

Trosborg, Anna (ed) 2010. *Pragmatics Across Languages and Cultures*. Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter. 644 pages. ISBN 978-3-11-021443-7 (Review of Part IV Pragmatics in Corporate Culture Communication)

This review considers the final five chapters entitled ‘Pragmatics in Corporate Culture Communication’ in the edited volume. The editor, Anna Trosborg, provides a stimulating and extremely informative overview of the section. She sees it as divided into two parts; the first two chapters deal with how pragmatics has been most innovative for understanding corporate communication, for example, by activating speech act theory and genre analysis, but also by reactivating the ancient rhetorical notion of credibility and applying it to corporate discourse. The last three chapters make up the second part, which introduces the reader to new and emergent areas, namely crisis communication and Corporate Social Responsibility. The editor eloquently demonstrates the problems scholars have been faced with. Also she shows how the shift has proceeded from linguistically based questions to matters that business people themselves can benefit from. The effects of globalization and the increasing call for understanding of the pragmatic components of intercultural competence falls now within the remit of corporate communication researchers. Also the accommodation to the multi-modality of corporate communication is a feature which the chapters gathered here pay careful attention to. Anna Trosborg modestly notes that the studies presented in the volume are more than just state of the art portrayals of the research so far; instead she is optimistic that they will trigger more interest in the areas discussed and serve to promote the pragmatics of the language and cultural mix.

The first chapter in the section, Hilikka Yli-Jokipii ‘Pragmatics and research into corporate communication’, presents a review of the literature that recognizes that pragmatic issues are crucial to the investigation of corporate communication. Yli-Jokipii argues that corporate communication is a separate subset of business communication, distinguished by its goal being “ultimately that of making a profit for the shareowners”. The research of the past 15 years deals with “communication in context, as discourse” focusing on investigations into genuine, real-life material on the one hand and on cultural issues. Section two looks at speech-act derived research. Section 3 succinctly treats negotiation research which has always been a major pragmatically oriented area of work on corporate communication. The author refers to the trail blazing and agenda setting research by Charles, Öberg, Bülow-Møller, Poncini, Grinstead, Neumann and Shaw and successfully underlines how it has uncovered areas where intercultural variability is likely to manifest itself, for example in emails in English. Section 4 turns to applied genre analysis, followed by a useful section 5 entitled “Towards investigating multimodal communication”. One example will be the need to get to grips with the “relation between the verbal and visual elements of communication” as exhibited, in particular, in company websites so as to arrive at “meaningful findings on data from the business world”. But unfortunately Yli-Jokipii does not explicate for whom they need to be meaningful. Overall Yli-Jokipii succeeds in arguing convincingly for the utility of casting a pragmatic light on corporate communication. She notes that this will need to incorporate research on writing (emails) as well as speaking genres (eg negotiation), while not forgetting to pay serious attention to the increasing multi-modality of corporate discourse. The author provides a clear and readable review of the relevant literature of importance for future researchers in this field and points to areas where new methods will be needed.

The next chapter, by Poul Erik Jørgensen and Maria Isaksson, ‘Credibility in corporate communication’, surveys the connection between rhetorical studies dating from the classical period through to contemporary studies. Against the background of philosophically grounded studies of rhetoric, credibility is shown to be a significant object for pragmatic research to elaborate principles and practices of self-presentation that both researchers and practitioners can analyze and apply. The need for corporations to respond to criticisms since the 1970s, when many groups challenged western corporations, provides the trigger for such work. Research has shown that corporate identity

has become increasingly important, as, too, has its link to the image a corporation projects. The authors themselves are responsible for demonstrating that a grasp of contemporary and Aristotelian definitions of ethos can show how expertise, trustworthiness and empathy are notions that can serve to bolster corporate identity. The authors constructively review work that looks at the corporate facework corporations engage in. They do well to single out specifically the issuing of apologies as part of crisis communication. As they state (p. 519) this is “a type of mediated corporate discourse where self-promotion and the saving of face become inextricably intertwined”. The major part of the chapter consists of a paraphrase of the authors’ own recent work on analyzing corporate websites and developing from this empirical data definitions of credibility appeals on the one hand. Then by a close analysis of a corpus of the image advertising done by the Deutsche Bank they show how the textual appeals were linked to visual metaphors that underpin the industry’s expertise, trustworthiness and empathy. A further section then gives insightful empirical examples of how in mission statements credibility appeals are employed. They conclude their contribution with an informative analysis of public relations companies’ self presentations. They claim, in conclusion, that (p. 535) “a detailed discourse analysis of a corpus of text can produce a clear and distinctive picture of the rhetorical strategies behind actual words, sentences and paragraphs.” They conclude with rather truisitic and obvious advice to writers working for corporations to provide truthful constructions “catering for the needs and expectations of their stakeholders” (p. 535).

In the third chapter, ‘Corporate crisis communication across cultures’, Finn Frandsen and Winni Johansen present a state of the art report concerning crisis communication. Firstly, dominant lines of research are outlined; these can be divided into the rhetorical or text-oriented tradition and the strategic or context-oriented tradition. The source of this research stems from public relations theory with the former studying what and how organizations communicate in a crisis situation, whereas the latter is interested in studying where, when, and to or with whom organizations communicate during a crisis. The rhetorical tradition treats crisis communication as image restoration discourse or as an instance of terminological control. The strategic tradition is largely quantitative and hypothesis-driven research with evidence-based management now serving to transform scientific findings into normative guidelines. The core theories adopted here are Situational Crisis Communication Theory and the Contingency Theory of Accommodation. The authors provide adequate summaries and useful literature references for this approach. Secondly, the intercultural dimension of crisis communication is treated in some depth also. Despite the effects of globalization, research has demonstrated that crises are still largely handled within a local context. Latterly however, scholars are beginning to pinpoint the ways in which national cultures or organizational cultures influence strategic communication. But intercultural perspectives are still limited in this research. A particularly interesting section discusses how perhaps western public relations strategies are not always adequate to deal with consumers in the non-western world. The differential use of apologies is an instance where Asian cultures are distinct. A number of recent events and cases are adduced to show how important it is on the part of corporations to consider national culture in order to communicate effectively. A set of case studies is briefly but helpfully summarized. The authors themselves situate their own research in the area; they have developed a model which emphasizes the need for a multi-vocal approach rather than simply a sender-receiver model. It is worth quoting them to underpin the utility of this approach, which can truly be said to emphasize pragmatic variables (p. 563): “Crisis communication ... includes various actors, contexts and discourses (manifested in specific genres and specific texts) that relate to each other.” In short this heralds the way for new interpretive, social-constructionist and audience-oriented approaches.

Following this Christa Thomsen investigates ‘The pragmatics of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) across cultures’. Thomsen considers theoretical and empirical aspects of CSR, taking a ‘meaning-in-context’ approach, looking at how it is managed and communicated. After a review of the meaning of CSR, noting especially how it is a socially constructed concept, the interestingly argued section three presents the explicit vs implicit types of CSR, demonstrating that the

former is the preferred approach in the US, while the latter is adopted in the more highly regulated European corporate environment. Section four briefly argues that the spread of 'new institutionalism' is resulting in the corresponding global spread of explicit CSR. The fifth and longest section discusses in some detail the implications for CSR communicational practice. Research pointing to the need for consistency and intercultural adaptation strategies on the part of corporations is reviewed. Communication models developed by Danish researchers particularly are forefronted. CSR objectives are shown to be differently conceived by European corporations as compared with their US counterparts. A brief, but helpful, overview of the range and the changing shape of issues implicated in CSR is given. An important point discussed concerns also the types of channels employed, whether social reports, web sites or advertising. This chapter, not unlike some of the others, underlines how elastic the notion of 'pragmatics' has become, indeed stretching it to include institutional analysis.

In the final chapter in the section Patricia Mayes looks at a case study, 'Corporate culture in a global age: Starbucks' "Social Responsibility" and the merging of corporate and personal interests'. It commences promisingly with the notion of 'fast capitalist texts' where language is used to create images of a perfect world masking negative impacts the changing work order is generating. Issues like the construction of identity through discourse is discussed and how identities are linked to class and consumption patterns. Then the author introduces three types of CSR. This serves as the frame that is applied in the empirical investigation the author herself undertakes of how Starbucks melds a corporate take on socially responsible identities with implicit presuppositions of consciously acting human agency. The empirical analysis of the website of Starbucks and particularly their self-proclaimed timeline provides then data for a detailed case study of how semantic agency is discursively constructed. Features that show a construction of a caring and compassionate corporation by association with third parties are effectively adduced and commented on. But nonetheless this chapter is rather disappointing. The author claims not to be placing Starbucks in a negative light at the same time as she does precisely that very thing. So the message of the chapter is rather mixed. Is it descriptive, normative or advocative? This is not clear. Actually like many of the chapters in this section, it is dry, matter of fact and is written in a very academic 'tone'.

But after reading these five chapters the disinterested reader can 'take it or leave it'. The future researcher or advanced student will learn much about corporate discourse. But what they will not really learn is how to take a 'distanced' look at this kind of research. Certainly the first three chapters are corporation-friendly. Much of the work reviewed appears at times to be quite self-seeking, introverted or research community-aligned. What the real 'point' of this research might be to readers who are not specialists in these fields is often unclear. To be sure, reading the summaries on offer can be of use to students and potential researchers. But on reading these chapters one realizes how locked into the straitjacket of the unexamined values of corporations the authors turn out to be.

In conclusion, despite some of the weak points mentioned, I thoroughly recommend the chapters as providing good overviews of the contemporary research issues related to corporate communication that can be broadly called pragmatic. Overall, the chapters reviewed are mostly appropriate to the stated topics dealt with and the bibliographical and reference apparatus is clearly and fully documented, thus enabling students and researchers to follow up the topics and methods discussed. Here the careful and full editorial control over the book as a whole is very much in evidence. All chapters are well written and for the most part comprehensible even for non-expert readers. This is a volume that will be a must on the library shelves of institutions teaching and researching in the area of corporate communication for some years to come.

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