

A Sample Typology of Texts in Corporate Discourse

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Abstract: The subject matter of this article is to present a working typology of different texts existing in corporate discourse. The data for the following analysis are drawn from various groups of documents existing in Nestle Corporation. The division into categories was possible after highlighting the most discriminative features of the texts under investigation. Moreover, it gives me the possibility to reveal how texts are shaped by contexts in which they exist. Bearing the above in mind, we must not forget that written utterances are always influenced by different but closely related parameters, such as a sender, a recipient, a particular incident and an aim of the conversation – to be more precise they cannot exist independently. This paper attempts at pointing out the weakness and merits of the corporate discourse communication system in the described company and by doing so, facilitate the flow of information among all departments, employees and factories.

Keywords: corporate, discourse, analysis, category, text and document.

1. Research objectives

Nowadays it is easily possible to distinguish quite a range of highly dynamic and changing corporate discourses which use a number of specific and discourse-dependent texts (for the introductory discussion of *speech genres* see, e.g., Bakhtin 1986). The aim of this short paper is to suggest a direction in the text-oriented studies of corporate discourse regarding the multifarious written interactions existing in a large worldwide corporation (NESTLE) which produces processed food, liquid seasoning, ice-creams and beverages. The fact that the company is a huge international venture, and its factories, distribution centers and head offices are located in 80 countries and employ over 275 000 people, forced its management board to choose one universal language in order to facilitate the processing of information flow within the corporation (for the discussion of various types of communication models see Fiske [1982] 1999). Moreover, the above-mentioned company has been developing its own version of English, i.e. “Nestlish”, and has been organizing language training for all employees in each country for over the last two decades and more. The development of the internal language system was facilitated because members of the board realized that the company’s efficiency and prosperity fully depended on the transparency of its communication processes.

2. Research Material

I have collected over 15 000 pages of various documents regulating all Nestle’s activities, and managed to obtain their written permission to gather all procedures, guidelines, instructions, contracts, rules of law, advertisement materials, leaflets, checklists, documents displaying and strengthening membership to the corporation’s working environment, and even ordinary e-mails written by their employees of different ranks. It is worth mentioning that most of the collected documents are highly confidential and they cannot be copied or disclosed to third parties without authorization and written permission signed by the NESTLE management board.

3. Research Perspective

According to a number of linguists a text cannot exist as an independent entity by itself (see Banach 1982, de Beaugrande 1980, de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, Grabias 1997). It always exists in the environment created by a particular culture, society and situation which influences the meaning of that text (Hudson 1980, Yule 1996; Chruszczewski 2002). Discourse analyses relate to texts just as much as to conversations. This attitude was strengthened by linguists who defined the term *discourse* as a flow of language behaviors located inside social interactions (see also Labov 1972, van Dijk 1997a, 1997b), and influenced by different but closely related parameters, such as the sender, recipient (Bühler [1934] 2004), the particular incident and the aim of the conversation. All of them depend on such contextual phenomena as culture, society and situation. Culture is understood at that point as the entire assembly of verbal and nonverbal achievements of our specific civilization (Tylor [1871] 1911), whereas society creates an environment stimulating and affecting situations in which a particular text exists (for the discussion of the phenomenon of a discourse milieu or “habitus” see Bourdieu [1980] 1990). The unavoidability of this reasoning encouraged me to turn my attention to the analysis of written documents existing within one corporation. The written documents under discussion are more permanent and tangible than spoken utterances (for the discussion of definitions of texts see Duczmal 1993). The diagram placed below illustrates multiple inter-dependencies between texts and all extra-linguistic factors determining the textual content

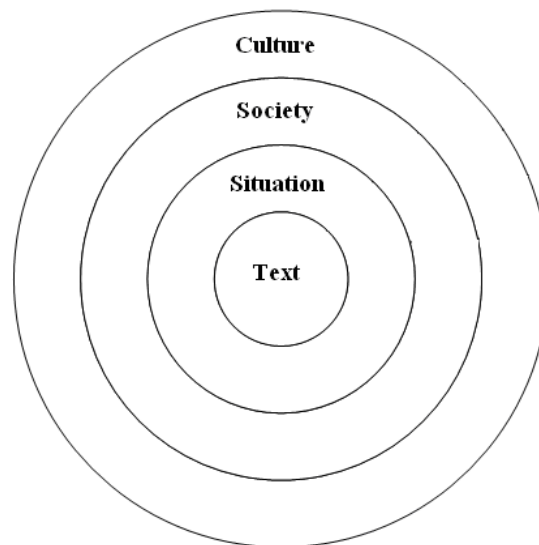


Figure 1 A diagram illustrating the extra-linguistic (meaning creating) elements and their inter-dependencies (see also Chruszczewski 2006: 51).

4. Text Typology

Below there is a working typology of the texts under investigation, all of which belong to the corporate discourse being researched.

4.1. Documents displaying and strengthening membership of the corporate working environment

Definition and explanation

Documents displaying and strengthening membership of the corporate working environment are extremely similar to agitprop or electioneering documents (see van Dijk 1998). Their major task is to build and strengthen the feeling of membership among all employees in order to increase the effectiveness of all their working activities. Moreover, this group of documents is an invaluable tool for increasing worker involvement in the ever-present corporate life.

Appearance

They are usually long, colorful and clearly divided into sections representing different subjects or explanations. This kind of structure enables the corporation to build an atmosphere of friendliness, orderliness and perfect harmony which is expected to exist inside its environment.

Characteristics

All the propaganda texts prepared by Nestle are written for co-workers and outsiders. They usually contain highly formal vocabulary and simple grammar, avoiding sophisticated subordinate or relative clauses. This style can be characterized by its strong emotionalism and highly aesthetic form.

4.1. Guidelines

Definition and explanation

What is unique about guidelines lies in their interest in showing employees solutions for problems which may occur in a workplace. Their main aim is not to instruct but to facilitate most employee activities and prevent them from wasting time, resources and money. The corporation is viewed here as a friendly and helpful organization which tries to have a positive influence on employees by reducing stressful situations and eliminating all possible difficulties.

Appearance

These documents bear a striking similarity to the previous category because of their transparent division into sections describing different problems. Yet, despite this, they are usually much shorter and less colorful. According to the corporation, a typical guideline does not have to be attractive but informative. This attitude is reflected in the uninteresting layout of their pages.

Characteristics

Documents of this sort are prepared mainly for white-collar workers. Under no circumstances must guidelines be displayed to third parties because they are strictly confidential. Their consolatory and supplementary character strongly influences the grammar and vocabulary of guidelines, which is kept as simple as possible. Therefore, the authors prefer imperative forms to more polite ones. The following example illustrates this tendency: *Use luggage that is solid and has a reliable combination lock.*

4.2. Instructions

Definition and explanation

Another interesting group of texts is represented here by Instructions. These documents illustrate procedures, describing the appropriate behaviours and activities which each worker must obey in order to protect the corporation's reputation and image. Their major aim is to instruct employees to behave and act in accordance with company strategy and prevent them from causing damage. This feature differentiates them from Guidelines, which usually try not to demand but to encourage employees to look for best solutions and actions.

Appearance

The appearance of Instructions is broadly similar to the previous group. Paragraphs are divided by full lines, which highlight their distinctive character. However, there are two distinctive features. Firstly, each Instruction consists of precisely the same paragraphs: Background, Purpose, Procedures, Accountability/Responsibilities, a section concerning the subject of the document and a list of other related documents, whereas the structure of Guidelines varies, depending on the subject.

Characteristics

The prime objective of the group is to show the seriousness of the issues described. As a result, the texts contain sophisticated grammar and vocabulary, which force the reader to pay much more attention to their content.

4.3. Advertisement Materials

Definition and Explanation

Advertisement Material represents a form of communication that usually tries to persuade potential customers to purchase or to consume more of a given product. The corporation is perceived here as a supplier of vital and healthy nutritional products without which the average family could not exist. It is important to remember that these documents play a crucial role in building brand loyalty.

Appearance

There are several kinds of advertisement materials existing in the Nestle corporation. The most common are: leaflets, brochures, two magazines entitled *Very Best Kids* and *Nestlé Everyday Eating Magazine* containing recipes and short articles on healthy lifestyles, packaging materials informing about the benefits and chemical constitution of a given product. The designers and editors cooperating with Nestle always pay a lot of attention to the colourful and attractive character of above-mentioned advertisement materials. The most perceptible feature is the presence of corporation's logo and advertising slogan, in the form of a short piece of poetry or rhyme.

Characteristics

Advertisements are usually directed at customers, and as such, must attract purchasers. This goal can be achieved by using simple vocabulary and well-known grammatical constructions which do not discourage a potential customer from the careful reading of an advertising text. Furthermore, it possesses an advisory character, strengthening the atmosphere of friendliness and warmth.

4.4. E-mail messages

Definition and Explanation

An e-mail is a method of creating, transmitting, or storing mostly written forms of human communications enabled by digital communications systems.

Appearance

E-mail messages sent inside Nestle usually contain both regular and changeable elements. Each e-mail begins with headers such as:

- From: The e-mail address or usually the name of the sender,
- To: The e-mail address(es) or the name(s) of the message's recipient(s),
- Subject: A brief summary of the contents of the message,

- Date: The local time and date when the message was written.

The length of a single e-mail message varies, depending on the subject and its seriousness. A typical e-mail ends with a valediction: *Best regards* or *Yours sincerely*.

Characteristics

E-mail messages represent the most diverse group of documents existing in the corporation under discussion. Their formality depends mainly on the position of the sender and his / her recipients. The company's managers prefer to use highly formal vocabulary and grammar while ordinary workers usually send informal messages containing numerous abbreviations, phrasal verbs, locally used semantic leaps (Coulson 2001) and idioms. Their formality can also be influenced by the content of the documents sent and their accessibility.

4.5. Legal Permissions and Contracts

Definition and Explanation

Contracts are concluded in order to regulate cooperation between the corporation and subcontractors. They describe all decisions concerning costs, deadlines, obligations and potential financial fines inflicted in case of delays. Permissions are legal documents enacted by local authorities on the basis of Polish and European Union legislation. The fact that both kinds of document regulate cooperation between corporation's management board and third parties, and possess an extremely similar appearance and layout force me to place them in the same group.

Appearance

The length of the documents described depends on their content. Contracts and Permissions relating to serious matters such as safety management, production or environmental protection issues are always long, whereas, those regulating small repairs, water-supply, maintenance or atmospheric emissions are only several pages long. Each document consists of three parts: an introduction, a regulatory part and an approbatory part with signatures and stamps. The introduction contains a title, a date, short descriptions of the signatories and the number of the document. The regulatory part, which is usually divided into paragraphs, outlines various duties which should be fulfilled before final acceptance. The aim of the approbatory part is to give legal force to the document.

Characteristics

Legal Permissions and Contracts, in order to be unquestionable, are supposed to have defining, descriptive and formal language in them, in order to eliminate all contingencies and prevent any misunderstandings or deliberate injuriousness of an action. They are bereft of idioms and phrasal verbs which could lead to misinterpretations. The authors always choose their words and combine them into sentences with extreme precision. The formal character of these documents is always highlighted by the application of relative clauses, passive voice and causative 'have'.

5. Conclusions

This analysis of corporate discourse would not be possible without a thorough inquiry into the language of various texts existing in the corporation under investigation. I decided to divide the documents into several classes in order to highlight the differences among them. The classification into groups was carried out after considering the most distinctive factors influencing the structure of the analyzed documents, such as the relationships between the participants, aims of the texts and the situation which obviously influenced their creation.

This paper attempted to illustrate the weakness and merits of the corporate discourse communication system in this particular company and by doing so, facilitate the flow of information among all departments, employees and factories. This work, to the extent that it is possible at all, might contribute to the further development of innovative communication strategies and methods, which may strengthen planning, organizing, staffing, leading, directing, and inspection procedures. It can certainly give employees an opportunity to eliminate misunderstandings, positively influencing the effectiveness of Nestle's management system.

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