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ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE

Renata Fox & John Fox, *Organizational Discourse – A Language-Ideology-Power Perspective*, Westport, Connecticut/London, Praeger, 2004, 221

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

This book is part of a wider interdisciplinary field of discourse studies, more specifically, organizational discourse (OD), which explores various aspects of linguistic expression that is manifested in organizations. Pointing out "the weakness of present definitions of OD" and aiming at "giv[ing] some momentum to OD" (p. xii), the authors set about exploring the relationship between language and corporation from a novel language-ideology-power perspective. Drawing extensively on theories from linguistics, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, the ethnography of communication, organizational studies, social psychology, the theory of ideology and media theory, and applying computational text analysis (CTA) to an imposing corpus, which includes corporate mission statements, business guidelines, media advertisements, annual reports and CEO media interviews, the authors develop a theory of corporate public discourse (CPD) in order to answer the fundamental question of how "corporations strategically use discourse to practice power through consent" (p. 181). The basic notion of *CPD* is elaborated through the key concepts of *CPD genres*, *CPD communicative events*, *CPD continuum* and *text-world model*. The book reaches out toward a wide audience of laymen and scholars whose theoretical or practical aspirations are driven not only by gaining an insight into how corporations actually use language to promote their own interests, but also in how language may, in turn, shape corporations.

SUMMARY

The book opens with a preface which sets the scene: the authors sketch out the world of corporations, introduce questions relevant for the study of OD, outline the present state of the art, including the problems related to a proper definition of OD, and briefly state their objectives and methodology. The book ends with a glossary, bibliography and an index. The rest of the book is organized into seven parts.

PART I: INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter (p. 1-10) defines the research perspective. Starting with an instance of corporate discourse – Wal-Mart's weekly meetings – the authors go on to discuss the central notions of *ideology*, *legitimacy* and *power through consent*, relating them, by way of illustration, to Wal-Mart's practices. The chapter closes with a clear statement of the authors' research intention, "we explore how corporations use discourse to practice power through consent" (p. 8), followed by a succinct presentation of the content of the book.

PART II: THE CORPORATION

This section contains four chapters. Chapter 2, "Corporate Public Discourse" (p. 13-23), introduces CPD, a dominant discoursal practice of corporations, as a synthesis of three key concepts (*corporate*, *public*, *discourse*), which performs the functions of "institutionalization, legitimization, capitalization and inculcation of a corporation's ideology" (p. 22). The rest of the chapter provides a theoretical background for the study of CPD, namely, the ethnography of communication, organizational studies and linguistics. Chapter 3, "A Corporation's Ideology" (p. 25-30), is a case study in Shell's CPD. Chapter 4, "CPD's Nomenclature" (p. 31-39), explicates the metalanguage: a *CPD communicative event* (of a general or specific communicative purpose) as the basic unit, a *CPD genre* as a class of CPD communicative events, and *text* (or *text-world model*) as a linguistic expression of a CPD communicative event. Chapter 5, "CPD as Capital" (p. 41-44), is a case study in IBM's CPD, applying the nomenclature introduced in the previous chapter.

PART III: CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

This section, consisting of four chapters, introduces the notion of *corporate management discourse community* (*CMDC*) as distinct from that of *speech community* (chapter 6 "The Corporate Management Discourse Community" (p. 47-49)), and relates it to the ways a selected group of CEOs use CPD for legitimization (chapter 7 "A Disclosure of Power" (p. 51-58); chapter 8 "A Disclosure of Leadership" (p. 59-63); chapter 9 "A Disclosure of Social Position" (p. 65-71)). Elaborating on Beaugrande's categories of discourse processes (presented in chapter 4), the authors demonstrate how each CEO's media interview shows properties characteristic of a particular discourse process (e.g. semiotic and volitional) attested by the use of certain linguistic indicators such as personal pronouns, argument structure and lexis.

PART IV: MEDIA OF CPD

This section consists of two chapters. Chapter 10, "Writing" (p. 75-84), explains why writing must be the preferred medium of CPD. It also outlines the historical development of literacy and highlights certain aspects of writing conceived of as a process. The chapter closes with a presentation of "patterns of knowledge" (p. 81), such as frame, schema and script, defined as "the means for people to rationalize their cognitive resources" (p. 83), relating them to particular instances of CPD communicative events. Chapter 11, "Mass Media and CPD" (p.

85-93), discusses the interdependency of the mass media/corporation relationship and the influence mass media (including the Internet) exert on CPD, which, in turn, assumes the strategic roles of a medium of "virtual witnessing", "compulsory visibility" and "extended mediazation" (p. 93).

PART V: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The first four sections explore instances of CPD communicative events. This section, by contrast, focuses on CPD genres. It consists of two chapters. Chapter 12, "Five CPD Default Genres' (p. 97-112), is both general and specific in orientation. It deals with the issue of corpus representativeness (e.g. problems related to corpus sampling techniques and size), and presents the standard tools of computational text analysis (CTA), namely, frequency and alphabetical lists, text concordances and basic numerical parameters. The focus is then shifted to the discussion of the results obtained by applying CTA to the CPD corpus which comprises five subcorpora, each representing a particular CPD default genre: the corporate mission statement genre, the CEO media interview genre, the corporate business guidelines genre, the corporate media advertisement genre and the corporate annual report genre. The research intention of Chapter 13, "Five Corporate Web Pages" (p. 113-124), is based on the assumption that "the highly frequent content words of a corporation's downloaded Web page [...] represent ideas [...] constitutive to a corporation's ideology" (p. 115). To this purpose, CTA is applied to the corporate Web pages of five corporations (Accor, Airbus, Altana, Ricoh and Vodafone).

PART VI: SPECIFIC RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

This section is a selection of topics that show a diversified potential of CPD research if approached from a language-ideology-power perspective. It consists of five chapters. Chapter 14, "The Corporate Metaphor (p. 127-139), gives a general introduction to the phenomenon of metaphor, focusing then on corporate metaphor, more specifically, on warfare metaphor, animal metaphor, sport metaphor, anthropomorphic metaphor, family metaphor, religious metaphor and Wild West metaphor. The first three types of metaphor, according to the authors, prevail in CEOs' media interviews. Chapter 15, "Globalization" (p. 141-147), investigates the discourse of globalization as demonstrated in a number of CPDs. Chapter 16, "Gender" (p. 149-162), discusses gender issues related to corporate practices (e.g. gender discrimination, the gender stereotype, an androgynous model of behaviour, a gender-neutral style, etc.) and their influence on CPD. Chapter 17, "The CEO's Media Interview" (p. 163-167), illustrates the transformation of the CEO's media interview into a regular drama. Chapter 18, "Promotionalization of CPD" (p. 169-177), considers the promotional (communicative) function of CPD, particularly at work in corporate mission statements whose hyperbolic language is not unlike the discourse of advertising.

PART VII: POSTSCRIPT

The final chapter, true to its title "Adjourning the Exploration" (p. 181-184), is a refreshing reminder of the main ideas espoused in the book that argues for an

interdisciplinary approach to a theory of CPD, indicating, without fail, directions for further study in OD.

EVALUATION

The first obvious merit of this book lies in a clear, consistent and painstaking organization. Each chapter is prefaced with an apposite citation that sets the tone for what is to follow, and closes with the authors' well-constructed conclusion. The sections, and chapters within, flow smoothly according to the layout given in the introduction. The plan for achieving the stated goal (i.e. "[d]efine a discoursal practice of corporations", "[e]xplore and describe that discoursal practice", "[e]stablish a general theory for that discoursal practice", "[a]nalyze the linguistic form and content of that discoursal practice", "[d]evelop a metalanguage", and "[s]et a path for the future development of OD" – from a well-argued "language-ideology-power perspective" (p. 9)) is thoroughly observed. The reader is frequently made aware of what has been accomplished in a given chapter in relation to the stated goal of the book (e.g. "[a]nalyzing individual communicative events, we explored the event end of the continuum. Analyzing corpus^{CPD}, we explored the CPD end of the continuum" (p. 111)). Equally commendable is the authors' treatment of the rich and varied terminology, which is not an easy task, but is nonetheless an inevitable corollary of any interdisciplinary undertaking. Not only are the terms and concepts pithily explained when introduced, but the book also provides a well-balanced glossary (p. 185-191) as a most welcome addition.

The interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter makes this book an excellent reference. A reader with a background in linguistics will find chapters 12 and 13 particularly stimulating in their presentation and discussion of the findings related to the most frequent function and content words of CPD. Chapter 14 offers an interesting analysis of corporate metaphor although it fails to mention some current cognitive *and* pragmatic approaches to metaphor, such as relevance theory, in the general overview of the existing accounts. This, however, is a forgivable omission in a multi-perspective book of this scope.

The argumentation is convincing and well-supported with genuine examples, making the overall value of this book high. The book also whets the appetite for further study in corporate discourse, which might include, for instance, politeness phenomena, discourse markers, linguistic indicators of backstage corporate discourse, and cross-cultural manifestations in a multinational environment that uses English as its official language. Further broadening of the topic in languages other than English still remains to be done, but this book is a good start.