Environmental communication: Control of discourse, discourses of control

Framing nature: discourses past and present of nature and the environment. CLAVIER 2023, Milano, 22-24 nov.

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Field of interest

Environmental communication:

- French-speaking and Scandinavian companies
  - Small and medium businesses
  - Internet communication (websites)
  - Wealth of research on multinational / major national companies already
    - ➢ SMBs « out of the picture » in the literature?

Field of interest

- Communication from big companies:
  - Lot of scrutiny
  - Carried out by trained professionals
    - Normative isomorphism? (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)
  - Importance of social responsibility communication :
    - 3rd biggest expenditure (Hutton *et al.*, 2001)
    - Homogeneity in CSR reports of multinational companies (Yu and Bondi, 2017; Sun *et al.*, 2018)

- Northern Europe / Scandinavia
  - Praised for its performance with CSR / sustainability (Strand *et al.*, 2015)
  - Bigger companies tend to communicate in English rather than local language

Field of interest

Voluntary communication?

- Moral obligation and need for legitimacy as « drivers » for CSR
  - CSR as a « social demand » (Pesqueux, 2009)
- No legal pressure for SMBs

- European directive 2014/95/EU on non-financial reporting
  - Non-financial statements (human rights, environment…) in companies' annual reports
  - SMBs specifically excluded from the provisions of the directive
    - Communication expected to be voluntary?

Corpora

Communication on companies' website

- Open to everybody : neutral communication?

- One corpus for each country

  - (French-speaking) Belgium

  - Denmark

  - France

  - Norway

  - Sweden

	BE	DK	FR	NO	SV
Companies	27	30	28	28	28
Pages (URLs)	53	49	46	47	51
Tokens	19 876	16 669	18 084	21 614	15 744

Methodology

Methods and tools from corpus linguistics and textometry

- Quantitative methods

- In-text observations to complete statistical calculations

Theoretical framework borrowed from sociology (institutional theory)

- « *Why organizations tend to look alike* » (Greenwood *et al.*, 2014:1207)

- Relevant for the analysis of corporate communication stemming from different corpora

Methodology

Framing

- Frames : *"Our cognitive or conceptual views of particular situations"* (Hyland 2005:8)
  - ➢ Framing: orienting the reader's view
- An attempt at controlling discourse
- Consistent framing constructs discursive representations and makes them accepted by the public
  - ➢ "Naturalization" (Fairclough, 2010)
- Lack of clarity:
  - "The term frame is used in a wide variety of ways by academics in different disciplines, by those in the same discipline and sometimes even by the same author" (Stibbe, 2015:46)
- Typologies: MacLachlan and Reid (1994)

A typology of framing

4 modes of framing in MacLachlan and Reid's (1994) typology:

- Intratextual framing

- Extratextual framing

- Intertextual framing

  ➤ Intertextual references to standards or certifications:

    « engagés dans ce processus d ' amélioration continue, nous avons obtenu en 2017 la certification iso 14001 en faveur d'un management environnemental performant » (pierrebleuebelge-1 [BE])
    « as we're committed to this process of continuous improvement, we were awarded iso 14001 certification in 2017 for efficient environmental management »

- Circumtextual framing

POLITIQUE ENVIRONNEMENTALE

Soucieux de l'importance de la Qualité environnementale, nous veillons sur chaque chantier à :

- la réduction des consommations énergétiques

- la réduction des pollutions

A typology of framing

- Intratextual framing:

  - "*the way in which the flow of words within the text is affected by internal organizational devices which guide interpretation*" (Hyland, 2005:8)

  ➢ Markers of cause, consequence or goals

  "derfor har vi en klar procedure for affaldssortering" (bj-gear-703 [DK])
  "therefore, we have a clear waste sorting policy"

  ➢ Use of syntactic or pragmatic devices (e.g. thematization or presupposition)

  "[nous] sommes fiers de proposer des produits […] avec un impact réduit sur l'environnement" (st-groupe-24 [FR])

  "we are proud to offer product with reduced environmental impact"

  ➢ Explicit framing strategies from companies

  "som byggföretag vill vi…" (hansabygg-15 [SV])
  "as a construction company, we want to…"

A typology of framing

- Numerous instances of intratextual framing:

"COMPANYNAME har gode innarbeidede rutiner i egen produksjon <u>for å</u> forhindre miljøforurensing og redusere miljøbelastningen" (norfolier1 [NO])

"COMPANYNAME has well-established routines in its production process <u>to</u> prevent environmental pollution and reduce environmental impacts"

- ➢ Efficiency of the routines is framed
  - ➢ Pollution is prevented
  - ➢ Environmental impacts are reduced

- Cases of overlapping: intertextual references "walk" the readership through conclusions:

"[…] <u>les entreprises certifiées</u> contribuent <u>donc</u> activement à la protection de l'environnement" (Europal-packaging-2 [BE])

"<u>certified companies</u> make <u>therefore</u> an active contribution to environmental protection"

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Framing processes paint companies in a situation of control
  - Able or willing to act, when they're not succeeding already:

"en faisant des choix pertinents, nous **parvenons** à limiter notre impact sur l'environnement" (bietlot-1 [BE])
"by making relevant choices, we **manage** to limite our impact on the environment"

"COMPANYNAME **åtar sig** att [...] minska miljöbelastningen genom att medverka [...]" (swedhandling-1[SV])
"COMPANYNAME **undertakes** to reduce its environmental impact by contributing…"

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Challenges pertaining to sustainable development / the environment can easily be addressed:

"<u>organiser un événement</u> dans un des COMPANYNAME, <u>c'est faire</u> le choix du développement durable" (martins-hotels-1 [BE])
"<u>organizing an event</u> at COMPANYNAME <u>means chosing</u> sustainable development"

- In line with observations from Fernández-Vázquez et Sancho-Ródriguez (2020)

  ➢ Environmental discourse from private companies is mostly optimistic

  ➢ But in addition to that: environmental challenge can be addressed (or has been partially overcome already)

  ➢ Companies are « in charge »

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Discourse of control that partially relies on « buzzwords » (sometimes associated to recurring lexico-syntactic patterns)

  - Connection between buzzwords and extratextual framing
    - ➤ "*our accumulated knowledge of the world, both experiential and textually mediated*" (MacLachlan and Reid, 1994:3)

  - Recurring lexis / patterns: "formulaic style" required to fulfil expectations / grant legitimacy (Rist, 2002)
    - ➤ Connect with our stereotypes (e.g. "protecting the environment")

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Discursive items offer much flexibility and forging of neologisms

  ➢ Literature points out abuse of what is "eco-" or "green" (Cox, 2018:199)

  ➢ Adjective "sustainable" in my corpora:

    ➢ Sustainable forestry
    ➢ Sustainable future
    ➢ Sustainable growth
    ➢ Sustainable procurement
    ➢ Sustainable trade
    ➢ …

  ➢ Insincere talk?
    (Fiala *et al.*, 1987:60)
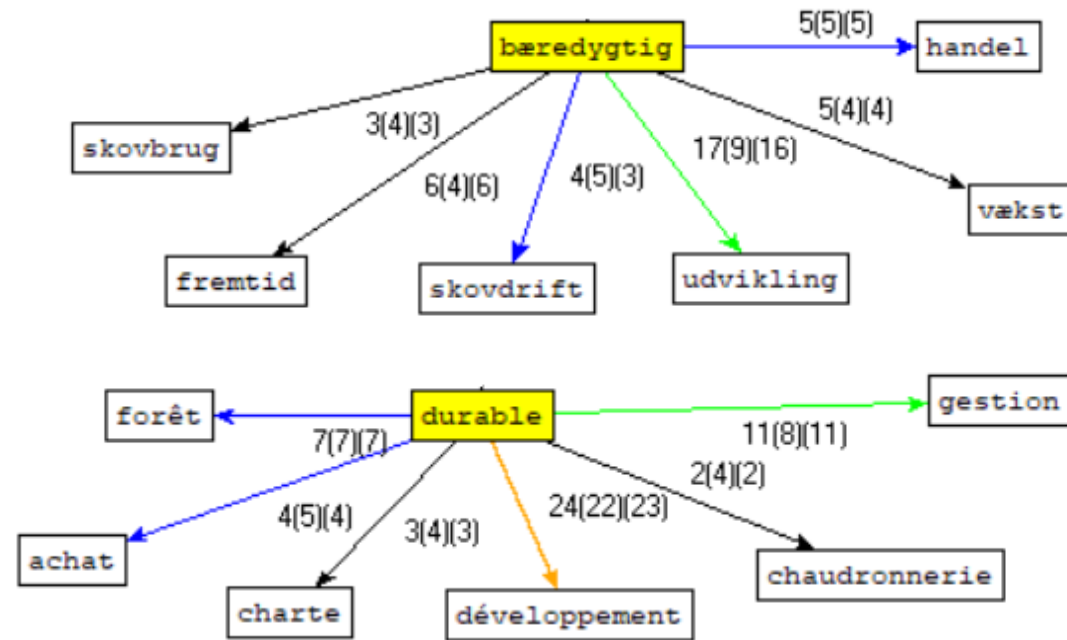
Statistically significant co-occurrences of
« sustainable » (lemmatized) in the Danish and Belgian corpora.
Le Trameur, ind. sp. min. 4. Contextual window: sentence (delimiters: . ! ? §)

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Patterns that refer to a situation of control

  - "Environmental management" refers directly to ISO 14000 series and the idea of an existing set of rules / procedures:

"iso 14001 – 2015 innebär att vi arbetar strukturerat för… " (skoglunds-38 [SV])
"iso 14001 – 2015 means that we work in a structured way to…"

  - The mention of « environmental policies » or « processes » suggests the existence of similar procedures:

"la politique environnementale du COMPANYNAME vise à …" (guinier-1 [FR])
"COMPANYNAME's environmental policy aims to…"

- Lexico-syntactic patterns to the same intent

  - "Environmental impact" that must be "reduced" or "limited":

"norsk produksjon […] reduserer miljøbelastningen… " (høie-315 [NO])
"production in norway reduces the impact on the environment"

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- A challenge: identifying recurring lexis / patterns
  - Small corpora:
    - What does "recurring" mean?
    - How to deal with phenomena such as syntactic ellipses ("the environment and our impact on it")…
    - … or variation ("impact on the planet" ; "ecological impact"…)

  ➢ Interesting on a discursive level, but problematic for quantitative analysis
  ➢ Need to set strict rules for calculation
    ➢ Leaves much data out of the analysis
    ➢ Disputable results
    ➢ Applies to framing devices as well (what IS a framing device?)
  ➢ Results are tentative (though encouraging) and must be taken with caution

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- What correlation between the use of intratextual framing devices and that of extratextual framing devices?

  - Are buzzwords often paired with other framing devices?

    - Do buzzwords also carry an intrinsic argumentative weight?

"<u>grâce à</u> un rendement énergétique supérieur à la plupart des technologies existantes, nous pouvons maitriser l'<u>impact écologique</u> de notre activité" (sicoly-394 [FR])
"<u>thanks to</u> an energy efficiency superior to most existing technologies, we are able to control the <u>ecological impact</u> of our activity"

Intratextual framing devices	Extratextual framing devices
Cause/consequence/goal markers	Recurring lexis based on strict rules
Recurring syntactic strategies (e.g. thematization)	
Recurring pragmatic strategies (e.g. presupposition)	

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Selection of lexis :

  - Based on its frequency in each corpus

  - But also across the corpora:

    - Verbal constructions are excluded from the list of patterns

    - "Protecting the environment" is not taken into account, but "Protection of the environment" is

    - The Norwegian equivalent ("beskyttelse av miljøet") appears only once, but is selected on the basis that the French equivalent ("protection de l'environnement") appears several times in the Belgian and French corpora

    - ➢ Makes up for the size of the corpora

    - ➢ Coherent with institutional theory ("organizations tend to become similar")

Control of discourse, discourse of control

- Khi2 test of independence to check for correlation between intra- and extratextual framing strategies at the sentence level

  - A sentence = a series of characters between two delimiters (following punctuation marks: . ! ?)

  - Two hypotheses: H_0 (independence) and H_1 (correlation)

    - H_0 : no correlation between the use of intra- and extratextual framing devices

    - H_1 : correlation between the use of intra- and extratextual framing devices

  - Results encouraging but tentative

  - In-text observations should complete statistical analysis (e.g. Carbou, 2017:11)

Khi2-test results

BE	$\chi^2(1) = 9.47$, $p < 0.005$
DK	$\chi^2(1) = 4.28$, $p < 0.05$
FR	$\chi^2(1) = 4.47$, $p < 0.05$
NO	$\chi^2(1) = 11.7$, $p < 0.001$
SV	$\chi^2(1) = 10.78$, $p < 0.005$

- Statistically significant correlation between the use of intra- and extratextual framing devices at the sentence level

  - Reinforcing the use of buzzwords with specific markers (or vice-versa) is likely to be a rhetoric choice

  - Recurring lexico-syntactic patterns / buzzwords to reinforce the image of companies and their ability to act and succeed

  - Environmental discourse of SMBs bears the features of a discourse of control as much as it attempts to control discourse

    ➢ Control of discourse sustains a discourse of control – in all 5 corpora

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Thank your for your attention!

Grazie per la vostra attenzione!

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