At the same time the study contributes to the conceptualization of recourse to evaluation on business oriented SNSs.

In the next chapter, authored by Esterina Nervino, the focus is still on social media, but shifts from LinkedIn to Facebook, a SNS which has a more specifically personal/individual character, but is nevertheless used quite extensively in corporate communication for branding and advertising purposes. Nervino’s study provides an overview on the use of discourse on Facebook by companies in the luxury industry for branding purposes. In this respect she identifies three main aspects: engagement, as the fundamental pillar of social media activity; entertainment, which is recreated through the deployment of storytelling; and integration, realized through the use of hyperlinks redirecting the users from Facebook to other online outlets. Another important notion exploited by luxury brands is that of brand heritage. According to Nervino, this approach is geared to catering to the tastes of consumers in the luxury industry who have become ever more educated and sophisticated, and informed about the characteristics of products. In this respect, she concludes, research on relevant multimodal corpora can potentially lead to a more systematic and global understanding of the process of construction of the concept of luxury in the digital environment.

In the following chapter, the focus is on YouTube, a video sharing site where users can watch, like, share, comment on and upload their own videos. Considered as being part of Web 2.0, YouTube is often classified among social media sites although *strictu sensu* it is not (cf. Benson 2017). Dermot Heaney focuses on videos of inaugural press conferences by native speaker football managers posted on YouTube and available on football club websites. After identifying the characteristic communicative purpose and move structure of the genre, the study, which is essentially qualitative in approach, examines the main discursive strategies implemented by football managers in order to establish their credentials and suitability for the job, and their unswerving commitment to the team, to the club, and its traditions. The chapter also discusses how these media events posted on YouTube are exploited to interact with various other members of the participation framework, like journalists, but also other legitimated overhearing audiences, for example, fans, players, and sponsors. The results of the analysis indicate that in this Web-mediated media genre the language and moves associated with the notions of permanence and identification with the club brand are central to this professional role, even though the unpredictable nature of the game and a ruthless corporate logic have combined to create a dynamic of pervading job insecurity and impermanence.
Further discursive investigations of new web-mediated discursive activities are presented in Chapter Five where Roxanne Barbara Doerr explores the organizational practices associated with the innovative work organization of “workshifting”, also referred to as “remote working” or “telecommuting”, resulting from advances in communication and collaboration technology, and characterized by increased mobility and hybridity of the workplace, and looks at the linguistic and discursive practices characterizing the relevant online communities. Doerr’s attention focuses on the multimodal and linguistic choices that are adopted by these workers and their online communities of practice in order to present, promote and distinguish their professional and/or corporate identity and strategies. Qualitative critical discourse analysis is carried out on three interlinked but very different blogs (Citrix.com, Workshifting.com, and Misfits-inc.com), looking in particular at definitions, neologisms and discursive strategies. The findings indicate that the practice of workshifting has consolidated itself within all organizational levels, created new professional profiles and taken on different registers and agendas within the professional community. Doerr concludes that, on all of these linguistic and discursive levels, the language that is emerging to satisfy the communicative and empowerment needs related to workshifting and workshifters reflects the dynamicity that this trending work practice presents and advocates.

In the next chapter, authored by William Bromwich, the centre of attention is the growing importance of consumer reviews on online platforms, such as TripAdvisor and Yelp, but also consumers’ and vendors’ ratings of web-mediated and app-mediated transactions, e.g. on eBay, Uber, BlaBlaCar and Amazon. While consumer reviews contribute to creating added value for businesses, Bromwich points out that such value is totally intangible and dependent on the credibility of reviews, which is inherently problematic as most of the content is user-generated by means of crowd-sourcing. So, in spite of deception detection methods, some of which are explained and discussed in the chapter, it is difficult for companies to fend off misrepresentation practices. Bromwich discusses some interesting cases of fake reviews and other forms of malpractice that ended up in court both in Europe and in the US, and points out that both consumers and companies should always be on the guard and very careful.

In the last study of this section, by Emanuela Tenca, attention shifts to one of the earliest web-genres to emerge, i.e. the homepage of a company’s website. The examination of thirty European companies’ homepages is carried out by means of Multimodal Discourse Analysis. The findings partly confirm and partly question the principles and strategies identified
in 2005 by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005), indicating that in time companies have updated their online communication, while maintaining some fundamental elements. In particular, among the lines of change under way at the present time there are the desire to compete with social networking sites and the need to adapt website content to the small screens of mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones, which arguably pose constraints on the ways in which information is presented. As many authors have pointed out since the early days of research on Hypermedia computer-mediated communication (cf. e.g. Garzone, Catenaccio and Poncini 2007), the inherent fluidity of the medium demands that in discourse analytical research generic categorizations are revised from time to time, in order to account for the latest evolutions.

Part II of the volume focuses in particular on Corporate Reports and CSR, a theme that has attracted substantial scholarly attention in business communication studies in the last few years. Under a CSR perspective, the traditional view of the enterprise as a subject aimed exclusively (and sometimes ruthlessly) at profit regardless of its consequences in terms of labour relations, social impact, environmental effects, etc. is left behind. Rather, reference is made to a renewed view of the enterprise as a sociotechnical subject set within a social and political context, willing to take responsibility for the environmental and social impact of its activities well beyond what may be required by law or by environmental protection regulations (cf. among others Catenaccio 2012). A socially responsible business enterprise integrates ethical values and self-regulation into its business model and into its workplace culture. Today these issues are at the centre of a rich and interesting line of research in discourse analysis and in corporate communication studies.

The first chapter in this section looks at Annual Company Reports and aims at a greater understanding of their transformations throughout an eight-year time frame (2000-2008). The three authors, Walter Giordano, Sergio Pizziconi and Laura Di Ferrante examine the case of WalMart whose annual reports have been identified as an ideal corpus, having proved to be suitable for a study on the phenomenon of hybridization, i.e. communication involving both financial and promotional discourse. For this purpose, three levels of analysis (textual, lexical and syntactic) have been particularly useful to undertake a comparative study aiming to identify the most outstanding differences between WalMart’s recent annual reports and the previous ones. Results indicate that annual reports included in the corpus seem to be more customer-oriented than before, notably thanks to the large use of images and of syntactic strategies such as hypotaxis, making the text usable for every kind of addressee. This
tendency to hybridization characterizing the genre of annual reports seems to be part of a more general evolution leading corporations to develop a closer relationship with their customers.

All the other chapters in this section explore various features of Corporate Social Responsibility reports.

Marina Bondi and Danni Yu investigate an annotated corpus of 18 CSR reports in Italian, Chinese and English, collected from the banking and energy sectors, in order to provide an account on the similarities and variations in the generic structure of the CSR report, with a focus on the self-presentation section. Combining corpus tools and theories developed in genre analysis, the study highlights four discourse features of the CSR report genre: dynamicity, complexity, multimodality, and recursivity. The comparative analysis reveals several cross-cultural variations in discourse features, e.g. in multimodal aspects, text length, preference for a part-genre or for specific moves. At the same time, the study highlights great cross-cultural convergence, with the clear possibility of establishing a common rhetorical structure and exploring common business approaches in the increasing global context of disclosure documents. The patterns highlighted can be understood in relation to a view of companies as social and economic actors engaged in corporate image construction, corporate culture creation and reputation enhancement.

Bondi and Yu’s chapter is followed by a study by Paola Catenaccio who investigates the discursive construction of the concept of value and related notions in a set of documents published by the International Integrated Reporting Council, an organization whose aim is to promote integrated reporting (i.e. combining financial and social reporting) in accounting practice, and in a corpus of recently issued integrated reports where this form of reporting is implemented. Her study aims to verify if and to what extent the purported “social” turn in reporting is reflected in the language used in the literature on and in the practice of corporate reporting. More specifically, in the face of emphatic claims as to the “different” – novel and better – nature of integrated reporting, the paper highlights discursive nodes which appear to be conceptually fuzzy and liable to multiple operationalizations, and this testifies to their nature as “floating” or “empty” signifiers. The chapter highlights the implications of a discourse-based approach to corporate social responsibility for a better understanding of this phenomenon, advocating the importance of a multidisciplinary approach comprehensive of a linguistic perspective.

In the following chapter Donatella Malavasi reports on the results of a comparative study of two small corpora, including the CSR reports and webpages generated by a sample of European companies working in three
different sectors (Credit Suisse and BBVA for Banking; Nestlé and Unilever for Food and Beverages; BASF and Eni for Oil and Gas). In an attempt to analyse the process of the intralingual and intersemiotic translation of information from printed into digital materials, the two sets of documents are examined in a selection of multimodal configurations and language strategies used by firms to communicate their sustainability. The results suggest that highly informative portions of reports, mostly covering data, performance and achievements, are counterbalanced on the Web by more discursive and ‘diluted’ sections which focus on companies’ CSR goals, values, programs, and partnerships. Furthermore, in the migration of information from the written to the digital medium, the charts, tables, and diagrams that pervade the reports are replaced on the Web by photographs, drawings and other audio/video materials that are used by companies to showcase their CSR principles and initiatives.

A further perspective on CSR reports emerges in Franca Poppi’s chapter, which discusses the issue of tension between global trends and cultural markedness, examining case studies from the airline industry. The study is based on the analysis of the English version of CSR reports published between 2011 and 2013 on the corporate websites of Delta, Etihad and JAL, and aims at verifying how global carriers are currently engaging in global communication, while at the same time trying to balance their cultural identity and global appeal. Through the analysis of the main semantic areas and key words in the corpora and their collocations, similarities and differences in terms of the values underpinning the different airlines’ commitment to CSR are identified and the interplay between globalization and local culture in their communication is explored.

In Chapter Thirteen Elisa Turra compares the different CSR approaches found on the corporate websites of Moncler and Patagonia, two international apparel manufacturers using animal feathers in their products. The analysis of different forms of corporate communication (websites, ads, CEO letters in CSR and Financial Annual Reports) shows that CSR has become a powerful marketing tool, as well as a long-term corporate strategy. Corporate social responsibility is foregrounded in Patagonia’s corporate website, where among a range of different documents available, the CEO letter in the CSR report is noteworthy in that it aims at constructing the identity of a socially responsible company, while at the same time highlighting the company’s distinctive CSR approach. The other case study examined, Moncler, refers to an episode in which the company was accused of cruelty to animals (geese used for feathers) and its shares plummeted, but it managed to neutralize the
potential source of distrust by promptly denying all the allegations in a press-release. It also increased the space devoted to CSR on its website, published the first CSR report and incorporated responsibility, sustainability and respect into its values and mission statement.

Part Three of the volume, entitled “Representation and Discursive Construction in Corporate Communication”, collects studies that investigate a variety of aspects of corporate communication, both internal and external, focusing on a range of different activities, from accounting to human resources, from sales to promotion.

The section is opened by a study focusing on Italian banks. Being authored by four experts in accounting, Alessandra Allini, Luca Ferri, Marco Maffei and Annamaria Zampella, the chapter meaningfully reflects the basic concept underlying DICOEN’s philosophy, which advocates a synergy between scholars in linguistics and discourse analysis on the one hand, and professionals and experts in specific disciplines in the area of economics and business administration on the other. Allini et al.’s study aims to verify whether the Italian banking sector is compliant with the information required under the IFRS 7. The banking sector seems to be particularly concerned with this issue, especially after the financial crisis. Since banks have taken on increasingly prominent roles in international business, their financial reporting is likely to be more opaque than that of industrial companies. Furthermore, the regulatory framework of bank financial risks is complex since it is formulated by a range of different bodies. In the literature, however, various scholars pinpoint the incompleteness of such frameworks, which is one of the premises for IFRS 7. Overall, results show a medium level of compliance with financial risk disclosure requirements under IFRS 7 in the Italian banking sector over the period 2007-2013.

In Chapter Fifteen the focus shifts to corporate values as they are conveyed in texts aimed at employer branding. Jolanta Łącka-Badura’s study aims to identify the values constituting the Employee Value Proposition that are communicated by companies through their existing employees, and to explore how those values are expressed linguistically. The analysis, based on a corpus of employee testimonials extracted from the corporate websites of selected organisations, shows that the emotional/psychological benefits and employer brand values are mentioned by existing employees far more frequently than the functional/rational benefits. While the majority of values and benefits are expressed explicitly, with positively charged lexical items denoting (or easily associated with) particular values, there are some interesting instances of less explicit expression of values. Most of the findings are consistent with the observations made by organisational
scholars and HR practitioners about the salience of the highest ranking values, although significant differences have been found for two rational/functional values: remuneration and job security.

The communication dynamics explored in the next chapter by Anna Danielewicz-Betz pertain to internal communication, as the focus is on the managerial tool-related meta-discourse of top-down directives in the context of IT Sales and enterprise software, where employees are pressured to perform in an accurate and timely manner to drive corporate results. Danielewicz-Betz puts forth the findings of a research carried out on 240 anonymized emails originating from three global IT companies that is preliminary to a larger research project on internal business communication, with a corpus of over 4,000 emails. The results of the quantitative and qualitative analysis conducted suggest that imperative, declarative, conditional, and interrogative forms are frequently employed when anticipating and/or addressing issues connected with ‘tools’ and tool-mediated reporting, with requests being infrequent in such context. The prominent category of ‘urgency’, including priorities and deadlines, drew the author’s attention to yet another aspect of modern existence reflected in digital business discourse, i.e. ‘acceleration of time’, which further brought into focus technological and social forms of acceleration.

In the following chapter Janet Bowker uses the data provided by a semiconductor industry located in the Abruzzo region of Italy as recounted by one of its major figures and current CEO. It analyses the use of storytelling as a tool for trust repair between the company and stakeholders through the construction of a shared discourse. In particular, it examines the multi-modal visual texts which accompany the CEO’s workshop presentations to a part of the Business Studies academic community. The CEO, through his own “personal signature story”, recounts the troubled history of the company in a series of embedded and interlinked narratives. The discursive construal of trust is analysed linguistically through semantico-grammatical choices, speech functions, argumentation, word-image relationships and semiotic ensembles. At the same time, the study sheds light on the broader dimensions of rapid, often crisis-driven, transformation, revealing the embedding of “small stories” inside the “big stories” of contemporary business.

In Chapter Eighteen Oleksandr Kapranov presents a qualitative discourse analysis of Royal Dutch Shell’s corporate image building in the domain of climate change, which is investigated from the vantage point of cognitive linguistics and elucidated by means of a conceptual metaphor analysis of Shell’s 2014 Annual Report. The focus then shifts on how the image thus constructed is rendered in the Financial Times articles in