

ON (DE)CONSTRUCTING CORPORATE IDENTITY: AN ECOLINGUISTIC APPROACH

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This book is a welcome addition to the existing literature in the field of *ecolinguistics* “symbolically marked with the 1970 talk delivered by Einar Haugen and the publication of *The Ecology of Language* (1972) that opened the door to challenging the perception of the relations between language and its environment” (63). The second major strand of this approach began in the 1990s with Halliday’s insights connecting biological ecology as well as ecological and environmental issues to language.

In an attempt to be comprehensive, this volume has been divided into five chapters. Each chapter finishes with a summary section in which the most relevant aspects covered are reviewed. The first chapter thoroughly revises the theoretical foundations of the ecolinguistic paradigm, providing a solid summary of its history and main developments. Chapter 2 defines the concept of identity in the organizational setting, taking an interdisciplinary perspective that draws on contributions representing the fields of social psychology, sociology, discourse studies, organizational studies and corporate communication studies, construed in the ecological paradigm. This chapter differentiates and compares elusive concepts such as *identity*, *individual vs. social identity*, *identity vs. self*, *image and reputation*, whose meanings often overlap across disciplines. It also includes new concepts, which have become relevant to the construction of corporate identity: ethical and environmental issues. Ethical aspects of corporate identity have become a must for

corporate communication, reinforcing and consolidating corporate identity and reputation. On page 77, the author rightly points out the scarce consensus that exists on the notion of organizational identity and “calls for a multilevel framework for analysis, embracing the individual, group, social, organisational, corporate and cultural identities (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000; Brown 2000; Gioia, Schultz and Corley 2002)”. Another important issue is the dynamic nature of corporate identity, seen as a dynamic construct, that is, in Breeze’s words, “created, expressed and replicated through discourse, and it is also performed through the actions and practices of the corporate entity and its members” (2013: 14). In the final section of chapter 2, the author develops her own Ecological Model of Corporate Identity that situates the company in the broadly understood ecosystem accounting for a complex network of social, cultural, economic, political, technological and environmental factors. The novelty of her model lies in exposing the company’s embeddedness in the intricate network of mutual relations between the company, its stakeholders and the ecosystem, and in assuming the centrality of ethical and ecological appeals as well in constructing corporate identity.

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Chapter 3 is particularly attention-grabbing for those interested in the mechanisms of communicating corporate identity on the internet corporate webpages, undoubtedly nowadays the most important communication tool. The author explores the unequal status among users and organizations, the latter being the source of a persuasive message with a clearly defined goal. Corporate messages are cleverly “planned, controlled and subdued to the needs of the company rather than encouraging an honest dialogue with stakeholders” (154). This chapter also highlights the most important generic and linguistic aspects of the corporate webpage, concerning the construction of corporate identity, and discusses both the form and content of the mission statement, a web-migrated micro-genre, considered the main carrier of corporate identity, and the cunning use of pronouns as the key identity markers in corporate discourse.

In chapter 4 —“Ideological Aspects of Corporate Identity and Discourse: Towards Ecological Discourse Analysis”— we find an explanation of the notion of discourse and then of another essential, yet nebulous, notion of ideology. It also outlines the main assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and contrasts them with those of Ecological Discourse Analysis. The author concludes that the perspective offered by CDA seems too narrow to comprehend the discursive construction of corporate identity that nowadays has nuances of ecological embedding.

Chapter 5 presents a research project that analyses the discursive construction of corporate identity, with special focus on its ideology, confronted with the assumed ecosophy. In accordance with the proposed Ecological Model of Corporate Identity, corporate identity is understood as a concept deeply embedded in its

environmental and anthropomorphic ecosystem. Therefore, the self-representation of the company, guided primarily by corporate goals, emerges from a particular socio-economic and ecological context and the corporate identity discourse may reflect existing ideologies. The analysis, using corpus data gathered in the period of June-December 2015 from different companies, concludes that corporate companies construct their identities based on ecological appeals, named “surface ecologization” (Fill 2001: 50).

The findings of this volume are thought-provoking, not only because of what they prove in relation to the construction of corporate identity, but also because they open up new paths of research. These include the need for further studies of different corporate websites of international and local companies. These are important, particularly as they could have implications for discourse studies and web designers.

All in all, *On (De) Constructing Corporate Identity: An Ecolinguistic Approach* by Emilia Waśkiewicz-Firlej is theoretically well-grounded and this contributes to the development of corporate communication studies. However, the wide range of the four topics addressed —identity, discourse, ideology and ecology— results in a certain lack of unity of the book as a whole. Likewise, given the wide range of these research interests, it is hard to envisage a homogenous type of audience. It could be of interest to a wide readership, including people working on corporate websites, discourse analysis or cognitive linguistics. Despite these shortcomings, the book is highly recommendable because it includes a comprehensive analysis of corporate identity issues. Consequently, it is definitely a very interesting read for those interested in corporate identity as it brings to the fore an invaluable amount of scholarly material on this topic, providing original insights as well.

Works Cited

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