

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Corporate Annual Reports in a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Views from Grammatical Metaphor and Systemic Functional Linguistics

Authors : Antonio Piga

Abstract : The study of language strategies in financial and corporate discourse has always been vital for understanding how companies manage to communicate effectively with a wider customer base and offers new perspectives on how companies interact with key stakeholders, not only to convey transparency and an image of trustworthiness, but also to create affiliation and attract investment. In the light of Systemic Functional Linguistics, the purpose of this study is to examine and analyse the annual reports of Asian and Western joint-stock companies involved in oil refining and power generation from the point of view of the functions and frequency of grammatical metaphors. More specifically, grammatical metaphor - through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) - is used as a theoretical tool for analysing a synchronic cross-cultural study of the communicative strategies adopted by Asian and Western companies to communicate social and environmental sustainability and showcase their ethical values, performance and competitiveness to local and global communities and key stakeholders. According to Systemic Functional Linguistics, grammatical metaphor can be divided into two broad areas: ideational and interpersonal. This study focuses on the first type, ideational grammatical metaphor (IGM), which includes de-adjectival and de-verbal nominalisation. The dominant and more effective grammatical tropes used by Asian and Western corporations in their annual reports were examined from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective. The aim was to categorise and explain how ideational grammatical metaphor is constructed cross-culturally and presented through structural language patterns involving re-mapping between semantics and lexico-grammatical features. The results show that although there seem to be more differences than similarities in terms of the categorisation of the ideational grammatical metaphors conceptualised in the two case studies analysed, there are more similarities than differences in terms of the occurrence, the congruence of process types and the role and function of IGM. Through the immediacy and essentialism of compacting and condensing information, IGM seems to be an important linguistic strategy adopted in the rhetoric of corporate annual reports, contributing to the ideologies and actions of companies to report and promote efficiency, profit and social and environmental sustainability, thus advocating the engagement and investment of key stakeholders.

Keywords : corporate annual reports, cross-cultural perspective, ideational grammatical metaphor, rhetoric, systemic functional linguistics

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