

Introduction

The present volume has been underlain by the four transversal themes, i.e. identity, discourse, ideology and ecology, scrutinised in the context of corporate communication. The choice of the corporate context has been motivated by the fact that transnational corporations wield enormous power in the contemporary world. Reportedly, of the world's 100 largest economic entities, 52 are companies and 49 are nation states (Keay, 2015). Such a concentration of capital does not only translate into economic power but also empowers multinationals to influence world politics in line with their interests, which ultimately affects the whole global ecosystem, including its environmental as well as socio-economic, political and legislative facets.

As any kind of organisation, corporations need to construct their sense of identity and relations with their stakeholders. The key role in this process is played by discourse since corporations constitute their identity through discourse and are constituted through discourse. Taking into account the phenomenon of globalisation and the rise of the media, especially the Internet and social media, capable of providing instant and ubiquitous coverage, the management of corporate communication comes across as a particularly challenging task. Additionally, media coverage might be potentially addressed at an informed audience that approaches corporate messages with a dose of sound criticism and wariness related to ethical aspects of corporate activity, reported in self-praising corporate narrations. The process of the construction of corporate identity is interpreted here as "an emergent construction, the situated outcome of a rhetorical and interpretive process in which interactants make situationally motivated selections from socially constituted repertoires of identificational and affiliational resources" (Bauman, 2004: 1). Identifying the resources used to construct and reaffirm corporate identity is the main aim of this monograph.

The concept of identity is tightly intertwined with the ideology underlying it. Nonetheless, little attention has so far been paid to the ideological underpinning of corporate discourse, not to mention its ecological orientation. Researching corporate ideology is not only informative of the corporation itself but also of society, stakeholders and the complex network of relations between them (Fox, 2006). A major discursive practice through which corporations institutionalise and legitimise their ideologies, emerging from their systems of values, beliefs, ideas and concepts, is corporate discourse contained

in the “About us” section of corporate webpages, dubbed the major carrier of corporate identity. Thus, the novelty of this project lies in approaching the discursive construction of corporate identity from an ecolinguistic perspective, accounting for the eco-critical analysis of its ideological grounding. The selection of the ecolinguistic approach has been dictated by the assumption that all human activity is ecologically embedded. The understanding of the concept of ecosystem is broad and encompasses both its environmental and socio-economic dimensions. Thus, the ecosophy lying beneath this volume draws primarily on the Næss’s concept of deep ecology and the idea of sustainable development (Baker, 2006).

So far, the public debate has been monopolised by the neoliberal agenda (Holborow, 2012) and the dominating economic paradigm (Jonker and Marberg, 2007). Discourses of globalisation, market, profitability and marketisation have permeated all possible domains of human activity, including the public sector, colonising even the former anti-commercial strongholds, such as educational institutions, the health service or not-for-profit organisations (Fairclough, 1993). The neoliberal paradigm, however, has been to a large extent discredited by the world economic crisis in 2008. This single event instigated a wave of criticism and opened new avenues for public debate on the alternative socio-political order. The way to possible transformations, however, had been paved much earlier by the rise of environmentalism in the 1970/1980s that reached its climax in the 1990s when environmental issues were on the media and political agenda. This led to an observable rise in the ecological awareness of the public and their growing mistrust in corporations, followed by the emergence of environmental discourses in the public domain that offered a representation of reality alternative to the hegemonic neoliberal agenda. Corporations, however, have not remained unresponsive to the new social expectations. Quite the contrary, they rushed to reconstruct their identities in order to project a new “green” image, emanating an aura of social and environmental involvement, satisfying their stakeholders. Thus, it might be put forward that under public pressure, environmentalism has permeated corporate discourse and the new eco-friendly corporate identity has become conventionalised into the mainstream corporate discourse.

The present volume is divided into five chapters. The first chapter aims at elucidating the theoretical facets and main assumptions of the ecolinguistic approach and providing a frame of reference for further considerations. The next chapter focuses on the concept of identity, central in this book, and its understanding in the organisational context. The notion of identity will be approached from a multidisciplinary perspective, following Halliday’s (1978: 11) argument that “[a]ny study of language involves some attention to other dis-

ciplines". Accordingly, the undertaken discussion draws on selected contributions from social psychology, sociology, discourse studies, organisational studies and corporate communication studies, construed in the ecological paradigm. The chapter also strives for the delineation of the boundaries between the notions of identity, image and reputation, the meanings of which tend to overlap across disciplines. Additionally, it attempts to incorporate the newly-emerged corporate ethical and environmental concerns in the construction of corporate identity. The chapter is finalised with the advancement of the Ecological Model of Corporate Identity.

Following McLuhan's (1962) canonical statement that "the medium is the message", the subsequent chapter focuses on the affordances of the newly-emerged virtual environment and their influence on communicating corporate identity. The frameworks for the discussion on new media have been demarcated by the theory of technological determinism and social constructivism. Further considerations, applied to the corporate context, pertain to the concept of genre and its transformation in cyberspace. The corporate webpage, narrowed to its "About us" pages, is posited as the major tool for communicating corporate identity online.

The fourth chapter centres on the notions of discourse and ideology. It offers an analysis of the principles and applications of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) and the recently proposed (Stibbe, 2014; Alexander and Stibbe, 2014) Ecological Discourse Analysis (henceforth EDA), advancing EDA as a more viable alternative, effectively addressing the challenges of the contemporary world.

The final, fifth, chapter reports the findings of the undertaken study, aspiring to verify the hypothesised ideological shift in the corporate identity discourse towards the eco-social paradigm with "hard" linguistic data. The main rationale behind the study is the lack of relevant ecolinguistic research on the corporate identity discourse. Therefore, one of the challenges faced by the researcher is the development of analytical procedures merging the principles of the newly-proposed and unexplored EDA and Corpus Linguistics (henceforth CL). The study addresses three major research questions concerning the generic characteristics of the "About us" sections (RQ1), the discursive construction of corporate identity (RQ2), as evidenced by keywords and dominating themes, as well as ideological underpinning of corporate identity discourse (RQ3).

The novelty of the current project lies in the application of the integrative ecolinguistic approach to the study of the discursive construction of corporate identity, with a special focus on its ideological aspects. The study also attempts to blaze a trail for the application of CL in EDA and develop methodological procedures for further analysis.