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USING CORPUS LINGUISTICS TO DESCRIBE CORPORATIONS' IDEOLOGIES

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Abstract: This article applies corpus linguistics to research the ideologies of Fortune 500 corporations as institutionalised through those corporations' mission statements. The methodology used is both qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative methodology relates to the semantics of corporations' ideologies. More precisely, it explains the ideas, beliefs, meanings, and concepts found in corporations' mission statements, the relation between those ideas, beliefs, meanings, and concepts and society, and what makes those ideas, beliefs, meanings, and concepts meaningful. Quantitative methodology relates to the description and comparison of corporations' ideologies based on a corpus-driven approach and computational text analysis of a corpus of corporations' mission statements. Ultimately, through its ideology a corporation creates a symbolic universe: "a matrix of all social and individual meanings" that determines the significance of the corporation and its stakeholders.
Key words: corpus linguistics, corporate ideology, corporate public discourse, default genre, mission statement, symbolic universe.

Sažetak: PRIMJENA KORPUSNE LINGVISTIKE U OPISU IDEOLOGIJA KORPORACIJA. Ovaj rad koristi korpusnu lingvistiku za istraživanje ideologija korporacija Fortuna 500 institucionaliziranih u izjavama o misiji tih organizacija. Koristi se kvalitativna i kvantitativna metodologija. Kvalitativna metodologija primijenjena je kod semantike korporacijske ideologije. Točnije, kvalitativna metodologija objašnjava ideje, uvjerenja, značenja i pojmove koji se nalaze u izjavama o misiji, veze između tih ideja, uvjerenja, značenja i pojmova te društva, kao i što tim idejama, značenjima i pojmovima daje smisao. Kvantitativna metodologija primijenjena je kod opisa i usporedbi korporacijskih ideologija zasnovanih na korpusnom pristupu te računalnoj analizi teksta korpusa izjava o misiji. Analiza je pokazala da korporacije koriste ideologiju kako bi stvorile simbolički univerzum: "matricu svih društvenih i individualnih značenja" koja određuje značenje korporacije i njezinih interesnih grupa.
Ključne riječi: korpusna lingvistika, ideologija korporacije, javni diskurs korporacije, defoltni žanr, izjava o misiji, simbolički univerzum.

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There is nothing outside of the text
– J. Derrida (1977)

1. INTRODUCTION

The linguistic turn in the social and human sciences, 'a tendency to view many social and psychological phenomena as constituted through language, sustained through language and challenged through language' (Gabriel 2004: 63), deeply affects our understanding of organisations. First, it opens the door to researching language in organisation as a strategic resource of corporate management. Second, it encourages transdisciplinarity: research which is 'at once between the disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all disciplines' (Nicolescu 1996). And third, it provides the field of study organisational discourse with a unique potential to create an 'epistemological break' in organisational studies (Fox and Fox 2004: 183-184).

Although the linguistic turn has promoted a rethinking of organisations and a 'reclamation of the political as an intrinsic part of all organisational experience, structure and practice' (Deetz 2003: 427), most studies into the language of organisation have tended to bypass the 'central "turn" issues' of researching how 'different worlds emerge' (p. 425; cf. also Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). Influential projects such as, for example, *The SAGE Handbook of Organisational Discourse* (Grant et al. /eds./ 2004), are helping to put this right. The 'plurivocality' (p. 2) of such a project leads to an awareness of the existence of the many realities of an organisation, the numerous discourses and counter-discourses which constitute those realities, as well as the variety of epistemological positions and perspectives on those realities offered by researchers in organisational discourse.

One of these realities is a corporation's ideology: a system of ideas (values, concepts, meanings, beliefs, attitudes and opinions) prioritised and institutionalised by a corporation. A corporation's ideology is a corporation's social representation through which it defines itself and its stakeholders. The discursive practice through which corporations institutionalise their ideologies is corporate public discourse (Fox and Fox 2004). In this paper I shall apply corpus linguistics[2] to describe the ideologies of the Global 500 companies 2005 through researching their mission statements. The rest of the paper is split into seven parts. In part two the role and the value of the mission statement to a corporation are discussed. Part three introduces the concept of the mission statement as a default genre of corporate public discourse (CPD). Part four outlines research methodology. Part five defines the text corpus used for this research. In part six quantitative analysis and results are given. Part seven describes the ideologies of the Global 500. In the discussion I look at the contribution of corpus linguistics to organisational discourse as a field of study.

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[2] Putting the *use* of language at the centre of language-related research, corpus linguistics has given an enormous impetus to the study of language in naturally occurring context, a position founded by Firth in the 1950s and further developed by Halliday from the 1960s and Sinclair from the 1980s. This position resolutely opposes the Chomskyan tradition which views language as a cognitive and biological phenomenon, that has to be studied through methodologies which rely mainly on the intuition of the researcher.

2. THE ROLE AND VALUE OF A MISSION STATEMENT

There are few books on either strategic or general management that do not devote at least a few paragraphs to the importance of a mission statement to an organisation. Generally perceived as the leading tool of strategic planning within an organisation, mission statements are closely linked to a corporation's management strategy. According to a The Economist 1990 report *Do you Need a Mission statement*, the impetus to create a mission statement, comes from different sources. Sometimes it is a corporate identity consultant who feels that constructing a mission might be a key step in building a corporation's identity. Or the idea may come from the financial community which sees a mission statement as a tool that enables managers to define and articulate rationales for a company's activities and management style. The internal sources stimulating the creation/reformulation of a mission statement are usually middle management, a company's executive committee and the chief executive herself. While the first two sources are stimulated by the wish to clarify the predominant view of a company's future, a chief executive may decide to create a new mission statement simply to communicate the 'basis of the new regime' (Do You Need .. 1990: 2).

Although companies (as well as practitioners and scholars) might disagree in their expectations of issues a mission statement should address and the benefits it should provide, they nevertheless have reached a consensus in their understanding of the mission statement as a document underlying the development of a company's business mission and fundamental to a company's growth (Falsey 1989; Kakabadse and Kakabadse 2001; Analoui and Karami 2002), as a factor of a company's financial success (David and David 2003; Bartkus, Glassman and McAfee 2006), as an instrument of motivation (and control) of employee behaviour (Daniel 1992; Ireland and Hitt 1992; Klemm et al. 1991; Bart, Bontis and Taggar 2001), as the necessary critical starting point for key strategic initiatives (Bart 1997; Thompson and Strickland 1992; Bart 2001; Bart et al. 2001), and as a means of promoting a sense of shared understanding/ expectations in employees (Analoui and Karami 2002; Bart 2001; Kemp and Dwyer 2003). Some, however, have questioned the usefulness of a mission statement, and have suggested that for a company with a good business mission there is no need for a statement (Simpson 1994; Rarick and Vitton 1995; Analoui 2002).

Aware of the practical value of a document aimed at clearly and succinctly capturing an organisation's uniqueness (its unique purpose, its unique rationale, its unique objectives), companies have embraced the idea of producing a mission statement (e.g., Pearce and David 1987; Peat Marwick McLintock 1989; Abrahams 1999; Analoui and Karami 2002; David and David 2003). Indeed, commonly included in a corporation's web page, a company's catalogue, a corporate advertisement, and the company's financial report, a mission statement is probably the most ubiquitous of all corporate genres.

3. A DEFAULT GENRE OF CPD

Highly stabilised in content and form, the mission statement constitutes a default genre of CPD (Fox and Fox 2004: 33). Like other CPD genres, for example, the corporate annual report, corporate business guidelines, and the CEO media interview, the mission statement has two communicative purposes: general and specific.

The general communicative purpose is the same for all CPD genres and concerns the institutionalisation of a corporation's ideology. It is in this sense, for example, that Bart and Baetz (1998) and David and David (2003) view the mission statement, as a means to assure unanimity of purpose, arouse positive feelings about the organisation, provide direction, provide a basis for objectives and strategies, serve as a focal point, and resolve divergent views among managers.

The specific communicative purpose is particular to a CPD genre and concerns its propositional (ideational) content, which for a mission statement has been defined in many different ways, for example, as

- an answer to the question what a company business is and should be (Drucker, 1973),
- capturing an organisation's unique purpose and practices (Bart 1997)
- distinguishing an organisation from other similar enterprises (David and David 2003).

Most surveys into a corporate mission statement focus on propositional content. An assumption of these surveys is that the inclusion/exclusion of certain propositional content (also referred to as components' of a mission statement), as defined by academic literature, determines the 'quality' of a mission statement. Pearce and David (1987), for example, have identified nine mandatory components of a mission statement: customers, products/services, geographic markets, technology, concern for survival/growth/profits, philosophy, public image, employees and distinctive competence. According to Klemm et al. (1991), a mission statement should focus on four main categories: purpose, strategic objectives, quantified planning targets, and the business definition. Studies by Bart (1996a, 1996b) add 'specific behaviour standards', which, the author claims, is especially important for innovative organisations. Finally, Bartkus, Glassman and McAfee (2004) have provided a framework for evaluating the mission statement content based on three elements: the identification of specific stakeholder groups, the inclusion of certain components (for example, industry, target customer, geographic scope ...) and an achievement of four objectives (communicating direction, assisting in control, guiding decision making, and motivating employees).

A major weakness of all mission statement content analyses is their lack of objectivity stemming primarily from the research perspective. Rather than *describing* the conventions of a mission statement and how those conventions meet the specific communicative purpose of a mission statement, researchers *prescribe* conventions and then analyse how these conventions are met in a mission statement.

4. METHODOLOGY

Most research into organisational discourse using theories and methods from linguistics focuses on the communicative event: an activity driven by a set of communicative purposes or communicative objectives which determine the schematic structure of the discourse and constrain choice of content and style (Fox and Fox 2004: 32-33). Typically, such research concerns text (as the social manifestation of a communicative event) and explores relationships between the event's objectives and the schematic structure, choice of content and style of the event. A discussion of a communicative event implies, then, the inseparability of meaning as held in the event's

text and an understanding of that meaning as held in a person's social knowledge. Without social knowledge it is not possible to discuss the communicative event.

When, however, the subject of research is a corporate genre -- a class of corporate communicative events sharing the same specific communicative purpose -- the conception of text is changed dramatically. Within the frame of a corporate genre, text (which now exists only as a virtual representation of a genre) is separated from any individual communicative event and, therefore, can no longer be thought of as a social manifestation of a communicative event. It follows, therefore, that the meanings of corporate genre 'text' is not dependent on the inseparability of meaning and understanding. Rather, those meanings are encapsulated in a system of stabilised linguistic choices of a genre.

The definition and description of a system of stabilised linguistic choices is possible through the compilation and analysis of a text corpus: a principled body of naturally occurring linguistic data, or rather, natural texts, which can be empirically analysed through quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques (cf. Sinclair 1991; Biber et al. 1998; Aijmer and Altenberg /eds./ 2004; Sinclair 2004). Corpus analysis enables the identification of central and typical language features to reveal the conventions of a discourse community: a social system which promotes the regulation of discourse. Conventions, of course, embody ideologies (systems of ideas prioritised and institutionalised by a corporation). In sum, then, by identifying central and typical language features to reveal the conventions of a discourse community, corpus analysis provides access to a discourse community's ideology.

5.   CORPUS$^{Global\ 500}$

The text corpus compiled for this research consists of 462 Global 500 mission statements (23,149 words) downloaded from companies' websites. The use of complete documents assures the representativeness of Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$: the applicability of findings based on corpus contents to a larger hypothetical corpus (on the advantage of using a text corpus compiled from complete documents cf. Sinclair 1991: 19). Research into a text corpus assumes the use of computational text analysis (CTA). Two standard products of CTA are the frequency list and text concordance which, together, allow for a wealth of research and the interpretation of data and results.

5.1 Frequency lists

A frequency list shows absolute/relative frequencies of all 'types' (different word forms). Since CTA treats different members of a lemma as different words, frequency lists have to be lemmatised (e.g. 'be' 'is', 'been'; 'we', 'our'; 'innovate', 'innovation', 'innovating'). The vocabulary of English is generally divided into two categories: function words (words that mostly do the grammatical work in a text: auxiliary verbs, modal verbs, pronouns, prepositions, determiners, conjunctions) and content words (words that mostly do the meaning work in a text: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, main verbs). This division, though, is not perfectly discrete, as all function words have at least some content.

Content words can be further divided into thematic words (words generally related to topics and activities) and key words (words generally related to social values of an era) (Fox 1999). For example, in the mission statement, thematic words will indicate the industry in which a company operates (for an IT company: 'technology', 'Windows', and 'software') and the corporate genre ('mission', 'statement') (Fox 2006: 361-363). The key words of a mission statement, on the other hand, are not exclusive to a corporation's industry, nor are they exclusive to a corporate genre. Because key words relate to social values of an era, they are by definition fundamental to the ideas upon which a corporation founds its ideology.

The division into thematic words and key words links to Sinclair's idea of the existence of two lexicons (1996, 2004: 149-163). One is an 'extended term bank'. Words/phrases in this group are mostly found in technical texts and have clear-cut fixed meanings which allows for 'clear meaning differentiation'. While the lexicon built on a terminological model attracts much attention by researchers who often attempt to use it as a model for the entire lexicon of a language, it is not of great linguistic interest because it deals with rare and specialised words and their least characteristics. The other type of lexicon is what Sinclair refers to as the 'empty' lexicon. This group is usage-defined and consists of words 'of the living language': words whose meanings are not entirely known in advance but created (and updated) through a word's relationships with other words, through the semantic links created by these relationships, and, as emphasised by Teubert (2001; 133), through the 'history' of a word's use.

5.2 Text concordance

Text concordance shows the occurrence of tokens (all words in a text) within their natural context. It provides quick access to both individual words and combinations of words, for example, collocations (the co-occurrence of words), colligations (the co-occurrence of words with grammatical choices), semantic preference (the co-occurrence of words with semantic choices) and semantic prosody (the junction of form and function expressing attitudinal and pragmatic meaning). Together, colligations, semantic preference and semantic prosody account for the meaning of a word. Take for example the word 'provider' in corpus MS and its more typical collocations:

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  to be the most trusted provider of systems and technologies
to be the leading global provider of financial solutions for d
         to be the premier provider of financial services in eve
        to be a premier provider of selected global financial
        to be the premier provider of design and manufacturing
           is the premier provider of full-service communicatio
           uality focused provider of power and gas , with the
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In these collocations the colligate 'of' functions to allow for the postmodification of 'provider' as a noun phrase and its choice of semantic preference for 'systems and technologies', 'selected global financial', 'power and gas'. A reader's understanding of 'provider', however, is pre-controlled by the attributes 'most trusted', 'leading', 'premier', which create semantic prosody. Thus, the meaning of the word 'provider' is created through three elements: a core ('provider of'), the semantic preference for a particular industry (e.g. finance, technology, power and gas) and the semantic prosody of an attribute (e.g. 'leading', 'premier').

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6. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Computational text analysis of Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$ was performed in the program TEXTPACK. The top 50 lemmas for Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$, split into thematic lemmas and key lemmas, are given in Table 1.

Table 1: The top 50 lemmas for Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$

CORPUS$^{Global\ 500}$			
Rank	**Lemma**	**Thematic lemmas**	**Key lemmas**
1	and		
2	be		
3	to		
4	of		
5	in		
6	a		
7	customer		customer
8	mission	mission	
9	with		
10	services	(financial) services	services
11	value		value
12	that		
13	business		business
14	global		global
15	by		
16	people		people
17	company		company
18	provide		provide
19	products		products
20	as		
21	they		
22	create		create
23	vision	vision	
24	best		best
25	on		
26	its		
27	through		
28	innovative		innovative
29	develop		develop
30	quality		quality
31	all		
32	environment		environment
33	this		
34	group	group	
35	most		most
36	work		work
37	energy	energy	
38	it		
39	growth		growth
40	leader		leader
41	shareholder		shareholder
42	society		society
43	achieve		achieve
44	at		
45	financial	financial	
46	community		community
47	which		
48	new		new
49	employees		employees
50	needs		needs

Together, thematic and key lemmas represent the ideas upon which corporations found their ideologies. Their meanings, however, should not be taken for granted. Take, for example, the key word 'growth'.

Within a terminological model the meaning of 'growth' is offered in dictionaries. General language dictionaries commonly define 'growth' as a degree of increase in size, importance, weight, power, etc. Specialised dictionaries (e.g., of economics, of business, of accounting) do not define 'growth'. They do, however, offer definitions for 'economic growth', 'growth theory', 'growth rate', 'growth stock' and so on.

If we wish to get to the meaning of 'growth' within the empty lexicon model, we assume that that meaning is not known in advance but is created (and updated) through the relationships of 'growth' with other words. Reference to Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$ text concordance for 'growth' shows its semantic preference to be focused on 'long-term', 'sustainable' and 'value', and its semantic prosody to be focused on 'fast', 'new' and 'innovative'. In sum, while a terminological model defines 'growth' in the context of economies of scale and an appropriate use of the scarce resources land, labour and capital, the empty lexicon model defines 'growth' in the context of economies of scope arising from the need to continually apply knowledge in novel ways. Of course, any further use of 'growth' in a communicative event will update the meaning of the word. For example, the semantic preference of the word 'growth', as used by General Electric's CEO Jeff Immelt in his HBR interview *Growth as a Process* (Stewart 2006), is 'organic'. Associating 'growth' to 'organic', Immelt further redefines an understanding of 'growth' within the context of economies of scope as growth attained not by acquisition but by innovation.

7. CORPORATIONS' IDEOLOGIES

If we accept the fundamental importance of key words to a corporation's ideology, then the top key words in Table 1 (customer, service, value, business, global, people, company, provide, products, create) will represent the main ideas of the ideologies of the Global 500. The meanings of these key words, as previously mentioned, are constructed of a core (the key word itself with its grammatical choices), semantic preference (preferred semantic choices of a key word), and semantic prosody (preferred semantic choices of a key word expressing attitudinal and pragmatic meaning). The most frequent semantic choices of the top five key words of Table 1 are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Top five content collocates for the top five key words of Corpus$^{Global\ 500}$

	KEY WORDS				
	customer	**service(s)**	**value**	**business**	**global**
COLLOCATES	~ value	products and ~	create ~	~ partners	~ company
	~ needs	customer ~	customer ~	core ~	most ~
	~ service	financial ~	shareholder ~	~ conduct	leading ~
	best ~	quality ~	product ~	~ solutions	~ environment
	outstanding~	~ value	service ~	~ ethics	best ~

Table 2 can be thought of as a semantic map of the ideologies of Global 500 companies. Each key word represents an idea to which companies are committed. The meaning of that commitment is defined through the key word's semantic preference (value, needs, service, products, customer, financial, quality, create, shareholders, partners, core, conduct, solutions, ethics, company, environment) and semantic prosody (best, outstanding, most, leading) Table 2 suggests that most companies are committed to providing 'outstanding customer service', 'products and services of universal quality', 'shareholder value by enhancing financial performance', 'customized business solutions' and to becoming 'leading global organizations'.

The choice of collocates, as I see it, enables a corporation not only to define the meanings of the ideas upon which it founds its ideology, but also to control the meanings of those ideas. Producing and controlling meanings, a corporation constructs itself as an object (perceived by others) and as a subject (perceived by itself). A consensus on the meanings of the ideas upon which a corporation founds its ideology infers a simple, stable, and determinate relationship between a corporation and society and makes the institutionalisation of a corporation's ideology easier.

DISCUSSION

Corporations are permanently involved in the institutionalisation of ideologies through which they construct social representations of themselves and their stakeholders and define themselves and their stakeholders (cf. also Fox 2005, 2006). In this paper I have used a corpus-driven approach to research the meanings of the ideas upon which corporations found their ideologies as institutionalised in their mission statements. Essentially, those ideas are represented through key words which embody social values. Because the meaning of a key word is susceptible to change, it is best revealed through the examination of the context of a key word.

Applying theories and methodologies from corpus linguistics to research into corporations' ideologies provides organisational discourse as a field of study with potential to research corporate genres. Eventually, we may see such research involving the whole of the 'corporate public discourse continuum' (Fox and Fox 2004: 111). The new knowledge created through applying theories and methodologies from corpus linguistics to researching corporations' ideologies will affect many areas of theoretical and practical concern. For one, it could contribute to the development of a grounded theory on what makes a 'winning' mission statement. But more important, researching corporations' ideologies through a corpus linguistics approach is about the definite move of organisational discourse as a field of study towards transdisciplinarity.

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