

CORPORATE DISCOURSE IN BUILDING CORPORATE IDENTITY: ON SOME PRAGMALINGUISTIC FEATURES OF ANNUAL REPORTS

The increasingly growing relevance and attractiveness of business and corporate discourses as an object of study by researchers, can be attributed to placing discourse in the heart of business activities aimed at profit maximization through successful negotiations, productive communication at meetings, building lasting relationships with all stakeholders via improved communication practices at workplaces, the marketplace, stock exchanges and anywhere business is concerned. This paper aims at revealing some consistent pragmalinguistic strategies used in corporate discourse and its role in promoting corporate image and identity. Annual reports, being a powerful tool for building a strong motivation, involvement and bond between the company and its stakeholders, served as a study material. Through a detailed discourse analysis based on the annual reports of some companies, we focus on the use of the most common linguistic and pragmatic strategies by the speech writers for projecting the desired image and influencing the target audience's decisions. The paper findings come to verify the existing opinions on the complex and multilayered nature of corporate discourse and eventually increase the target audience's competence of correctly decoding the received information.

Key words: corporate communication, business discourse, corporate discourse, corporate image, corporate identity, pragmalinguistic strategies, annual reports

Introduction

Effective communication is the foundation of meaningful existence whether in business or everyday life. The incredible pace of technological advancements seems to have greatly facilitated communication process, but human factor

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Received: 16/01/2024

Revised: 21/03/2024

Accepted: 30/04/2024

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continues to play an essential role in making the right choices and getting the desired results by sending and decoding messages in all spheres of life. Thus, the role of language and pragmatic tools employed in communication can hardly be underestimated.

Business communication, being an object of interest to many researchers, is a complex and multifactor process affected by big and small entities involved in it. A major aspect of communication is the discourse (in this case corporate discourse) within which it takes place and is actualized with a combination of its numerous building blocks like language/language system, agents/participants (speaker/listener), the environment (the place/atmosphere, etc.), the time, the purpose of communication and so on.

This paper focuses on the role of corporate discourse in building a strong corporate image and identity. We strive to cast more light on a number of lexical, grammatical, as well as stylistic means chosen by speech writers and speechmakers in their attempts of reaching out target audiences, projecting the desired company image and, thus, directly or indirectly influencing the audience's decisions by motivating, inspiring or persuading them to take action.

Annual Reports (AR hereinafter) are believed to have a special weight in crafting company image through the information and data presented in different sections. Whether it is numerical data/statistics or claims, criticism, gratitude, praise and promises by prominent company representatives, this document is a vital communication medium between the company and its stakeholders. Moreover, in today's business world, in most countries, if not all of them, AR is a document required by law.

Thus, this spurs an interest for this research to study some linguistic and pragmatic features (language choices guided/dictated by the context and goals of the language users) of this genre (as part of corporate discourse) in relation to building a strong and positive image for the company.

The ARs considered in the paper are authentic documents covering the period between 2019 and 2022 publicly accessible on the respective websites of the companies Procter & Gamble (P&G hereinafter) - an American multinational consumer goods corporation; ASOS plc. - a British online fashion and cosmetics retailer; Burberry Group plc. (Burberry hereinafter) - a British luxury fashion house; Selfridges & Co. (Selfridges hereinafter) - an upscale chain of department stores in the UK; Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (Deloitte hereinafter) - a British multinational professional services network).

Further in the analysis section of the paper we present some foreground and background (explicit and implicit) features of ARs through which business organizations work their magic in the tough task of maintaining the existing stakeholders and attracting new ones.

Research scope and methods

The study aims to reveal some consistencies in the text of ARs as part of corporate discourse (based on the analysis of ARs) in the process of building a positive corporate image/identity or promoting the latter.

It is through qualitative rather than quantitative approach that some language features of the corpus texts were studied here to show their intentional use by the speechmaker/writer in attaining specific goals. However, some strategies (such as the use of strong and positive words, 1st person plural pronoun, comparatives, etc.) discussed in the paper demonstrate a high frequency throughout the whole report, which creates room for further quantitative research.

The language means (lexical, grammatical or other) discussed in the paper are not merely constituent parts of the texts or speech to make the communication happen, but also indicators and signals of the speaker's intentions and often invisible guides or a driving force for the target audience's (the reader's) actions in response. From this perspective, this analysis depicts the speechmaker's/writer's deliberate and careful choices and preferences which would best serve their/the company's interests.

The way language functions and meanings are created in the discussed context (corporate ARs) is the main object of the research. In other words, it is not merely a semantic and syntactical analysis of the AR texts but also, and most importantly, an attempt to reveal pragmatic approaches of the language users in the respective community while communicating and achieving particular goals and results.

In his study of discourse analysis Van Dijk emphasizes the role of context models when reflecting on the intentions of communicators. Moreover, he implies that both semantic models and pragmatic context models, being based on socially shared knowledge of the communication, enable understandable, intersubjective communication and interaction (Van Dijk, 2011, p. 616).

Content analysis of the study material was conducted to reveal common patterns of the communication through ARs, to identify intentions and focus on communication trends of the corporate communicators/institutions, etc.

Interpretative method was employed in the analysis of the texts/narratives, based on the details of the material and contextual knowledge to describe or present the speaker's/writer's choices and intentions (bound by various factors of communication – context, their previous experiences, relevant background knowledge and information about the target audience and the situation in general). From this perspective, the inseparable link between language and pragmatic choices of the speaker becomes obvious, as shown in the presented analysis, which shows that language tools are carefully chosen to influence the target audience.

The production of semantic representation of text and talk through lexical, syntactic, phonetic, visual or multimodal structures (some of which are discussed

in the analysis) are controlled by pragmatic models, not only in reference with ‘what’ to say, but also ‘how’ to say it considering all possible situationally variable use of verbal and non-verbal resources (Van Dijk, 2011, p. 616).

Theoretical overview

In business, communication is not an end in itself; there is always an underlying business purpose or objective to be achieved as a result of the communication. To study and understand organizational communication, researchers need to take into account the specifics of the context, including business strategy, the business environment and professional practices, and how that context influences communication practices in given discourse community (Varner, 2000 and Bhatia, 2004 as cited in Bargiella-Chiappini, Nickerson & Planken, 2007, p. 172).

In her work “The Business of Talk”, Boden describes ‘talk at organizations’ as a dimension that measures the organizational behavior with high accuracy. Moreover, she places ‘talk’ in the center of the organizational structure, calling it a medium through which organizations are constituted and reconstituted (Boden, 1994, pp. 202-203).

Companies invest a great deal of time and other resources in public relation activities striving for a long-term positive image. The main way to achieve this is using the most effective communication channels and tools, but sometimes it is easier said than done.

In the course of their operations corporations communicate with different audiences which can be referred to as stakeholders classified into two groups: internal and external. Internal stakeholders are people whose interest in a company comes through a direct relationship, such as employment, ownership, or investment. External stakeholders, on the other hand, are those who do not directly work with a company but are affected somehow by the actions and outcomes of the business. Suppliers, creditors, the government and public groups are considered external stakeholders (Investopedia, 2023). All the mentioned groups of people have different interests and motives being involved in the company operations. Thus, communicating with each group efficiently and effectively to ultimately generate the intended outcome requires enormous efforts and often adds to the companies’ financial burden.

Opposite to the above classification of the corporate audiences, business communications expert Christensen believes that modern businesses need to communicate with their various audiences via an inclusive communication system and model which will help them ‘project one uniform and unambiguous image of what the organization is and stands for’ (Christensen, 2002, p. 162).

A reason for such an approach could be the blurred line between different target groups of present day business communication, i.e. a company employee

could be a customer and a potential shareholder while a company investor can be a customer using the services provided by that very company, similarly, a customer may start working for that company or choose to invest in it. This means that corporate communications are moving towards a coherent, overall communications strategy that groups all the different aspects of communication under one heading, perhaps placing them all under the authority of a single department (Breeze, 2013, p. 20).

We come across a similar approach by Goodman, who considers that a number of tangible and intangible values are crucial and would enhance corporate communication, particularly, a strong corporate culture; a coherent corporate identity, a genuine sense of corporate citizenship; an appropriate and professional relationship with the press; a quick and responsible way of communicating in a crisis or emergency situation; an understanding of communication tools and technologies; a sophisticated approach to global communication (Goodman, 2000, p. 70).

In her work “Corporate discourse” Breeze discusses views of some researchers and experts on the concept of corporate identity pointing to its wide use in the field of corporate communications and giving importance to examining it from the perspective of discourse analysts, who adopt a critical stance to corporate communications and their discourses. In the same book Breeze refers to the Strathclyde statement issued by the International Corporate Identity Group where we find the following about corporate identity: “Every organization has an identity. It articulates the corporate ethos, aims and values and presents a sense of individuality that can help to differentiate the organization within its competitive environment. When well-managed, corporate identity can be a powerful means of integrating the many disciplines and activities essential to an organization’s success” (Van Riel and Balmer, 1997, p. 355 as cited in Breeze, 2013, pp. 10 - 11).

Those who are involved in corporate communication understand corporate identity as something that they need to control. If they can define and shape this identity, they will not only help the company to achieve inner consistency, but they will also help to ensure that the desired image is projected to the outside world. Thus, corporate identity and corporate image are closely connected (Breeze, 2013, p. 10).

Corporate identity is created, expressed and replicated through discourse, and it is also performed through the actions and practices of the corporate entity and its members. But not all of the members of the corporation seem to contribute in equal measure to the generation of the corporate identity. Its image, on the other hand, is the way that the company wants its stakeholders to perceive it, which may or may not be entirely congruent with its self-perceptions. More and more companies are seeking to construct more positive identities through strategic use of the increasingly powerful communicative resources that are at their disposal. However, in the corporate world the desired results through communication are more often

achieved by using implicit rather than explicit tools of communication, which means an increasingly allusive and careful discourse, which avoids difficulties and negotiates tricky issues adeptly-sometimes so adeptly that few readers will pick up the fact that there was a problem at all- is the key (Breeze, 2013, pp. 14-15).

It is hard to disagree with Breeze that the company's relationships with clients or customers, the government or state, competitors, investors, stakeholders in general and, of course, the media, can and should be managed through discourse. Discourse is one of the corporation's most powerful tools in the current configuration of society (Breeze, 2013, p. 178). The discourse used within and beyond the boundaries of the corporation to reach its corporate goals is "corporate discourse" (CD hereinafter), which has been an object of research by many scholars for decades and remains as such due to its ever-changing nature and dependence on changes in the world. We can come across many similar and dissimilar definitions of CD, each of them being quite comprehensive and convincing in one or the other situation.

Breeze thinks of CD as a set of messages that a corporation intends to send to the world at large and to its target markets and existing customers. What makes her view even more interesting is that she believes that the same corporate discourse also includes messages intended for internal consumption only, such as those aimed at employees and predefined stakeholders, particularly company shareholders (Breeze, 2013, p. 19).

Moreover, Breeze describes CD as a common 'voice', a common 'language', a common way of understanding and thinking about important things in businesses regardless of its being a webpage, a job advertisement or AR. She further adds that the net effect of this 'collective' voice is a voice that may differ in some respects from sector to sector, but which is surprisingly homogenous. Unlike other types of discourses, e.g. academic discourse, it projects a specific set of values. It extols values such as profitability, cost effectiveness or expansion, which are accepted as good by general consensus. There is no need for corporate texts to explain why these are good, or to justify the measures used to establish how they have been achieved, since the underlying utilitarian worldview is tacitly accepted. CD takes many things for granted, apparently feeling little need to justify many of its claims in terms of either method or epistemology (Breeze, 2013, pp. 177-178).

Considering different approaches to CD, we can define it as a complex set of circumstances shaped by numerous factors of communication, where corporate representatives create the desired values through carefully chosen language and other tools to reach specific goals and audiences.

The idea of homogeneity, however, as far as corporate discourse is concerned, is not unanimously shared by all researchers.

In a critical genre analysis study some researchers reflect on interdiscursivity or overlap of discourses (e.g. legal, business, media, etc.) in professional communication, which takes place in a specific socio-pragmatic space, where all

communicating sides negotiate and reach particular professional goals and objectives through different dynamic voices (Bhatia & Bhatia, 2014, pp. 123-130).

In this respect, it is of great interest to present Bhatia's view on interdiscursivity in professional genres (Bhatia, 2010, as cited in Bhatia & Bhatia, 2014) compared to the views of Bakhtin and Fairclough (Bakhtin, 1987 and Fairclough, 1995, as cited in Bhatia & Bhatia, 2014). Bhatia describes the latter as 'creative appropriation or manipulation of prior formulations of discursive actions within and across professional practices and cultures to construct new and creative forms of professional genres', while Bakhtin and Fairclough think that all texts are normally heteroglossic and heterogeneous in nature, as they are constituted by combinations of different genres and discourses transforming the past or prior texts into the present (Bhatia & Bhatia, 2014, pp. 123-130).

Analysis and discussion

Content and structural evolution and features of contemporary AR

Experts believe that ARs are no longer what they used to be from the functional point of view. Once they were merely a source of information about the company's operations, most importantly about the financial gains and losses, about their position in the market, etc. Today's ARs are much more than numerical data and facts, they play a crucial role in building, enhancing and maintaining a company's image, multidimensional relationships and ultimately generating a solid profit.

A contemporary AR consists of a number of sections some being an indispensable part of it. Giving a high priority to the main sections devoted to the company's financial performance over the previous year, letter to shareholders or the CEO/Chairman speech and strategic report section, companies are now placing a huge value on projecting a more positive, sustainable and, thus, competitive image by adding even more sections to the traditional yearly reports. Furthermore, most organizations are using these reports to target individuals and businesses for future cooperation. To succeed in this, they need to master the techniques of writing a report that will be objective, trustworthy and reliable on the one hand, reasonable, colorful and outstanding in style, design and wording on the other. Objectivity, trustworthiness and reliability used to be achieved even in the past through the figures, graphs, charts and a set of words (mainly business terms) that were sufficient to solve the problem then. Presently, the tools of the past will not work the magic because of many reasons, primarily, a tight competition both locally and globally and advanced communication systems that make the competition even tougher. Hence, to stand out from the rivals, companies strive to invest enormous efforts and resources to perform at their best and document both their failures (failures are believed to teach businesses the best lessons and mentioning the employed appropriate crisis management practices in the report

could build an image of a resilient and a learning organization) and achievements, hardships and the measures taken to overcome the hurdles on their way, profits and losses and more in the AR.

While studying the reports of various organizations regardless of the sphere of their operation (in this article - retailers (traditional and/or online), a luxury fashion house, an upscale department store chain, a multinational professional service provider), it becomes obvious that they compete even in report writing to build a stronger and more lasting image and promote it further to be a step ahead of the competition, ultimately increasing the company's bottom line.

To keep up with the current trends, organizations have recently incorporated several sections into the report such as one aimed at building trust among existing and potential customers and the society as a whole, a section referring to the relations with the government, a separate section of highlights, etc. A skilled combination of all of these sections makes the AR a 'calling card' of the company.

Referring back to interdiscursivity and trying to relate it to the structure of the AR, it is worth presenting another valuable approach to the issue.

From this perspective, Van Leeuwen expresses a close view to that of Bhatia, focusing on corporate annual reports. Considering the component parts of the AR (financial, accounting, legal, etc.) the claim by Van Leeuwen, that the AR contains four distinct discourses: accounting, finance, public relations and legal, sounds more than logical (Van Leeuwen, 2013, pp. 45-47).

Another important aspect of the AR structure is the conventional order of the sections of the report. As a rule, the beginning or the first half of the report is easier and more interesting to read both for insiders and outsiders regardless of their personal interest or investment in the given company. This is primarily due to the linguistic characteristics of the texts found in that part of the report though those linguistic tools serve pragmatic goals of the author/speaker. To be more specific, here we speak about the CEO speech, letter to shareholders, chairman's statement and the like, i.e. those sections of the report that are more emotionally colored, certainly, for a profound reason, and are more subject to thorough linguistic analysis as the speaker uses various linguistic (and not only) means and devices to reach their ultimate goals.

Alongside broader and narrower discourses considered in this context, there is another factor called 'metadiscourse' that, obviously, makes a valuable addition to the attempt of understanding the interrelations and interactions of many components of corporate communication.

Hyland places a special importance on the role of metadiscourse in the process of corporate communication, reflecting on the CEO's letter in annual reports. He describes it as a social and communicative engagement between a writer and readers through some signals on how they should understand, evaluate and respond to the information passed on from the sender. In his study, Hyland views metadiscourse as a rhetorical tool of generating support in the CEO's letter

by expressing credibility, resolving uncertainty, and avoiding disputes (Hyland, 1998, p. 4).

From the perspective of expressiveness and the ease/difficulty of perceptibility of the text/report the concept of “multimodality” is considered invaluable. It is the use of a sophisticated combination of texts and high quality images, illustrations, photos, charts, diagrams, different font types and sizes, text design and other graphic tools to make some details in the provided information more or less visible or clear to the audience. The mentioned components through increased visual effects cast a brighter light on particular products, activities, campaigns, achievements, etc., bringing the intended messages to the foreground unleashing all possible implicit information and minimizing the contained ambiguity. Photos of board members and other key company representatives, usually with a positive and professional posture and face add even more authority and credibility to the presented information, whether the latter is about the company finances, sustainability, cooperation and new partnerships, customer satisfaction or attracting new investors.

All contemporary annual reports have this feature, which according to Breeze, has long been criticized by experts not least for distracting the readers from the information but contributing to maintaining levels of ignorance in society. This, according to Simpson, was essential for the companies’ existence on the one hand and the societies’ stability and order on the other (Simpson 2000, p. 231 as cited in Breeze, 2013, p. 91).

The use of lexical, grammatical and other expressive means in the AR to project positivity

The abundant use of various linguistic and pragmatic strategies in one and the same example that has been selected to demonstrate a specific device sometimes makes it almost impossible to categorize the examples due to just one or another device. Hence, a detailed analysis conducted here (in some cases following the examples immediately) reveals even more common strategies and tools within the study frameworks than just the ones classified and grouped by some features in individual paragraphs.

The use of the pronoun ‘we’ for inclusion in the AR

Perhaps, the first thing the researchers state is that a common feature for this genre is the use and sometimes ‘overuse’ of the personal pronoun “we” (correspondingly, “our” and “us”) when speaking about the company’s success stories and failures, while making a call to action, etc. It is worth mentioning that the use of all possible linguistic and other strategies and tools can be interpreted from different perspectives sometimes with similar or different results and views

for the same case or examples studied. This is why it always makes sense to look at the same issues again and again under a different light, however much they have been spoken or written about. The point is that all those tools are used to express certain ideas in a way that would possibly be the quickest and the best to get to the chosen destination. Moreover, the destination is chosen by ‘the company as one body’ and the results achieved by the speaker and the speech itself can ‘make or break’ the company’s reputation in the first place, stain its past and even ruin its present and future. Here the sense of corporate responsibility increases the burden of possible risks, invisible challenges and more for the speech writer or the speaker but on the other hand there is a ‘huge sense of belonging’ for the people involved in this, that can be called ‘inclusion’, ‘unity’ and ‘oneness’ which often turns out to be much bigger than any potential obstacle or hurdle on their way to the collectively envisaged and aspired success.

In all the reports studied there are numerous examples with repeated use of the 1st person plural ‘we’, the latter serving different purposes worth discussing here. Those presented for analysis were the more expressive ones among multiple cases.

1. “*We* are confident *we* are on the right path and that *our* unique business model, combined with the strength of *our* brand, *our* offer and *our* people, means ASOS is well positioned to succeed and to create long-term shareholder value” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

2. “*We* know that companies with a strong sense of purpose perform better, uniting everyone on common values. Therefore, underpinning *our* purpose, *we* have four core values: creatively driven; open and caring; proud of *our* heritage; and forward thinking. *We* believe in the power of creativity and *we* are passionate about what *we* do. In a virtuous circle, *our* teams at Burberry find inspiration in *our* history and archive as they create *our* future” (Annual Report 2019/20, Burberry PLC).

3. “But, as *we* continue to face a highly uncertain economic and geographical environment it is clear *we* must sharpen *our* focus on improving operations, performance, flexibility and relevance, as well as capitalizing on *our* core strengths- the strong ASOS brand and compelling customer offer” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

4. “Deloitte’s purpose is still to create an impact for *our* clients, *our* people, and the society that we are part of. *We* aspire to be #1 in every business area *we* choose to play, and *our* Connect for Impact strategy outlines how we will achieve this goal. *Our* values are the guiding principles that show us how to create results, be inclusive and take care of each other - so *we* can foster sustainable lives, growth, and transformation. *Our* values should always serve as *our* moral compass and guide us in making the right decisions in difficult times” (Annual Report 2022, Deloitte).

In all examples (1-4) the intentional use of pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ are shorter and in most cases stronger alternatives to a number of words and combinations (such as the/ this/ our company/ team/ organization and the company name at least) that could be found in a similar text though with a less emphatic and a rather neutral tone. The first associations that the reader or the listener has with the presented statements would, perhaps, be more about the speaker’s pathos to express positivity, gratitude, confidence in some and hope in other cases, sense of achievement, feeling of success, etc. all of which are, obviously, the results of joint and collective efforts. More importantly, the intentional use of this device pursues a goal of appealing to or inviting the audience to cooperate or become/remain part of the team. It is worth mentioning that in all examples we find a close repetition of 1st person plural pronoun which makes the statement even more compelling and credible.

Alongside the mentioned connotations the same device is used in AR, though not with the same frequency, to express self-criticism, hope for improvement and striving for continual perfection (as in Examples 3 and 4).

As was mentioned earlier, these interpretations are not of absolute exactness and are subject to alterations due to numerous reasons, like the aim of the study, the spectrum of the researcher’s or the audience’s knowledge and information, etc. Though, one thing is obvious and hard to deny: every single word is accurately chosen to create a value, in particular, to encourage and inspire the present and potential investors to keep trusting them and cooperating for a stronger and a brighter future.

The use of strong and positive vocabulary to portray strength, credibility, reliability in the AR

Another strategic feature for AR is an overwhelming presence of positive vocabulary, especially strong verbs and adjectives often accompanied by intensifying adverbs like ‘incredibly’, ‘exceptionally’, ‘absolutely’, ‘truly’, ‘highly’ and others, as well as superlatives to embody a competitive and resilient company in the eyes of the audience even under critical circumstances.

The examples below combine the mentioned tools for a more persuasive and inspiring tone to impact the audience’s further decision-making through the positive impressions and an enhanced company image.

5. “ASOS has a *powerful* business model, which enables customers to shop for *the very best* fashion - choosing from our ASOS brands from a curated choice of *the world’s best leading* third-party brands. This *unique* combination remains *central* to our strategy, providing our customers with *all* their fashion needs in one place. And it is this global platform and scalability which provides us with a *solid* foundation to deliver our ambition

to become the go-to destination for fashion-loving 20-somethings” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

6. “Against the backdrop of an *incredibly challenging* climate, the strength of our brand and our *compelling* customer offer has enabled our business to deliver a *resilient* performance this year. [...] There are *amazing* things to stand for as a company. In addition, we have been the partner of choice for many of the world’s *biggest* brands, delivering innovative collaborations that give our customers a reason to keep choosing ASOS” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

In Examples 5 and 6 the use of the definite article alongside strong adjectives in some phrases like ‘*the* partner of choice’ and ‘*the* go-to destination’ respectively is worth mentioning here, as a means of pointing to the company’s singularity and superiority. This, like the use of superlatives conveys a stronger message of self-confidence, excellence, etc., and, thus, increases the level of anticipated trust inspired by the surrounding positive vocabulary.

7. “At Deloitte, our strategic ambition is to be the market leader by being *the most responsible, trustworthy, and influential* firm of our industry. [...] Throughout the past year, we have focused on *enhancing* our industry expertise across all sectors to ensure that our clients always receive *the best* professional service competencies wrapped in *deep* industry knowledge. In doing so, we have moved even closer to our clients and built tighter long-term relations – initiatives that are necessary in a rapidly changing world” (Annual Report 2022, Deloitte).

8. “This is *strong* performance in *very difficult* operating conditions. [...] P&G employees have delivered *great* results over the past four years in a *very challenging* macro environment against *very capable* competition. [...] As consumers face increased pressure on nearly every aspect of their household budgets, we invest to deliver *truly superior* value through a combination of price and product performance to earn their loyalty every day” (Annual Report 2022, P&G).

The combined use of positive and negative vocabulary in some phrases in the same statement (as in Example 8 - ‘*strong* performance’, ‘*great* results’ ‘delivering *truly superior* value’ and ‘*very difficult* operating conditions’, ‘*very challenging* conditions’ as well as ‘*increased* pressure’) is a clear pointer to the might and adaptability of the company to survive and grow in tough times. In this way, the speaker creates a powerful visualization of investing possible and impossible resources to reach success, portraying a resilient and unbreakable image. Moreover, in the same example, a similar effect is created here with the use of the determiner ‘*every*’ in ‘*every* aspect of their household budget’ and ‘to earn their

loyalty *every day*' highlighting the company's customer-caring nature, willingness, strength and agility in building a solid customer thanks to decent and proven investment tactics. Combining their business acumen, persuasion and other necessary skills with carefully chosen language tools the company representatives (in this case the speaker/speechmaker) strive to impress and encourage the audience to start or keep investing in their business.

Thus, it becomes obvious that strong and most often positive vocabulary, regardless of the part of speech (a noun, verb, adjective, adverb) is the most dominant, hence a most visible and distinguishing feature as far as the texts of ARs are concerned. So, unsurprisingly, we find similar uses in all examples presented in this paper. For instance, in Examples (1-4) the following vocabulary will support our claim: *confident, unique, strength, long-term* (1); *strong, better, uniting, creatively, open, caring, proud, forward-thinking, the power of creativity, passionate, virtuous, inspiration* (2); *sharpen, improving, capitalizing, strengths, compelling* (3); *impact, inclusive, foster, sustainable, growth, transformation* (4); *radically redesign* (16); *harness, cement, meaningful, reignite* (18); *newly reimagined, iconic* (19), etc.

The use of comparatives to convey a sense of striving for development and self-improvement in the AR

Among many grammatical tools used to convey the desired message in ARs the frequent use of comparative adjectives should be mentioned, especially that the latter helps to add a tint of positivity in some cases and create room for improvement or adjustment of the companies' errors in others.

9. "Now, as our industry reels in the aftermath of this extraordinary year, how will we build back in a way that is *better* and *more respectful* of each other and our only home?" (Annual Report 2020-2021, Selfridges)

10. "At Deloitte Denmark, we will continue to move our businesses and borders *closer* within our global Deloitte network. This move will allow us to serve our clients in an even *more seamless and borderless* way and bring our global expertise to our local markets" (Annual Report 2022, Deloitte).

11. "Over the next 12 months, it is therefore my mission to implement a clear change agenda that will create a *stronger* ASOS. [...] With our short-term focus being firmly on building resilience, our *longer-term* priority is to insure ASOS generates sustainable growth" (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

In all three examples (9, 10 and 11) it is not difficult to sense the company's past, present and future. Perhaps, the speaker uses comparative adjectives to communicate the company's consciousness of their past flaws, openness for change and improvement at the same time visualizing a better future and most

importantly, client-centric approach. The mentioned qualities are crucial incentives for the stakeholders to rely on when making an investment decision.

The use of the Present Continuous Tense to envisage dynamics, continuity and potential growth in the AR

On the list of grammatical patterns peculiar to ARs some tense forms have a broader and more frequent use than others to express the company's particular state or behavior in a given situation. For instance, higher frequency use of the Present Continuous Tense not only represents an action or activity in process, but also helps the speaker sound more practical, realistic and reliable to the audience by presenting their activities as a part of a stable and dynamic present rather than a hopefully bright future in the form of promises.

12. "We *are building* bespoke plans for each market, rapidly reallocating resources towards rebounding economies" (Annual Report 2019/20, Burberry PLC).

13. "We *are improving* our supply chain capacity, agility, cost efficiency and resilience for a new reality and a new age. [...] We *are already making* the next round of investments needed to ensure we have multiple qualified suppliers for key inputs, sufficient manufacturing capacity to satisfy growing demand and flexibility to meet the changing needs of all types of retailers" (Annual Report, 2022 P&G).

Repetitive use of the Future Simple Tense for assertiveness in the AR

On the other hand, the Future Simple Tense is found in this genre in closely repeated statements in certain sections, such as CEO's, Chairman's Statement or Strategic report or others for predictions and promises, which is least surprising, but the repetition makes the speech more pathetic, emphatic and, sometimes even tempting and irresistible when generous promises are considered. In both examples presented below, the statements with 'will' convey a strong word of determination and portray an undefeatable image, which, from the speaker's perspective might generate confidence in the stakeholders to join them for cooperation.

14. "Each pillar of our strategy is essential to our success, and both prioritization and execution *will be* key. The common denominator between all three pillars is sustainability. We *will put* greater emphasis on our people's work-life balance, development and long-term career perspectives. We *will also continue* to value and protect our long-term client relationships and commitments and take a long-term view of our strategic choices (Annual Report 2022, Deloitte).

15. “We believe, this *will be* a fundamental testing ground for the new way in which consumers *will experience* our stores. Creating new ways of reaching our customers, such as through live streaming and remote selling, *will remain* critically important over the next few months as lockdowns gradually ease and consumers slowly regain their confidence. [...] We *will continue* to engage customers through our upcoming capsules and building on the good trajectory we have established, leather *will remain* an important part of our offer. All our efforts *will be underpinned* by rigorous financial discipline to maintain and secure liquidity as required, while leaving space for investment as markets recover. [...] It *will take* time to heal from this terrible pandemic but I believe our customers *will look* to Burberry to make them dream again” (Annual Report 2019/20, Burberry PLC).

The use morphological tools to repaint the corporate image /identity in the AR

Multiple use of words with the prefix *re-* (words (most often verbs)), which is used to add the meaning ‘do again’ especially to verbs (Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2023), e.g. *redefine, rethink, reimagine, reinvent, re-launch, reorganize* etc.), was encountered while studying some AR sections.

This, presumably, deserves a particular attention as its overwhelming presence in the studied texts is an indicator of successfully influencing the audience’s perceptions of the company image and identity. The goal of the language user is almost the same as in previously discussed cases, i.e. to impress, appeal to, persuade and attract more investors through a stronger and more positive image.

Thus, speechwriters make conscious choices from the language toolset to paint the most desired picture of the company with all accessible alternatives. Moreover, in this case, it is ‘reshaping’ or ‘redrawing’ the image rather than drawing it from scratch in order to communicate a sense of flexibility, self-adjustment or expressing self-criticism and readiness for perfection.

16. “We always knew our 2025 material targets were ambitious but over the last year we’ve realized that we need to radically *redesign* our systems and *rethink* our ways of working to achieve them” (Annual Report 2020-2021, Selfridges).

17. “Achieving our material commitments by addressing what and how we buy, will significantly reduce the impact of our business. But alone they are not the only roadmap to *reinventing* retail. That’s why we are also exploring and establishing alternative models that allow us to *reimagine* the very act of shopping itself” (Annual Report 2020-2021, Selfridges).

18. “But it is also clear that we have not done enough to harness our strengths, or to cement our position in key markets outside the UK. Indeed, the lack of meaningful growth and scale in our key international markets- the US, France and Germany- has been one of our main challenges, so we must *rethink* how we can better leverage our leading position in the UK to *reignite* our international operations” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

19. “We remain confident in our direction and, guided by a newly *re-imagined* sense of our purpose, we will continue to work together to deliver the potential of our iconic brand” (Annual Report 2019/20, Burberry PLC).

From the perspective of corporations, teams and their representatives who are in charge of building, maintaining and enhancing a corporate culture, identity, image and, most importantly, reputation it is quite wise and justifiable to prefer the use of the prefix *re-* over the ‘verb + again’ combination for at least two reasons. Firstly, the prefix *re-* offers a broader range of connotations (‘do again’, but perhaps ‘doing again’ means more ‘doing better, in a more contemporary or innovative way, more efficiently, at least differently than others or not in the same way as before) whether positive or negative, while ‘verb + again’=‘do again’ does not necessarily promise a change or improvement. Secondly, using ‘verb + again’ would shift the focus of the audience on the previous unsuccessful/less successful decisions, attempts or experiences of the company, thus making a weak and negative impression on the way of building a positive image.

The use of metaphors, inversion and repetition for more emphasis and highlighted ‘shades’ in the AR

The use of expressive means of language such as metaphor, repetition and inversion was another notable strategy in the studied AR texts. Each device has a special weight in the expressiveness and impressiveness of the speech. Whether these devices make the speech lighter or heavier, if wisely and carefully chosen, they create a lasting effect and inject the right shades and proportion of information into the right place at the right moment. ‘

20. “Jose brings *a wealth of experience* as a multichannel, international retailer and a track record of driving innovation” (Annual Report and Accounts 2022, ASOS PLC).

In this example, the speaker expresses his recognition and gratitude for his ‘skilled and experienced team member’s valuable contribution’ by means of the metaphor ‘*wealth of experience*’. In this way, the speaker sounds more emotional and emphatic, thus, highlighting the merits of a team member and the importance

of his contribution. This will be seen as encouragement, hopefully, motivating the rest of the staff.

21. “*Only* seven U.S. publicly traded companies have paid a dividend in more consecutive years than P&G, and *only* three are recognized to have increased their dividend in more consecutive years than P&G” (Annual Report 2022, P&G).

Here, by means of repetition (‘*only...*, *only...*’) the speaker emphasizes the fact of being among a handful of leading companies, thus portraying a strong image also providing numbers adding to the validity and reliability of the statement.

22. “*Diversity* is not *only* about gender. *Diversity* also means coming from different backgrounds, and we are proud to have 50 different nationalities at Deloitte Denmark – meaning that 10 per cent of our 3,200 people are foreign nationals. In the coming years, we will increase our focus on other kinds of *diversity* – including age and neurodiversity” (Annual Report 2022, Deloitte).

In this example, though, the same device, repetition (‘*diversity*’ used 3 times) keeps the focus on the importance of a relatively new and trendy concept of ‘*diversity*’ in business organizations and context in general. It subconsciously affects the minds of the audience and supports the image and corporate culture of the presented company.

23. “*Only through collective, co-created mindset change can we place society and environmental justice at the heart of our culture*” (Annual Report 2021, Selfridges).

In this case, the reverse word order, which is called inversion, adds extra emphasis to the given part of the statement (here: ‘collective, co-created mindset change’ is considered to be of ultimate importance).

To finalize the analysis section of the paper, it is worth mentioning that all the strategies discussed here have obviously become a vital and irreplaceable tool used by the speakers and company representatives to present themselves and the company under a brighter light, sounding more persuasive, inspiring, reliable and stronger while navigating through complex situations of business communication to eventually win the trust of the target audience.

Conclusion

This paper looks at CD from the perspective of building a positive corporate identity. Annual reports of several companies (ASOS, Burberry, Procter & Gamble, Selfridges and Deloitte) have served as a study material for the research. Annual reports of most companies are broadly available to the public on their websites. As a matter of fact, the audiences that can freely access the information shared by business organizations are large and of different skills and competencies. This can be viewed as both a positive and a negative factor for the company from the perspective of the audience's competence of decoding and interpreting the publicly provided information about the ups and downs, achievements and failures, gains and losses of the company.

Through a detailed and comprehensive qualitative analysis based on comparison of multiple texts of certain sections of AR, such as letter to shareholders, CEO's/Chairman's speech, strategic section, etc., the study has revealed a number of consistent strategies specific to this genre, the latter heavily influencing corporate identity.

Among the findings of the paper are linguistic strategies, such as lexical and grammatical means (pronouns, comparatives, tense forms, and others), as well as rhetorical devices (metaphor, repetition, inversion), used for a particular reason or aim (appreciation, motivation, persuasion, inspiration, encouragement; expressing gratitude, self-confidence, criticism or self-criticism etc.) by the speaker in this way shaping the pragmatic aspects of the texts/reports.

The studied strategies provide a clearer view of a contemporary AR structure, quitting the old conventional model of dry and dull numerical data and statistics. Nowadays, more emotional and emphatic texts, guiding the decisions of the company stakeholders, are incorporated in the studied sections of AR. It becomes obvious that corporate discourse, in this case ARs, however transparent and objective from the point of view of statistics, data, numbers, etc., contain emotionally colored texts and components. Quite often a strong message is carefully wrapped and packaged in a simple or complex set of words containing information that is not always straightforward. Hence, the audience needs some competence and experience to dig deeper into pragmatic and linguistic choices of the speechmaker/writer to reveal every hidden bit of message aimed at them.

In summary, it can be stated that corporate discourse (regardless of the genre) deserves attention and is open to a thorough multi-sided research to reveal the tools of decoding even the most complex messages and most carefully hidden intentions of business people and make the right decisions. Moreover, in today's fast paced world and business environment the weight of research in business/corporate discourse grows in importance as far as the company image and other valuables are concerned.

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Լ. Ավդալյան – Կորպորատիվ խոսույթի դերը կորպորատիվ ինքնության ձևավորման գործում՝ տարեկան զեկույցներին բնորոշ որոշ լեզվագործարանական օրինաչափությունների հիման վրա. – Հետազոտողների շրջանում գործարար և կորպորատիվ խոսույթի ուսումնասիրության նկատմամբ հետզհետե աճող հետաքրքրությունը կարելի է պայմանավորել գործարար խոսույթին վերագրվող դերով, քանի որ վերջինս համարվում է կազմակերպությունների՝ շահույթի առավելագույնն ուղղված գործունեության կարևորագույն գործոն՝ աշխատավայրում, շուկաներում, ֆոնդային բորսաներում, և ցանկացած գործարար միջավայրում պատշաճ հաղորդակցման արդյունքում երաշխավորելով արդյունավետ քննարկումներ տարբեր հանդիպումների և բանակցությունների ընթացքում, ինչպես նաև ամուր և երկարատև հարաբերություններ բուրբ շահառուների հետ: Հոդվածի նպատակը կազմակերպությունների՝ կորպորատիվ կերպարի և ինքնության խթանման նպատակով համապատասխան խոսույթի դերի ընդգծումն է՝ դրանում առավելապես կիրառվող լեզվագործարանական միջոցների ուսումնասիրության հիման վրա: Տարեկան զեկույցները կարևորագույն գործիք են հանդիսանում կազմակերպության և վերջինիս շահառուների միջև ամուր կապի ձևավորման, առկա շահառուներին մոտիվացնելու և նոր ներդրողներ ներգրավելու համար, ինչով էլ պայմանավորված է հոդվածի գործնական նյութի ընտրությունը: Այսպիսով, մի շարք կազմակերպությունների տարեկան զեկույցների համադրմամբ, խոսույթի մանրակրկիտ ուսումնասիրության ընթացքում փորձ է արվել վեր հանել լեզվաբանական և գործարանական որոշ օրինաչափություններ (ինչպես օրինակ՝ բառապաշարային, քերականական, ոճաբանական որոշ կարգերի կամ միավորների, ինչպես նաև բազմաեղանակավորման կիրառումը), որոնք կարող են ուղղակի կամ անուղղակի կերպով ազդել թիրախային լսարանի վարքագծի և որոշումների վրա: Հետազոտության արդյունքները վերստին հաստատում են թեմայի առնչությամբ նախկինում հնչեցված մոտեցումները կորպորատիվ խոսույթի բազմաշերտ լինելու վերաբերյալ՝ միաժամանակ ծառայելով որպես անհրաժեշտ և օգտակար գիտելիք թիրախային լսարանի համար՝ ստացված խորին տեղեկատվությունը հնարավորինս ճիշտ վերծանելու հմտությունների բարելավմանն ուղղված:

Բանալի բառեր. *կորպորատիվ հաղորդակցություն, գործարար խոսույթ, կորպորատիվ խոսույթ, կորպորատիվ կերպար, կորպորատիվ ինքնություն, լեզվագործարանական օրինաչափություններ, տարեկան զեկույց*

Л. Авдалян – *Роль корпоративного дискурса в построении корпоративной идентичности (на основе прагмалингвистических особенностей годовых отчетов)*. – Всевозрастающая актуальность и привлекательность делового и корпоративного дискурсов как объекта изучения исследователей объясняется тем, что дискурс находится в центре деловой активности, направленной на максимизацию прибыли за счет успешных переговоров, продуктивного общения на встречах, построения прочных отношений со всеми заинтересованными сторонами посредством совершенствования коммуникативных практик на работе, рынке, в биржах и везде, где ведется бизнес. Целью данной статьи является выявление некоторых устойчивых прагмалингвистических стратегий, используемых в корпоративном дискурсе, и изучение их роли в продвижении корпоративного имиджа и идентичности. Годовые отчеты, являющиеся мощным инструментом создания сильной мотивации, вовлеченности и связи между компанией и ее заинтересованными сторонами, послужили материалом для исследования. Дискурс-анализ годовых отчетов некоторых компаний позволяет выявить наиболее распространенные лингвистические и прагматические стратегии (лексические, грамматические и стилистические средства, а также мультимодальность) авторами речи для проецирования желаемого образа и влияния на решения целевой аудитории. Полученные в работе выводы позволяют подтвердить существующие мнения о многослойности корпоративного дискурса и одновременно повысить компетентность целевой аудитории в правильном декодировании полученной информации.

Ключевые слова: корпоративная коммуникация, деловой дискурс, корпоративный дискурс, корпоративный имидж, корпоративная идентичность, прагмалингвистические стратегии, годовой отчет