A linguistic approach to corporate communication

Lingua Inglese IA-L (LINCOM) 2012-2013

Prof. Paola Catenaccio
Rationale for the course

• The course is intended to provide students with the tools required to understand (and produce) different types of communication activity in corporate and organisational settings;

• The idea at the heart of the course is that organisations are discursively constructed, and that, more generally

  • discourse is constitutive of reality

• i.e. our social and professional life is discursively mediated
What concept of discourse?

- Epistemological but also ontological conception of discourse (social constructivism)
  - [this does not mean that no reality exists; but reality is linguistically mediated]

- Discourse produces and reproduces social reality (Fairclough 1993)
Importance of discourse for understanding reality

- Discourses come and go
  - Foucault

- Discourses are negotiable
  - Chinese discourse of human rights?

- Discourses create realities
  - Rise of CSR?
Uses of discourse in organisations

• Organisations as discursive constructs

• Organisations function discursively (Yates / Orlikowsky 1992)

• All internal and external functions of organisations are discourse- and language-mediated

• Watch this video on the role of storytelling in organisation

[NB: the videos linked in this lesson are meant for you to start approaching report writing from audio/video sources; the first ones are VERY easy; they will become progressively more difficult]
Growth in importance of the communication function in organisations

- Why?

- Think of the functions of internal and external communication

- What makes both so relevant to today’s organisations?

→ A more ‘practical’ approach!

→ NB: we shall endeavour to combine practical approaches with theoretical considerations!
Historical Roots: Corporate Communication and Public Relations

- Corporate communication began as public relations in major corporations.

- It developed as a communication practice in an industry setting within major corporations as a direct spin off of public relations.

- The business aspects came later with advertising, branding, and marketing responsibilities assumed by the corporate communication department, sometimes called corporate relations within major industries.
Foundations in PR

- Lee is known for his contributions to corporate communication and public relations management
- He is also credited with having ‘invented’ the genre of the press release
Issues of Importance to Corporate Communication Today

- The Global Economy
- Quality of the Environment
- Increased Role of Management
- Emphasis on Issues Management
- Professionalism of the Publics

- Proliferation of Publics/Splintering of Mass Markets
- Fragmentation of the Mass Media
- Rapid Development of New Media Technology Leading in Communication Trends

> Highly relevant issues from the point of view of linguists!!!
Defining Corporate Communication

• What is included in corporate communication?
  • Advertising
  • Marketing
  • Communications
  • Public Relations
Aspects of Corporate Communication

- managing communication or fulfilling the communication management function
- dealing with controlled and uncontrolled media
- serving both internal and external audiences
- proactive communication planning
- advocating communication strategies and tactics
- dissemination of persuasion and information
- branding images and reputation
- branding products and services
- monitoring the responses from audiences and markets
- counseling and advising senior executives
- managing issues and responding to crisis situations
- lobbying for favorable stances for the organization
- organizational image creation and maintenance
- organizational presence building and monitoring
Scope of Corporate Communication

- **Corporations** -Departments with the tasks such as community relations and marketing communications dealing with an organization's reputation and service to clients.

- **Nonprofit Agencies** - Options ranging from membership organizations to social and cultural groups, hospitals, and health care agencies offer public relations opportunities where fund raising is always involved.

- **Entertainment, Sports and Travel** - Communicators in these areas are usually concerned with *press agentry* and promotion of events. *Publicity* is an important part of practitioner duties here.
• Government and Military - Here communicators focus on *promotion of political issues* (often including lobbying), information dissemination about government activities to citizens, and information distribution to and about the military.

• Education - Higher education opportunities cover *relationships with alumni, faculty and administration, students*, and the general public promoting the college image, recruiting students, and raising funds.

• International - With today's almost instantaneous global communication, intriguing new areas have opened. These areas are particularly desirable for bilingual or multilingual practitioners who are familiar with many cultures.
Contextual variables in corporate communication

• Who are the addressees of corporate communication?

• What is the purpose of communication in each and every situation in which it occurs?

• What linguistic resources are drawn on to achieve these effects?

• Watch this video on the scope of marketing communication
Dealing with Stakeholders

- It is important to recognize **stakeholders** (those with a vested interest in a specific industry).
  - Primary stakeholders (those who are immediately affected by the organization’s activities)
  - Secondary stakeholders (everybody else who may be indirectly affected)
- Monitoring and managing key issues and moving to offset crisis and emergency situations in a **pro-active** way is essential to corporate relations today.
- This means that companies need to invest a lot of energy in communication
  - Because the advent of new means of communication has changed the coordinates of corporate communication
  - Because influencing and monitoring the public has become part of business strategy
Hot topics in Corporate Communication

• Some of the hottest issues are the environment, health and safety, and accountability to all stakeholders, especially to the media, stockholders, the government, and special interest groups.
  • Rise in CSR-related communication
  • Increased use of social networks (more generally, media management)
  • Reduced control on media outlets
How is communication effected?

• Through GENRES

• Genres are typified responses to recurrent rhetorical situations (Miller 1984)

• Rise of genre theory

• This is the underlying rationale for our course: learning to use language effectively for specific communicative purposes