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**COMPANIES' GLOBAL WEBSITES. THE INTERPLAY OF
LANGUAGE, GENRE AND MEDIUM IN WEB-MEDIATED
INTERCULTURAL BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

**SITI WEB AZIENDALI IN VERSIONE GLOBALE. LINGUAGGIO,
GENERI TESTUALI E MEDIUM IN INTERAZIONE NELLA
COMUNICAZIONE INTERCULTURALE D'IMPRESA VIA WEB**

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*The price a world language must be prepared to pay
is submission to many different kinds of use.*

Chinua Achebe

ABSTRACT

In today's globalized economy, the use of English and of the Web have become strategic assets for companies to address their stakeholders worldwide and promote their products. On the one hand, English is the privileged language to conduct business in an intercultural environment, on the other it is now common practice for companies to publish a global version of their corporate website to properly communicate with their stakeholders worldwide.

Banking on the assumption that English and the Web are today crucial for intercultural business communication, my PhD dissertation intends to investigate the discursive patterns along with the hypertextual, interactive and multimodal features that emerge from the analysis of a corpus of thirty companies' global websites. The chosen websites belong to renewable energy companies based in European countries where English is not the native language.

In particular, my dissertation aims at contributing to the interdisciplinary field of Intercultural Business Communication, by providing an answer to the following research questions:

1. Is it possible to categorize companies' websites in generic terms?
2. How does textual information cooperate with and is influenced by the other semiotic resources?
3. How is English adapted for the purposes of web-mediated international corporate communication?
4. How do companies appropriate the resources available to fulfil the specific business purposes of their organizations when addressing their international audience?

Considering the objectives of my dissertation together with the complexity of the materials selected, different yet interdependent methods have been chosen. The methodology adopted combines a genre and a corpus perspective. Corpus Linguistics offers ways of looking at lexico-grammatical patterns. Genre Analysis contributes to investigating the textual organization of the websites sampled. In addition, the theoretical framework of traditional Genre Analysis has been integrated with the approach of Multimodal Discourse Analysis, with a view to examining the hypertextual, interactive and multimodal resources exploited in the global websites.

The findings of the study seem to suggest that all the websites differ from one another in the way information is managed and web resources are exploited. This personalization of

promotional strategies places added value on the communicative activities of each company, and it proves to be instrumental in maintaining business relationships with a varied international audience, as well as to making the company stand out from competition.

To conclude, nowadays companies promote their products and services, disseminate knowledge about their performances, and they aim at projecting a positive corporate image by relying on the convergence of language and Web properties. This has brought about a ‘remediation’ of the traditional genres of business discourse, while leading to a problematization of the status of English as the language for intercultural business communication, which is *de facto* adopted and adapted by members of the business community in order to share information and conduct trade in today’s globalized world.

Keywords: Intercultural Business Communication, Corporate Websites, Genre Analysis, Multimodality, Business English as a Lingua Franca.

RIASSUNTO

Al giorno d'oggi, le aziende operanti nel contesto dell'economia globalizzata impiegano la lingua inglese e la rete Web come risorse strategiche allo scopo di rivolgersi ai loro *stakeholders* (portatori d'interesse) internazionali, e per promuovere i loro prodotti. Da un lato infatti l'inglese è diventata sempre più la lingua prescelta per condurre commerci in ambito internazionale ed interculturale, mentre dall'altro lato la pubblicazione di una versione globale del sito web aziendale è ormai una pratica comune al fine di comunicare con il pubblico internazionale nella maniera più appropriata.

Partendo dal presupposto che il Web e l'inglese sono strumenti essenziali per la comunicazione interculturale d'impresa, la presente tesi di dottorato intende esaminare i modelli discorsivi ricorrenti, così come le caratteristiche ipertestuali, interattive e multimodali che emergono dall'analisi di un corpus di trenta siti web aziendali in versione globale in lingua inglese. I siti che sono stati selezionati appartengono ad organizzazioni operanti nel settore delle energie rinnovabili con sede in paesi dell'Unione Europea dove la lingua madre è diversa dall'inglese.

La presente tesi intende dunque inserirsi nell'area interdisciplinare di studi sulla Comunicazione Interculturale d'Impresa, fornendo una risposta alle seguenti domande di ricerca:

1. È possibile categorizzare un sito web aziendale in termini di genere testuale?
2. In che modo le informazioni veicolate in forma testuale interagiscono con e sono influenzate da altre risorse semiotiche?
3. Quali processi di adattamento subisce la lingua inglese per rispondere ai bisogni della comunicazione interculturale d'Impresa mediata dal Web?
4. In che modo le aziende si appropriano delle varie risorse rese disponibili dal Web per raggiungere i loro obiettivi allorché si rivolgono ad un pubblico internazionale?

Dati gli obiettivi della presente tesi, e considerata la complessità dei materiali di analisi, è stato opportuno individuare diversi seppur interdipendenti approcci metodologici. Per prima cosa, si è fatto riferimento alla Linguistica dei Corpora per individuare le strutture lessico-grammaticali più ricorrenti ed efficacemente utilizzate. In secondo luogo, il quadro teorico tradizionale dell'Analisi dei Generi Testuali è stato integrato con l'approccio fornito dall'Analisi del Discorso Multimodale al fine di investigare l'organizzazione testuale dei siti, e come questa dipenda dalle risorse multimodali, ipertestuali e interattive adoperate.

Dai risultati pare emergere che ogni sito web si differenzia dagli altri in termini di gestione dell'informazione e utilizzo delle risorse digitali. Tale personalizzazione delle strategie promozionali fornisce un valore aggiunto alle attività comunicative di ciascuna azienda, e risulta quindi essere determinante non solo nel mantenere rapporti d'affari con gli *stakeholders* internazionali, ma anche nel fronteggiare la competizione.

In conclusione, attualmente le aziende promuovono i loro prodotti e servizi, divulgano informazioni riguardanti i loro risultati e rendimenti, e mirano alla proiezione di un'immagine aziendale positiva facendo leva sulla convergenza di strumenti linguistici e digitali, contribuendo così ad un processo di ri-contestualizzazione dei tradizionali generi del discorso aziendale. Per quel che riguarda invece l'utilizzo dell'inglese, esso è oggi adottato ed adattato dalle aziende al fine di condividere informazioni e condurre affari nell'attuale mondo globalizzato. Questo ha reso necessaria una problematizzazione nell'approccio a tale lingua, che è di fatto il codice privilegiato della comunicazione interculturale d'impresa.

Parole chiave: Comunicazione Interculturale d'Impresa, Siti Web Aziendali, Analisi dei Generi Testuali, Multimodalità, *Business English as a Lingua Franca*.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Globalization is one of the most discussed phenomena of the present era, yet it remains an elusive issue for the majority of experts doing research in various scientific and cultural fields. Globalization involves all domains of human life, and it has brought about unprecedented changes to the areas of society, politics, economy and culture, to name but a few. In fact, during the last decades a dramatic increase in contacts among people in countries all around the world has been witnessed. However, it is difficult to say whether this increase is a driver or a result of globalization. Undoubtedly, globalization has been fostered by developments in transports and in communication that have intensified movements of people, capital and goods, as well as exchanges of services, information and ideas across countries and continents. In this new communication context, the implementation of new media and technologies, along with and the adoption of English as an international language, have played a crucial role in blurring traditional territorial boundaries.

The debate around globalization has been going on for several decades, and different conceptualizations have been attempted so far. According to Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton (1999), globalization is to be regarded as a process or set of processes which have prompted the emergence of interregional networks of interaction and exchange across countries and involved all social domains, from politics through economy and culture to the environment. Not only has globalization overcome national barriers, but it has brought about a deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation of traditional economic, social and political entities into new subnational, regional and supranational complexes, too. As Held *et al.* put it,

[u]nder conditions of globalization, 'local', 'national' or even 'continental' political, social and economic space is re-formed such that it is no longer necessarily coterminous with established legal and territorial boundaries. On the other hand, as globalization intensifies, it generates pressures towards a reterritorialization of socio-economic activity in the form of subnational, regional and supranational economic zones, mechanisms of governance and cultural complexes. (Held *et al.* 1999, 28)

Held *et al.* also stress the impact that all this is having on the exercise of power in general, since power relationships in one country may influence the way power is exerted in other

parts of the world. In Held *et al.*'s terms,

[i]n an increasingly interconnected global system, the exercise of power through the decision, actions, or inactions, of agencies on one continent can have significant consequences for nations, communities and households on other continents. Power relations are deeply inscribed in the very processes of globalization. (Held *et al.* 1999, 28)

One of the most relevant aspects involved in the exercise of power today is related to the strategies that are applied in order to disseminate knowledge and regulate the flow of information globally. As a result, in the modern world information is power, and in this new international and intercultural context the implementation of the latest technologies along with the use of English take on considerable importance and deserve to be critically addressed. As a matter of fact, according to Held *et al.* global communication is made possible thanks to the combination of telecommunication infrastructures and shared languages. In this context, "it is English that stands at the very centre of the global language system" (Held *et al.* 1999, 346), since nowadays it is the main language used in the economic, political, scientific and cultural domains. Of course, the dominance of English today is connected to the military, political and economic hegemony of Britain in the Nineteenth Century and of the USA in the Twentieth Century, as well described by Crystal who observes that, "[i]t may take a military powerful nation to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain and expand it" (Crystal 1997[2003], 10). In this sense, military and economic power have been gradually replaced by economic, cultural and scientific power in assigning English its hegemonic role in the globalized world.

The conceptualization of globalization presented by Held *et al.* (1999) underscores the complex networks of interaction that have engaged social and political entities all around the world, hence it takes into account the spatial dimension of the phenomenon. Yet, globalization did not come about for the first time in the contemporary age. As a matter of fact, Friedman (2005[2006]) divides globalization into three main eras or stages, which he names Globalization 1.0, Globalization 2.0 and Globalization 3.0. Friedman tracks the beginning of the first stage of globalization to 1492. As Friedman states, this era lasted until the Nineteenth Century, and it was distinctively characterized by the degree of power each country was able to exert in the global competitive scenario. Globalization 2.0 stretched from the Nineteenth Century to the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and during this stage the influence of multinational companies gained momentum. Accordingly, global economy emerged and grew during this stage. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, and thanks to the developments introduced in both transportation and telecommunication technologies that dropped the costs of overseas operations, companies began to go for global markets. The

last stage of the phenomenon, Globalization 3.0, which is the one still taking place today, banks on the advancements of Globalization 2.0 especially as regards technological improvements, but its major driving force is the power each individual is capable to exercise when interacting with the others on a global scale. Thus, during the three stages Friedman has outlined, the world has gradually become smaller, yet this process has sped up dramatically during Globalization 3.0. As the author glosses,

Globalization 3.0 is shrinking the world from size small to size tiny and flattening the playing field at the same time. And while the dynamic force in Globalization 1.0 was countries globalizing and the dynamic force in Globalization 2.0 was companies globalizing, the dynamic force in Globalization 3.0 — the force that gives it its unique character — is the new found power for individuals to collaborate and compete globally. (Friedman 2005[2006], 10)

Friedman goes on to explain that this shrinking and flattening of the world has been made possible by the interplay of such communication tools as the personal computer, the fiber-optic cable and the work flow software. Yet, as Charles (2007) rightly points out, technological facilities, although necessary, do not represent a sufficient condition to drive any ground-breaking communication change in Globalization 3.0, unless these changes are supported by language. In fact, with particular reference to the domain of business, Charles ascribes to language a role of “enabler” of communication, and she states that “[t]o understand globalization, it is [...] crucial to examine developments in the language and communication through which it occurs” (Charles 2007, 261). The language Charles is hinting at is English, since it is used by companies operating in today’s globalized business environment in order to communicate with their partners. Nonetheless, Charles acknowledges that professionals are confronted with thorny issues each time they implement English as a tool for business communication. In fact, English, especially when used in an intercultural context, may present challenges for non-native and native speakers alike, so much so that it may turn into a “troublemaker” of communication (Charles 2007, 261).

Drawing the threads of this brief preliminary presentation of globalization as both an agent and a product of change, as well as a complex set of processes exerting a considerable impact on all areas of human life in the contemporary age, it becomes clear that an exhaustive investigation of intercultural business communication should incorporate a discussion of the roles played by technology and language, taking into account the ways in which these converge and interact when they are utilized as strategic assets by professionals, too. Globalization has had, and it is still having major consequences for business activities, so it is the appropriate background against which to view intercultural business communication. For instance, in agreement with Held *et al.*’s (1999) conceptualization of globalization, the

interregional interaction and exchange networks that have been established thanks to achievements in transport and in the communication infrastructure have brought about far-reaching implications to business activities. Accordingly, corporations have been trading across national borders for decades, and competition has become even fiercer than in the past, given that companies are confronted with rival organizations based both within and outside national borders. In this new business setting, companies' accountability towards their stakeholders has gained high priority. As a matter of fact, companies have started to feel a pressing need to project a trustworthy image. This is in fact the manifestation of their identity, and it is instrumental in creating and maintaining reliability in their partners' eyes, and to beating their competitors. To these purposes, companies have availed themselves of the rapid communication flow prompted by improved transportation systems and new technologies, so as to promote their products and services, and disseminate knowledge about their economic, social and environmental performances globally. As I will indicate, invaluable resources for these actions to be enacted are the World Wide Web as a medium, and English as a code for intercultural communication.

For the aim of an in-depth scrutiny of the interaction between the World Wide Web and English in today's globalized business scenario, companies' global websites can be selected as an insightful object of analysis. In fact, it is now common practice for companies to publish a global website, that is, a version of their corporate website¹ especially designed to cater for the needs of an international audience. The language in which companies' global websites are published is usually English. Companies' global websites have become one of the privileged means of international corporate communication today. In particular, two aspects are of paramount importance as regards the way in which communication is established via global websites.

The first aspect to be considered is the medium in which companies' websites are published, i.e. the World Wide Web, which is supported by the technological infrastructure of the Internet.² The second aspect is the language employed, i.e. English. The diffusion of the

¹ As I will explain in more detail in § 5.1, the terms 'companies' websites' and 'corporate websites' are used interchangeably in this work, although the latter term might be considered a hyponym of the former (Kotler 1998, Ellerup Nielsen 2002). The term 'global website' is used to refer to the English version of companies' (or corporate) websites, which is addressed to an international audience.

² As pointed out by Friedman (2005[2006]), although the terms 'World Wide Web' and 'Internet' are often used interchangeably, they do not refer to the same entity. Indeed, Finneman defines the Internet as "a globally distributed, electronically integrated and open network of connected computers" (Finneman 2001, 21-22) that can be accessed via browsers, e-mail programmes, websites, to name a few. In other words, the Internet refers to the technological infrastructure linking computers in a global network. On the other hand, the World Wide Web, which was developed by a team of scientists coordinated by Sir Tim Berners-Lee at CERN, Geneva, Switzerland, in the early 1990s, is a "system for creating, organizing, and linking documents so they [can] be easily browsed over the Internet" (Friedman 2005[2006], 60), or in Berners-Lee's own terms, "an abstract (imaginary) space of information" (Berners-Lee n.d.). Given that the main interest of this

Web and of English in the world, which in turn has become “the chief lingua franca of the Internet” (Crystal 1997[2003], 117), especially with respect to the purposes of corporate communication, are consistent with processes fuelled by globalization, since this phenomenon has contributed to shaping the state of affairs of society, culture, economy, environment, technology, transports and communication today, as pointed out beforehand.

Not only are companies’ global websites among the most inspiring although ‘virtual’ settings to carry out a close investigation of the interconnectedness of the Web and English in today’s globalized professional world, but also valuable guidance for the analysis of online corporate communication is gained by delving into issues regarding both medium and linguistic code. In fact, thanks to the properties of the Web, corporate websites can be regarded as virtual repositories of the promotional material delivered by companies, which is made accessible to any stakeholder in any part of the world all day and every day of the year. Furthermore, since the global version of corporate websites is usually published in English, this language has come to be regarded as the common code of communication among language users from different lingua-cultural backgrounds.

In order to refer to the usage of English as a contact language in the business domain, in particular as regards interpersonal communication, the acronym BELF has been devised (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles, & Kankaanranta 2005). BELF stands for Business English as a Lingua Franca, and it refers to a shared language serving the aim of conducting business in a multicultural and multilingual environment (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, Charles 2006, Ehrenreich 2010, Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 2012). To put it in different terms, BELF is “an instrument for getting the job done” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 400), yet it seems that the notion of BELF, which is usually applied when referring to the micro level of international business communication (i.e. interpersonal exchanges such as spoken interaction or emails, Louhiala-Salminen 2009, Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 2012, Louhiala-Salminen 2013) needs to be further problematized when dealing with corporate communication via website. In fact, global websites should be assumed to belong to the macro level of international business communication (i.e. companies’ communication directed towards their target audiences at large, Louhiala-Salminen 2009), and the language employed in this sort of text is considered to abide by the norms of Standard English (StE).

Nonetheless, global websites may also be regarded as instruments used to ‘get the job done’, in the context of corporate communication, as they fulfil the strategic function of

work is in the communication medium rather than on the physical, technical framework that supports it, from here on reference will be made exclusively to the World Wide Web.

constructing and projecting a positive corporate image to the various international stakeholders. Bearing in mind that corporate image is negotiated via efficient communication at both a macro and micro level (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011), in this work I will argue that the language of global websites as it is exploited in the domain of international corporate communication can be considered a resource that admits of comparison with BELF as it is adopted during interpersonal encounters, despite contextual differences between the two. In this way, I will try to provide an answer to Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010) challenging question concerning whether the domain of written BELF is to be restricted to non-public communication products only, and if that is the case, whether BELF can be expected to ever cross over into the public domain of corporate websites.

Hence, it can be assumed that the use of the Web and of English for the promotional purposes of companies has significant effects that contribute to shaping companies' global websites. In particular, the promotional material uploaded in corporate websites includes texts that were once distributed in printed form, and that with the advent of the new technologies introduced in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication³ have been moved to the Web, along with texts that have emerged thanks to the affordances of the medium. All these texts are gathered together and made accessible by means of hyperlinks. Furthermore, corporate websites employ various semiotic systems besides textual information. As a matter of fact, the presence of images, the web page layout, and the colour scheme take part in the meaning-making process too, and influence the language used.

1.2. Objectives

All the facets of communication via global website mentioned above bear strong implications on the generic status of the websites themselves, on the lexico-grammatical features that emerge from the texts, on the design and usability of the web pages, as well as on the promotional strategies implemented by each company to conduct their business and to stand out from competition. Hence, banking on the assumption that the Web and English play a crucial role in today's intercultural business communication, this work will purport to provide an answer to the following research questions:

³ A definition of Computer-Mediated Communication, often abbreviated with the acronym CMC, is provided by Spitzberg: "CMC is tentatively defined as any symbolic text-based interaction conducted or facilitated through digitally-based technologies. This working definition includes the Internet; cellular phone text, instant messaging (IM), and multi-user interactions (MUDs & MOOs); email and listserv interactions; and text supplemented videoconferencing (e.g. decision support systems). This definition requires actual people engaged in a process of message interchange in which the medium of exchange at some point is computerized" (Spitzberg 2006, 630).

1. Is it possible to categorize companies' websites in terms of genre?
2. How does textual information cooperate with and is influenced by other semiotic resources?
3. How is English adapted for the purposes of web-mediated international corporate communication? Is it possible to compare the implementation of English as a resource for companies' global websites to the use of BELF in interpersonal communication exchanges?
4. Since meaning making is socially situated, and since it should be investigated taking into account all the semiotic resources employed (Iedema 2003), how are the capabilities of web-mediated business communication appropriated and exploited by the companies aiming at fulfilling their "private intentions" (Bhatia 1993, 2004, 2012) when addressing their international stakeholders?

1.3. Data and methods

In order to provide an answer to the questions raised here, I have collected a corpus of texts taken from thirty companies' global websites. The selection has been made following two criteria that could work towards a better understanding of what is at stake when companies promote their products and activities in today's global market place. The first criterion regards the industry sector, while the second regards the country of origin of the companies. Hence, the websites analysed here belong to companies active in the renewable energy sector, based in countries of the European Union where English is not a native language.

To begin with, I have chosen companies active in the renewable energy sector, given the interdependence that exists among the production of energy, the depletion of natural resources, and the need to promote sustainable development. This sector is relevant to a discussion of corporate communication in the context of globalization, since every human action is based on the supply of energy, whether it is the management of households, industrial activities, trade or transport. As a consequence, the costs of energy production have an impact on the global economic growth, and they bring up thorny social and environmental issues (Anderson 2000). In this scenario, not only is the production of low-cost energy from renewable resources highly relevant to the current debates regarding human health and environmental conservation, but also a growing number of companies are getting involved in this industry, as they envisage an expansion of their trade and future profits.

In particular, the companies I have selected for my corpus can be divided into five groups, as they deal with types of renewable energy generated from different sources. The

types of energy I have considered are hydropower, wind energy, bioenergy, solar energy (photovoltaics) and geothermal energy. In today's European Union, there are several non-profit organizations that promote and coordinate the business of the companies affiliated to them. For this reason, when selecting the websites for my corpus, I made sure that the companies selected belong to one of these organizations,⁴ assuming that their membership witnesses their commitment to the production of green energy, and their consolidated position in this sector.

Secondly, the companies have been selected according to their geo-political status and lingua-cultural background. The global websites I have included in my corpus are owned by companies based in non-English speaking countries of the European Union. The rationale behind this selecting criterion has been inspired by Cramer's study (2007) of the diffusion of English in the twenty-seven countries that have been part of the European Union since 1 January 2007.⁵ Cramer's study belongs to the theoretical framework of World Englishes (WEs), i.e. the area of Applied Linguistics that investigates how English has spread in different varieties across the globe, and it is the revisited version of the model devised by Berns (1995a), who took into account the twelve member states that made up the European Union in 1995. Both models presented by Berns and Cramer are indebted to Kachru's (1985, 1992) conceptualization, which accounts for the status of English as a native, second or foreign language, according to its "historical, educational and functional distinctiveness" (Kachru 1997, 68). Nonetheless, Berns's and Cramer's models differ from Kachru's model as they consider Europe as a single and unified socio-linguistic entity (Berns 1995a, Cramer 2007).

Relying on Cramer's conceptualization, fifteen out of the thirty companies that I have selected to collect my corpus are based in countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, while the remaining fifteen belong to Transition Circle #1.⁶ Both circles include countries where English is not a native language, yet these countries vary according to the symbolic status that

⁴ The organizations representing the companies selected for my corpus are the European Small Hydropower Association (ESHA) for hydropower, the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA) for wind energy, the European Biomass Association (AEBIOM) for bioenergy, the European Photovoltaic Industry Association (EPIA) for solar energy (photovoltaics) and the European Geothermal Energy Council (EGEC) for geothermal energy.

⁵ On 1 July 2013 Croatia entered the EU and became the twenty-eighth state member of the Union.

⁶ The countries belonging to the Expanding Circle that are accounted for in this study are Austria (two companies), Belgium (one company), Estonia (one company), France (two companies), Greece (one company), Italy (five companies), Portugal (one company), Slovakia (one company) and Spain (one company), while the countries belonging to Transition Circle #1 are Denmark (two companies), Finland (three companies), Germany (six companies), Sweden (two companies) and the Netherlands (two companies). As I will elucidate in § 4.2.3, Cramer's model considers also the use of English in Malta. This country is the only one to be included in Transition Circle #2, due to the particular historical and political conditions underlying the spread of English. In my analysis I do not account for the case of Malta, as I could not retrieve any company active in the renewable energy sector with headquarters in this country.

English has achieved and the utilitarian functions it fulfils. On the one hand, the Expanding Circle features those countries where English is primarily acquired at school as a foreign language, and used as a communication tool in international encounters,⁷ as it was the case in Bern's conceptualization (1995b). On the other hand, in the countries located in Transition Circle #1 (which was devised by Cramer as a substitute for Berns's so called Expanding/Outer Circle) English fulfils a wide number of functions in professional, institutional, cultural and educational settings, and it is more and more used as a code for intranational communication as well.

Hence, my dissertation sets out to analyze the strategies that European companies implement to communicate in a globalized world which is now witnessing a decrease in prestige of the Western countries, and of the European ones in particular, in favour of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), whose economies are now experiencing a rocketing development. For this reason, it seems relevant to consider the European Union as a single socio-linguistic entity that transcends the traditional territorial borders between countries. This idea of unity is given by the fact that the European organizations that gather the companies mapped here were in turn members of the former European Renewable Energy Council (EREC),⁸ a supranational association which represented the renewable energy sector in Europe from 2000 to 2014.⁹

For all the reasons mentioned so far, the implementation of a global website in English has become a strategic asset for companies aiming at promoting their products, disseminating information about their activities, shaping their corporate identity, and projecting their corporate image. A global website is designed to serve all these purposes, and as a tool of corporate communication it constructs meaning on a variety of levels.

In particular, two website sections have been selected to conduct the study of the most recurring lexico-grammatical features. These sections include the web pages dedicated to the presentation of the company (the so called 'About Us' or 'Company sections'), and the web pages dedicated to the presentation of the products and services offered (here referred to as 'product sections'). The rationale behind the choice of these texts is that these web pages are

⁷ Croatia, was not originally considered by Cramer in 2007, since at that time it was not among the EU member states. Yet, Cramer's model featured Slovenia, which had entered the EU on 1 January 2007. In order for this study to account for the case of Croatia as well, I consider the linguistic situation regarding the spread of English in Croatia to be comparable to that of Slovenia, as both were countries belonging to the former Yugoslavia. In addition to this, according to the results of the *Special Eurobarometer* report dedicated to "Europeans and Their Languages" (2006), 49% of Croatian citizens declared that they can speak English well enough in order to have a conversation, a percentage comparable to the one characterizing other two countries included in Cramer's Expanding Circle, i.e. Austria (50%) and Greece (48%). Banking on these assumptions, and given the current situation in the EU, Cramer's model can be integrated by including Croatia in the Expanding Circle.

⁸ <<http://www.erec.org>>, last accessed on 20 July 2014.

⁹ EREC voluntarily decided to go into liquidation on 6 March 2014 (EREC 2014).

particularly relevant from both the perspective of the informative function (disseminating general information about the companies' products, services, performance), as well as from the perspective of the promotional function of the websites (promoting the companies' identity as a reliable and trustworthy partner, and carrying out marketing functions), as my analysis will attempt to demonstrate. In fact, companies' websites are crucial in sharing information about the company, its products and activities with a global audience. Hence, when accessing the About Us/Company section and the section dedicated to the products and services, the global audience is confronted with a wealth of texts aimed at describing the company as an accountable partner, thus projecting a positive corporate image, with the underlying promotional purposes of selling its products, building and maintaining solid business relationships, and beating competitors.

The methods which I have selected aim at providing a comprehensive investigation of such multifaceted objects of analysis as companies' global websites seem to be. In particular, with reference to Corpus Linguistics, I have opted for the techniques of wordlists and concordance strings, with a view to identifying the most frequently employed lexico-grammatical structures. In order to allow for a quantitative analysis of the web pages, the texts have been included in a corpus to be analysed by means of the *AntConc* (Version 3.3.5) concordancing tool (Anthony 2012). Although research in BELF is not concerned with language skills *per se*, and so it is not usually focused on the study of terminology (Charles 2007), I believe that an investigation of the most frequently employed lexico-grammatical structures will provide guidance in assessing how efficiently each global website promotes the company's products and services, shapes a positive corporate identity, and disseminates information about the company's performance.

1.4. Theoretical approaches

By providing an answer to the questions posed above, the present work intends to make a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of Intercultural and International Business Communication, as it aims at shedding light on the textual, hypertextual, multimodal and interactive features that emerge from the investigation of a corpus of companies' global websites. Furthermore, this work intends to provide fresh insights into the study of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) by focusing on business discourse, and by adopting different yet interdependent methodologies taken from Corpus Linguistics, Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

A range of theoretical approaches have been selected to carry out this study, so as to

provide different yet interconnected perspectives to tackle online corporate communication. The complexity of global websites derives from their heterogeneous nature, since they collect and combine a variety of texts in one virtual *locus* only, and meaning is provided by the interplay of different semiotic resources. As a consequence, disentangling the elements that contribute to communication via global website proves to be a hard task, let alone the fact that scrutinizing each element making up global websites may entail the risk to lose track of the overall purpose of the object of analysis itself. For this reason, in order to investigate the multiple facets that participate in the meaning construction of global websites without losing sight of their integrity as resources of online corporate communication, a series of decisions have been reached regarding the way in which the materials of analysis have to be treated.

By moving the analysis beyond a lexico-grammatical level, I have looked further on at the types of texts which are included in the sections under scrutiny, and at the way in which they are organized to address an audience made up of stakeholders who differ not only in their lingua-cultural background, but also in the specific interest they take in the company. While analyzing the internal organization of the sections, I have drawn upon the theoretical framework of Genre Analysis to investigate how the advent of online corporate communication has brought about a ‘remediation’ of the traditional printed genres of corporate communications, as for instance company brochures, mission statements and CSR reports.

Beside this, I have adopted the approach of MDA, since the multimodal, hypertextual and interactive features of the websites chosen seem to gain prominence in the construction of meaning for the promotional purposes pursued by the companies. To this effect, I have relied on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996[2006]) visual grammar, with a view to examining the multimodal resources exploited in the About Us/Company sections and in the products sections, as for instance the presence of images, the web page layout and the colour scheme. This qualitative approach has been adopted banking on the assumption that a discussion of intercultural business communication should move away from the study of language alone, “to the study of the integration of language with other resources” (O’Halloran 2011, 121). Furthermore, since global websites belong to the domain of CMC, hypertextual and interactive strategies have been considered, given that the presence of hyperlinks and interactive tools such as search bars and fill-in forms contributes to the meaning-making process, and it has an impact on the rhetorical choices made for corporate communication via global websites.

This variety of approaches has been deployed in order to address the research questions formulated above in the most comprehensive way possible. The results seem to

suggest that corporate communication via global website is influenced by the complex interplay between the implementation of English as a resource for intercultural business communication and the properties of the Web medium, which offers companies a wealth of communicative tools to recontextualize promotional discourse. Hence, in order to cater for the needs of their international audiences, and in order to stand out from competition, companies personalize both the way in which they adapt English to their professional purposes, and the way in which they exploit the multimodal, hypertextual and interactive resources offered by the medium.

All in all, the present investigation may help raise awareness in practitioners, that is, all the people employed in companies trading internationally, on how to successfully communicate and do business in a globalized setting. Furthermore, this investigation is meant to be relevant for the teaching of English for business purposes, since it should encourage trainers of future managers to support novices in the development of those skills that are required to efficiently and strategically handle the Web and English when entering the professional world.

1.5. Overview of the study

My study is organized in eight chapters. The present chapter (Chapter 1) has presented the background of the study, my objectives, my data, the methods and the theoretical approaches I have adopted for my research. Chapter 2 offers a general background by discussing a selection of definitions and models to explain the concepts of communication and culture. Next, the interdisciplinary field of Intercultural Business Communication is introduced. The development of this field is tracked by considering the related domains of Business Discourse, Business Communication and Corporate Communication. The notions of corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate identity are also illustrated, as they subsume companies' forms of corporate communication.

Chapter 3 articulates my theoretical framework by providing an overview of the different theories of Genre Analysis. The conceptualization of genre propounded by the school of North American New Rhetoric is illustrated, along with the theories outlined within the paradigm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Thus, Chapter 3 aims at combining the perspectives offered by these two distinct schools of thoughts, in order to define analytical tools which will provide guidance in evaluating the generic status of corporate.

Moreover, Chapter 3 accounts for the impact of the Web medium on professional discursive practices. To this effect, the area of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) is

introduced, and issues regarding the interrelationship between generic realizations and the Web medium are tackled. The properties of the Web medium are described, with particular regard to multimodality: this refers to the co-presence of several semiotic modes to construct meaning, and it is typical of web-mediated communication forms. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design is therefore introduced, and studies in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) are surveyed, since this approach aims at investigating meaning construction via the interaction of several semiotic modes.

Chapter 4 tackles the role and function of English for the aims of intercultural and international communication in today's globalized scenario. Firstly, the paradigm of World Englishes (WEs) is introduced to account for the spread of English worldwide. In this context, the models by Kachru (1985, 1992) and Modiano (1999a, 1999b) are illustrated. With regard to the spread of English in Europe, the models by Berns (1985a, 1985b) and Cramer (2007) are presented. Next, the concept of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and its implications for language learning and use are extensively discussed. As for the use of English for the purposes of business communication in international contexts, the concept of Business English as a Lingua Franca is explained.

Finally, the chapter delves into the inter-relationship between communication in ELF (and BELF) and translation. This is due to the focus of my research on companies' websites in their global version in English, which are often translation-based. Therefore, the interplay of globalization, technology, translation and the use of ELF in communication via website will be explored, on the assumption that translation and ELF both respond to the needs of spreading information globally, and that they are equally affected by technological innovation.

In Chapter 5, the data for the study and the methodological approach are presented. Relevant literature about corporate websites is surveyed, and my corpus of thirty websites is described with particular reference to the industry sector in which the companies operate. Methods of data gathering and analysis are also explained.

The two subsequent chapters are dedicated to the results of my analysis. Chapter 6 reports on the analysis carried out on the About Us/Company sections, while Chapter 7 reports on the analysis of the products sections. In both chapter, the same analytical approach rooted in MDA has been adopted, as both types of sections have been investigated in terms of lexico-grammar, hypertextual and interactive strategies, and visual elements.

The final chapter draws the strings of my study by referring back to my research questions. The limitations of my study, along with avenues for future research, will be also illustrated.

CHAPTER II

Discourse in intercultural and international business settings: key concepts and theories

With the sharp rise of globalized trade, the role of culture has acquired a prominent role in the international business context, especially as regards the way in which communication is managed. The effects of culture shape the interactions between and among professionals as part of their daily practices in the workplace, and reverberate throughout the activities in which the companies are engaged in order to promote their products, disseminate knowledge of their performances, and gain the trust of all their multiple stakeholders, that is, customers, suppliers, shareholders, employees, the media, local communities and governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Professionals doing business in international settings are very often faced with barriers created by cultural differences, which usually entail linguistic differences as well. One of the ways in which these differences can be managed and overcome, at least to some extent, is by identifying and adopting the most appropriate communicative strategies. Given the fact that nowadays trade is conducted within and outside national borders, companies face fiercer competition than in the past. Furthermore, companies feel more accountable towards their stakeholders, and one of their chief preoccupations lies with projecting a positive corporate image that will allow them to build and maintain long-lasting business relationships. Therefore, the implementation of efficient and effective communicative strategies constitutes an urgent challenge in business settings, so much so that its implications have attracted the attention of scholars in social studies as well as in the humanities, with a growing interest for language-based studies, as pointed out by Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini in their Introduction to the volume *The Language of Business: An International Perspective* (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 1997). Banking on these assumptions, communication can be regarded as the *locus* where cultural differences emerging in the business domain are negotiated. In fact, the convergence of communication and culture in the context of business is the object of inquiry of a wealth of disciplines characterized by different yet interrelated approaches, each contributing to a better understanding of the phenomenon.

The present chapter outlines the theoretical underpinnings of my work by shedding light on the basic constructs of communication and culture, and by surveying a range of

disciplines investigating discursive practices in intercultural and international¹ business settings. The chapter starts out by providing a selection of available definitions to explain the terms communication and culture. Next, the chapter introduces the interdisciplinary field of Intercultural Business Communication² (IBC). In order to understand how IBC was categorized as a discipline in the past, and in order to suggest a conceptualization that takes into account recent theoretical developments in the field, reference will be made to the interconnected disciplines of International Business (IB) and Intercultural Communication (ICC). In addition, this chapter surveys the development of IBC, taking into account the related areas of Business Discourse, Business Communication and Corporate Communication. The notions of corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate identity are illustrated, too. IBC can provide an appropriate theoretical framework for the present study, as this field articulates a range of notions that are crucial in understanding today's globalized business environment, and that are useful to address online corporate communication via global websites. Moreover, attention is paid to other disciplines that draw upon communication, culture and business studies, with a view to clarifying the relations existing among this multiplicity of disciplines that offer different approaches and yet overlap to a large extent, thus leading to a fruitful cross-fertilization.

2.1. Communication

Communication is a construct incorporated in numerous fields of research that investigate human interactions, information exchanges and knowledge dissemination. The meaning and relevance of communication as a process are sometimes taken as a given, yet this construct has been the object of inquiry of many academics belonging to the most diverse fields of study, from mathematics to linguistics. As a consequence, a plethora of models have been devised in order to describe what communication is, which factors are involved in the process, how they are interrelated, and which implications they carry.

One of the first models of communication was built by the mathematicians Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver at the end of the 1940s. As shown in Figure 2.1 on the following page, Shannon and Weaver's Communication Model is graphically represented by

¹ In the present work I adopt the conceptualization of the terms 'intercultural' and 'international' suggested by Palmer-Silveira, Ruiz-Garrido and Fortanet-Gómez (2006). As indicated in § 2.3, while introducing the research area they tackle, that is Intercultural and International Business Communication (IIBC), Palmer-Silveira *et al.* adopt both terms, implying that different cultures can be found within the territorial boundaries of one nation.

² Capital letters are used in this work when naming disciplines that deal with communication, culture and related issues. Lower-case letters are used when referring to communication as a process and to culture as a system of values, beliefs, norms, etc..

a diagram where a *Transmitter* selects a *Message* from an *Information Source* to be sent to a designated *Receiver*. During this process, the *Message* is transformed into *Signals*, yet some external elements, i.e. *Noises*, may interfere with the transformation of the *Message*, thus distorting it.

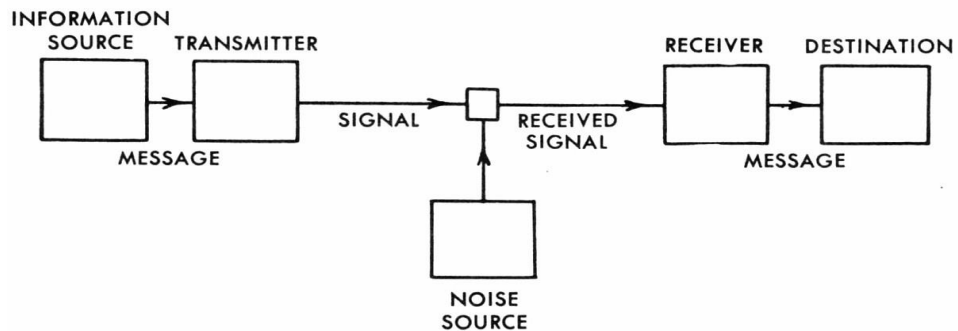


FIGURE 2.1. Shannon and Weaver's Model of Communication (Shannon & Weaver 1949, 34).

The model constructed by Shannon and Weaver has a general character. It was originally intended to provide assistance in fixing engineering problems, and to encourage improvements in telecommunication infrastructures. In fact, it referred primarily to flows of information between machines rather than to human interactions. Yet it served as a starting point for other theories in the area of linguistics too. For instance, in his discussion of the relationship between poetics and linguistics, Jakobson (1960) devised a model to explain verbal communication. He relied on the assumption that every language is a system constituted by a number of patterns, each pattern fulfilling different functions. Jakobson contended that, in order to describe the functions of a language, it is necessary to take into account the factors at play in any verbal communication, as they are represented in Figure 2.2 below.

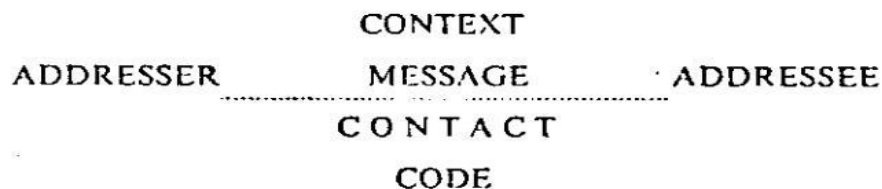


FIGURE 2.2. Jakobson's Model of Communication (1960, 353).

First of all, Jakobson's model comprises an *Addresser* sending a *Message* to an *Addressee*. For communication to occur, the *Message* demands to be referred to a *Context* and to be verbalized in a *Code*. Both *Addresser* and *Addressee* should be familiar with the *Context* and

with the Code of communication. Thus, the Message is sent by the Addresser via a *Contact*, i.e. “a physical channel and psychological connection between the addresser and the addressee enabling them to enter and stay in communication” (Jakobson 1960, 353).

After having outlined the six factors at play in any verbal communication, Jakobson attributes a different function to each factor.³ According to Jakobson, the overall function of a communicative event will be determined by its predominant factor. Although verbal communication usually fulfils more than one function, the predominant factor will shape the structure of the communicative event, and it should be taken in consideration by the analyst. To put it in Jakobson’s terms,

[a]lthough we distinguish six basics aspects of language, we could, however, hardly find verbal messages that would fulfil only one function. The diversity lies not in a monopoly of some one of these several functions but in a different hierarchical order of functions. The verbal structure of a message depends primarily on the predominant function. (Jakobson 1960, 353)

Thus, verbal communication may be characterized by a *referential function* whenever the Context is given the highest importance, an *emotive function* if the Addresser’s emotions, attitudes and intentions are brought to the fore, a *conative function* every time verbal communication aims at provoking the Addressee’s reactions (i.e. by the use of vocative and imperative forms), a *phatic function* if communication is oriented towards the Contact in order to attract the Addressee’s attention or to establish and maintain the information flow, a *metalinguistic function* if information about the Code employed is provided (as for example in the process of learning a language), and a *poetic function* if the Message is the focus of the communicative event. The model devised by Jakobson helped to deepen the understanding of verbal communication by describing its constituents, and by distinguishing the different functions that a communicative event may take on, according to the degrees of importance attached to each constituent.

Communication has been investigated by several other theorists, yet an exhaustive survey of all the models of communication that have been designed to date is beyond the scope of this chapter. For a further understanding of communication, and in order to reinforce the theoretical foundation of the present work, I will quote other two contributions that are relevant to the objectives of my research. The first one by Halliday (1978, 1985a[2004], 1985b) adds up to the present discussion by highlighting the interdependence between the form and function of language, and by bringing to the fore the role of language in the process

³ When outlining the six functions of language, Jakobson (1960) relies on Karl Bühler’s “organon model” of communication (1934[1990]). In fact, Bühler considers language the means by which communication is made possible, and he identifies three functions of communication which are included in Jakobson’s model too, i.e. the expressive, the referential and the conative function.

of meaning construction. The second contribution by Janoschka (2004) provides useful insights by setting forms of mass communication apart from interpersonal or face-to-face communication, and by considering their impact on one particular type of promotional communication, that is, web advertising.

An influential model of communication was developed in the area of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (1978, 1985a[2004], 1985b). The approach to communication adopted by SFL has had far-reaching implications for linguistics studies, as it is based on the assumption that language is not a neutral vehicle, and so it cannot be dissociated from meaning. According to SFL, language and meaning are deeply interrelated, that is, in language grammar and meaning, form and function are not separate entities. In other words, the role of each linguistic element in grammar depends on its function. Therefore, language plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning, and in turn it is shaped by the actual context in which the use of language is embedded.

SFL suggests that humans' social experience is constructed by means of various semiotic systems, and language is the most crucial among these systems. To this regard, Halliday (1978) considers language a *social semiotic* or a *mode of social action*, as it is a resource contributing to the realization of social experience. Halliday's conceptualization deals with spoken and written language alike, and it takes into consideration how texts are patterned according to the context to which they belong. In order to formulate a theory of the relationship existing between text and context, Halliday introduces the notion of *register*. Together with *dialect*, register is a type of language variation. Halliday (1985b) defines dialect a type of social variation that depends on the "particular region, social class, cast, generation, age group, or other relevant grouping within the community" (Halliday 1985b, 44) to which the speaker belongs. On the contrary, register is a functional variation. As a matter of fact,

[l]anguage also varies according to the functions it is being made to serve: what people are actually doing, in the course of which there is talking, or writing, involved; who the people are that are taking part in whatever is going on (in what statuses and roles they are appearing); and what exactly the language is achieving or being used to achieve, in the process. (Halliday 1985b, 44)

Hence, register is determined by three variables. These are *field* ("what is going on", Halliday 1985b, 44), which indicates the specific activity in which language is involved in order to convey content and ideas, *tenor* ("who are taking part", Halliday 1985b, 44), which refers to the status of the interactants and the relationships among them, and *mode* ("what role the language is playing", Halliday 1985b, 44), which stands for the way in which communication

is organized, as well as for the medium employed (i.e. spoken or written language).

Halliday's theorization has exerted a great influence on communication studies, so much so that it has been extended to the study of other modes in addition to verbal communication, as for example to the visual mode. In addition, the notion of social semiotic has been taken on board by researchers in multimodality (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1998, 1996[2006]), as it will be explained in § 3.3. Register is a crucial construct for the analysis of communication in the sense that it reconciles form and function of language, and it puts the emphasis on the role of context for the production of both spoken and written texts.

In order to round off this brief survey on models of communication, I will report on a conceptualization that deals with the new forms of communication that have been brought about by technological improvements. In fact, the rise of the Internet as an infrastructure and of the Web as a medium have had far-reaching implications for the management of information flow, and they have redefined the constituents of communication. In her book about web advertising, Janoschka (2004) elucidates the notion of communication drawing on previous approaches and models. Her work is highly relevant to the present discussion, as it deals with the influence that is exerted by the properties of the Web medium on online promotional communication. Janoschka defines communication as "a process in which some kind of information or message is exchanged between communicators" (Janoschka 2004, 84). Janoschka acknowledges that communication in the Web environment has developed its own characteristics, although it is still based on traditional communication practices, and she states that the focus of her research is on "the production and perception of the message which is closely connected to the function of the Internet as a carrier medium and the changing roles of communicators" (Janoschka 2004, 86).

As regards the status of communicators and the relationships that can be established between them, Janoschka relies on the distinction drawn by Rusch (1998) between mass and interpersonal (or face-to-face) communication. Both mass and interpersonal communication can be found in traditional as well as in the new realizations that have emerged in the Web medium, yet mass and interpersonal communication differ markedly from one another in the aspects that follow. According to Janoschka (2004), in mass communication information flows from one sender to a mass audience, whereas in interpersonal communication the target is usually an individual. In addition, mass communication is characterized by a one-to-many relation between sender and receiver, whereas interpersonal communication features a one-to-one relation. In mass communication, there is no temporal concurrence between the production of the message and its reception, and by the same token, the message reception takes place in the absence of the sender. On the other hand, in interpersonal communication,

message production and message reception generally co-occur in the presence of both sender and receiver. Message transfer in mass communication is made possible by a medium (e.g. print, TV, the Web), whereas message transfer in individual communication is basically direct.⁴ In mass communication, feedback from the audience is usually not possible, or it can be provided with certain limitations (i.e., reactions are time-shifted). As a consequence, the message receiver is passive, and the flow of communication moves in one direction, whereas in interpersonal communication the message receiver is active and in a position to provide feedback, thus making the flow of communication a two directional exchange. In mass communication, information is publicly accessible, whereas in interpersonal communication messages are exchanged privately. As it has been pointed out, mass communication is realized by written and spoken language, sound, graphics, animations and pictures, while interpersonal communication relies on spoken language, sound and other non-verbal means such as gestures and mimic. The characteristics of mass and interpersonal communication are illustrated and compared in the following table.

TABLE 2.1. Different characteristics of mass and interpersonal communication (Janoschka 2004, 94).

Forms/characteristics	Mass communication	Interpersonal communication
Number of addressees	mass	individuals
Sequence of transfer	asynchronous, time-shifted	synchronous, real-time
Message transfer	indirect	direct
Special contact of comm. partners	absent	present
Relation S to A	one-to-many	one-to-one
Communicative feedback	generally no, but with restricted possibilities	(immediately) mutual
Message perception	passive	active
Flow of communication	uni-directional	two-directional exchange
Informational access	public	private
Basic means of communication	written, spoken language, sound, (animated) graphics and pictures	spoken language, sound, gesture, mimic

⁴ Janoschka (2004) states that, in general, interpersonal communication is a one-to-one, synchronous, non-mediated exchange taking place in the presence of two interactants that are “mutually senders and receivers, or source and target” (Janoschka 2004, 92) of the message. Yet, in the case that multiple interactants are involved in the exchange, the transfer of information becomes more difficult and less direct. Under such conditions, interpersonal communication is time- shifted, and it requires a medium to take place.

This comparison between the features of mass and interpersonal communication allows Janoschka to distinguish between mass and direct advertising. The perspective in which communication is observed in Janoschka's discussion of web advertising provides useful insight for the present work. One aspect that I would like to highlight here is that mass and direct advertising, similarly to mass and interpersonal communication, have different underlying purposes. First of all, Janoschka states that "communication always has a certain purpose: to inform, to entertain, to persuade, or to create a relationship between the communication partners. Persuasion and relation are keywords in the communication purpose of online advertising" (Janoschka 2004, 85).

With regard to mass communication, Janoschka relies on Maletzke's (1998) description of the influence exerted by mass media on the audience. In particular, according to Maletzke, mass communication is aimed at affecting the audience in terms of knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and emotions. Relying on this observation, Janoschka's states that "[a] person's knowledge can be expanded by the perception of new information which can affect a person's or a group's attitudes and might influence their behaviour" (Janoschka 2004, 88). However, Janoschka argues that interpersonal communication and direct advertising are both aimed at eliciting a response from the audience. For instance, sellers usually engage potential customers in a dialogue, and they expect the customers to provide a feedback (i.e. a positive or negative reaction) to their input (i.e. an offer). As pointed out by Janoschka, this two-directional exchange may take place in the physical presence of both interactants, or it may be mediated by a telephone, as in the case of telephone marketing.

As it will be explained in § 2.3, the distinctive functions of interpersonal and mass communication outlined above can be gleaned from the objects of analysis of the various disciplines that deal with intercultural communication in the business domain. As for the spread of information and dissemination of knowledge involved in mass communication, I will come back to these two interrelated processes when dealing with communication via corporate websites (§ 5.1). In fact, corporate websites can be classified under the umbrella term of mass communication, as they are intended to disseminate knowledge about the company's performance, claim its identity as a trustworthy partner, project a reliable corporate image, and elicit positive attitudes in their multiple international audiences. In other words, corporate websites fulfil a combination of informative and persuasive functions, which are in line with Maletzke's (1998) and Janoschka's (2004) categorizations of mass communication and web advertising.

2.2. Culture

From the models of communication outlined previously, it can be inferred that the process of meaning construction is made possible by the interplay of a variety of factors. The context in which communication unfolds bears far-reaching implications in shaping language usage. The nature of these implications may depend on the professional domain in which interactions and information exchanges take place (i.e. in the business environment), or it may be linked to the different lingua-cultural backgrounds of the communicators. In the case of communication in an intercultural and international professional domain, it is clear that stakes are particularly high, as communication becomes a strategic asset to carry out business. In this section, it will be pointed out that variations in language and culture go hand in hand. For instance, Ting-Toomey (1999) argues that language is “*key to the heart of culture*” (Ting-Toomey 1999, viii, author’s emphasis). In fact, language and culture affect the process of meaning construction, sometimes making communication a challenging task to attend to. This is the reason why lingua-cultural issues have become a major preoccupation for professionals, while paving the way for a variety of theories that have been formulated in the most diverse fields of studies in order to come to grasp with the complex notion of culture. Therefore, this section sets out to survey the relevant literature about the concept of culture, and its relationship to communication and language.

In the first place, culture has been the focus of attention of anthropological studies since their emergence. In fact, during the Nineteenth Century, studies of culture were influenced by Darwin’s theory of evolution. Hence, in that period, culture was regarded “as an entity that evolved and could be possessed and acquired by societies to varying degrees” (Lane 2013, 2). In the same years, the evolutionary approach was adopted by linguists too, who were concerned with retracing the “common source” (Lane 2013, 1) of all languages. In turn, within anthropological studies, the branch of cultural anthropology soon started to investigate the role of language (Risager 2013). According to Risager (2013), at the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the evolutionary view of culture started to attract criticism from the school of thought that had gathered around the German-American anthropologist Franz Boas. Boas (1982 [1940]) disputed the ethnocentric and racist implications of evolutionary theories, and he introduced an integrated and relativist approach to culture, according to which every culture has to be regarded as a whole system independent from others. In Boas’s theory, the role of language in relation to culture was acknowledged as well (Risager 2013).

Hence, since the Nineteenth Century, theoretical developments of culture and language have unfolded in similar ways, and nowadays anthropology and linguistics alike

consider culture and language respectively as two hybrid entities negotiated by human agents. As Lane (2013) aptly points out, “currently culture is understood, similar to the way language is perceived by many linguists, as a combination of stable and co-constructed, fluid and contextualized patterns of behavior; both as something humans have and something we do” (Lane 2013, 2).

Alternative definitions of the term culture have been suggested by a large number of scholars in the domains of Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication,⁵ and each definition has brought to the fore different aspects of the notion. Although all the definitions provided so far are too numerous to be surveyed in the present study, I will now refer to the research conducted by Ting-Toomey (1999) in the area of Intercultural Communication, which is a strand of research that will be touched upon in the literature review in the next section. Ting-Toomey’s conceptualization is instrumental to the present discussion, since it brings culture, communication and language into the same framework. In fact, Ting-Toomey defines culture as a “*complex frame of reference that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, symbols, and meanings that are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community*” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 10, author’s emphasis). The author provides a graphical representation of culture, which is depicted as an iceberg composed of different layers.

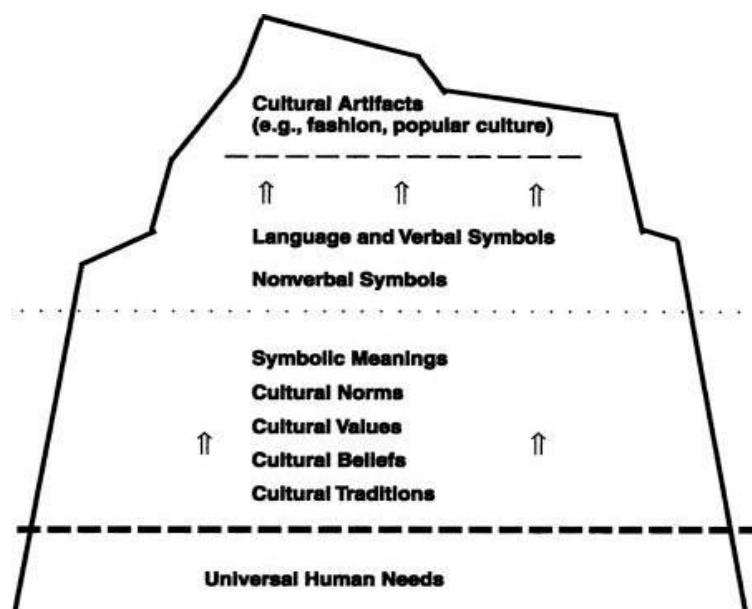


FIGURE 2.3. Culture: an iceberg metaphor (Ting-Toomey 1999, 10).

⁵ Although the terms ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘intercultural’ are often used interchangeably, a distinction should be drawn between the fields of Cross-Cultural Communication and Intercultural Communication. The former adopts an abstract approach to make comparisons between and among independent communication systems, whereas the latter focuses on interaction which directly involves people from different cultural groups (Scollon & Wong Scollon 1995[2001], Ting-Toomey 1999, Gudykunst 2002).

The layers that constitute the tip of the iceberg comprise those elements and products of culture (cultural artefacts, language, verbal and non-verbal symbols) that can be directly experienced in human interactions, whereas the layers under the surface level include the whole range of abstract factors (symbolic meanings, cultural norms, values, beliefs, traditions) that affect culture. Deep down the iceberg, the invisible foundation of each culture depends on the whole range of human universal needs, which are experienced and fulfilled in different manners according to each cultural system.

As displayed in the above representation of culture, culture and language are interdependent entities. Ting-Toomey contends that culture and communication affect each other, and she distinguishes between cultural and intercultural communication. Cultural communication designates a process that makes people join together as a community by means of shared linguistic codes, norms and patterns of interaction. When communication occurs among people coming from different cultures, the cultural membership of each interactant affects the process, thus giving rise to intercultural communication, i.e. “the *symbolic exchange process whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situations*” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 16-17, author’s emphasis).

According to Ting-Toomey, language “frames our expectations and directs our perceptions” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 84). In her view, language is a system which is coherently structured, but which is loaded with symbolic implications and organized according to arbitrary rules developed within the speech community where it is employed. This is in line with the fact that “[c]ultural value orientations drive language usage in everyday life” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 91). Hence language is to be regarded as an “emblem of ‘groupness’” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 91) that is present in every aspect of society: “[l]anguage infiltrates so intensely the social experience within a culture that neither language nor culture can be understood without knowledge of both” (Ting-Toomey 1999, 93).

Prior to Ting-Toomey’s articulation of the notion of culture and its relationship to communication and language, the interdependence between culture and communication had been investigated by a large group of scholars based in the United States, who between the 1950s and the 1960s had gathered around the theories advanced by the American anthropologist Edward T. Hall. Between 1950 and 1955, Edward T. Hall worked for the Foreign Service Institute to train technicians and diplomats involved in initiatives promoted by the United States that were aimed at providing aid to foreign countries. These initiatives were addressed to European countries in the context of the Marshall Plan, which had started soon after WWII, and to other countries in Latin America, Africa, Asia, where another plan

had been put forward by President Truman in 1949 (Rogers & Hart 2002).

Hall built his theories upon his experiences, and he contributed to the establishment of Intercultural Communication⁶ as a discipline. One of Hall's main tenets is that communication is at the heart of culture. In his ground-breaking work *Beyond Culture*, first published in 1976, the author defines culture as

Man's medium; there is no one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture. This means personality, how people express themselves (including shows of emotion), the way they think, how they move, how problems are solved, how their cities are planned and laid out, how transportation systems function and are organised, as well as how economic and government systems are put together and function. It is the least studied aspects of culture that influence behaviour in the deepest and most subtle ways. (Hall 1976[1989], 16-17)

In *Beyond Culture*, not only does Hall propound a definition of culture, but he also introduces a model to classify different types of cultures according to their communication styles. In particular, Hall draws a distinction between *low-context* and *high-context cultures*, and this distinction has since then been influential in explaining differences in communication practices across cultural groups. According to Hall, members of low-context cultures communicate in an overt and straightforward way, providing as much information as required in order to avoid misunderstanding. On the other hand, members of high-context cultures tend to leave many things unsaid, thus relying on implicit information that is to be read between the lines and inferred from the context of communication. Hall's view accounts for the considerable differences existing in the communication styles of people with different cultural backgrounds, and it acknowledges that these differences may lead to misunderstandings and clashes. Since communication and culture are at the centre of human interaction, the core idea of Hall's book is that, in order to build long-lasting relationship and avoid problems and crises, people should develop a full awareness that allows them to 'go beyond' cultural differences and accept other people's culture.

Though insightful, Hall's all-embracing conceptualization of culture attracted some criticism for being too wide in scope. For instance, Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini (1997) contend that the attempt to explain every human behaviour as a function of culture may not serve to explain social interaction:

[t]he risk [...] is that individuals become shaped and regulated by a system of values that limits their ability to make sense of their experiences self-reflexively. Culture becomes a homogenising force which tends to regulate the behaviour of people and institutions within an integrative framework of values and believes, thus necessarily defining variation as deviant. (Harris & Bargiela-

⁶ As it will be explained more in-depth in the next section, Intercultural Communication is the study of the interactions involving people characterized by different cultural memberships.

Chiappini 1997, 5)

In order to overcome this theoretical impasse, Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini suggest to regard culture as “the product of social interaction and the self-reflexive individual [as] a creator, rather than a passive recipient, of cultural values” (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 1997, 6).

A further model to classify different cultures is the one conceptualized by the Dutch psychologist Geert Hofstede (1980[1984], 1991). Hofstede is known for his research into international and organizational culture, and his model represents an invaluable contribution to studies of culture in general, and in particular to the discipline of Cross-Cultural Communication.⁷ Between 1960s and 1970s, Hofstede worked for IBM, where he conducted a project aimed at identifying differences in cultural patterns across those countries in which IBM had branch offices. The research was based on the assumption that people are characterized by what Hofstede defines mental programs or software of the mind (Hofstede 1980[1984], 1991). Individuals’ cultural orientations are developed during childhood and consolidated by the dominant values, beliefs, rituals and models of the country in which they grow up and live. Hence, people coming from different countries are characterized by different value systems, and this variability is the main source of problems in situations of intercultural communication. According to Hofstede, cultural variability can be measured by means of statistical analysis, thus he carried out his research by sending out around 116,000 questionnaires, from which he gathered more than 60,000 responses. Thanks to the data collected, Hofstede identified five dimensions or indexes⁸ to measure cultural differences across countries:

1. *Power Distance*: this index measures the degree of inequality distributed and tolerated in the exercise of institutional and organizational power. Countries with a high Power-Distance index tend to accept unequal distribution of power, whereas countries with a low index tend to minimize inequalities and reduce hierarchical distances.
2. *Individualism*: this index refers to people’s preference for working alone or for collaborating in a group. Cultures scoring a high Individualism index expect people to take care of themselves without depending on others, and support individual achievements. Cultures scoring a low Individualism index foster group membership and regard performance as collective achievement.

⁷ As previously mentioned, studies in Cross-Cultural Communication, compare communication in different cultures (Gudykunst, 2002).

⁸ The research conducted between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s prompted Hofstede to define four cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1980[1984]). A second part of the research was then conducted especially in Asian countries at the end of the 1980s, and led to the inclusion of the fifth and last dimension (Long-Term Orientation, Hofstede 1991).

3. *Masculinity*: this index measures the extent to which in a given society male-related values such as authority, self-confidence and personal performance are encouraged instead of such female-related values as nurturance, interpersonal relationships and cooperation. Male-oriented countries tend to be autocratic and urge individual achievement, whereas female-oriented countries stimulate identification with other people's feelings, and attach high importance to social support and personal bonds.
4. *Uncertainty Avoidance*: it measures the level to which societies tolerate ambiguity, and the extent to which future events are controlled by the implementation of clear rules. Societies with a high Uncertainty-Avoidance index require explicit rules to deal with the future, whereas countries with a low index can cope with future uncertainty and ambiguity without the support of any specific rules.
5. *Long-Term Orientation*: the last index refers to the degree of importance that a certain culture attaches to such long-term values as determination and perseverance, instead of short-term values like for instance traditions and the achievement of quick results. Cultures scoring a high index are oriented towards the future, whereas countries with a low index concentrate on the past and the present (Hofstede 1980[1984], 1991).

Hofstede's taxonomy soon became one of the most influential and widely appreciated theorizations of cultural differences in the strands of research of Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication alike, and it has been quoted in a high number of studies dealing with cultural issues and communication in the business domain. Nonetheless it has also been hotly disputed. In his article "Hofstede – Culturally Questionable?", Jones (2007) seeks to strike a balance between arguments in favour and against Hofstede's research. Arguments in favour recognize the novelty of the research as well as Hofstede's fundamental role in paving the way for more studies about cultural variations. Other scholars supporting Hofstede's taxonomy emphasize the rigour with which the study was conducted, along with the fact that, when replicated, results are often consistent with those obtained by Hofstede at IBM.

On the other hand, some of the most popular arguments running against Hofstede's taxonomy contend that cultural variability cannot be measured by means of a questionnaire, and that Hofstede's research banks on the disputable assumption that cultures are entities that depend from nation states. In addition, Hofstede's taxonomy runs the risk to oversimplify the issue by regarding culture as a homogeneous whole, and for ignoring the presence of variations within communities. Other detractors criticize the fact that Hofstede's research is limited to just one company, and hence it cannot provide information about the wider cultural context outside the company itself. Furthermore, Hofstede's research is bound to the time in

which the data were collected, thus disregarding current global social changes.

To conclude, Jones (2007) indicates further instances of criticism that, on the one hand, point to the insufficient amount of information that can be gathered from just five variables, while on the other they challenge the statistical integrity of the questionnaires. All in all, the lively debate sparked off by Hofstede's research confirms that this is still a valuable piece of work to be considered by both academics and practitioners with an interest in cultural issues and communication in the business domain, and that the notion of culture still caters for insightful research, especially when considering today's dynamic social context, which is affected by globalizing forces and technological developments in an unprecedented way.

So far I have presented a selection of definitions of culture propounded by scholars in the domains of Cross-Cultural and Intercultural Communication, and I have surveyed two models for classifying variation across cultures. In particular, Hall's categorization of low-context and high-context cultures relies on differences in communication patterns across different cultural groups, while Hofstede's taxonomy measures cultural variation in the context of a specific organization. The results of these investigations are in line with Ting-Toomey's conceptualization of culture and its interdependence with communication. In addition to this, as mentioned before, in Ting-Toomey's theorization of culture, language is one of the products of culture, and given that knowledge of a culture implies knowledge of its language and vice versa, it might be argued that language and culture unfold in a joint manner. Hence, starting from the observation that the context of communication shapes language usage, it can be assumed that language in professional domains, and in particular in business settings, will be affected by the procedures and practices of that professional community.

For instance, when it comes to the usage of a certain language in intercultural and international business settings, this language will encode reality in different ways (Poppi 2012), not only according to the national but also to the culture of the specific organization under inquiry. As a matter of fact, as highlighted by Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini (1997), not only does the national culture in which organizations are based influence communication, but also corporate culture and its related discursive practices "reflect[ing] particular sets of ideas or interests of certain groups of employees" (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 1997, 15) affect communication practices. Hence, in intercultural and international business settings, communication is the result of the convergence between national and corporate culture, whose effects cascade on the interactions and on the discourse types used within a company. This interplay is illustrated by Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini's model of cross- and intercultural business discourse below.

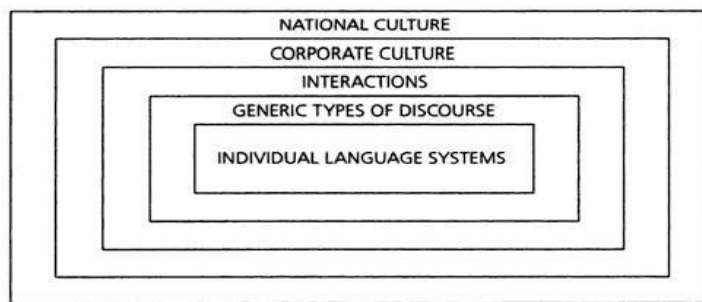


FIGURE 2.4. Cross/Intercultural Business Discourse (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 1997, 14).

Usually, the language chosen to allow communication and carry out business in a lingua-cultural context characterized by variation is English, and in most cases, this is not the native language of the communicators. The interplay between national and corporate culture and its impact on business communication and language usage will be treated in subsequent chapters of this work, which are dedicated to addressing the consequences of the use of English in international business contexts, and to providing a definition of the status that this language acquires whenever it is employed as a resource for web-mediated corporate communication.

As I will explain in the following section, the interrelatedness of communication, culture and language is at the heart of a broad and varied research area. Disciplines belonging to this research area have gained momentum thanks to the emergence of globalized trade and the advent of new communication technologies. With their different approaches, all these disciplines offer alternative perspectives to deepen our understanding of web-mediated intercultural and international business communication, which in the context of the present study is intended as a process carried out to do business across national borders and involving individuals with different lingua-cultural backgrounds, who exchange information via websites. The fact that several cultures can be found within one country is acknowledged as well. The disciplines surveyed in the following section will in turn offer invaluable tools to analyse corporate communication via global websites.

2.3. Studies on communication and discourse in intercultural and international business settings: a survey

In her article “The Theoretical Foundation for Intercultural Business Communication: A Conceptual Model”, Varner (2000) develops a framework for Intercultural Business Communication (IBC) that gives prominence to the dynamic nature of this field of study, and

foregrounds the interplay among intercultural, business and communication strategies. According to Varner, “intercultural business communication deals with intercultural issues, communication, and business. It is the communication among individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds in a business environment” (Varner 2000, 39). Starting from this assumption, Varner stresses the importance of differentiating IBC from other disciplines such as International Business (IB) and Intercultural Communication (ICC).

Before moving on to Varner’s conceptualization of IBC, the following explanatory paragraphs on IB and ICC will prove instrumental in understanding her model of IBC. On the one hand, IB is a branch of Applied Social Science (Buckley & Casson 2009). According to Wilkins (2009), “the adjective connot[es] business over borders and the noun defin[es] the producer of goods and services” (Wilkins 2009, 5). To put it in different terms, the focus of IB is on the activities involving companies outside national boundaries, on the problems their experience in the international context, and on the strategies they implement to respond to the conditions defined by world economy (Dunning 2009).

On the other hand, Rogers and Hart (2002) argue that the focus of ICC is the interpersonal interaction involving individuals from different cultures, as well as the individuals’ differences in values and beliefs that emerge during the communication process.⁹ The definition provided by Rogers and Hart implies that ICC deals with information exchanged mainly between and among individuals, whereas according to Gudykunst (2003), ICC addresses communication across entire social groups of people, too. In fact, in Gudykunst’s terms, ICC can be regarded as “one type of intergroup communication” (Gudykunst 2003, 163). In sum, all the conceptualizations of ICC presented here share a marked interest in the key elements of communication and culture, although some approaches study individuals interacting, while others examine the behaviour of people as members of a certain group.

Going back to Varner’s contribution, it should be mentioned here that theoretical categories drawn from ICC and IB have traditionally served the purposes of IBC, yet Varner argues that the approaches adopted by scholars in ICC and IB offer only partial answers to issues related to IBC. For instance, in her survey of the literature relevant to these two fields of studies, Varner points towards the fact that research in IB tackles functional issues that

⁹ Rogers and Hart set the domain of ICC apart from that of International Communication (INC) and that of Development Communication (DC). Although all these disciplines show an interest in culture and communication, ICC concentrates on the micro level of interpersonal exchanges between individuals, whereas INC and DC both deal with the flow of information between and within nations. In particular, INC devotes its attention to the role of mass media in the interactions between and among different countries, while DC studies how development and social change may be determined by research and advancements in communication (Rogers & Hart 2002).

emerge in the practice of business in an international environment, whereas studies in ICC address culture in relation to a general context, rather than in relation to the business domain, which on the contrary should be given prominence in a model of IBC. For these reasons, Varner proposes a new model of IBC that brings together intercultural strategy, communication strategy and business strategy, as it is shown in Figure 2.5.

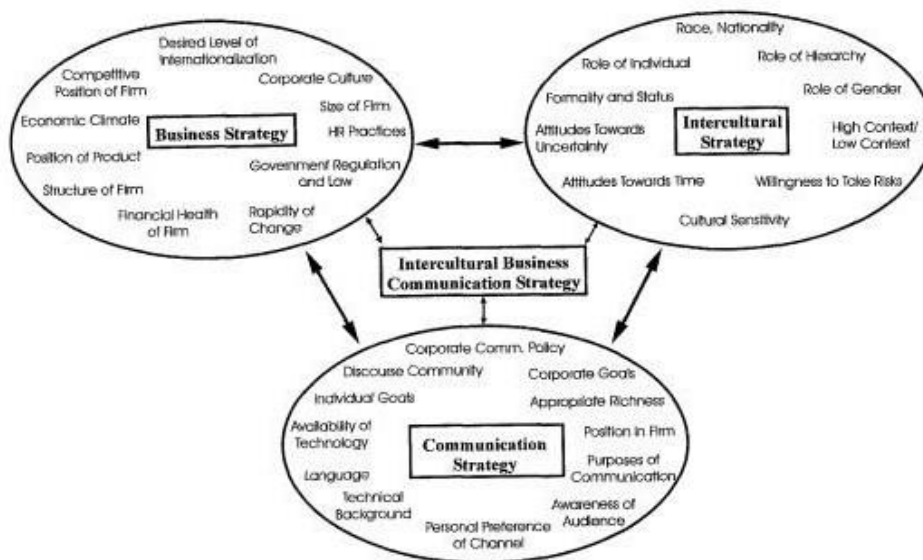


FIGURE 2.5. Intercultural Business Communication: A Conceptual Model (Varner 2000, 42).

The model developed by Varner (2000) clearly shows that the processes involved in intercultural business communication result from the interaction of culture, communication and business. Above all, Varner's model foregrounds the role of business, as it is not regarded as just one contextual variable, or as a type of specific professional knowledge that can be replaced by other types of knowledge (e.g. religion, medicine). To put it in Varner's terms, "the business strategies, goals, objectives, and practices become an integral part of the communication process and help create a new environment out of the synergy of culture, communication, and business" (Varner 2000, 44). Furthermore, Varner goes on to elucidate in which ways intercultural strategy and communication strategy can contribute to IBC.

Firstly, business professionals ought to be aware that different layers of culture are at play in the context of IBC, and that the properties of these layers cascade on their personal behaviour and professional practice too. As a matter of fact, professionals "are tied to their corporate culture, the industry culture, the general business culture, and their national culture" (Varner 2000, 46).

Secondly, communication strategy is instrumental to IBC since it is implemented to fulfil business aims. Varner outlines a variety of elements that influence communication

strategy, such as corporate communication policies, individual communication preferences, the availability of technology, the communicator's expertise, the use of certain channels instead of others, the professionals' goals, career aspirations and position in the company, the preferences of the audience in receiving a message from the company, and the language used. Varner rounds off her considerations stating that, in order to be effective, communication strategies have to consider the specific business context and business purpose:

[i]n intercultural business communication the communication has a business purpose. The channels, levels of formality, use of technology, content and style of delivery are influenced by cultural and business considerations. The objectives of the business, the level of internationalization, the structure of the organization will help determine the intercultural business communication strategy. A communication strategy that does not take the specific business context into consideration will not be effective. (Varner 2000, 49)

In the concluding section of her article, Varner groups previous works conducted in IBC into five categories. The five categories outlined by Varner are the theory of intercultural business communication, communication practices in other countries, comparative studies, studies of specific business communication genres, and intercultural business communication studies. Among these five categories, one which is particularly relevant for the present work is the category including studies on specific business communication genres. As a matter of fact, this category focuses on the role of culture in professionals' communication practices, and on the effects of technology on business genres. Nonetheless, according to Varner, studies of specific business communication genres ought to place more emphasis on the business side of communication, since the articles she reviews are mainly concerned with features of communication, culture and the comparison of culture. I will come back to the genres of business communication later on in this work, since I will argue for the impact of generic issues and technological advancements on communication via corporate websites.

In their article "Intercultural Business Communication: A Rich Field of Studies" serving as an introduction to the Special Issue of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies* dedicated to IBC, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2003) conduct a survey of the trends emerging in this discipline and, similarly to Varner (2000), they acknowledge the relevance of the interplay of culture, communication and business. Their core idea is that the nature of IBC is complex, diverse and multi-faceted, yet extremely stimulating for discussions among scholars in this area. Given the complexity of IBC, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2003) argue that this discipline may profit from the debates occurring in related fields of studies, especially when it comes to the definition of culture, which can be conceptualized in different ways. As I have pointed out in the previous section, the notion of culture takes on different

shades of meaning, whether it is considered in relation to the *locus* of the nation from which the communicators come, or to that of the organisation for which they work. Accordingly, culture can be conceptualized as national or as corporate culture (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 1997). Both dimensions of culture contribute to communication in business settings.

Furthermore, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson place great emphasis on the issues of diversity and power. These issues play a key role in the development of Business Discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini & Harris 1997, Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2002), which is a research field in the context of IBC that these authors have contributed to shape. In fact, due to its multidisciplinary nature, the approach of Business Discourse considers the business context in its “rich complexity of culture(s), human relationships and power” (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2003, 4), and it regards “intercultural communication [as] social action” (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2003, 7). In the context of intercultural communication, diversity, culture and power are interrelated in the sense that communication may serve the purpose of overcoming cultural differences, yet power relationships are negotiated during interaction, and those parties that possess the most extensive knowledge of the language along with the most efficient communication tools gain a dominant position. In fact, according to Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2003), the approach of Business Discourse should bring to the fore the effects of language and technology on business interactions as well, and it could be useful for those researchers in both Applied Linguistics and Business Studies who deal with the intercultural dimension of communication.

More precisely, the analytical paradigm for Business Discourse is laid out by Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2002) in their introductory article to the special issue of the *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching (IRAL)* dedicated to the then emerging field of study. First of all, they situate Business Discourse against the backdrop of Business Communication, as this can be considered the broad research area that comprises communication studies in business settings in general. Subsequently, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson move on to provide the following definition of Business Discourse: “we understand business discourse as a web of negotiated textualizations, constructed by social actors as they go about their daily activities in pursuit of organizational and personal goals. It is therefore language as social action that is the concern of business discourse research” (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2002, 274). In this way, the authors acknowledge the indebtedness of Business Discourse to Business Communication, while at the same time setting the two disciplines apart, in order to root Business Discourse among discourse-based

approaches.¹⁰

Hence, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson try to define a new analytical framework for Business Discourse that takes into account its multidisciplinary and multimethodological value. The framework devised by Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson represented in Figure 2.6 below brings together the methods of Genre and Discourse Analysis along with Intercultural Communication and Organizational Theory,¹¹ and applies them to the context of business. The framework is articulated into three levels: the first two levels, i.e. the macro level of national and regional cultures and the meso level of organizational culture, are accountable for the realization of generic discourses, whereas the micro level of interaction shapes single textual realizations. From this framework it becomes apparent that the crucial aspects in Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson's conceptualization are first of all the context of business, as it sets the communication agenda and influences communication choices of professionals in the workplace, then culture, since its different manifestations impact on generic choices, and finally the language system, as it encompasses all three levels of communication.

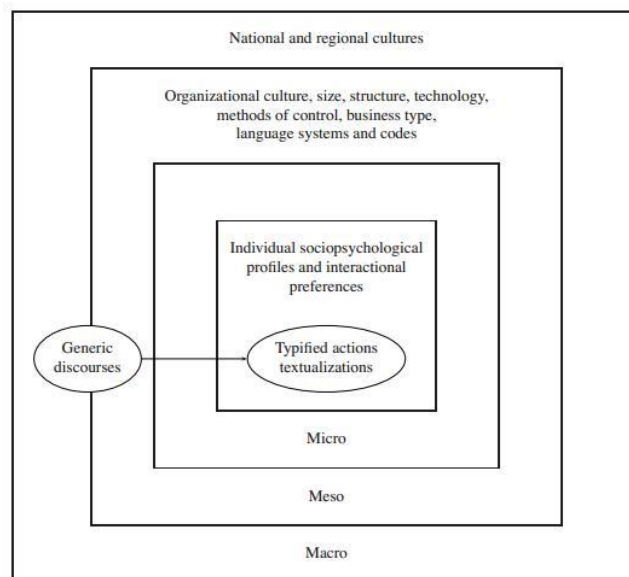


FIGURE 2.6. A framework for the analysis of Business Discourse (Bargiela-Chiappini & Nickerson 2002, 279).

¹⁰ Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2002) also draw a clear distinction between advancements in Business Discourse and developments in ESP. As regards the present work, I will include a discussion of ESP in the next chapter, as it will provide fruitful insights to assess the generic status of corporate websites.

¹¹ Organizational Theory is a field within social sciences that investigates the phenomena occurring within organizations and the factors that determine them. According to Pfeffer (1997), Organizational Theory is very wide in scope, and it is characterized by “an interdisciplinary focus on (a) the effect of social organization on the behavior and attitudes of individual within them, (b) the effects of individual characteristics and actions on organizations [...], (c) the performance, success, and survival of organizations, (d) the mutual effects of environments, including resource and task, political, and cultural environment on organizations and vice versa, and (e) concerns with both the epistemology and methodology that undergird research on each of these topics” (Pfeffer 1997, 4).

The tenets of Business Discourse are further developed in Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini's article "Business as a Site of Language Contact" (2003). In this article the authors survey the literature in the field, while taking into consideration language and technology as drivers of change in today's business communication. In fact, Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini suggest that studies in Intercultural Communication ought to critically address the discursive practices adopted in today's globalized multicultural and multilingual workplace, "focusing on the speech community rather than the individual" (Harris & Bargiela-Chiappini 2003, 156), and moving beyond the traditional socio-linguistic approach that considers language outcomes as simple objects rather than processes unfolding in the business context (Bargiela-Chiappini 2004).

As mentioned before, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2002), when defining the field of Business Discourse, introduce a new paradigm that aims at setting this discipline apart from Business Communication. Nonetheless, the two disciplines are reconciled to some extent in the volume edited by Bargiela-Chiappini, *The Handbook of Business Discourse* (2009), that includes a contribution by Louhiala-Salminen (2009) dedicated to Business Communication. In fact, Bargiela-Chiappini (2009) stresses once again that the perspectives of Business Discourse (BD) and Business Communication (BC) are distinct but not incompatible, hence incorporating BD into a discussion of BC that can lead to a cross-fertilization of the two areas of research. In her contribution, Louhiala-Salminen (2009) states that in the last years BC has become an increasingly popular discipline in the academia, with the introduction of specific university programs such as those offered at the School of Business at Aarhus University, Denmark, and at the School of Business at Aalto University, Finland. Moreover, BC has found further legitimization among professionals as well under the aegis of the Association for Business Communication, and thanks to two renowned journals, *The Journal of Business Communication* and *Business Communication Quarterly*.

According to Louhiala-Salminen, BC and BD share the same focus on the communication processes taking place among professionals that aim at "get[ting] their work done" (Louhiala-Salminen 2009, 305). Yet, BD is concerned mainly with the micro level of individuals' interactions, whereas BC deals with the macro level of companies trying to communicate with their target audiences: "[b]oth disciplines look at text and context, but BC seems to target a wider range of textual and contextual issues, while BD focuses more directly on text and uses context to explain linguistic phenomena" (Louhiala-Salminen 2009, 305). The author goes on to explain that BC is included among business studies, and that its approach crosses borders, among others, with that of communication studies, rhetoric, discourse analysis and sociology. Furthermore, BC is included in a multicultural and

multilingual frame, and it is particularly concerned with “the utilitarian goal of developing and disseminating knowledge that increases the effectiveness and efficiency of business operations” (Louhiala-Salminen 2009, 306). BC has been influenced by technological advancements, changes in business structures and globalization: these three factors are interrelated, and they have had an impact on communication practices in business settings.

Hence, BC is instrumental to business professionals that exchange messages in an intercultural and international environment as part of their daily activities in order to conduct trade globally. These activities are those involving individuals in interpersonal communication, but they also comprise all the measures taken by companies in order to share information with their international stakeholders. To this regard, Louhiala-Salminen (2009) stresses the corporate aspects of BC, and points to the fact that this discipline overlaps with Corporate Communication. As a matter of fact, Corporate Communication refers to the strategies implemented by companies when they address their stakeholders within and outside the organization boundaries, particularly when they are confronted with the challenges implied in today’s constantly changing business context. The convergence between the two disciplines is witnessed by the fact that scholars often use the terms Business Communication and Corporate Communication interchangeably (Louhiala-Salminen 2009). I will expand on the core ideas of Corporate Communication later on in this section, and I will argue for including companies’ global websites among the instruments used by companies to build and maintain business relationships with their stakeholders.

In order to go back to my discussion of IBC and highlight some of the points in common with its related research areas, I will mention the volume *Intercultural and International Business Communication. Theory, Research and Teaching* edited by Palmer-Silveira, Ruiz-Garrido and Fortanet-Gómez (2006). In their Introduction, the editors adopt views of Intercultural and International Business Communication (IIBC) that can be considered in line with those outlined so far.¹² According to the editors, IIBC has become one of the most relevant fields of study, in connection with the teaching and learning of English for business purposes too. The editors’ main interest, as well as the focus of the contributions included in the volume, is in the comparison and in the relations established between and among cultures that come into contact in business settings. In the approach adopted by the

¹² Palmer-Silveira *et al.* use the acronyms IBC and IIBC to refer to the same research area. As already stated, they nonetheless underscore the difference between the terms ‘intercultural’ and ‘international’ by saying that “[they] do not see culture as equivalent to nation or state” (Palmer-Silveira *et al.* 2006, 11). According to this view, several cultures can be found within one country. Relying on these observations, the contributions included in the volume also purport to explore the relationships that exist between cultures and nationalities. In the present work I rely on the conceptualization by Palmer-Silveira *et al.*, and therefore I consider the domain of corporate communication via global website both intercultural and international.

editors, two elements of intercultural and international communication gain prominence, i.e. the business setting and the use of English. As a matter of fact, Palmer-Silveira *et al.* argue that communication processes are influenced by culture and the professional context, and they underline the role of English as “the lingua franca of business for the communication between people with different mother tongues and different cultures” (Palmer-Silveira *et al.* 2006, 9).

According to Palmer-Silveira *et al.*, the business context is crucial since “the final aim of business interaction is always measured in terms of the repercussion it may have on the company performance” (Palmer-Silveira *et al.* 2006, 13). This aspect is of paramount importance these days given that companies deal with overseas trade on a daily basis. In order to overcome language differences encountered in the globalized marketplace, companies have adopted English as a shared code of communication: “[l]anguage is the medium speakers or writers use to express their own or their company’s point of view” (Palmer-Silveira *et al.* 2006, 13).

Having stressed the importance of language choice for Intercultural and International Business Communication, Palmer-Silveira *et al.* acknowledge the indebtedness of IBC/IIBC to other research areas such as sociology and socio-linguistics on the one hand, and economics and business organization on the other. In fact, in intercultural relations “language is always accompanied by social behaviour”, while “the final aim of business interaction is always measured in terms of the repercussion it may have on the company performance” (Palmer-Silveira *et al.* 2006, 13).

Furthermore, in their overview of Intercultural and International Business Communication, the editors hint at the difference between individual and corporate communication too, as the contributions included in the volume deal with interpersonal interactions in the workplace and with instances of companies’ promotional discourse alike. To this regard, I will next focus my discussion on an overview of Corporate Communication as part of the theoretical framework of the present study, relying on the assumption that this research area may be set against the backdrop of IBC, as demonstrated by Louhiala-Salminen’s (2009) conceptualization described above. In addition, Corporate Communication offers insights for the investigation of corporate websites as instruments to communicate with the companies’ international stakeholders. In fact, in this study it is argued that individual communication and corporate communication represent the two ends of the continuum of intercultural and international business communication (see also Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011).

Nonetheless, the conceptualizations of IBC surveyed so far deal with interpersonal exchanges unfolding between and among individuals, rather than with the activities in which

companies are engaged when trying to reach out to their global audiences. For this reason, I wish to reconcile these two different approaches to communication, since I believe that they both contribute to shedding light on web-mediated communication by adopting a text-based analysis. As a matter of fact, communication is a product of the interplay of strategies implemented at both macro and micro level, as represented in the framework for the analysis of Business Discourse devised by Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (2002). The business context impacts on both the macro and micro level of communication, and for communication to take place in today's intercultural and international environment, a shared code for communication, i.e. English, and the implementation of the latest technologies are required to share information, promote the company and its products, and eventually foster a positive attitude in the companies' global stakeholders.

According to Balmer and Gray (1999), "[c]orporate communication is the process through which stakeholders' perceive the company's identity and image and reputation are formed" (Balmer & Gray 1999, 171). In fact, the purpose of corporate communication is to influence the stakeholders' opinions "through a positive corporate branding and an effective and regular diffusion of information in order to build a transparent relationship" (Poppi 2012, 134). Before the 1970s, corporate communication used to be limited to the activities of the Public Relations/Public Affair department, which is traditionally charged with the management of the information to be shared with the media. Nonetheless, in the past these activities were not usually supported by specific strategies. Strategic planning became more relevant when new trends started to develop in the business context in the 1970s, as stressed by Argenti (1996). These new trends are a consequence of what Balmer and Gray (1999) call the "ten environmental forces". These are:

- (1) Acceleration of product life cycles.
- (2) Deregulation.
- (3) Privatisations programmes.
- (4) Increased competition in the public and non-profit sector.
- (5) Increased competition in the service sector.
- (6) Globalisation and the establishment of free trade areas.
- (7) Mergers, acquisitions and divestitures.
- (8) Shortage of high-calibre personnel.
- (9) Public expectations for corporate social responsiveness.
- (10) Breakdown of the boundaries between the internal and external aspects of organisations (Balmer & Gray 1999, 172).

These forces have been affecting companies operating in the context of globalized trade since the 1970s, thus adding to the importance of "the three focal responsibilities in corporate communication", i.e. "identity, reputation, and communication orchestration" (Van Riel 1997, 305). In fact, as it will be stated in this section, it is thanks to the implementation of the most

appropriate communication strategies that companies can spread information about their identity within and outside the organization, thus establishing good reputation among their stakeholders.

According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007), corporate communication is a fundamental tool for companies to gain access to the indispensable resources they need to carry out business. These resources can be divided into primary resources, including tangible assets such as money and property, human resources and raw material, and secondary resources, including intangible qualities such as legitimacy and reputation. These resources are owned by the company's multiple stakeholders, which Van Riel and Fombrun divide into five key groups: employees, customers, investors, government, and the public.¹³ In order to comply with the diverse demands of these groups, most companies usually avail themselves of specific departments within the organization. In particular, Van Riel and Fombrun indicate that the Internal Communications department deals with the company's employees, the Marketing Communications department addresses customers, Investors Relations is responsible of communication with investors and analysts, Government Relations (or Public Affairs) deals with regulators, legislators and government representatives, and Public Relations is entrusted with communication with NGOs and activist groups.

These departments are in charge of the manifold communication activities carried out by a company. Banking on the assumption that companies address their messages to a varied and heterogeneous audience, three types of corporate communication can be identified (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006, Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, Poppi 2012):

1. Management communication consists of the forms of communication taking place between the managers of the company and its internal and external stakeholders. The purpose of management communication is to influence the stakeholders' opinion about the company and gain public consent. Tools for management communication are internal newsletter, the company's intranet, team meetings, house journals and magazines, annual reports.
2. Marketing communication includes those activities aimed at promoting brands and

¹³ In a prior study, Lantos (2001) proposed a conceptualization of companies' stakeholders accounting for some groups which are not included in Van Riel and Fombrun's (2007) categorization. In particular, Lantos claims that stakeholders exist at four levels: "[f]irst, is the systemic/macroenvironmental/general environment level – larger societal factors, including the entire business system, the social system, plus society at large, which consists of institutions and forces, such as economic, legal, political, technological, natural, media and sociocultural forces. The second level of stakeholders is the corporation's microenvironment/operating/task environment – its immediate environment, consisting of exchange relationship partners (such as suppliers and distributors), plus competitors, customers, the local community, and the financial community (stockholders, bondholders, and creditors). A third level of stakeholders is found within the business organization, notably superiors, subordinates and other employees, and labor unions. The final level of stakeholder is significant others of business decision makers, such as peers, family, friends, etc." (Lantos 2001, 605-605).

supporting sales of products and services. Marketing communication is associated with the “4 Ps” of product, price, place and promotion (Melewar & Karaosmanoglu 2006), and among its activities, advertising is “a vital and salient component of the communication mix” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 17). Other component of marketing communication include public relation activities aimed at spreading information about the company’s performances.

3. Organizational communication includes all those activities, such as public relations, public affairs, investor relations, corporate advertising, environmental and internal communication, that aim at presenting the company. This type of communication is directed towards shareholders, journalists, analysts and legislators.

The three types of corporate communication outlined above function as an integrated system, with sometimes overlapping areas of interest. For instances, both marketing communication and organizational communication are orchestrated at the level of public relations. Furthermore, both marketing communication and organizational communication may be realized with the same resources, for instance via corporate websites. As I will seek to demonstrate with the analysis presented in this work, corporate websites include a variety of material that is instrumental to the companies’ corporate communication activities.

In line with Van Riel and Fombrun’s conceptualization, companies can be conceived of as “networks of people” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 13), where every communication activity affects the opinion of the various stakeholders, influencing the corporate image and reputation. Hence, the core idea of efficient and successful corporate communication is that the activities comprised under this umbrella concept are not fragmented, but should be coordinated in a coherent and total system. As stated by the authors,

an organization’s *communication system* [is] the multiple tactical and strategic media it relies on to communicate with its stakeholders, as well as the message content it chooses to diffuse through those media. [It] encompasses marketing communication, public relations, investor relations, and employee communications; it also includes the kinds of institutional communications an organization makes that are created to influence how issues are framed and the public debate that results about it. (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 2, authors’ emphasis)

The effectiveness of corporate communication can be assessed in terms of *brand*, *image* and *reputation*. According to Van Riel and Fombrun, corporate brands include “the features of a company that employees, investors, customers, and the public associate with an organization as a whole” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 4). Corporate brands may be realized verbally,

visually, or they may be associated with the emotions a company intends to generate in its audience. Additionally, corporate brands allow a company to stand out from competition, and their final aim is to create value. Corporate branding is linked to the creation of positive perceptions about the company in the minds of the various stakeholders. These perceptions constitute the specific corporate image, which includes “the features of the company that the stakeholders come to perceive” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 40). The overall success of the company depends on the combined effects of corporate brand and image on the stakeholders’ opinions, and this can be measured in terms of corporate reputation. Corporate reputation is “a vital means through which the success of the organization develops” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 10), as it provides an indication of the stakeholders’ opinions and expectations regarding the company’s performance, legitimacy and trustworthiness. To put it in Poppi’s words,

a good reputation is a perfect match between the corporate image and the individual’s own value system. When the degree of correspondence between the value systems of the stakeholders and the corporate image is high, the company is respected and held in high esteem. This, as a result, leads to a perception of high levels of trust and support among stakeholders. (Poppi 2012, 139)

Besides corporate branding, image and reputation, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) shed light on another fundamental construct of corporate communication, i.e. *corporate identity*. The concept has been theorized by other scholars in Corporate Communication. Quoting the definition provided by the British Standards Institution in 1995, Topalian (2003) describes corporate identity as “the articulation of what an organisation is, what it stands for, what it does and how it goes about its business (especially the way it relates to its stakeholders and the environment)” (Topalian 2003, 1119). In fact, in order to foster positive corporate reputation, and in order to implement the most appropriate communication strategies, companies should in the first place develop a full understanding of what their mission, vision and objectives are, what it means for their stakeholders to be part of that business, and what are the features that distinguish that particular company from its competitors. Efficient corporate communication and positive corporate reputation are rooted in corporate identity: “[i]dentity consists of the collection of attributes that members use to describe an organization” (Van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 67, authors’ emphasis). These attributes are manifested by the companies by what scholars in Corporate Communication call the *corporate identity mix* (Balmer 2001, Van Riel & Fombrun 2007).

The corporate identity mix has been conceptualized in several ways by different researchers. For instance, in his article “Corporate Identity, Corporate Branding and

Corporate Marketing - Seeing through the Fog”, Balmer (2001) propounds a model of the identity mix encompassing corporate communication, corporate culture, corporate strategy and corporate structure. To these, Balmer adds three further elements that companies should take into account in order to manage their business identity, i.e. environmental forces (the need to recognize and accept them), stakeholders (the need to acknowledge their role), and corporate reputation (the opinion held the company’s business units and subsidiaries, by its partners, and the country-of-origin). The combination of these elements is depicted in the figure below.

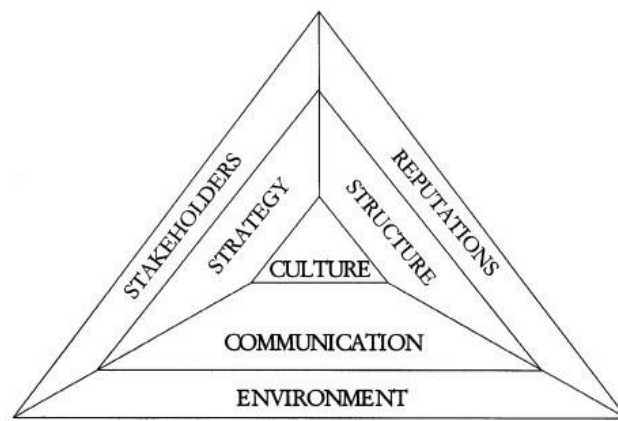


FIGURE 2.7. The corporate identity management mix (Balmer 2001, 263).

Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) propose an alternative model comprising the three forms of expression that companies employ to transmit their identifying features to their audiences. These forms are communication (the whole range of verbal messages), behaviour (the actions undertaken by a company to support its claims), and symbolism (the set of visual and aural symbols devised by a company, such as logos, names, music, design, to name a few).

These models have been conceived as instruments for companies to develop awareness of their role in the international marketplace, and to help senior management devise strategies that add value to their communication, thus allowing their organization to beat competitors. In addition to these models, researchers in Corporate Communication have introduced an approach to evaluate the processes which companies go through in the management of their corporate identity. This approach is known as the ACID Test of Corporate Identity ManagementTM, and it was developed for the first time in 1999 by Balmer and Soenen. The ACID Test of Corporate Identity ManagementTM (Balmer & Soenen 1999) stems from empirical research conducted in a prestigious corporate identity consultancy firm and from the comparison of the material issued by UK’s top 20 corporate identity

consultancies. Balmer and Soenen were particularly interested in designing a method that could support companies when introducing changes regarding their corporate identity. This approach was named after the acronym that stands for the four types of identity underlying the wider notion of corporate identity. The four identities identified by Balmer and Soenen (1999) are

- **The Actual Identity:** what the organisation is,
- **The Communicated Identity:** how the organisation is perceived by its publics and how the organisation communicates,
- **The Ideal Identity:** the optimum positioning of the organisation in its market or markets taking cognisance of its strengths and abilities in addition to environmental considerations,
- **The Desired identity** [sic]: the identity which the chief executive and management board wish to acquire. (Balmer & Soenen 1999, 82, authors' emphasis)

Balmer and Soenen's research revealed that the majority of consultancies considered develop their corporate identity around the Desired Identity. As a matter of fact, in most of these firms, corporate identity is projected in the company's vision as it is expressed by the CEO and by the managerial levels within the firm. Furthermore, the authors underscore the fact that the company's vision can be realized by means of textual resources, or it can be delivered visually. As the analysis of the materials selected for the present work will purport to demonstrate, corporate websites in their global version in English represent a tool for companies to operationalize, display and communicate their identities in the intercultural and international trade arena, relying on the variety of semiotic resources offered by the Web.

To the four identities identified by Balmer and Soenen, Balmer and Greyser (2002) added the notion of Conceived Identity. According to the authors, the Conceived Identity

refers to perceptual concepts —corporate image, corporate reputation, and corporate branding. These are the perceptions of the company—its multi-attribute and overall corporate image and corporate reputation—held by relevant stakeholders. Management must make a judgment as to which groups' perceptions are most important. (Balmer & Greyser 2002, 74)

The Conceived Identity plays a fundamental role in determining the stakeholders' perception of the company. Hence, by taking into account this additional type of identity, Balmer and Greyser (2002) design a new model, the AC²ID TestTM (Figure 2.8), which is an updated version of Balmer and Soenen's (1999) conceptualization.

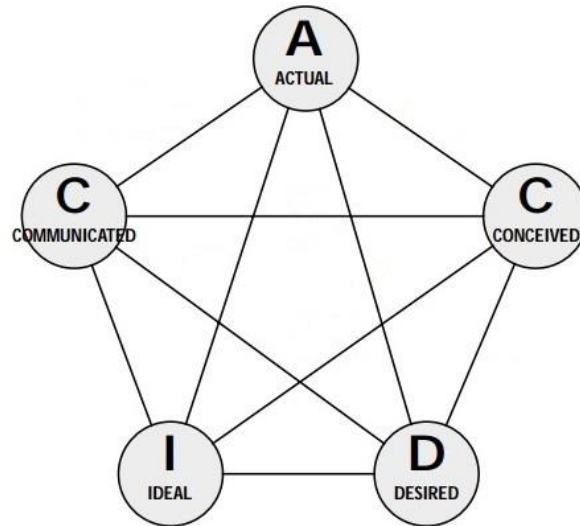


FIGURE 2.8. The five identities of the AC²ID Test (adapted from Balmer & Greyser 2002, 74).

Balmer and Greyser (2002) argue that the processes of corporate identity change and realignment have become more prominent than in the past, due to the higher incidence of mergers, acquisitions and divestments that characterize today's globalized economy. As a consequence, the AC²ID TestTM by Balmer and Greyser may be implemented as a useful tool by CEOs and managerial levels seeking for support in reshaping the corporate identity of their companies, in response to the challenges posed by today's variable business environment.

In their daily communicative practices, professionals rely upon texts which sustain corporate communication, as they contribute to building the company's corporate identity, and to shaping the stakeholders' perception of the company's image. As Bhatia and Lung (2006) observe,

[i]n today's highly competitive business environment, it is necessary for every corporation to project the image of a powerful and well-established company, and this is essentially done through various forms of communication which create a distinct corporate identity and brand image for the corporation. (Bhatia & Lung 2006, 272)

Among these forms of communication, the mission statement and the corporate social responsibility (CSR) report deserve to be mentioned. To start with, the mission statement is the textual instantiation of the vision, mission and objectives which, according to Topalian (2003), a company needs to develop to support its reputation and inform its communication accordingly. Swales and Rogers (1995) claim that mission statements "act as carriers of culture, ethos and ideology" (Swales & Rogers 1995, 226) within a corporation. Mission statements might be labelled in a variety of ways, as for instance "Our Mission", "Our Commitment", "Vision" (Swales & Rogers 1995), to name a few. In general, the traditional printed version of mission statement relies on textual information, and it consists of "general

statements, claims and conclusion” (Swales & Rogers 1995, 226-227). Other semiotic modes, as for instance visuals, are almost absent.

Following from their investigation of a sample of a hundred texts, the authors state that mission statements are usually written by senior executives or by the CEO. The content of the mission statement varies across the sample, yet all the texts “tend to stress values, *positive* behavior and guiding principles within the framework of the corporation’s *announced* belief system and ideology” (Swales & Rogers 1995, 227, authors’ emphasis). The authors also suggest that mission statements are in general addressed to employees and job seekers. In fact, although “the precise sets of motives and purposes underlying a particular Mission Statement can vary quite widely, perhaps all share the aim of facilitating employee ‘buy-in’ and of fostering identification with the company” (Swales & Rogers 1995, 227).

As for the CSR report, the notion which underpins this textual realization has been much debated, and several definitions have been propounded. In order to frame the notion of CSR, Dahlsrud (2008) has retrieved thirty-seven definitions. On the basis of these definitions, Dahlsrud has identified five dimensions of CSR that are subsumed in all the definitions he has retrieved. The five dimensions of CSR are the *environmental dimension*, the *social dimension*, the *economic dimension*, the *stakeholder dimension* and the *voluntariness dimension*. These are explained by the author as follows:

The social, environmental and economic dimensions are merely different categories of impacts from business. However such a distinction is a recognition that business, as a producer of economic wealth, does not only have economic impacts. [...]

The voluntariness dimension implies that the business should perform above regulatory requirements, which will set the minimum performance level deemed acceptable.

But what is the optimal performance above regulatory requirements or when nor regulations exist? [...] The definitions answer this by pointing towards the stakeholders. [...] Thus the only conclusion to be made from the definitions is that the optimal performance is dependent on the stakeholders of the business. (Dahlsrud 2008, 6)

The five dimensions have been drawn by Dahlsrud by mapping the presence of five groups of phrases that emerge across the thirty-seven definitions chartered. Example phrases are:

1. the environmental dimension: “a cleaner environment”, “environmental stewardship”, “environmental concerns in business operations”;
2. the social dimension: “contribute to a better society”, “integrate social concerns in their business operations”, “consider the full scope of their impact on communities”;
3. the economic dimension: “contribute to economic development”, “preserving the profitability”, “business operations”;

4. the stakeholder dimension: “interactions with their stakeholders”, “how organizations interact with their employees, suppliers, customers and communities”, “treating the stakeholders of the firm”;
5. the voluntariness dimension: “based on ethical values”, “beyond legal obligations”, “voluntary” (adapted from Dahlsrud 2008).

From a textual point of view, Bondi (2014) points towards the fact that CSR reports exhibit the same structure chapter by chapter. Each chapter includes a preamble, a main report and a corollary, and this pattern is repeated across the whole report.

In short, the mission statement and the CSR report characterize professional communication in the business domain, and they are strategic tools for the construction of the companies’ positive identity, and the projection of their image. The discursive features of professional communication in the business domain will be tackled more in-depth in the next chapter, while the analysis conducted in Chapter 6 will purport to demonstrate that, along with other traditional texts of corporate communication, the mission statement and the CSR report have undergone a process of ‘remediation’ will being transferred to the Web medium.

The present chapter has presented a selection of definitions of the constructs of communication and culture, and it has surveyed several research areas dealing with intercultural and international communication, touching upon various disciplines which, with their different approaches, provide invaluable insights to deal with communication in the international business context. The following chapter will delve into the linguistic area of Genre Analysis, in order to pin down those factors that contribute to shape texts for professional communication. The impact of the communication channel, that is, the Web medium, will be considered as well.

CHAPTER III

Genre theories and the role of new media

In the previous chapter the core notions of communication and culture have been illustrated, and a variety of disciplines investigating Intercultural and International Business Communication have been profiled, with a view to systematizing the approaches adopted by different strands of research in this domain, while articulating part of the theoretical framework for the present work. More in particular, reference to Corporate Communication has been made, and the concepts that subsume this area such as corporate branding, corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate identity have been elucidated, as they are instrumental in bringing to the fore the reasons underpinning companies' strategies in disseminating information about their performances, projecting their image, establishing positive reputation and managing their identity. In order to fulfil their business aims, companies have always been confronted with the choice of the most effective tools for communication, thus giving rise to a plethora of discursive realizations that are typical of the business context, as for instance the mission statement and the CSR report. Nowadays company usually avail themselves of corporate websites, which now number among the most widespread tools for corporate communication. In fact, corporate websites store the promotional material of companies and make it accessible online for every stakeholder within and outside the organization boundaries.

Communication via corporate website is pervasive and without time and place constraints. This is possible thanks to the properties of the medium, i.e. the World Wide Web. Among the texts that are included in a corporate websites there are texts that existed before the advent of the Web, along with texts that have emerged thanks to the technological advancements related the use of computers and the Web medium. The advent of the Web as a medium has been made possible by the implementation of the Internet infrastructure, which links computers in a global network. New technologies, together with the requirements of the international, social and business context in which companies operate, have impacted the discursive practices of professionals in the business domain, affecting the ways in which texts are produced and put to their particular purposes. In order to examine how the promotional material available online functions as the textual realization of corporate communication practices, and in order to understand why this is crucial for the daily activities of all the

stakeholders involved in the communication of a company, an overview will be provided of Discourse Analysis along with the different theories comprised under the umbrella term of Genre Analysis.

In particular, a section will be devoted to the conceptualization of genre propounded by researchers affiliated to the school of North American New Rhetoric, while another section will offer insights into the theories of genre outlined by practitioners of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). In fact, New Rhetoricians are primarily concerned with the social context surrounding text production, whereas ESP practitioners are interested in the recurrent formal features and in the purpose of texts. A further section will be devoted to those contributions in ESP that have purported for a readjustment of the concepts of stability and of purpose in defining genre status. By doing so, the present chapter aims at reconciling and systematizing the perspectives offered by these two distinct schools of thoughts, with a view to combining as many aspects of genre as possible that together will provide guidance in evaluating the generic status of corporate websites.

In sum, while the survey of International and Intercultural Business Communication in Chapter 2 has laid out an all-encompassing background for the present study, Chapter 3 will outline a frame of reference to gain a more extensive knowledge of text production within the business context for the purposes of online corporate communication. Furthermore, given the fact that the traditional written genres of business discourse have evolved under the influence of the World Wide Web and of the Internet, this chapter will also include a general discussion of Computer-Mediated Communication to track changes in professional discourse in the new computer- and web-mediated environment, with a particular focus on the properties of the Web medium. Several contributions will be surveyed in § 3.2.1 below in order to offer an overview of the capabilities and constraints of the Web medium, which have been referred to as ‘affordances’ by various researchers (Norman 1988[2013], Agar 1998, Garzone 2007, Miller & Shepherd 2009, Berkenkotter 2012). The different theories proposed by the authors quoted will offer different perspectives to categorize the interrelationship between genre and medium in the World Wide Web.

Finally, § 3.3 will investigate the different ways in which communication takes advantage of different semiotic modes, in order to enhance its effectiveness. Particular attention will be devoted to visual communication, relying on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design. To conclude, the interrelationship between multimodality and discourse will be further highlighted by drawing upon studies in Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). As a matter of fact, the aim of MDA is to explore the ways in which meaning is co-constructed thanks to the interaction of several semiotic modes.

3.1. Discourse and Genre Analysis

Broadly speaking, discourse refers to how language is used in institutional, professional and social contexts in general, in written and spoken forms alike. In turn, Discourse Analysis (DA) is commonly understood as the study beyond sentence level of naturally occurring discourse. In fact, according to Stubbs (1983), Discourse Analysis “refers to attempts to study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause, and therefore to study linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts” (Stubbs 1983, 1). Additionally, Widdowson (2007) defines Discourse Analysis (DA) as the investigation of the ways people express and understand meaning in texts. In particular, Discourse Analysis is the area of language studies that is interested in how linguistic resources are exploited for the aims of communication. In the context of this research area, meanings are regarded as socio-cultural representations of reality, realized by linguistic means in a given social context. Accordingly, meaning in texts is conveyed by their lexico-grammatical features, yet texts are not mere instances of language to be regarded from a formal point of view, on the contrary they are first and foremost characterized by a communicative purpose. As a consequence, texts can be manipulated by language users who adapt them to their communication aims. In sum, discourse consists of the communicative purposes subsuming and motivating the production of a text. Hence, texts negotiate meaning across discourse, provided that they are the result of the convergence between what the addresser means during its production and what the addressee understands during its reception. In order for this convergence to occur, addresser and addressee should share the same knowledge of the world. The set of assumptions constituting the parties’ shared knowledge of the world are very often bound to the particular community to which individuals belong. It follows that not only the purpose but also the context of communication plays a role in the construction and understanding of meaning across discourse (Widdowson 2007).

Hence, purpose and context are two fundamental constructs underlying text production and meaning negotiation. More in particular, with regard to context, Miller (1984) suggests a categorization of discourse in terms of the stable forms of communication that emerge within a given community, i.e. genres. According to Miller, context is the main driving force shaping genres. This view of genre is shared by scholars belonging to the school of North American New Rhetoric, a field of research which developed in North America between the 1980s and 1990s. New Rhetoricians have moved beyond the study of literary genres to concentrate on the production of texts for everyday activities, and in doing so they have brought about a reconceptualization of genre that “connect[s] a recognition of regularities in discourse types

with a broader social and cultural understanding of language in use” (Freedman & Medway 1994, 1).

When defining their approach, the New Rhetoricians indicated differences between their theoretical perspective on genre and that of other studies in the field (Freedman & Medway 1994). First of all, New Rhetoricians have claimed the independence of their approach from that developed by scholars of the so called Sydney School, who apply the theories of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) introduced by Halliday (1978, 1985a[2004], 1985b) to shed light on genre. Although both approaches underpin the role of the social context in shaping genres, the Sydney School researchers are more interested in studying lexico-grammatical features, in keeping with their application of the methods of SFL, whereas New Rhetoricians emphasize the interconnections that can be established between textual and contextual features. Furthermore, as highlighted by Freedman and Medway (1994), the Sydney School researchers share a static vision of genre, whereas the New Rhetoricians regard genres as dynamic, and they place value on the notions of interplay and interaction in the evolution of genres. Banking on these assumptions, Freedman and Medway also point to the different teaching implications that issue from these approaches. In fact, as argued by Hunt (1994), since the New Rhetoricians consider genres as responses to the demands of the dynamic social context in which they are embedded, this will have to be taken into account by teachers, who will rearrange their methods in relation to their students in the classroom, so as to elicit fresh knowledge regarding genres as they evolve.

The contribution of the theories articulated in the branch of the school of North American New Rhetoric is acknowledged by Kankaanranta (2005) in her in-depth study of the use of emails in lingua franca English for internal communication in a multinational company. Kankaanranta’s study is supported by a thorough theoretical framework that accounts for the notion of genre in Applied Linguistics: this framework is relied upon in the present work as well, since it provides an extensive survey of the categorizations of genre that have been proposed across different schools of thought. For instance, in order to assess the generic nature of emails, Kankaanranta adopts the approach defined by the New Rhetoricians, but she discards that propounded by the linguists of the Sydney School, contending that in their conceptualization genre is treated only as “one aspect of a larger theory of functional language use” (Kankaanranta 2005, 46). In addition, according to Kankaanranta, the relationship of genre with the notion of register, which is of paramount importance for SFL, causes disagreement among researchers. For instance, Bhatia (1996) points out that the roles of genre and register in SFL are not well defined, with some scholars using the terms as

synonyms, and other scholars keeping the two notions apart.¹ However, along with the approach offered by the North American School of New Rhetoric, Kankaanranta includes in her theoretical framework the categorization of genre unfolded in the domain of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as well. In fact, on the one hand Kankaanranta considers emails as actions responding to given situations in order to do business. Moreover, emails can be regarded as new instances of business discourse originating from already established genres, and that are influenced by the medium in which they are embedded. On the other hand, in order to identify genre, the author takes advantage of the notion of purpose too, while taking into account the form and content of emails.

Like SFL, ESP is concerned with the formal features of texts, yet the view of genre offered by ESP is also interconnected to that of New Rhetoric. The interconnection between the New Rhetoric and ESP is acknowledged by Freedman and Medway (1994) too, who include in their survey on genre theories a discussion of Swales's *Genre Analysis* (1990). The New Rhetoric and ESP can be considered interrelated approaches due to the fact that ESP includes the notion of purpose among its tenets. Moreover, in ESP genres are seen in close relation to the discourse communities in which they emerge, as stressed by Freedman and Medway (1994) in their discussion of Swales (1990).

In this chapter, in keeping with Kankaanranta's (2005) theoretical framework, my aim is to reconcile the perspectives on genres offered by New Rhetoric and ESP, as they seem the most suitable to carry out an analysis of corporate communication via global website. In fact, on the one hand corporate websites in their global version have emerged in the context of corporate communication thanks to the properties of the Web medium, on the other hand the properties of the medium have afforded new communication possibilities but imposed constraints on online textual production, thus influencing features of form and content of websites.

3.1.1. North American New Rhetoric

As already hinted above, Miller's (1984) view of genre is ascribable to one particular strand of Genre Theory, i.e. that of the North American New Rhetoric, which is mainly concerned with the social aspects of the context surrounding genres. In her landmark article "Genre as Social Action", Miller regards discourse from the perspective of the rhetorical action it performs. In line with this pragmatics-oriented approach to discourse, it is Miller's contention

¹ Ventola (1984) and Martin (1985) have established a relationship between register and genre by articulating the notion of semiotic planes. In this sense, genre represents the content plane of register, whereas register represents the expression plane of genre. As a consequence, register realizes genre, while being realized by language.

that “if genre represents action, it must involve situation and motive, because human action, whether symbolic or otherwise, is interpretable only against a context of situation and through the attributing of motives” (Miller 1984, 152). As a consequence, genres arising in the same situation share the same conventional form. Furthermore, in accordance with their pragmatic nature, genres evolve in response to changes in society, hence “the set of genres is an open class, with new members evolving, old ones decaying” (Miller 1984, 153).

The situation in which genres are embedded is of paramount importance in Miller’s conceptualization. According to Miller,

[s]ituations are social constructs that are the result, not of “perception”, but of “definition”. Because human action is based and guided by meaning, not by material causes, at the center of action is a process of interpretation. Before we can act, we must interpret the indeterminate material environment; we define, or “determine”, a situation. (Miller 1984, 156)

In order to interpret a situation, interactants can rely on “their stock of knowledge” (Miller 1984, 156). In this way, “the new is made familiar through the recognition of relevant similarities; those similarities become constituted as a type” (Miller 1984, 156-157). Types are created within society, and for communication to succeed, their knowledge is to be shared by all interactants. In turn, situations are determined by what Miller calls exigence, which is “a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need” (Miller 1984, 157).

Nonetheless, Miller goes on to claim that situation is not a sufficient element to explain how a genre can function as a rhetorical action. In order to do this, it is necessary to take into account the fusion between the substance (i.e. “the semantic value of discourse”, Miller 1984, 159) and the form (i.e. “the ways in which substance is symbolized”, Miller 1984, 159) of genres. In particular,

[f]orm shapes the response to the reader or listener to substance by providing instruction, so to speak, about how to perceive and interpret; this guidance disposes the audience to [...] respond in a certain way. Seen thus, form becomes a kind of meta-information, with both semantic value (as information) and syntactic (or formal) value. Form and substance thus bear a hierarchical relationship to each other”. (Miller 1984, 159)

Miller draws the strings of her discussion about genre by acknowledging the fact that her conceptualization does not aim at outlining any taxonomy, since genres are subject to change, they may evolve or even disappear. Nonetheless, Miller’s perspective is intended to offer tools to evaluate whether instances of discourse are to be granted generic status. This can be done in three ways: by comparing substance and form across all instances, by taking into

account those elements that characterize the same rhetorical situations in which the instances are embedded, and finally by considering their “pragmatic component” or “pragmatic force” (Miller 1984, 164), which is necessary for an understanding of genre as a social action.

Miller’s view is taken on board by Yates and Orlikowski in their article “Genre of Organizational Communication: A Structural Approach to Studying Communication and Media” (1992). In keeping with their discussion of communication within organizations (i.e. organizational communication), Yates and Orlikowski outline the notion of genres of organizational communication, which they define as “a typified communicative action invoked in response to a recurrent situations” (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 301). According to the authors, this notion can be deployed to categorize the variety of communicative practices that are usually adopted in organizations. One example of genres of organizational communication is the memo. The memo genre has been used for internal business correspondence since the mid 1800s to serve the demands of managers to document and store instances of intra-organizational interaction for later reference.

In their article, Yates and Orlikowski trace the evolution of the memo genre, which has undergone changes over time, due to the emergence of new communication practices within organizations. For example, the introduction of the typewriter in the 1870s encouraged the use of a range of formatting conventions, such as underlining, capitalization and subheadings. Moreover, the need to simplify and standardize address norms, together with the adoption of vertical files for the systematic storage of the memos, gave rise to new rules regarding heading style, such as the inclusion of the fields ‘To’, ‘From’, ‘Subject’ and ‘Date’ into the memo layout. The last stage in the evolution of the memo genre described by the authors is the one started in the 1970s as a consequence of the widespread use of computers and of the electronic mail for business communication. Yates and Orlikowski consider the electronic mail as “a new electronic medium of organizational communication” (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 316). During this stage, the layout features of the memo genre were transferred to the electronic mail, since these seemed to comply with the needs of organizations for faster information exchanges. However, the authors acknowledge that messages sent via electronic mail exploit the new capabilities of the medium, hence they are different from the printed memos for various reasons. First of all, the electronic email can be used for external communication too, thus headers and signatures, that are typical of business letters but not of memos, have become conventional features of intra-organizational exchanges via electronic mail too. Furthermore, given the increasing rapidity of the communication process, more informal expressions and colloquialisms have started to appear in electronic mail messages.

As I have discussed above, Yates and Orlikowski, in their discussion of genre, place great emphasis on the role of communication media, with particular reference to the media introduced with the diffusion of computers. Communication media are relevant for the authors, as they are part of the context in which genres are enacted. I will draw on Yates and Orlikowski's conceptualization of media later on in this chapter, when dealing with the impact of the World Wide Web on corporate communication.

According to Yates and Orlikowski, genres of organizational communication are characterized by similar substance (i.e. "the social motives, themes, and topics being expressed in the communication", Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 301) and form (i.e. "the observable physical and linguistic features of the communication", Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 301). Yates and Orlikowski further state that elements of form and substance are associated with recurrent situations thanks to the presence of genre rules, on which individuals draw to reproduce genres in the context of organizational communication. To this extent, the authors illustrate the example of business letters:

in the case of the business letters, which is invoked in recurrent situations requiring documented communication outside the organization, the genre rules for substance specify that the letter pertains to a business interaction with an external party, and the genre rules for form specify an inside address, salutation, complimentary close, and correct, relatively formal language. (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 302)

In their categorization of the genres of organizational communication, Yates and Orlikowski give prominence to the social context in which genres emerge. In turn, since genres are enacted in recurrent situations, they are also in a position to "shape future responses to similar situations" (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 305). Nonetheless, genres can be modified by the individuals using them in response to changes in a given situation. It is Yates and Orlikowski's stance that "[a]lthough rules establish continuity with the past, they are not determining forces because communicative action can create variations in the rules of substance and form. [...] Thus, the potential of genre modification is inherent in every act of communication" (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 306-308).

The authors further elaborate on the notion of genre in their article "Genre Repertoire: The Structuring of Communicative Practices in Organizations" (Orlikowski & Yates 1994). In particular, Orlikowski and Yates use genre to analyse communicative practices within a given community, but they acknowledge the fact that usually a variety of genres are adopted by the members of that community to fulfil their purposes. In order to refer to the array of genres characterising the communication of a community, Orlikowski and Yates introduce the notion of *genre repertoire*:

[m]embers of a community rarely depend on a single genre for their communication. Rather, they tend to use multiple, different, and interacting genres over time. Thus, to understand a community's communicative practices, we must examine the set of genres that are routinely enacted by members of the community. We designate such a set of genres a community's "genre repertoire" [...]. (Orlikowski & Yates 1994, 542)

According to Orlikowski and Yates, the notion of genre repertoire is instrumental not only to understanding the communicative practices of a particular community, but also to providing an explanation to changes occurring within a set of already established genres. To this regard, the authors raise questions regarding variation in relation to genre:

[g]iven ongoing variations to existing genres, when can it be said that a new genre has emerged? In practice, it is impossible to define an exact point. The [...] definition of genres as socially recognized types of communicative action suggests that variants are communicative actions still recognizable as instances of the old genre, while a new genre can be said to have emerged when a new conjunction of form and purpose becomes recognized by its community as different from the old. (Orlikowski & Yates 1994, 545)

In order to shed light on the processes that bring changes to the communicative practices of a given community, very often leading to the emergence of new genres, the authors outline three aspects of a genre repertoire. The first aspect is *nature*, which is bound to the communicative activities of a community, and it is further characterized by composition ("the set of genres making up the repertoire", Orlikowski & Yates 1994, 547) and use ("the frequency with which specific genres are enacted at various times by members of the community", Orlikowski & Yates 1994, 547). The second is *establishment*, which depends on the initial enactment of the genres by the members of a (newly formed) community. The members of a community enact new genres banking on prior knowledge gained in other communities, or they may rely on the communicative purposes of the community to which they have come to belong. The last aspect indicated by Orlikowski and Yates is *change*, which can occur inadvertently or on purpose, each time new genres are introduced into the repertoire, or old genres are discarded.

To sum up, the notions of genre and genre repertoire laid out by Orlikowski and Yates provide guidance in coping with the communication practices adopted by communities and in investigating changes occurring over time. In addition, as they stated in their prior discussion of genre (Yates & Orlikowski 1992), the authors argue that the medium plays a role in genre variation too, and they suggest that the notion of genre repertoire may be useful to gain deeper insights into the impact of new media on the communication practices of organizations. I will expand on the influence of new media on the evolution of existing genres as well as on the creation of new genres of corporate communication later on in this chapter.

A further contribution on genre in the strand of the North American School of New Rhetoric has been offered by Freedman and Medway in their Introduction to the volume *Genre and the New Rhetoric* (Freedman & Medway 1994). Freedman and Medway underpin the relevance of the notion of genre in understanding “how it is and why it is that we produce the kinds of discourse that we do” (Freedman & Medway 1994, 1). In agreement with the tenets of the North American New Rhetoric, it is the authors’ contention that regularities across discourse types are connected with the broader social context, and they acknowledge the fact that “complex social, cultural, institutional and disciplinary factors [are] at play in the production of specific kinds of writing” (Freedman & Medway 1994, 2).

Freedman and Medway’s Introduction paves the way for the other contributions included in the volume, which among others feature Bazerman’s essay “Systems of Genre and the Enactment of Social Intentions” (1994). Bazerman chooses the patent as a textual form with a view to demonstrating how genres enact social actions. As Bazerman states,

I want to build upon what we already know about genres and connected sets of genres [...] to present a vision of how people create individual instances of meaning and value within structured discursive fields and thereby act within highly articulated social systems. The action is accomplished through performance of genres that have highly specific, systematically contextual requirements and well defined consequences for further-generically shaped social acts. (Bazerman 1994, 79)

Bazerman’s contention is in line with Miller’s (1984) categorization of genres that develop over time across similar contextual situations in order to fulfil certain communication purposes, and that they are recognized by members of a community thanks to their repeated use and their formal characteristics.

A milestone in the strand of North American New Rhetoric is represented by *Genre Knowledge in Disciplinary Communication* by Berkenkotter and Huckin (1995). In this work, the authors deal with written communication in disciplinary contexts. Disciplinary contexts are characterized by the production of knowledge, which is fostered by the enactment of genres. According to the authors,

[g]enres are the media through which scholars and scientists communicate with their peers. Because genres are intimately linked to a discipline’s methodology, they package information in ways that conform to a discipline’s norms, values, and ideology. Understanding the genre of written communication is therefore essential to professional success. (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 1)

In agreement with the conceptualization of the New Rhetoric, Berkenkotter and Huckin tackle disciplinary communication in relation to the actions undertaken by writers in a given situation, and according to the system in which they are involved. In addition, the authors foreground the fact that, for genres to be enacted, communicators need to possess genre

knowledge, which is “the individual’s repertoire of situationally appropriate responses to recurrent situations” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, ix). The authors argue that

genres are inherently dynamic rhetorical structures that can be manipulated according to the conditions of use and that genre knowledge is therefore best conceptualized as a form of situated cognition embedded in disciplinary activities. For writers to make things happen [...], they must know how to strategically use their understanding of genre. (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 3)

In order to engage with the analysis of the genres of disciplinary communication they have selected, which include among the others the scientific journal article, the experimental article, and the peer review, Berkenkotter and Huckin construct a theoretical framework encompassing five principles. The first principle outlined by Berkenkotter and Huckin is *dynamism*. Dynamism is in line with the theorizations carried out by Miller (1984) and by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) and Orlikowski and Yates (1994), since it states that “[g]enres are dynamic rhetorical forms that develop from responses to recurrent situations and serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 4). The second principle is *situatedness*, and it is linked to the fact that writers develop genre knowledge by participating to the communicative activities of their professional or disciplinary community. In turn it is fundamental for writers to be competent with “repertoires of typified social responses” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 7), so as to deal with recurrent situations. The third principle elucidated by Berkenkotter and Huckin encompasses *form and content*, “including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 13). Not only is the localization of genres in terms of time and place relevant, but also the background knowledge possessed by the audience is fundamental for the enactment of genre. *Duality of structure* is the fourth principle devised by the authors, who rely on the assumption that, when enacting genre to carry out their activities, professionals simultaneously constitute and reproduce social structures. Hence, the action of professionals and the social context in which they work are interdependent and affect each other. To conclude, *community ownership* establishes a connection between genre and “a discourse community’s norms, epistemology, ideology and social ontology” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 21). In fact, the examination of the genres owned by a community may elicit information about the community itself.

In sum, it is the authors’ stance that genres are “sites of contention between stability and change” (Berkenkotter & Huckin 1995, 6). On the one side, genres adapt to the demands of the context and of their users in order to be effective, while on the other genres hold a certain degree of stability so as to represent the recurrent aspects of the situation in which they are embedded. Professionals are not only competent with the reproduction of the genres

already established in their community, but they are also in a position to adapt them to changes in the contextual situation. Hence, a close analysis of the genres characterizing a given professional or disciplinary community will provide insights into the set of norms that regulate it, but also into the stock of knowledge, into the ideology and social nature that characterize the community itself.

As I have illustrated in this section, studies carried out alongside the New Rhetoric tenets have given prominence to the context surrounding the production and development of genres that are articulated within professional communities in order to fulfil the communicative purposes of their members. Nonetheless, New Rhetoricians have often paid attention to form and content of texts too, as information related to these aspects can provide guidance in defining the nature of professional genres. As I will elucidate in the next section, form and content along with the purpose of texts are the guiding principle in the branch of genre studies represented by ESP.

3.1.2. *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*

According to Kankaanranta (2005), the approach to genre laid out by ESP is primarily concerned with purpose, and it attempts at defining and limiting the scope of this notion in relation to specific academic and professional domains. Swales (1990) addresses the use of English in academic and research settings from the perspective of the purpose of the written genres realized in this domain. In fact, according to the author, textual knowledge, even if important, is not sufficient to tackle issues related to genre. This is due to the fact that writing is socially situated, and it is designed to achieve rhetorical aims. For his analysis, Swales draws upon three core notions, i.e. discourse community, genre and communicative purpose. In particular, discourse communities are “sociorethorical networks” (Swales 1990, 9) working towards a set of common goals. Members of a discourse community are familiar with the genres deployed in communication to develop their particular set of goals. In turn, genres do not belong to the individual members of the community, but to the discourse community as a whole. Secondly, genres are defined by Swales as “classes of communicative events with features of stability, name recognition and so on” (Swales 1990, 9). In addition, genres consist of spoken or written texts, and they are encoded and decoded in relation to the task they aim at fulfilling, as well as in relation to the context in which they are used. Competence in the use of genres is based on previous knowledge of the world (“*content schemata*”, Swales 1990, 9-10, author’s emphasis) and on knowledge of prior texts (“*formal schemata*”, Swales 1990, 10, author’s emphasis). Thirdly, communicative purpose is what “drives the *language* activities of the discourse communities” (Swales 1990, 10, author’s emphasis). Communicative purpose

is a standard for genre identity, and it determines the task of the communication.

Swales further elaborates on the notion of genre, first of all relying on Miller's (1984) categorization of genre as a tool for social action, and then providing a working definition to get grasp of what is otherwise regarded as "a fuzzy concept, a somewhat loose term of art" (Swales 1990, 32). The definition proposed by Swales encompasses five criteria:

1. *Genre is a class of communicative events* (Swales 1990, 45, author's emphasis): genres comprise discourse, its participants, the role of discourse in that community, as well as the contexts of its production and reception.
2. *The principle criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative events* (Swales 1990, 46, author's emphasis): genres are the means by which goals are achieved in communication. In other words, communicative purpose determines language activities, and it represents a standard for defining genre identity.
3. *Exemplars or instances of genre vary in their prototypicality* (Swales 1990, 49, author's emphasis): instances of the same genre can be recognized by their interrelationships rather than by a set of common features. These interrelationships may regard similarities in terms of form, structure, content and audience expectations.
4. *The rationale behind a genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their content, positioning, form* (Swales 1990, 52, author's emphasis): genre conventions, which are purpose-based, exert influence, although they are constantly evolving.
5. *A discourse community nomenclature for genres is an important source of insight* (Swales 1990, 54, author's emphasis): the expert members within a discourse community are those who are in a position to give names to the genres relevant to their professional purposes, thanks to their profound knowledge of the genres themselves.

To sum up, genre is a class of communicative events, the members of which are characterized by the same set of communicative purposes. The communicative purposes are recognized by the expert members of the discourse community, and they shape the rationale for the genre. In turn, the rationale of the genre determines the schematic structure of the discourse, and it guides choices in content and style. Purpose as well as features of structure, style, content and audience are the main criteria to establish generic status (Swales 1990).

Swales further stresses that genres vary according to their rhetorical purpose, the degree to which genre exemplars are prepared in advance, the mode and medium deployed to express them, and the incidence of universal or specific language features. In order to

properly address the objective of the present research, I will come back to issues of mode and medium in relation to genre, as they constitute a benchmark to assess how the generic value of textual instances constituting a corporate website has evolved due to web-mediated communication.

An invaluable contribution to the development of the study of genre in the context of ESP can be gleaned from Bhatia's numerous studies on Genre Theory (Bhatia 1993, 1996, 1997, 2002, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2012). For his conceptualization of genre, Bhatia builds upon the framework of Discourse Analysis, which he defines as the "study of language use beyond the sentence boundaries" (Bhatia 1993, 3). Accordingly, understanding the structure and function of language use to convey meaning is at the core of Discourse Analysis (Bhatia 1993). In this sense, Discourse Analysis entails not only a description of the linguistic features participating in the construction and in the interpretation of meaning in texts, but also a grounded explanation "of why a particular type of conventional codification of meaning is considered appropriate to a particular institutionalized socio-cultural setting" (Bhatia 1997, 5). Hence, in his conceptualization of genre articulated against the backdrop of ESP, Bhatia moves beyond the study of language at sentence level, and he seeks to reconcile the analysis of form and function of genres, while investigating textual realizations in their socio-cultural, institutional or organizational context. This should provide a description of the specific genres used in academic and professional communities that is thicker than that obtained by the analysis of register² (Bhatia 1996), while eliciting an answer to the question "Why are specific discourse-genres written and used by the specialist communities the way they are?" (Bhatia 1993, 11). This approach should eventually lead to a meaningful correlation between the form and function of texts, which will give fruitful insights for several areas of Applied Linguistics, as for example the teaching of English for Special Purposes.³

Banking on the said premises, Bhatia (1993) elaborates upon Swales's (1990) definition of genre, by first of all placing further emphasis on the purpose or set of purposes that genres aim at fulfilling. In fact, genres can be characterized and distinguished according to their purposes, and these are recognized by the members of the professional communities in

² According to Bhatia (2004), genre is a more suitable criterion than register to discuss discourse, since "genres are more action-oriented than registers, which often indicate the general flavour of lexico-grammatical choices" (Bhatia 2004, 32). In this sense, the notion of genre entails a level of dynamism that is lacking in that of register.

³ The relevance of genre studies in ESP for the teaching of English is recognized by Swales (1990, 2000) too, who acknowledges that disciplinary and professional competence in the use of English has gained momentum due to the internationalization of the domains of science, scholarship and business. In turn, Kankaanranta (2005) points to the fact that ESP studies view genre as a means for the teaching of English as a foreign or second language in academic and professional contexts alike. The pedagogical implications of ESP in relation to non-native speakers sets this branch of genre studies apart from the New Rhetoric, which is mainly concerned with the teaching of the use of English in academic and professional domains to native speakers of the language (Kankaanranta 2005).

which they are used. Secondly, the nature of genres is characterized by their structure and conventions, which again is determined by their purpose or purposes. Thirdly, in order to take part in the communicative events, professionals within a given community are compelled to abide by the norms guiding the production of genres. These norms impose a series of constraints, which nonetheless can be exploited, at least to a certain degree, by taking into account the circumstances and the needs of the communicators. To conclude, Bhatia highlights the fact that the norms regulating the production of genre within a professional community can be flouted by its expert members, who use their knowledge of generic convention along with their creativity for the achievement of their private intentions.

Pulling together the aspects of genre elaborated upon in his conceptualization, it is Bhatia's contention that

each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discoursal resources. [...] Although [...] it is true that many professional writers do manage to exploit genre constraints to achieve effectiveness and originality in their writing, most of them still operate well within a broad range of generic rules and conventions. (Bhatia 1993, 16)

As a consequence, in his study of genre Bhatia aims first of all at identifying recurrent characteristics of genre instances that can lead to correlations between form and function of texts. Once this form-function correlation is uncovered, it can be relied upon for pedagogical purposes. Secondly, the author seeks to relate the characteristics of genre to the specific context of production and to the constraints imposed by the professional or disciplinary domain.

The approach to discourse and genre framed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993) in the domain of ESP caters for an analysis of text in relation to its rhetorical purpose, which is to be fulfilled within the professional context of production. Hence, in order to provide a grounded explanation of how meaning is articulated in genre instances, it is necessary to move beyond the analysis of texts within sentence boundaries towards the study of longer stretches of discourse, since the sole investigation of lexico-grammatical patterns proves inadequate in offering insights into the ways in which communicative purpose is achieved in a certain genre (Bhatia 1993, 2004). This is the rationale subsuming Swales's (1981[2011], 1990) investigation of the rhetorical structure of research articles.⁴ In order to account for the communicative purpose of research articles, Swales (1981[2011]) gathered a corpus of 48 articles, and he identified a series of regular patterns emerging from their introductory

⁴ In keeping with the pedagogical concerns of ESP studies, Swales (1990, 1981[2011]) embarked on the investigation of the rhetorical organization characterizing research articles with a view to responding to the needs of NNSs of English active in the academic domain (Biber *et al.* 2007).

sections. Swales (1981[2011]) called these recurrent patterns *moves*, and he demonstrated how each pattern carries out a specific function within the introduction, thus contributing to the overall purpose of the article.

The cognitive structuring of texts that includes the series of moves displayed by Swales (1981[2011]) was taken on board by ESP practitioners and further developed by Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993). Bhatia, for instance, argues that “[j]ust as each genre has a communicative purpose that it tends to serve, similarly, each move also serves a typical communicative intention which is always subservient to the overall communicative purpose of the genre” (Bhatia 1993, 30), and he applies Swales’s (1981[2011], 1990) approach to inform his study of other research genres, such as article abstracts and student dissertations, and professional texts belonging to promotional and legal discourse. As a matter of fact, it is Bhatia’s (1993) contention that, by interpreting regularities across texts belonging to a genre, it is possible to get a grasp of the rationale behind the genre itself. Furthermore, Bhatia assigns the same genre status to textual instances that at first sight seem to represent different communicative events. This is the case of sales promotion letters and job application letters. By illustrating the moves that articulate the structures of these two textual instances, Bhatia points to similarities in their rhetorical patterns, and he claims that sales promotion letters and job application letters are characterized by the same persuasive function, and so they aim at achieving comparable promotional purposes (the promotion of a product on the one side, the promotion of a job applicant on the other). Bhatia concludes that “communicative purpose is the most privileged criterion for the identification of genres” (Bhatia 1993, 43).

The approaches to genre adopted in the context of the ESP studies that have been profiled so far put emphasis on the presence of regularities and conventions that lead to a certain degree of consistency across instances of genres, and on the role of purpose in determining genre membership. Nonetheless, the fact that genre can be defined in terms of stable, recurring patterns and in terms of purpose has been challenged in the context of ESP. In the next section I will consider contributions by researchers in ESP who have questioned the primacy of stability and of purpose in determining genre affiliation, and who have brought to the fore the dynamic nature of genres, while advocating for more emphasis to be placed on textual and contextual features that determine genre production.

3.1.3. Readjusting the notions of stability and purpose in ESP studies

The notion of stability in the context of ESP studies has been challenged in relation to the dynamism that subsumes genre production. In fact, albeit the presence of regular patterns is recognized and highly valued in the conceptual frameworks devised by Swales (1990) and

Bhatia (1996), the authors acknowledge the dynamic nature of genres, and in this sense they share the same view of the New Rhetoricians. According to the ESP practitioners, the flexibility and dynamism that characterize genres afford their adaptation to new and unexpected conditions in the context of communication. Bhatia (1996) lists a number of factors subsuming these conditions. These factors include the media used for communication, technological advances, the level of overlap among disciplinary and professional contexts, the increasing competitiveness in the academia and in business alike, the pervasiveness of promotional and advertising activities, and the pressing need on the part of professionals “to be creative and innovative in professional communication” (Bhatia 1996, 50). Hence, the expert members within a disciplinary or professional community who aim at fulfilling their private purposes can give rise to new generic forms by relying on their creativity and genre knowledge. However, any innovation is to be introduced “within the broad limits of specific genres” (Bhatia 1996, 49). This is due to the fact that “any flagrant flouting of generic conventions leads to opting out of the genre altogether and is noticed by the specialist community as odd” (Bhatia 1996, 49).

As a consequence, the dynamic nature of genre brings about hybridized forms. According to Bhatia (1995, 1997, 2004), the process of genre hybridization can give rise to *genre-mixing* and to *genre-embedding*. Both genre-mixing and embedding occur when professionals need to fulfil their private intentions within the range of purposes that are distinctive of their social context. In particular, genre-mixing ensues each time the rhetorical strategies of one genre are appropriated by another genre to fulfil a particular purpose. This is the case for example of academic introductions that display lexico-grammatical features proper of promotional genres (e.g. the use of evaluative language). In this case it will be possible “to find a dual communicative purpose in academic introductions, that is to introduce the book and to promote it to the potential readers, who may be tempted to invest in the knowledge being offered” (Bhatia 2004, 73). As far as genre-embedding is concerned, this ensues when the formal features of a given genre are deployed to realize another genre. For instance, the generic forms of poems, letters, dialogues, etc. are very often exploited to provide a pattern for advertising genres (Bhatia 2004).

The other notion that has been put to test by ESP practitioners is that of communicative purpose. Purpose has proved to be a volatile notion, running the risk of turning into a questionable criterion to establish genre status. Bhatia (1996, 2004) deals with issues related to communicative purpose in terms of the versatility entailed in the notion. Bhatia claims that “[on] the one hand it can be identified at a fairly high level of generalization, whereas on the other hand it can be narrowed down to a very specific level.

Also, it may either be a single communicative purpose or a more detailed set of communicative purposes” (Bhatia 1996, 51). It follows that the status of a genre and the conventions that guide its production can be assessed in relation to “the level of generalization and detail at which one specifies communicative purpose(s)” (Bhatia 1996, 51).

In order to account for the different levels of generalization that guide the identification of genres, and in order to deal with the degree of overlap in the use of genres which is brought about by the practices of professionals belonging to different disciplinary and professional communities, Bhatia (1996, 2004) orchestrates the notion of *genre colony*. A genre colony

represents a grouping of closely related genres, which to a large extent share their individual communicative purposes, although most of them will be different in a number of other respects, such as their disciplinary and professional affiliations, contexts of use and exploitations, participant relationships, audience constraints and so on. (Bhatia 2004, 57)

Further, Bhatia relates this notion to that of genre hybridization by arguing that “[c]olonization as process [...] involves invasion of the integrity of one genre by another genre or genre convention, often leading to the creation of a hybrid form, which eventually shares some of its genre characteristics with the one that influenced it in the first place” (Bhatia 2004, 58). Hence the notion of genre colony is instrumental in designating groups of genres cutting across several domains, and sharing the same communicative purpose, but also in indicating the process involved in the exploitation of generic resources in order to give rise to new mixed or embedded forms.

In order to substantiate this definition, Bhatia presents the example of the colony of promotional genres. The highest level of generalization in the colony of promotional genres corresponds to promotional discourse, which stands for a grouping of interrelated genres characterized by the same promotional purpose they tend to serve. Instances of promotional genres are advertisements, book blurbs, promotional letters, sales promotion letters and job application letters. In turn, these genres can be distinguished from each other by considering them at a lower level of generalization. In this way, differences in terms of the medium used for communication, and in terms of the discursive and visual strategies adopted for product description and evaluation may emerge. Moreover, a distinction between primary and secondary members of the colony can be drawn: primary members of the colony of promotional genre are for example job advertisements, book blurbs, and sales promotion letters, while secondary members are those brought about by processes of genre mixing. This is the case of annual reports, which are partly descriptive and partly promotional. To conclude, secondary members of a given genre colony may be primary members of another

genre colony. For instance, annual reports are primary members of the colony of reporting genre, but secondary members of the colony of promotional genre. Other criteria to identify promotional genres are sender-receiver relationship, the intended audience, the product or service offered, the channel or medium used for communication, and the type of argumentation devised to persuade the audience (e.g. describing or evaluating the product or service offered). Figure 3.1 below illustrates the colony of promotional genre as devised by Bhatia.

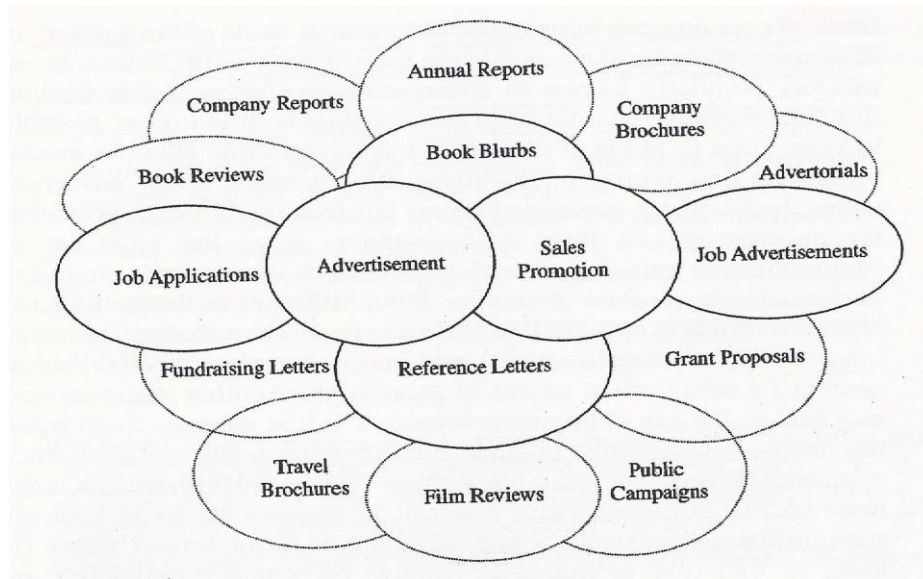


FIGURE 3.1. Colony of promotional genres (Bhatia 2004, 63).

Prior to Bhatia's conceptualization of the colony of promotional genres, Askehave and Swales raised important issues regarding the role of communicative purpose in determining genre affiliation in their article "Genre Identification and Communicative Purpose: A Problem and a Possible Solution" (2001). Askehave and Swales indicate that in most of the approaches to Genre Theory in New Rhetoric and ESP alike, the notion of purpose has served as the primary criterion to define generic status. However, it is the authors' contention that purpose is a hard notion to be operationalized at the outset of any process of genre analysis, hence the question arises whether it is appropriate to evaluating genres. As a consequence, Askehave and Swales concentrate on the form and context of genres, since they are immediately apparent to the analyst. In fact, the authors contend that "it would be prudent to abandon communicative purpose as an immediate or even quick method for sorting discourses into generic categories, even if the analyst can and should retain the concept as valuable—and perhaps unavoidable—long-term outcome of the analysis" (Askehave & Swales 2001, 207). Askehave and Swales propound two alternative approaches that are meant to uncover the generic status

of texts. The first one is a traditional, text-driven approach that takes into account the features of the structure and style of texts in the first place, as it is schematically represented in Figure 3.2 below.

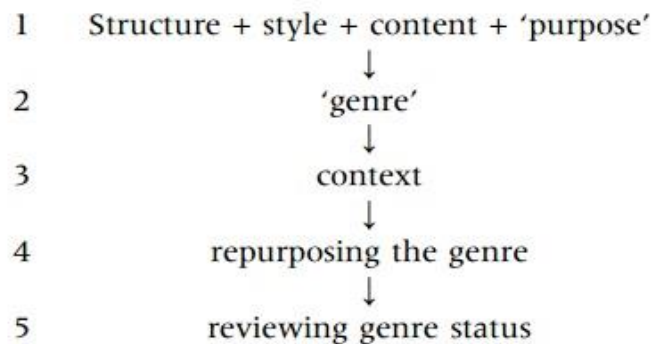


FIGURE 3.2. A text-driven procedure for genre analysis (Askehave & Swales 2001, 207).

It is worth noting that, as illustrated above, content plays a substantial role in the first stage of the analysis. In addition, the notion of purpose and genre are not discarded, but they are included in the first and second stage and put into scare-quotes so as to indicate their provisional nature. In the third stage the notion of context is intended broadly, and it is to be negotiated according to the requirements of the researcher carrying out the analysis. In this procedure, the authors also introduce the notion of repurposing, which is in line with the variety of communicative practices emerging in the domain of institutional communication in general. To conclude, the fifth stage implies a possibility to review generic boundaries, in keeping with genre innovation.

The second procedure outlined by Askehave and Swales is characterized by an ethnographic approach, since it starts with the identification of the discourse community. Moreover, it appears to be less straightforward than the text-driven procedure, as it is apparent in Figure 3.3 on the next page. After the identification of the specific discourse community, stages in the context-driven procedure for genre analysis entail a study of the values, goals and conditions of the community, while considering practices such as working rhythms and expectations of the community, with a view to defining repertoires of genres and their underlying rules. These stages will lead to repurpose genres to uncover the distinctive features of each genre.

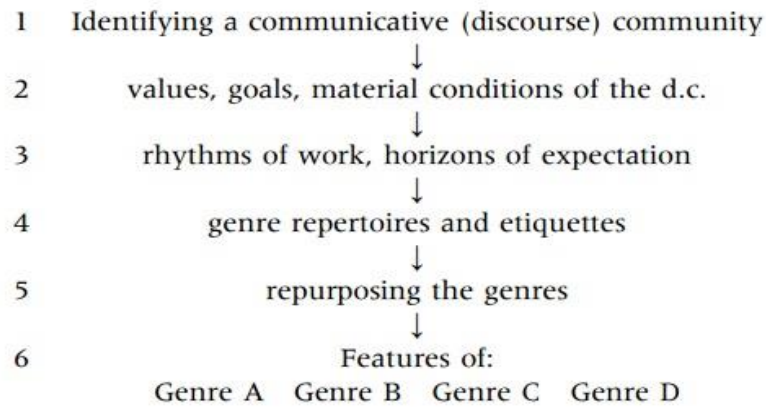


FIGURE 3.3. A context-driven procedure for genre analysis (Askehave & Swales 2001, 208)

The concept of *genre-repurposing*, which is included in both procedures, seem to go beyond the limitations of purpose as such as a criterion to conduct genre analysis. According to Askehave and Swales, genre-repurposing allows to define and redefine sets of genres deployed in the same discourse community, and to solve issues regarding their nomenclature. Besides, this notion concentrates on the impact that the technologies used for communication have on instances of genres. To put it in Askehave and Swales's terms, repurposing "allows attention to focus on the highly contemporary issues of how technological advance affects the way in which genre exemplars are perceived and ranked in relation to their mode of transmission: telex, fax, phone, e-mail, face-to-face meeting, video conference, on-line journal, print journal, and so on" (Askehave & Swales 2001, 209). In the conclusion of their article, Askehave and Swales foreground the last advantage offered by the operationalization of genre-repurposing, that is, the prominence given in both procedures to the context in which texts are produced. In fact, "genre categorization, as an issue of applied linguistic practice, is more a matter of extensive text-in-context inquiry than straightforward textual or transcriptal scrutiny on the one hand, or introspective system building, on the other" (Askehave & Swales 2001, 209).

Here it is argued that Askehave and Swales's view can be reconciled with Bhatia's (2004, 2007a) suggestion to take into account professional practices and cultures when analysing professional genres. First of all, Bhatia (2002, 2004) devises a three-space multidimensional model that is intended to function as a theoretical framework for the analysis of written discourse. In the first space, i.e. the textual space, discourse is regarded as text, and so it is analyzed at the level of its lexico-grammatical features. In the second space, which Bhatia (2004) calls the socio-cognitive space, discourse is investigated as genre. In this case, the analysis moves beyond sentence boundaries to include a study of the professional context and of the professional practices of a discourse community. In the third space, which

is called the social space, discourse is viewed as social practice, and the social context is taken into consideration in a broad sense.

In addition, Bhatia agrees that communicative purpose intended as the privileged criterion to attribute generic status “appears to be fuzzy and sometimes subjective” (Bhatia 2004, 113), yet he argues that the vagueness implied in the concept makes the analytical process stimulating. Bhatia also admits that since genre researchers are not expert members of the disciplinary or professional communities they study, they lack a full understanding of the discursive practices of the communities. Hence it is fundamental for genre researchers to come to terms not only with the text-internal but also with the text-external and socio-cultural aspects of professional communication. Banking on this assumptions, Bhatia contends that “we need to go beyond the text to factors very much external to the language of the text” (Bhatia 2004, 117). Hence, it is necessary to refer to text-external factors in order to uncover the generic value of any linguistic features, while text-internal factors are to be considered in order to confirm inferences made on the basis of text-external factors. This discussion leads Bhatia to articulate the concept of *generic integrity*, which

may be understood in terms of a socially constructed typical constellation of form-function correlations representing a specific professional, academic or institutional communicative construct realizing a specific communicative purpose of the genre in question. It is essentially constructed in the context of the goals of the professional or disciplinary culture that is often associated with. It is possible to characterize it in terms of text-internal and/or text-external or a combination of such features. It is not static, fixed or prescribed, but is often flexible, negotiable or sometimes contested. (Bhatia 2004, 123)

The role of contextual features in defining the generic value of communicative events in professional discourse communities is further corroborated by Bhatia in his article “Genre Analysis, ESP and Professional Practice” (2007a). The need to integrate text-internal with text-external aspects of language use in order to carry out an all-encompassing analysis of professional genre is graphically illustrated in Figure 3.4 below.



FIGURE 3.4. Language use in professional contexts (Bhatia 2007a, 164).

In this article, drawing examples from the contexts of business and law, Bhatia deploys a multi-perspective and multidimensional framework that includes instances of appropriation of semiotic resources across genres. For example, when dealing with texts such as corporate annual reports, the analysis of other texts such as earnings, results announcements and press releases, to name a few, can improve the understanding of the communicative practices of a professional community. Bhatia refers to the study he conducted on corporate disclosure documents, and he argues that in these texts the features of reporting genres are exploited by expert professionals not only to inform about the performance of the organization, thus complying with the practices of accounting discourse, but also to promote a positive image of the organization itself, hence bending the generic norms of reporting genres towards the conventions of public relation discourse. In Bhatia's study it becomes apparent that "two genres are strategically placed in the same document, that is, the annual report, thus establishing an interesting interdiscursive relationship between this two different corporate genres" (Bhatia 2007a, 169).

Taking into consideration the influence of professional practices and cultures of discourse communities on text-internal factors of genres, Bhatia introduces the concept of *interdiscursivity*, which is viewed as "one of the significant functions of appropriation of generic and other semiotic resources across various dimensions of genres, professional practice, and professional cultures" (Bhatia 2007a, 170). This notion has been usually devoted little attention, whereas the notion of intertextuality, intended as "the use of prior texts transforming the past into the present often in relatively conventionalized and somewhat standardized ways" (Bhatia 2007b, 392) has been fully explored. As the author contends, intertextuality is based on text-internal resources, whereas interdiscursivity involves such text-external factors as conventions and constraints shaping professional genres but also professional practices in general. In this sense, interdiscursivity plays a more important role than intertextuality when it comes to "the construction, interpretation, and exploitation of text-external resources at various levels" (Bhatia 2007b, 393), and it can be deployed to account for those instances of genre hybridization devised by professionals who seek to achieve the communicative aims of their organizations. In sum, interdiscursivity fosters a discussion of the multiple facets constituting the domain of professional communication, and it is instrumental in providing the most appropriate contextualization to generic features at a lexico-grammatical level, while defining the professional purposes of the members of a given discourse community.

Banking on his conceptualization of interdiscursivity, Bhatia suggests that the analysis

of genre should move towards a more critical study of the practices and cultures of professional communities, concentrating on their interdiscursive interactions. This leads Bhatia (2012) to define a new approach to discourse which he names Critical Genre Analysis (CGA). CGA “is an attempt to extend genre theory beyond the analyses of semiotic resources used in professional genres to understand and clarify professional practices or actions in typical academic and professional contexts” (Bhatia 2012, 22). Bhatia sets Critical Genre Analysis apart from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In fact, CDA focuses on social structures and relations, and it takes into account such issues as domination, gender and race, to name a few. On the other hand, CGA tackles generic exploitations and semiotic appropriations to provide an account of the professional practices within and across discourse communities. In Bhatia's terms, CGA

is a way of “demystifying” professional practice through the medium of genres. [...] In CGA [...] no professional, institutional, or organizational practices are assumed but negotiated. They seem to be in a constant struggle between competing interests. CGA with its focus on practice considers individual members of professional organizations, though bound by their common goals and objectives, still having enough flexibility to incorporate “private intentions” within the concepts of professionally shared values, genre conventions, and professional cultures. (Bhatia 2012, 23)

Moreover, Bhatia stresses that the role of Computer-Mediated Communication and the influence of technological advances are to be included in the framework of CGA, as they contribute to shaping discursive and professional practices. The impact of technologies and new media on professional, and in particular on corporate communication, is in line with the objective of the present work, hence it will be brought to the fore several in later chapters.

The survey of ESP studies conducted here has shown that this approach to genre has moved from the investigation of lexico-grammatical features within sentence boundaries, to a study of longer stretches of discourse, and to a consideration of the professional context in which text production is embedded. Despite being two different approaches, ESP and the New Rhetoric can be integrated, so as to build a more articulated and solid foundation to tackle genre issues. In ESP studies, stability and communicative purpose have usually served as benchmarks to assign generic status, yet limitations in their application have been uncovered, thus bringing about the need for a new conceptualization of these sometimes volatile notions that would integrate both formal and contextual features of text instances. The concern for genre dynamism and for the context of production developed by ESP researchers further proves that New Rhetoric and ESP can inform each other, thus leading to a beneficial cross-fertilization.

Tracking the development of ESP is instrumental to the present study, since it offers a

multiperspective and multidimensional view on the genres employed in the professional domain that is useful to deal with issues of online corporate communication. Furthermore, in later developments of ESP, the role of the medium of communication, which has been acknowledged also by the New Rhetoricians as a component of the context of communication, has gained momentum (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, Orlikowski & Yates 1994, Shepherd & Watters 1998, Crowston & Williams 2000, Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, Kankaanranta 2005, Garzone 2007, Giltrow & Stein 2009, Miller & Shepherd 2009, Berkenkotter 2012), as I will point out in the next section. As a matter of fact, the properties of the medium affect communication and contribute to innovating generic conventions, often leading to the emergence of new genres. It follows that the theories of genres orchestrated in New Rhetoric and ESP studies lend themselves to their inclusion in a theoretical framework to investigate online communication.

3.2 Genre and the World Wide Web

As discussed beforehand, the influence of the medium on genre realizations has always been a concern of genre theorists in both strands of the North American New Rhetoric and ESP. This concern has become greater as a consequence of developments in Information Technology in the second half of the Twentieth Century, which have brought about new tools for communication. These tools are, among others, computers on the one hand and the World Wide Web on the other. Petroni (2011) defines the World Wide Web as “a huge virtual environment where human beings communicate with each other without space and time constraints, thanks to computer mediation” (Petroni 2011, 22-23). As already mentioned in the Introduction, albeit ‘World Wide Web’ and ‘Internet’ are commonly used and understood as synonyms, the two terms designate different entities. The Web is a medium that enables the creation, organization and transmission of texts that can be accessed by any user all over the world at any time of the day, provided that they have a connection to the Internet. The Internet, in turn, is a global network connecting all computers of the world thanks to the availability of electronic infrastructures and services.

The introduction of the World Wide Web is more recent than that of the Internet. The Internet was invented by Vinton Cerf and Robert Kahn at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in the early 1970s. In 1974, Cerf and Khan published the article “A Protocol for Packet Network Interconnection”, where they describe a protocol to be used among computers in order to deliver data and share resources. This is known as the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP), which was later associated to the Internet Protocol (IP),

thus giving rise to the Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP). Nowadays, the TCP/IP still allows computers all over the world to communicate over the Internet.

The World Wide Web was developed at CERN in the early 1990s by a team of researchers lead by the British computer scientists Tim Berners-Lee. Berners-Lee (n.d.) explicates the difference between the Internet and the World Wide Web as follows:

[t]he Internet ('Net) [sic] is a network of networks. Basically it is made from computers and cables. What Vint Cerf and Bob Kahn did was to figure out how this could be used to send around little "packets" of information. As Vint points out, a packet is a bit like a postcard with a simple address on it. If you put the right address on a packet, and gave it to any computer which is connected as part of the Net, each computer would figure out which cable to send it down next so that it would get to its destination. That's what the Internet does. It delivers packets - anywhere in the world, normally well under a second.

[...]

The Web is an abstract (imaginary) space of information. On the Net, you find computers -- on the Web, you find document, sounds, videos,... [sic] information. On the Net, the connections are cables between computers; on the Web, connections are hypertext links. The Web exists because of programs which communicate between computers on the Net. The Web could not be without the Net. The Web made the net [sic.] useful because people are really interested in information (not to mention knowledge and wisdom!) and don't really want to have know [sic] about computers and cables. (Berners-Lee n.d.)

In accordance with the objectives of the present work, I will draw on the afore-mentioned distinction between the World Wide Web and the Internet, and I will deal mainly with the former, since one of my aims is to discuss the implications of the introduction of the Web medium for corporate communication. As a consequence, an investigation of the technical features of the Internet as a computer infrastructure is outside the scope of my work. However, here the assumption is made that for the Web to be accessed and for information to be shared, a network of interconnected computers, i.e. the Internet, is required.

Berners-Lee Cailliau, Luotonen, Frystyk Nielsen and Secret (1994) state that "[a]part from being a place of communication and learning, and a new marketplace, the Web is a show ground for new developments in information technology" (Berners-Lee *et al.* 1994, 81). In fact, the unprecedented changes sparked off by the use of computers and the World Wide Web have impacted on all domains of human action, such as society, culture, education, business and politics, to name a few. This has resulted in far-reaching consequences for the creation of knowledge, for the development of human relationships, and for the spread of information. Practitioners in all professional domains have been affected by the introduction of computers and the Web, since these have revolutionized their daily working activities. Moreover, these phenomena have awakened the interest of the general public, since

potentially every individual has been provided with tools to communicate without any time and place constraints, and at a relatively low cost. All this of course has attracted the attention of researchers in several disciplines, from computer sciences to humanities, who have started to develop theories to explain the multiple facets of what has come to be known as Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC).

In his attempt to outline a theoretical model to measure CMC competence, Spitzberg (2006) describes the phenomenon as follows:

CMC is tentatively defined *as any human symbolic text-based interaction conducted or facilitated through digitally-based technologies*. This working definition includes the Internet; cellular phone text, instant messaging (IM), and multiuser interactions (MUDs & MOOs); email and listserv interactions; and text-supplemented videoconferencing (e.g., decision support systems). This definition requires actual people engaged in a process of message interchange in which the medium of exchange at some point is computerized. (Spitzberg 2006, 630-631, author's emphasis)

Under the terminological roof of CMC, Spitzberg includes forms of synchronous and asynchronous communication alike.⁵ Furthermore, the author stresses that texts in CMC are not confined to linguistic realizations. To put it in the author's terms, text in CMC "is defined broadly, consistent with cultural studies in which images, architecture, metaphors, and other message forms take on iconographic meaning. Specifically, text is defined as any message form to which patterned meanings are attributed" (Spitzberg 2006, 631). Hence, not only textual information, but also the exploitation of other semiotic modes contribute to the construction of meaning in CMC, and they influence discursive choices. As I will indicate later, the co-presence of several modes on the Web, which is commonly referred to as multimodality, is one of the properties of the medium that can be deployed to enact communication.

3.2.1. Properties of the Web and issues regarding genre-medium relationship

CMC has soon attracted the interest of linguists, who have started to articulate theories with a view to adequately accounting for those factors that shape discursive practices and the construction of meaning in the World Wide Web. In the context of this discussion, a need as emerged to reconsider the relationship between genre and medium, since the properties of the Web bear far-reaching consequences for textual production.

Petroni (2011) considers the World Wide Web "an immense, limitless hypertext [...]"

⁵ Forms of synchronous communication are those characterized by a real-time transfer of information, such as chats, Instant Messaging (IM), mobile texting, Multi-User Dungeons/Dimensions (MUD) and Virtual Reality environments (VR). Forms of asynchronous communication include time-shifted information exchanges, i.e. emails, blogs, discussion lists, newsgroups, websites, social networks and wikis (Petroni 2011).

where CMC takes place thanks to the Internet (Petroni 2011, 35). The notion of hypertext is fundamental for the understanding of both the ways in which texts are interrelated on the Web, and of the ways in which they can be accessed by users. As stated by Berners-Lee (n.d.) in the quotation above, texts on the Web are connected by hypertext links, which today are widely referred to as hyperlinks or simply links. Hyperlinks can be considered the backbone of hypertexts, and hence of the World Wide Web, since they enable users to devise their own navigation towards those instances of information for which they are searching. A definition of hypertext is provided by Bolter (2001), who states that

a hypertext consists of topics and their connections, where the topics may be paragraph, sentences, individual words, or indeed digitized graphics and segments of videos. [...]

The connections of a hypertext constitute paths of meaning for the author and for the reader. Each topic may participate in several paths, and its significance will depend on which paths the reader has traveled in order to arrive at the topic. (Bolter 2001, 35)

In addition to this, Petroni (2011) stresses the relevance of hyperlinks for the construction of meaning by arguing that “[l]inks are not technical devices but they are embedded into a meaning-making process of a hypertext that, in turn, is not a new writing technology, but a way of processing or structuring information, ideas, and thoughts electronically, just as the human mind processes them biologically” (Petroni 2011, 36).

Following from these premises, it becomes apparent that the introduction of the World Wide Web as a new medium of communication has brought about noticeable effects on discursive practices, thus affecting genre realizations. The influence of the media choice in professional discourse was acknowledged by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) and Orlikowski and Yates (1994) in the domain of the North American New Rhetoric even prior to the global diffusion of the World Wide Web. As I have illustrated in § 3.1.1, in their studies of genres of organizational communication, Yates and Orlikowski (1992) and Orlikowski and Yates (1994) investigate the consequences of the rise of the electronic mail as “a new electronic medium of organizational communication” (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 316) in order to track the evolution of the memo genre. Yates and Orlikowski draw the following distinction between genre and medium: “[m]edia are the physical means by which communication is created, transmitted or stored. Genres are typified communicative actions invoked in recurrent situation and characterized by similar substance and form” (Yates & Orlikowski 1992, 319). Their research demonstrates that features of the traditional memo genre are embedded into the new medium of electronic mail, whose properties lead to an evolution of the genre, so as to comply with the demands for faster communication of today’s organizations. Further, not only does the new medium offer a new context to which familiar genres may be imported, but

also where new genres may be established. The implications carried by new media on genre conventions may then be associated with those usually brought about by the social situation, which according to New Rhetoricians determines genre production. To put it in Orlikowski and Yates's (1994) terms,

[g]enre [...] may be particularly useful for conceptualizing and investigating the introduction, use, and influence of new media in organizations. By examining the structuring of communicative practices in detail, we should be able to gain insights into the types of changes that may occur as a result of introducing new media. Just as people import established genres into new situations, we speculate that they may import established genres into a newly introduced medium. [...] Similarly, we might see the development of genre variants and new genres in new media, just as communities develop variants and new genres over time. (Orlikowski & Yates 1994, 572)

This specific approach to new media adopted by New Rhetoricians is brought to the fore by Kankaaranta (2005), who stresses the fact that "consideration of medium as an aspect of the form of genre, in the North American New Rhetoric tradition in particular, implies that the media are situated in the social practices of the organization, and an attempt is made to understand the use in relation to the interplay between the media and the social practice" (Kankaaranta 2005, 77). In this sense, the new medium offers new capabilities for communication, while becoming a source of insights into the changes introduced in professional genres.

While accounting for the changes that genres have undergone due to the introduction of the Web medium, researchers as for instance Shepherd and Watters (1998) and Crowston and Williams (2000) have propounded taxonomies of web-mediated genres. Shepherd and Watters (1998) argue that the combination of computers and of the Internet (which they regard as a medium, and so they employ the term as a synonym of Web) has led to the introduction of a new class of genres which they label *cybergenres*. Cybergenres exist by virtue of the new medium, which affords possibilities that differ from those of traditional media.

Starting from this assumption, Shepherd and Watters argue that cybergenres are to be characterized not only in terms of content and form, as in the case of non-digital genres, but also in terms of functionality. According to the authors, "functionality refers to capabilities now available through the new medium" (Shepherd & Watters 1998, 3), and it is this factor that determines the emergence, evolution and persistence of cybergenres. In their study, Shepherd and Watters divide cybergenres into two main categories, i.e. *extant* and *novel cybergenres*. On the one side, extant cybergenres are those that pre-existed the new medium. These in turn can be divided into replicated, which reproduce almost faithfully their source

genres, and variant, which have evolved from their source genres, taking advantage of the properties of the medium, for example by including videos and images, as well as hyperlinks. On the other side, novel cybergenres are those that depend on the new medium for their existence. Novel cybergenres can be further categorized as emergent, when they represent the last stage of the evolution of other genres that have initially migrated to the new medium. In Shepherd and Watters's term, "[t]he typical evolutionary path [of emergent cybergenres] is from simple replication through variant to emergent" (Shepherd & Watters 1998, 3). In turn, novel cybergenres can be categorized as spontaneous when they are completely new and have no counterpart in other media. However, with regard to both emergent and spontaneous cybergenres, it is the author's stance that "[t]he primary distinguishing feature of these genres is a level of functionality that makes it fully dependent for its existence on the new medium" (Shepherd & Watters 1998, 3).

The taxonomy suggested by Shepherd and Watters (1998) illustrates the characteristics of web-mediated genres in relation to the medium in which they are embedded. Yet, the relevance of this contribution in the context of my study relies above all on the conceptualization of functionality which the authors propose. This in fact seems to bear more insights than any attempt at classification, since tracking the evolution of genres on the Web with a view to organizing them into more or less precise classes may prove to be a hard task due to the lightning-fast advances in communication technology. Instead, the introduction of the concept of functionality, with its focus on the properties of the Web that influence genre realizations, seem to provide useful analytical tools to cope with the practices of online corporate communication. As a matter of fact, this concept and its implications can be gleaned from the work of other scholars (as for example Bolaños Medina, Rodríguez Medina, Bolaños Medina, Losada García, 2005, see § 5.1), who have theorized it in different ways, thus offering their own views regarding the general properties afforded by the Web medium.

Similarly to Shepherd and Watters, Crowston and Williams (2000) propound a taxonomy of web-mediated genres. First of all, the authors draw on the research conducted by Yates and Orlikowski (1992) and Orlikowski and Yates (1994), and they apply the notion of genre to illustrate the phenomenon of the World Wide Web. The authors highlight the fact that, since its implementation, the World Wide Web has attracted the interest of individuals, companies and institutions, with an urge to establish their presence in the new medium. While acknowledging this facet of the phenomenon, Crowston and Williams (2000) feel the need to explore the ways in which the adoption of the Web has determined "the adaptation of existing genres and the emergence of new ones" (Crowston & Williams 2000, 202).

Relying on the conceptualization of genre and genre repertoire outlined by Yates and

Orlikowski (1992) and Orlikowski and Yates (1994), Crowston and Williams argue that the Word Wide Web is a stimulating arena to put these notions to test, since the Web is characterized by a series of properties that foster the emergence of new genres, with a high degree of experimentation. Another advantage of research on the Web is that data are easy to be collected. In addition, individuals who rely on the discursive conventions of their professional community enjoy a certain degree of freedom in developing generic forms on the Web, as they do not need any official enforcement to do this, as it usually happens within organizations. To conclude, a great number of communities gather and communicate on the Web, carrying on their experiences, practices and purposes. This diversity makes research about genre on the Web stimulating but also difficult, due to the unpredictability of the audience's numerous expectations.⁶ However, from the properties of the medium listed here, it ensues that “the resulting genre repertoire of a collection of web pages will be the result of the interactions among communities” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 204).

In order to account for the genres available on the Web at the time of their research, Crowston and Williams mapped and coded a sample of one hundred randomly selected web pages. As a result of their in-depth analysis, they grouped the web pages into genres which they decided to call *reproduced* and *adapted*. The former reproduce genres already established in traditional media, while the latter are the result of the “adaptation to the capabilities or needs of the new media” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 207).

In addition to reproduced and adapted genres, Crowston and Williams map a number of pages that seem to be novel genres. As the authors put it, [t]hese new page have new genres because they serve communicative purposes unique to the web” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 208). The novel (or *emergent genres*) mapped by Crowston and Williams are homepages, hotlists and topical homepages,⁷ pages about web servers and interactive pages. At the time of their research, Crowston and Williams were able to find only eleven instances of new genres. It is now reasonable to assume that the number of these novel genres on the Web has

⁶ The relevance of genre-based Web studies and the heterogeneous nature of the Web audience are admitted by Roussinov, Crowston, Nilan, Kwasnik, Cai & Liu (2001) too, who argue that “[t]he Web is an interesting setting for studying genres, because there are many communities meeting on the Web, bringing experiences with different genres and using the Web for many different purposes. [...] In many [...] cases, however, the audience is unpredictable. [...] Indeed, it is unlikely that there is a single Web community at all. Therefore, the resulting genre repertoire of a collection of Web pages will be the result of interactions among communities” (Roussinov *et al.* 2001, 1-2).

⁷ The difference between homepages and topical homepages can be explained relying on the definitions offered by Crowston and Williams (2000). On the one side, homepages include “personal or organizational information plus links to other pages reflecting the subject's interest”, and they aim at “introduc[ing] the person or organization to the world and to facilitate further contact” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 208). On the other side, topical homepages aim at providing access to information about a given topic, and in this sense their purpose is similar to that of hotlists. However, hotlists only gather sets of links related to a given topic, whereas topical homepages are characterized by a higher informational value, since they include information about the topic itself too (Crowston & Williams 2000).

increased sharply due to the fast innovation that characterizes communication technology, and due to the advent of new communication demands that have arisen on the Web. Accordingly, some genres that were popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s may have evolved over time, or become obsolete in case they were not up to the new communication needs, and so they have been eventually discarded. Finally, Crowston and Williams admit some difficulties in categorizing some pages in generic terms. This is the case when the form of the web page is new, and its purpose not yet recognized. Nonetheless, the authors argue that these pages “may be examples of genres in the process of adaptation to the Web. [...] [T]hey are usually seen as variants of an accepted genre, missing some features and possibly adding others” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 2009).

Alongside their taxonomy of the genres available on the Web at the time of their research, what seems to be meaningful in Crowston and Williams’s categorization, also in keeping with the aims of my study, is the emphasis placed on interactivity and hyperlinking. In fact, the interactivity implied in the medium and the presence of hyperlinks make genre adaptation possible. The interactive tools integrated in web pages include submission forms, search engines and discussion groups. As regards hyperlinks, their presence contribute to the surge of novel genres, while often enabling one page to achieve more than one purpose. For example, a series of links on a web page can function as a list or as an index, as in the case of the table of contents included in paper abstracts, which provide a straightforward access to the pages of the document. Interactivity and hyperlinking are properties of the Web medium, which impact on the organization of information. The remainder of this sections surveys other contributions investigating the properties of the Web medium.

To start with, the crucial role of hyperlinks in the process of meaning construction on the Web has been acknowledged by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005).⁸ The authors maintain that the properties of the Web bestow specific features on the genres hosted by the medium, and they draw on the Swalesian framework of genre analysis (Swales 1990) to assess the generic status of homepages. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) rely on the assumption that, in order to analyse genres transmitted by the Web medium, “it is necessary to incorporate the notion of ‘medium’ into the notion of ‘genre’” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 121). In fact, the authors argue that texts on the Web cannot be regarded as static objects of inquiry, due to the characteristics of the medium which contribute to shaping the aspect and function of web-genres. In this sense, according to Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen, the Web medium “should not be seen only as an important contextual feature of web

⁸ In their article, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) use the terms ‘Internet’ and ‘World Wide Web’ interchangeably, hence they refer to the Internet not in relation to the global network of computers but in relation to the communication medium.

genres; rather the WWW is an integrated part of web genres. This means that [...] the medium adds unique properties to the web genre in terms of production, function and reception which cannot be ignored in the genre characterisation” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 225).

Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen focus on two properties that underpin the realization of web genres. These are *multi-medianess*⁹ on the one side, and *hypertext* and *hyper-reading* on the other. Multi-medianess refers to the fact the Web functions as a medium encompassing a variety of other media, thus allowing web user to read text, watch videos, and listen to audio files. Hypertext deals with the way in which information is organized and transmitted on the Web, i.e. via hyperlinks connecting different blocks of text, also known as nodes. Hence, hypertext is “a non-sequential text system” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 126) that places some constraints on the production and reception of texts on the Web. As a consequence, from the perspective of the web user, a hypertext can be accessed in multiple ways thanks to the presence of the links connecting the nodes, which allow a personalized navigation within the hypertext itself. This specific way to access hypertexts give rise to a non-linear type of reading, which is defined hyper-reading (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005).

Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen further investigate the process by which texts on the Web are accessed drawing on the conceptualization of the ways in which electronic texts can be approached proposed by Finneman (2001). Finneman defines three possible ways to access an electronic text: reading “as usual”, navigating and browsing, and editing. For the purpose of their research, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) outline two modes, the reading mode and the navigating mode, and they provide the following explanation:

[t]he “reading mode” leaves the user in a traditional reader position with sequential reading as the guiding principle (similar to traditional reading, no matter whether the actual reading is strictly linear or not). The “navigating mode” allows the reader to navigate the site and actively construct his/her own reading path through one or several sites. So when consuming web texts, the web user employs two different cognitive capacities and demonstrates two different types of behaviour when s/he shifts from the reading to the navigating mode and vice versa. (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 127)

To sum up, when users approach a web document in the reading mode, they act as readers, and they zoom in on the document as if it were printed out, whereas they act as navigators whenever they approach a document in the navigating mode, thus zooming out of it, and taking advantage of the properties of the medium.

⁹ Petroni (2011) refers to this property as multimediality, and she sets it apart from the property of multimodality, which also characterizes communication via Web, by stating that multimediality concerns the notion of medium, whereas multimodality concerns the notion of semiotic mode. In turn, as I will point out in § 3.3.1, modes denote “technologies of representation”, whereas media denote “technologies of distribution” (Jewitt 2004, 184).

In order to account for the effects of the medium on Web genre realizations, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen apply these two different modes in order to analyse the rhetorical structure of the homepage introducing the corporate website of a Danish food company, Danisco A/S.¹⁰ The reason supporting this document choice is given by the fact that homepages have emerged with the advent of the World Wide Web. Thus, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen consider the homepage a web-generated genre,¹¹ which they define as

the top-level document of a web site which performs two overall functions. First it introduces the user to the general content of the site by presenting the 'informative' tables of contents and providing 'enticing' text bits. Secondly, it functions as the official gateway of the web site as it enables the reader to access and navigate the site by providing navigational tools or links that branch off into the web site as a whole. (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 123-124)

The homepage appears as a two-dimensional document, where the realization of textual features is influenced by the properties of the medium. As a consequence, when extending the genre framework to the analysis of homepages, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen not only take into account the communicative purpose, the move structure and the rhetorical features of homepages, but also their hypertextual nature, which depends on the medium in which they are embedded. Starting from these premises, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen propound a two-dimensional model for the analysis of web-mediated genres, which is graphically represented in Figure 3.5 below.

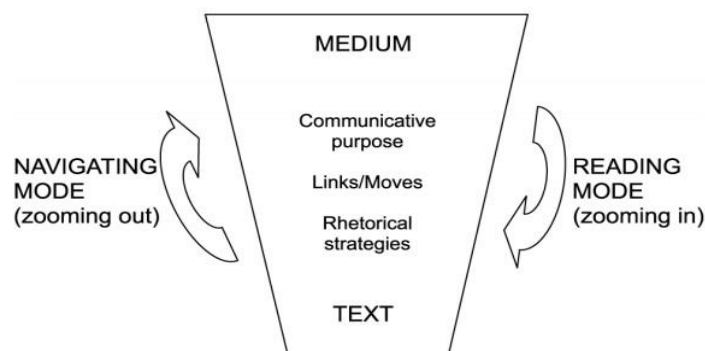


FIGURE 3.5. The two-dimensional genre model (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 127).

¹⁰ The authors limit their analysis to just one sample, since they do not aim at outlining a taxonomy of Web genres, nor at bringing to the fore the communication practices implemented on the Web with regard to a specific domain. The rationale behind Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's choice is that of developing an analytical framework that copes with the interplay of genre and medium in the Web environment (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005).

¹¹ Although Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) consider the homepage a new genre, they suggest that this web-generated genre shares some of its characteristics with two traditional genres, namely the *exordium* and the front page of newspapers. The *exordium* is a promotional spoken genre belonging to the classical Greek rhetoric, serving as an introduction to oral speeches, in order to outline the content of the speech itself. The newspaper front page is a printed genre, which is characterized by a promotional function too, and which aims at detailing the content of newspapers.

This model implies that web users establish whether the document is to be approached in the reading or in the navigating mode, and that they are in position to switch from one mode to the other, according to their demands. Further, in the reading mode, the constellation of communicative purpose, moves and rhetorical strategies will be applied to guide the analysis of a web document, whereas in the navigating mode, the constellation of communicative purpose, links and rhetorical strategies will be applied. Finally, from this model it becomes apparent the text receiver plays a crucial role in the communication process, since s/he determines whether the document is relevant in terms of its textual features or in terms of its medium properties.

Thus, when applying the reading mode to the analysis of a homepage, the authors argue that its main communicative purpose is that of introducing the website. As a matter of fact, “the homepage is a condensation of the most important information on the site and serves as a swift, brief, and scannable site introduction. The homepage does not provide the reader with a complete overview of the entire site [...]. Instead it presents a selection of topics” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 130). Besides this informative function about the content of the website to which it belongs, the homepage fulfils two secondary purposes, that of establishing and supporting the sender’s image on the one side, and that of presenting global or local news items. In the first case, the homepage contributes to the process of image construction,¹² whereas in the second case the homepage act as a type of news genre, displaying similarities with the front page of newspapers.¹³ Conversely, when applying the navigating mode, the purpose of the homepage is that of providing access to the other pages of the website. This is possible thanks to the presence of hyperlinks on the homepage.

The functional units of a homepage are realized in terms of moves in the reading mode, whereas in the navigating mode they are represented by the hyperlinks. In the first case, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen apply the Swalesian model (Swales 1990) to outline the rhetorical structure of the homepage, and they pin down a list of prototypical moves that can be implemented on corporate homepages for textual organization. These moves are attracting attention, greeting, identifying sender, indicating content structure, detailing (selected) content, establishing credentials, establishing contact, establishing a (discourse) community,

¹² As discussed later in this work, this function of homepages is particularly relevant in the case of corporate websites, as they contribute to establishing corporate image, thus supporting effective corporate communication.

¹³ The categorization of homepages laid out by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen in terms of main purpose (informative) and secondary purposes (promotional and news-giving) may prompt homepages to be regarded in terms of colony of genres (Bhatia 2004). In this sense, a homepage can be regarded as a primary member of the colony of reporting genres, as its main purpose is to provide information. Beside this, the homepage can be considered a secondary member of the colony of promotional genres on the one side, since it contributes to the process of the construction of the sender’s image, and of the colony of the news genres on the other, since it presents news items too.

promoting an external organization (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005). When the homepage is accessed in the navigating mode, hyperlinks, which are “inherent property of the web medium as such” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 132), play an equivalent role to moves in the reading mode. They are realized by clickable objects that allow the navigator to move from one web page to another. As a consequence, their functional value depend on the relationship that can be established between web pages. In other words, “[l]inks do more than simply guide the navigator from one place to another. Links add meaning to the chunks of information that they connect, as they postulate a relationship between the two information units connected by the link” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 133). This function of the hyperlinks is consistent with the communicative purpose of the homepage in the navigating mode, which is to guide the navigator towards other pages on the website.

The authors further investigate the types of hyperlinks available on a homepage by dividing them into two groups. The former includes those hyperlinks that are usually placed in the upper section of a homepage and direct towards general topic section within the website. These hyperlinks are called *generic links*, and they are often incorporated into a navigation bar. They have a high information value, they are static and descriptive, and they are usually realized by a noun phrase. The latter group includes those hyperlinks on a homepage that are designed to prompt the navigator to visit the rest of the website. Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen call these hyperlinks *specific links*: they are placed further down the homepage, they lead to specific information within the website, and they are subject to change. Linguistically, specific links are realized by a lead, often accompanied by a clickable object that can be realized by an icon or by such meta-textual elements as “read more”. Generic links and specific links contribute in different way to the achievement of the communicative purpose of the homepage. On the one hand, generic links provide the navigator with an overview of the content of the website, which is in line with the informative function of the homepage. This is a feature of homepages that make them look like newspaper front pages. On the other hand specific links give prominence to certain topics within the website, thus making the homepage more attractive, in keeping with the promotional nature of the homepage.

In the last stage of their analysis, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen unfold the rhetorical strategies implemented on homepages in the two different modes. In order to account for the reading mode, the authors concentrate on two moves that they consider particularly relevant for the overall purpose of the homepage, i.e. *attracting attention* and *establishing credentials*. Both moves rely on different semiotic modes and are realized by a range of verbal, visual and audiovisual elements. In particular, the attracting attention move on the Danisco homepage is

textually realized by slogans, puns, and by lexical choices such as “new”, “recent” and “today”. As regards the establishing credentials move, the authors argue that this move is textually realized by the presence of the company slogan, which in turn is accompanied by the company logo, which is a visual item. Other visual items contributing to the realization of this move are the colour scheme, the font choice, as well as any other elements associated with the message sender, such as pictures of the company’s premises. When tackling the navigating mode, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen focus their attention on the ways in which the hyperlinks are realized, that is implicitly or explicitly. When hyperlinks are realized implicitly, the navigator becomes aware of them only once s/he places the mouse cursor on the link itself. The navigator understands s/he has hit a hyperlink if the cursor takes on the shape of a pointed hand, or if the clickable object undergoes a transformation in colour or in shape, or if a menu is revealed. Conversely, when hyperlinks are realized explicitly, they are immediately apparent to the navigator. In this case, the links are rendered by a series of strategies including icons, underlined texts, colour shifts in texts, meta-texts, and meta-texts combined with colour shifts and underlining.

All in all, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen’s study is an attempt to extend the traditional genre model devised by Swales (1990) to account for web-mediated genres. In doing this, they incorporate in their discussion of genre a discussion of medium as well, and they devise a two-dimensional model which integrates the two different modes in which a web document can be approached, that is, by reading it or by navigating it. Accordingly, in Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen’s model, hyperlinks gain prominence, since they do not only enable navigation from one text chunk to another, but they are also semantically loaded, as they provide meaningful relationships between text chunks. Relying on these assumptions, it is the authors’ contention that “web genres cannot be characterised as genres in isolation from their medium” (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, 138), and so they question the presence of a clear-cut distinction between genre and medium. As I will explain later, this duality of genre and medium in web documents is controversial, and it has been further discussed by other researchers, in an attempt to clarify the relationship and the interplay between these two notions.

After having surveyed Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen’s model, which foregrounds the role of hyperlinking as one of the properties of the Web that contributes to the process of meaning construction, I would like to integrate the set of properties that characterize the Web medium by relying on Garzone’s (2007) conceptual framework. Garzone builds upon the premise that in the context of the World Wide Web the need has emerged “to develop conceptual frameworks to cope with the complexity and the novelty of new multimedia

constellations” (Garzone 2007, 15). Hence the question arises as to whether it is still possible to tap into the traditional theories of discourse analysis, or whether it is necessary to orchestrate alternative strategies, to deal with web-mediated documents. According to Garzone,

traditional models and categories of linguistic and textual analysis are not in themselves inadequate, but their use should be accompanied by the development of a conceptual framework able to incorporate analytical categories suitable for a textual configuration which includes not only text, but also non-linguistic, non-linear elements – visual, iconic and functional (links, toolbars, buttons). (Garzone 2007, 15-16)

First of all, the author banks on the assumption that communication on the Web relies on pre-existing genres, thus triggering a process of genre migration. This process has entailed both the reproduction of traditional genres which have been transferred to the Web without undergoing any relevant changes, as in the case of the book and of the academic article, as well as the adaptation of other genres that have evolved as a consequence of their migration to the new medium. However, the medium has fostered the surge of genres that do not exist in hard copy, as demonstrated in the research conducted by Crowston and Williams (2000), and Garzone (2007) acknowledges the fact that the number of web-generated genres is bound to increase.

Garzone mentions Askehave and Swales’s (2001) attempt to revise the concept of purpose as a guiding principle, and to emphasize such factors as “structure, style, content and context” (Garzone 2007, 18), in order to assess generic status. This is in line with Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen’s (2005) inclusion of the notion of medium into the discussion of web-generated genre, although Garzone warns against conflating the notion of genre with that of medium. As a consequence, Garzone argues for “a revision of the whole set of analytical tools so that the 'media' element is tightly incorporated into the notion of genre, thus determining its overall re-adjustment as a system”. In fact, with regard to the impact of new technologies on communication, the author states that “there is a direct relationship between the options made available by technologies and the generic characteristics of communicative events”.

To such an extent, Garzone lays out eight factors, or affordances,¹⁴ that are to be considered for the repurposing and the classification of web-mediated genres. These are *immateriality*, *extension* *in* *participation* *framework*, *multimodality*,

¹⁴ The term 'affordance' was first introduced by Gibson, an American psychologist, to designate everything that the environment offers to animals, “either for good or for ill” (Gibson 1979, 127), and later applied to the processes of Human-Machine/Human-Computer Interaction by Norman (1988[2013]). More specifically, Agar adopts the term to refer to communication media, and he argues that “the technical affordances of each medium conditions how it can be used” (Agar 1998, 83). In more recent years, Miller and Shepherd (2009) and Berkenkotter (2012) have talked about affordances in relation to weblogs, or blogs, which is one of the most popular forms of communication on the World Wide Web, as elucidated further on in this section.

hypertextuality/hypermediality, co-articulation and interactivity, multiple reading modes, intertextuality and granularity, and they are elucidated by Garzone as follows:

1. Immateriality refers the fact that web documents are not always provided with a printed counterpart, and they may be updated, replaced or withdrawn from the Web.
2. Extension in participation framework refers to the property of the Web to be accessed by a global audience. This carries two implications. Firstly, a web document can be accessed virtually by anyone surfing the Internet, including those individuals who approach a given document by chance. As a result of this global availability, the authors of web documents have implemented promotional strategies to increase the potential of information dissemination on the Web. Secondly, since the Web prompts a straightforward contact towards its audience, the medium also fosters a I-you relationship between message sender and message receiver, with a high incidence of first and second person pronouns.
3. Multimodality designates the integration of different semiotic modes in the communicative event.
4. Hypertextuality/hypermediality, as already stated above, deals with the properties of web documents to be connected to each other by means of hyperlinks.
5. Co-articulation and interactivity depend on the property of hypertextuality/hypermediality. Web documents are co-articulated, in the sense that the different options in which they can be accessed have been devised beforehand by web designers. However, web documents are also interactive, since web users participate in the unfolding of the different ways in which hypertexts are linked to each other by choosing their own navigating paths.
6. The affordance related to the multiple reading modes of web documents builds upon Askehave and Elleurp Nielsen's (2005) conceptualization of the reading and navigating modes, and it implies that text chunks constituting hypertexts are connected by hyperlinks in meaningful ways. The web user switches from one mode to the other by activating different cognitive abilities.
7. Iptertextuality, which is a property of traditional printed genres too, is inherent in Web communication, as text chunks in hypertexts exist and have meaning in relation to each other.
8. Granularity refers to the division of discourse into blocks in order to facilitate their visualization on the screen. This puts some constraints on the amount of information to be displayed, since this should fit the screen in order to avoid continuous scrolling on the part of the navigator. Hence, it is more advisable to provide access via

hyperlinks to those elements that do not fit the screen, instead of placing them on the low section of the web page. As a consequence of granularity, Bondi (2009) observes that writing for the Web is characterized by a *block style*, i.e. discourse is divided into sequences of smaller, coherent, independent units, with a limited number of words” (Bondi 2009, 116). Over and above this, sentences and paragraph are mainly connected in a paratactical way.

All in all, Garzone advocates a multiple approach that is meant to appropriately account for the complexity of genres in the World Wide Web. The idea underlying the affordances articulated by the author is to provide the researcher with analytical tools that integrate the notion of purpose. In fact, although genres retain their social purpose when migrating to the Web, they enact it in relation to the affordances offered by the Web environment. It can thus be concluded that the primacy of purpose as a guiding principle to assess genre status is retained yet demoted to a certain degree, in line with the developments in ESP studies elucidated in § 3.1.3 above.

A further discussion of genre realizations in the Web medium is conducted in the volume *Genres in the Internet: Issues in Theory of Genre* edited by Giltrow and Stein (2009). The aim of this volume is to collect the contributions of researchers from various disciplinary domains, from business to literary studies, which present different views of the discursive processes in the field of Computer-Mediated Communication. As a matter of fact, the editors contend that CMC is the most appropriate arena “for the testing, comparing, and revising of concepts of genre” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 1), due to the fluid and dynamic nature that characterize its discursive practices.

The aim of the introduction by Giltrow and Stein is to bring to the fore “the theoretical issues surrounding theories of genres, as catalysed by Internet¹⁵ genres” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 2). Building upon the definitions of genre suggested by scholars in the past, the editors stress the importance of the notion of genre as a means to reduce the complexities subsuming language and discourse. In fact the editors argue that “[i]f a piece of discourse receives its identity through belonging to a certain genre, this highlights the achievement of genres in reducing complexity and making comprehension and communication feasible in the first place” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 6).

However, the advent of the Internet and of new media has afforded a new communication context, hence the need has emerged to reconsider the traditional categories used to define discursive practices. In particular, Giltrow and Stein raise the following

¹⁵ Also in this work, the term ‘Internet’ is used by the authors to indicate the Web medium.

questions:

- Does a new medium automatically make for a new genre? Is it possible for a traditional genre in the spoken or written media to migrate into the Internet without loss of identity? How much can be lost or changed for a genre to retain its identity? Is it possible to have stability of genre across the medium change?
- Do genres on the Internet automatically possess properties that the traditional spoken and written genres do not have? Are there systematic changes to genres in cases where genres are held to have felicitously migrated into the Internet?
- If new genres are to be found, what is their relationship to previous genres? Do all genres have some sort of ancestry? How is such ancestry to be conceptualized? (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 9)

According to Giltrow and Stein, genres on the Web are volatile and shape-shifting. This is in line with the tendency of the medium towards change. Hence, in the World Wide Web “[t]here is a constant and fast proliferation of genres—or forms of communication, that are candidates for being a genre” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 9). It follows that it is difficult to assign full generic status to the forms of communication that emerge on the Web. The authors refer to this forms of communications as *genre-lets*, since they do not constitute typified instances of discourse. To this concern, Giltrow and Stein quote the example of the email, and question its status as a fully-fledged genre. Nonetheless, the authors admit that the email “enables several genres” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 10), and so it could be categorized as a superordinate genre, or a hypergenre. To put it in the authors’ terms, “[t]he problem [...] is to find the bracketings, or establish types and their boundaries, and it may well be that bracketings taken over from traditional spoken and written genres will not do any more, and new abstractions have to be found” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 10). Hence it becomes apparent that it is not possible to rely on the abstractions traditionally used to establish the status of genres in the spoken and written media when it comes to the definition of the boundaries delimiting categories of superordinate genres in the Web medium. The task of researchers of Web genres will be then to “encourage theory to establish what would count as mid-levels for study, between superordinate and genre-let” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 10). In this sense, superordinate genres seem to represent genres at the highest level of abstraction, whereas genre-lets represent the lowest level of abstraction. Beside this, the authors stress the fact that the set of Web genres is open, not only because new genres are created “to answer newly defined exigence” (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 10), but also because genres may be subject to withdrawal, when the conditions of this exigence cease to exist.

In addition, Giltrow and Stein contend that the function of Web genres changes often, and this has an impact on their linguistic form. In fact, it is hard to establish a form-function correlation in Web genres, due to the lack of established linguistic conventions. Banking on

this assumption, the authors downplay the role of language as a criterion to help defining genre status on the Web, while advocating a pragmatic-functional type of description.

By the same token, Giltrow and Stein problematize the notion of text in relation to CMC. The editors question the meaning and role of hypertext as well, although this notion has been devised in the context of CMC and has been so often deployed by other researchers to shed light on the organization of communicative forms embedded in the Web medium. To put it in the authors' terms, the Web environment "has given rise to new technical possibilities of whatever is the 'text' in the new medium. The term 'hypertext' is ambiguous in this context: it refers to meta-text linking text chunks, and, at the same time, to new ways of constructing individualized and modularized text chunks" (Giltrow & Stein 2009, 12). The stance that Giltrow and Stein take in relation to text and hypertext may seem daring, yet, by challenging these notions, the authors imply that the new medium possesses specific capabilities and constraints that distinguish it from traditional spoken and written media. It becomes clear, then, that the introduction by Giltrow and Stein raises a range of questions that should be taken into account by analysts researching genres on the Web. Beside this, a suggestion is made to abandon or at least to revise traditional criteria for genre analysis so as to cope with the dynamic nature of CMC in the most appropriate way.

The volume edited by Giltrow and Stein includes contributions investigating one particular form of Web communication, the blog. Blogs emerged in the late 1990s as a sort of online diary, then they began to adapt to other communication needs, and new forms soon developed, as for example the public affairs blog, the corporate blog and the travel blog, to name a few. Due to its dynamic nature, the blog instantiates one of the factors of the medium in which it is embedded, i.e. change, as stressed by Miller and Shepherd (2009) in the last contribution in the volume. Due to its unstable nature and its adaptability to various communicative functions, the blog is considered by the editors and by the contributors of the volume apt to inform an investigation of the properties of the Web medium.

In their contribution, Miller and Shepherd investigate the evolution of the blog in order to explicate the relationship between genre and medium. First of all, the authors draw their attention to the fact that it is problematic to regard genre as "a mark of recurrence" (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 264) in relation to the Web, since communication practices in this medium are subject to change. However, genres are inherently dynamic and flexible, so they can be adapted to changes. In fact, "[g]enres originate not only from changes in situation, context, and culture but also from other genres, in an evolutionary process, and occasionally from the conscious effort of individuals to fill a previously unmet need" (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 265).

Having acknowledged the fact that genres are susceptible to change, the authors seek to define what is recurrent and stable across forms of communication in the Web medium. In order to do this, the authors illustrate the historical development of the blog. This kind of investigation of the blog seems to exemplify the relationship between genre and medium, as well as the tension that exists between stability and dynamism in forms of communication on the Web. At the outset, blogs were mainly used by practitioners in the field of technology to share information, while later they became popular with the general public too, and nowadays personal blogs are used in the same way as those printed genres such as the personal diary or journal were used before the advent of the Web. This popularity has been enhanced by the introduction of integrated tools that have allowed individuals to manage their own blogs.

However, not only technical affordances, but also the social context has contributed to the success of blogs, since these seem to respond to the demands of the public that has grown dissatisfied with mainstream communication media. In this sense, blogs have soon provided tools to discuss about social and political issues, extending the possibility to participate in the debate to a wide audience. In this way, public affair blogging has emerged as a form communication different from personal blogs, with different underlying purposes.

Having sketched the evolution of blogging, the author claim that blog are “native” to the Web, “since they could not exist as they do in another medium” (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 281). For this reason they can be employed as a benchmark to conceptualize the relationship between genre and medium. Blogs are native to the Web because they depend on the affordances of this medium for their existence. According to Miller and Shepherd, the affordances of the Web are

properties of information and interaction that can be put to particular cognitive and communicative uses. Links, instant distribution, indexing and searching, interactivity, and other features of the internet constitute affordances that differ from those of print media, and a specific configuration of affordances is what constitutes the blog as distinct form from other internet media. (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 281)

In addition to this, the author argue that the affordances of a medium do not create communicative exigences, rather they potentiate exigences that have not yet been addressed. It can be concluded that new genres emerge “from the combination of exigence and affordances, along with the modelling of forms and topoi offered by antecedent genres” (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 283). Relying on these premises, Miller and Shepherd contend that the blog “is a technology, a medium, a constellation of affordances—not a genre”¹⁶ (Miller &

¹⁶ The fact that the blog is regarded by Miller and Shepherd as a medium embedded in another medium, i.e. the World Wide Web, is in line with the property of multi-medianess (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005) or multimediality (Petroni 2011) of the Web itself, which is a channel of transmission allowing for the presence

Shepherd 2009, 281), although at the outset genre and medium seemed to conflate in this form of communication. To put it in the authors' terms, at the beginning "[t]he genre and the medium, the social action and its instrumentality, fit so well that they seemed coterminous [...]. As the cluster of affordances multiplied repeatedly, recurring again and again on the screen, reproducing and creating expectations, the blogging medium itself seemed motivation for all that rhetorical action" (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 283). Accordingly, the evolution of blogging can be compared to that of other forms of communication that are considered media by the authors, such as the letter, the memo and the email among others: "when they were new, the medium was the genre; but adoption and experimentation led to differentiation and multiplication of genres anchored in the same medium" (Miller & Shepherd 2009, 284). From the conceptualization devised by Miller and Shepherd (2009) it is apparent that genre and medium are to be considered as two distinct notions: genres originate from a given social action, and they can be enacted thanks to the inherent properties of the medium by which they are transmitted.

The discussion conducted so far has focused on the consequences of the World Wide Web on genre realizations, and on the theoretical issues encountered by researchers in their attempt to define new conceptual frameworks to deal with genres in the Web environment. In particular, it is interesting to notice that the contributions that have been surveyed have articulated the relationship between genre and medium in different ways. For example, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) seem to consider genre and medium as faces of the same phenomenon, while Garzone (2007) claims that genre and medium are separate entities. Here it is argued that the concepts of genre and medium, although interrelated, are not to be mingled, so as to avoid over-generalization. Furthermore, by distinguishing between genre on the one side and medium on the other, it is possible to draw upon their specific properties for the functioning of communication in the Web environment.

The above arguments lead to the conclusion that in the context of communication via Web, traditional categories of genre classification should be revised in the light of the properties of the medium. As elucidated in this section, the properties of the medium have been defined in different ways: for example, Shepherd and Watters (1998) have talked about the functionality of cybergenres, whereas Garzone (2007) has laid out eight affordances to analyse genres on the Web. The contributions that have been surveyed in this section provide different perspectives that can be integrated to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between genre and the Web medium. Hence it is clear that the Web is not only a channel of transmission but also a driver of genre change and dynamism. The Web impacts on textual

organization and consumption, it affords new communication possibilities, while placing some constraints that need to be taken into consideration for effective communication.

All in all, the Web constitutes an invaluable resource for professional communicators, who need to develop apt strategies to exploit the potentialities of the medium when they address their heterogeneous audience, which in turn is determined by the pervasiveness of the medium, as well as a challenge for researchers, who need to re-contextualize and integrate traditional tools of genre analysis in accordance with the new properties of the medium, in order to articulate a conceptual frameworks that accounts for the multiple facets of the phenomenon of CMC. I will come back to these issues when presenting the materials of this study, i.e. corporate website, while the conceptual framework that has been devised here will inform my attempt to assess the generic status of corporate websites.

3.3. Visual communication and the grammar of visual design

In the previous section, the effects that the introduction of the Web have exerted on the relationship between genre and medium have been considered. In fact, the properties, or affordances (Norman 1988[2013], Agar 1998, Garzone 2007, Miller & Shepherd 2009, Berkenkotter 2012), of the Web have influenced online textual realizations, thus changing the ways in which meaning is constructed online. Drawing upon Spitzberg's (2006) assumption that in the domain of CMC the construction of meaning is not confined to language, but it lies with other semiotic modes¹⁷ too, in this and in the following section I will account for the affordance of multimodality in detail. The importance of multimodality has been acknowledged by linguists, who therefore have taken up this property with a view to expanding the number of methods deployed to analyse discourse. This has opened new avenues for the research that falls under the rubric of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). Hence, in § 3.3.1 I will bring into focus studies that have been conducted in the domain of MDA. The overall aim of the present discussion is to draw out some significant points regarding the interrelationship between discourse practices and other modes of representation.

As mentioned earlier in § 3.2.1, multimodality denotes the co-presence of different semiotic modes in one communicative event (Garzone 2007). Van Leeuwen (2005) identifies five modes of communication: the linguistic, the visual, the audio, the gestural and the spatial mode. As I will point out in the case of corporate websites (see § 5.1), communication in the

¹⁷ A clarification is appropriate here with regard to terminology. Given that research in multimodality from the perspective of discourse is relatively young, and it is still developing, the terminology used in this area is loose, as observed by O'Halloran (2011, see also § 3.3.1). For this reason, the terms 'mode' and 'semiotic mode' will be used interchangeably in this work.

Web domain relies not only on textual information (i.e. the linguistic mode) but also on images (the visual mode). In order to provide an appropriate theoretical framework about visual communication and its relationship with textual communication, I will take on board here the conceptualization brought forward by Kress and Van Leeuwen in *Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996[2006]). In this book, which has so far represented a turning point in the study of multimodality, the authors take up visual communication as an object of enquiry. In the Preface to the first edition, Kress and Van Leeuwen hold that, along with the linguistic mode, “a knowledge of other semiotic modes can open new perspectives on language” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], ix). Therefore, Kress and Van Leeuwen carry out an extensive investigation of how images convey meaning. In order to do so, the authors propound a ‘grammar’ of images or of visual design (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]).¹⁸

Kress and Van Leeuwen’s aim is “to develop a descriptive framework that can be used as a tool for visual analysis” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 13-14). To start with, they introduce the notion of grammar of visual design, a term which is mentioned in the sub-title of the book as well. The authors treat images as grammatical forms, and they set out to explore how these “are combined into meaningful wholes” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 1). Building upon these premises, Kress and Van Leeuwen’s “visual ‘grammar’ will describe the way in which depicted elements – people, places and things – combine in visual ‘statements’ of greater or lesser complexity and extension” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 1).

Kress and Van Leeuwen adopt a social semiotic approach to frame their visual grammar. As stated by Kress and Van Leeuwen, a social semiotic approach rests primarily on the concept of sign. A sign consists of a form (or *signifier*) that is chosen by the sign-maker to convey a certain meaning (or *signified*). Accordingly, Kress and Van Leeuwen summarize the main ideas subsuming their social semiotic with reference to communication and representation. On the one side, “[c]ommunication requires that participants make their messages maximally understandable in a particular context” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 13). However, it has to be born in mind that maximal understanding is affected by the social structures in which communication occurs, and that these social structures are determined by power relationships. Over and above this, “[r]epresentation requires that sign-makers choose forms for the expression of what they have in mind, forms which they see as most apt and plausible in a given context” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 13).

¹⁸ In the second edition of the book, they integrate their grammar by including moving images and colours, and by adding examples from CD-ROMs and websites. As a matter of fact, CD-ROMs and websites were omitted in the first edition in 1996, but in the second edition in 2006, their relevance in terms of their visual dimension is acknowledged.

In keeping with their social semiotic approach, the authors take Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1978, 1985a[2004], 1985b, see also § 2.1 in this work) as a springboard for their discussion. In fact, according to Halliday's approach to grammar, linguistic structures are not to be considered in isolation from meaning, but they are to be construed as "resources for encoding interpretations of experience and forms of social (inter)action" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 1). By the same token, the authors contend that "[l]ike linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 2).

Additionally, the authors place emphasis on the fact that the realization of meaning is culture-bound, hence "the way meanings are mapped across different semiotic modes, the way some things can, for instance, be 'said' either visually or verbally, others only visually, again others only verbally, is also culturally and historically specific" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 2). However, the authors go on to claim that expressing something verbally or visually affects meaning, even in those cases when meaning can, at least in theory, be encoded both visually and verbally. To put it in the authors' terms, "what is expressed in language through the choice between different word classes and clause structures, may, in visual communication, be expressed through the choice between different uses of colour or different compositional structures" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 2).

The grammar of visual design proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen is general, since it can be applied to visual artefacts such as oil paintings, magazine layout and scientific diagrams alike, but it is not universal, since it is limited to the Western culture. Kress and Van Leeuwen restrict their grammar to the Western culture, on the assumption that this has been the predominant culture so far.¹⁹ Beside this, the authors warn that nowadays visual communication is controlled by "the global/cultural technological empires of the mass media" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 5). As a matter of fact, mass media exert a normalizing influence on visual communication: on the one side they endorse those visual representations that are defined by prominent designers, while on the other side they distribute these representations by means of the technologies that are now available.

Going back to the relationship between language and images, the authors claim that "writing is itself a form of visual communication" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 17), and that both writing and other forms of visual communication can be deployed "to realize the 'same' systems of meaning that constitute our cultures" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 19), albeit they are characterized by their own forms, and hence their use is independent of

¹⁹ As it will be shown later on in this section, the fact that Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar accounts for the Western culture only will determine how left-right, top-bottom and centre-margin polarizations are construed.

each other. In order to demonstrate this, they give the example of the distinction between subjective and objective meaning. The authors bank on the assumption that this distinction can be encoded both linguistically and visually, but that the respective realizations will differ one another. As the authors put it,

in language an idea can be realized subjectively by using a ‘mental process verb’ like *believe* in the first person (e.g. *We believe there is a grammar of images*); or objectively through the absence of such a form (e.g. *There is a grammar of images*). Visual representation, too, can realize both subjectivity, through the presence of a perspectival angle, and objectivity, through its absence [...]. Mental process clauses and nominalization are unique to language. Perspective is unique to images. But the *kinds of meaning* expressed are from the same broad domain in each case [...]. Both language and visual communication express meanings belonging to and structured by cultures in the one society; the semiotic processes, though not the semiotic means, are broadly similar; and this results in a considerable degree of congruence between the two. (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 19, authors’ emphasis)

Further on in their discussion, Kress and Van Leeuwen provide examples of the different representations of transactional and locative relations across textual and visual communication. With regard to transactional relations, these can be textually encoded by action verbs, whereas they can be visually depicted in the form of vectors. With regard to locative relations, these can be textually conveyed by means of locative prepositions, whereas they can be visually rendered by creating a contrast between background and foreground. However, the authors caution that, despite the degree of congruence that exists between the two, linguistic and visual communication realize meaning by tapping into their own specific potentials on the one side, and withstanding their own specific limitations on the other side. It follows that “[n]ot everything that can be realized in language can also be realized by means of images, or vice versa” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 19). I will come back to this point several times during the present discussion, as it is a fundamental assumption to understand the interrelationship of language and visual representations in the context of multimodality.

From a historical point of view, the authors go on to observe that, in literate cultures such as the Western culture, visual representations have been traditionally subordinated to language.²⁰ In order to explain this, Kress and Van Leeuwen formulate the hypothesis that in literate cultures “the visual means of communication are rational expressions of cultural meanings, amenable to rational accounts and analysis”, yet “literate cultures have

²⁰ This can be exemplified by the fact that, when text and images are used in combination, language often imposes meaning on the images. However, depending on the composition, images may come first, hence carrying the meaning instead of the text. This is for example the case of representations in children's books (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]).

systematically suppressed means of analysis of the visual forms of representation” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 23), with the consequence that today the Western culture has no established theoretical framework to appropriately account for visual representation.

The social context is paramount to the ways in which visual communication is deployed. With regard to the place of visual communication within a certain social context, Kress and Van Leeuwen introduce the notion of *semiotic landscape*. This is characterized by “the range of forms or modes of public communication available in that society” on the one side, and by “their uses and valuations” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 35) on the other side. This notion is crucial in Kress and Van Leeuwen’s framework, since it relies on the fact that semiotic modes are affected not only by the medium used for communication, but also by “the requirements, histories and values of societies and their cultures” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 35). These in turn determine how the affordances of the medium are utilized for communication. Therefore it can be safely assumed that the semiotic landscape is shaped by social, cultural and economic factors. As for today’s globalized society, the authors argue that such factors as the advent of multiculturalism, the introduction of new communication technologies, and developments in transportation have blurred both social and semiotic boundaries. The authors recognize that this has had unprecedented consequences on language,²¹ since language is losing its hegemonic role as the semiotic mode *par excellence*. To put it in the authors’ terms, in today’s semiotic landscapes, “[t]he place, use, function and valuation of language in public communication [...] is moving from its former, unchallenged role as *the* mode of communication, to a role as one mode among others” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 35, authors’ emphasis). In line with Kress and Van Leeuwen’s conceptualization, questions arise about the status of written language in texts that integrate visual and textual communication, and about the ways in which information is disseminated. These questions will be accounted for in the analysis of the multimodal features of the companies’ websites selected for this study.

In their discussion, Kress and Van Leeuwen propound a range of categorizations to account for the elements included in a visual representation, and for the ways in which they are interrelated. In what follows, I will survey those categories that will be relevant for the purposes of my analysis. First of all, the authors conceptualize the elements (people, things and places) that are depicted in a visual representation as *participants*. In general, the shape which characterizes participants in a visual representations is meaningful. For instance, in the contemporary Western culture, “squares and rectangles are the elements of the mechanical,

²¹ Kress and Van Leeuwen also hint at the changes that the English language is undergoing as a result of globalizing processes, in both national and global settings.

technological order, of the world of human construction [...]. [R]ectangular shapes can be stacked, aligned with each other in geometrical patterns: they form the modules, the building blocks with which we construct our world” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 54). In opposition to this, circles are “self-contained, complete in themselves” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 54), and they are often associated with nature. To conclude, triangles are more similar to squares and rectangles, since they represent elements of the mechanical and technological world. Yet, they have a more dynamic nature, and they often imply the idea of a process.

Participants in a given visual representation interact in a *narrative process*. In a narrative process, participants are represented “as doing something to or for each other” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 59, authors’ emphasis). The interaction among participants in a narrative process is conveyed by the use of *vectors*. In abstract images such as diagrams, vectors may take on the form of an arrow, whereas in naturalistic representations of narrative processes where the participants are people, the directionality of the vector can be rendered by the eye direction from one participant to another. The participant from whom or from which the vector originates is the *Actor*, while the participant to whom or to which the vector is directed is defined as the *Goal*.

In a nutshell, a narrative process is a process where events and actions unfold. However, Kress and Van Leeuwen account also for those representations where participants are combined in a conceptual pattern, as for example in terms of class, structure, or meaning. These processes are defined as *classificational processes*. The relationship among participants in a classificational process is defined as a *taxonomy*. In taxonomies, “at least one set of participants will play the role of *Subordinates* with respect to at least one other participant, the *Superordinate*” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 79, authors’ emphasis). Kress and Van Leeuwen identify two different types of taxonomies, i.e. *covert* and *overt taxonomies*.

In covert taxonomies, the overarching category is not explicitly shown, hence “the Superordinate is inferred from such similarities as the viewer may perceive to exist between the Subordinates, or only indicated in the accompanying text” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 79), if there are any. However, the authors underscore the fact that in covert taxonomies “the proposed equivalence between the Subordinates is visually realized by a symmetrical composition” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 79). Thus, in covert taxonomies the Subordinates have an equal distance from each other, they have the same size as well as the same orientation towards the axis of the composition. The classification in covert taxonomies is described by Kress and Van Leeuwen as being stable and timeless. In order to produce this effect, “the participants [in covert taxonomies] are often shown in a

more or less objective, decontextualized way” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 79), that is, against a plain or neutral background, and with a reduced or no depth. To this, Kress and Van Leeuwen add that there are often words inside the representation.

As far as overt taxonomies are concerned, these explicitly order the Subordinates to its Superordinate in a diagrammatic tree structure. Usually, the tree structure is vertically oriented, and the Subordinates can be placed above or below the Superordinate. Besides, Kress and Van Leeuwen observe that overt taxonomies “are usually ‘chained’, so that the ‘intermediate’ participants [...] will be Superordinate with respect to some of the other participants, and Subordinate with respect to others” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 80). Kress and Van Leeuwen name these intermediate participants *Interordinates*. However, when the diagrammatic structure is horizontally oriented, a *flowchart* is obtained. Taxonomies and flowcharts differ in the kind of information they provide. The ones exhibit a hierarchical order in which the various elements are ranked “from the perspective of a single unifying term” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 84), namely the Superordinate, whereas the others articulate active processes in terms of beginning and end, as they unfold towards a certain goal. Finally, Kress and Van Leeuwen introduce a third and more recent type of diagram, i.e. the *network*. A network is a non-linear representation where the participants are defined as *node*. These are connected to each other by means of *links*, so that any node “can form an entry-point from which its environment can be explored” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 84). The links imply that the elements represented by the nodes are next or close to each other, or associated to each other. Figure 3.6 on the next page exemplifies these tree types of diagrammatic representations.

Kress and Van Leeuwen include in their discussion also *analytical processes*. Instead of representing a hierarchical order, or a progression, or an association among the participants, analytical processes combine participants in a part-whole structure. The participants in analytical processes are construed by Kress and Van Leeuwen in terms of *Carrier*, which is the whole, and a variety of *Possessive Attributes*, that is, the different parts that make up the whole. Kress and Van Leeuwen consider the pictures that are commonly used in advertisements as instances of analytical processes. As a matter of fact, in an advertisement, the product, i.e. the whole, can be conceived of as the Carrier, while its different parts are its Possessive Attributes. Analytical processes allow the viewer to identify the Carrier and examine its Possessive Attributes. This kind of representation can be exploited in advertisements, in keeping with the persuasive function of this kind of texts. The authors contend that images in advertisements might focus on the plethora of components that make up the product to be advertised, or they might focus on the product as a whole. The effect that

is conveyed might be “of an abundance of parts [...], or the alluring sensory quality of the product advertised as a whole [...] take precedence over more dispassionate scrutiny of the Possessive Attributes. Persuasion is foregrounded, instruction and exposition are backgrounded (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 89-90).

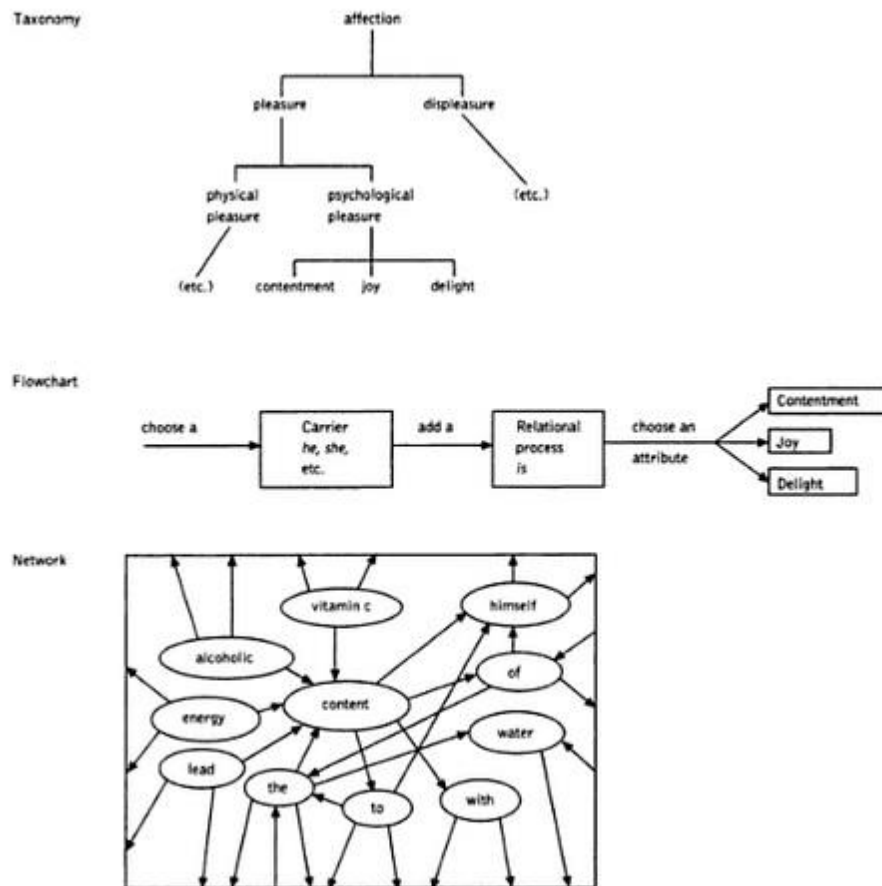


FIGURE 3.6. Taxonomy, flowchart and network (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 85).

Apart from the various relations among participants in a visual representation, I would like to account here for another factor that Kress and Van Leeuwen consider meaningful in a visual representation, that is, its *composition*. In Kress and Van Leeuwen's words, the composition is “the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 176). Composition is subsumed by three principles, i.e. *information value*, *salience* and *framing*. These principles apply not only to images in isolation, but also to composite visuals. Kress and Van Leeuwen define composite visuals as multimodal texts, that is, “visuals which combine text and image, and, perhaps, other graphic elements, be it on a page or on a television or computer screen” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 177). The

authors state that the way all these elements relate to each other is charged with meaning. Therefore, when analyzing multimodal texts, it is crucial to account for all these element in an integrated way. By the same token, it is the authors' contention that the layout of a visual representation is a further element upon which the principles of information value, salience and framing should be applied, since the layout is meaningful with reference to multimodal texts as a whole.

Going back to the principles of composition, information value is a function of the place occupied by the participants in a multimodal text, and it depends from the left and right, top and bottom, centre and margin areas of the image. With regard to the information value of left and right, Kress and Van Leeuwen rely on their analysis of pages in women's magazines. In the case of this type of multimodal text, the authors hold that elements which are placed on the left represent given information (i.e. the *Given*), whereas elements placed on the right represent new information (i.e. the *New*). Interestingly, as the authors rightly point out, this left-right and Given-New polarization is the same that can be retrieved in spoken English, as investigated by Halliday (1985a[2004]). According to Halliday, the Given-New polarization is rendered in spoken English by different intonations. Going back to the case of women's magazine, the authors observe that the element on the left representing given information is often a text, whereas the element on the right representing new information is often an image.

However, in other types of multimodal texts, this order might be reversed. Kress and Van Leeuwen give an example taken from the corporate website of an automotive company. The left-hand side of the screen includes the picture of a car, and this is treated as the Given. The right-hand side of the screen features a textual element, which is to be understood as the New. This reversal in the composition is due to the social context to which the two multimodal texts belong. To put it in the authors' terms, "[w]hat is taken for granted by one social group is not taken for granted by another" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 184). Here I would like to hypothesize that this difference in composition might depend not only on the social context to which the text belongs, and on the audience the text addresses, but also on the specific medium in which the text is embedded. Following this hypothesis, the question arises whether corporate websites adopt a composition in which given information is located on the left-hand side of the screen, and it is conveyed in a visual model, whereas new information is located on the right-hand side, and it is conveyed by a text. This point will be touched upon during my analysis.

The polarization between left and right can be found in compositions organized around the horizontal axis of the text. In compositions organized around the vertical axis, the polarization is between the top and the bottom of the text. In these compositions, the elements

at the top represent the *Ideal*, whereas the elements at the bottom represent the *Real*. Kress and Van Leeuwen elucidate this difference in information value by providing examples of promotional multimodal texts such as advertisements and marketing websites. In these texts, the upper section of the composition has a persuasive function, as it exhibits the “promise of the product” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 186), while the lower section fulfils an informative function. As the authors rightly point out, “[t]he lower section visualizes the product itself, providing more or less factual information about it” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 186). In vertically oriented compositions, the lower and upper sections appear rather disjointed, or at least not as uniform as the left- and right-hand sections in horizontally oriented compositions. However, the overall colour choices in the visual representation might cater for a certain level of uniformity. I will delve more deeply into the use of colours in multimodal text towards the end of this section.

As for the polarization between the *Centre* and the *Margins* of a multimodal text, Kress and Van Leeuwen describe compositions organized around these two poles as including a central element surrounded by other elements. Therefore, a composition characterized by a Centre-Margin polarization is symmetrical. According to the authors, these compositions are rather unusual in the Western culture. Nonetheless, the authors hold that a trend towards multimodal texts with a centralized composition is now developing in the Western culture, too. The authors describe this composition, and cast light on its information value, along the following lines:

if a visual composition makes significant use of the Centre, placing one element in the middle and the other elements around it, we will refer to the central element as Centre and to the elements around it as Margins. For something to be presented as Centre means that it is presented as the nucleus of the information to which all the other elements are subservient. The Margins are these ancillary, dependent elements. (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 196)

Additionally, the authors underscore the fact that the Margins are often very similar or identical to each other. When this is the case, the composition does neither distinguish between Given and New nor between Ideal and Real. Yet, the authors acknowledge that in some multimodal texts Centre and Margin may respectively overlap with Given and New or with Ideal and Real.

In fact, these three different types of composition can be found in combination in one single multimodal text, depending on the information value of the text itself. The combination of the Given and New, Ideal and Real, and Centre and Margin dimensions give rise to the figure of the Cross, which by no accident is one of the visual spaces that are most frequently represented in Western culture. Kress and Van Leeuwen graphically represent the integration

of the various dimensions of visual space in the figure of the Cross (Figure 3.7).

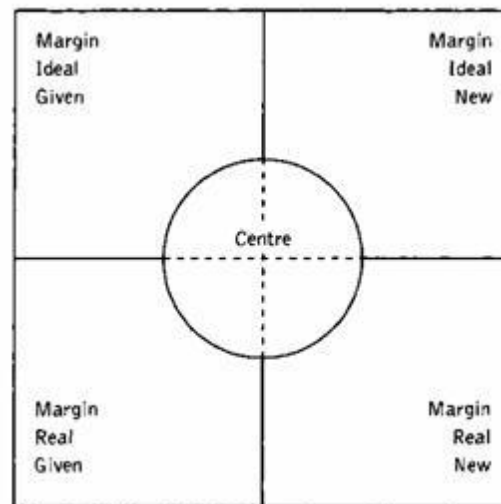


FIGURE 3.7. The dimensions of visual space (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 197).

Historically, one of the visual representation in the Western culture which integrates the Given and New, Ideal and Real, and Centre and Margin dimension, and which therefore applies the Cross pattern to its composition, is the Medieval triptych. In particular, the Medieval triptych encompasses a religious theme or events in the central panel, and figures of Saints and donors in the surrounding panels. With reference to the contemporary age, the authors notice that, at the time they were writing the second edition of *Reading Images*, the triptych pattern was adopted to design university websites. However, a word of caution should be added here, which could inspire further research on the topic. In fact, in the last two decades website design has evolved at a surprisingly rapid pace (Garzone 2009, Sklar 2011, Madill 2014), with new trends fostered also by the implementation of new technologies. Hence, it might be safe to assume that the 2010s visual design of university websites, and of websites in general, is different from the 2000s design. Accordingly, potential differences in design apply to the dimensions of composition as well. In order to confirm or invalidate this hypothesis, further research efforts could be put into the diachronic research of websites design, yet this would be outside the scope of the current discussion.

Kress and Van Leeuwen round off their overview of the information value of composition by pointing out that, with the exception of the Given-New polarization, there is no counterpart in English to account for the semantic relations established by the combination of elements in a visual representation. As stated above, the Given-New polarization, which is exteriorized in terms of left and right positioning in multimodal texts, runs parallel to the use of different intonations in spoken English. In contrast, the Ideal-Real and Centre-Margin polarizations are not to be found in language. In order to provide an explanation to this

ostensible gap in the inventory of linguistic affordances, Kress and Van Leeuwen reiterate one crucial point presented at the outset of their discussion:

sometimes language and visual communication express the same kind of semantic relations, albeit in very different ways, but there are also many types of semantic relation which are more often and more easily expressed visually, just as there are others which are more often and more easily expressed linguistically [...]. (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 199)

Obviously, this has consequences on the ways in which information is conveyed and knowledge shaped, as stated previously.

In the present work, I adopt Kress and Van Leeuwen's stance to explain the absence in language of structures that might be considered the equivalent to the Real-Ideal and Centre-Margin polarizations of visual representations. However, I would like to integrate Kress and Van Leeuwen's argument by recalling one of their previous contributions in which they engage with the analysis of multimodal texts (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1998). In this contribution, Kress and Van Leeuwen operationalize their descriptive framework with reference to a specific type of multimodal text, i.e. the newspaper front page. Newspaper front pages comprise both visual and textual elements. These are orchestrated into a coherent and meaningful whole, since their elements are combined in terms of Given-New, Ideal-Real, and Centre-Margin polarizations. These polarizations are achieved by placing the elements of the text on the left or on the right, at the top or at the bottom, and in the middle or in the margins of the composition accordingly.

Interestingly, as regards the Ideal-Real polarization, some commonalities can be pinpointed between the composition of newspaper front pages and the inverted pyramid structure in news articles.²² Firstly, it is important to note that newspaper front pages and news articles are both instantiations of news discourse. Secondly, as Kress and Van Leeuwen state, in general the Ideal comprises those items, usually placed at the top of the text, which are "presented as the idealised or generalized essence of the information" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1998, 193). In contrast to this, the Real denotes those items, usually at the bottom, which present "more specific information (e.g. details) and / or more 'down to earth' information [...] and /or more practical information (e.g. practical consequences, directions for action, etc.)" (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1998, 193). These organization of information is akin to the inverted pyramid structure of news articles. By adopting the inverted pyramid structure, news articles present more general information first and additional details second (Pöttker 2003). Hence, banking on the similarity between the layout of newspaper front pages

²² A similar parallel is drawn by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) in their analysis of the layout of website homepages (see § 3.2.1), while in a previous article Ellerup Nielsen (2002) suggested that the overall information organization in corporate websites should follow the inverted pyramid principle.

and the information structure of news articles, I would like to argue here that the visual representation of front pages might be characterized by the same semantic relation undergirding the textual organization of news articles. Hence a parallel might be drawn between visual communication and language with regard to the representation of the Ideal-Real polarization.

In order to resume the conceptualization proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]) in relation to the principles of composition, I now concentrate on salience. Salience denotes the extent to which the elements in a multimodal text engage the viewer's attention. Salience depends on a range of visual clues, such as the positioning of the elements in the foreground or in the background, on their sizes, on the colour contrast among them, on degrees of sharpness, on perspective, along with other cultural factors as for instance the presence of human figures or culturally-loaded symbols. These differences in multimodal texts are instrumental in "creat[ing] a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 201). Besides, the salience of an element can be combined to its information value. In other words, the Given, the Ideal and the Centre can be more salient than the New, the Real and the Margin, or the vice versa, or the poles can be equally salient. The salience of the elements in a multimodal text is not measurable in an objective way, but it can be intuitively grasped by the viewer, relying on the observation of the complex interplay among the visual clues mentioned above.

The third principle of composition, i.e. framing, regards the ways in which elements are connected or not: "[t]he elements or group of elements [in a visual composition] are either disconnected, marked off from each other, or connected, joined together" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 203). Furthermore, framing can be realized to different degrees, with the consequence that, "[t]he stronger the framing of an element, the more it is presented as a separated unit of information" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 203). Elements in a composition can be framed, that is, separated from each other, by placing them in a given context, or by using colours accordingly. With regard to context, the authors give the example of the representation of a group of people. The people can be portrayed as a group, thus conveying an idea of identity, or they can be represented in isolation, separated from the others by means of frames or empty spaces, thus conveying an idea of individuality. As for colours, the stronger the contrast among the elements in a composition, the higher the degree of separation. In opposition to the representation of separation, connectedness can be exteriorized by the use of vectors or other depicted and abstract graphic elements, "leading the eye from one element to another, beginning with the most salient element, the element that

first draws the viewer's attention" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 203). From this quotation it is apparent that framing goes hand in hand with salience, and in turn with information value.

In order to conclude this survey of Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design, I will deal with colour as a semiotic mode. I have already elucidated above how colours can be meaningfully employed in visual representations. For instance, as for composition, colours are used to realize salience and framing. In Kress and Van Leeuwen's conceptualization, colours are signifiers, and not signs, in the sense that they "carry a set of affordances from which sign-makers and interpreters select according to their communicative needs and interest in a given context" (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], 232, see also Kress & Van Leeuwen 2001). In addition to this, the authors claim that colours have always been used as a semiotic mode in order to convey meaning. However, the use of colours varies greatly across societies and cultures, yet some regularities can be identified, for instance, in terms of the functions they carry out.

In order to explain the functions of colours, Kress and Van Leeuwen relies once again on Halliday, and in particular on his metafunctional semiotic theory (Halliday 1985a[2004]). According to this theory, any communication system fulfils three functions. The first one is the *ideal function*, that is, a communication system provides a representation of the world. The second is the *interpersonal function*, following which a communication system enacts interactions among individuals, with a view to fulfilling specific social purposes or establishing social relationships. Finally, the *textual function* is the function a communication system performs when it combines single communicative acts in a larger, organized whole. Following from this observations, it is Kress and Van Leeuwen's stance that these three functions can be carried out also by the use of colours. Firstly, colours fulfil the ideal function since they are used to identify people, things, places, ideas, and classes of these. Secondly, colours can be used to fulfil the interpersonal function in the sense that they exert a certain effect on the viewer, by impressing, warning, intimidating, him/her. Thirdly, with regard to the textual function, colours can be deployed as tools to distinguish elements in a composition, as in the case of salience and framing. Over and above this, colours can fulfil all these three functions at the same time.

While bringing this survey of Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design to a conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the elements and principles described in this sections have been selected in order to provide guidance in the analysis of the companies' global websites selected for the present study. Thus, it will be possible to integrate the textual analysis with the analysis of visual elements, given that the latter are also crucial for the

production of meaning. Hence, the approach adopted for my analysis, which relies on the integrated analysis of different semiotic modes, is analogous to the approach advocated by Multimodal Discourse Analysis, which will be tackled in the next section.

3.3.1. *Multimodal Discourse Analysis*

So far I have dealt with multimodality as a framework accounting for those texts that integrate the textual and the visual mode. This focus on multimodality is in line with my analysis, since the material selected, i.e. companies' global website, articulate their communication by drawing on textual information and on visual representations. Following from these observations, I have included Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design in my theoretical framework, as it provides a range of parameters to investigate the co-presence of text, images, layout, and colours. These semiotic modes can be meaningfully combined in one single multimodal texts, as in fact companies' websites seem to be.

Kress and Van Leeuwen have been pioneers in the analysis of visual design, which in the late 1990s was still a neglected area of enquiry (Garret & Bell 1998). Since then, Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework has been taken up by other researchers to inform Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). MDA represents one of the major approaches to the study of discourse today (Bhatia, Flowerdew & Jones 2008). In fact, it investigates the production of meaning in discourse as a combination of several semiotic modes. Research in this area has flourished in the last two decades, hence promoting a multimodal approach to meaning making.

The main notion within MDA, i.e. multimodality, is illustrated by Iedema (2003) in his article about the development of MDA. In this article, Iedema presents the principles which underpin the description of multimodal texts, and he argues for the advantages that MDA affords to the analysis of discourse. To start with, Iedema tracks the development of MDA back to discourse analysis, and in particular to Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1978, 1985a[2004], 1985b). As already in the previous section when dealing with the indebtedness of Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design to SFL, Halliday construes language as a social semiotic, and this is fundamental for the study of multimodality. In fact, "multimodality was introduced to highlight the importance of taking into account semiotics other than language in use, such as image, music, gesture, and so on" (Iedema 2003, 33). Arguably, the construction of meaning is accomplished not only in language but also in other semiotic modes, as Kress and Van Leeuwen extensively explain in their work.

Besides, it is Iedema's contention that nowadays "we are faced with sound and image

taking over tasks associated with the role language since the invention of the printing press” (Iedema 2003, 33). In order to elucidate this point, Iedema adopts Kress and Van Leeuwen’s notion of semiotic landscape. In particular, the author reiterates Kress and Van Leeuwen’s argument about the evolution of our contemporary semiotic landscape under the influence of electronic communications, globalized trade and blurred social, political and cultural boundaries. As the author puts it, “our semiotic landscape is becoming more and more populated with complex social and cultural discourse practices” (Iedema 2003, 33). It follows that the traditional discursual resources used for meaning construction are affected by changes in the semiotic landscape. However, apart from the changes that our contemporary society is undergoing from the point of view of communication practices, Iedema acknowledges the “essential multimodal nature of all human meaning making” (Iedema 2003, 39). Relying on this assumption, the author further argues that “[m]ultimodality [...] provides the means to describe a practice or representation in all its semiotic complexity and richness” (Iedema 2003, 39), albeit it does not necessarily grant priority to one semiotic mode over another.

Along with multimodality, Iedema tackles the notion of *resemiotization*. This notion is relevant to his discussion of the development of MDA, since it appropriately integrates the notion of multimodality. Resemiotization accounts for the dynamic nature of multimodal texts, which are often shaped by transition processes. As the author states, resemiotization “is about how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next” (Iedema 2003, 41).²³ During processes of resemiotization, texts may evolve in the sense that one semiotic mode becomes more prominent than another, in agreement with the purposes of meaning construction. Iedema exemplifies this by comparing the 1992 IISI manual to the 1999 iMac manual. In his analysis, Iedema shows how language is backgrounded in the 1999 manual, while visuals are foregrounded. The overall impression is that the 1999 manual conveys information in a more straightforward way than the 1992 manual, which in contrast articulates information in a complex way.

In order to explain this, Iedema draws upon Saint-Martin (1995) and Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]), who claimed that each semiotic mode is characterized by a set of capabilities on the one side, and of constraints on the other side. Therefore, what can be accomplished by language sometimes cannot be accomplished by images, at least not to the same extent, and vice versa. In relation to the properties of the visual mode and of language respectively, Saint-Martin argues that in general the one is continuous, spatial, sensorial, while the other is discontinuous, linear and abstract. Over and above this, language is subject

²³ The notion of resemiotization, introduced by Iedema (2003), is reminiscent of the notion of *remediation*, introduced by Bolter and Grusin (1999). The former accounts for processes of meaning transfer across semiotic modes, while the latter for processes of meaning transfer across media.

to syntactic rules. It follows that the process of resemiotization from the 1992 manual to the 1999 manual implies a shift from an abstract towards a sensorial representation of reality, with obvious consequences for the ways in which the manual will be perceived by its readership. As Iedema rightly points out, the resemiotization of the 1992 and 1999 manuals “do[oes] not only merely comprise shifts in ideational semantics, but also involve[s] privileging different domains of human experience, in particular those concerned with the sentient dimensions of reading visuals” (Iedema 2003, 47).

In sum, the notion of resemiotization as it has been construed by Iedema fruitfully informs the approach of MDA. Relying on the dynamic nature of text production, resemiotization accounts for the different ways in which meaning can be constructed when it is transferred from one context to another. As I will try to demonstrate in my analysis, this is paramount when considering the generic status of texts that have migrated from one medium to another. In fact, by tapping into the affordances of the Web medium, texts that were traditionally available in printed version, have undergone changes regarding the ways in which they convey information, as well as regarding the ways they exploit the modes afforded by the medium.

So far it has been pointed out that the theories formulated to elucidate multimodality have often drawn upon SFL, and on Discourse Analysis in general. With regard to the latter, in the introductory chapter to the volume *Advances in Discourse Studies*, Bhatia, Flowerdew and Jones (2008) observe that MDA has grown out of the interdisciplinary nature of Discourse Analysis. The authors state that in the last fifty years the study of discourse has developed to become “an interdisciplinary field of enquiry” (Bhatia *et al.* 2008, 1). Bhatia *et al.* describe discourse as the language in use in a variety of institutional and professional settings, as it has been broadly explained in the literary survey conducted in this chapter as well. Bhatia *et al.* note that in order to analyze discourse, researchers have eclectically drawn on various fields, such as Sociology, Semiotics, Communication Studies, Rhetoric, Information Technology, Business and Marketing, to name a few. In particular, MDA has emerged from the convergence between Discourse Analysis and Semiotics. In fact, MDA is interested in “nonlinear extra-linguistic forms of communication” (Bhatia *et al.* 2008, 4), as for instance images, diagrams, colour scheme, and typefaces. All these forms of communication are examples of semiotic modes, and as such they partake in the analysis of text in context.

Additionally, the authors highlight that MDA “regard[s] text as just one of the many modes of communication available for social interaction” (Bhatia *et al.* 2008, 9). In this sense, MDA varies from other approaches to discourse, e.g. Conversation Analysis and Corpus

Linguistics, which limit their analysis to linguistic realizations, whether spoken or written. Among the various modes that are explored in the context of MDA, Bhatia *et al.* mention text, gestures, posture, proxemics, images, document layout, music and architectural design. Accordingly, the authors observe that approaches within MDA examine the different modes that are integrated in static realizations such as texts and images on the one side, and in dynamic realizations such as interactions on the other side.²⁴ Since an account of the dynamic realizations from the perspective of MDA would lead us too far afield in this discussion, I focus my attention to the insights which MDA provides regarding static realizations only, in keeping with the materials analysed in the present study. As a matter of fact, the global version of corporate websites can be considered a static realization, as it constructs meaning by combining texts, images, colours and layout in the first place.

A more recent contribution retracing the origin of MDA, and surveying its theoretical and analytic underpinnings, comes from O'Halloran (2011). To start with, O'Halloran provides a definition of MDA: "Multimodal discourse analysis [...] is an emerging paradigm in discourse studies which extends the study of language per se to the study of language in combination with other resources, such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound" (O'Halloran 2011, 120). Given that MDA is a relatively young area of enquiry, the author rightly notes that its terminology has not been established yet. As a consequence, concepts subsuming MDA are referred to loosely. In order to illustrate this point, O'Halloran claims that

language and other resources which integrate to create meaning in 'multimodal' (or 'multisemiotic') phenomena (e.g. print materials, videos, websites, three-dimensional objects and day-to-day events) are variously called 'semiotic resources', 'modes' and 'modalities'. MDA itself is referred to as 'multimodality', 'multimodal analysis', 'multimodal semiotics' and 'multimodal studies'. (O'Halloran 2011, 120)²⁵

Further, O'Halloran argues that the focus of MDA is on "theory and analysis of semiotic resources and the semantic expansions which occur as semiotic choices combine in multimodal phenomena" (O'Halloran 2011, 121). In keeping with Iedema's theorization, O'Halloran acknowledges the importance of taking into account processes of resemiotization too.

Along the same line, O'Halloran accounts for "the paradigmatic shift away from the

²⁴ The contributions about MDA included in the volume edited by Bhatia *et al.* deal with dynamic representations, and they shed light on the interplay of spoken language, posture, gaze, gestures, etc. as they are realized in the meaning-making process that characterizes interactions in the workplace (Norris 2008) and in the classroom (Jewitt & Jones 2008) respectively.

²⁵ Other terms adopted to refer to the notion of semiotic modes are 'semiotics' (Iedema 2003) and 'multimodal semiotics' (Garzone 2009).

study of language alone to the study of the integration of language with other resources” (O’Halloran 2011, 121) by stating that it is nowadays imperative to bear in mind that meaning is created by the interplay of several semiotic modes, adopted in a variety of media, including also those introduced by the rise of new technologies (e.g. the Web). In addition to this, MDA is informed by an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary nature of MDA poses some challenges. As the author rightly claims,

[a]s a domain of enquiry, [MDA] encourage[s] engagement and cross-fertilisation with other disciplines which have the same object of study. Incorporating knowledge, theories and methodologies from other disciplines poses many problems, however, not least being the provision of adequate resources for research to be undertaken across traditional disciplinary boundaries. (O’Halloran 2011, 123)

However, it is safe to argue that MDA will undoubtedly contribute to other disciplines, and above all to linguistic studies. Hence, the author holds that MDA can offer fresh insights to carry out research in other areas.

In order to account for the theoretical and analytical issues of MDA, O’Halloran articulates the perspectives offered by other researchers in previous studies in three different sets:

1. *Modelling semiotic resources which are fundamentally different to language* (O’Halloran 2011, 124, author’s emphasis): MDA acknowledges that language and other semiotic resources, as for instance images, are intrinsically different. O’Halloran explains the difference between language and images in terms of the relationship between the mode and what this mode represents: “language is a symbolic sign system which has no relationship to what is being represented, while images are iconic because they represent something though [sic] similarity” (O’Halloran 2011, 124-125). Notwithstanding this difference, methods to investigate discourse can be applied to the study of visual representations, as already demonstrated in § 3.3.
2. *Modelling and analysing inter-semiotic expansions of meaning as semiotic choices integrate in multimodal phenomena* (O’Halloran 2011, 124 author’s emphasis): the combination of different semiotic modes in a given multimodal text enhances the meaning potential of the text itself. Furthermore, meaning is enhanced also by the medium used for communication, and in this sense an important role is played by computer technologies and the Web.
3. *Modelling and analysing the resemioticisation of multimodal phenomena as social practices unfold* (O’Halloran 2011, 124, author’s emphasis): this last set of issues banks on Iedema’s (2003) construct of resemiotization (see above), which has to be

considered in the analysis of multimodal text. To this, O'Halloran adds that such issues as those related to resemiotization, "add to the complexity of the semantic space which must be modelled and analysed. Indeed, managing this complexity lies at the heart of MDA" (O'Halloran 2011, 127).

In order to further substantiate her survey of the theoretical and analytical underpinnings of MDA, O'Halloran presents the results of a case study concerning a television talk-show. In fact, the realization of meaning through the semiotic modes afforded by the television medium can be investigated in terms of multimodality. Albeit the television medium caters for a stimulating arena for the study of multimodality, I will now pay attention to issues regarding discourse, technology and multimodality, in accordance with the focus of my analysis on the Web medium.

In this and in the previous section I have hinted at the interrelationship of discourse, technology and multimodality by quoting Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]) and Iedema (2003), who claim that technological developments have contributed to change the semiotic landscape, and consequently the way in which people communicate. By the same token, Bhatia *et al.* acknowledge the importance of "electronic media" (Bhatia *et al.* 2008, 9). The interrelationship of discourse, technology and multimodality is discussed by Scollon and LeVine (2002) and by Jewitt (2002). For instance, Scollon and LeVine recognize the multimodal nature of discourse, and they claim that "[d]iscourse analysis [...] is the product of technological change" (Scollon & LeVine 2002, 1). Jewitt delves more deeply into the interconnectedness of new technologies and multimodality, with particular reference to the role played by the communication medium. Interestingly, Jewitt starts her discussion with a terminological clarification. The author brings out the difference between mode and medium by highlighting that modes are "technologies of representation", while media²⁶ are "technologies of dissemination" (Jewitt 2002, 184).

In her study, Jewitt illustrates the affordances of the media on the one hand, and of the modes on the other hand, by drawing on a contrastive analysis of two different versions of the same novel, one in its printed version (i.e. the book), the other on CD-ROM. Albeit Jewitt's analysis does not account for the Web, I adopt here her conceptualizations regarding the CD-ROM, relying on the similarities between the two media. In fact, both the Web and CD-ROMs are products of new technologies, and they can be both accessed via the screen of a computer. Moreover, CD-ROMs are not only characterized by the affordance of

²⁶ In a similar vein, O'Halloran provide the following definition of medium, that is, "[t]he medium is the means through which the multimodal phenomena materialise" (O'Halloran 2011, 121).

multimodality, but they exhibit other Web affordances, as for instance immateriality, hypertextuality/hypermediality, co-articulation and interactivity, multiple reading modes, intertextuality and granularity (Garzone 2007, see § 3.2.1). The only Web affordance that CD-ROMs do not seem to exhibit is extension in participation framework, since they can be accessed only provided the user has the material compact disc at his/her disposal, to be inserted into his/her computer.

Hence, similarly to the Web, CD-ROMs integrate visuals and writing, as observed by Jewitt. Over and above this, Jewitt rightly claims that writing acquires a new value in this medium, thus becoming more similar to the visual mode. As the author puts it, in CD-ROMs “[t]he relationship between image and writing is newly configured and is itself a visual meaning-making resource. In the context of the screen the writing has become a visual element, a block of ‘space,’ which makes textual meaning beyond its written content” (Jewitt 2002, 185). Hence it seems safe to argue that the medium used to convey meaning has an impact on the role and value of the semiotic modes it affords. Besides, Jewitt’s study caters for a deeper understanding of multimodality, since she accounts for the process of resemiotization too, as it is apparent from her contrastive analysis between a printed book and a CD-ROM. In fact, these two media exemplify the dynamic nature of a text, in this case a novel, which has been transduced from one medium into another. However, the author adds a word of caution in relation to the role of technologies on the one side, and of the people who use them on the other side. As a matter of fact, not the medium, but the message sender, is the one in charge of choices about how meaning is to be constructed: “it is not technology that determines people’s meaning making: the medium of book, or the CD-ROM, like all media, is shaped by the people who use it, and what it is that they do with it” (Jewitt 2002, 188).

I conclude this section by presenting the results of a case study conducted by Garzone (2009) about the impact of multimodality and new technology on corporate communication. This case study is relevant to the present discussion, as it brings together the theoretical and analytical concerns that have been elucidated so far, and it relate them to the study of an actual text. Over and above this, Garzone’s study offers invaluable perspectives for my research, since it explores how the potentials of multimodality and of the Web can be exploited by companies for the aims of their corporate communication.

First of all, Garzone claims that

[t]he development of computer-mediated communication and the evolution of the World Wide Web have made a whole range of new multimodal options available to companies, profoundly affecting the organisation of their communication. [...] Connection to the World Wide Web offers further advantages [...] as computer-created multimodal products are made potentially available to millions of users the world over in no time and with no additional

costs.

Companies have taken advantage of such options not only to enact more effective interpersonal and interorganisational communication, but also to enhance all forms of communication contributing to corporate image-building and promotion, in the business environment proper as well as in marketing activities and in relations with customers, investors and other stakeholders. (Garzone 2009, 155)

Relying on the fact that the Web affords companies a wealth of tools to take advantage of the multimodal nature of the medium, Garzone sets out to analyze the website of a US multinational food corporation, Campbell's, with a view to pinpointing the communicative practices adopted for the projection of its corporate image. As a matter of fact, the analysis of corporate websites cannot be restricted to language only, but it should be conducted by adopting "a semiotically stratified approach" (Garzone 2009, 157). This approach is informed by the deployment of linguistic methodologies for the analysis of web-mediated discourse, with a view to taking into account the affordances of the medium, i.e. immateriality, extension in participation framework, multimodality, hypertextuality/hypermediality, co-articulation and interactivity, multiple reading modes, intertextuality and granularity (Garzone 2007, see also § 3.2.1). As it will be demonstrated, not only language and visuals, but also such affordances as hypertextuality, interactivity and extension in participation framework play a fundamental role in the construction of meaning if the Campbell's website.

The Campbell's corporate website is "a complex semiotic mix" (Garzone 2009, 158). From a visual perspective, the website is structured in an eye-catching way, as it is dominated by one colour (i.e. red) and by graphic choices which aim at making the corporation immediately recognizable. Garzone starts her analysis by tackling the homepage first. Garzone observes that a group of clickable objects placed at the centre of the page are in fact hyperlinks to further sections within the website. The homepage gives access to the different localized versions of the website,²⁷ too. Therefore, "the homepage has the status of a global portal, being the main page that can be accessed from search engines" (Garzone 2009, 159). Further links provide access to 'Product Websites', which are websites connected to the Campbell's website, specifically dedicated to one single product. All in all, what is apparent when looking at the homepage is that its communication relies massively on visual and on hyperlinks, while textual information is limited.

On top of this, the analysis accomplished by Garzone demonstrates that each section within the website carries out specific communicative purposes and addresses one specific stakeholder group accordingly. Firstly, Garzone focuses on the 'Campbell's Kitchen' section,

²⁷ We will deal with website localization in § 4.4.1.

where menus and recipes are made available. The interactive tools integrated in this section of the website enable users to log in, upload their recipes, and share their photos with other users. In this way, not only does the company builds rapport with its audience, but it also tries to establish “a virtual community of Campbell consumers” (Garzone 2009, 160). Garzone rightly points out that, what is realized by the affordances of the medium (in this case interactivity), “is reflected in the genuinely interactive organisation of this section of the website, where all short texts in links are highly interpersonal, with a prevalence of the conative function (‘Share your Photos’) or, occasionally, of the phatic function (‘What’s for Dinner Tonight?’)” (Garzone 2009, 160). Longer texts and captions have a dialogic nature, too, and instances of evaluative language can be found as well.

The second section analyzed by Garzone is the ‘Nutrition and Wellness’ section. This section is more informative than the previous one. In fact, it is concerned with healthy lifestyle, and it promotes the responsible consumption of Campbell’s products. It follows that the implied purpose of this section is to project the Campbell’s corporate image as a “company that is highly competent and prepared to give priority to health-related issues” (Garzone 2009, 160). This section relies on textual information, and it is characterized by an impersonal style

Thirdly, Garzone turns her attention to the ‘Our Company’ section, which encompasses managerial and financial information, and therefore addresses mainly shareholders. Given the type of information made available here, it could be assumed that the ‘Our Company’ section relies more on the textual mode, rather than on the other modes afforded by the medium. In fact, financial documents are uploaded as PDFs that can be saved and/or printed out by the user. Yet, these documents can be accessed also in their hypertextual format, so that this section in the Campbell’s website exhibits an information structure which is similar to that of the homepage. According to Garzone, companies choose to make their financial documents available in both PDF and hypertextual format in order to enlarge their participation framework, that is, to appeal to a wider audience as the one to which financial documents are typically addressed. This communication strategy, which combines both the hypertextual and the textual mode, serves a promotional function. As Garzone underscores, this way of distributing information via the Web allows a company to

reach not only the stakeholders to whom it was traditionally addressed, but also a virtually unlimited number of recipients, and in particular the curious potential investors as well as the lay net surfers who come across the website by pure chance [...]. What inevitably ensues is the addition of a promotional element to financial documents, aimed at attracting the highest possible number of such casual participants. (Garzone 2009, 161)

Finally, Garzone accounts for the ‘Shop’ section, in which users can buy Campbell’s gadgets online thanks to integrated tools for online shopping. As Garzone rightly notes, this accomplishes the function of an e-commerce website, and it is the web-mediated version of mail order catalogues. The style that characterizes this section of the website is highly interactive, since it aims at prompting the user to take action, i.e. buying the Campbell’s gadgets. As for textual information, directives are used, and the products to be purchased are named and described.

From the analysis conducted by Garzone it is apparent that each section can be categorized in generic terms. In particular, the sections draw on pre-existing genres, but they creatively exploit their generic features by taking advantage of the affordances of the Web medium. Above all, the common thread across all the sections is “the constant presence of a dialogic dimension, the traces of which are perceptible in linguistic and discursive choices, as well as in the contents and in the overall organisation, where an interpersonal component is always at work” (Garzone 2009, 162). This confirms the “social dimension” (Garzone 2009, 162) of websites, which in fact enable users to take part in the process of meaning construction thanks to the interactivity afforded by the medium.

The results of the analysis conducted by Garzone fruitfully integrate Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen’s (2005) study of homepages of corporate websites. Following from this observation, Garzone’s case study can be taken on board in order to inform the analysis of the companies’ websites chosen for my research. In addition to this, Garzone’s case study provides invaluable insights as it shows how a multimodal approach can be adopted to shed light on the complex interplay of the semiotic modes available in the Web medium, and how these modes are tapped into for the purposes of corporate communication.

All in all, MDA testifies to the fact that the concepts of language analysis can be extended to the analysis of visual communication (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]), in order to investigate how language and other semiotic modes interact in the Web context, in accordance with the communicative function of texts. In this and in the previous section, I have assumed that Kress and Van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design represents the appropriate conceptual benchmark to claim for the interconnectedness of textual and visual communication when realizing meaning, while MDA provides further insights for the analysis of corporate websites.

To reiterate what I have already stated in § 3.1.2, issues of mode and medium provide a background against which the generic value of textual instances on the Web can be judged. These new perspectives on the analysis of discourse in Web-mediated communication lie with the unprecedented changes that are to be witnessed in today’s semiotic landscape, as a

consequence of globalization processes. Languages have also been influenced by these changes, and English in particular has been affected in the way it is used in both national and global contexts, as noted by Kress and Van Leeuwen as well. In the next chapter, I will investigate with the changes that the English language has been undergoing in the last decades, the factors that have initiated these changes, and the effects that these are having on the status and functions of English in today's globalized world.

CHAPTER IV

Conceptualizations of English as the language for intercultural and international business communication

In the previous chapters I have provided a theoretical framework for the present study by first of all describing the processes underpinning international and intercultural business communication. In Chapter 2, the notions of communication and culture have been explored, and a number of disciplines tackling international and intercultural business communication has been surveyed. Particular attention has been devoted to the tenets of Corporate Communication, i.e. corporate image, corporate reputation and corporate identity, as these are fundamental for companies aiming at promoting themselves as well as the products and services they offer. In Chapter 3 the developments of theories of genre have been surveyed, with a view to providing analytical tools to explain the discursive practices of professionals in the business domain in terms of text, context and purpose of communication. The notion of genre has been explained against the backdrop of two different schools of thought, that is, the North American New Rhetoric and ESP. In addition, genre has been problematized in relation to the rise of communication via World Wide Web. As a matter of fact, the Web has provided a new medium whose affordances have prompted the implementation of new forms of communication. These new forms of communication have challenged the traditional notion of genre, thus emphasis has been put on the role of the Web medium in the realization of discursive practices.

For communication to take place in the context of intercultural and international business communication, the most appropriate language choice has to be implemented. Hence it is now necessary to address issues revolving around the language that is used to encode these practices, i.e. English. In today's globalized world, English has come to be considered a shared code of communication among language users from different lingua-cultural backgrounds. According to Crystal (1997[2003]), English has reached the status of global language since it has developed "a special role that is recognized in every country" (Crystal 1997[2003], 3). The author states that a close relationship exists "between language dominance and economic, technological, and cultural power" (Crystal 1997[2003], 7). In fact, while tracing the history of the global spread of English, the author points first of all to the expansion of the British colonial power, which started towards the end of the Sixteenth Century and reached its momentum towards the end of Nineteenth Century. It is apparent that

at the outset the dominance of English relied on military power. Yet, English maintained its position thanks to the fact that Britain became the world's leading industrial and trading power in the early 1900s. In addition, during the Twentieth Century the US established their hegemony in business and trade, and they came to play a pivotal role with regard to advances in science and technology. To sum up,

[t]he present day world-status of English is primarily the result of two factors: the expansion of British colonial power, which peaked towards the end of the nineteenth century, and the emergence of the United States as the leading economic power of the twentieth century. It is the latter factor which continues to explain the world position of the English language today [...]. (Crystal 1997[2003], 59)

As far as technological developments in the Twentieth Century are concerned, it is interesting to note that the Internet is a US-based technology, and that the inventor of the World Wide Web comes from the UK. Crystal defines English as “the chief lingua franca of the Internet (Crystal 1997[2003], 117), while Giltrow and Stein (2009) aptly point out that English is native to communication technology, and that all meta-terminology is in this language. This of course further contributes to the global prestige of the English language, albeit it has to be acknowledged that the presence of other languages in the Web medium has steadily risen since the late 1990s, thanks to the introduction of communication infrastructures in European, Asian, African and South American countries (Crystal 2001[2006]). This trend is identified by Graddol (2006) too, who argues that, “[t]he dominance of English in the internet is declining. Other languages, including lesser-used languages, are now proliferating” (Graddol 2006, 14).

This chapter accounts for the prominent role played by English all around the world to enable communication, with special reference to the multinational and multicultural context of business. In this context, professionals from different lingua-cultural backgrounds draw upon English to carry out their daily working activities, while companies active in overseas trade publish their promotional material in an English version of their corporate website in order to reach out to the widest international audience as possible. The chapter provides a conceptualization of the global spread of English by referring to the paradigm of World Englishes (WEs). The theoretical framework of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) will be presented as well, as the concept of *lingua franca* has been deployed to investigate the use of English as a common code of communication among speakers with different native languages. ELF is crucial for a deep understanding of the processes of adoption and adaptation of English by non-native speakers (NNSs), as these are not to be considered as simple learners who conform to a series of language standards, but as active users who seek to

negotiate their communicative choices according to a specific situation.

Due to the focus of my work on intercultural and international business communication, particular emphasis will be placed on Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), which is understood “as a shared communication code for the function of conducting business” (Poppi 2012, 130). However, in this context the notion of BELF needs to be problematized for two reasons that are closely linked to the rationale of my study and to the materials selected for my analysis. First of all, BELF is used with reference to interpersonal exchanges in business contexts, which occur for example in spoken interactions or emails. From this perspective, BELF does not seem to fit in an investigation of corporate communication, as this is usually characterized by formal decisions on the part of companies which are usually oriented towards the adoption of standardized language choices when it comes to the dissemination of official information. Secondly, the promotional material written in English issued by companies in non-English speaking countries is very often translation-based. Here it is assumed that a text which has been translated from a given source language (SL) into a target language (TL), in this case English, cannot be considered an occurrence of BELF *per se*. In fact, BELF refers to processes of communication negotiation occurring in interpersonal interactions, whereas during translation processes the standards of the TL are usually taken into account, in order to transfer meaning from the source text (ST) to the target text (TT).

Nonetheless, my claim is that the same processes of adoption and adaptation underpin both the use of BELF as the language of interactions in the intercultural business domain, and the use of English translations for global corporate communication. Accordingly, English can be regarded as a resource to be exploited in all domains of intercultural and international business communication. In addition to this, English is the language that is most often utilized for web-mediated global corporate communication. In this sense, I will argue that BELF and the translation of corporate material into English can be regarded as the two ends of the continuum of international and intercultural business communication. Building upon these premises, the framework devised in BELF research may provide some invaluable contribution to shed light on the use of English in the global version of corporate websites.

Thus, in the last sections of this chapter I will elucidate the relationship between the use of English as today’s lingua franca of international business and the practice of translation. As mentioned above, the global version in English of companies’ websites is often a translation of the corporate website in the first language of a company’s country of origin. Albeit the use of a lingua franca on the one side and translation on the other side seem two divergent practices responding to different needs, it should be borne in mind that

globalization processes have encouraged the advent of ELF (and of BELF), while giving way to an increasing demand for translations. Both ELF and translation have been affected by new communication technologies, and in particular by the introduction of the Web medium. Therefore, the interconnectedness of ELF and translation, together with communication technologies in today's globalized world, needs to be acknowledged. By surveying literature about translation practices on the Web in § 4.4.1, and by reviewing recent contributions that tackle translation from an ELF perspective in § 4.4.2, it will be possible to integrate the theoretical framework of the present study, in order to support the analysis of the selected materials.

4.1. The global spread of English

The spread of English across the globe is the object of enquiry of a disciplinary area within Applied Linguistics known as World Englishes (WEs). The term World Englishes refers to the “varieties of English used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts” (Bhatt 2001, 527), and the theoretical foundation of this branch of study is built upon the fact that nowadays “there is not one English language anymore” but a number of varieties, i.e. “Englishes”, which “represent diverse linguistic, cultural, and ideological voices” (Bhatt 2001, 527). The paradigm of WEs is based on a pluricentric view of English, which is used as a contact language to serve a wide number of purposes in multilingual and multicultural contexts. As already stated, this phenomenon was fostered in the first place by the colonization history underpinning the spread of English. In fact, migration is one of the most relevant factor that determine language spread (Graddol 2006). Between the Sixteenth and the Eighteenth Century, the English language expanded from England to the rest of the British Isles, then with the movement of English-speaking population around the world, English spread in North America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This phase in the spread of English is known as the first diaspora (Kachru 1997, Bhatt 2001). The second diaspora took place when the English language was planted in the colonies located in Asia and in Africa. Once these colonies obtained their independence from the British Empire, the English language maintained its leading role and was institutionalized along with the native languages of these countries. According to Kachru, the second diaspora “provides a body and substance to the concept of world Englishes” (Kachru 1997, 68), and it can be described as follows:

- It initially involved limited—very limited—numbers of English speakers. But, as time passed, various strategies of educational planning, proselytization, and trading in the language were used to increase bilingualism in English.

- It brought English into contact with genetically and culturally unrelated languages in far-flung parts of the world.
- It created a new ecology for the teaching of English in terms of linguistic input, norms, identities, and methodology. (Kachru 1997, 68)

In order to elucidate his theory of the spread of English around the world, Kachru (1985) devised a Concentric Circle Model that could shed light on “the historical, sociolinguistic, acquisitional, and literary contexts” that have determined this phenomenon over time. As shown in Figure 4.1 below, Kachru’s model includes three circles, the Inner, the Outer and the Expanding Circle.

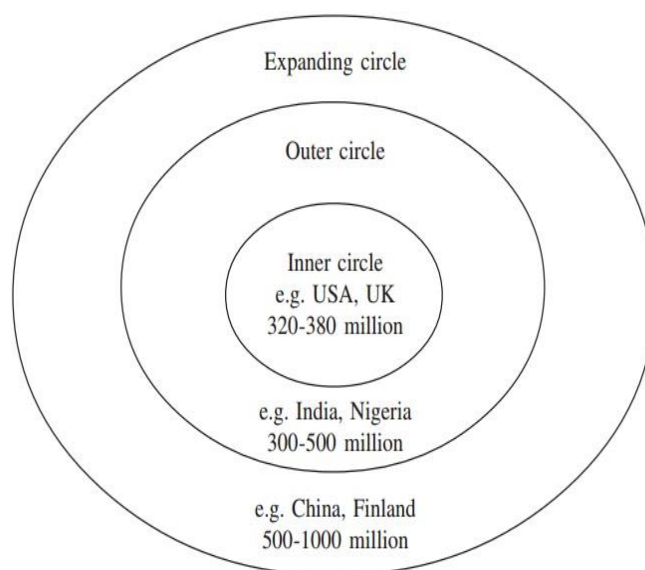


FIGURE 4.1. The Concentric Circle Model (Kachru 1985, 12).

The Inner Circle comprises those countries where English is the native language (English as a Native Language, ENL). These are Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the USA. The Outer Circle accounts for those countries where English has spread as a non-native language, and where it has been assigned the role of an additional language in institutional settings (English as a Second Language, ESL). Countries in the Outer Circle are Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Tanzania and Zambia. The Expanding Circle comprises those countries where English is used as a foreign language (English as a Foreign Language, EFL), as for instance China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, to name a few. As far as the language system underlying the use of English in the countries included in each circle is concerned, the English spoken in the Inner Circle is regarded as norm-providing, whereas the English spoken in the Outer Circle is norm-developing. To conclude, the English spoken in the Expanding Circle is said to be norm-dependent (Kachru 1985).

Kachru’s paradigm was highly influential, since it acknowledges the existence of

varieties of English that have developed beyond the territorial borders of those countries where it is used as a native language, and it provides theoretical tools to systematize these varieties in historical, sociolinguistic, cultural and institutional terms. Nonetheless, this paradigm attracted some criticism, as it implies that only countries in the Inner Circle are granted ownership of the language. In other words, only NSs are in a position to establish the linguistic norms to which language learners and users in the other Circles should conform. Kachru replied to this criticism by suggesting an updated version of his model that could better account for the dynamism and mobility implied in the spread of English around the world. Therefore Kachru (1992) replaced the image of the concentric circles with that of ripples in a pond (Figure 4.2), with a view to communicating the idea of a continuous development. The most relevant aspect in Kachru's revisited model is that it provides indications of the names of the countries within the circles, along with figures of the speakers of English in each country. These data give prominence to the fact that the number of NNSs using English for their daily activities is higher than that of the NSs, and that it is increasing exponentially.

The growing use of English among NNSs is further stressed by Crystal (2008), who argues that "the centre of gravity of the English language has moved from the native speaker to the non-native speaker" (Crystal 2008, 6). In a previous study, Crystal (2003) also attempted to provide figures of the speakers of English around the world by referring to Kachru's models: the Inner Circle comprises 320-38 million speakers of English, the Outer Circle 300-500 million speakers, and the Expanding Circle 500-1000 million speakers. At the end of the Twentieth Century it was already apparent that NNSs were outnumbering NSs. The ratio between NSs and NNSs was estimated to be around three or four NNSs for every NS, but it was expected to increase in due course (Graddol 1999), also due to the growing numbers of English speakers in China, which has become one of the world's leading powers today. In the late 1990s, learners and speakers of English in China were approximately calculated to be around 220 million (Crystal 2008). These trends have been gradually acknowledged, and the privileged status of NSs as the only ones in control of the English language has been called into questions by several scholars. As Graddol (2006) puts it, "[n]ative-speaker norms are becoming less relevant as English becomes a component of basic education in many countries" (Graddol 2006, 14).

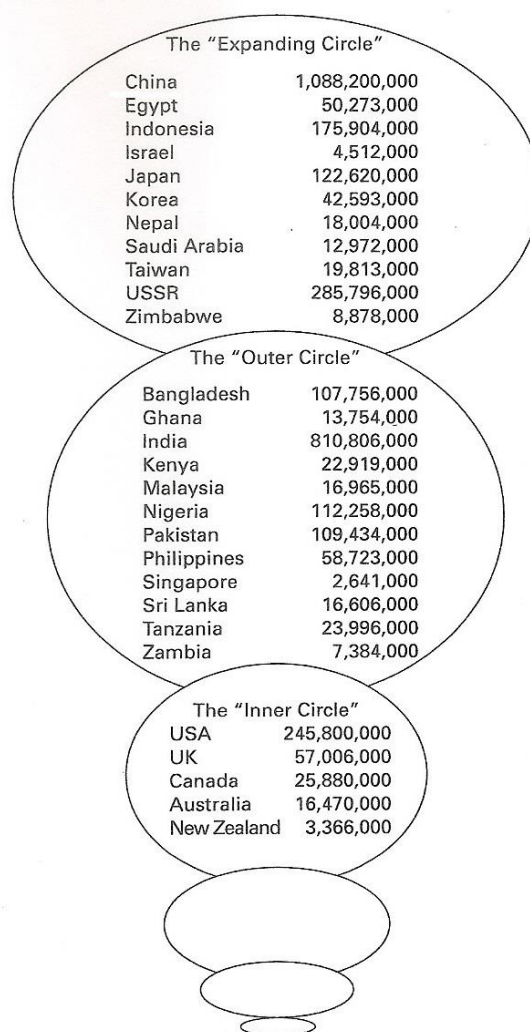


FIGURE 4.2. The three-circle model of World Englishes (Kachru 1992, 356).

At the end of the 90s, Kachru's models were criticized by Modiano (1999a), who claimed that, by distinguishing among norm-providing, norm-developing and norm-dependent varieties, this conceptualization reinforces the idea that "language is the property of specific groups, and that correct use is determined by experts who speak a prestige variety" (Modiano 1999a, 24). Modiano introduced an alternative model which is no longer based on birth-rights but on the level of proficiency acquired by speakers of English in contexts of intercultural communication. In this model, Modiano shows that English is nowadays an international language, and he uses the acronym EIL (English as an International Language)¹ to refer to it. EIL is not to be restricted to any particular geographical location, so the models used to represent it should legitimize the role of NNSs as well. To put it in Modiano's terms, "[p]roficient non-native speakers of EIL, rather than the native speakers who are not

¹ As § 4.2.1 will demonstrate, the acronym EIL was taken up as a synonym for ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) by scholars at the beginning of the ELF debate.

proficient in EIL, are better equipped to define and develop English as a tool in cross-cultural communication” (Modiano 1999a, 25). As displayed by Figure 4.3 below, the inner circle in Modiano’s model includes speakers of the language that are judged proficient on the basis of their ability to conduct efficient intercultural communication exchanges.

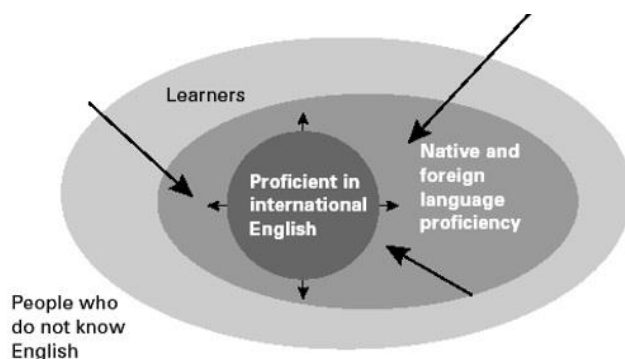


FIGURE 4.3. The centripetal circles of international English (Modiano 1999a, 25).

Nonetheless, Modiano’s model caused disagreement too. The arguments running against his conceptualization stressed that the different types of English included in the model, along with the boundaries between circles, are hard to define (Poppi 2012). Modiano (1999b) tried to counteract criticism by devising a second model (Fig. 4.4). In his second model, Modiano devised a Common Core comprising all those features of English in which any speaker need to become thoroughly proficient in order to communicate efficiently in intercultural contexts. The other varieties of English spoken by NSs and NNSs alike are placed around the Common Core. Modiano’s second model was met with further criticism, as it still failed to define the features of English included in the Common Core. Furthermore, the fact that native and non-native varieties were granted equal status was not deemed acceptable.

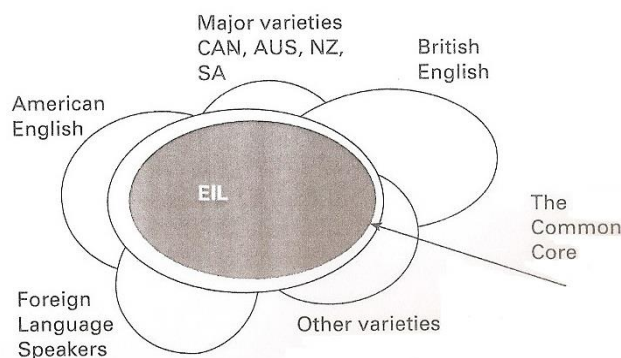


FIGURE 4.4. The model of EIL (Modiano 1999b, 10).

However disputed both models by Modiano have been, they are important for a discussion of English as the language of international and intercultural communication, as they overcome the traditional distinction between NSs and NNSs, while setting the ability to use English efficiently in international settings as a standard (Poppi 2012). In particular, the second model further emphasizes the notion of English as an International Language (EIL) as opposed to English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The term EIL gives prominence to the fact that English is used across Kachru's circles (Seidlhofer 2011), and it "openly suggests the necessity to move away from a vision of property of the language on the part of native-speakers" (Poppi 2012, 31).

The debate around Kachru's models has been going on in recent years too. For instance, by adopting a pedagogical approach to the issues regarding the spread of English as a global language, Ur (2010) singles out the reasons according to which native-speaker standards are not viable for teaching English today.² First of all, NSs now represent a minority of users of the language, and they all speak different varieties that, although accepted within local communities, may not function as mutually intelligible in an intercultural context. Moreover, the majority of teachers of English are NNSs themselves, and they actually represent the only model for learners of the language. In this sense, Ur agrees with Cook (1999), who stresses that NSs cannot provide a model for learners of English, "since nobody can become a native speaker of an additional language" (Ur 2010, 86). As a consequence, Ur concludes by stating that it is possible for NNSs to become competent in speaking and writing English, thus developing "a correct, fluent and easily comprehensible variety of the language which is a totally acceptable model for learners" (2010, 86).³

The debate sparked off by Kachru's Concentric Circle Models has served to reposition English against the backdrop of today's globalized world. English is widely acknowledged as a global language, yet when describing English as global, the risk is that of adopting an ethnocentric view (Graddol 2006) that would imply the supremacy of English as the language spoken and written by its NSs. From this perspective, NSs are regarded as "the custodians who are granted rights of control over the development of English" (Poppi 2012, 87), whereas

² Ur's (2010) contribution represents one of the voices in the ongoing debate about English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in relation to teaching practices. According to the author, research conducted so far by linguists in the domain of ELF may provide useful insights to teachers, yet she claims that the need has emerged to pay more attention to teachers' in-class experience, as this may inform researchers' investigations about the aspects of ELF.

³ According to Ur (2010), a more appropriate model to conceptualize the status of English today, especially from a pedagogical perspective, is the one proposed by Rajadurai (2005), in which the speaker's level of competence is taken as a point of reference. The model represents different degrees of proficiency, from limited to competent to fully competent speakers. The fully competent speaker is placed in the center, and the boundaries between one degree and another are not clear-cut but graduating.

NNSs are perceived as having some sort of deficit, as their definition by negation seems to suggest (Seidlhofer 2011). However, this view does not account for the fact that English functions as a means of communication thanks to its dynamism and variability. As a consequence, it is here acknowledged that English has transformed the world while being transformed in turn (Graddol 2006).

This obviously has pedagogical consequences, as demonstrated by Ur in her article. Quirk's (1990) assumption that teachers of English should concentrate on NSs' standards and performance in order to guarantee mutual intelligibility in the Outer and Expanding Circles is rejected, while admitting that the world language system is being restructured, and so it is more relevant today to account for the massive use of English among NNSs, and to the strategies that are implemented to guarantee mutual intelligibility.

As regards the ways in which English is taught, Graddol (2006) distinguishes between English as Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL). EFL tradition dates back to the Nineteenth Century. In this model, centrality is given to the culture and society of NSs, whereas learners are relegated to an outsider position. In his discussion of EFL, Graddol (2006) argues that this model is bound to failure, as native-like accuracy is an unrealistic target. Moreover, the implementation of this model may cause frustration in learners, as they are faced with their supposed inferiority. On the other hand, the focus of ESL "recognises the role of English in the society in which is taught" (Graddol 2006, 84). This model was first adopted in colonies of the British Empire (i.e. in countries included in the Outer Circle), with the aim of training a social elite charged with the administration of the colonies.⁴ In this context, a wide number of local varieties emerged, which later started to develop their own literatures.

Beside these two models, Graddol includes a discussion of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as an emergent yet controversial issue in the teaching of English today. This approach banks on the assumption, already discussed in this chapter, that nowadays just few interactions in English involve NSs in comparison to the high number of communicative events in which NNSs participate using the language as a shared code. For this reason, it is now imperative to consider the way in which NNSs adopt English to communicate. ELF has been gathering an increasing number of scholars in the last decades who have attempted to shed light onto the use of English by NNSs. In this approach, mutual intelligibility is more relevant than native-like proficiency. This once again carries pedagogical implications, and

⁴ Seidlhofer (2011) indicates that the acronym ESL has a two-fold meaning. On the one hand, ESL refers to English as an additional language with official status, used in post-colonial contexts. This is the connotation adopted by Graddol (2006). On the other hand, ESL indicates English as it is learnt by people after their first (native) language.

suggestions have been made as regards for example the ways in pronunciation is taught (Jenkins 2000), a point which will be discussed later on. The discussion around ELF has gained momentum, and studies have flourished around this topic. A survey of the conceptualizations of ELF propounded in the last decades is presented below.

4.2. English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

In the previous section, the paradigm of World Englishes (WEs) has been introduced, and a selection of models conceptualizing the global spread of English (Kachru 1985, 1992, Modiano 1999a, 1999b) have been presented. These models have initiated a heated discussion that has been going on for the last decades about the notion of Standard English (StE), and about the authoritative role of NSs in establishing what kind of linguistic practices should be regarded as acceptable forms of the language. This has caused much controversy: taking into account that English has become the chosen language for international and intercultural communication in nowadays globalized world, the existence of Standard English (StE) has been questioned, and the role of the NSs has been put into a new perspective in relation to the number of NNSs, who now represent the vast majority of users of English.

The existence of such a language as StE along with the NSs' role have been debated by Widdowson (1994) in the plenary address entitled "The Ownership of English", delivered in Atlanta during the 27th Annual TESOL Convention in April 1993. First of all, Widdowson addresses two questions, one regarding the role of the NSs of English, and the other regarding the criteria underpinning StE. The usual answers would be that the NSs are the custodians or owners of the language, while StE is based on "quality of clear communication and standards of intelligibility" (Widdowson 1994, 379). For these criteria to be guaranteed, and for English to function as a language for international communication, stability is required. It has usually been assumed that the NSs are the only ones endowed with the authority to maintain this stability, since they are born to the language. Nevertheless, Widdowson contests these suppositions, and he argues that birth rights are not sufficient for NSs to claim authority over the language. In fact, not only do they represent a minority of speakers of English, but also they often use some form of dialect that does not comply with the standards of mutual intelligibility. In this way, Widdowson's stance seems to problematize the authoritative definition of StE provided by Quirk (1990), according to which StE is to be regarded as an institutionalized variety spoken by a small subset of NSs, different from ENL. In this sense, StE represents one of the possible realizations of ENL, which is yet mastered by a minority of people conforming to its norms.

Furthermore, StE is mainly understood as a written variety used in institutional contexts in general. The reason for this, according to Widdowson, is that the written medium is more durable than the spoken medium, and it does not give way to deviations in accent or spelling. Conformity to spelling rules, as well as to grammar conventions, are seen as further conditions to guarantee stability. As regards grammar, this is preferred to vocabulary as a criterion to assure communication in StE, since it is more difficult for NNSs to master. In this sense, grammar represents the socio-cultural identity of the NSs, and it takes on a gate-keeping function, as NNSs are left outside the community of speakers conforming to Standard English.

These assumptions regarding the ownership of English that have been perpetrated for a long time are then deconstructed by Widdowson in the following terms:

[t]he question is which community, and which culture, have a rightful claim to ownership of standard English? For standard English is no longer the preserve of a group of people living in an offshore European island, or even of larger groups living in continents elsewhere. It is an international language. As such it serves a whole range of different communities and their institutional purposes and these transcend traditional communal and cultural boundaries. I am referring to the business community, for example, and the community of researchers and scholars in science and technology and other disciplines. Standard English, especially in its written form, is their language. It provides for effective communication, but at the same time it establishes the status and stability of the institutional conventions which define these international activities. These activities develop their own conventions of thought and procedure, customs and codes of practice; in short, they in effect create their own cultures, their own standards. And obviously for the maintenance of standards it is helpful, to say the least, to have a standard language at your disposal. But you do not need native speakers to tell you what it is. (Widdowson 1994, 382)

StE, as it has been usually defined in terms of correct spelling and grammar, does not admit creativity when it comes to the formation of new words. Yet, Widdowson states that creativity and dynamism are inherent in any language, so as to allow communication: “people are inventing words all the time to express new ideas and attitudes, to adjust to their changing world. It is this indeed which demonstrates the essential dynamism of the language without which it would wither away” (Widdowson 1994, 382). Specialist communities are recognized the right to build their own vocabulary to meet their needs, so it is Widdowson’s contention that, if creativity in professional domains is admitted, creativity in the use of the language in society at large should be admitted, too. This applies to English as the language used for international communication, where NNSs show a certain degree of proficiency every time they use it as “an adaptable resource for making meaning” (Widdowson 1994, 383). In this way, Widdowson suggests a reconsideration of the notion of the ownership of English arguing

that

[t]he very fact that English is an international language means that no nation can have custody over it. [...] As soon as you accept that English serves the communicative and communal needs of different communities, it follows logically that it must be diverse. An international language has to be an independent language. (Widdowson 1994, 385)

As long as English is deemed an independent language, it can be used by people, regardless of their membership to any professional or socio-cultural community, to represent their experience.

Starting from the late 1990s and the early 2000s, scholarly attention has been diverted from the role of NSs as custodians of the language (Widdowson 1994) to that of NNSs as agents of language change (Brutt-Griffler 1998). As regards the ownership of English, Brumfit adopts the following point of view:

[t]he English language no longer belongs numerically to the speakers of English as a mother tongue, or first language. The ownership (by which I mean the power to adapt and change) of any language in effect rests with the people who use it [...]. Statistically, native speakers [of English] are in a minority of language use, and thus in practice for language change, for language maintenance, and for the ideologies and beliefs associated with the language—at least in so far as non-native speakers use the language for a wide range of public and personal needs. (Brumfit 2001, 116)

The global reach of English along with the status acquired by NNSs have led to a new conceptualization of the language in term of *lingua franca*. In this new conceptualization of English, NNSs are seen as “legitimate users” (Seidlhofer 2011, 9) of the language, and not just as learners, as I will illustrate in the following sections.

Meierkord and Knapp (2002) trace the origin of the term *lingua franca* back to a variety based on Italian dialects with elements from Spanish, French, Portuguese, Arabic, Turkish, Greek and Persian, that was spoken by traders along the South-Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea between the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Century. The term *lingua franca* has been used with reference to English, thus giving rise to the acronym ELF (English as a Lingua Franca), since it encapsulates a number of features that characterize the global spread and use of English nowadays. These features, as outlined by Meierkord and Knapp, regard the variety of purposes served by *lingua francas* in general, the fact that these are employed by “a heterogeneous group of speakers for whom the language does not always have the same status of a second or foreign language” (Meierkord & Knapp 2002, 10), the fact that they present a range of common characteristics, and that it is difficult to teach these languages, “due to their heterogeneous character” (Meierkord & Knapp 2002, 10). By the same token, Mauranen argues that

[t]he English language has established itself as the global lingua franca, that is, a vehicular language spoken by people who do not share a native language. [...] Most of its use today is by nonnative speakers (NNSs), and the number of people speaking it as a foreign or second language has surpassed the number of its native speakers (NSs). (Mauranen 2003, 513)

Consequently, NSs have lost their role “as the most relevant model for teaching English” (Mauranen 2003, 513), and new models are needed to define the new status of the English language today. Banking on these assumptions, a new approach to English used in intercultural and international settings has emerged, and innumerable studies have flourished to shed light on this phenomenon, and to account for its pedagogical implications.

In § 4.2.1, a selection of relevant definitions of ELF which have been proposed over the years will be presented, along with the different attitudes of scholars towards this concept and its implications. The description of ELF at the levels of phonology, lexico-grammar and pragmatics will be the focus of § 4.2.2. To conclude, § 4.2.3 will account for the spread of English and the status of ELF in Europe.

4.2.1. *ELF: definitions and attitudes*

During the 13th IAWC Conference in Regensburg, Germany, in 2007, Jenkins (2009) stated that, when using the acronym ELF, she refers “to a specific communication context: English being used as a lingua franca, the common language of choice, among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds” (Jenkins 2009, 200). In her book *Understanding English as a Lingua Franca*, Seidlhofer (2011) provides the following working definition of ELF, which seems in line with Jenkins’s proposal: “*any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option*” (Seidlhofer 2011, 7, author’s emphasis). Jenkins’s and Seidlhofer’s definitions of ELF are among the most recently proposed in this field of research. In fact, ELF has been categorized in a wide number of ways over the years, in an attempt by linguists to reach a full understanding of this phenomenon. However, the process of defining and describing ELF and its implications has sparked off lively debates, sometimes causing disagreement among linguists, as it will be explained later on.

At the outset, the acronym EIL, which stands for English as an International Language (EIL), was used interchangeably with ELF to define the use of English in international settings by speakers with different lingua-cultural backgrounds.⁵ For instance, the acronym

⁵ Seidlhofer (2004) highlights the difference between EIL and IE (International English), with the latter acronym being sometimes used misleadingly as a shorthand version of English as an International Language. According to Seidlhofer, the two terms are not to be confused, as IE seems to suggest “that there is one clearly distinguishable, codified, and unitary variety called International English, which is certainly not the

EIL is employed with this connotation by Jenkins (2000, 2002) and Seidlhofer (2000, 2003) among others. Jenkins (2007) states that the acronym EIL was the preferred term until the early 2000s, and it was then replaced by ELF, which is now widely established. Seidlhofer (2005) explains the difference between EIL and ELF in the following terms:

[t]he traditional meaning of EIL [...] comprises uses of English within and across Kachru's 'Circles', for intranational as well as international communication. However, when English is chosen as the means of communication among people from *different* first language backgrounds, the preferred term is 'English as a Lingua Franca'. (Seidlhofer 2005, 339, author's emphasis)

The acronym EIL is drawn upon by Seidlhofer (2000) in one of her early contributions. Here the author suggests that in the contemporary globalized era, EIL should be understood in terms of language spread, and not in terms of language distribution. Language spread and language distribution are the frames of reference outlined by Widdowson (1997) *vis à vis* the global use of English today. Widdowson explains the difference between language spread and language distribution as follows:

English as an international language is not *distributed*, as a set of established encoded forms, unchanged into different domains of use, but it is *spread* as a virtual language. [...] When we talk about the spread of English, then, it is not that the conventionally coded forms and meanings are transmitted into different environments and different surroundings, and taken up and used by different groups of people. It is not a matter of the actual language being distributed but of the virtual language being spread and in the process being variously actualized. The distribution of the actual language implies adoption and conformity. The spread of virtual language implies adaptation and nonconformity. The two processes are quite different. And they are likely to be in conflict. Distribution denies spread. So you can think of English as an adopted international language, and then you will conceive of it as a stabilized and standardized code leased out on a global scale, and controlled by the inventors virtual language. [...] But it is not. It spreads, and as it does it gets adapted as the virtual language gets actualized in diverse ways, becomes subject to local constraints and controls. (Widdowson 1997, 139-149, author's emphasis)

As a result, in the frame of reference suggested by Widdowson to appropriately contextualize English in today's globalized scenario, the spread of English should be thought of in relation to processes of adaptation and non-conformity. These notions are instrumental in recognizing the role acquired by English as it is used by NNSs, who develop their own strategies independently from native-speaker norms, in order to suit their communicative needs.

Going back to Seidlhofer's (2000) contribution, the author employs the acronyms EIL and ELF interchangeably. Seidlhofer points out that ELF was introduced after EIL arrived on

case" (Seidlhofer 2004, 210, author's emphasis).

the scene, but that it was becoming more and more common among scholars at the time. It is apparent that in Seidlhofer's discussion the term ELF seems suited to embody the ideas of adaptation, non-conformity and independent development of the language elaborated upon by Widdowson (1997). In fact, Seidlhofer (2000) defines English as a *Lingua Franca* as

an additionally acquired language system that serves as a means of communication between speakers of different first languages, or a (pidgin) language by means of which members of different speech communities can communicate with each other but which is not the native language of either – a language which has no native speakers. (Seidlhofer 2000, 61)

The conceptualization proposed by Seidlhofer marks a further step in defining ELF, and it signals a positive attitude towards the phenomenon. In this definition, the role of the NNSs is acknowledged, whereas NSs are not considered users of ELF. Nonetheless, it will be pointed out later that this categorization of the users of ELF has changed over time to include NSs as well (Seidlhofer 2011), although during in ELF interactions NSs represent a minority (Jenkins 2007).

The acronym ELF soon became the favoured term among scholars, while EIL was eventually discarded. In fact, ELF is a more viable term to foreground the role of NNSs as responsible of the autonomous development of the language. As stated by Seidlhofer (2004),

ELF has taken on a life of its own, independent to a considerable degree of the norms established by its native users, and that warrants recognition. It is for this reason that ELF would appear to be the preferred term for this phenomenon—not because most *lingua franca* definitions restrict it to communication among nonnative users as such, but because it best signals that it is those nonnative users that provide the strongest momentum for the development of the language in its global uses. (Seidlhofer 2004, 212)

In this argumentation, NSs are not ruled out from ELF communication, but ELF may as well be used to refer to interactions occurring among speakers from countries included in Kachru's Inner and Outer Circles (Kachru 1985, 1992). Mauraanen (2006b) adopts a similar view, when she explains that “it is in the nature of things in ELF discourses that L1 speakers mix with L2 speakers” (Mauraanen 2006b, 129).

Yet, it is contended that empirical studies about ELF should not be based on too many ELF informants, as their participation in the interactions would make the identification of emerging forms of ELF more difficult. The same view is adopted by Jenkins (2009), who states that

[t]he vast majority of ELF researchers take a broad rather than narrow view, and include all English users within the definition of ELF. The crucial point, however, is that when Inner Circle speakers participate in ELF communication, they do not set the linguistic agenda. Instead, no matter which circle we come from, from an ELF perspective we all need to make adjustments to our local

English variety for the benefit of our interlocutors [...]. ELF is thus a question, not of orientation to the norms of a particular group of English speakers, but of mutual negotiation involving efforts and adjustments from all parties. (Jenkins 2009, 201)

Furthermore, it has been stressed by Seidlhofer (2000) that the majority of English users is represented by NNSs who employ the language “for communication that cannot be conducted in the mother tongue, be it in business, travel, science or politics – in conversation, in print, on television, on the internet” (Seidlhofer 2000, 57). The main concerns of speakers using English for international communication do not include conformity to NS rules, but “efficiency, relevance and economy in language learning and use” (Seidlhofer 2000, 57). Following from these premises, linguists started to call for more empirical research in this domain, so as to map out a model of ELF that would cast light upon common features in the usage of English by NNSs. In particular, language descriptions of ELF have been conducted at the level of phonology, lexico-grammar, and pragmatics, as elucidated in the following section.

Several definitions of ELF have been postulated over time, with a view to deal with the many faces of the phenomenon, and the implications it carries for globalized communication. However, some of the terms that recurred the most often in the first years of ELF research were soon rejected, since they had been borrowed from traditional sociolinguistic categories, and therefore they were not apt to capture the novelty implied in ELF. One of this term is ‘contact language’. For instance, Firth (1996), in one of the first studies conducted on ELF pragmatics (see the next section), defines ELF as “a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication” (Firth 1996, 240, author’s emphasis). This definition leaves out NSs from ELF interactions, and it is in line with the original meaning of *lingua franca*, as also suggested by Meierkord and Knapp (2002). However, Jenkins (2007) observes that “the historical *lingua francas* had non NSs” (Jenkins 2007, 1), whereas ELF interactions may include NSs as well, with the proviso that they represent a minority in the communicative event under consideration, as pointed out previously. In this perspective, the use of ELF cuts across the three circles of Kachru’s model, and this is a consequence of the global spread of English, which lends this language a special role that historical *lingua francas* did not have, and that allows NNSs to be actively involved in the process of meaning construction.

Furthermore, by conceptualizing ELF as a contact language, it is simply assumed that “a ‘foreign’ language that happens to be English” (Jenkins 2007, 2) exists, and that speakers with different L1s resort to this language in order to communicate. Yet at the same time, no

recognition is given to the fact that ELF *de facto* represents “an emerging English that exists in its *own right* and which is being described *in its own terms* rather than by comparison with ENL” (Jenkins 2007, 2, author’s emphasis). Taking these observations into accounts, the traditional sociolinguistic term ‘contact language’ does not seem appropriate to define ELF.

In addition to this, Jenkins distinguishes ELF from ESL and EFL, which are terms traditionally linked to the Kachruvian models of the spread of English, and she provides the following definition:

ELF is the preferred term for a relatively new manifestation of English which is very different in concept from both English as a Second Language (ESL)—the label frequently given to outer circle Englishes, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL)—the traditional, if to a great extent anachronistic, label for English in the expending circle. Unlike ESL varieties, it is not primarily a local or contact language *within* national groups but *between* them. And unlike EFL, whose goal is in reality ENL (English as a Native Language), it is not primarily a language for communication between its NSs and NNSs, but among its NNSs. (Jenkins 2007, 4, author’s emphasis)

It is apparent that in this definition Jenkins seeks to place the discussion of ELF beyond the traditional categories of ENL, ESL and EFL, while giving prominence to the role of NNSs as active users of English for international communication. Moreover, the author tries to reconcile ELF with the framework of WEs. In fact, this framework banks on plurilinguism, but the models of the spread of English that have been propounded over the years are still bound to NS standards of uniformity. As a matter of fact, studies conducted in the context of WEs “promote a unitary and essentially monolithic model based on idealized NS norms, with little scope for either NNSs variation or NNS-led innovation at the international level” (Jenkins 2007, 17-18). In contrast to these models, ELF is characterized by the same plurilinguistic nature that is actually inherent in the WEs framework.

An attempt to reconcile the WEs paradigm with ELF research is made by Seidlhofer (2009b) as well. In her paper presented during the 13th IAWWE Conference in Regensburg, Germany, in 2007, Seidlhofer argues that there is no contradiction between the respective views endorsed by WEs and ELF, but that they are compatible. In fact, the author contends that both WEs and ELF “are engaged in the same shared endeavour to understand and confront the sociolinguistic challenges of a rapidly changing world” (Seidlhofer 2009b, 243), and that as a result these two strands of research can lead to fruitful cross-fertilization.

To go back to my discussion of those traditional sociolinguistic constructs that have been employed to conceptualize ELF, it is to be acknowledged that the term ‘contact language’ was popular among ELF researchers during the early 2000s. For example, House (2003) quotes Firth (1996) at the beginning of her contribution, with a view to providing an

introductory definition of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the author's main point in her study is developing an argument against the widespread assumption that during the 2000s saw ELF as a threat to multilingualism. House's argument relies on the functional distinction between 'language for communication' and 'language for identification', and she describes ELF as follows:

ELF appears to be [...] one of a repertoire of different communicative instruments an individual has at his/her disposal, a useful and versatile tool, a 'language for communication' [...], that is, a useful instrument for making oneself understood in international encounters. It is instrumental in enabling communication with others who do not speak one's own L1. (House 2003, 559)

In this sense, ELF does not represent a threat to one's native language, since it is assigned a specific function as a tool for communication, to which speakers with different L1s resort to communicate in intercultural scenarios. It follows that

[i]n using ELF, speakers are unlikely to conceive of it as a 'language for identification': it is local languages, and particularly an individual's L1(s), which are likely to be the main determinants of identity [...]. Because ELF is not a national language, but a mere tool bereft of collective cultural capital, it is a language usable neither for identity marking, nor for a positive ('integrative') disposition toward an L2 group, nor for a desire to become similar to valued members of this L2 group – simply because there is no definable group of ELF speakers. (House 2003, 560)

As is evident from this quotation, House assumes that there is no such thing as a single ELF speech community. In turn, House suggests that the notion of 'community of practice' is a more viable concept to explain ELF. In fact, what is crucial during ELF interactions is the successful meaning negotiation that leads to the accomplishment of shared communicative goals in diverse settings (House 2003). In this scenario, ENL norms are not applicable to judge the success of ELF interactions. To this regard, House argues that "[t]he yardstick for measuring ELF speakers' performance should therefore rather be an 'expert in ELF use', a stable multilingual speaker under comparable socio-cultural and historical conditions of language use, and with comparable goals of interaction" (House 2003, 573). As I will indicate in this section, the notion of community of practice is considered an appropriate construct to define the speakers using ELF by Seidlhofer (2009b, 2011) as well.

Another term which is linked to the sociolinguistic notion of community, and which has been often employed to categorize ELF, but eventually discarded as not suitable to define ELF, is 'variety'. For example, in one of her early studies, and during the first phase of the

ELF debate, Mauranen (2003)⁶ refers to ELF as “a new variety that emerges in situations where interlocutors do not share a L1” (Mauranen 2003, 514). Doubts about the appropriateness of this construct to get grasp of ELF are expressed by Mollin (2006). From a sociolinguistic point of view, Mollin argues that “varieties [are] bundles of idiolects that share certain features. These bundles may be determined regionally (also called dialects) or socially (sociolects)” (Mollin 2006, 43). In this sense, the construct of variety entails a certain degree of homogeneity, and this is problematic, since it is a characteristic which is hard to define *per se*, and which does not seem to account for the nature of ELF, as Mollin sets out to demonstrate.

Mollin tackles this issue “from a regional perspective” (Mollin 2006, 46), that is, by concentrating on the use of ELF in the European Union. On the one hand, the author banks on the assumption that new varieties of English have developed in countries included in Kachru’s Outer Circle. Therefore, the author states that ELF “has the theoretical potential of developing its own variety” (Mollin 2006, 44-45), namely as a result of accommodation processes. On the other hand, Mollin highlights that ELF situations are unpredictable and unstable. In fact, each ELF interaction includes speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds and with different degrees of competence, in an endeavour to adjust to each others’ speech. As a result, the author argues that “what unifies lingua franca speech is communication strategies rather than the result of any structural convergence” (Mollin 2006, 45).

Mollin demonstrates her claim by reporting on a study conducted on the Corpus of Euro-English. This corpus consists of 400,000 words: 160,000 derive from on-line synchronic written interactions, such as discussion groups and chat rooms involving European citizens, while 240,000 words derive from transcripts of speeches and press conferences held at the European Commission, where participants are politicians, officials and journalists. For this reason, the author adds the caveat that the spoken part of the corpus “reflects English as it is used daily in a rather closed community” (Mollin 2006, 47).

The analysis of the findings reveals that, despite evidence of L1 transfer across the corpus, there are no common patterns in terms of lexico-grammar or morphosyntax that may characterize Euro-English as a variety. Contrary to this, the corpus shows a tendency to adhere to NS norms. Nonetheless, one striking result indicates the overuse of such verbs as *have* and *make*, which according to the authors are drawn upon by the European speakers in the corpus as all-purpose verbs to get the meaning across from one NNS to the other. Relying on this result, Mollin contends that this choice is not a feature of ELF as a variety, but it is “a direct result of the communication purpose” (Mollin 2006, 51), therefore ELF may be

⁶ In the same article, the author defines ELF as a contact language (Mauranen 2003).

regarded as a register: “if it is the case that the characteristics of ELF depend on the situation and communication purposes of the speakers, we should indeed classify ELF not as a variety, but indeed as a register [...] in the Hallidayan sense” (Mollin 2006, 51). In addition to this, Mollin states that the notion of register seems more appropriate to define ELF also because it entails a higher degree of variation than the notion of variety.

Here I would like to point out that Mollin’s attempt to go beyond the traditional sociolinguistic category of variety provides useful insights into the phenomenon of ELF. In fact, she stresses the functional aspect of ELF, which is used in purposeful communicative events, where NNSs seek to fine-tune their speech to get meaning across. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that register as conceived by Halliday has been problematized by other scholars, due to the conceptual vagueness implied in the term (Bhatia 1996, 2004, see also § 3.1 in the present work). Moreover, as also explained by Mollin, her research focuses on a very specific context of ELF use, that is, the European Commission, which is an institution characterized by its own set of procedures and practices. As a result, a question arises regarding the extent to which the linguistic choices emerging in the Corpus of Euro-English are due to the informants’ institutional and professional roles, rather than by their lingua-cultural background. Hence, the idea of register is too narrow to explain ELF, which in turn should rather be compared to a fully-fledged language.

The idea of variation as opposed to the notion of variety is elaborated upon by Seidlhofer (2011) as well. The author states that ELF cannot be interpreted in terms of a variety, since this categorization would restrict the phenomenon to a discrete entity, and it would entail an attempt to fix what is unstable. The notion of variety should be discarded relying on the assumption that “[l]anguage is a continuum in time and space” (Seidlhofer 2011, 46). In her argumentation, Seidlhofer hints at the conceptual gap (Seidlhofer 2000, 2001, 2009b, 2011) that exists today among the kind of English that is taught and learnt, based on NS standards, and the kind of English that it is difficult to accept “as a legitimate object of investigation and descriptive research” (Seidlhofer 2009b, 237), although this is actually the language used nowadays for global communication among a majority of NNSs. The contemporary reality of English used as a lingua franca cannot be conceived of as a variety, i.e. formally, but functionally. As the author explains, ELF “is not a variety of English but a variable way of using it: English that functions *as* a lingua franca” (Seidlhofer 2011, 77, author’s emphasis).

While suggesting this deconstruction of the notion of variety, Seidlhofer rethinks the

notion of community as well (see also Seidlhofer 2009b).⁷ According to Seidlhofer, the traditional notion of community as a group of people in direct contact to each is not tenable anymore, if the unprecedented changes brought about by globalization in the areas of transports and communication are considered. As Seidlhofer (2011) explains,

with the current proliferation of possibilities created by electronic means and easy global mobility, changes in *communications* have accelerated and forced changes in *communication* [...]. In all these, English is in a pivotal position: already established as a widespread language, it is particularly well placed to play a crucial role in these changed conditions, where communities can no longer be defined in terms of face-to-face contact, and certainly not by a common native language. (Seidlhofer 2011, 86)

This argumentation leads the author to the conclusion that ‘community of practice’ is a more convenient notion to be applied to the community of ELF users, as it implies the idea of the existence of a common communicative purpose which is pursued by language users who share the same linguistic resources.

As I have tried to show so far, each conceptualization of ELF which has been attempted over time, has represented a step forward in the process of coming to terms with the multifarious aspects of this phenomenon, while also signalling how attitudes of scholars, teachers and speakers have changed to its regard. Nowadays ELF is widely accepted as an object of linguistic enquiry, especially in the area of ELT, where discussions of this phenomenon, considered a realization of English to be taken into account in today’s globalized world, have gained momentum. Nonetheless, ELF has often been encountered with sharp criticism, and it has been stigmatized as a deficient and not legitimized use of English. The negative attitudes shown by scholars and teachers towards ELF, especially with regard to ELF accents are the focus of Jenkins’s *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity* (2007).⁸ Jenkins argues that

scholars who recognize the legitimacy of ELF are at present in a fairly small minority among linguists (even, surprisingly, sociolinguists and applied linguists). ELF appears not to be seen in a positive light by large numbers of NSs and NNSs alike [...], who for various reasons continue to support the traditional orientation to English in international contexts. (Jenkins 2007, 7-8)

In this work, Jenkins carries out systematic research by reviewing academic literature on the topic as well as teaching material, and by designing questionnaires and collecting the opinions

⁷ A stance similar to Seidlhofer’s one (2009b, 2011) with regard to the notions of variety and community has been adopted by Georgieva (2009). The author rejects both notions, since in today’s international communication, the innumerable lingua-cultural backgrounds of NNSs do not allow the codification of ELF in terms of a variety. In addition to this, the notion of community cannot account for the “transnational nature and the diversity and instability” (Georgieva 2009, 295) underlying ELF.

⁸ Jenkins (2007) is the continuation of Jenkins (2000), as also stated by the author (Jenkins 2007). In fact, with her second book-length work about ELF, the author aimed at countering the criticism which her first in-depth study about ELF pronunciation (Jenkins 2000) had attracted.

of more than 300 teachers in twelve countries around the world. The picture at which the author eventually arrives depicts a situation oriented towards native-speaker norms, in which ELF is regarded as a deviation from standard language. In this context, learners are encouraged to adopt NS forms, but in this way they are denied the possibility to develop a type of language that would be more appropriate in today's multilingual and multicultural contexts.

Jenkins affirms that a misleading idea has been disseminated until now, according to which NS forms are superior to ELF, in particular when it comes to pronunciation. To this regard, Jenkins refers to studies on this topic that purport to demonstrate intelligibility problems ensuing from NNSs' incorrect accents. In response to this, Jenkins calls for more empirical research in real-life settings, since to that date most studies had been conducted in artificial, non-interactive environments. Moreover, the author quotes her own results (Jenkins 2000, 2002, see the following section) obtained from research on actual interactions among NNSs, where interactants deployed accommodation and negotiation strategies, which allowed them to reach mutual intelligibility. Jenkins concludes that NNSs should be recognized the same rights as NSs, and encouraged to accept those pronunciation features that, although deviating from NS standards, do not hinder mutual intelligibility.

All in all, Jenkins's study seeks to dispel the prejudices that surrounded ELF during the 2000s. By drawing upon their accommodation skills, it is Jenkins's contention that NNSs adjust their communication to their interlocutors' needs. As Jenkins asserts, "in international communication, the ability to accommodate to interlocutors with other first languages than one's own (regardless of whether the result is an 'error' in ENL) is a far more important skill than the ability to imitate the English of a native speaker" (Jenkins 2007, 238). As a consequence, conformity to NS standards is now anachronistic and not even desirable.

In addition, ELF speakers reach mutual intelligibility while retaining their socio-cultural and socio-linguistic identity in their speech. The stance adopted by Jenkins *vis à vis* the issue of identity seems to differ from the one encapsulated in the functional dichotomy between 'language for communication' and 'language for identification' propounded by House (2003). In fact, according to Jenkins (2007), the use of ELF does not prevent language users from retaining their identity, which characterizes them as individuals with a specific lingua-cultural background. In this sense, ELF users act as effective multilingual speakers in intercultural contexts. This has become even more relevant in relation to international communication in today's globalized scenario, which is dominated by identity diversity and complexity.

Similar remarks about how NNSs retain and display their identity in ELF interactions

have been made by Seidlhofer (2009b, 2011) as well. First of all, by relying on empirical research conducted to that date, Seidlhofer (2009b) argues that “speakers assert and communicate their own identities”, by using language in a personalized way. In fact, NNSs do not imitate NSs in their use of the language, but they adapt the language to their purposes in a creative way, thus “assert[ing] and communicat[ing] their own identities” (Seidlhofer 2009b, 239). The author banks on the findings of studies on ELF carried out not only to identify linguistic features, but also to investigate the functions that ELF fulfils. As I will point out in the following section dedicated to ELF phonology, lexico-grammar and pragmatics, “the crucial challenge has been to move from the surface description of particular features, however interesting they may be in themselves, to an explanation of the underlying significance of the forms” (Seidlhofer 2009b, 241). In other words, ELF research has demonstrated that the interdependence of form and function in ELF interactions underpins the attempt on the part of ELF speakers to signal their identity.

In addition to this, Seidlhofer (2011) stresses that ELF lexico-grammar and accommodation in ELF interactions, which will be tackled in depth in the following section, are closely related to NNSs’ identity. Beside this, the author warns that “simply to home in on the formal properties of ELF and their lack of conformity to the norms of ENL is to fail to understand how ELF functions as an entirely natural linguistic phenomenon” (Seidlhofer 2011, 124). Further, it is the author’s contention that “non-conformity of form does not at all preclude functional effectiveness but on the contrary can enhance it” (Seidlhofer 2011 127), and that this may be even desirable so as to express NNSs’ identity, provided that intelligibility is maintained. As a matter of fact, lexico-grammatical variations that ensue as the result of communicative adaptation are instrumental to successful interactions, as elucidated in the following section when dealing with descriptions of ELF at the level of pragmatics (Seidlhofer 2009a, 2011).

The above argumentation and the definition of ELF quoted in the first paragraph of this section have been taken from the same book by Seidlhofer (2011). With this work, the author has offered one of the most recent and comprehensive contributions to ELF research. The aim of Seidlhofer’s book is namely “to arrive at ‘a certain level of understanding’ of ELF by both seeking to explain the concept as such and describing how ELF users interact amongst themselves, how they understand each others’ ELF” (Seidlhofer 2011, ix). Taking this observation into account, Seidlhofer’s definition has been selected together with Jenkins’s one to open this section, since it is the result of linguistic research that has been conducted for more than two decades now, and it acknowledges ELF “as a use in its own right, and ELF speakers as language users in their own right” (Seidlhofer 2011, 35). In order to explain the

nature of ELF, Seidlhofer resorts neither to traditional sociolinguistic categories, such as variety and contact language, nor to the dichotomy between NSs and NNSs, but she emphasizes the role of the speakers as actively engaged in the use of a language, i.e. ELF, and on the intercultural and multilingual context in which they interact. Beside this, what is also relevant in Seidlhofer's definition is also that she recognizes that ELF is sometimes the only resource available to speakers to conduct communication in intercultural settings.

In order to conclude this section, and to exemplify the fact that the debate around the issues surveyed so far is still thriving, I would like to mention the lively and stimulating exchanges between Sowden (2012) and Cogo (2012) about the meaning and implications of ELF.⁹ Sowden's contribution reports on the negative attitudes towards the ELF phenomenon, which are due to the still persisting uncertainties regarding the nature of this phenomenon. In particular, according to the author, ELF is "a reduced version of the language" (Sowden 2012, 90), and he lists practical and theoretical problems regarding the feasibility of what he defines "the ELF project" (Sowden 2012, 91). First of all, in Sowden's opinion, the codification of the constitutive elements of ELF is not practicable, and as a result it is not possible to distinguish between ELF "non-standard alternatives and persistent errors" (Sowden 2012, 92). Secondly, he criticizes the introduction of ELF as a teaching target, relying on the assumption that this would force teachers into lowering their professional standards, and learners into "devaluing the content of what they are studying" (Sowden 2012, 95). In addition to this, given the fact that the NS model is still the most influential one, the operationalization of ELF teaching models would lead to a divide between prestigious schools teaching according to NS standards and low-level schools offering a syllabus based on ELF. Sowden rounds off his article by arguing that the Anglo-Saxon model will remain the preferred one in teaching methodologies, only to be challenged by nativized varieties of English that have developed locally around the world, whereas ELF will remain an "uncertain substitute for authentic English" (Sowden 2012, 95).

In response to Sowden, Cogo (2012) contends that ELF research is not only about pinning down a set of core features of ELF, but rather describing its practices and the communicative strategies implemented by its users. In other words, ELF research does not aim at the codification of the language as a monolithic variety, but it endeavours to describe how English is appropriated by diverse communities to get meaning across in international communication.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, according to the author, ELF research delve into the

⁹ The exchange between Sowden (2012) and Cogo (2012) included in the Point and Counterpoint section of the *ELT Journal*, volume 63, issue 3, has been further commented by Sewell (2013) and Dewey (2013).

¹⁰ Cogo's article contains a revision of the notions of variety and community, and it advocates the use of the term 'speech community' as a more tenable concept to conceptualize groups of ELF users.

language from a pragmatic perspective, with a view to identify form-function correlations that are strategically established to create and negotiate meaning among groups of speakers with different lingua-cultures. As Cogo puts it, “[t]he main purpose of ELF research today is, of course, to reveal some of the forms that emerge in ELF interaction in specific communities, by more importantly to highlight the pragmatic strategies speakers draw on as they collaboratively engage in communication” (Cogo 2012, 99). As for ELT, Cogo argues that it is now imperative to make “students aware of different ways of speaking English, of language variability and change”, so that they can choose whether to orient towards NS norms or to tap into ELF strategies, as appropriate to a given contexts. As for language teaching, an approach should be adopted which focuses not only on lexico-grammar and pronunciation, but also and above all on “communication skills, knowledge, and attitudes such as communication strategies, pragmatic competence, and language and cultural awareness” (Cogo 2012, 104).

The exchange between Sowden and Cogo is evidence of the fact that there is so much debate going on about ELF, and that ELF research is yielding results that carry far-reaching implication for the teaching and use of English as a means of intercultural communication, and that should be borne in mind when approaching the language from the point of view of linguistic analysis.

4.2.2. *ELF: phonology, lexico-grammar and pragmatics*

The survey conducted in the previous section has tried to account for the range of definitions of ELF that have been proposed over the years, and for the way in which attitudes have changed with regard to this phenomenon. Meanwhile, linguists have soon felt the necessity to corroborate the conceptualization of ELF with empirical work. Following from these premises, Seidlhofer (2004) contends that “[i]f we are to think differently about English, we need to know more about what forms it takes in different contexts of use in lingua franca settings. In other words, changes on the conceptual and attitudinal levels have to be substantiated by descriptive work” (Seidlhofer 2004, 215). As a consequence, a body of research has begun to thrive, aiming at describing ELF at the linguistic levels of phonology, lexico-grammar and pragmatics. In most cases, studies have concentrated on spoken interactions for two reasons. Firstly, spoken language is less stable and standardized than written language, and secondly during spoken interactions it is possible to investigate processes of meaning negotiation and mutual intelligibility (Seidlhofer 2004).

The first studies on ELF carried out at the level of phonology began to emerge during the early 2000s. *The Phonology of English as an International Language* by Jenkins (2000,

see also Jenkins 2002),¹¹ is the first substantial investigation of the features of spoken ELF. The aim of this work is to outline a “pedagogical core of phonological intelligibility for speakers of EIL” (Jenkins 2000, 123). Jenkins relies on the fact that NNSs of English outnumber NSs, and that nowadays English is being learnt for international communication. Nonetheless, learners of English are still encouraged to assimilate NS pronunciation features, even if this causes problems of intelligibility. Jenkins’s aim is then to “advocate and implement a far more realistic approach to phonology within ELT pedagogy” (Jenkins 2000, 2), and so to orchestrate a pronunciation model that suits the communication needs of NNSs.

First of all, Jenkins (2002, 2002) examines the phonological behaviour of NNSs by describing and analysing data drawn from contexts where ELF is used. Secondly, she discusses “specific new goals for pronunciation teaching” (Jenkins 2000, 2) that are better suited to promote intelligibility among NNSs. Relying on evidence of ELF interactions, Jenkins propounds the Lingua Franca Core, that is, a pronunciation syllabus intended to be more easily teachable for NNSs than the traditional models relying on RP and GA. The Lingua Franca Core includes all those phonological and phonetic characteristics that guarantee mutual intelligibility in ELF contexts. Jenkins (2007) contrasts the main core items that should be addressed in the classroom as a target of ELF teaching (right-hand column) with the traditional items of EFL teaching (left-hand column) as follows:

TABLE 4.1. EFL and ELF pronunciation targets: core features (Jenkins 2007, 23).

	EFL target Traditional syllabus	ELF target Lingua Franca Core
1 The consonantal inventory	• all sounds close RP/GA • RP non-rhotic /r/ - GA rhotic /r/ • RP intervocalic [t] - GA intervocalic [ɾ]	• all sounds except /θ/, /ð/ but approximations of all others acceptable • rhotic /r/ only • intervocalic [t] only
2 Phonetic requirements	• rarely specified	• aspiration after /p/, /t/, /k/ • appropriate vowel length before fortis/lenis consonants
3 Consonant clusters	• all word positions	• word initially, word medially
4 Vowel quantity	• long-short contrast	• long-short contrast
5 Tonic (nuclear) stress	• important	• critical

¹¹ In both works, the author uses the acronym EIL to refer to ELF.

On the other side, Jenkins (2000, 2002) singles out those features of pronunciation that have usually been considered fundamental for intelligibility, and so taught in the EFL classroom, but that in actual fact are not necessary for communication in ELF, as demonstrated by her data. As a consequence, these features of ELF pronunciation targets that do not hinder mutual intelligibility are considered non-core times. The table below compares the ELF non-core features (right-hand column) with the traditional features taught in the EFL classroom (left-hand column).

TABLE 4.2. EFL and ELF pronunciation targets: the non-core features (Jenkins 2007, 24).

	EFL target Traditional syllabus	ELF target Lingua Franca Core
1 Vowel quality	• close to RP or GA	• L2 (consistent) regional qualities
2 Weak forms	• essential	• unhelpful to intelligibility
3 Features of connected speech	• all	• inconsequential and may be unhelpful
4 Stressed-timed rhythm	• important	• unnecessary
5 Word stress	• critical	• can reduce flexibility/ unteachable
6 Pitch movement	• essential for indicating attitudes and grammar	• unnecessary/ unteachable

As a consequence, Jenkins suggests that teachers of English should focus on those phonological features that are most relevant for intelligibility in ELF situations. Accordingly, learners should be encouraged to develop specific accommodation skills, so as to make the most appropriate adjustments to their pronunciation in order to make themselves easily understandable by their interlocutors, given the fact that they may come from different L1 backgrounds, or present different levels of proficiency.

As regards the description of ELF at the level of lexico-grammar, Seidlhofer (2000) suggests that this can be provided by compiling a corpus of ELF, so in 2001 the VOICE project was launched at the University of Vienna (VOICE 2013). VOICE, i.e. the Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English,¹² aims at “open[ing] the way for a *large-scale* and *in-depth linguistic description* of this most common contemporary use of English by providing a

¹² As stated in the section of the VOICE website dedicated to the Frequently Asked Questions, “‘Oxford’ is a constituent of the name VOICE because the Oxford University Press supported the VOICE project financially in its initial phase” (VOICE 2013).

corpus of spoken ELF interactions which will be accessible to linguistic researchers all over the world” (VOICE 2013, authors’ emphasis). At the present time, VOICE includes 1 million words of spoken ELF, which correspond to 110 hours and 35 minutes of recorded and transcribed interactions.

As regards the lingua-cultural backgrounds of the informants recorded for the VOICE project, the rationale behind the compilation of the corpus seems to take into account the observations made in § 4.2.1 concerning the contribution of NSs during ELF events. In fact, one of the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions in the VOICE website states that

ELF interactions often also include speakers from backgrounds where English is used as a first or second language. The VOICE project therefore works with a definition of ELF which includes English native speakers as well. Nevertheless, so-called non-native speakers of English commonly outnumber English native speakers in ELF interactions, a fact also represented in VOICE. Speakers who have English as a first language only make up about 7 per cent of all speakers recorded in VOICE. (VOICE 2013)¹³

Therefore, the main informants for empirical investigations of EFL in the VOICE project are NNSs.¹⁴ In addition to this, this choice seems to imply the fact that NSs do not always comply with “quality of clear communication and standards of intelligibility” (Widdowson 1994, 379), as mentioned in § 4.2 above. This may be due to the particular dialect they speak, or to a lack of sensitivity in using English internationally which has been criticized, among others, by Phillipson (2003).

As regards the VOICE project, Seidlhofer (2001) contends that the compilation of this corpus represents a first step in the process of giving a central space to the description of ELF, with a view also to close a conceptual gap in the discussion about English Language Teaching (ELT), which to that moment had concentrated exclusively on language practices in the Inner and Outer Circles. Seidlhofer acknowledges that, albeit the meta-level discussion about ELF was gathering pace at the time, this momentous change was having no impact on the level of pedagogy:

the daily practices of most of the millions of teachers of English worldwide seem to remain untouched by this development [...]. This is not surprising if we consider that what these teachers of English generally regard, for better or for worse, as their main knowledge base and point of reference, the target language as codified in grammars, dictionaries and textbooks, has not moved with the tide of applied linguistic research. (Seidlhofer 2001, 134)

¹³ As regards the settings in which ELF interactions take place, Seidlhofer lists such “influential networks” as “global business, politics, science, technology and media discourse” (Seidlhofer 2004, 211).

¹⁴ When reporting on the initial phases of the VOICE project, Seidlhofer (2001) states that at the outset it was established not to include in the data any interactions among NSs, and that these should not occur in settings where English is the predominant language.

Contrary to this general trend, Seidlhofer suggests that the potential of non-native teachers of English should be highlighted, since they “know the target language as a foreign language, share with their students the experience of what it is like to try and make it their own, often through the same first language/culture ‘filter’, and can represent relevant role models for learners” (Seidlhofer 2001, 134-135). In this sense, evidence that emerges from VOICE can be instrumental in changing the traditional perception of the type of English that should be taught in the present global era. Accordingly, ELF is gaining relevance, as it represents the most established reality of English usage today.

Since the beginning of the initiative, VOICE has been regarded as an instrument to carry out systematic research on the lexico-grammar of spoken ELF. The ultimate objective of the project is a codification of ELF as “a feasible, acceptable and respected alternative to ENL in appropriate contexts of use” (Seidlhofer 2001, 150) that can be tapped into as a resource in designing material for ELT. In particular, while investigating the data comprised in the corpus, “[i]t will [...] become possible to take stock of how the speakers [...] actually communicate through ELF, and to begin to build a characterization of how they use, or rather co-construct, ‘English’ to do so” (Seidlhofer 2001, 147). In fact, the analysis of interactions included in the corpus shows instances of successful communication among NNSs. For example, the presence of back-channelling suggests that interactants are actively cooperating in the conversation, while deviations from ENL standards such as the lack of third person *-s* or missing indefinite article do not hinder mutual intelligibility (Seidlhofer 2001). Those deviations, that NSs would consider errors in need of correction, are in fact unproblematic in most of ELF interactions, and they are summarized by Seidlhofer as follows:

- dropping the third person tense *-s*
 - confusing the relative pronouns *who* and *which*
 - omitting definite and indefinite articles where they are obligatory in ENL, and inserting them where they do not occur in ENL
 - failing to use correct forms in tag questions (e.g., *isn't it?* or *no?* instead of *shouldn't they?*)
 - inserting redundant prepositions, as in *We have to study about...*
 - overusing certain verbs of high semantic generality, such as *do*, *have*, *make*, *put*, *take*
 - replacing infinitive constructions with *that*-clauses, as in *I want that*
 - overdoing explicitness (e.g. *black colour* rather than just *black*).
- (Seidlhofer 2004, 220, author's emphasis)¹⁵

VOICE is not the only corpus of ELF which has been compiled so far. The ELFA (English as a Lingua Franca in Academic Settings) project was launched at the Tampere University in the

¹⁵ I will explain further on in this section that Cogo and Dewey (2006) pointedly remark that Seidlhofer (2004) fell into the trap of using negative categories when mapping the recurring lexico-grammatical features of ELF interactions.

early 2000s and completed in 2008. The corpus consists of one million words, corresponding to 131 hours of speech recorded at the University of Tampere, the University of Helsinki, Tampere University of Technology, and Helsinki University of Technology (ELFA 2008).

In the early stages of the project, Mauranen (2003) wrote that the investigation subsuming ELF is meant to serve three research interests, that is, a theoretical, a descriptive and an application oriented interest. Firstly, the theoretical interest in ELF is given by the fact that, as discussed in the previous section, according to Mauranen English functions as a contact or vehicular language. Theoretical works account for the fact that ELF speakers have all at some point dealt with English as learners, and so they may present interferences due to their competence in the language, and due to their lingua-cultures. As a consequence, the data gathered in theoretical works “centre[s] around the possibility of finding manifestations of simplifications, evidence of universally unmarked features, and hypothesised universals of communication as well as evidence for self-regulative patterns” (Mauranen 2003, 516).

Secondly, the descriptive interest in ELF stems from the need to map the core elements that distinguish it from ENL. Descriptive work is required to validate theoretical hypothesis and to assist application oriented interests, since it provides foundation to practical application,s especially in ELT. In fact, practical interests purport to establish “reasonable and achievable targets of learning” (Mauranen 2003, 517). In other words, new teaching models should be developed that are adequate to intercultural settings, and that allow learners to “negotiate and manage communicative situations successfully and fluently” (Mauranen 2003, 517), without feeling marginalized.

This new teaching models should focus on efficiency and achievable targets that cannot be accounted for by the traditional EFL syllabus, as this has always focused on ENL norms. Accordingly, teachers should concentrate on those core elements that are easy to learn, and that are instrumental to ELF communication. Moreover, it is advisable to redefine language standards according to the function it fulfils in relation to specific discourse communities. As a matter of fact, it is Mauranen’s contention that

particular discourse communities using ELF might plausibly develop their own norms of use, that is standards of what is acceptable, comprehensible, and adequate for efficient communication more or less spontaneously. [...] Therefore, the point of departure for establishing standards for teaching and assessment ought to be the empirical study of discourse communities that use ELF successfully. (Mauranen 2003, 518-519)

Taking all these observations into account, the ELFA project was launched to compile a corpus of ELF spoken in academic settings. The social context was limited to the academia so as to bring the behaviour of a specific discourse community into focus. Furthermore, spoken

interactions were chosen since to that time the majority of studies of academic English had been conducted on instances of written discourse.¹⁶ Furthermore, the study of spoken interactions seemed more relevant to the ELF context since academic written discourse is usually edited, whereas “in spoken interaction, the negotiation of meanings and deployment of interactive patterns are left to the interactants, without outside monitoring” (Mauranen 2003, 520). The purpose of the ELFA corpus is two-fold. As explained by Mauranen (2006a),

on the one hand, it helps us understand how academic discourses work at time when so much of teaching and research is carried out in different countries using English as a lingua franca. On the other hand, the corpus offers a clearly delimited database of ELF in situations which are linguistically and intellectually demanding, and which therefore go well beyond simple routines or rudimentary exchanges. (Mauranen 2006a, 147).

The ELFA corpus includes authentic data from monologic events, such as lectures and presentations, accounting for 33% of the recorded data, and dialogic or polylogic events, such as seminars, thesis defences, and conference discussions, accounting for 67% of the data. Moreover, the data are distributed across several disciplinary domains, as for instance social sciences (29% of the recorded data), technology (19%), humanities (17%), natural sciences (13%), medicine (10%), behavioural sciences (7%), and economics and administration (5%, ELFA 2008). The informants in ELFA are represented by approximately 650 speakers with 51 different first languages, all coming from several continents. English NSs account for only 5% of informants (ELFA 2008).

According to Mauranen (2003), the data recorded for the ELFA corpus allow both quantitative and qualitative research methods, so as to investigate different aspects of ELF. As regards quantitative analysis, by using tools of corpus linguistics such concordancing, it is possible to uncover recurrent patterns in language usage that are typical of ELF. As for qualitative analysis, the study of long transcripts lends itself to detecting pragmatic phenomena too, as for example misunderstanding, criticism, disagreement and evaluation. In sum, this “diversity of approaches will allow us to test hypothesis and the validity of earlier findings on comparable data—not only NS academic speech but also data based on NS-NNS interaction and smaller scale ELF studies” (Mauranen 2003, 524).

The concluding paragraphs of this section will be dedicated to a survey of a selection of studies that have carried out a description of ELF at the level of pragmatics. One of the first contributions in this area is the one by Firth (1996), who examined ELF interactions by

¹⁶ Two spin-offs of the project are now complementing the ELFA corpus. One project, the WrELFA (Written ELF in Academic Settings) is a corpus of written academic genres, as for example preliminary examiners’ statements, pre-edited research papers and research blogs. The other project, the SELF (Studying English as a Lingua Franca) is characterized by a qualitative and ethnographic approach, and it aims at mapping “interactive and adaptive processes in action from the point of view of ELF users themselves” (ELFA 2008).

deploying the methodology of Conversation Analysis (CA). According to the author, CA provides powerful tools to investigate naturally-occurring talk and social action: in fact, CA practitioners rely on the assumption that “talk is sequentially structured and interactively managed” (Firth 1996, 238). In order to carry out his analysis, Firth gathers data from NNSs of English in order to demonstrate that interactants who do not share the same lingua-cultural background present an unidiomatic usage of the language, also characterized by lexical, syntactic, morphological and phonological anomalies.

Firth’s informants are NNSs of English only, since he relies on the assumption that ELF is a contact language used by people who do not share a common lingua-cultural background. In particular, Firth’s data are represented by phone calls among export managers and their clients in two Danish international trading companies. By analysing these interactions, Firth is able to demonstrate that ELF talk is characterized by cooperation between the participants. In fact, ELF talk “is *made* ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ by the participants themselves, in their local discursive practices” (Firth 1996, 242, author’s emphasis). This is done with the aim of carrying out common institutional goals on the one hand, and providing interactions “with a ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ appearance in the face of sometimes ‘abnormal’ and ‘extra-ordinary’ linguistic behaviour” (Firth 1996, 242). Hence, Firth notices that anomalies and infelicities are irrelevant in ELF interactions, and that the speakers implement two kinds of strategies, known as ‘let it pass’ and ‘make it normal’, so as to co-construct talk. When deploying ‘let it pass’ strategies, the hearer disregards problematic utterances and shows acceptance towards them, as long as these will become clearer later in the interaction. When adopting ‘make it normal’ strategies, the hearer incorporates the speaker’s unidiomatic forms in his/her turn, therefore ‘normalizing’ anomalies and infelicities in language usage. Therefore, it is apparent that in ELF talks occurring in business settings, speakers are oriented towards mutual cooperation and support, rather than towards language correctness, since their main goal is to conduct consensual communication, and to keep the exchange flowing smoothly.

A further empirical study purporting to describe ELF at the level of pragmatics is the one conducted by House (2002), who investigated lingua franca interactions among international students¹⁷ at the University of Hamburg. In order to give the appropriate interpretation of the data obtained, House also collected feedback from her informants. As a matter of fact, when investigating the pragmatic level of ELF, it is often necessary to integrate the transcriptions under consideration with other contextual cues that are obviously missing in the data from the interactants themselves (Seidlhofer 2011). The author’s final aim was to

¹⁷ In House’s (2002) case study, all informants are NNSs of English.

draw useful inferences that can be operationalized in the ELT classroom to develop pragmatic competence.

The analysis of the data gathered by House shows that there are two major contradictory trends that characterize this sort of interactions. The first trend refers to the attempt on the part of some of the interactants to pursue their agenda, thus making the whole exchange “resemble a set of parallel monologues rather than a dialogue” (House 2002, 251). In this way, interactions are self-oriented, rather than being the outcome of “a collective achievement” (House 2002, 251). The second trend identified by House seems to contradict the first one, as it is characterized by the effort on the part of the interactants to build solidarity and achieve consensus. All in all, in the interpretation of the results, the author reconciles these trends, and she makes clear that during the conversations the interactants are involved in a process of meaning making in which they behave as “individual ELF speakers belonging to something as vague, fluid and immaterial as the ‘community of ELF speakers’, a consortium that is always constituted anew in any ongoing talk” (House 2002, 259).

Cogo and Dewey (2006) make a contribution to the body of work about ELF pragmatics by conducting a study on two corpora of spoken ELF collected at King’s College London. In particular, Cogo and Dewey seek to establish a connection between the analysis of ELF lexico-grammar and the analysis of pragmatics, with a view to demonstrating that the speakers’ pragmatic needs may give rise to innovations in lexis and grammar. Cogo and Dewey adopt a qualitative approach, and they select a range of ELF features on the basis of their typicality. In fact, as Cogo and Dewey put it, these features are characterized by typicality provided that they are “indicative of emerging trends in ELF use” (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 64), and that they comply with the following four criteria:

1. they are systematic, i.e. they do not happen randomly or in isolation, but “they often reveal larger patterns of change” (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 64),
2. they are frequent, i.e. they are produced on many occasions and by a large number of speakers with different L1 backgrounds,
3. they are communicatively effective, i.e. they never give rise to communication breakdowns,
4. since these features are in line with the three criteria listed above, they may be regarded as “non L1 variants (not errors), differing from standard L1 equivalents but not regarded as erroneous or deviant” (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 64).

First of all, Cogo and Dewey report on their findings at the level of pragmatics from two different perspectives, that is, interactional discourse and meaning negotiation. From the point

of view of interactional discourse, the findings show that speakers are oriented towards cooperative communication by adopting such strategies as cooperative overlaps, utterance completion, back-channeling and latching. In this way, the speakers signal their involvement and interest in the conversation. From the point of view of meaning negotiation, the authors note that the speakers provide explanation to idiomatic expressions they have used, or they implement accommodation strategies such as repetitions, in order to achieve efficient communication.

As for lexico-grammar, Cogo and Dewey state that seven out of the eight lexico-grammatical features identified by Seidlhofer (2004, see above) are attested in their data. What is important to stress here is that Cogo and Dewey rename these features, since they aptly point out that the items listed by Seidlhofer (2004) are phrased according to negative categories such as ‘confusing’, ‘omitting’, ‘failing to use’, ‘overusing’ and ‘overdoing’. As Cogo and Dewey contend, “[t]here is [...] some dissonance in the way in which the features are described: [...] it is a pity that the language used to report these findings is reminiscent of language used in error analysis” (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 74). Therefore, the authors rename the items as follows:

- Use of 3rd person singular zero
- Extension of relative *which* to include functions previously served only by *who*
- Shift in the use of articles [...]
- Invariant question tags (and use of other similar universal forms, such as *this* for *this* and *these*)
- Shift in patterns of preposition use, e.g. *we have to study about*
- Extension to the collocational field of words with high semantic generality, e.g. *take an operation*
- Increased explicitness, e.g. *how long time in place* of *how long* (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 75, authors’ emphasis).

In addition to these, the authors add two further features that have emerged in their corpora:

- Preference for bare and/or full infinitive over the use of gerunds, as in *interested to do* rather than *interested in doing*, or as *in to study is...* and *to read is...*, where the infinitive is used as the subject of a clause
- Exploited redundancy, such as ellipsis of objects/complements of transitive verbs, as in *I wanted to go with*, *You can borrow*, etc. (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 75-76, authors’ emphasis).

The remainder of Cogo and Dewey’s article is dedicated to the discussion of the use of 3rd person singular zero. The analysis of their findings lead to the identification of interrelationships between pragmatic needs and lexico-grammatical innovations. In particular, the authors argue that in the case of the 3rd person singular zero, this “option occurs as the result of efficiency of communication and exploited redundancy” (Cogo & Dewey 2006, 87).

With regard to language innovation and cooperation, Seidlhofer (2009a, see also Seidlhofer 2011) affirms that during ELF interactions speakers jointly construct idiomatic phrases that differ from NS wordings. Drawing data from VOICE, Seidlhofer shows that ELF speakers coin new idioms not only to share meaning, but also to establish rapport and to signal in-group membership. This occurs in accordance with the cooperative and territorial imperatives defined by Widdowson (1983) as follows:

[h]uman communication involves the reconciliation of two opposing forces. One is a function of the territorial imperative, as powerful in humans as in other species of animal, which disposes the individual to maintain his own schematic life space against the threat of invading influence. The other is a function of the cooperative imperative which disposes the individual to assume a social role, for his own good, and to accept a modification to his world in return for social benefits. Survival depends on getting right the balance between these two forces. (Widdowson 1983, 47)

Therefore, Seidlhofer contends that, in order to achieve effective communication, ELF speakers are supposed to strike the right balance between these two opposing tendencies. Furthermore, Seidlhofer suggests that the cooperative imperative is line with the idiom principle as it was defined by Sinclair (1991):

[t]he principle of idiom is that a language user has available to him or her a large number of semi-preconstructed phrases that constitute single choices, even though they might appear to be analyzable into segments. To some extent, this may reflect the recurrence of similar situations in human affairs; it may illustrate a natural tendency to economy of effort; or it may be motivated in part by the exigencies of real-time conversation. (Sinclair 1991, 110)

Speakers resort to the idiom principle in order to achieve effective communication. In fact, they use already existing and familiar phrases, instead of combining words to coin new patterns, following the open-choice principle (Sinclair 1991).

Obviously, Sinclair's conceptualized the idiom and the open-choice principles in relation to ENL interactions. Seidlhofer attempts to explain the formation of innovative idiomatic wordings in ELF interactions, banking on the assumption that the idiom principle "does not stop working, but continues to operate in the ongoing use of language to yield new realizations" (Seidlhofer 2009a, 197). Hence, Seidlhofer sets out to investigate how the principle is exploited in ELF interactions by speakers who wish to accommodate to each other, even if they may not be familiar with ENL idiomatic phrases. In this sense, the co-construction of new idiomatic patterns during a given ELF interaction serves the cooperative imperative, yet the author contends that these patterns serve a territorial function too, as they act as "territorial markers of social identity and group membership" (Seidlhofer 2009a, 198).

These processes occur in response to pragmatic motives, and they are the result of a

special kind of competence, i.e. that of constructing new idioms, which is developed by ELF speakers “through an extended experience of language in use” (Seidlhofer 2009a, 200). Hence, ELF speakers are in a position to appropriately exploit semantic resources in a given interaction while drawing upon the open-choice principle. From a sociolinguistic perspective, these innovations, once accepted and established in ELF settings, may have long-term effects, in the sense that “the smallest variation may be the beginning of widespread change” (Seidlhofer 2009a, 205).

From the survey conducted above, it is apparent that in recent years the need has emerged among applied linguists to integrate surface level analyses of ELF with pragmatic research, with a view to providing a coherent conceptualization of English. This new conceptualization should go beyond the notions of StE, ENL and native-speaker authority, while accounting for ELF as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. In fact, as Seidlhofer contends, “ELF is an entirely natural language development: it exemplifies perfectly how language varies and changes in reaction to circumstances and conditions of use” (Seidlhofer 2011, 70). In doing so, it is possible to acknowledge the role of NNSs in shaping the language, cooperating towards mutual understanding, and establishing in-group membership. In this sense, the notion of competence is not to be defined in terms of what would be acceptable in ENL, but of what actually happens when ELF speakers exploit the language “in order to negotiate feasibility and make their language appropriate to the contexts in which they use it to achieve their purposes” (Seidlhofer 2011, 91). In the end, such thorough descriptions of ELF may provide support to teachers in developing new pedagogies, defining achievable targets and encouraging learners. To put it in Seidlhofer’s terms, “what is required is a reconceptualization, supported by thick descriptions, of how ‘the language [teachers] are supposed to teach’ is used appropriately and effectively in the function it predominantly has in the world at large, namely as English as a Lingua Franca, not English as a native language” (Seidlhofer 2011, 58).

4.2.3. *The spread of English and the emergence of ELF in Europe*

This section is dedicated to a survey of the spread and use of English in Europe. This is relevant to the present study in keeping with one of the two rationales determining the choice of materials under scrutiny. As stated in the Introduction, the companies’ websites included in my corpus have been selected not only according to the industry sector in which the companies are active (i.e. renewable energies), but also according to geo-political and linguistic criteria. In particular, the companies which own the websites to be analyzed later in this work are based in countries of the European Union (EU), where English is not a native

language.

As I will claim in the chapters dedicated to my analysis, by investigating online corporate communication in English as it is implemented by a sample of European companies, it will be possible to identify common linguistic patterns, and eventually to draw conclusions about the communicative strategies adopted by companies using English as a tool to disseminate information about their performance, and promote themselves as reliable business partners in front of their international audiences.

Berns (1995b) offers one of the first contributions focusing on the spread of English in Europe, by reporting on the linguistic situation in the European countries during the early 1990s. Berns identifies a gap in the paradigm of WEs, underscoring that up to that date no model exclusively addressing the European situation was available. Taking this observation into account, and relying on the fact that English was acquiring a dominating role in communication across European countries, Berns endeavours to conceptualize the socio-linguistic situation in Europe by applying Kachru's Concentric Circle Model (1985) to the full members of the EU.¹⁸

The European Union was given the name which is currently used when the Treaty of Maastricht was signed in 1993. However, the European countries have been unified in an international organization since the early 1950s. This organization has changed its name several times, while the number of state members has increased, and more countries are now candidate to enter the EU. First of all, the European countries were united by the Treaty of Paris in 1951, which established the so called European Coal and Steel Community. In this early phase, the treaty was signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. Nowadays, these countries are widely acknowledged as the founders of the EU. With the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the European Coal and Steel Community was renamed European Economic Community (EEC). In 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom joined the EEC, then Greece followed in 1981, and Portugal and Spain in 1986. Therefore, up until 1995, that is, up until the year of Berns's article, the EU included twelve countries: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. In 1995, other three countries entered the EU, i.e. Austria, Finland and Sweden (European Union, 2014). These countries are however not considered in Berns's study.

By concentrating on the state members of the EU, Berns regards Europe as a regional unit, comprising a wealth of speech communities, and characterized by multicultural and

¹⁸ In her article, Berns uses the term 'European Community' and the acronym 'EC' to refer to the European Union (EU).

multilingual variation. Furthermore, from a political and economic perspective, Berns remarks that the member states of the EU are connected to each other by shared policies as well as by common trading activities. This particular situation where countries are deeply interrelated makes the EU a socio-linguistic unit. In this context, English plays a crucial and complex role. In fact, as stated by Berns, in the EU English is used a native, a foreign and an international language: not only is English the native language in the UK and in Ireland, but in some countries such as the Netherlands and Luxembourg it is used as a primary language along with the country's mother tongue. Moreover, while carrying out this multiplicity of roles, it is Berns's contention that English is undergoing a process of 'nativization', because of which European speakers apply their own innovations as appropriate to the use of the language. To put it in Berns's terms,

such nativization, or "Europeanization", involves a variety of linguistic processes at formal, contextual, and discoursal levels [...]. Lexical borrowings provide ready examples as in the continental use of English *eventual* in the sense of "probably, perhaps" and *actual* to mean "current, topical" (cf. French or German *eventuel* and French *actuel* or German *aktuell*, respectively). (Berns 1995b, 6, author's emphasis)

While accounting for the European situation in the 1990s, Berns presents a further aspect that characterizes the use of English in Europe, that is, the existence of common patterns of acquisition, use and interaction. For instance, the EU countries share common practices as regards the ways in which English is learnt in the classroom. As for higher education, at that time English had already established itself as a medium of instruction, while it represented the primary way to access information and obtain membership in certain disciplinary communities, as for example in the technical and scientific areas. The knowledge of English was already imperative in professional communities too, especially in business and diplomacy, due to the increasing number of occasions involving interactions among speakers of different native languages. The variety of contexts in which English is used, and the fact that English was becoming the regional language of a diverse speech community spreading across European countries closely intertwined because of institutional and economic reasons, led Berns to the conclusion that a new language, i.e. Euro-English or European English, was emerging.¹⁹ Obviously, this language, which is used during contacts within the European continent, is different from the English spoken by NSs in their home countries. As contended by Berns, the emergence of such a language goes hand in hand with the linguistic diversity characterizing the EU, "a diversity valued by the leadership of the member states and the EC itself" (Berns 1995a, 7).

¹⁹ Among others, the phenomenon of Euro-English has been theorized by Jenkins, Modiano and Seidlhofer (2001). Their contribution will be considered later in this section.

Taking these observations into account, Berns tries to conceptualize the spread of English in Europe according to Kachru's framework (1985). First of all, the author seeks to define the relationship between the kind of English spoken in Europe and the English spoken in the UK and in Ireland, which represent the norm-providing countries in the European area. As for the countries in the Outer Circle of Kachru's model, their reality cannot represent that of the European countries, even though English in Europe is used more and more often in the media as well as during interpersonal contacts. This is due to the fact that no European country in Berns's study has ever experienced British colonization, hence outside the UK and Ireland English neither have the status of an indigenous language, nor is it used for institutional purposes. Nonetheless, Berns argues that in some countries such as Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the situation is comparable to that characterizing the countries of the Expanding Circle in Kachru's model, since, in the first place, English is taught and acquired as a foreign language, and subsequently it is used as an international language.

A question then arises in relation to the status and role of English in Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. In fact, in these countries, English is neither an official nor an institutional language, yet in Luxembourg and in the Netherlands English is of paramount importance to conduct trade with other countries, while in Germany English is used not only to do business abroad, but it is used also intra-nationally in both interpersonal and professional context (e.g., in the subsidiary units of multinational companies, or in military settings, in the media). As a result, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are characterized by a hybrid situation, as they share features with both Expanding and Outer Circle countries in Kachru's model.

In order to illustrate this situation, Berns devises a new framework of "European Englishes" (Berns 1995a, 9) consisting of three circles, i.e. the Inner Circle, which includes the UK and Ireland, the Expanding/Outer Circle, which replaces Kachru's Outer Circle, and which includes Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, and the Expanding Circle, which includes Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. As displayed in Figure 4.5 on the following page, the Expanding Circle and the Expanding/Outer Circle in Berns's model are not clearly demarcated, but they are separated by a dotted line, with a view to providing a graphical rendition of the degree of overlap between these two areas.

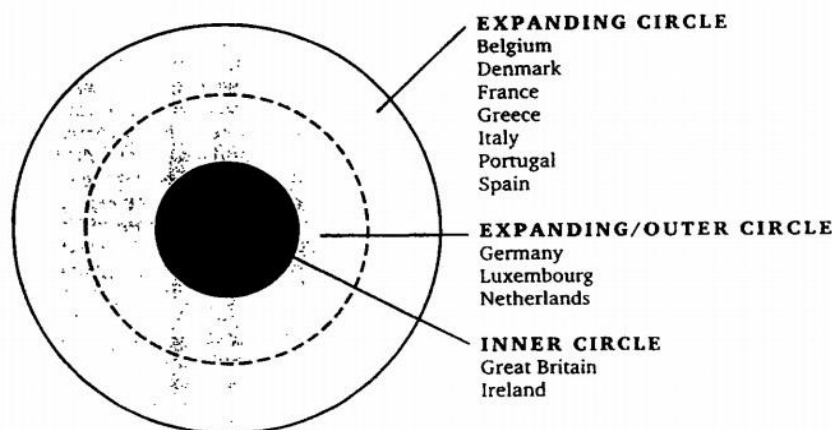


FIGURE 4.5. The Concentric Circles of European Englishes (Berns 1995a, 9).

Although Berns's framework aptly accounts for the grey area between the Expanding and the Expanding/Outer Circle in Europe, a final caveat remains. In fact, as stressed by the author herself, it is difficult, let alone impossible, to conceive of Europe as a socio-linguistic unit, given the presence of the UK and Ireland on the one side, and of such countries as Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands on the other, where language users stand out for their "multi-faceted and highly differentiated profile" (Berns 1995b, 9).

Berns's article predates the beginning of the ELF debate, yet it shows provides insights that are in line with ELF research. For example, when describing English as it is spoken in the countries of Kachru's Expanding Circle, Berns conceptualizes the language as follows: "English has the role of international language, and develops as performance varieties among speakers. Learners are expected to acquire the norms of behavior appropriate to the users of English in the Inner Circle" (Berns 1995a, 8). Bern's categorization of English in terms of a variety is no longer tenable if confronted with the latest developments in the ELF debate, as elucidated in § 4.2.1. Nonetheless, the author's reference to an international language which develops during its actual performance seems to entail some of the concepts which have been undergirding the ELF debate in the last years. In this sense, Bern's study is still highly relevant, and it anticipates ELF research at least to some extent.

Further understanding of English in Europe, with special regard to controversial matters as for instance identity, culture and language ownership, is offered by Bern's article "English in Europe: Whose Language, Which Culture?" (Berns 1995a). In this study, the author discusses issues linked to the spread of English and the impact of the US culture on European diversity. In fact, during the early 1990s, concern was mounting in relation to this situation, where European individual lingua-cultures and identities were supposedly in jeopardy due to the homogenizing force of English and the US culture in the context of

globalization. Yet, relying on the fact that in the past the use of English in Asia and Africa has given rise to linguistic adaptation and creativity, Berns suggests that a language belongs primarily to those who use it. As previously pointed out, Berns resorts to the notion of Euro-English or European English to conceptualize the European socio-linguistic situation. In this view, English in Europe is a means of supra-national communication, representing the supra-national identity of a supra-national speech community (Berns 1995b). This idea seems to be in keeping with some of the tenets underpinning ELF research, and in fact the author states that English in its role as a supra-national language “can also be described as a language of wider communication (LWC) or of intra-European communication, a *lingua franca*” (Berns 1995b, 24). Berns goes on to stress the clear-cut distinction between Euro-English and English as an International Language (EIL), by defining the latter as a language “needed for communication in the world community in the fields of science, technology, or business and commerce” (Berns 1995b, 24). As a consequence, it can be assumed that English used in Europe by Europeans will bring about specific linguistic realizations characterized by common patterns.

Furthermore, in Berns’s perspective, Euro-English is not to be regarded as a deficient variety of English deviating from NS standards. Once again, this is in line with the core features of ELF, since Berns dissents with the negative attitudes surrounding the use of English by NNSs, but she foregrounds the high potential entailed in Euro-English. To put it in the author’s terms, “[i]n their unique socio-linguistic context, the speakers of English in Europe are as capable as Asians, Africans, Australians or Americans of using their creativity and identity to develop an English that is their own and thus distinct from other Englishes” (Berns 1995b, 25). Differences across the various Englishes will be in terms of accent, discourse and lexis.²⁰ While wrapping up her discussion, Berns also acknowledges the change and dynamism inherent in language use, which are still elaborated upon by ELF scholars, as shown previously in this chapter.

After Berns’s studies, in the early 2000s the notion of Euro-English was taken on board by other scholars theorizing in the paradigm of WEs on the one hand and in ELF research on the other. As it will be shown, while seeking to define this linguistic phenomenon and its implication, researchers still tapped into the traditional socio-linguistic construct of variety. In fact, Euro-English was conceived of as the specific language usage emerging within the European region, across countries where English is not a native language. In this

²⁰ Berns’s (1995b) stance according to which individual European identities emerge in the use of English in Europe is in line with Jenkins’s (2007) later conceptualization. As mentioned in § 4.2.1 above, while using ELF, language users rely on their identity to communicate (Jenkins 2007). Obviously, as pointed out earlier, this perspective is at odds with House’s (2003) suggested dichotomy between ‘language for communication’ and ‘language for identification’.

sense, Euro-English was categorized as a variety, in agreement with the definition later suggested by Mollin (2006), mentioned in § 4.2.1, according to which varieties are groups of languages regionally or socially determined which present common features.

In the joint article “Euro-English”, written by Jenkins, Modiano and Seidlhofer (2001), three perspectives on the development of English in Europe are presented. First of all, Modiano advances the hypothesis that, if English were to be introduced as an official language in the European Union, it would soon acquire the role of a second language as it did in the countries of Kachru’s Outer Circle. In order to conceptualize Euro-English, Modiano uses both the category of ‘lingua franca’ and of ‘variety’. In fact, the author contends that

the EU is a political entity where English functions as a lingua franca among linguistically diverse people. It is clear that in all instances around the globe where English is used locally as a language of wider communication, distinct varieties have emerged, and there are strong arguments for promoting such Englishes as educational models. (Jenkins *et al.* 2001, 13)

Although in this quotation Modiano adopts the term ‘lingua franca’, his categorization does not seem to be in line with the meaning that ELF researchers have attributed to the use of English as a means for international communication. In fact, Modiano’s categorization seems to rely on the traditional socio-linguistic construct of variety, and he ascribes to Euro-English the same role that English has in such countries as India, Singapore and Nigeria, thus defining it in regional and social terms. Beside this, Modiano suggests that the process leading to the creation of this variety is made possible by discorsal nativization on the one side and fossilization on the other. Discorsal nativization regards the emergence of lexical terms that are specific to the English spoken in the EU, but that may be opaque for English users, even NSs, outside the European Union. Fossilization is connected with the transfer of certain grammatical patterns from one European language to English. Modiano quotes examples of grammatical constructions that are typical of Swedish, but that are gradually entering Euro-English usage. Modiano acknowledges that in the first stages of these processes, the results of discorsal nativization and fossilization are considered non-standard by NSs, yet it can be positively assumed that these forms will be eventually accepted as features charactering Euro-English.

Seidlhofer puts Euro-English in perspective by reference to the body of research that was beginning to thrive in the early 2000s in order to codify the use of ELF globally. According to this view, Euro-English and ELF are part and parcel of the same global phenomenon. As explained earlier in this chapter, in those years the need emerged to systematically map out the phonological, pragmatic and lexico-grammatical features of English. In this context, the VOICE project is instrumental in shedding light upon the lexico-

grammar of English spoken by NNSs, and given that the data for the corpus are gathered at the University of Vienna, that is, in Europe, it is Seidlhofer's contention that the project may serve as an empirical basis to delve into the lexico-grammar of Euro-English, too.

Jenkins tackles Euro-English from the point of view of accent. In order to make informed hypotheses about the development of Euro-English accents, Jenkins extends the results of the research on ELF phonology conducted up to that date in the European context, and she provides a preliminary description of the core features of Euro-English. Over and above this, Jenkins addresses issues connected with the role of English NSs in Europe. It is the author's contention that more awareness of the relevance of intercultural communication should be raised in NSs, in order to help them develop a range of "lingua franca skills" (Jenkins *et al.* 2001, 19) necessary for them to adapt their English to the language usage of the majority of people in Europe.

In sum, the joint contributions by Modiano, Seidlhofer and Jenkins make an acknowledgement to the emergence of English as a supra-national language in Europe. As apparent from the authors' considerations, in their attempt to describe the usage of English in Europe, they conceived of Euro-English as a variety determined from a regional and social perspective. At that stage, research was in its initial phases, however a full codification of Euro-English has not been achieved yet. In fact, the process of codification is made difficult by the co-presence in Europe of numerous lingua-cultural backgrounds, while from a socio-political point of view the EU is still in the making, with several countries which are candidates to the European membership.²¹ All this makes the European scenario extremely multifaceted, and the description of Euro-English in terms of a variety a daring task. Nonetheless it seems that nowadays researchers' attention has shifted from a descriptive interest to a concern for the functional aspect of English as a language for intercultural communication. As pointed out in § 4.2.1 above, the preoccupation with categorizing the type of English spoken in Europe as a variety was problematized by scholars such as Mollin (2006), banking on the fact that researches carried out until that moment did not present any evidence of common lexico-grammatical or morpho-syntactical pattern. In addition to this, Mollin argued that what is crucial in the use of Euro-English is its purpose and the strategies to which speakers resort in order to communicate. All in all, although the codification of Euro-English has not been achieved, research on the socio-linguistic implications of the spread and use of English in Europe has continued to thrive in the area of Applied Linguistics

²¹ At the time of the present study, and after the accession of Croatia on 1 July 2013, the EU numbers twenty-eight member states. Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey are candidate countries, that is, countries which are adopting EU legislation, whereas Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are potential candidate countries, that is, countries which have not yet fulfilled the requirements for EU membership (European Union, 2014).

in the 2000s, with a view to shedding light not only on its lexico-grammar but also on its functional aspect.

With regard to the functional aspect of English use in Europe, Cramer (2007) considers the socio-linguistic situation of the EU in the early 2000s, taking into account the enlargement in which the Union was engaging in those years. In particular, as mentioned above, Austria, Finland and Sweden joined the EU in 1995, while Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia in 2004, and Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 (European Union, 2014a). This new politic situation obviously entailed socio-linguistic consequences, bringing about a need to revise Berns's model. Hence Cramer (2007) proposed a revised version of Berns's model (1995a), underscoring that English in Europe is characterized by both utilitarian and symbolic uses. As a matter of fact, the author recognizes that "English has become the language of wider communication" (Cramer 2007, 2) in the context of business, education, information technology, mass media, entertainment, to name a few. As a consequence of this, new identities are developing the world over and in Europe as well, providing speakers of English with countless occasions for interpersonal exchanges.

First of all, Cramer underscores the importance that has been constantly attached to language policies since the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community in the early 1950s. Given the presence of different lingua-cultures, the EU has always fostered multilingualism, also with a view to encouraging the movement of goods and people across the member states. At the time Cramer wrote her article, the EU had twenty official languages, but the number was due to grow to twenty-two, when Bulgaria and Romania were admitted to the EU, and to twenty-three in 2007, as Irish was included among the official languages of the EU (European Union 2014).²² In turn, each member state promotes multilingualism by offering at least two foreign languages in the classroom. In this context, English is studied at school in all EU countries,²³ but young people experience the language through the media too, and thanks to the distribution of American films in their original version. Beside this, English remains the privileged language for the promotion international interaction in several professional domains.

After having surveyed both Kachru's and Berns's models, Cramer offers a profile of the status of English in the countries that joined the EU since 1995. Cramer devotes a section to Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland,

²² With the inclusion of Croatia in 2013, Croatian has become the twenty-fourth official language of the EU.

²³ According to data published by Eurostat and updated on 24 June 2014, 93.8% of European pupils in general upper secondary education learn English as a foreign language. The data refer to 2012, and they cover countries "where English is described as a foreign language in the curriculum or other official document relating to education in the country" (European Commission, 2014a).

Romania and Sweden, and she describes their situation with reference to English, relying on the information that is available about the ways in which the language is learnt and used in each country. However, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia are not included in the survey due to lack of information about the spread and use of English in these member states. Banking on Berns's proviso that her model would need to be revised in agreement with any socio-politic changes occurring within the EU over time, Cramer seeks to place the new member states into one of Berns's concentric circles.

While updating Berns's Concentric Circles Model in agreement with the current socio-linguistic scenario of the EU, the author includes Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in the Expanding Circles, and she provisionally includes Finland and Sweden in the Expanding/Outer Circle, since the linguistic situation in these countries is comparable to that of the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany in Berns's model. However, Cramer suggests some adjustments as regards Berns's Expanding/Outer Circle. In Berns's model, this circle comprised the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Germany. Moreover, the information gathered by Cramer about Denmark, originally placed in Berns's Expanding Circle, suggests that English in this country is currently presenting the same patterns of acquisition and use that are typical in the Expanding/Outer Circle countries. In this sense, English as it is learnt and used in Denmark displays a dynamism which had not been accounted for by Berns. This calls for a reconceptualization of the Expanding/Outer Circle as defined by Berns.

Beside this, the author points out that the situation is made even more problematic by the addition of Malta to the EU. In fact, Berns's categorization does not account for the unique role of English in this country. Malta became part of the British Empire in the 1800, and was granted independence in 1964. As a consequence of Malta's military and political background, English achieved the status of official language along with Malti in 1921. Nowadays, the two languages fulfil different functions: English is mainly used in workplace settings, while Malti is mainly used in the family, yet it is assumed that in Malta there are NSs of English, as aptly pointed out by Davidson (1996). Hence, given the historical and linguistic background of Malta, the ambiguous role of English in this member state places Malta somewhere in between the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle in Kachru's original model, i.e. in a position which is not considered by Berns.

In order to overcome the issues posited by the new status of English in Denmark and the complex nature of English in Malta, Cramer restores Kachru's Outer Circle, which is left empty in the new model. In addition to this, Cramer devises two Transition Circles, i.e. Transition Circle #1, which substitutes Berns's Expanding/Outer Circle, and which is placed

between the Expanding and the Outer Circle, and Transition Circle #2, which includes only Malta, and which is placed between the Outer and the Inner Circle (Figure 4.6). The new circles in Cramer's model are separated from each other by a dotted line, and the Transition Circles function as sort of grey areas which, to put it in the author's terms,

capture the diachronic changes that are taking place in a variety; if a variety is clearly an Expanding Circle variety, as long as no major changes in the nature, spread, use, and acquisition of English take place in the country, it may always remain in this category. However, as we have seen with Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, English can grow in its uses to become more integrated in the language community than a variety of English only acquired and used in the classroom. [...] This does not mean, however, that eventually Danish, Swedish, and Finnish English will be considered Outer Circle varieties [...]. Varieties can remain in Transition Circles, just as they can remain in any of the other levels, as long as no other change takes place. (Cramer 2007, 35)

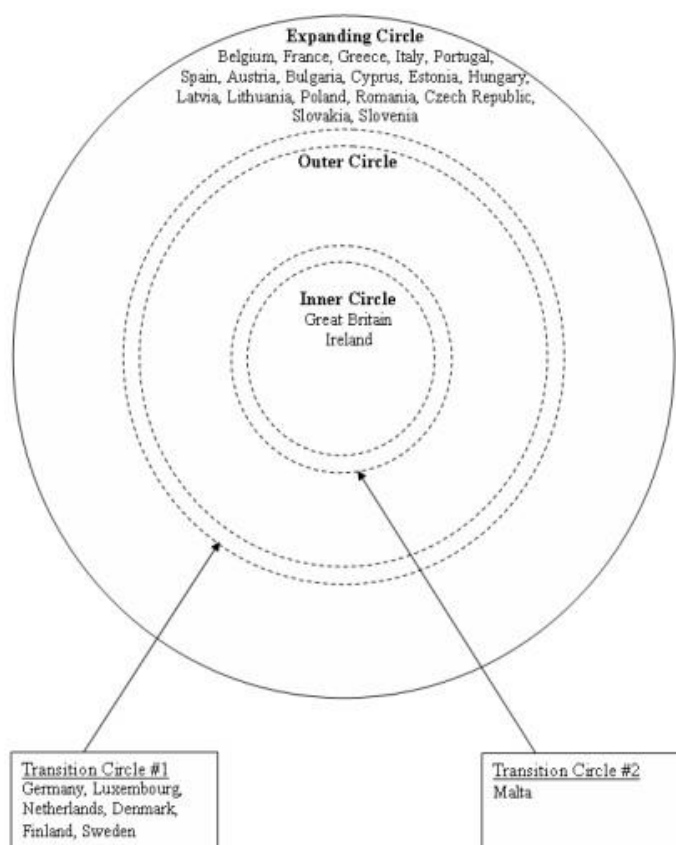


FIGURE 4.6. Concentric Circles of European Englishes with Transition Circles (Cramer 2007, 34).

With the inclusion of Transition Circles #1 and #2, Cramer's revised Concentric Circles Model seem to provide an adequate explanation to diachronic changes that English may undergo in the EU member states in terms of acquisition and use. In this way, those countries that are now comprised in the Expanding Circle may be eligible for inclusion in Transition

Circle #1, as long as English is adopted in more domains to fulfil an increasing number of functions. Moreover, the role of English in Malta is appropriately conceptualized by Transition Circle #2, as it accounts for the peculiar status of this former British colony, where English is now spoken as a native language too.

However, it shall be pointed out here that Cramer still resorts to the traditional socio-linguistic construct of variety to refer to the use of English across the EU member states. Once again, I would like to argue, in line with Seidlhofer's (2011) stance quoted in § 4.2.1 above, that this construct entails a certain degree of stability that seems at variance with the dynamism and potential adaptability of English as it is used in intercultural settings. As a consequence, it is here posited that the EU represent an intercultural setting where English is used to perform a wealth of functions. Banking on this assumption, English in Europe may be categorized as a *lingua franca*.

The categorization of English in Europe as a *lingua franca* subsumes the article by Seidlhofer, Breiteneder and Pitzl entitled "English as a Lingua Franca in Europe: Challenges for Applied Linguistics" (2006). This categorization is based on the special status that English enjoys in Europe in comparison to all the other European languages, as well as on the manifold functions it performs in a broad range of domains. The authors survey these domains, indicating for instance that English is widely taught at the levels of primary and secondary education. Over and above this, English plays a crucial role in scientific research, since the knowledge of this language is essential to access information and have works published on an international level. Furthermore, English is the language used for communication in supranational institutional and political settings, and despite EU policies promoting multilingualism, English is the mostly employed language for in-house communication in European institutions. As contended by the authors, the use of English has a far-reaching influence on business settings, since it has become the company language of many multinational and national companies, but also on mass media communication, advertising, youth culture and entertainment. The authors conclude that English in Europe

has become a *lingua franca*, a language of wider communication, and has entered the continent in two directions as it were, top-down by fulfilling functions in various professional domains and, simultaneously, bottom-up by being encountered and used by speakers from all levels of society and practically all walks of life. So English functions as a *lingua franca*, enabling people to connect based on common interests and concerns across languages and communities. (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006, 5).

The authors go on to argue that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in Europe claims independence from the conventions of English as a Native Language (ENL). Nonetheless, the authors point out that in Europe the use of ELF coexist with the use of ENL. On the hand,

ENL as it is distributed in on the European continent, that is, outside the boundaries of the UK and Ireland, represents a lingua-cultural model abiding to NS norms, mainly serving the needs of communication with NSs, and characterized by a certain prestige. On the other hand, ELF “is appropriated by its speakers [...] with very little reference to the norms pertaining in ENL contexts” (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006, 7). This implies that ELF in Europe not only has a high functional value, but also an unprecedented potential that allows its speakers to express their own identity while communicating in an international environment.

In their overview of the empirical studies conducted on the use of English in Europe, Seidlhofer *et al.* hint at the fact that the first signs of an “emergent European English” (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006, 9) can be recognized. This seems in agreement with the stance adopted by Berns (1995a, 1995b) and Jenkins *et al.* (2001) quoted above in this section. However, the authors also state that more studies are needed to support this claim. The authors are not concerned with the development of English in Europe as a distinct variety. In fact, the approach that is adopted by Seidlhofer *et al.* aims at describing the usage of ELF in Europe in an ‘endonormative’ perspective, namely by regarding ELF as a language in its own right. The type of analysis that is applied in this case is qualitative, and the language is conceived of as a set of processes, rather than a set of forms to be investigated by means of a quantitative analysis. In sum, the approach advocated by Seidlhofer *et al.* is at variance with the traditional ‘exonormative’ approach, which judges the use of English by NNSs against the yardstick of NS conventions.

Relying on these observations, Seidlhofer *et al.* survey the research conducted up to that date, and present two case studies that deal on the one hand with ELF lexico-grammar and with pragmatics on the other. The first case study tackles the marked use of the third person singular *-s*, while the second case study examines the phenomenon of miscommunication. The results of the analysis conducted at the level of lexico-grammar seem to suggest that ELF speakers focus on the joint construction of meaning, rather than on the linguistic form of the information exchange. In turn, at the level of pragmatics, the authors argue that in goal-oriented interactions, speakers may resort to miscommunication in a strategic way, so as to pursue their communicative aims. All in all, both case studies seem to show that ELF speakers appropriate the resources of the language in an efficient way: to put it in the authors’ terms, “[e]xploiting the creative and strategic possibilities, they make the language their own. In that manner, the ELF speakers in both data sets exhibit highly effective linguistic behavior” (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006, 20).

In the conclusion to their article, Seidlhofer *et al.* while calling for more empirical research, and pointing to new directions for ELF study, as for instance in the contexts of

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), underscore the dilemma that is implied in the status and use of English in Europe. In fact, English is regarded both as unifying force, but also as a threat to multilingualism. A possible solution to this dilemma, as the authors argue, “is to welcome next to the familiar, long established ENL an essentially different English, ELF, as an independent concept whose linguacultural norms are not controlled by native speakers” (Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006, 24).

This section has surveyed how research into the status and use of English in Europe has moved from a consideration of the spread of English that was in line with the WEs paradigm to a conceptualization of the functional value of the language in terms of a *lingua franca*. Berns’s Concentric Circles Model (1995b) endeavoured to show common patterns in the acquisition and use of English across the EU state members, while Cramer’s revisited version of this model accounted for the ways in which these patterns may vary if new member state are added to the EU, or if the member states display developments in the process of acquisition and use of English. Nonetheless, studies conducted between the 1990s and 2000s regarded English in Europe as variety or group of varieties. What is relevant to the present study is the perspective offered by ELF research, since this has stressed the functional value of English used in Europe, along with role of its international speakers, who are in a position to appropriate the language in order to pursue their communicative aims.

As I have explained above, business is one of the domains in which English plays a crucial role in the EU. The present work addresses this domain with special regard to corporate communication conducted by European companies via website in English version for their international stakeholders. As I will seek to demonstrate in the analysis, companies tap into the resources of English to gain advantage over their competitors. Building on these premises, it is relevant to keep into account the spread and use of English in the EU, since the main competitors of European companies are other European companies, while their most important market is located in the EU area. Nonetheless, while communicating via website in English, European companies address an international audience beyond the boundaries of the EU, in order to take active part in the globalized marketplace.

4.3. Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF)

As pointed out in § 4.2.2 above, the business domain is regarded as one of the “influential networks” (Seidlhofer 2004, 211) in which ELF interactions take place. As a matter of fact, the emergence of global business and trade, the distribution of services, as well as the rapid growth of movements of goods and people the world over have sparked off changes in

communication, and created a need for a shared linguistic code, thus prompting information exchanges on an international level. This context is highly influenced by the processes of globalization, and English has acquired a key function in conducting business (Poppi 2012). This function has changed the way in which linguistic resources are tapped into by professionals for their communicative purposes, thus attracting researchers' attention. In order to refer to the use of English as a shared code in the international business domain, researches have introduced the acronym BELF, which stands for Business English as a Lingua Franca (Louhiala-Salminen, Charles & Kankaanranta 2005). As indicated by Jenkins, Cogo and Dewey (2011), communication in BELF focuses on the content rather than on the form of communication itself, and it requires extensive knowledge of the business domain in order to function appropriately. According to them, "BELF communication is seen as content-oriented (rather than focusing on form) and requiring domain specific knowledge" (Jenkins *et al.* 2011, 298). Along the same line, BELF has also been defined as "an instrument for getting the job done" (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 400). As it will be pointed out in the survey conducted in the following two sections, the studies on BELF have investigated the strategies implemented by professionals to conduct successful intercultural and international business communication, and they have shown that the ability to shape language according to the business purposes is a more pressing need than conformity to NS norms. The present section is dedicated to BELF studies made during the mid-2000s, while § 4.3.1 will focus on research that has been conducted during the 2010s. This division has been drawn with a view to emphasizing the revised definitions and new concepts that have been introduced in the 2010s, in order to update and integrate the results obtained in the first phase of BELF studies.

One of the first contributions to take into account the use of English as a lingua franca in international business contexts is Nickerson's Editorial to the 2005 Special Issue of *English for Specific Purposes*. Nickerson places her discussion within the research area of ESP, and in particular into the area of English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP), and she aims at illustrating how this particular use of English has impacted the genres of spoken and written discourse in workplace settings, thus opening avenues for further studies. While doing so, the author indicates two trends that have developed in the area of ESBP with regard to business language. The former has shifted attention from the analysis of written texts or spoken interactions in isolation, "towards the analysis of contextualised communicative genres" (Nickerson 2005, 369), with a particular focus on the organizational and/or cultural factors involved. The latter trend has fostered research on language strategies rather than on language skills, thus giving rise to "a concern with identifying those strategies that can be associated with effective communication in business, regardless of whether the speaker/writer is a native

or non-native speaker” (Nickerson 2005, 369).

Building on these premises, Nickerson underlines that up to that moment research into ESBP has concentrated mainly on business letters and emails as instances of written discourse, and on negotiations and meetings as instances of spoken discourse. More in particular, the author acknowledges the contribution by Bhatia (1993, 2004) as regards written discourse. In fact, Bhatia’s approach to genre analysis, which stresses the interdependence between text and context, has been adopted by applied linguists to carry out research on business discourse. With respect to emails, which represent a recent textual realization brought about by new communication technologies, Nickerson observes that the linguists’ interest to this kind of communication has increased, and she considers email research a good example of the contextualized analysis of discourse: in this perspective, emails are regarded as “a construction of the corporate context” (Nickerson 2005, 372). This brief reference to ESBP research on emails as contextualized instances of discourse seems to be in line with the choice of materials selected for the present study. As a matter of fact, notwithstanding the specific features that characterize emails and companies’ websites as two different discursive realizations,²⁴ it is here assumed that communication via companies’ websites originates from the combination of textual and contextual features.

As far as spoken discourse is concerned, here I would like to mention Planken’s (2005) study on sales negotiations among NNSs using BELF to communicate. This article is included in the Special Issue edited by Nickerson, and it exemplifies the second trend in ESBP pinned down by Nickerson, i.e. the interest in the strategies that can be associated with effective business communication. Planken’s article represents an invaluable contribution to ESBP, since it focuses on the kind of linguistic strategies that are deployed by professionals according to their level of expertise in the business environment.

Another article that deserves to be cited here is the one by Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005). This article is illustrative of both trends in ESBP, and it deals with spoken and written discourse alike, in particular with two genres of companies’ in-house communication, i.e. emails and meetings. The findings presented in the article emerge from a research conducted in two multinational companies involved in a cross-border merger between a Swedish and a Finnish company.²⁵ Both companies have adopted English as their

²⁴ The discursive features of email messages will be elucidated later in this section relying on Kankaanranta’s (2005) research. For a discussion of companies’ website as a discursive realization, see § 5.1.

²⁵ This article is based on selected findings from a larger research larger project involving four merged companies altogether. This project was entitled *Finnish, Swedish or English? Internal Communications in Recently Merged Finnish-Swedish Companies*, and it was undertaken at the Helsinki School of Economics (now Aalto University School of Economics) in the first decade of the year 2000s. A further article by Louhiala-Salminen and Charles (2006) is dedicated to a more detailed discussion of the meetings recorded in the same companies considered by Louhiala-Salminen, Charles and Kankaanranta (2005). The article by

corporate language, so it is assumed that the professionals employed by these companies use BELF to communicate. The results of a questionnaire distributed in the two companies are used as a springboard to make inferences about communication in English in multicultural and multilingual business settings: as the authors state, the aim of this study is “to find out how employees were coping with the cultural and linguistic challenges resulting from a cross-border merger” (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, 403).

Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* also provide a working definition of BELF: the authors describe BELF as the type of “English used as a ‘neutral’ and shared communication code” (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, 404-405). With respect to the neutral and shared features of this language, the authors go on to state that

BELF is neutral in the sense that none of the speakers can claim it as her/his mother tongue; it is shared in the sense that it is used for conducting business within the global business discourse community, whose members are BELF users and communicators in their own right – not ‘non-native speakers’ or ‘learners’. (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, 405)

In relation to the presupposed neutral nature of BELF, the authors stress that this assumption raises some issues about the presence or absence of any cultural traits in the use of the language. In this sense, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* express their agreement with Meierkord (2002), who conducted research on lingua franca interactions in a case study of dinner table conversations among international students in the UK. Meierkord relies on the assumption that “language and culture are inseparable” (Meierkord 2002, 111), and so she argues that lingua franca speakers bring their own cultural background into their interactions. As a matter of fact, as pointed out by the author, “[c]ulture is regarded as influencing linguistic behaviour and language is said to have an impact on the culture of those who use it for communication” (Meierkord 2002, 111-112). Meierkord wraps up her discussion by claiming that the communicative goal of the interaction, together with the speakers’ linguistic competence, and their cultural background, are all factors which influence lingua franca communication. To these elements, Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* add the fact that professionals transfer the discursive practices that characterize their native languages into BELF interactions. It follows that “[i]n multicultural situations, the various cultures of the interactants interact with and influence encounters, which, in turn, influence the nature of discourse. As discourse then shapes and structures encounters and cultures, the three create a constant, dynamic interactive process” (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, 404). The results of this study seem to suggest that BELF meetings are determined by the discursive practices that are specific to the interactants’ own cultures, whereas email messages written by professionals with different lingua-cultures

display similarities in form and content. The authors conclude that, despite the complexity of intercultural business communication, the use of BELF can facilitate communication among employees with different lingua-cultural backgrounds in the context of cross-border mergers.

Hence, it is apparent that the articles by Planken (2005) and by Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005) bring forward evidence of the two trends observed by Nickerson (2005) in the domain of ESBP that have been underlined above, i.e. the contextualized analysis of business discourse on the one hand, and the concern with the linguistic strategies that are implemented by the professionals for effective business communication. These two trends have informed research on English as a lingua franca in international business from the mid-2000s onwards.

For instance, the case study presented by Fredriksson, Barner-Rasmussen and Piekari (2006) well represents these two trends in ESBP. In fact, they carry out their investigation in the context of a multinational corporation (MNC) which has English as its corporate language,²⁶ and they focus on the linguistic choices that its international employees make to conduct everyday business communication. The MNC selected for this study is Siemens, an engineering corporation with headquarters in Munich (Germany), and the data are gathered from semi-structured interviews carried out in the corporation's branch offices located in Germany and Finland. In this study, the authors address the issue of language diversity, and the challenges that MNCs are faced with when devising common language policies to be applied in their subsidiary units. In fact, the co-presence of employees with different lingua-cultural backgrounds in a business setting may give rise to a divergence between the language policies that are introduced top-down, and the actual everyday communication practices among employees. In the case of Siemens, English is the corporate language, and it is widely used across the various units during employees' interactions. Nonetheless, the employees admit to using other languages, as for example German and Finnish, when they deem that these languages are instrumental to a certain communicative event. Over and above this, the use of English is affected by the varying degrees of proficiency displayed by the employees, while their linguistic choices are very often the reflection of the vocabulary which is specific to the MNC's industry sector (electronic engineering) in general, or with that kind of 'company speak' that distinguishes Siemens from other corporations in the sector. On the basis of these results, it can be stated that the linguistic choices presented by the international employees at Siemens rely also on the particular practices of the industry sector and of the MNC itself. This is in agreement with Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini's (1999) model of

²⁶ In this study, Fredriksson *et al.* employ the term 'corporate language' rather than 'lingua franca' in order to refer to the use of English as a shared code for internal communication in a multilingual business setting, "in recognition of the fact that that [sic] the interactants have various linguistic backgrounds" (Fredriksson *et al.* 2006, 409). According to this perspective, English happens to be the corporate language of a high number of companies, due to its pervasive presence in the domain of international business.

Cross- and Intercultural Business Discourse (see § 2.2).

As discussed in the case studies conducted by Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* (2005) and by Fredriksson *et al.* (2006), the methodologies of ethnographic research such as semi-structured interviews and questionnaires are very often adopted to contextualize the discursive and linguistic practices of professionals communicating via English in the international business environment. In fact, these methodologies can be fruitfully integrated with the methods of Applied Linguistics especially with those of Genre Analysis. This, for instance, is the case of Kankaanranta's (2005) research on email messages.²⁷

Kankaanranta starts from the assumption that the email is a form of communication which has been recently brought about by technological advancements, and which is being used more and more often for in-house information exchanges. Beside this, the diffusion of the email, along with the spread of English as a common language for international business communication, have been fostered by the increase in cross-border mergers and acquisitions. First of all, in order to investigate the email from a discursive point of view, Kankaanranta draws on Genre Analysis, and in particular on the framework conceptualized by Bhatia (1993) in the area of ESP,²⁸ to investigate the move structure of the 282 email messages included in her corpus. The emails were written by 103 Finnish and Swedish employees in a multinational paper company, which resulted from the cross-border merger between a Finnish and a Swedish company. The findings of this analysis show how the purpose of the messages allows the emails to be classified into three genres, the *Noticeboard* genre, the *Postman* genre and the *Dialogue* genre. The author describes the three genres as follows:

[t]he messages whose communicative purpose was to inform employees of corporate issues are referred to as *Noticeboard messages*. The messages delivering other documents or messages are called *Postman messages*. In the messages, reference was usually made to the attached documents or appended messages but sometimes also textless Postman messages were used for this delivery function. The messages exchanging information are called *Dialogue messages*; some of them opened dialogic exchanges (opening messages), while others responded to them (response messages). (Kankaanranta 2005, 207, author's emphasis).

Moreover, Kankaanranta identifies nine different moves that characterize the email messages at varying degrees. These moves are *Identifying Subject*, *Salutation*, *Referring to Previous Contact*, *Indicating Enclosure*, *Providing Information*, *Requesting*, *Pre-Closing*, *Closing*, and *Signature*. In order to support her analysis, Kankaanranta relies on her informants' feedback

²⁷ Kankaanranta's (2005) research is also based on some of the findings belonging to the larger project undertaken at the Helsinki School of Economics (now Aalto University School of Economics) in the mid-2000s.

²⁸ See § 3.1 for more details about the theoretical framework articulated by Kankaanranta.

too, gathered via follow-up interviews and questionnaires. Accordingly, the answers obtained via ethnographic research provide contextual information that corroborates the results of textual analysis.

As regards the language used in the emails under scrutiny, the author argues that the informants use BELF as a common code. During the linguistic analysis, some grammatical inaccuracies emerged, which nonetheless did not hinder mutual understanding, as pointed out by Kankaanranta. Over and above this, the emails display features typical of the spoken language, thus providing evidence of the hybrid nature of the language of emails. Kankaanranta states that the incidence of spoken language features varies according to the specific genre of the email message. For example, the Dialogue genre displays the highest number of spoken language features, whereas the Postman genre very often includes phrases that are typical of business letter writing. Finally, the Noticeboard genre ranges between these two tendencies.

To conclude, the ways in which the moves are rendered indicate that BELF email writers make discursive choices that do not match with the ones made by NS email writers, for example in the USA. In fact, Kankaanranta's Finnish and Swedish informants adapt the discursive practices of business letters and faxes to textualize such moves as Salutations, Closing and Signature, while USA business people usually abide by the conventions of the memo genre.²⁹ Arguably, this is due to the greater popularity that the memo genre enjoyed in the USA in the past in comparison with European countries (Nickerson 2000). As indicated also by Kankaanranta, "the existence of the concept of a memo in the sense American business uses it can be questioned in the European context" (Kankaanranta 2005, 74). As regard the Requesting move, Kankaanranta highlights both similarities and differences across the email messages by Finns on the one hand and Swedes on the other. In particular, the differences depend on the degree of directness in which the requests are phrased. In fact, Finns show a tendency to write their requests in a less straightforward way than their Swedish counterparts do. On the basis of these observations, Kankaanranta agrees with Meierkord's (2002) stance that *lingua franca* communication brings the cultural identities of its speakers to the surface.

In a nutshell, Kankaanranta's investigation is conducted at both a discursive and linguistic level, and it taps into the methodologies of Applied Linguistics on the one hand and of ethnographic research on the other. As is evident from the variety of methods adopted by the author, an integrated approach is crucial to get insights into the communicative practices of BELF users. Obviously, the context of globalization is to be included in the investigation,

²⁹ For a discussion of the email as an evolution of the memo genre, see § 3.1.1 in the present work.

since it represents a key factor in international business communication, and it has often served as a point of departure for BELF research. For instance, Charles (2007) draws a parallel between the phenomenon of globalization and the diffusion of BELF, and she starts her discussion by quoting Friedman's (2005[2006]) conceptualization of the three eras, or stages, of globalization, namely Globalization 1.0, Globalization 2.0 and Globalization 3.0.³⁰ Additionally, Friedman contends that technology is a globalizing force. Charles complements this view by stating that language is a driver of globalization too.

In particular, Charles argues that language choices are a challenge for companies active in the international marketplace, especially given the fact that the language in question is English. Charles draws upon the research conducted on ELF and on BELF respectively to show that their categorizations of English differ one another. Charles argues that up to that moment ELF research had described the phenomenon in its basic features, with a view to defining the extent to which NNSs' usage differs from NSs' standards. In fact, as pointed out in § 4.2.2, the phonology (Jenkins 2007) and the lexico-grammar (Seidlhofer 2004) of ELF have been detailed against the backdrop of NS standards. Hence Charles observes that in those years ELF was overall judged against the yardstick of NS norms. In opposition to this perspective that focuses on the linguistic features of ELF, Charles contends that BELF research has a deeper concern with the communicative needs of the business people who employ English as a shared code to do business internationally. Charles summarizes the differences between ELF and BELF in the following table.

TABLE 4.1. Summary of the main differences in research approaches based on the ELF concept and those based on BELF (Charles 2007, 266).

	<i>ELF</i>	<i>BELF</i>
Successful interactions are created through...	NS-like language use and linguistic competence.	language use appropriate for the needs and requirements of the communicative event.
The speaker/writer aims to...	emulate NS discourse.	get the job done.
NNSs are seen as...	"sources of trouble", "learners."	communicators in their own right.
The main source of communication problems is...	inadequate language skills.	inadequate communication skills.
"Culture" is...	the national cultures of NSs.	the diversity of the globalized business

³⁰ For a discussion of the three stages of globalization as elucidated by Friedman (2005[2006]) see the Introduction to the present work.

	<i>ELF</i>	<i>BELF</i>
The aim of linguistically oriented communication research is to...	increase understanding of deviation from NS-like English language and discourse, and reduce linguistic anomalies.	community. Increase understanding of the different Englishes and discourses used to conduct global business, and encourage the development of situationally appropriate communication skills.

Overall, the main difference between ELF and BELF that can be gleaned from this table is that “ELF researchers tend to be more language than communication oriented [...], whereas BELF researchers see communication skills as crucial” (Charles 2007, 266). Moreover, it can be noticed that in Charles’s exemplification of the ELF approach, the conceptualization of the language and of the NNSs is still tied to negative categories that are reminiscent of those pinpointed by Cogo and Dewey (2006) when referring to the description of ELF lexico-grammar propounded by Seidlhofer (2004) (see also § 4.2.2 in this work). Nonetheless, as underlined during the survey of ELF conducted in § 4.2.2 in this work, the focus of ELF research has eventually moved from a description of the language against the backdrop of NS standards, towards a pragmatic evaluation of the NNSs’ ability to convey meaning when using English for international communication (Cogo & Dewey 2006, Seidlhofer 2009a, 2011). It follows that ELF cannot be described as set of lexico-grammatical features, but it is to be studied in relation to its context of use and its underlying communicative purposes.

This shift in the focus of ELF research has been taken into account by Poppi (2012), who claims that “BELF differs from ELF simply because the former is used within the business domain and its frame of reference is provided by the globalized business scenario” (Poppi 2012, 132). Following from this observation, Poppi propounds an adapted version of Charles’s table, in which BELF is set in opposition to EFL, and not to ELF.³¹ In fact, the author rightly points out that “the features of BELF could be extend to ELF, too, with the caveat that the former makes reference to particular communities of practice, operating in the business context” (Poppi 2012, 132).

Beside this, Charles observes that BELF research draws upon the concept of International English for Business Purposes, or International Business English (IBE), introduced by Bartlett and Johnson (1998). In Bartlett and Johnson’s approach, the inclusion

³¹ A modified version of Charles’s table has been devised by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013) too (see § 4.3.1).

of the terms ‘international’ and ‘business’ in the acronym IBE diverts attention from the sheer linguistic dimension of communication to take into account the specific context in which English is used. As Charles explains, “[i]nternational takes English away from the sole realm of native speakers, and *business* gives it its domain of use, as well as indicating the discourse community whose terms of reference should be used in any judgement of ‘efficiency’ or ‘success’” (Charles 2007, 264, author’s emphasis). Furthermore, Charles argues that “BELF differs from ELF in that its domain is solely business, and its frame of reference is provided by the globalized business community. The *B* of BELF is thus the sociopragmatic backdrop against which language—and any lexical or syntactic anomalies in it—is to be interpreted” (Charles 2006, 264 author’s emphasis). In relation to the ways in which BELF evolves, the forces that determine its inherent dynamism, and its relationship with globalization, Charles adds that

we can refer to the global business community as the “culture” that has created BELF, and with which BELF evolves. As with all cultures, the global business culture is diverse and dynamic: it also has groups who see themselves as its “owners”. In the case of BELF, its owners are the “International Business Discourse Community”, who have certain shared values (e.g. that of doing profitable business), and use it for a shared purpose. The “rules” of BELF, and its operational guidelines, however, have yet to be defined. Though globalization may well have reached Stage 3.0, BELF is only at the beginning of its development. (Charles 2006, 264)

Pulling together the main themes introduced by Charles to reconceptualize English as a lingua franca in terms of Business English as a lingua franca, it can be stated that the international context and the business domain play a fundamental role in shaping the discursive practices of professionals using BELF. It follows that, in Charles’s view, BELF research should focus on communication skills rather than on linguistic competence.

In order to corroborate this reconceptualization, Charles reports on the results of a study which she and her associates of the Helsinki School of Economics³² conducted on in-house communication in four MNCs with headquarters in Finland. The methodology adopted for this study is both multidisciplinary and multimethod. Firstly, the study is informed by Charles and her associates’ understanding of linguistic research, but is also supported by the theoretical and experiential knowledge of an advisory board made up of experts in the fields of management communication, organizational communication and international business management. Secondly, the analysis of the data relies on both quantitative and qualitative methods. Charles and her associates collected a variety of authentic material from the MNCs,

³² The Helsinki School of Economics was founded in 1911. In 2010 it became part of Aalto University, it was given the name of Aalto University School of Economics (<<http://biz.aalto.fi/en/about/history/>>, last accessed on 25 July 2014).

such as emails, videotaped meetings and presentations, and intranet websites. They also conducted surveys which were analyzed quantitatively, and follow-up interviews which provided further material to be investigated qualitatively. As a consequence, this profusion of methods and data allowed the researchers “to look at a variety of communication issues from different perspectives, and thus gain insight into the multifaceted communication processes in [the] companies” (Charles 2007, 269).

The findings of this study are summed up by Charles in the form of the following five statements:

1. “Informal oral communication deserves to be considered of paramount importance in MNCs” (Charles 2006, 271). The results of the surveys conducted by Charles and her associates show the importance of face-to-face communication within MNCs, despite the introduction and the increasing use of communication technologies during the late 1990s and the early 2000s. Beside this, during the follow-up interviews, the informants admitted to experiencing problems in understanding each other when talking in English in face-to-face interactions, especially in interactions with NSs. Accordingly, the degree of NSs’ linguistic complexity seems to pose a challenge to NNSs’ understanding of English. A further challenge is represented by the participation in small talk exchanges, during which informants admitted to encountering difficulties in expressing their opinions, or conveying different shades of meanings. Contrary to this, formal communication events and the use of the terminology specific to the business area of the professionals are unproblematic.
2. “Language is a power-wielding instrument in organizations” (Charles 2007, 272). The data gathered from the interviews show that power can be wielded through language, in the sense that adequate skills in the corporate language allow access to information within the MNC, which would be otherwise denied. If only few people within a business unit know the language, this will offer them a significant advantage in comparison to those colleagues who cannot speak the language, and place them in a position of gatekeepers. In turn, if more people are trained in the corporate language, power will be shared among more individuals. Additionally, Charles reports on a case in one of the MNCs under scrutiny, in which English replaced Swedish as the corporate language. When Swedish was the corporate language, the Finnish staff felt at a disadvantage in front of their Swedish colleagues. The introduction of English as the corporate language was thus widely welcomed by the Finnish-speaking business people, as they were placed on the same level as their Swedish counterparts. Hence, Charles concludes that, “[t]he use of BELF was perceived to remove the NS >< NNS

dichotomy, and thus to equalize language-based power relations” (Charles 2007, 274).³³

3. “Language affects perceptions of oneself and others” (Charles 2007, 274). This statement, which is in line with the previous one about power relationships, refers to the fact that a lack of language skills is perceived by professionals as a form of inadequacy that calls into question the prestige of the professionals themselves in the corporate hierarchy, so much so that they feel frustrated and dissatisfied with their job. This feeling of frustration becomes particularly acute when the point of reference for efficient communication is represented by NS standards. Charles concludes that in MNCs “it is therefore particularly important for managers to be aware of the significance of language and communication skills for staff motivation and job satisfaction” (Charles 2007, 274).
4. “Language unites people and organizations—but also divides them” (Charles 2007, 274). Language functions as a uniting force when it allows for more frequent and fluent communication exchanges. Obviously, this is particularly evident across units in MNCs which are close to each other from a lingua-cultural point of view. It follows that, as confirmed by the findings of this study, language works as a dividing force too, since it clusters professionals around groups that share the same language knowledge. These groups will hardly share information with each other, and this in turn will cause divides in the MNC.
5. “BELF is not a ‘cultureless’ language” (Charles 2007, 275). The data provided by the qualitative analysis of the videotaped meetings show that speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds who use English to communicate “create a ‘new’ operational culture based on shared understanding of situational factors” (Charles 2007, 276) by bringing into BELF exchanges their own cultural features. In particular, the analysis of the meetings carried out at the level of pragmatics indicate differences in communication style across the Swedish and the Finnish professionals. On the one hand, the Swedish professionals are straightforward in the way they address their interlocutors, and they are interested in building rapport with the other participants. On the other hand, the Finnish professionals are less talkative, they are more focused on

³³ This statement reminds of what a manager once told to Bill Bryson during an interview, quoted in the book *Mother Tongue*, i.e. that the use of English “puts all at an equal disadvantage” (Bryson 1990, 2). Similarly, with reference to their study of BELF meetings, Louhiala-Salminen and Charles (2006) convey the same idea in the following terms: “at the level of individual speakers, a lingua franca was seen to relieve the burden of communicating in a foreign language, as it put all interactants at the same level: as NNSs, everyone had greater or lesser communication problems, no one was ‘more powerful’, and nobody’s cultural values dominated” (Louhiala-Salminen & Charles 2006, 46).

the information to be shared, they are more indirect in the way they approach their interlocutors, and they tend to take longer turns in the conversation.³⁴ What is interesting to note here is that these findings are consistent with what was earlier stated by Kankaanranta (2005) about the differences in writing styles that emerged in her analysis of email messages by Swedish and Finnish business people communicating in BELF.

All in all, the empirical analysis reported upon by Charles seems to confirm the assumption put forward by the author at the beginning of her article, i.e. that in the context of today's globalization language functions as both an enabler and a troublemaker of communication. Nonetheless, the findings discussed by Charles prove that BELF speakers are in a position to create their own discourse, which is the result of "their own sociopragmatic assumptions and conversational expectations" (Charles 2007, 277), and which is different from that of NSs. The discursive process in which BELF speakers are actively involved gives rise to a co-constructed type of communication that serves the purposes of the professionals while doing business. What is to be underlined here is that arguably BELF functions not only as a 'language for communication' (House 2003),³⁵ devoid of the cultural traits of its speakers, and used exclusively to enable interactions among speakers of different L1s. Contrary to this, BELF speakers rely also on their identity to communicate. This tendency seems to be in line with the stance adopted by ELF scholars too, who contend that NNSs bank on their identity and culture to shape their communication style in ELF interactions (Jenkins 2007, Seidlhofer 2009b, 2011, Seidlhofer *et al.* 2006). Obviously, BELF speakers transfer into their communication not only their cultural background, but also their professional identity.³⁶

On the basis of the latter observation about the emergence of cultural features in BELF communication, it seems safe to conclude that the approaches of ELF and BELF are not in opposition, but they supplement each other. This is the view adopted by Ehrenreich (2010) in her article about a study she conducted on the use of BELF in a family-owned MNC based in

³⁴ These results have emerged from a close pragmatic analysis of the metadiscoursal items in the interventions by Swedish and Finnish professionals respectively. As reported by Louhiala-Salminen and Charles (2006), the use of such strategies as queries, questions, hedging, checking and references to previous discussion by the Swedish informants make their communication explicit as well oriented towards building rapport. In opposition to this, the lower incidence of metadiscourse in the Finnish interventions reveals their tendency to rely on shared knowledge, along with their focus on the communicative task at hand rather than on establishing interpersonal relations.

³⁵ For the discussion of the difference between 'language for communication' and 'language for identification' conceptualized by House (2003), see § 4.2.1 in the present work.

³⁶ Again, in the context of the research project conducted at the Helsinki School of Economics, the idea of different types of cultures and identities emerging in BELF communication is enunciated by Louhiala-Salminen and Charles (2006) in the following terms: "[u]sing the language in a particular situation, a BELF speakers simultaneously expresses his/her identity as representing a nationality, a profession, a company, a particular business unit, or some other group" (Louhiala-Salminen & Charles 2006, 31-32).

Germany. The starting point of Ehrenreich's research is that "English has undoubtedly become *the* dominant language in international business" (Ehrenreich 2010, 408, author's emphasis), yet some issues still need to be tackled. These regard first of all the type of English that is used in international business contexts, and the implications carried by the dominant role of this language. In particular, the question whether the extensive use of English excludes that of other languages is to be answered. Finally, the nature of international business needs to be defined too, while also profiling the people who tap into English "as a communicative tool" (Ehrenreich 2010, 409) in their daily working activities.

Similarly to Charles (2007), Ehrenreich draws upon ELF research to build a framework for her study. However, instead of focusing on the differences that exist between ELF and BELF, she starts by reconciling their approaches. Ehrenreich pointedly remarks that ELF belongs to the wider domain of linguistics, while BELF is to be placed against the backdrop of international business communication. Notwithstanding the different perspectives adopted by ELF and BELF to examine the use of English as the language of international communication, Ehrenreich claims that these can be brought together, since "[t]here is general agreement in both ELF and BELF research that English used for international communication purposes is not the same as the English used by its native speakers locally in their home countries" (Ehrenreich 2010, 410). To this regard, Ehrenreich observes that the NS model is not tenable to describe NNSs' performance when communicating in English in international settings. As a result, ELF scholars have also started to apply criteria of pragmatic competence to evaluate the strategies implemented by NNSs when they use English in multilingual and multicultural settings, and this is an approach in agreement with the one pursued by BELF scholars. Thus, the distinction that Ehrenreich draws between ELF and BELF concerns the specific context in which BELF communication unfolds, i.e. the business domain. This implies that "a range of business-related, extralinguistic contextual factors such as the participants' professional roles, the extent of shared knowledge and differing expectations, as well as time constraints" (Ehrenreich 2010, 411) are to be acknowledged when analyzing BELF, since these influence language use.

In order to explore the above-mentioned issues, Ehrenreich outlines the results of a qualitative study that aims at pinning down the features of BELF that make communication possible. The data were collected in a MNC supplying transportation systems with headquarters in Germany, referred to in the article as TechComp. A variety of ethnographic methods were used to gather significant data, as for instance qualitative interviews, observation and recordings of meetings, shadowing, recordings of phone meetings and conferences. The languages spoken at TechComp are German (especially at the headquarters),

English, and the languages of the countries in which the MNC has its subsidiary units. The professionals involved in the study are both NSs and NNSs. NSs were included, since they actively participate in the international interactions that take place in the MNC under consideration.

As far as NNSs are concerned, Ehrenreich raises an issue relating to their status. In other words, the question arises as to whether NNSs should be considered “primarily *learners*, or rather *speakers* in their own right” (Ehrenreich 2010, 415, author’s emphasis). In order to answer this question, Ehrenreich introduces the concept of ‘community of practice’ (CofP). This notion was originally framed by Wenger (1998) and Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999),³⁷ and Ehrenreich adopts it to interpret the results of her research. As a matter of fact, this notion is used by socio-linguists to delve into issues of language variation, since it gives centrality to the concept of practice. To put it in Holmes and Meyerhoff’s terms, “[t]he CofP is one way of focusing on what members do: the practice or activities that indicate that they belong to the group, and the extent to which they belong” (Holmes & Meyerhoff 1999, 175). In addition to this, a CofP can be identified in terms of the three dimensions listed by Wenger (1998), i.e. “mutual engagement”, “joint negotiated enterprise” and “shared repertoire of negotiable resources”. Ehrenreich exemplifies these dimensions in relation to the professionals at TechComp by stating that their ‘mutual engagement’ unfolds in face-to-face interactions in various settings, or via phone calls, email and the Internet, with a view to contributing to the company’s goal of making profit (the ‘joint enterprise’). Finally, the ‘shared repertoire’ into which the professionals tap to pursue the joint enterprise consists of the languages spoken at TechComp, along with the variety of documents that are issued in the MNC.

To start with, the findings presented by Ehrenreich shed light on the role played by English at TechComp. Evidence from the interviews reveals that, although English is not the corporate language of TechComp, “its status as the *de facto* lingua franca of international business is undisputed” (Ehrenreich 2010, 416). The author goes on by stating that knowledge of the language is indispensable, “a ‘must’ for managers and employees in all locations and at practically all levels”, yet professional expertise comes first. In other words, “language skills without the necessary professional profile are not sufficient” (Ehrenreich 2010, 417). Accordingly, the criterion to assess competence in English is not compliance with StE but “pragmatic attitude” (Ehrenreich 2010, 417), to quote from one of the respondents’ contributions. Hence, what is crucial for the employees at TechComp is to make themselves

³⁷ As already pointed out § 4.2.1, also House (2003) and Seidlhofer (2011) bank on this notion in order to categorize the community of ELF speakers.

understood, and to convey information effectively. However, compliance with StE is pursued for matters of prestige when writing official documents to be disseminated outside the MNC: “[b]y presenting to the world English texts that conform to Standard English, the company demonstrates its professionalism and its global leadership” (Ehrenreich 2010, 418). The results of the research also reveal that BELF skills are developed either through active engagement with the language or through training.

The data gathered by Ehrenreich also provide insights into the informants’ perception *vis à vis* their personal experience with English. The author argues that “English can be many things ranging from facilitator through to barrier” (Ehrenreich 2010, 419). In particular, English takes on the role as facilitator when it represents the only means of communication available to conduct business. Nevertheless, communication in English may sometimes be challenging. In this sense, English may represent a barrier, e.g. when interlocutors have a limited knowledge of the language, or when there is high variation across the levels of proficiency characterizing the business partners.

As regards the informants’ ability to understand the types of English spoken by their interlocutors, Ehrenreich states that drawing a conclusion that encompasses the individual perceptions obtained at TechComp is a difficult task. Yet, it seems that overall the informants get used to other people’s English thanks to the range of strategies that they have developed with experience of the language. The “repertoire of coping strategies” quoted by Ehrenreich includes, among others, “comprehension checks, asking for clarification and repetition, attention to facial expression” (Ehrenreich 2010, 422). However, the author underscores that the use of these strategies is influenced by the context, by the task at hand, and by face issues. As regard the latter factor, the informants admit to deliberately avoiding clarification requests, in order not to damage their professional prestige. Furthermore, in agreement with Charles’s (2007) findings outlined above, intelligibility problems arise in interaction with NSs, due to the speed of their speech and the complexity of their lexis. To this regard, three of Ehrenreich’s informants believe that NSs use English “as an instrument of power” (Ehrenreich 2010, 422), and they are displeased by this. Apart from this, difficulties are encountered in interaction with Indians talking in English.

As far as the role of German and other languages at TechComp is concerned, it is apparent from the data collected by Ehrenreich that English is not the only option to conduct business in international contexts. Languages other than English may be used if deemed instrumental to carry out certain tasks in certain situations. For instance, German has a privileged status in the head offices, and it is used when dealing with customers from Germany. German also influences the company jargon in terms of loan words, which are also

adopted during interactions in English. On the basis of these observations, it can be argued here that English does not represent a threat to multilingualism, as indicated also by House (2003) with reference to ELF (see § 4.2.1 in the present work). However, English remains the language of choice when interlocutors lacking knowledge of German take part in the communicative event. As regards the MNC's representatives working in units abroad, these often use the local language.

Finally, coming to the perception the professionals have of themselves, the informants from TechComp place their status somewhere in-between learners and users of English. In this sense, the construct of CofP presented above allows to overcome the learner-user dichotomy³⁸ thanks to its focus on the professionals' actual practice during communication, and on the strategies they implement to interact in the international business environment. Thus, the construct of CofP is consistent with the idea of life-long learning, and it seems particularly suitable to international business communication. In fact, the professionals that operate in this environment rely on their experience, shared knowledge and common practices to communicate efficiently in English, and cooperate for the achievement of the same objectives.

In essence, from the study conducted by Ehrenreich it is evident that the challenge implied in BELF communication is the NNSs' diversity in terms of lingua-cultural backgrounds, along with the co-presence of varying degrees of language proficiency. Hence, developing pragmatic efficiency and flexibility is far more important than conforming to StE norms when communicating in BELF. The interviews conducted by Ehrenreich have raised awareness in the professionals about the strategies they adopt to function appropriately in international business communication, while redefining their status in terms of both learners and users of English. In her conclusions, Ehrenreich also reiterates the idea that ELF and BELF are compatible to each other. BELF speakers are similar to ELF speakers since both groups face lingua-cultural issues when using English. However, the context of business plays a defining role in BELF. In this sense, the notion of CofP with its three dimensions of mutual engagement, joint negotiated enterprise and shared repertoire of negotiable resources is particularly apt to categorize the community of BELF users. All in all, the linguistic concerns informing ELF research on the one hand, and the interest for the contextual features of

³⁸ The learner-user dichotomy is explained by Mauranen (2012) in order to account for the difference between ELF and learner language. Although ELF users and learners of English share common "fundamental bilingual processes" (Mauranen 2012, 3), ELF users cannot be categorized as learners. Learners acquire their status in relation to the social context in which they interact, i.e. the classroom, which is regulated by educational goals. Outside the classroom, the interaction does not abide by classroom rules. In fact, "even when a non-native speaker is assuming a learner position relative to a native-speaker interlocutor, native speakers tend to orient to them as speakers, attending to the contents of what is being said, not correcting their language" (Mauranen 2012, 5).

international business communication characterizing BELF on the other hand, are both instrumental to gaining deeper insights into lingua franca issues.

Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) explore the nature of BELF along the same line as Ehrenreich. Banking on the assumption that the difference between ELF and BELF lies in the purpose and domain of use of BELF, i.e. conducting goal-oriented communication among NNSs in international business contexts, the authors aim at better defining the nature of BELF and its importance in today's globalized business scenario, by "explor[ing] the perceptions of internationally operating business professionals about BELF communication and its 'success' at work" (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 382). The authors report on the findings of the research project *Does Business Know How? The Role of Communication in the Business Know-How of Globalized Operations*, which was organized by the Academy of Finland between 2006 and 2009 in the context of a larger research program.³⁹

In order to gather the perceptions of a group of internationally operating business professionals, Kankaanranta and Planken conducted online surveys followed up by interviews in a sample of European MNCs from a variety of industry sectors (IT, logistics and global HRM). In particular, the surveys were directed to 987 professionals employed in five companies based in Finland, and they included questions regarding the use of English, the degree of competence required in the workplace, the type of interlocutors with whom they exchange information most often (NSs or NNSs), and the type of communication practices (company internal or external communication) in which they are usually active. The informants were also asked to evaluate the importance of such business-related factors which are traditionally considered crucial in business communication textbooks as for instance directness, clarity and politeness (Bovée & Thill 2010, Munter 2007). Finally, the respondents were submitted open questions asking them for additional information about their perceptions of communicative success. The results of the online survey were integrated by 27 semi-structured interviews with the professionals from two of the Finnish-based MNCs involved in the survey who had volunteered for the interviews, and with other professionals working in three MNCs with headquarters in the Netherlands. The topics tackled in the interviews are outlined by the authors as follows:

(a) the use of English at work (why, when, how much, with whom, about what,

³⁹ The project involved researchers from three international academic institutions, which is the former Helsinki School of Economics (now Aalto University School of Economics), the University of Nijmegen, and the University of Milan. The aim of the project was "to show that communication knowhow is an integral part of business knowhow", by conducting investigations of the "features that (are perceived to) contribute to 'successful communication'" (Academy of Finland 2010), also in relation to the use of English as a lingua franca for business purposes in international settings. The articles by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) and Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) that are surveyed in § 4.3.1 below discuss findings from the same research project.

etc.); (b) the nature of English communication (characteristics, differences/similarities between speakers, etc.); and (c) the notion of “success” in BELF communication, the (individual and situational) factors that contribute (or not) to such “success” and the strategies that individuals use to optimize their BELF communication in the interest of “success”. (Louhiala-Salminen & Planken 2010, 386).

The answers obtained were classified according to these three topics, with the objective to identify general tendencies across the findings. The findings allowed to draw conclusions about the status of BELF users, about the nature of BELF, and about the ways this language functions.⁴⁰

First of all, the findings reveal that the majority of communication events in BELF occur among NNSs. Beside this, some of the findings in Kankaanranta and Planken’s research are in keeping with the results of previous studies already quoted in this section (Charles 2007, Ehrenreich 2010). For instance, NS proficiency is not regarded as a model for successful BELF communication. However, interactions with NSs are described as asymmetrical and unequal, thus confirming the power issues underlined by Ehrenreich (2010). With regard to communication with NNSs, these are perceived as “equal communication partners” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 389), although the respondents admitted to having difficulties in understanding certain accents, e.g. the accent of Chinese and Indian interactants. The findings also reveal the tendency among NNSs to resort to accommodation strategies, whenever the communicative events include any interlocutors with lower degree of proficiency.

Secondly, the findings elucidate the nature of BELF in the light of the professionals’ opinions. In particular, the nature of BELF is understood in terms of the context surrounding communication, and in terms of the characteristics of BELF *per se*. As far as the context of BELF communication is concerned, three factors are crucial in the informants’ perceptions. The first factor is the shared international business domain, “where it is used with colleagues and with different types of business partners” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 391). This observation is in keeping with the findings obtained by Charles (2007) and by Ehrenreich (2010). The second factor which the respondents consider crucial for BELF communication is “the shared professional area of expertise involving special concepts and terminology” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 391). In relation to this, the data gathered in the surveys and in the interviews show that the respondents judge as essential not only having the knowledge

⁴⁰ Kankaanranta and Planken subdivide their findings following the three questions formulated by the editors in the Call for Papers of the Special Issue of the *Journal of Business Communication* in which Kankaanranta and Planken’s article is published, i.e. *Whose English? What kind of English?* and *How exactly (does it work)?* (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, author’s emphasis).

of specific terminology, but also using this terminology within their professional culture and context. The third factor is associated with the length of the business relationship with their communication partners. In fact, the respondents admitted that when they have a good knowledge of a given business partner, they know what to expect when communicating with him/her, and they manage the interaction accordingly.

Along with the three contextual factors outlined above, the investigation of the professionals' perception indicates three main characteristics of BELF. The first characteristic is called "simplified English" by the authors, and it implies that "BELF hardly contain[s] idiomatic expressions, complicated phraseology, or complex sentence structures" (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 392). The second characteristic is the use of terminology from general business discourse, or from the informants' specific professional areas. This characteristic seems to contrast with the first characteristic of BELF, i.e. the preference for simplified language, furthermore it makes communication in BELF difficult for non-experts. Hence, in interactions with non-experts, as for example with clients, the professionals feel compelled to talk more slowly, explain terminology, and check for understanding. Beside this, what is relevant in this type of BELF conversations is not getting the grammar right, but making content and terminology transparent to the interlocutor. The third characteristic is related to the hybrid nature of BELF, which ensues from the influence of the business people's native languages on their discourse. This influence is perceived in several ways. For example, the professionals may prefer to focus on the content of the interaction or on its relational aspects, they may rely on shared knowledge or provide additional explanation, and they may deploy politeness strategies to a greater or lesser extent.

The authors quote the case of those Dutch and Finnish respondents who admitted to perceiving their discourse as content-oriented and direct,⁴¹ and containing less politeness forms than the discourse of other BELF professionals from other lingua-cultural backgrounds. The majority of the respondents are also aware of cultural differences as regards politeness conventions, although in general they do not perceive such differences as an obstacle to business interactions. Nonetheless, some of the respondents admitted that including rapport-building features in their discourse is "more challenging than communicating business content" (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 395), for this is not usually included in the syllabus of business English courses. Here it is argued that building rapport is more difficult than communicating business content, since the former practice is subsumed by strategies that are culture-bound, and therefore difficult to be tackled in the international business context where

⁴¹ The acknowledgement by the Finnish respondents as regards their preference for content-oriented and direct discourse is in line with Ehrenreich's (2010) findings.

interactants with different backgrounds have to negotiate joint communication.

Finally, with regard to the third question which concerned the ways in which BELF functions, the informants agree that BELF functions “in such a way that it gets the job done” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 395). In this case as well, the respondents’ answers indicate three components that contribute to efficient communication in BELF. The first is accuracy in conveying information, which is judged as more important than achieving language correctness. The second component is referred to by the authors as clarity, and it comprises those features that business communication textbooks regard as fundamental (Bovée & Thill 2010, Munter 2007), as for example “logical progression, organization, explicitness, and readability” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 396). Over and above this, in order to achieve clarity, the respondents reckon that “the discourse should be explicit (unambiguous), simple (without complex word structures), and compact (without unnecessary words, repetition)” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 396). The third component is labelled by the authors with the phrase “making the recipient feel good”, and it is defined as “having communicated information (either in good or bad news contexts) that [is] useful or usable to the recipient, and in a manner appropriate to the context and in line with the expectations of the recipient” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 397). Politeness forms are part and parcel of this component, and they are exploited to build rapport (this is what is defined as “relational talk” in the article, Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 397), as well as to mitigate the force of requests or the impact of bad news.

The results obtained by Kankaanranta and Planken testify to the fact that BELF competence is “perceived as an essential part of the business knowledge of internationally operating business professionals” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 400). It is safe to argue that BELF corresponds to the use of English mostly by NNSs rather than by NSs for professional purposes in the international business domain. As the authors put it, BELF is “an international code and operating language used at work, to do the work” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 400). In this sense, BELF is regarded as an instrument to ‘get the job done’, and evidence from the interviews testify that knowing the language is as fundamental as being able to use a computer. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that internationally operating business professionals very often take advantage of their first languages in the workplace too, hence knowing two languages can be regarded as a further asset.

Next, the findings suggest that BELF users are aware that BELF is different from the language used by NSs in the UK, USA, or in other countries where English has the status of a first language. Since NNSs represent the majority of BELF users, Kankaanranta and Planken suggest that NSs should be trained in BELF competence, especially with regard to those

characteristics of effective communication that emerged in the surveys and in the interviews, and that are traditionally listed in textbooks, such as “simplicity, clarity, and relational orientation” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 401).

In the concluding paragraphs of their article, Kankaanranta and Planken pinpoint a crucial difference between the use of BELF, which is the language to fulfil “immediate, everyday tasks and duties” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 401), and the use of English for the purposes of corporate communication in official documents. In fact, the respondents in Kankaanranta and Planken’s research distinguish between BELF used as a daily communication practice and the type of English used to disseminate corporate information. In fact, the latter is perceived by the professionals as more challenging and demanding than BELF. Hence, on the basis of these results, the authors suggest that official, standardized documents for internal and external corporate communication “will likely adhere to ‘standard’ English language usage, which [is] characterized as more demanding than BELF” (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 401).

This consideration leads to a problematization of the type of English used by companies to address their international stakeholders, and in this sense companies’ global websites in English are an interesting case in point. As I have postulated in the Introduction of this work, communication via companies’ global websites targets the companies’ international audiences at large, hence it is here assumed that companies’ global websites partake of the macro level of international business communication (Louhiala-Salminen 2009, see also § 2.3). More in particular, companies’ global websites comprise an array of texts used for corporate communication. Given the official nature of these texts, it may be argued that the type of English in which global companies’ websites are published will abide by the norms of StE. However, in the present work companies’ global websites are regarded as communication tools used to ‘get the job done’ in the context of corporate communication. In fact, they fulfil the strategic function of constructing and projecting a positive corporate image for the various international stakeholders.

Following from these assumptions, I will seek to demonstrate that the English of companies’ global websites can be considered a resource that can be comparable to BELF, despite the contextual differences that exist between the two. In this way, I will try to provide an answer to the challenging query posed by Kankaanranta and Planken at the end of their article, which questions whether the domain of written BELF is to be restricted to non-public communication products only, and if so, whether BELF can be expected to ever cross over into the public domain of corporate websites.

In order to bring this section to a conclusion, I would like to highlight, the presence of

several common threads across the above-mentioned studies on BELF during the mid-2000s. To start with, these studies have confirmed the tendency towards a contextualized analysis of business discourse, and a concern for the strategies implemented by the professionals in their communication, as previously indicated by Nickerson (2005). Secondly, BELF is considered a goal-oriented, context-specific type of language used by professionals active in the international business domain to conduct their daily working activities during written and spoken interactions. Competence in BELF is achieved by the knowledge of business in general as well as the knowledge of the specific domain in which the professionals operate, also as regards terminology. This kind of expertise is deemed more relevant than achieving native-like proficiency in English. BELF is different from the type of English used by NSs. Nonetheless, such qualities as clarity, simplicity and rapport-building are crucial for efficient communication. The majority of BELF users are NNSs, however it is advisable for NSs to develop some competence in BELF to function more efficiently in the intercultural and international business domain. Finally, despite its dominant role, BELF does not prevent other languages from being spoken in the international workplace, and BELF users bring in their identity and culture when they use this language ‘to get the job done’. With regard to methodology, it seems safe to argue that an integrated approach combining the techniques of ethnographic research (e.g. surveys, interviews) with the techniques of Applied Linguistics (analysis of linguistic and discoursal features) is the most suitable to shed light on the multiple components of BELF communication. Over and above this, both qualitative and quantitative methods provide fruitful insights into BELF. In the following section I will round off this overview of BELF by referring to the research conducted in the 2010s that has offered fresh perspectives on this phenomenon.

4.3.1. Latest trends in BELF and new conceptualizations

In order to further our understanding of the multiple facets of BELF communication, I now delve into recent contributions offered in the 2010s. In the last decade, the study of BELF has continued to thrive, and issues brought up in preceding years have been elaborated upon with a view to gaining a more detailed picture of BELF communication and of its implications for the globally operating business professionals.

In their Research Note “English? — Oh, It’s Just Work!”: A study of BELF users’ perceptions”, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) report on a project sponsored by the Academy of Finland, aiming at investigating business professionals’ perceptions of BELF

communication.⁴² In their theoretical framework, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen include prior research on ELF and on BELF. With regard to the latter, they acknowledge the contribution by Nickerson (2005) surveyed in the previous section. As I have elucidated in § 4.3, Nickerson pins down the two major trends that have been guiding research on the use of English for the purposes of international business communication since the 2000s, namely the interest for the context of communication on the one hand, and for the linguistic strategies adopted by professionals on the other. The context of communication and the linguistic strategies adopted by professionals are components of BELF that have been examined also after Nickerson's contribution. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen state that their project is concerned with both these components of BELF communication, hence it seems safe to argue that their study is in keeping with the studies surveyed in § 4.3. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen rely on the notion of BELF, yet they provide an alternative explanation of the acronym, which is slightly different from the one adopted by researchers since its introduction in Louhiala-Salminen *et al.*'s (2005) ground-breaking article, i.e. Business English as a Lingua Franca. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen rephrase the definition of BELF as "English as a lingua franca in business contexts" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 205). Here it is argued that this revised definition of the acronym has two foci, English as a lingua franca on the one side, and the business contexts on the other side. First of all, this new definition thematizes the language, that is, English as a Lingua Franca or ELF, with a view to acknowledging the contribution that ELF research has offered to the domain of BELF. In other words, internationally operating business professionals are users of ELF in their own right, since they adopt English to interact in a multilingual and multicultural context. Beside this, they are for the majority NNSs of English, and they adapt the language to their communicative purposes, also transferring the features of their lingua-cultural backgrounds into their communication. It follows that BELF research is indebted to ELF research, and that their respective approaches are not at variance with each other, but they are coterminous. The second part of the definition brings to the fore the context of communication, i.e. business. The business context represents the crucial difference between ELF and BELF research, and it characterizes BELF users mainly as users of English for the professional purposes of global business communication. As elucidate by the authors,

the speakers and writers of BELF are members of the global business discourse community and use the language to do their work. They thus share the "B", that is the context of business, although their individual jobs may be very different. As ELF users, they also share the "E", that is, the English language, but are separated by the communicative frameworks connected with their

⁴² This is the same project that informed Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010) previous research (see § 4.3 above).

various native discourse practices, and, in particular, the hidden, implicit rules involved in mother tongue communication. (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 205).

Additionally, in their investigation of business professionals' perceptions of their communication in BELF, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's introduce the concept of 'communicative success', which they conceptualize as "the extent to which the goals of a particular communicative event are achieved as *reported* by the respondents and interviewees. 'Success' thus refers to their [sic] personal experiences of the participants, the context, the message and the language of a particular communicative event" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 205, authors' emphasis).

Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen conduct their study along the same line as Kankaanranta and Planken (2010). In fact, the project is informed by the results of ethnographic data gathered by means of an online survey addressed to international business professionals working in five companies with headquarters in Finland. The online survey was followed up by semi-structured interviews. More precisely, 987 respondents with 31 different first languages and from 20 different countries took part in the survey, while 15 respondents from Finland took part in the interviews. The survey was meant to elicit the respondents' perceptions about the use of English for their everyday professional communication, and provided quantitative data across a broad sample of business people with different lingua-cultures. With regard to the interviews, these included questions about the context of communication, as for example the type of interlocutors (NS versus NNS), the communication practices adopted in terms of media and languages, and the linguistic skills that the business professionals need in order to be considered competent users of English.

In the light of the professionals' perceptions, the findings obtained by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen illustrate three main components of communicative success. First of all, the respondents revealed they use two languages to fulfil their professional purposes, namely English and their mother tongue. In general, the majority of the informants use their mother tongue more frequently than English, however others prefer using English rather than their mother tongue, as they feel their professional expertise emerges more clearly when they speak in English. Overall, the most part of the interactions take place among NNSs. The second component of communicative success is the knowledge of the national and corporate culture, and of the role within the organization of their interlocutors. Moreover, a common understanding of the topic under consideration and of the specific generic conventions fosters BELF communication. As far as interactions with NSs are concerned, the data show two opposing views. Some of the respondents feel at a disadvantage when communicating with

NSs, thus confirming that NNSs sense the existence of asymmetrical relationships *vis à vis* their NS counterparts, as pinpointed in other studies (Ehrenreich 2010, Kankaanranta & Planken 2010). However, other informants feel comfortable when they interact with NSs, as they regard NSs as ‘teachers’ to be emulated. The third component for communicative success is having a degree of proficiency in English in terms of “communication competence, business competence and business know-how overall”⁴³ (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 207). Accordingly, grammar skills are deemed less relevant than the expertise in the professional genres used to accomplish their everyday communication tasks. To conclude, the evidence gathered during this project seems to confirm the findings presented by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010). For instance, the respondents admitted to resorting to accommodation strategies in order to adjust their English and make themselves easily understood by their NNS interlocutors with a lower level of linguistic competence. Beside this, the business-related characteristics of directness, clarity and politeness, which are traditionally considered of paramount importance by business communication textbooks (Bovée & Thill 2010, Munter 2009), and which rank high in the perceptions of the professionals interviewed by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) too, are regarded as a factor of communicative success by the respondents in Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen’s research.

On the basis of the above-mentioned findings, the authors conclude that “[t]he use of English in today’s global business environment is ‘simply work’” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 207). This is related also to the way in which internationally operating professionals have acquired competence in English over the last decades. As the authors aptly indicate, those professionals who were employed during the 1990s had already learnt English as part of their educational syllabus, hence English was “an integral part of their work” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 207). On the other hand, the older generation of professionals who had been employed before communication technologies and cross-border mergers became the order of the day, were confronted with the challenge to learn English ‘by doing’. As a consequence, their priority was not “to master the language perfectly”, but rather to master “the business-related issues” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010, 207), in order to be communicatively successful. As demonstrated by the studies surveyed in the previous section, communicative success is a function of business competence and of the understanding professionals have of business communication and its genres.

So far, it has been pointed out that recent BELF scholarship has reformulated the

⁴³ As I will discuss later in this section, the role and importance of business know-how is emphasized in other studies, too (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013).

definition of BELF and introduced the notion of ‘communicative success’, with a view to clarifying new aspects of the communication of internationally operating business professionals. In particular, the notion of communicative success allows to draw conclusions about the professionals’ perceptions of their use of English. Another concept which arguably paves the way for a further understanding of BELF communication is that of ‘Global Communicative Competence’ (GCC). This concept is elucidated by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) in another article reporting on the research project *Does Business Know How? The Role of Communication in the Business Know-How of Globalized Operations* carried out at the Academy of Finland between 2006 and 2009.⁴⁴

While focusing on global professional communication, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta reiterate what was claimed in earlier studies about the impact of globalization and of technologies on international business encounters. For instance, globalization and new technologies have contributed to making these encounters more complex than in the past, thus making imperative for the professionals to develop a new type of communicative competence. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta observe that so far scholarly attention has been devoted to several components of communicative competence, yet language has been neglected, thus disregarding its essential role. As Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta write, “the choice of language and the effects of that choice on communication are to a large extent taken for granted, without any further problematization” (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 244). The authors claim that the choice of language is crucial for communication to take place. Nowadays, the language used to conduct global business is English, and since the majority of professionals using English during business interactions are NNSs, English needs to be conceptualized in terms of ELF, that is in terms of a “shared resource” (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 245), adopted by speakers with different lingua-cultures, rather than a foreign language to be judged against the standards imposed by its NSs. Following from these assumptions, the authors contend that “one of the consequences and, at the same time, prerequisites of globalization are [sic] the widespread use of ELF among international communicators” (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 245), and therefore they set out to investigate the role of ELF in global professional communication.

Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta build their theoretical framework around two concepts, namely communicative competence and ELF. As regards the former, the authors rely on the theories propounded by Hymes (1972) in the domain of linguistic philosophy. According to Hymes, speakers’ communicative competence is based not only on the knowledge of the grammar rules of a given language, but also on the knowledge of the way

⁴⁴ See also § 4.3.

this language is used in relation to the socio-cultural context⁴⁵. As a matter of fact, language knowledge is acquired also by learning what is appropriate in certain contexts. As Hymes puts it, “[t]he acquisition of such competency is of course fed by social experience, needs, and motives, and issues in action that is itself a renewed source of motives, needs, experience” (Hymes 1972, 60). On the basis of these observations, Hymes posits a theory of language use that seeks to reconcile linguistic theory with the theory of communication and culture, and that evaluates language on the basis of the following questions:

2. Whether (and to what degree) something is formally *possible*;
3. Whether (and to what degree) something is *feasible* in virtue of the means of implementation available;
4. Whether (and to what degree) something is *appropriate* [...] in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
5. Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually *performed*, and what its doing entails. (Hymes 1972, 63, author’s emphasis)

From these questions, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta derive four parameters, namely *possibility*, *feasibility*, *appropriateness* and *probability*, which they deploy in their analysis of professionals’ communicative competence.

Beside drawing upon Hymes’s linguistic theory, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta rely on communication studies to draft their theoretical framework. In the communication studies conducted in the 1980s, two dimensions of communicative competence emerged, i.e. effectiveness and appropriateness. According to Wiemann and Backlund, communicative competence “focuses on the individual’s ability and skill, which necessarily includes both knowledge of social/communicative rules and the wherewithal to perform in an appropriate manner” (Wiemann & Backlund 1980, 188). In order to be effective, the individual’s level of knowledge and skills should be sufficiently high in relation to the context of communication. As for being appropriate, the individual should meet three “basic contextual requirements”, which are postulated by Wiemann and Backlund as follows:

- (1) [t]he verbal context, that is, making sense in terms of wording, of statements, and of topic;
- (2) the relationship context, that is, the structuring, type and style of messages so that they are consonant with the particular relationship at hand;
- and (3) the environmental context, that is, the consideration of constraints imposed on message making by the symbolic and physical environment. (Wiemann & Backlund 1980, 191)

⁴⁵ The type of knowledge indicated by Hymes is in line with the notion of procedural knowledge, as opposed to declarative knowledge. On the one side, procedural knowledge, i.e. “knowing how” (Ryle 1949[2000]), subsumes the performance of skilled actions such as riding the bicycle or playing the piano, as well as cognitive actions such as language production (Berry & Dienes 1993). Furthermore, procedural knowledge “can be demonstrated only by performing the procedure”, and it is “often acquired only after extensive practice” (Pressley & McCormick 2007, 106). On the other side, declarative knowledge, i.e. “knowing that” (Ryle 1949[2000]), is the knowledge of events that happened to us, or of other factual events, that can be stated in propositions (Berry & Dienes 1993). Additionally, “[d]eclarative knowledge can be acquired after a single exposure” (Pressley & McCormick 2007, 106).

In a similar vein, Spitzberg and Cupach (1984) argue that communicative competence is a function of the individual's ability to communicate messages in keeping with the context of interaction. In addition to this, Spitzberg and Cupach conceptualize linguistic competence according to the ways in which a language is used. However, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta aptly observe that neither Hymes's theory nor the communication studies outlined above account for the actual language used. In order to overcome this limit, the authors incorporate the notion of ELF into their theoretical framework.

Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta bank on the assumption that in contemporary global professional communication the notion of English cannot be taken as a given, since it is used by internationally operating business professionals who are for the most part NNSs, and so its realization is different from that which characterize NS use. As the authors put it, "when English is used as a shared language by internationally operating business professionals, the notion of language is different: it is not 'owned' by anyone nor directly linked to a particular context" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 248). In this sense, the introduction of the notion of ELF in the 2000s is useful to further substantiate a model of communicative competence. As a matter of fact, ELF research not only reflects upon to the type of language used by NNSs, thus closing a conceptual gap (Seidlhofer 2001), but it also accounts for the influence of the NNSs' lingua-cultural background on their language usage (Meierkord 2002). Obviously, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta include in their framework the notion of BELF surveyed earlier in this chapter, since they focus on the business context. They describe BELF as "the language that business professionals from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use to conduct their daily work activities" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 248), and they restate the context-specific and goal-oriented nature of the notion.

As mentioned earlier, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta glean the four parameters of possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and probability from Hymes's theory, and these seem to be appropriate to investigate today's global professional communication. Nevertheless, since communication in this context is conducted in English as a lingua franca, the authors claim that the notion of communicative competence theorized by Hymes needs to be integrated. In order to do this, the authors draw upon the model of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) in the context of Second Language Acquisition. In fact, Canale and Swain devise three components of communicative competence, i.e. *grammatical*, *sociolinguistic* and *strategic competence*. According to Canale and Swain, grammatical competence "include[s] knowledge of lexical items and of rules of

morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology” (Canale & Swain 1980, 29), sociolinguistic competence “is made up of two sets of rules: sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse”, while strategic competence is “made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (Canale & Swain 1980, 30). A fourth component of communicative competence was introduced by Canale (1983), namely *discourse competence*, which “concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text” (Canale 1983, 9).

Yet, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta add a further caveat. The model of Canale and Swain exclusively addresses communicative performance intended as ability of use. Conversely, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta endeavour to examine global professional communication in relation to the perceptions of internationally operating business professionals. As they observe, their study “focuses on the respondents’s ‘knowledge’ of competence rather than ‘ability of use’” (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 201, 247). For this reason, Canale and Swain’s model needs to be adjusted accordingly. In order to overcome this theoretical constraint, the authors adopt Peterwagner’s (2005) standpoint, which puts knowledge on a par with ability of use. As Peterwagner writes, knowledge and ability of use “are inseparably connected, being even mutually prerequisite to each other” (Peterwagner 2005, 14). Following from all these observations, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta set up the conceptual framework represented in Figure 4.7 on the next page.

In a nutshell, according to the framework represented above, the findings gathered by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta are to be evaluated against the backdrop of global business. Furthermore, knowledge and ability are two dimensions of communicative competence, and they are connected with the four parameters of possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and probability. These in turn can be explained in terms of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. In particular, grammatical competence indicates what is possible in global business communication, sociolinguistic and discourse competence indicate what is feasible, appropriate and probable, while strategic competence indicates the set of strategies adopted to integrate the other types of competence when needed.

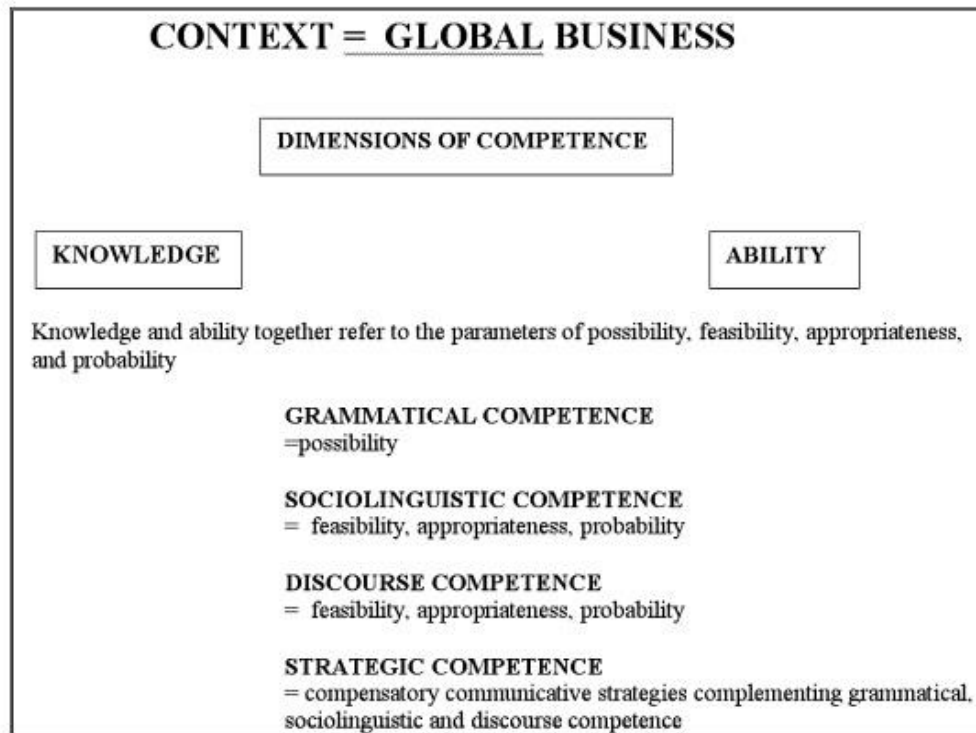


FIGURE 4.7. Conceptual framework for the analysis of communication in a global business context (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 251).

Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta apply this framework to discuss the findings of an exploratory survey conducted between 2007 and 2008, which was aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of BELF use in the context of global business. The survey was directed to professionals active in five corporations with head offices based in Finland, and it consisted of six items addressing the features of competence in English required in the workplace, the role of culture and the type of audience addressed, along with the professionals' "views of the relationship between communication know-how and business know-how" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 252). The survey included three open-ended question too, which asked the informants about those factors that can, in their opinion, "[1] make communication succeed, [2] make communication fail, and [3] confirm that a communicative act succeeded in the globalized business environment" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 252).

The respondents' perceptions obtained by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta are in line with those gathered in the studies mentioned previously, and which belong to the same project (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2010). The authors subdivided the findings into four groups, namely 'English language competence and genre knowledge', 'the role of culture and audience', 'characterization of successful communication', and 'business know-how'. After having grouped the findings in these four

areas, the authors evaluated the respondents' perceptions by drawing parallels with the four types of competence included in the theoretical framework represented in Figure 4.7.

To start with, the findings included in the area 'English language competence and genre knowledge' are related to grammatical, discourse and strategic competence. With regard to grammatical competence, English language competence is an essential condition to do the work, yet grammar is perceived as less important than the knowledge of specialized vocabulary and genres. Genre knowledge is part of discourse competence, and it can be safely stated that this competence is perceived as crucial for communication and business to take place. As regards strategic competence, such practices as checking and re-checking for understanding, clarifying and asking for repetition are deemed fundamental by the respondents.

Secondly, the area 'the role of culture and audience' is associated with sociolinguistic and discourse competence. In fact, albeit during business interactions the interlocutor's organizational role is perceived as more relevant than his/her corporate and national culture, the respondents are well aware of the impact of cultural issues on their discursive practices. This awareness is connected to the respondents' degree of sociolinguistic competence. In fact, the respondents are sensitive to communication differences which characterize their interlocutors, and which are due to their cultural backgrounds. This differences regards such aspects as talkativeness, directness and brevity, and politeness. The respondents admit to taking these aspects into account, and they adjust their communication accordingly, by tapping into accommodation and flexibility skills. These processes are an integral part of discourse competence.

Thirdly, the area identified by the authors as 'characterizations of successful communication' overlaps with discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competence. According to the findings, the respondents agree that the success of an interaction depends on the factors of clarity, directness and politeness. In general, clarity, which falls within to category of discourse competence, seems to be the most relevant factor. To put it in the authors' terms,

[w]hen dealing with multilingual and multicultural audiences, other factors (such as, e.g., politeness) only come after the clarity of a message has been ensured. Here we could also argue that sociolinguistic competence is relevant; with a particular audience, politeness may be more important than clarity, with other audiences, directness might come first. (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 256)

Apart from these three factors, the respondents underscored the importance of adding explanations in order to support their argumentation.

To conclude, the fourth area of 'business know-how' is also associated with discourse,

sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The authors observe that the notion of business know-how does not emerge explicitly in the responses, as it is considered a *sine qua non* to conduct their daily activities. In general, the respondents agree that communication is successful when it gets the job done, thus emphasizing its practical side. The respondents also agree that knowledge of business-related principles and of the particular topic at hand is required for communication to function effectively among NNSs using BELF. Knowledge of general business principles and of the particular topics discussed belongs to the domains of sociolinguistic and discourse competence. With regard to strategic competence, this is deployed by professionals when they face problems regarding different “business practices, conventions, and ethics” (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 257). Overall, the respondents perceive communication know-how as a fundamental part of business-know, and they consider communicative skills crucial for their working activities, thus emphasizing the practical aspect of communication. Following from these observations, it is safe to conclude that professionals perceive business as a communication-based activity.

The above-mentioned findings, along with the notions of communicative competence and of ELF/BELF that are included in the theoretical framework that guided the research, eventually allow Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta to devise a model of Global Communication Competence (GCC). As displayed by Figure 4.8 below, this model encompasses all the elements that contribute to successful communication in the global business context.

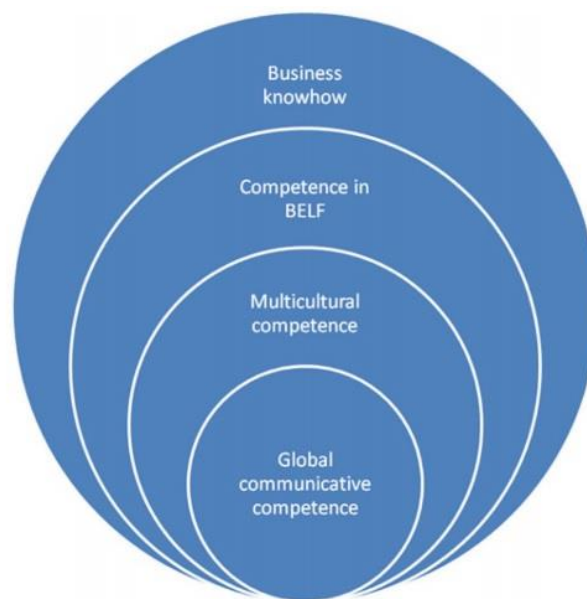


FIGURE 4.8. Model of GCC in business context (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 258).

The element of global communicative competence lies at the core of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's model. This element depends first of all on the professionals' multicultural competence, that is, on their knowledge of the factors related to national and corporate culture, and on their ability to be flexible and to accommodate to their interlocutors' communicative habits. In essence, multicultural competence relies on sociolinguistic and discourse competence.

Multicultural competence is embedded within competence in BELF. This type of competence entails a knowledge of English grammar that ranges from a basic level to the level of Standard English, according to a given situation. The knowledge of specialized terminology is also included in BELF competence. As the authors put it,

[t]he users of English as a lingua franca in a particular situation are capable of making use of the situation-specific "core" of the English language. At the same time, they use highly specialized, shared terms, and concepts to adapt to the forms and norms of the language required in each business situation. We argue that in some contexts, this may mean very basic English with plenty of "language errors." In other situations, BELF competence refers to language use which can be characterized as "standard English," possibly affected by the discourse competences of the particular communicators in other languages. (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 259)

A part from grammatical and discourse competence, competence in BELF is associated with strategic competence, which the authors describe as "being aware of the need to explicate and ascertain messages. Successful BELF communicators ask questions, repeat utterances and use more than one channel to achieve shared understanding" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 259). Finally, the external layer of the model is business know-how, since "it cannot be separated from communicative competence but it is an integral part of the entity" (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 259).

In their concluding remarks, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta emphasize two reasons why this model appropriately integrates already existing communication theories. On the one side, the model shows the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach when tackling the communication of internationally operating business professionals. On the other side, it stresses that communicative competence and business know-how go hand in hand. Beside this, the model carries implications for practitioners and students alike. First of all, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's research has demonstrated that business professionals do not need to acquire a native-like level of proficiency in the language, but rather they need to develop interactional and rapport-building skills. Therefore, as regards the training of future business-professionals, the focus of education should be shifted from grammatical competence towards sociolinguistic and strategic competence. Nonetheless, the importance of

such traditional business communication skills as directness, clarity and politeness is to be retained, since the study has demonstrated these are part and parcel of business know-how.

Finally, it is to be acknowledged that in today's globalized business domain the ability to create rapport and establish credibility and trust is both a challenge but also an asset that may eventually put NNSs and NSs of English on an equal footing:

[i]n multicultural communication, when the criterion for effective communication is not the command of grammatical forms but rather the command of the ability to build rapport and trust, the NSs may, in fact, lose some of their taken-for-granted power and become more equal players in the new global business arena. (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 260)

In order for students and practitioners to acquire and strengthen these abilities, they need to develop strategies to check for understanding and asking clarifying questions. They also need to be educated to identify and be tolerant of different pronunciations, accents and intonations in English, while making adjustment to their communication according to the level of competence of their business counterparts. To conclude, students and practitioners should be prepared to be flexible towards the different discourse practices that originate from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, and that cascade into the BELF communication of their international counterparts.

The research conducted by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta is relevant to the present study for at least three reasons. First of all, the authors have stressed the importance of adopting a multidisciplinary approach to delve into international business communication. Secondly, the authors have posited a theoretical framework that offers an extensive set of criteria to analyze the many facets of communicative competence in the global business context. Thirdly, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's study has propounded a model of Global Communication Competence that aptly represents the type of multi-layered competence that business professional need to develop in order to function properly in today's multicultural and multilingual workplace.

Here I would like to mention a fourth reason why Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's research may be instrumental to the present study, by reporting on some of the assumptions put forward by the authors themselves. Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta aptly point out that, although the focus of their inquiry is the communication that occurs among individual business professionals, i.e. at the micro level of international business communication (Kankaanranta 2009, see also the §§ 1.1 and 2.3) their results provide a framework to investigate the companies' global communication directed toward their international audiences at large, i.e. the macro level of business communication. As the authors write, their

study further highlights the significant position of communication and communicative competence as essential parts of the know-how required for managing a business. In addition, the role of other languages than the organization's own "home language and/or English in globally operating organizations should be recognized and theory value appreciated for business success. (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 260)

These remarks included in the conclusion of Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's article are in line with what they state in the introduction, namely that the micro and macro level of international business communication are not separate components of the same phenomenon, but they are interrelated, and they influence each other. This interdependence between the micro and macro level of companies' international business communication applies for example in the construction of the corporate image. As the authors aptly point out,

daily encounters between internationally operating business professionals and their business partners from all over the world are continuously constructing the corporate image of the organization. [...] As a concept, corporate image belongs to the macro level, yet it can be affected at the macro level of origin and the micro level of daily interaction. (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011, 245).

From the quotation above it is apparent that the micro and macro level of international business communication can be reconciled, and that their interdependence unfolds in the construction of corporate image. Moreover, they both partake of communication know-how and consequently of business know-how. Therefore, in order to provide an answer to my research question formulated in the Introduction, and reiterated in § 4.3, i.e. whether the English of companies' global websites can be compared to BELF, my analysis will pay particular attention to the communicative strategies adopted by companies to construct and project their corporate image for the sake of their international audiences. Hence, I will try to show how the global communicative competence of companies functions also at the level of corporate communication via global website in English.

In order to round off this survey of BELF research in the 2010s, I will discuss Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's article entitled "What Language Does Global Business Speak?" – The Concept and Development of BELF" (2013). In this article, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen track the evolution of BELF, and start by indicating how its conceptualization has changed over time. As indicated at the beginning of this section, at the outset BELF was understood as 'Business English as a Lingua Franca' (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005), then Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2010) rephrased the definition of BELF in terms of 'English as a lingua franca in business contexts'. In the article under consideration, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen describe BELF as 'English as

Business Lingua Franca’,⁴⁶ since this definition foregrounds the domain of use rather than the type of language that characterize BELF interactions. In fact, the domain of use, i.e. business, is one of the major concerns of BELF research, as I have shown in this and in the previous section.

Next, the authors analyze the development of BELF by firstly indicating how BELF research is indebted to ELF. The authors’ view is at variance with Charles’s (2007). As it has been pointed out in § 4.3, Charles summarizes the different perspectives adopted by ELF and BELF, and she draws a table where ELF is still evaluated according to such negative categories as for instance “inadequate language skills”, “deviation”, and “linguistic anomalies” (Charles 2007, 266). In opposition to Charles’s stance, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen pin down a series of features that are shared by ELF and BELF. The authors acknowledge the fact that at the beginning the approach adopted by ELF scholarship was mainly descriptive, as indicated by Charles, since it concentrated mainly on identifying the linguistic features of the type of English spoken by NNSs. However, in due course the focus was shifted to the functions that these features fulfil in interaction. This development in the ELF approach is highly relevant to BELF studies. As the authors put it, “while earlier ELF research was concerned with what was regular in ELF discourse, now it seems that the focus has turned to the inherently dynamic nature of ELF and the rationale for using particular forms in a particular context” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 22). As the studies reviewed in this section seem to demonstrate, BELF research has paid attention to the functions that English carries out when it is adopted by internationally operating business professional.

In addition to this, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen underscore the fact that ELF research is interested not only in the functions that the linguistic forms assume, but also to the specific context in which ELF is used, thus indicating another feature in common with the BELF approach. To this concern, the authors refer to the work of ELF scholars in the domain of academic discourse (Mauranen 2003, 2006a), and the compilation of such corpora as VOICE and ELFA. To conclude, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen contend that ELF research has inspired BELF by introducing the notion of the ‘conceptual gap’ (Seidlhofer 2000, 2001, 2009b, 2011). As elucidated in § 4.2.1, this notion refers to the common assumption that English is associated with its NSs. The ELF perspective has tried to deconstruct this notion by establishing the role of NNSs as language users on their own right. BELF research has adopted this standpoint, since BELF is to be judged in terms of successful

⁴⁶ The same definition is adopted by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2012) in their empirical study on internal communication in BELF in the context of a global non-governmental organization.

business communication, and not in terms of its compliance to NS standards. As the authors claim, “the notion of ELF as any speaker’s ‘right’ that supports a power balance among speakers, was a turning point in [BELF researchers’] thinking: no more benchmarking to native speakers but rather to an effective business communicator no matter what his/her native tongue” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 22).

After having stated the ways in which BELF relies on ELF research, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen go on to consider the two major projects conducted at the Helsinki School of Economics (now Aalto University School of Economics) over the 2000s, to which they also contributed. As already discussed in the present and in the previous section, these two projects have given rise to a considerable body of research. Here the most important findings referred to above are summed up, in order to obtain an overall picture of BELF studies so far. The first project, *Finnish, Swedish or English? Internal Communications in Recently Merged Finnish-Swedish Companies* was dedicated to internal communication in newly merged Finnish-Swedish companies, with a view to exploring the language used and the practices adopted by business professionals with Finnish and Swedish backgrounds when communicating in English. A multi-method approach combining linguistic and discourse analysis with questionnaire surveys and follow-up interviews led the researchers to the conclusion that English is adopted by the professionals to ‘get the job done’ in the context of international business. This type of English is perceived as a neutral code, in the sense that none of its users can claim ownership over it, but they all have an equal right to its adoption in the business domain. However, BELF is not a cultureless language, since it reflects the lingua-cultural backgrounds and the communicative habits of its users.

The second project, *Does Business Know How? The Role of Communication in the Business Know-How of Globalized Operations*, was aimed at defining to what extent business communication has been influenced, among others, by globalization processes and the increasing use of technology. As it can be inferred from its name, the project revolved around the notion of business know-how. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen, together with the researchers who collaborated with this project, took as a starting point the idea that “communication knowhow is an integral element of today’s business professionals. In other words, professionals need to know what, why, how, and when to communicate when they are sharing knowledge and building networks” (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 26). As already mentioned in this section, the methodology adopted for this project consisted of questionnaire surveys followed up by interviews, which were directed to investigate the perceptions of a sample of globally operating professionals. From the data gathered in this project, it is apparent that BELF is perceived by the respondents as a fundamental prerequisite

in the communication of any professionals working in today's globalized business scenario. Furthermore, BELF is conceptualized as a 'global' language, which is different from the language spoken in the UK or in the USA. It follows that BELF competence is "perceived as a dynamic construction heavily dependent on the context of its use and the users" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 27). This competence does not depend on native-like proficiency, but rather on "accommodation skills, listening skills, an ability to understand different 'Englishes', and overall, tolerance towards different communication styles" (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 27). As indicated beforehand, the research carried out in this project has led to defining a model of Global Communicative Competence. This is a concentric model made up of different layers: the core element is represented by the professionals' global communicative competence, which needs the outer layers of multicultural competence, competence in BELF and business know-how in order to function properly.

Having acknowledged the indebtedness of BELF to ELF, and having outlined the development of BELF research, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen summarize the characteristics of BELF by updating Charles's (2007) table. In Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's revisited version of Charles's table, BELF is not compared to ELF but to EFL, which was the predominant paradigm before the advent of ELF (and BELF) studies.

TABLE 4.2. Comparison between EFL and BELF approaches (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 29).

Criterion	EFL	BELF
Successful interactions require	NS-like language skills	business communication skills and strategic skills
The speaker/writer aims to	emulate NS discourse.	get the job done & create rapport
NNSs are seen as	learners, "sources of trouble"	communicators in their own right.
The main source of problems	inadequate language skills	inadequate business communication skills.
"Culture"	national cultures of NSs	business community cultures and individual cultural backgrounds
English is "owned" by	its native speakers	nobody – and everybody

By comparing BELF with EFL, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta indicate the implications that a BELF approach would entail in the teaching and learning of English for future business professionals. The EFL paradigm has for a long time established that the native-like proficiency should be the desired learning outcome. BELF, similarly to ELF, has suggested a new teaching and learning agenda which is focused on the domain, i.e. international business, and on the purpose of the interaction, i.e. ‘getting the job done’. Nevertheless, the hybrid and dynamic nature of BELF represents a pedagogical challenge, since it is difficult to define the linguistic features that are to be taught in class. In order to overcome this challenge, Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen suggest that the model of GCC should be adopted as a framework for teaching English. To put it in the authors’ terms,

[f]or a future business professional, the outermost layer, business knowhow, is the foundation on which the communicative competence is constructed. This entails that business knowledge and awareness should be imported into the BELF classroom, for example, with the help of case studies, problem-based learning, and different types of simulations. Although there is no denying of the fact that ultimately, the real life practice is the best school for learning BELF, these methods are still able to imitate the real life experience fairly effectively. In this way, the students would learn – not only the key business terminology – but even more importantly, the related concepts, genres, and practices that are typically shared in the business discourse community and would thus be salient in a particular communicative situation. (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013, 29-30)

As is evident from the quotation above, competence in BELF entails also a knowledge of the discursive practices that characterize the business domain. In fact, as claimed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011), and as reiterated by Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen (2013), in BELF genre knowledge is more important than grammatical correctness.

The general picture that can be obtained from this survey is that BELF is a *sine qua non* of the communication of today’s internationally operating business professionals. BELF is a context-dependent, purpose-oriented type of language which puts its international users on an equal footing. Accordingly, BELF is a neutral code, since none of its users can claim ownership over it. Nonetheless, BELF is not a cultureless language but rather a linguistic *masala* (Meierkord 2002), as the communicative practices that characterize the *lingua-cultures* of BELF speakers cross over into their communication. Recent BELF research has been characterized by the two-fold interest for the context of business communication on the one hand, and for the professionals’ communicative strategies on the other hand, which was distinctive of past ESBP studies, as indicated by Nickerson (2005). However, recent BELF research has been supported to a larger extent by the methods of ethnographic research, both quantitatively and qualitatively, rather than by linguistic and discourse analysis. These

methodologies have led to a redefinition of communicative competence in terms of global communicative competence. Over and above this, the model of GCC proposed by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) represents a suitable framework to examine international business communication today, since it considers communication know-how as a constituent of business know-how (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen 2013).

As I have already pointed out, BELF studies have concentrated so far on the micro level of international business communication (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta 2011). The overall aim of the present work is trying to integrate the BELF approach by taking into account the macro level of international business communication. In order to do so, I delve into the corporate communication conducted by companies by means of their global websites in English version. As stated in the Introduction, the corpus of websites selected for my analysis is made up of websites owned by companies based in European countries whose L1 is not English. These companies have chosen to publish an English version of their websites in order to cater for the needs of their international audiences. Given the fact that these companies adopt English as a tool for international business communication, it is here assumed that English for corporate communication bears of comparison with BELF as it is used in individual professionals' interactions. However, since the English version of the companies' websites is very often a translation of the website published in the company's native language, in the next section I will focus on issues related to the relationships between translation practices and the use of English as a *lingua franca*.

4.4. The interconnectedness of translation and ELF in a globalized world

In the previous sections of Chapter 4, the global spread of English in the light of the World Englishes paradigm has been considered. Then, attention has been focused on the development of ELF research as a new framework which accounts for the role of English as the communication code chosen by speakers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds. In addition to this, the BELF approach has been introduced, following from the observation that the studies conducted in this area so far have elucidated the many faces of communication in English for the purposes of international business. The world-wide spread of English as a shared code of communication, together with its use in the international business domain, can be regarded as both a cause and a result of globalization. Within this context, the implementation of new communication technologies represents a further element which subsumes the processes of globalization. In § 3.2.1, the ways in which the properties of the Web medium have afforded new potential for communication on a global scale have been

elucidated. This potential has in turn brought about new discursive practices, while affecting the relationship between genre and medium. In particular, the factor designated by Garzone (2007) as extension in participation framework accounts for the global accessibility that characterizes the texts which are uploaded onto the Web.

Not only has the implementation of such technologies as the Internet and the Web made communication across national, cultural and linguistic boundaries easier, but it has also resulted in a reduction of its costs, thus fuelling globalization processes, as Pym (2006) pointedly underlines. Pym considers the role of English as the international lingua franca an outcome of cheaper communication in today's globalized world. Yet Pym observes that cheaper communication has reinforced another trend, whose nature seems to diverge from the use of ELF, i.e. the increasing demand for multilingual translations. Banking on the assumption that globalization processes and the rise of new communication technologies have contributed to the spread of ELF on the one side, and to the increase of translations on the other side, in this section I set out to discuss translation practices in the context of globalization, and in particular in relation to the use of ELF (and implicitly BELF). This will allow us to establish whether translation and the use of English as a lingua franca are mutually excluding communication practices, or if they bear of any comparison, at least to some extent.

The interconnectedness of such factors as communication technologies, ELF and translation seems particularly relevant for the aims of the present study, since in the last decades internationally operating companies have taken advantage of the World Wide Web as a means for international business communication. Companies spread information about their products and performances by relying on the Web medium. The Web allows every company to publish a variety of informative and promotional material online, which was once available in printed version only. Nowadays this material can be easily accessed by opening the company's website. Therefore the Web is now commonly used for the purposes of corporate communication. Companies usually upload a website in the language spoken in their country of origin, along with a website in English, which caters for the needs of their international stakeholders. In this sense, the English version of companies' websites can be regarded as a tool for international corporate communication. Nonetheless, the emergence of new technologies which have made translation cheaper and easier currently allows company to publish their websites in multilingual versions, each version corresponding to one of the various languages spoken in the countries where these companies trade. It follows that English may be in the process of losing its hegemony as regards corporate communication via website. Although this is theoretically possible, many companies still seem to rely on a global website in English to address their international public. This assumption will be further

substantiated when the materials used for my analysis will be presented.

As stated above, this section explores the relationship, and hypothesized divergence, between translation and the use of English as a lingua franca in today's globalized scenario. In the context of my research, two questions arise. First of all, a question arises whether the English version of a company's website is suitable to cater for the needs of its stakeholders with different lingua-cultures, or whether it is more appropriate to have so many language versions as the number of languages spoken in the countries in which the company conducts its business. Secondly, if it is true that a global website in English appropriately fulfils the needs of the companies' international audiences, the question should be answered whether the spread of English as a lingua franca has impacted the English used in companies' global website, and if so, to what extent.

These two questions will be tackled during the analysis in Chapters 6 and 7, while in the following section I will provide a theoretical framework to support the analysis itself. This framework relies on recent literature which can be brought together under the label of Translation Studies. Albeit an exhaustive review of recent Translation Studies is beyond the scope of the present work, I will run through the main concepts that are associated with globalization and the influence of communication technologies on translation. Firstly, I will survey contributions dealing with multilingual translation practices in the high-tech industry, and more in particular on the Web. Secondly, I will review selected contributions about the impact of ELF on translation practices, and I will discuss issues about the interplay of globalization, technology, ELF and translation.

4.4.1. *The impact of communication technologies on translation*

In order to introduce the present discussion about translation practices in the high-tech industry, I would like to restate what was pointed out regarding the role played by the English language in this field at the beginning of Chapter 4. English is widely regarded as the *lingua franca* of the Internet (Crystal 1997[2003]). In fact, communication technologies were firstly introduced in the English language (Giltrow and Stein 2009). Not only was the Internet developed in the US, but also the World Wide Web was invented by an international team of researchers at CERN, Geneva, led by Tim Berners-Lee, a British scientist. However, with the implementation of communication infrastructures in other countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America, the presence of other languages in the Web medium has been steadily increasing since the late 1990s (Crystal 2001[2006]), thus leading to the decline of the dominance of English in online communication (Graddol 2006).

In addition to this, communication technologies have reduced the costs of translation

and afforded new tools which make the translators' task easier, as I will illustrate in this section. Therefore, companies currently tap into a range of strategies that enable them to efficiently address local markets in their native languages. One way to pervasively disseminate information about the companies' activities and performance in local markets is to provide a multilingual version of the company's website. The translation of websites from one SL to many TLs is made possible by the practices introduced with the rise of the localization industry. *Localization* can be defined as "the translation and adaptation of a software or web product, which includes the software application itself and all related product documentation" (Esselink 2000, 1). The term derives from 'locale', which in its strictest sense denotes a small area or vicinity.⁴⁷ This term is now used in the technical domain to describe "a specific combination of language, region, and character encoding" (Esselink 2000, 1). As indicated by Pym (2010), localization includes a variety of activities that cut across the areas of information technology, marketing and language skills. Therefore, translation is one of the many activities that contribute to the whole process of localization.

The localization industry started in the domain of information technology, following from the need to release multilingual versions of such products as software, hardware, user's manuals, and other high-tech devices and documentation. Esselink argues that localization is crucial for companies "that want to sell their products in international markets", and it is especially important in terms of for "product acceptance and success" (Esselink 2000, 1). The reason why companies resort to localization is twofold. On the one hand, localization increases sales opportunities in target countries, on the other hand, imported products are to be accompanied by a user's manual in the local language in order to comply with the local law. With the steady increase of communication via Web, websites soon started to be localized, too.

The fact that, in the context of localization, translation is only one of the activities involved in the process of transferring a product from one language into another, is emphasized by Esselink, too. Other activities indicated by Esselink, are terminology research, editing, proof-reading, and page layout. Hence, localization is different from translation in two ways. Firstly localization is made up of an array of tasks, as multilingual project management, software and online help engineering and testing, to name a few. Secondly, traditional translation tasks are conducted after the ST is finalized, whereas localization runs parallel with the development of the source product, so that all versions of a given software,

⁴⁷ The *OED Online* provides the following definition of 'locale': "A place or locality; esp. a place considered with reference to some particular event or circumstances connected with it; a quarter in which certain things are done, or which is chosen for particular operations" ("locale, n.". *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/109551?redirectedFrom=locale>>, last accessed on 2 October 2014).

device, or manual, are released at the same time.

In order for all the multilingual versions of a certain product to be released at the same time, the process of localization depends on the production of an “intermediary version” (Pym 2010, 123) of that product. The preparation of this version, which takes place while the product is designed and developed, is called *internationalization*, and the version thus obtained is known as *internationalized version*. Given that the high-tech industry is traditionally US-based, the intermediary version of the majority of high-tech products is usually in English. However, the language used for these products is conceived in such a way as to be devoid of any culture-specific elements, in order to allow multiple translation without the need for redesign (Pym 2010).

Traditionally, translation from a ST into a TT is a process that takes place *a posteriori*, i.e. only after the ST has been released. In opposition to this, as a preliminary step to localization, internationalization calls for an *a priori* preparation of the product. Then, the internationalized version that ensues will allow subsequent translations for the local markets. To put it in Pym’s terms,

[t]hanks to internationalization, the fundamental message of localization is not just that products need to be adapted to new users in different cultures, as a process that occurs after the product has been developed. The inclusion of internationalization means that those adaptations have to be *thought about from the very beginning*, and planned for at every stage of product development. Translation is usually considered to be something that comes later, after the source text has been produced. Localization, on the other hand, ideally involves a complete rethinking of the way products and texts are produced. (Pym 2010, 125, author’s emphasis)

In addition to this, the practices of localization and internationalization are integrated in what is now referred to as *globalization*. Pym makes a note of caution regarding the meaning and use of this terminology. Generally speaking, globalization is understood as the set of processes which underlie the creation of interregional networks of interaction and exchange across countries, and which involve all social domains, such as politics, economy, culture and the environment. In a similar vein, O’Hagan and Ashworth (2002) state that globalization can be defined in several ways, “depending on the framework from which it is observed, be it commercial, political, social or technical” (O’Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 66). In fact, in the field of high-tech industry, globalization takes in a more specific meaning, which denotes the range of business issues thrown up by the global launch of a product, namely product design, internationalization, localization, marketing, sales and support (Esselink 2000, Pym, 2010).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ In order to describe globalization, internationalization and localization, Esselink (2001) and Pym (2010) rely on the definitions propounded by the former Localization Industry Standard Associations (LISA). LISA was a non-profit organization based in Geneva, Switzerland, responsible for the creation of high-quality

Along the same line, O'Hagan and Ashworth describe globalization in the high-tech industry as "a process to enable the Message to be adaptable to the condition that may be imposed by Receivers who do not share the same linguistic and cultural backgrounds as the Sender" (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 66).⁴⁹ In this sense, localization facilitates globalization "by addressing linguistic and cultural barriers specific to the Receiver who does not share the same linguistic and cultural background as the Sender" (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 66-67).

On the basis of the above-mentioned definitions, it can be concluded that globalization, internationalization, localization and translation are to be regarded as interconnected procedures under the roof of the high-tech industry. Pym summarizes this as follows: "within a company that has been *globalized*, products are *internationalized* so that they can be localized quickly and simultaneously, and part of that localization process is translation" (Pym 2010, 125). Globalization, internationalization, localization and translation are usually brought together into the same fold using the acronym GILT. It follows that the industry which deals with these procedures is often referred to as GILT industry.

With regards to websites, Esselink observes that companies resort to globalization procedures in order to sell their products in international markets. For example, a company which relies on GILT practices will enable visitors to choose their language on the opening page of its website. This is crucial, since the Internet (and the World Wide Web) represents one of the contexts, or *loci*, where international communication takes place, and in fact the digital environment is typical of localization practices (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002). Therefore, localized websites should be designed in compliance with the linguistic and cultural conventions of the markets which they address. O'Hagan and Ashworth reiterate that localization takes place within globalization. The design of localized websites involves not only linguistic features, but also "the general design of the homepage, the layout, the font, the color scheme, the icon design and the position of buttons" (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 67). O'Hagan and Ashworth categorize the linguistic features of websites in terms of Content, whereas "other non-textual elements and the container (medium) in which the Content is delivered" (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 67) are referred to as Package. Content and Package are both capitalized, and together they constitute the Message. Following O'Hagan and Ashworth's categorization, localization is a process which adapts the Message from the Sender's to the Receiver's new environment. Hence, localization is a Receiver-oriented process, which entails the adaptation of a given Message in terms of both Content and

multilingual software and technical documentation (W3C 1996). When LISA closed in July 2011, its activities were taken over by the Industry Specification Group (ISG) for Localisation Industry Standards (LIS) established within the European Telecommunications Standards Institute (ETSI), a non-profit organization officially recognized by the EU as the European standard organization (ETSI 2011).

⁴⁹ O'Hagan and Ashworth (2002) also rely on the definitions propounded by LISA.

Package. With regard to translation, this is rooted in the whole process, and it entails the adaptation of the Content. The interrelationship of globalization, localization and translation for the conversion of the Content and Package of a Message for a given Receiver is aptly represented in Figure 4.9.

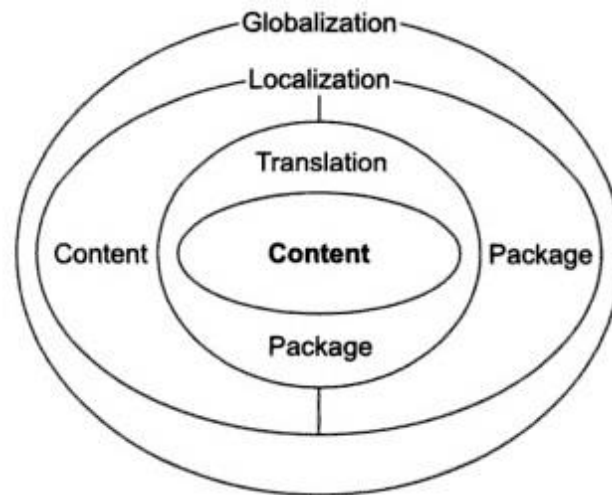


FIGURE 4.9. Globalization, Localization and Translation with Content and Language Conversions (O'Hagan & Ashworth 2002, 69).

So far it has been shown how globalization, intended in its general meaning, has been accelerated by new communication technologies, and how these have in turn affected translation practices. In the domain of high-tech industry, the translation of software, hardware, documentation material, and websites is only a step embedded in the overall process of products' globalization, here used more specifically by the high-tech industry as a term denoting the range of activities involved in the global launch of a product. Hence, in the context of globalization, translation occurs while the product is designed and developed, by relying on an intermediary version of the product itself, known as internationalized version. This will allow the product to be localized for different, multilingual audiences, in a process of one-to-many translation. To this concern, Pym (2006) argues that localization practices are replacing the traditional source-target model of Translation Studies with the pattern of one-to-many document production.

While bringing this section to a conclusion, it is worth emphasizing that, when tackling GILT concepts and procedures, a given industry is actually considered. Similarly, the software, hardware, documentation, and the websites that are localized (and translated) are conceptualized as products. This is in line with the business logic which subsumes these processes, and which is connected with globalization at large, that is, with globalization

intended as a phenomenon regarding trading exchanges across international borders. In the following section, I will leave aside the economic dimension and technical implications of the adaptation of websites for international audiences, in order to focus and on those issues which are thrown up when considering ELF from a translation perspective, especially when considering the translation of texts into English for an international readership. To this aim, I will review recent literature which has considered ELF and its impact on current translation practices. The discussion will delve into pedagogical issue regarding translators' training as well.

4.4.2. *The impact of ELF on translation practice and pedagogy*

In the previous section I have delved into the interconnectedness existing among four elements that are crucial for communication today, i.e. globalization, technology, translation and the use of English as the lingua franca of international communication. In this section I delve further into the relationship between translation and ELF, since this phenomenon has recently attracted scholarly attention in the field of Translation Studies, and diverse opinions have been expressed as regards the ways in which the rise of ELF is affecting translation practices today. The emergence of English as the dominant language in the field of translation is in fact tackled by Snell-Hornby in her article "Mind the GAB" (2010). Albeit Snell-Hornby does not directly mention the use of ELF as it has been conceptualized in §§ 4.1., 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 in this work, the author sets out to comment on the phenomenon of the global spread of English, which in her view has brought about the advent of GAB, i.e. Globish/American/British. Snell-Hornby defines GAB as "the reduced, interference-bound system of verbal communication, based on a low common denominator of the English language code, and is basically comprehensible to those with some knowledge of English" (Snell-Hornby 2010, 18).

The author starts from the assumption that the use of GAB is acceptable for informal exchanges, such as online chatting, but not for highbrow communication, such as scholarly conferences and publications. Nonetheless, Snell-Hornby laments the fact that this code is entering the academic domain with hazardous consequences which might affect the information value of scholarly texts. Snell-Hornby adopts a negative approach to the dominance of English especially as regards Translation Studies. In fact, the author contends that,

[w]ith translation studies, which deal with complex acts of communication across potentially all languages and cultures, at the same time using language as its medium of expression, the dominance of English involves further problems. The danger is increasing that English, beyond being a means of

communication, is itself becoming part of the object of discussion. (Snell-Hornby 2010, 18)

According to Snell-Hornby, the problems that issue from the spread of GAB in the academic domain, and more specifically in Translation Studies, regard first of all the fact that contributions in English by NNSs are “exceedingly difficult to follow” (Snell-Hornby 2010, 18). Secondly, the dominance of English in the academic domain, where it represents the language in which information is shared and knowledge is disseminated, acquires a gate-keeping function, that prevents those scholars with a limited knowledge of the language from fully participating in the academic discourse community. Having underscored the negative effects of the predominance of the English language in its GAB instantiation for academic communication, Snell-Hornby suggests that the scholarly community should rely more on linguistic and cultural diversity, for example by devoting more space in journals to contributions in languages other than English, or by avoiding English as a conference language.

It is therefore evident that Snell-Hornby adopts a negative stance towards the spread of English as an international code of communication in the academic domain. Moreover, in order to react to the English hegemony, Snell-Hornby indicates a list of prescriptions that should be adopted to foster multilingualism. In response to Snell-Hornby’s article, House (2010) defends the role of English as a means of global communication, by engaging in a discussion where she shows how reductive Snell-Hornby’s categorization of English is. First of all, with reference to the global spread of English, House provides a definition of *lingua franca* “as a language used by people who share neither a native tongue nor a common culture, and for whom it is the chosen foreign language of communication” (House 2010, 16). This definition, which is in line with those of ELF reviewed in § 4.2.1 above, prompts the author to underscore the formal and functional flexibility of English as a *lingua franca*. As a matter of fact, ELF studies have demonstrated that ELF is a “fully functional, adequate mode of both oral and written communication” (House 2010, 17), that is characterised by a variety of strategies that speakers implement to avoid misunderstanding, negotiate meaning and co-construct communication (see § 4.2.2). Moreover, House reiterates what she argued in one of her previous contributions (House 2003, see also 4.2.1), that is, that ELF does not represent a threat to multilingualism, but an asset for intercultural and international communication, and a choice on the communicators’ part. As a matter of fact, it is House’s stance that “[s]peakers generally choose to communicate in English for their own advantage, because it is currently the language with the highest communicative range or ‘linguistic capital’” (House 2010, 17).

As far as translation is concerned, House believes that the use of English for

international communication will hardly replace translation practices, since new technologies have afforded cheap and simple tools to distribute information in multilingual versions, as elucidated in the previous section. To put it in the author's terms, "[c]ontemporary information distribution now relies heavily on information technologies. And these have led to the emergence of a worldwide translation industry that many see today as the most important safeguard of continuing linguistic and cultural diversity in the face of English dominance" (House 2010, 17). Hence, it can be safely argued that in the future multilingualism, translation practices and the use of ELF will coexist, in keeping with the diverse communication needs of individuals in the globalized world.

The articles by Snell-Hornby and House testify to the fact that in the last decade scholarship within Translation Studies have started to consider the impact of ELF on translation practices. Nevertheless, the implications of the rise of ELF have been devoted little attention from the standpoint of translation, therefore Taviano puts ELF into perspective in her book *Translating English as a Lingua Franca* (2010). This book delves into the challenges with which translators are confronted due to the rise of ELF in today's globalized business scenario. As the author puts it, "[g]lobalization and the spread of ELF [...] call into question the traditional correspondence between language on the one hand and nation and culture on the other, as well as the conventional view of nation states and languages as separate and autonomous systems" (Taviano 2010, 3). In her study, which cuts across ELF research, Translation Studies and translation pedagogy, Taviano concentrates on the hybrid nature of ELF and on the translator's multilayered tasks alike. Furthermore, she argues that ELF is to be conceived of as both a local and a global language, thus challenging the shared assumption according to which ELF is a simplified communication code which characterizes NNS use only.

Taviano's study delves into translation practices into and out of English, thus it focuses on written communication, and in doing so it integrates ELF research, which has primarily concentrated on spoken interactions, as I have explained in the previous sections of this chapter. However, Taviano starts by considering how the traditional notion of text is now evolving, and she points out that the distinction between spoken and written texts is now blurred. In fact, she observes that "written language is increasingly affected by spoken conversation and recent forms of communication, as testified by e-mail language and by the widespread use of spelling and abbreviations typical of text messages" (Taviano 2010, 5). This obviously makes the translators' task more demanding. In addition to this, the distinction among text-typologies is in the process of being obliterated, too. Hence, translators are today "faced with hybrid text, combining norms and conventions of different types" (Taviano 2010,

5). The third factor leading to text hybridization is the multimodal nature of today's communication, which subsumes the co-presence of several codes in one single communication instance, namely the written, the audio and the visual code. Following from these observations, Taviano defines hybrid texts as “the product of negotiations between cultures and languages, resulting from overlapping rhetorical and discourse norms, created by and addressed to a supranational community in which the traditional distinction between source text/culture and target text/culture is no longer applicable” (Taviano 2010, 8). Taviano adds further that hybrid texts are “created within a multinational and multicultural context – and therefore unrelated to a specific source culture – in a hybrid language” (Taviano 2010, 8).

Hybrid texts are directed to multinational and multicultural audiences, and the language they employ is usually English. Yet, this type of language does not adhere to NS standards under several aspects, as for example syntax, the use of nominalization, and the presence of uncommon collocations, as illustrated more in-depth below. The hybrid features of such a language should be taken into account while training future translators, so that they are made familiar with these texts which are becoming more and more widespread. As a matter of fact, translators are usually trained on textual skills that are traditionally defined against the yardstick of the British and American socio-cultural backgrounds. With the rise of English as the international *lingua franca*, this pattern needs to be reconceptualized. This reconceptualization can be achieved by complementing the training of future translators with documents written by international organizations, such as the EU⁵⁰ and multinational companies.

Furthermore, according to Taviano's view, it is nowadays imperative for translators to become acquainted with the inherent hybridity of texts addressed to multicultural and multinational audiences, so that they can meet the communicative demands of these audience in the most appropriate way. This observation leads the author to account for the double nature of ELF, which was previously outlined by Graddol (2001), too. On the one hand, English is the language in which global communication occurs, whereas on the other hand “it forms the basis for constructing cultural identities”, thus “encourag[ing] the development of local forms and hybrid varieties” (Graddol 2001, 27). It follows that, when translating into and out of ELF, translators should be trained to handle the ST with a view to producing translations that are suitable for global diffusion, or that are appropriate for a local audience, in keeping with the function of the TT. To put it into Taviano's words,

the expertise of the translator today partakes of the [...] double nature of ELF.

⁵⁰ According to the Directorate-General for Translation, the number of texts drafted in English within the European Commission amounted to the 72.5% of all the original texts issued in 2008 (European Commission 2009).

While on the one hand, the translator deals with a language that is specifically used for communication on a global level and as such tends to be free from cultural connotations, on the other hand, the same language will be subject to locally defined constraints. [...] [T]he ELF translator needs to develop a wide-ranging and complex expertise, which reflects a global context, but includes local nuances, according to the task in hand. (Taviano 2010, 13)

Taviano substantiates her argument by presenting a case study of texts written in Euro-English.⁵¹ Texts in Euro-English are hybrid and can be categorized as instantiations of ELF, since they are characterized by syntactical features and collocations that are typical of this language. Taviano examines two groups of texts. The first group is represented by texts belonging to the documentation of the EU Commission, while the second group is exemplified by texts produced by multinational companies. As mentioned above, Taviano concentrates on those textual features which make these type of documents different from their equivalent written by NSs. Nonetheless, Taviano's aim is not prescriptive: the purpose of her study is not to categorize Euro-English as a variety, but to indicate the pedagogical and professional implications to which texts by the EU and by internationally operating European companies give rise. In fact, these texts provide "an example of a specific context of use and discourse community in which English is used as a *Lingua Franca*" (Taviano 2010, 20).

With regard to the hybridity of the texts produced by the EU Commission, this is due in the first place to the production process behind them, which can be defined as hybrid as well. As indicated by Taviano, the origin of EU texts is often unknown, since they are mostly outsourced. This is also one of the reasons why the quality of EU documentation is not always satisfactory. As regards those texts written within the EU, there are further reasons for their poor quality. Firstly, they are collectively authored, and secondly their writers come from different lingua-cultural backgrounds. Many of these writers are NNSs, hence their language presents a high incidence of first-language interferences. To conclude, the poor quality of EU texts may prevent their readers to interpret them correctly. However, as underlined by Taviano, EU texts are regarded as originals and not as translations, "according to the EU policy of multilingualism and equality of all official languages" (Taviano 2010, 22), and their formal features issue from "negotiations and interactions among speakers of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a specific context with a particular audience and goal in mind" (Taviano 2010, 23).

The first text investigated by Taviano is taken from the portal site of the EU

⁵¹ Taviano relies on the definition of Euro-English propounded by Jenkins *et al.* (2001), and on the conceptualization provided by Tanner (2007) with reference to legal English in the EU. As regards the latter, this is particularly relevant to Taviano's study, since Tanner acknowledges that in the European context Euro-English and British English influence each other in the production of legal texts.

Commission,⁵² and it regards health policies introduced in the EU. As a result of her analysis, Taviano draws a list of five features which characterize EU documents:

- a. convoluted syntax, resulting from an overuse of relative clauses, embedded and subordinate clauses;
- b. the use of uncommon collocations, specifically found in texts of this kind;
- c. Eurojargon, such as «Member States», «Treaty», «cross-border»;
- d. adjectives/past participles in a post-modifier position (without preposition);
- e. extensive use of nominalization. (Taviano 2010, 27)

Beside these five features, Taviano points to another peculiarity of EU documentation, which emerges from the second texts she analyses. Again, this text is taken from the EU portal, but it deals with another topic, that is, employment policies in the EU member states. This text can be regarded as hybrid since it is characterized by the same features pinned down in the text about health. Moreover, it is hybrid for the way in which information is organized. In fact, it relies heavily on intertextual reference to other EU policies and directives, and this type of intertextual information is provided by means of long and complex sentences in the form of lists.

These hybrid features become more evident when drawing a comparison between the EU text and a text on the same topic, i.e. health, authored by NSs. To this aim, Taviano considers an excerpt from the website of the UK Department of Health, and she observes that, contrary to the EU documentation, this is characterized by more linear syntax and by a lower incidence of nominalization. The differences between the two texts rely on their relative contexts of situation and context of cultures. As regards the context of situation, this is linked to Halliday's notion of register, which is further defined by the three variables of field, tenor and mode (Halliday 1985b), as I have indicated in § 2.1. Taviano states that “[t]he concept of register is related to the use language in a given social context, so that different types of registers are commonly associated with specific types of discourse” (Taviano 2010, 27). Following from these observations, the EU Commission can be conceptualized as a specific social context, which distinguishes itself for its formal register. In turn, the formal register of EU documents depends on the context of culture. In Taviano's view, the context of culture in which EU documents are embedded reflects the practices of the EU Commission, taken as a specific discourse community. As the author puts it,

[t]he combination of the EU text's rhetorical mode and register reflects the context of culture, which needs to be associated with the parallel concept of discourse community, represented by the EU. In other words, the register categories of field, mode and tenor, corresponding to the context of situation of

⁵² <<http://europa.eu/>>, last accessed on 2 October 2014.

these texts, are peculiar to the EU discourse community and this is what sets them apart from culturally identified texts, such as a British newspaper article or official document, and makes them pedagogically stimulating for the students. (Taviano 2010, 30)

With regard to the latter aspect, i.e. the pedagogical implications which these texts carry in the context of translators' training, Taviano underscores that it is imperative for translators to develop an expertise of the social and cultural practices lying behind the production of these texts, in order to produce translations that will be easily accessible to the local audiences to which the TTs are addressed. Taviano elucidates this by taking into account the Italian version of the EU document under consideration. Taken at face value, the Italian version of the document can be considered as an original text, rather than a translation, since it contains some information that are not available in the text in Euro-English. According to Taviano, this is in line with the EU approach to text production outlined above. A more in-depth examination of the Italian text shows instances of uncommon collocations which can be compared to those pinned down in the EU text in Euro-English. Hence, the overall impression conveyed by the Italian version of the document is that of being written in a "de-contextualized" language (Taviano 2010). As a consequence, future translators should be trained in such a way to make them aware of what is implied in the translation of such hybrid texts. Put it in another way, in order to enable future translators to produce "coherent and cohesive target texts despite the hybrid nature of the source texts", they should be trained in those skills that will help them, on the one side, "adhere to the practice and use of the target language speakers", and on the other side "negotiate their translation strategy according to the context and function of their translation assignment" (Taviano 2010, 36).

As far as the group of Euro-English texts by multinational companies is concerned, first of all Taviano analyses one text by a company active in the aluminium industry, and she observes that in this case not only is the company's communication affected by the discourse community of international business, as it might be expected, but also by the practices of the EU discourse community. This is due to the fact the company under scrutiny belongs to the European Aluminium Association (EAA), an NGO that represents the aluminium industry in Europe, and therefore it displays the features of EU texts listed above, as for example convoluted syntax and intertextual references to EU policies. The second text is taken from the website of the French-based multinational group Carrefour. The results of the analysis are in line with those of the text by the aluminium company. In fact, it displays features of the register of EU documentation, as for example nominalization, and it further exemplifies the tendency to rely on intertextual references to EU policies and directives. The analysis of these texts by two European multinational companies substantiates Taviano's argument in favour of

the inclusion of such hybrid texts for the training of students of translations, with a view to making them aware of the ways in which the translator's first language may interfere with the task at hand.

After having discussed the results of this case study, Taviano goes on to challenge one common assumption regarding the supposed simplified nature of ELF. Relying on the observation that ELF addresses international audiences, it would seem safe to argue that it is "a syntactically, grammatically and phonetically simplified form of English" (Taviano 2010, 41), which aims at guaranteeing global intelligibility as well as reducing translation costs. However, the texts presented in Taviano's case study contradict this view. In order to facilitate the production of texts in English that are easily accessible on a global scale, in the last years many institutions have issued style guides listing the best practices to be kept into account when addressing a multicultural readership in English. The European Commission provides its translators, both in-house and freelance with an *English Style Guide* (2011) too, which has recently been published in an updated version (September 2014). In general, these style guides have a prescriptive nature, as they encourage international writers to adopt a more linear and simple type of English.

Despite the variety and broad distribution of these style guides in recent years, Taviano shows in her survey that a simplified type of English does not always guarantee intelligibility, and it does not necessarily make the translator's task easier, since these texts often need to be post-edited, or even rewritten, before the translator can actually translate them. In particular, as regards the translation of websites into and out of English for global audiences, matters become even more intricate, since the "traditional boundaries between source text and target text are difficult to maintain in the world of global communication" (Taviano 2010, 57). The author points out that most companies issue their websites in two versions, one in the first language of their country of origin, the other in English. The texts included in these websites are very often the product of cross-linguistic processes, and therefore it is difficult to distinguish the ST from the TT.

Following from all these observations, Taviano seems to cast doubts on the usefulness of such prescriptive measures that advocate for a simplified language when addressing a global readership in English. As a matter of fact, she questions the view according to which "a reduced language represents an effective solution to the problems of global intelligibility posed by the use of ELF" (Taviano 2010, 62). Nevertheless, these style guides seem to recognize the role of translation in the production cycle of texts today. In fact, by encouraging the production of intelligible texts, they acknowledge the relevance of translation: "translation no longer appears as a secondary transposition, separate from the source text, but becomes an

integral part of the entire life cycle of the text starting from its conception” (Taviano 2010, 63). All in all, what seems nowadays crucial is to keep in mind the role of the translator has changed, as a consequence of the rise of ELF as a hybrid language, and the diffusion of hybrid texts, that make the distinction between ST and TT hard to recognize.

Finally, Taviano discusses a further effect of the rise of ELF on translation practices, that is, the increasing tendency to translate into a second language. Despite the so-called *mother tongue principle*, which represents an ethical precept for translation professionals and agencies all round the world,⁵³ the phenomenon of translation into a second language is now spreading. According to Taviano, this phenomenon is linked to the increasing number of translations out of minority languages, and it is developing in countries with high immigration rates, but most importantly it has been boosted by the practice of translating into ELF for an international audience. In the case of the EU, Taviano observes that the practice of translation into a second language is now accepted and recognized by the EU Commission, in consideration of the high number of languages spoken in the member states of the Union. However, this type of translation, defined within the EU Commission as *two-way translation*, is admitted only in the case of texts used for internal communication. In fact, Taviano argues that translation into a second language is still struggling to be accepted by professional translators, for the ethical but also for the practical issues that this practice entails.

Taviano goes on to state that translation into a second language is now being adopted in several contexts, especially when the second language in question is English. This type of translation is adopted for example in the business domain, where it is used to share in-house information, or in the scientific field, where scholarly publications are mainly in English, in order to guarantee their wide circulation and global reception. Hence, it can be safely concluded that translation into ELF is becoming a fact of life in several domains, and this calls for a change in the role and tasks of translators, too. As suggested by Taviano on the basis of the studies she surveys in her book, new practices have emerged, as for example proof-reading, post-editing and rewriting of translations into English by NNSs. These services are now offered by translators and agencies alike, and it can be assumed that in due course they will become part and parcel of the professional requirements of the translators’ job.

Therefore, with regard to pedagogy, it is Taviano’s contention that it is nowadays

⁵³ The mother tongue principle was introduced for the first time by the “Recommendation on the Legal Protection of Translators and Translations and the Practical Means to Improve the Status of Translators”, during the 19th Session of the UNESCO General Conference held in Nairobi in 1976. According to this UNESCO Recommendation, which has since then informed the codes of professional conducts of several international translation associations and agencies, “a translator should, as far as possible, translate into his own mother tongue or into a language of which he or she has a mastery equal to that of his or her mother tongue” (UNESCO 1976[2014]).

imperative to integrate translation courses with modules about editing, in order to “[bridge] the existing gap between translation training and professional requirements” (Taviano 2010, 72). In these modules, students might be asked to edit or rewrite actual translations into ELF addressed to international audiences.⁵⁴ Additionally, Taviano points out to the added value that these training activities bring to future translators. In fact, not only are students trained in the new skills that are now integral to the translator’s profession, but also they are given the possibility to develop a critical awareness that they will eventually apply in their future job, also when they translate out of a hybrid text. As a matter of fact, Taviano rightly states that “[p]rofessional translators mentally edit hybrid texts [...] while translating them, since their features, such as convoluted syntax, make them problematic to translate as they are” (Taviano 2010, 74). These kind of activities are crucial for future translators, as they bring to the surface

the fact that translating, like writing, means making choices, selecting one specific expression among a number of possible options. Editing a text in English is an exercise, which can be considered parallel to that of revising one’s translation. In the same way as editing a text involves looking closely at its syntax and selecting alternatives to the choices made by its author, revising and editing one’s translation means developing a critical attitude towards one’s writing and making alternative selections when necessary. (Taviano 2010, 77)

Furthermore, this type of training helps students make translations that are as coherent and as cohesive possible, while also being appropriate to the socio-cultural context they address. Finally, due to the increasing number of translations into English as a second language, hybrid texts are instrumental in students’ training, as they may reveal interferences due to the translator’s first language. Hence, students are encouraged to critically approach their own translations, in order to avoid such features as convoluted syntax or uncommon collocations, which would make their translation difficult to be accessed by an international readership.

All in all, Taviano’s book gives a deep insight into current and emerging translation practices. In particular, the author focuses on the hybridity that characterizes the texts with which translators deal today, as well as on the complexity entailed in translation into and out of ELF. The overall picture that emerges is one in which the boundaries between ST and TT are blurred, and in which the translator’s role needs to be reconceptualized, to include tasks such as proof-reading, post-editing and rewriting in his or her daily practices. Beside this, Taviano underscores the implications for pedagogy that issue from the interconnectedness of globalization, translation and ELF.

A further attempt at bridging the gap between Translation Studies and ELF research is

⁵⁴ Taviano includes in her discussion a sample text taken from an Italian tourist website in English for an international audience, which she submitted to her students to be edited in terms of sentence structure.

made by Cook in his article “ELF and Translation and Interpreting: Common Ground, Common Interest, Common Cause” (2012). Interestingly, this article was published in the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca (JELF)*, the first journal featuring contributions which are entirely dedicated to the investigation of ELF from a variety of perspectives. The title of Cook’s article is revealing, too. As a matter of fact, although the two areas of enquiry are usually considered separately, it is Cook’s contention that Translation Studies are relevant to ELF research for three reasons. First of all, they rely on the same theories, i.e. they share common ground. Secondly, they deal with the same problems, i.e. they have common interests. Thirdly, the academic domain, but also the world at large, can benefit of the insights they offer, and in this sense Translation Studies and ELF serve a common cause.

Cook starts from the assumption that Translation Studies and ELF would take advantage of greater mutual knowledge, and that this would yield a beneficial cross-fertilization. In fact, the author argues that there are three ways in which translators’ work involves ELF. To start with, translators are often NNSs, then they frequently deal with STs written by other NNSs, and/or the translation they produce is addressed to an audience of NNSs. Finally, given the unprecedented number of people who nowadays have some degree of knowledge in English, there are cases in which it is not strictly necessary to translate English STs. With regard to the common ground between the two areas of enquiry, Cook observes that

[f]irstly, and fundamentally, both are academic pursuits concerned with communication across language barriers: translation is one means of achieving such communication; speaking a lingua franca is another. Secondly, they are both also of necessity concerned with the unprecedented linguistic habitat of the 21st century in which the number of non-native speakers of English far exceeds the number of its native speakers [...] and is constantly increasing. [...] Thirdly, the study of translation and ELF are both, at least in part, branches of the same discipline: applied linguistics. (Cook 2012, 244)

What is relevant to underline here is that, being two branches of Applied Linguistics, they obviously focus on language. Studying language today is even more relevant than in the past since, as Cook rightly points out, its nature has changed under the effect of globalization and the socio-political, economic, scientific changes linked to this phenomenon.

As regards the interests shared by these two areas of enquiry, Translation Studies and ELF research have both changed the way in which they consider their respective objects of study. To begin with, Translation Studies has moved his attention from the ST and TT, regarded as static entities, to the whole translating process. As the author puts it, Translation Studies “has moved away from comparison of translation and source text as static products towards the process of translation in its social and political context. It has moved in other

words from a preoccupation of what a text means, to what is meant by its speaker/writer, and what it might mean to its listener/reader” (Cook 2012, 245). Therefore, Translation Studies “has favoured attention to what makes a good translation given certain purposes in a specific context” (Cook 2012, 246). Along the same line, ELF scholars emphasize the actual use of the English language in relation to particular contexts of interaction, and in relation to the communicative purposes it serves: “[w]ays of evaluating translations relative to context finds echoes in ELF criteria for establishing what counts as valid English” (Cook 2012, 247). In this sense, ELF scholars do not consider English as a static object, but as a tool that can be adapted following its speakers’ communicative needs, thus underlining its inherent dynamism. As far as teaching is concerned, the ELF approach implies that the focus of attention is not on the language *per se*, but on learners and on their learning process, as also argued by Seidlhofer (2011). Following from these observations, it is Cook’s stance that Translation Studies and ELF share the same refusal of static models, but they both embrace variability and flexibility in their conceptualizations. On the one hand, according to Translation Studies, the success of a translation is a function of its degree of applicability in a certain context and for the purpose it is meant to fulfil, while on the other hand ELF is mainly concerned with being communicatively effective, again, in a given context and for a given purpose.

Cook draws a further parallel between Translation Studies and ELF by arguing that they both defend the right of NNSs to claim their “non-English identity” (Cook 2012, 251) when using English as a code of communication. This can be regarded as a consequence of the fact that at the present time a linguistic model based on stability would not be tenable to conceptualize the use of English for the purposes of intercultural and international communication. Yet, the common perspective adopted by Translation Studies and ELF scholarship often undergoes sharp criticism, especially by all those who are still supporting a conservative view of the English language, and who therefore dismiss the ELF approach from current linguistic debates. In line with Cook’s stance, it is claimed in this work that such conservative views about the English language are to be regarded as anachronistic in relation to today’s globalized scenario, above all if it is considered that NNSs of English are outnumbering NSs by far. This in fact has an unprecedented impact on the language itself.

By the same token, Cook argues that Translation Studies and ELF serve a common cause in that they “bring the centrality of language in human affairs to the attention of those working with a wide range of key contemporary concerns related to the linguistic habitat of the 21st century” (Cook 2012, 256). The joint work of Translation Studies and of ELF research would be invaluable for the academic field in general, because it would draw

attention to such linguistic issues as identity and diversity, but also because it would develop new ways to conduct research, and its results might inform other disciplines. Moreover, the issues tackled by these two areas of enquiry are relevant to society in general, since they have been brought about by the processes of globalization, and they reflect upon the factors subsuming intercultural and international communication. Finally, Cook believes that Translation Studies and ELF should be given more prominence in the linguistic debate, while encouraging an exchange of insights between the two areas, in order to redress the imbalance that regards the teaching of English. In fact, Cook observes that pedagogical implications are usually absent from the agenda of Translation Studies, whereas ELF has been pre-eminently concerned with the teaching of English, to the point of under-representing other issues beyond pedagogy. Cook comments this imbalance as follows:

[b]oth emphases are regrettable: the omission by translation because language learning is for many people the pre-eminent activity in which they actually encounter translation, and the treatment in ELF because there is so much scope to demonstrate how approaches to English pedagogy have repercussions in the world beyond [...]. (Cook 2012, 257)

Hence, there is a need for more connections between these areas, not only because they would both take advantage of a mutual exchange, but also because other areas of enquiry and the world at large would benefit from this.

These views are reiterated in Taviano's introductory article to the Special Issue of the *Interpreter and Translator Trainer (ITT)* dedicated to "English as a Lingua Franca and Translation. Implications for Translator and Interpreter Education" (Taviano 2013). This Special Issue brings forward evidence to the fact that ELF is impacting translation, with theoretical and practical consequences in terms of both English research and pedagogy. Taviano starts by acknowledging the contributions by ELF researchers, who have demonstrated that ELF is "a dynamic and hybrid language whose complexity cannot be fully grasped without taking into account its interaction with other languages and cultures" (Taviano 2013, 156). According to Taviano, this approach to ELF would be instrumental in informing Translation Studies, too. In fact some scholars in this field, as for example Cook, have started to draw parallels between the spread of ELF and translation practices today.

Similarly to Cook, Taviano brings to the fore the dynamism that subsumes the ELF conceptualization. This conceptualization of the English language carries implications for the professional translators, and these should be taken on board in the training of future translators, as it has been discussed more in-depth in Taviano (2010), for example by encouraging students to develop editing skills, or to translate into and out of ELF. This is particularly relevant, given that nowadays translators very frequently deal with hybrid texts as

part of their daily professional activity. More in general, as regards pedagogy, the introduction of ELF and of hybrid texts as training materials brings into the classroom a new approach to English, which subverts traditional views and commonly held assumptions about language teaching and learning. In this sense, Taviano states that “students need to become aware that although they have to learn a standard variety of English as part of curricular and examination requirements, they will come across other varieties in professional life” (Taviano 2013, 159). Although the concept of variety is not applicable to ELF, as pointed out in § 4.2.1, what is crucial in Taviano’s view is that a monolithic representation of the English language would not fit students’ future communication and professional purposes. With regard to the nature of texts today, she goes on to argue that “traditional notions of texts written in a clearly identified language and addressed to a specific culture and readership are no longer valid, and translators are hence more often than not required to translate hybrid texts” (Taviano 2013, 160).

In a nutshell, Taviano calls for joint reflections on the dynamic and hybrid nature of ELF and on current translation practices, in order to improve English language teaching and translator training. As it is apparent, Taviano’s stance is in keeping with Cook’s conceptualization of ELF and translation in terms of processes. This conceptualization challenges the assumption that language and texts are stable entities. Obviously, the changes that the English language and translation are undergoing are connected with the phenomenon of globalization. In fact, although the use of a lingua franca and the need for translation seem mutually exclusive, Taviano agrees with Pym (2006), who claims that globalization actually promotes both ELF and translation. As I will illustrate below, this argument is supported by House (2013) as well.

Among the contributions published in the issue of *ITT* under consideration, I am quoting Stewart’s (2013) article, which uncovers further issues regarding translators’ training. The author starts from the assumption that, under the effect of globalization processes, the English language has become a moving target. The metaphor of the moving target pointedly represents the unstable nature of English in terms of translation training and practice. In particular, Stewart draws upon his experience with Italian university students who are trained in the translation of Italian texts into English for an international readership. The training material is made up of tourist texts, and this choice is extremely relevant in relation to the Italian context, since the purpose of translating tourist texts from Italian into English is to transfer information from a local to a global dimension. Given that the potential readers of these translations are very diverse in terms of their lingua-cultural backgrounds and their degrees of language proficiency, ELF would seem the most appropriate code to be adopted to

cater for the communicative needs of such translations. However, the first problem that arises when Italian students are trained in this type of translation regards the fact that the English language they have learnt is based on the model of Standard English, and of Standard British English in particular. To put it in the author's terms, "almost all Italian students of translation axiomatically adopt Standard British English as their parameter, perhaps without even realizing that they are doing so. [...] Such parameters are easily accessible for Standard British English, but not for English as a Lingua Franca" (Stewart 2012, 218).

Therefore, what makes translation for an international readership particularly demanding, is that the readership addressed is too heterogeneous. Following from this observation, Stewart problematizes the traditional notions of target culture (TC), along with the notions of TL and TT, in a similar vein as Taviano (2010, 2013) and Cook (2012):

[a]ccording to traditional definitions we have a target language (English) and we produce a target text (the translation), but there is no point in thinking in terms of a target culture when your potential readership ranges over hundreds of countries. And within this dynamic even the notion of *target language* is problematic, since the internationalization of English has turned it into a Protean, multi-faceted phenomenon which is becoming 'all things to men', with the result that it is no longer clear what the target is. Further, [...] even the notion of target *text* can be misleading, since there are numerous texts which are transformed into another language without managing to hit a target at all. (Stewart 2013, 219, author's emphasis)

In sum, when translating texts for an international audience, the notions of TC, TL and TT cannot be maintained in the traditional terms in which they have been held so far. Thus, the only criterion left to the translator to define the type of translation to be achieved seems to be represented by the function of the text at hand. In the case of tourist texts, where the boundaries between the promotional and the informative function are blurred, translators should focus on the core message of the text, with a view to providing information in the most clear and accurate way.

Going back to the type of English to be adopted for these translations, matters are particularly intricate. As a matter of fact, albeit ELF would seem the most obvious choice in relation to the heterogeneous potential readership, Italian students have been taught Standard British English at school, as previously mentioned. The reason why Italian schools and universities generally adopt Standard British English as a teaching parameter is the prestige of this native variety (Seidlhofer 2011). Beside this, given that ELF is not a variety, and its features cannot be codified in a stable way, it cannot be used as a teaching parameter (Mollin 2007). Relying from these observations and on his experience as a translator trainer, Stewart advocates for the adoption of the linguistic resources of Standard British English for two reasons. Firstly, Standard British English offers definable linguistic parameters, and secondly

Italian students are already equipped with these parameters. Yet, Stewart acknowledges the paradoxes inherent in the adoption of a native variety to address an international audience. On the one hand, translators could make linguistic choices that would be transparent only for the British readership, while on the other hand they could tap into words or expressions that the British and the non-British readership understand differently.

Stewart elucidates this by presenting examples taken from translation solutions suggested by his students. To start with, some examples highlight cases in which the students have opted for culture-bound terms (e.g. bank holiday) which would be clear only to the British readership. Other examples regards the translation of place names. When dealing with place names, including additional information by means of a literal gloss would make the translation more transparent to British readers, yet this additional information would be redundant for readers with a Romance linguistic background. In fact, leaving the original Italian name in the translated text would not cause any intelligibility problems for these readers, and this factor needs to be taken into account in consideration of the fact that native speakers of Romance language represent a large portion of the potential readership, especially if readers from South American countries are considered.

Further problems which Italian students are confronted with when translating from Italian into English for an international readership depend on the varying proficiency levels of their potential readers. To this concern, Stewart selects some examples from his students' translations which display uncommon collocations and other lexico-grammatical expressions that NSs would perceive as odd. These renditions are often the result of interferences with the students' native language, i.e. Italian, yet they are perceived differently by NSs of English on the one side and NNSs on the other side. In fact, the former would perceive these translations as inaccurate and off-putting, whereas the latter might hardly notice them. In these cases, Stewart's suggestion is that (future) translators should aim at translations that comply with the norms of Standard British English, so as not to convey the effect that inaccurate language is a sign of poor service. In fact, given the high competition that characterizes tourism today, language accuracy in tourist texts could make a difference to potential customers, when they are choosing to buy a service instead of another.

From a pedagogical perspective, Stewart contends that, when assessing students' translation, it is crucial to rely on parameters that have been previously agreed by the students, too, so as to guarantee fair assessment to those students who have opted for solutions in accordance to the recommended resources. Moreover, although a certain degree of flexibility would be appropriate, in line with the fact that the majority of English users today are NNSs, students should be encouraged to check their translating solutions on listed websites, to make

sure that their translations meet high standards. To put it in Stewart's terms,

while we need to be open to linguistic diversity and sensitive to linguistic change, we also need to acknowledge the usefulness of definable boundaries within which to operate. As with all forms of assessment, if one clarifies from the outset where the goalposts are, or what the parameters are, students can make informed choices and understand that they will be penalized if these parameters are not respected. Otherwise both students and assessors will be entitled to move the goalposts whenever it suits them. (Stewart 2013, 229)

To sum up, Stewart suggests the adoption of Standard British English as a parameter for translation, as this can be reliably employed in the context of Italian students' training, but he warns against the use of culture-bound terms, as these would prove unintelligible for the non-British audience, which actually represent the majority of international readers.⁵⁵ In the light of the latter observation, Stewart concludes his article by stating that nowadays "[t]he translator is required to negotiate and reconcile the possible variances attendant upon the need to acknowledge the usefulness of operating within codified boundaries, and to be open to linguistic diversity, accommodating as far as possible the sundry requisites of the target readers" (Stewart 2013, 233).

So far it is apparent that Stewart discards ELF as a hypothetical model for translation into English for an international audience, on account of its variability. The problem is that ELF cannot be codified, hence in the actual practice it cannot equip translators with viable parameters. The only type of language that seems to provide parameters is a native variety, e.g. Standard British English, which in fact can be codified, and it is used when teaching the language, too. The variability of ELF is admitted by House (2013) as well in her contribution to *ITT*. House starts her discussion by defining the meaning of English as a Lingua Franca, and she underscores variability as one of its salient features. Variability can be traced back to the historical *lingua francas*, to which ELF has been often compared (Meierkord & Knapp 2002, see § 4.2 in the present work). According to House, in general historical "*lingua francas* were [...] based on certain territories or speech communities, but from these they tended to be locally adapted as their radius of influence expanded" (House 2013, 280). Here I would like to point out to the fact that the expansion of historical *lingua francas* beyond their geographical borders reminds of the spread of English represented in the Kachruvian models, in particular in the so called ripple model (Kachru 1992), as this provides a clear graphical representation of the dynamism inherent in the spread of English around the world.

Taking a look at the present situation, and restricting attention to ELF, House states

⁵⁵ Also the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission encourages its translators to adopt the parameters of Standard British English, with the warning that "very colloquial British usage should also be avoided", on the ground that "a considerable proportion of the target readership may be made up of non-native speakers" (European Commission 2011, 4).

that “ELF can occur today anywhere and among any constellation of speakers, and it can also integrate native speakers of English” (House 2013, 280). She further adds that ELF

is NOT a fixed code, and it cannot be defined by certain formal characteristics; rather it is an open-source phenomenon [...]. ELF is negotiated *ad hoc*, varying according to context, speaker constellation and communicative purpose. It is thus individually shaped by its users. While clearly based on English, ELF tends to be amenable to considerable interlingual and intercultural adaptations, such that it typically contains elements from many linguacultures, and fulfils many different functions, ranging from simple small talk to complex arguments. (House 2013, 281, author’s emphasis)

ELF aims at mutual intelligibility among its speakers, and since these are for the majority NNSs, it does not keep to the criterion of correctness in terms of native varieties, but rather to functional flexibility. In turn, in order to guarantee mutual intelligibility, ELF discourages the use of words and expressions typical of native English varieties, which would be opaque to NNSs. Finally, speakers of ELF should not be regarded as learners but as competent language users who adopt ELF as a language for communication (House 2003), that is, “as a default means of worldwide communication” (House 2013, 282).

As such, ELF can serve a multitude of purposes in the context of intercultural and international communication, yet House restates that it has often aroused overt criticism on the account that it represents a threat to multilingualism. House argues against this commonly but wrongly held assumption by first of all arguing that in today’s globalized scenario ELF coexists with the use of other native varieties and of other languages alike. Furthermore, globalization has brought about the advent of ELF on the one side but also an increasing demand for translations. The latter factor guarantees multilingualism today, and it depends on the need of governments, organizations, institutions and companies to spread information worldwide. As this section has demonstrated, the implementation of technologies has made translation practices easier, faster and cheaper, and in some domains, as for example in the localization of products such as software, hardware, user’s manuals, etc., translating into local languages is preferred to translation into English, “since immediate access to information about a product in a local language increases its demand” (House 2013, 284).

House goes on to elucidate the relationship between ELF and translation.⁵⁶ Firstly, the author draws upon the debate engaged with Snell-Hornby (2010), which I have surveyed above in this section. In her response, House (2010) put forth arguments against Snell-Hornby’s assumptions that translating into a global language such as English is not functional from a communicative perspective, and that NNSs are not in a position to provide effective

⁵⁶ It should be noted here that in this article as well as in House’s (2010), translating into ELF equates “translating into English as a non-mother tongue” (House 2013, 289).

translations into English, as I have pointed out above. In the contribution included in *ITT*, House further points out to the fact that the practice is now widespread among international companies to translate their websites from the native language of their country of origin into English. As House rightly observes, “[i]n today’s global economy, companies seeking to market their goods and services globally will often begin by translating their brochures and websites into English” (House 2013, 287). Again, as in the case of localization, translating into English for a global audience is made easier by the technology available. Moreover, translation into English as a non-mother tongue is becoming more common due to the fact that translation projects are nowadays carried out by collective teams of professionals, overseen by one project manager, and frequently including proficient NNSs. To this regard House observes that “[i]n collective translation projects involving the collaboration of competent non-native professionals and qualifies native-speakers linguistic advisers, translation into a non-mother tongue can be just as successful as those produced by native speakers of the target language” (House 2013, 288). Finally, similarly to Taviano (2010), House quotes the examples of such organizations as the EU, where translation into English conducted by NNSs is accepted and common in the case of in-house communication.

In the concluding sections of her contribution, House challenges other two assumptions according to which the hegemony of the English language represents a threat to multilingualism. In particular, the first assumption regards claims that translating from English contaminates other languages. House demonstrates that these claims are doubtful, by bringing forward examples of excerpts from translation from English into German. The excerpts considered by House testify to the fact that, when translating from English, translators apply so called cultural filters, i.e. strategies to hide the lingua-cultural origin of the ST, with a view to producing covert translations, i.e. translation that are perceived as original texts in the TC.⁵⁷ Secondly, House argues against those claims according to which the influence of English through translation is detrimental to the ways in which thought and concepts are formed in other L1s. This influence is exerted by “the massive importation of English lexis into another language” (House 2013, 293). House rebuts this assumption by pointing out that to date there is no proof of any connection between the use of one given language and the processes of thinking and conceptualizing.

In short, House’s contribution casts further light on the interplay between translation and ELF, by drawing upon previous discussions on the topic, and by arguing that ELF is a

⁵⁷ House defines covert translations and cultural filtering in the following terms: “a covert translation is a translation which enjoys the status of an original text in the receiving linguaculture, and is not marked pragmatically as a translation at all. In order to meet the special needs of the new addressees, the translator must take different cultural presuppositions into account and create an equivalent speech event in the target culture. In order to achieve this, a ‘culture filter’ is applied” (House 2013, 284).

functional resource for communication, which in turn does not represent a threat to multilingualism, let alone to translation. House's contribution is instrumental in rounding off this discussion about the impact of ELF on translation, as it touches upon the leitmotifs running through the studies surveyed in this section. The first of these leitmotifs is that globalization has changed the context of today's communication, with consequences for translation practices, too. Secondly, in the globalized context, ELF is a fact of life, therefore it should be taken into account in professional translation. For instance, the practice of translation into a second language, and in particular of translation into English for international audiences, is spreading, and it is gaining wider recognition. However, the acceptability of this type of translation is a function of its ability to serve its intended purposes, e.g. the purposes of internal communication within the EU, or the informative and promotional purposes of companies' communication, to name a few. Beside this, translators cannot get rid of the model provided by standard varieties, but rather they should use it to their advantage, so to have parameters to rely upon when designing their translation. Obviously, the model of StE needs to be continuously negotiated, since culturally-embedded terms and expressions would not meet the functional requirements of translations for international audiences.

The latter observations are relevant here, since on the one side they testify to the fact that ELF is a highly functional code of communication, and its inherent flexibility may benefit translation practices. On the other side, as stated by Stewart in his article, experience in translators training indicates that it is crucial to equip future translators with parameters, in order to define the type of translation to be achieved. This is in line with Taviano's (2010) discussion of hybrid texts produced by NNSs at the EU Commission or in companies, since these often present uncommon collocations, features of syntax and nominal construction that make the texts difficult to read.

Finally, this section has pulled together the factors of globalization, technology, translation and the use of ELF, while trying to elucidate the interplay among them. Albeit at a first sight translation and ELF seem at variance, they both respond to the needs of spreading information globally, and they are equally affected by communication technology. In addition to this, from a theoretical point of view they overlap to a large extent, as they both imply the idea of communication as a process, and they have problematized the traditional dichotomies of NS/NNS, SC/TC, SL/TL and ST/TT. Therefore, the dynamism and functional flexibility that characterize both ELF and translation can be beneficial to intercultural and international communication, especially in the Web domain and for companies' business purposes. In the analysis of the companies' website selected for the present study, I will endeavour to elucidate

the effects of this interplay in relation to the companies' informative and promotional purposes, and therefore I will try to relate all this to the business domain.

CHAPTER V

Data and methodological approach

The literary survey conducted in the previous chapters has provided a theoretical framework to appropriately address the four research questions presented in the Introduction (Chapter 1). The overview of studies in the field of Intercultural and International Business Communication has supplied a general background to contextualize the discursive practices of internationally operating companies. Besides, in order to account for the impact exerted by globalization on business communication, the development of genre theories has been tracked, and the affordances of the Web medium have been considered too, so as to account for the ways in which the companies tap into them to make their communication more pervasive and effective. It is in fact unquestioned that the Web medium influences textual realizations. Hence, it is fundamental to take stock of its properties when tackling today's business communication from a discursive standpoint.

Over and above this, in order to fully account for the phenomena which subtend globalization, and which affect companies' communicative practices, the role played by the English language has been discussed extensively, given that it is a *sine qua non* of information exchanges in multinational and multicultural business contexts. English is crucial for internationally operating companies who intend to spread information and promote their products in front of the widest international audience possible. Thus, it can be safely argued that the Web on the one hand and English on the other hand have become fundamental assets for companies to conduct business worldwide. In this context, it is now common practice for companies to upload a global version in English of their corporate website to reach out to their international stakeholders.

The global version in English of corporate websites represents an insightful object of analysis to elucidate how companies disseminate information and establish their reputation in today's globalized business environment. As a matter of fact, companies' global websites seem to exemplify the several dimensions of corporate communication today, which can be characterized not only as international and multilingual, but also as web-mediated and multimodal, as it can be gleaned from the discussion conducted so far.

The present chapter starts out by surveying relevant literature about corporate websites, and it presents the materials selected for my analysis. With regard to the latter, the

corpus of websites collected will be described, with particular reference to the companies that own them, which are based in EU member states where English is not a native language, and the industry sector in which the companies operate, i.e. renewable energy. Finally, the methods deployed to gather the data and to conduct the analysis will be presented. With regard to the latter, I have selected different yet interdependent methodologies taken from Corpus Linguistics, Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis. As it will be explained, I have taken on board this multimethod approach in order to extensively investigate such multifaceted objects of analysis as companies' global websites seem to be.

5.1. Corporate websites

As I have indicated in Chapter 3, since its introduction in the 1990s, the World Wide Web has aroused linguists' interest, thus prompting them to reconsider the relationships between genre and medium, with a view to complementing research on Web communication. In fact, in the late 1990s and in early 2000s, research on Web communication predominantly dealt with issues related to the composition, structure, design and content of web-mediated documents, as observed by Ellerup Nielsen (2002).

The article by Shepherd and Watters (1998) quoted in § 3.2.1 is one of the first attempts to propound a categorization of web-mediated documents in discursive terms. The authors coin the term *cybergenres* to refer to all the genres available on the Web, and they argue that these are to be distinguished from traditional genres first and foremost in terms of their functionality, that is, in terms of the range of Web properties (or affordances, see also Norman 1988[2013], Agar 1998, Garzone 2007, Miller & Shepherd 2009, Berkenkotter 2012) upon which they depend in order to pursue their communicative purpose. Shepherd and Watters's (1998) theorization of cybergenres and their notion of functionality have provided a frame of reference to investigate companies' websites.

With regard to the use of websites in the business domain, Kotler (1998) attempts a first categorization in terms of their communicative purpose. In this sense, the author pinpoints two types of websites, i.e. *corporate websites* and *marketing websites*. According to Kotler, corporate websites are "designed to answer customer questions, build customer relationships and generate excitement about the company rather than to sell the company's product or services directly", whereas marketing websites are designed to "interact with the consumer for the purpose of moving them closer to purchase or other marketing outcome" (Kotler 1998, 971).

Hence, Kotler has introduced a terminological distinction between the two types of

companies' websites, according to their function. Nonetheless, the survey conducted in this section will demonstrate that the two functions of companies' websites have eventually combined into a single hypertextual artefact. This is often referred to as 'corporate website', albeit this type of website has adopted the function of a marketing website, at least to some extent. Following from these premises, in this study I employ the terms 'corporate websites' and 'companies' websites' interchangeably. In fact, in the light of the contributions surveyed in this section, I assume that drawing a clear-cut distinction between types of companies' websites might prove an elusive endeavour, given the blurred boundaries between them. Therefore, it might be difficult to establish one label to unambiguously designate companies'/corporate website. As the theorizations discussed in this section seem to testify, companies'/corporate websites fulfil several purposes, and their dynamic nature reflects the developments of communication technologies.

For instance, Ellerup Nielsen (2002) draws on Kotler's (1998) typology to analyse corporate websites from a discursive standpoint, but she aptly observes that, as a result of the continuous changes brought about in the domain of communication technologies, these two types of websites "have now more or less merged into a new and more complex type" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 7), which combines the features and communicative functions of both.¹

Ellerup Nielsen's objective is to integrate research on Web communication by investigating the functional and compositional features of corporate communication on the Web. Rather than concentrating on the content and marketing features of corporate websites,² Ellerup Nielsen compares the corporate websites of two companies with their company brochures,³ in order to elucidate how the companies' promotional material that is traditionally distributed in hard copies is adapted to the digital medium. To put it in the author's terms, her objective is "to examine to which extent the traditional rhetorical features of printed material are transformed when digitalised" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 11).

Ellerup Nielsen argues that corporate websites are part and parcel of companies' corporate communication, since they contain the same general information that can be found in company brochures or annual reports, as for instance the company's history, mission,

¹ Ellerup Nielsen employs the term "company website" to designate corporate/companies' websites.

² For instance, Ellerup Nielsen quotes Jacob Nielsen's studies on web usability (Nielsen 1999, 2000, see also Nielsen 2002), and she points out that this type of research is mainly concerned with the "practical issues" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 5) usually faced by marketing web writers and editors. Further studies that tackle content issues from a marketing standpoint are those by Esrock and Leichty (2000), Geissler (2001) and Robbins and Stylianou (2003).

³ A previous contribution by Perry and Bodkin (2001) also draws a parallel between corporate websites and company brochures, but it does so by moving from a marketing perspective, and by concentrating on the content features of websites.

products, service, employees and financial situation. Banking on this assumption, and relying on Hoyer, Cappel and Myerscough's (1998) categorization, she defines three communicative "uses" of corporate websites, and their relative "intentional communicative acts":

- 1) Promoting a company, brand or product overlaps with the *act of recommending*
- 2) Selling products or advertising space can be defined as an *act or persuading into purchase*
- 3) Providing customer support and offering information services support the *act of informing* (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 8, author's emphasis)

After having outlined the three uses and communicative acts of corporate websites, Ellerup Nielsen describes the properties of web-mediated communication in order to "establish a causal relation between such properties and the use of communication strategies on the web" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 10).

First of all, Ellerup Nielsen concentrates on the hypertextual nature of websites. As a hypertext, a corporate website has a unifying function, given that it gathers all information related to a company in one (virtual) place. However, the information disseminated via websites is fragmented into several units (or nodes) connected to each other via hyperlinks. This places some constraints on the way in which websites are accessed: the hypertextual nature of websites imposes particular reading conditions on their audience, in the sense that "reading on the [Web] is characterized by high speed and fragmentation" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 12).

Since the reception of web-mediated documents is non-linear,⁴ information on the Web needs to be more condensed than it would be in printed texts. Therefore, "[t]o accommodate to the reception conditions of the new electronic medium, the web writer has to adapt existing files to the constraints and potential of this medium" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 17), thus affecting the rhetorical structure of websites. In order to properly explain the rhetorical structure of websites, Ellerup Nielsen delves into their communicative features at both a macro and micro level. The author explores the rhetorical structure of two websites, one owned by the US-based Sara Lee Corporation, the other owned by the Danish company Oticon, by comparing them to the company brochures published by the two organizations.

Ellerup Nielsen's study relies on the assumption that corporate websites 'remediate'⁵ the information traditionally conveyed in hard copy by means of company brochures. Therefore, before dealing with the results of Ellerup Nielsen's analysis, an aside about the

⁴ For further discussions about reading on the Web see Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) and § 3.2.1 in this work.

⁵ In this work, I use the verb 'to remediate' in keeping with Bolter and Grusin's (1999) notion of *remediation*, which refers to the act of transferring meaning from one medium to another.

content and purpose of company brochures seems appropriate, to gain a better understanding of the rationale informing Ellerup Nielsen's research. According to Bhatia (2004), company brochures belong to the colony of promotional genres (see § 3.1.3). More in particular, with regard to the content and purpose of company brochures, I would like to quote here Askehave's (1998) doctoral research, which demonstrates how the various aspects of a company are strategically described in company brochures, with a view to presenting the company as a qualified partner, capable of cooperating with its stakeholders. Along the same line, Martin Nielsen (2001) states that company brochures partake in companies' communication by focusing on the message sender itself. Over and above this, Nielsen underlines the polysemiotic nature of company brochures, which combine text and images.

Going back to Ellerup Nielsen's study, it is to be observed that, from a macro perspective, corporate websites are usually introduced by a homepage. The homepage provides navigational information on the content of the website, and it is designed to attract the reader's attention.⁶ The homepage can be regarded as a point of departure from which all other documents in the website can be accessed. Put differently, the homepage is "the only point of unification of the website" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 19). As regards the other documents included in the website, these are "taken from the fields of advertising and public relations (company profile, annual reports, ads, etc.) and from news reporting (press releases)" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 18).

Building on these premises, Ellerup Nielsen argues that corporate websites cannot be conceived of as a genre, since they include "all kinds of company publications" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 18). Over and above this, at the time of Ellerup Nielsen's study the genre-medium relationship had not yet been fully problematized. Nonetheless, the author states that the homepage displays a set of conventionalized rhetorical features "which turns it into a genre in its own right" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 18). In particular, Ellerup Nielsen identifies four frames into which the homepage of a corporate website can be subdivided: "[t]he top frame usually shows the logo of the company, the left frame constitutes the table of hyperlinks, the right frame contains different facts and news, and the bottom frame often indicates the linear order of the hyper documents" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 18).⁷ From a rhetorical point of view, the overall organization of the homepage "gives an idea of the company and its values and priorities, without providing detailed information about the size,

⁶ For further discussions about homepages see Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) and § 3.2.1 in this work.

⁷ Given that Ellerup Nielsen's analysis was carried out in the early 2000s, it can be assumed that the prototypical features of homepages have evolved over time, in consideration of the dynamic nature of web-mediated communication. In order to assess the development of web documents more diachronic research is needed (see Turnbull 2013 below).

complexity, quality and age as in a company brochure” (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 19). In this sense, the homepage of a corporate website differs from a company brochure as it is less detailed.

As for the rhetorical micro level of corporate websites, Ellerup Nielsen firstly draws a comparison between the company brochure and the website published by the Sara Lee Corporation in terms of the visual elements they incorporate. The fact that Ellerup Nielsen accounts for the images in these two text types testifies to the relevance of the interplay of different semiotic modes in corporate communication, as indicated by Nielsen (2001), too. Ellerup Nielsen observes that the website of Sara Lee features less images than the company brochure. Nonetheless, this is due to the fact that the technology available at the time of Ellerup Nielsen’s study did not afford for the inclusion of numerous or large visual elements, as these would have taken too much time to be downloaded. However, with the development of communication technologies, which now cater for faster and cheaper data transfer, it is now safe to argue that corporate websites feature as many images as traditional company brochures, to say the least. This might be confirmed by accessing the updated version of Sara Lee’s website, and it is in line with the fact that companies usually draw upon the visual mode too, in order to effectively communicate via the Web medium. As for language use, Ellerup Nielsen points to further differences between the company brochure and the website of the Sara Lee Corporation. In fact, the language employed in the company brochure to describe Sara Lee’s products is evaluative and emotional, whereas the language employed in the website is more condensed and informative.

Ellerup Nielsen further substantiates these results by referring to the language used in the company brochure and in the corporate website published by Oticon to describe the company’s mission. The argumentation subsuming the text included in the brochure relies on evaluative, persuasive and emotional language, and it is supported by instances of meta-communicative language (e.g. “This expression”, “In practice, that means”). By doing so, the message sender “does not just present a number of facts. He [sic] presents himself as someone who has the authority of a teacher. So we also notice that the roles assumed by the speaker and reader in the discourse is that of an expert and a layman” (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 26). As for the mission included in the website, there is no explicit use of meta-communicative language. Besides, the argumentation is based on cause and effect relationships. As Ellerup Nielsen aptly observes, “[s]tating causal relations between events and properties is part of a simple strategy of observing how things are related and quite different from evaluating things and their epistemological connection” (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 27). It follows that corporate websites can be considered more informative than printed texts, and this is due to the process

of adaptation that companies' promotional material undergoes when it is transferred to the Web. Ellerup Nielsen concludes her study by observing that the higher incidence of factual information might run counter to the persuasive function of this type of material issued by companies.

A further contribution tackling the functions and communicative features of companies' websites is the one offered by Bolaños Medina, Rodríguez Medina, Bolaños Medina and Losada García (2005). The authors build their framework by drawing on Shepherd and Watter's (1998) theorization of cybergenres and functionality, and they propound a definition of corporate websites which accounts for the two typologies outlined by Kotler (1998). According to Bolaños Medina *et al.*, "[c]orporate websites are published and maintained by companies in order to promote the image of a firm (by building awareness of the company name, product range, values, etc.) and to facilitate the buying of goods and services over the Internet" (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005, 124). Put differently, corporate websites have two main functions: projecting the company's image and promoting the company's products, also by providing tools to place online orders.

This further characterization attests to the inherent hybridity of websites. Bolaños Medina *et al.* argue that the hybridity of corporate websites is a function of their hypertextuality. As indicated in § 3.2.1, hypertextuality is the Web affordance that allows for web documents to be connected to each other via hyperlinks (Garzone 2007). Bolaños Medina *et al.* formulate this concept by claiming that, similarly to all other websites and to other instances of web-mediated communication, corporate websites are made up of "various information nodes, some of which constitute different digital genres on their own and whose limits are fuzzy" (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005, 126).

Next, Bolaños Medina *et al.* set out to analyse the function of a sample of corporate websites from a multiple perspective. The authors sample websites by companies manufacturing computer hardware, and they investigate such structural features as images, linguistic markers and functionality. The parameters that inform Bolaños Medina *et al.*'s analysis are listed below:

Images:

- Type: whether it is a banner, a logo, a photograph, an icon or other.
- Content: product, person, own logo, other company's logo or other.
- Position within the web page.
- Whether it is animated or not.

Linguistic markers:

- Colloquialisms: whether their nature is lexical, syntactical, orthographical or iconic.
- Verbs: person, number, tense, voice and semantic content.

- Personal pronouns: person, number and function (subject or object).
- Adjectives: position (premodifier or postmodifier), semantic content.

Functionality:

- Hypertext: internal and external links (type, position and syntactical structure)
- Functionality set of computer hardware corporate websites (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005, 127-128).

From the analysis conducted by the authors, a better understanding of the features of corporate websites can be gained. By devoting attention to the images, Bolaños Medina *et al.* recognize the coexistence of several semiotic modes in web-mediated communication, and the relevance of visuals in particular. In the case of the websites analyzed by Bolaños Medina *et al.*, images are used to promote the companies' products. As for the most frequent linguistic patterns, the use of the imperative and of the present simple, together with the high incidence of the modal "can", of the plural pronouns "we" and "us", of the active voice, and the presence of evaluative adjectives in pre-modifying position, are in keeping with "the vocative and descriptive nature of the content of these websites" (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005, 143). Finally, with regard to functionality, the authors observe that internal links are more frequently used than external links. Furthermore, as regards internal links, these are especially conceived to be operated by prospective customers, e.g. to place online orders or ask for technical support.

Since Bolaños Medina *et al.* circumscribe their analysis to a particular industry sector (i.e. computer hardware manufacturing), it is apparent that more research is needed to establish whether the results they obtained reflect the typical features of corporate websites in general. Yet, the analytical framework provided by the authors might be instrumental to gaining a deeper knowledge of communication via corporate websites, since it explores linguistic patterns along with the presence of other semiotic modes and the use of hyperlinks.

Recent contributions on the form and function of corporate websites have paid attention to defining these hypertextual artefacts in generic terms. Poppi (2011) aptly observes that corporate websites bring together a variety of texts into a common framework. As a result, corporate websites cannot be considered instances of a genre *per se*. The same can be argued for websites owned by other organizations operating in the areas of tourism and cultural promotion. In this sense, the analysis of the form and function of tourism websites and of museum websites seems to afford valuable insights to tackle corporate websites in a generic perspective.

For instance, Petroni (2011) takes on board the term *macro-genre*, which is reminiscent of the term *macrogénero*, relied upon by Calvi (2010) in relation to tourism

websites. According to Calvi, “la categoría de macrogénero define productos tangibles, identificables sobre todo por el emisor y el canal utilizado, así como por un propósito dominante, pero caracterizados por la hibridación de diferentes géneros, tipologías textuales, estilos, etc.” (Calvi 2011, 23). As it can be inferred from this quotation, the nature of *macrogéneros* is defined by the medium used to transmit them, and by the purposes they aim to achieve. Beside this, *macrogéneros* are characterized by the hybridization of other genres, textual types, styles, and so on.

The problems in defining websites in discursive terms have been addressed by Bondi (2009) as well, with particular reference to museum websites. In order to account for their hypertextuality, Bondi adopts the term *hyper-genre*. This term seems appropriate to corporate websites, too, since it foregrounds their hypertextual nature. Hence, the terms ‘macro-genre’ and ‘hyper-genre’ might be used to classify corporate websites depending on their hybridity (macro-genre) or on their hypertextuality (hyper-genre).

A further attempt to define corporate websites, and websites in general, has been undertaken by Catenaccio (2012). In order to systematically describe the construct ‘website’, Catenaccio grounds her research in genre theory. Firstly, Catenaccio builds on Lemke’s (2002) notion of *hypermodality* to bring to the fore one of the fundamental characteristics of Web communication. According to Lemke, hypermodality, which combines the properties of multimodality and hypertextuality,

is one way to name the new interactions of word-, image-, and sound-based meanings in hypermedia, i.e. in semiotic artifacts in which signifiers on different scales of syntagmatic organization are linked in complex networks or webs. [...]

Hypermodality is more than multimodality in just the way that hypertext is more than plain text. It is not simply that we juxtapose image, text, and sound; we design multiple interconnections among them, both potential and explicit. (Lemke 2002, 300)

Following from this premise, Catenaccio observes that websites are a function of the interrelations that are established via hyperlinks among the range of texts they collect. Owing to the generic variability that characterizes the texts collected into the common framework of websites, Catenaccio describes websites as being polymorphic, and she acknowledges that it is therefore difficult to explain their status in a genre-theory perspective.

While looking for a definition of website rooted in genre theory, and which accounts for the genre-medium relationship that characterizes it,⁸ Catenaccio draws upon two notions, i.e. *rhetorical interface* and *genre network*. Firstly, a website can be regarded as a rhetorical

⁸ For further problematizations about the genre-medium relationship in Web communication see Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005), Garzone (2007), Giltrow and Stein (2009) and § 3.2.1 in this work.

interface in the sense that it “mediates between the affordances of the medium and the rhetorical function(s) of the genre, providing the structural features required to deploy them” (Catenaccio 2012, 35). Secondly, a website can be explained in terms of a genre network, given that this notion, originally theorized by Swales (2004), “seem[s] sufficiently supple to capture both the interconnectedness among the different genres accessible from a websites and the multiple ways in which these [...] combine to generate meanings” (Catenaccio 2012, 47).

In her contribution, Catenaccio (2012) does not deal with any specific type of website, unlike Calvi (2011) and Bondi (2009), who respectively theorize about tourism and museum websites. Nevertheless, Catenaccio upholds her theoretical claims by analysing the corporate website of the German-based MNC Siemens. Catenaccio starts by analyzing the homepage of the website, and then she describes a selection of its relevant structural aspects, with a view to shedding light on the ways in which the different documents in the website are made accessible via hyperlinks. Overall, Catenaccio shows how Siemen’s corporate website gathers a plethora of documents, which can stand on their own, thus fulfilling their specific aims, but which are also integrated into a complex whole, i.e. the website itself, characterized by the overarching aim of presenting and promoting the company. As the author glosses, “[c]ommunicative purpose seems therefore to be hierarchically organised, with individual genres pursuing rhetorical aims which are both an end in themselves, and at the same time serve higher purposes” (Catenaccio 2012, 45).

The contributions surveyed so far investigate corporate websites from a synchronic perspective. However, it is to be borne in mind that the findings obtained from the analysis of websites published in a given moment in time need to be considered in relation to the historical context to which the websites belong. In fact, communication technology has evolved in the last decades, and web design has developed accordingly, thus impacting on the generic and rhetorical features of corporate websites. As a consequence, the business domain has witnessed changes with regard to communication practices, and companies have updated their communicative strategies, in order to take full advantage of the tools afforded by the latest technologies.

These considerations represent the starting point of Turnbull’s (2013) diachronic study of corporate websites. Turnbull observes that, since the introduction of the Web, the concept of corporate website has evolved, while “companies have had to define and redefine the communicative purpose(s) of their websites and in doing so have established what we now know as the typical conventions of the genres” (Turnbull 2013, 39).

In order to gain a deeper knowledge of the linguistic features and of the overall

structure of corporate websites, Turnbull draws on the notion of genre, as suggested by Gotti, Berkenkotter and Bhatia (2012). As a matter of fact, it is the authors' contention that

[t]here is a close link between each type of specialised text and its organisation, which in turn implies correlations between the conceptual, rhetorical and linguistic features that characterise the text itself. Genre not only provides a conventional framework but also affects textual features and their conceptual and rhetorical development" (Gotti, Berkenkotter & Bhatia 2012, 9-10).

Starting from these premises, Turnbull adopts a broad approach to elicit information on the development of corporate websites from the 1990s to the 2010s.

Turnbull analyses the website published by the Anglo-Dutch multinational company Unilever in its four versions uploaded in 1997, 2001-2002, 2007 and 2001. In particular, Turnbull explores the four versions of the website by considering their respective form and content. By doing so, Turnbull aims at illustrating the complexity of corporate websites. First of all, Turnbull focuses on "the form, the visual, organizational and multi-medial aspects", and secondly she investigates "the content, the topics dealt with and the linguistic features" (Turnbull 2013, 43) of the four website versions.

From a formal perspective, Turnbull observes that the Unilever website has evolved from a basic and linear to a hierarchical organization of information. Beside this, the formal aspect of the website seems to acquire more and more meaning across the four versions, hence contributing to projecting the company's image in a more overt manner. For instance, in the 2007 version, "[t]he visual presentation is deliberately communicating something about the character or 'personality' of the company and no longer acts as just the framework of the text. It is communicating the company's identity, how the company sees itself and more importantly, how it wants to be seen" (Turnbull 2013, 45).

As far as the content of the website is concerned, Turnbull conducts a quantitative textual analysis to pin down the most significant semantic domains across the four versions. The author notes that some of these domains are closely related to the sector in which the company is active, and so they are easily predictable. Nevertheless, some of these semantic domains seem to acquire more relevance over time: this runs parallels to the formal changes identified in the first stage of the analysis, and it reflects the company's choice to emphasize some values instead of others. For instance, environmental issues seem to have lost some of their original prominence, and they are integrated into the broader notion of sustainability. In contrast to this, food issues have become a more relevant topic.

Next, Turnbull identifies and compares the most frequent content words across the four versions. The results of this investigation provide evidence of a shift in focus from issues that are related to business only, to issues that regard all the people that might be affected by

the company's activities. As a matter of fact, the word 'people' is the most frequently occurring in the 2011 version: this seems to imply that the company is primarily concerned in disseminating information to the widest audience possible, rather than directing its corporate communication only to its investors.⁹

In a nutshell, the analysis carried out by Turnbull testifies to the continuous evolution of the generic features of corporate websites, and it demonstrates how its form and content have been affected by changes in technology on the one side, and by changes in the perception of socio-cultural issues on the other side. As regards the latter, "the corporate discourse has broadened from a straightforward promotion of the company and its products [...] to the creation and projection of a brand personality of the company. The prime communicative purpose of the website therefore seems to have become image building" (Turnbull 2013, 51-52). Turnbull concludes her discussion by advocating more efforts into the research of corporate websites, hence expanding this type of analysis to other industry sector.

For the purposes of my analysis, I will rely on the insights offered by the studies I have reviewed in this section to inform my investigation of corporate websites published by companies operating in the renewable energy industry. As I will show in the next section, renewable energy represents one of the most prominent sectors today, owing to the high stakes that characterize its business. Therefore it will be interesting to establish, by means of a textual and multimodal analysis, whether the companies are more concerned in appearing as qualified business partners, as in the case of the early versions of corporate websites, or if their primary aim is to involve the widest audience possible in their corporate communication, or again if they try to balance these two different yet interdependent communicative objectives, and what the strategies are to achieve this.

5.2. Description of the corpus: the renewable energy industry in the EU

As we have seen beforehand, Bolaños Medina *et al.* (2005) suggest that research into corporate communication via website needs to be integrated by mapping the features of websites owned by companies operating in different sectors. For instance, further studies on companies' websites have been conducted more recently by Samson (2009) and Turnbull (2009).¹⁰ Samson engages with the analysis of a small corpus comprising texts taken from the

⁹ In a similar vein, Catenaccio (2012) acknowledges that the participation framework of websites is bound to become wider and wider by virtue of their publication on the Web. As we have already seen in § 3.2.1 in this work, extension in participation framework is one of Web affordances pinned down by Garzone (2007).

¹⁰ Both studies are included in the volume *Point of View: Description and Evaluation across Discourses*, edited by Radighieri and Tucker, and they tackle issues of description and evaluation in specific macro-sections of

websites of companies active in three sectors, i.e. communication devices, vehicles and surgical tools, while Turnbull deals with a small corpus including texts published online by companies operating in the fashion industry, in telecommunications and in the insurance sector. The contributions by Samson and Turnbull testify to the fact that, by considering websites belonging to companies doing business in a variety of industry areas, it is possible to assess whether the results obtained so far reverberate across other sectors, while further engaging with the challenges posed by the analysis of “hypermedia textuality” (Catenaccio 2012, 47).

Following from these premises, I have adopted two criteria to select the corpus of global websites to be investigated in this work. The first criterion lies with the industry sector, while the second criterion lies with the country of origin of the companies owning the websites. Thus, the websites I have analysed are published by companies operating in the renewable energy industry, and based in EU countries where English is not a native language.

The first criterion of corpus design is based on the debate about global environmental issues that has been going on over the last decades (Held *et al.* 1999, Poppi 2011), and in particular about environmental degradation. As indicated by Held *et al.*, environmental degradation is deeply rooted in history, and it is a consequence of human activities. The first phenomena of environmental degradation can be traced back to the Middle Ages. During the Nineteenth Century, the potential for environmental degradation was aggravated in Western countries with the advent of the Industrial Revolution. As for the present age, phenomena of environmental degradation are for the most part localized in particular areas of the world, yet they affect the global ecosystem. In fact, since the late Twentieth Century, “the environmental consequences of industrial production, combined with capitalist or state socialist economic organization, have [...] expanded their spatial reach beyond the local or the national” (Held *et al.* 1999, 384). Owing to the global reach of environmental degradation, a pressing need has emerged to promote sustainable development, which in fact is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹¹ to be achieved by 2015, listed by the United Nations in 2000 (UN 2014a).

One way to pursue sustainable development is by promoting the production of clean

companies’ websites. Samson deals with the macro-section dedicated to the companies’ products, while Turnbull deals with the macro-sections providing an institutional presentation of the companies (the so called About Us or Company section). Given their analytical approach, which is in keeping with the objectives of my study, the contributions by Samson and Turnbull will inform my analysis, too, as I will explain in Chapter 6 and 7.

¹¹ The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to eradicate extreme poverty, to achieve universal primary education, to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality, to improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, to malaria and other diseases, to ensure environmental sustainability, and to develop a global partnership for development (UN 2014a).

and affordable energy from renewable sources. As indicated by Anderson (2000) in the United Nations' *World Energy Assessment* published at the beginning of the Twenty-First Century, one of the most damaging implications of environmental degradation is the depletion of natural sources, and the subsequent rising costs of fossil fuels on the energy market. These processes are linked to the production of energy, and they bear obvious consequences on every type of human activities, e.g. households management, industrial activities, trade and transport, let alone on human health and on the climate.

In this scenario, the international community has been sensitized to sustainable development, and it is becoming more aware of the key role of renewable energy resources for global health, environmental protection and economic growth. For instance, during the Copenhagen Energy Security Dialogues in November 2014, the UN Secretary-General General Ban Ki-moon affirmed that progress in how energy is supplied, transformed and delivered is beneficial to development, human health and the environment, besides offering a firm response to climate change (UN 2014b). Ban Ki-moon also brought to the fore that strong commitment and full cooperation among countries and private organizations is required, to cater for global sustainable development.

In addition to the appeal launched by Ban Ki-moon and to the other activities endorsed by such an influential non-governmental organization as the UN is, it is to be noted that the performance of profit organizations in the renewable energy sector is decisive too. As a matter of fact, more and more companies have gone into this business in recent years, expecting their trade and profits to expand in the future. In particular, the sources of renewable energy that are currently exploited, and for which new technologies are being researched and developed are *solar energy*, *wind energy*, *geothermal energy*, *bioenergy*, *hydropower*, *ocean energy* and *hydrogen*. In what follows, a brief overview of renewable energy sources is provided:¹²

1. solar energy exploits the light and the heat coming from the sun. A variety of technologies have been introduced to generate solar energy, as for instance
 - a. photovoltaic systems, which convert light into electricity,
 - b. solar thermal systems (also referred to as solar hot water), which draw upon the sunlight to heat water in houses and commercial buildings,
 - c. solar thermal electricity systems (also referred to as solar electricity), which take advantage of the sun as a heat source in large power plants;
2. wind energy generates electricity from wind by using windmills and wind turbines;

¹² The following overview is based on information provided by the EREC website, which is still accessible, notwithstanding the association's voluntary liquidation on 6th March 2014 (EREC 2014), and by the website of RenewableEnergyWorld.com (1999-2014), which is one of the most trusted online sources of information and news about renewable energy operating today.

3. geothermal energy is obtained from the heat stored beneath the surface of the earth. It can be obtained directly, from hot water underneath the earth, or by means of pumps that exploit the heat of the shallow ground;
4. bionenergy (or biomass energy) is drawn from various types of organic matter obtained from forests, agriculture, from the by-products of the wood industry and of agricultural processes, and from waste. It can be either solid or liquid;
5. hydropower (also referred to as small hydropower) is generated from the power of flowing water;
6. ocean energy can be generated either by the heat of the sun that warms the water surface (thermal energy), or by the force exerted by waves and marine currents (mechanical energy);
7. hydrogen is the most simple and most abundant element in nature. Hydrogen is very high in energy and does not pollute. However, since hydrogen is always combined with other elements to form organic compounds, it needs to be separated from the other elements in order to produce energy. At present, most hydrogen is obtained from natural gas.

As for the exploitation of these energy sources, which afford valuable alternatives to fossil fuels, the European situation represents an interesting case in point within the international community, especially *vis à vis* the development of new technologies that allow for this exploitation in cost-efficient way.

Europe relies heavily on energy imported from extra-European countries, as for example from Russia, and it has so far represented the world's largest importer of energy (European Commission 2014b). In order to reduce Europe's dependence on imported energy, and hence to guarantee a domestic supply which can respond to the steady price increase on the energy market, the European Union has promoted the use of alternative and renewable sources in its energy policies. As a consequence, Europe is now the first region in the world for the development and implementation of new technologies in the renewable energy sector, as reported by the International Energy Agency¹³ (Müller, Marmion & Beerepoot 2011).

Europe is adopting a common political agenda to foster the supply of energy from renewable sources. In 2009, the EU introduced the directive on the promotion of the use of

¹³ The International Energy Agency (IEA) is an autonomous organizations founded in Paris in 1974 which seek to establish energy supply security all over the world, and gives support to research aiming at the production of clean and low-cost energy. The IEA counts twenty-eight member countries in the world, some of which are also members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The European Commission participates in the activities of the IEA, too.

energy from renewable sources,¹⁴ according to which “all member countries of the European Union now have binding targets for the overall share of renewable energy in gross final consumption. The global European Union target of 20% is assigned to member states based on the current level of penetration and economic strength” (Müller *et al.* 2011, 25). More recently, the European Commission has issued a document summarizing the EU's activities with regard to energy. This document further stresses the importance of common policies to be implemented in the EU, and it includes four targets that are to be reached by combining the efforts of all member states. These targets are

- securing Europe's energy supply;
 - ensuring that energy prices do not make Europe less competitive;
 - protecting the environment and in particular combating climate change;
 - improving energy grids
- (European Commission 2014b, 4)

The documents also clarifies that “EU countries are free to develop whatever energy sources they wish. They must, however, take account of EU renewable energy objectives” (European Commission 2014b, 4). This statement reiterates the strategic role of renewable sources to guarantee energy supply security in Europe, and therefore to sustain the European economy, while addressing environmental issues. It is however implied that the EU member states can decide on the sources to be developed, in consideration of the fact that the European energy market was liberalized in 1996, and that each member state is specialized in a number of renewable energy sources, according to its geographical conditions (Ringel 2006).

The average share of electricity from renewable energy sources from 2004 to 2012¹⁵ in the 28 EU member states is represented in the following table.

TABLE 5.1. The average share of electricity from renewable energy sources in the European Union (European Commission 2014c).

RE share [%]	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
EU-28	14.33	14.84	15.35	16.09	16.98	19.00	19.69	21.72	23.53

Put differently, the production of renewable energy in Europe in 2012 corresponded to 177,429.9 thousand tonnes of oil. In turn, the renewable energy sources which most

¹⁴ Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the Promotion of the Use of Energy from Renewable Sources and Amending and Subsequently Repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC.

¹⁵ The data referred to here are taken from the Eurostat website (<<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/energy/overview>>, last accessed on 1 December 2014). The most recent data available date back to 2012.

contributed to the total amount of electricity generated in Europe between 1990 and 2010 are hydropower (including tide, wave and ocean energy),¹⁶ wind energy, solid and liquid biomass, solar energy¹⁷ and geothermal energy (Šturk 2012, 2). The total production of electricity in Europe, subdivided in its primary sources and expressed in gigawatt hours, is graphically represented in Figure 5.1.

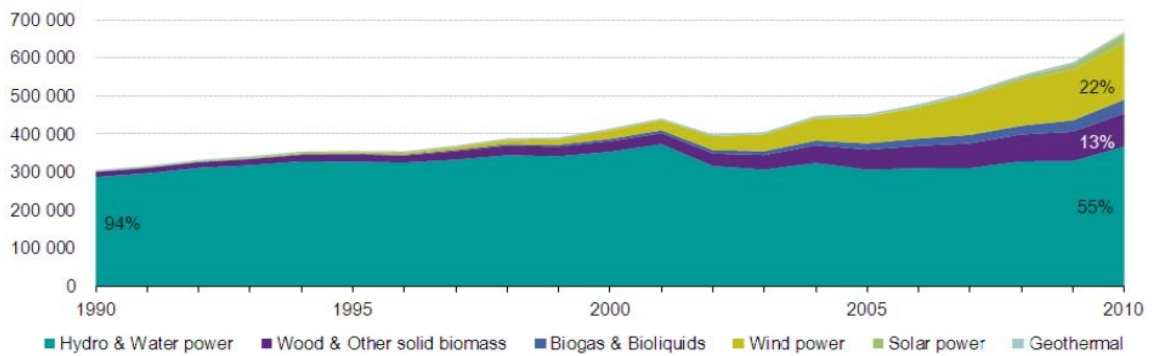


FIGURE 5.1. Gross electricity generation from renewable energy sources (in gigawatt hours, Šturk 2012, 3).

Overall, the renewable energy sector is characterized by very high stakes, not only because it is key to sustainable development, but also because it seems to guarantee economic competitiveness to the European countries in today's globalized business scenario. This is even more relevant if we bear in mind that the EU, as part of the Western world, is now facing the increasing industrial and trade prestige of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), as I have indicated in the Introduction.

The latter observation subtends the second criterion which I have applied to select the companies whose website I intend to analyze. This criterion lies with the geo-political location of the companies' headquarters. Therefore, the companies chosen for my research are based in EU member states. Over and above this, in order to provide an account of the use of English for the purposes of online corporate communication addressed to an international audience, the companies I have selected are based in non-English speaking countries, by drawing upon Cramer's (2007) Concentric Circles Model of the diffusion of English in the

¹⁶ In 2012, the total production of energy from (small) hydropower amounted to 28,811.4 thousand tonnes of oil, whereas tide, wave and ocean energy amounted only to 39.7 thousand tonnes of oil (European Commission 2014c).

¹⁷ The data analyzed by Šturk with regard to solar energy in Europe do not specify the type of technologies deployed. As a consequence, it is here assumed that these data describe solar energy production via, among others, photovoltaics and solar thermal systems in general. The energy production obtained by means of these technologies is in fact described in the tables available in the *Eurostat* website. In particular, the energy produced by solar photovoltaic systems amounts to 5,781.3 thousand tonnes of oil, and they contribute to the largest share in solar energy production, whereas the energy produced by solar thermal energy systems amounts to 3,320.2 thousand tonnes of oil.

EU (see § 4.2.3).

As a result, I have selected thirty global websites in English published by companies based in the EU. The sample includes product manufacturers and service providers alike, which operate in a business-to-business environment. Following Cramer's model, fifteen out of the thirty companies are based in countries belonging to the Expanding Circle, while the remaining fifteen companies are based in Transition Circle #1. The selection has been carried out making sure that an even number of countries across the two circles is obtained, so that the use of English in Europe is represented on the basis of the countries' proficiency level in the language. In order to determine the companies to be included in my corpus, I have deployed English proficiency as theorized by Cramer (2007) with regard to the EU as a parameter, instead of the state members' first languages. This is due to the fact that the EU state members contribute to generating renewable energy in various ways and to different degrees. Additionally, in some member states the renewable energy industry sector seem to be more developed than in others, as we will see below, also in relation to the sources available in their geographical areas. As a consequence, it would not have been possible to obtain a sample of companies representing all twenty-eight EU member states, and all twenty-four EU official languages, in an even way. For all these reasons, some EU member states are represented more than once, as it will be illustrated below in the survey of the companies included in the corpus.

In turn, the companies selected can be further subdivided into five groups, following the renewable energy source they deal with. These five groups have been established in keeping with the five primary renewable energy sources in Europe that I have indicated previously, i.e. hydropower (with the exception of ocean energy, which accounts for a small part of the total renewable energy generated in Europe, as indicated beforehand), wind energy, biomass, solar energy generated via photovoltaic systems, and geothermal energy. Furthermore, in order to design a corpus of websites that are published by companies with a consolidated position in the renewable energy sector, the companies have been selected on the basis of their membership to European non-profit organizations that sustain and endorse the production of renewable energy. Each of these non-profit organizations represents one source of renewable energy in particular. These five non-profit organizations are the European Small Hydropower Association (ESHA), the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA), the European Biomass Association (AEBIOM), the European Photovoltaic Industry Association (EPIA) and the European Geothermal Energy Council (ECEC).

To start with, the European Small Hydropower Association (ESHA)¹⁸ was founded in Brussels in 1989. It defends the interests of European and other international profit and non-profit organizations dealing with the production of energy from hydropower. It has sixty-eight members, including companies, national associations, universities, individual experts, etc. The companies belonging to ESHA which have been chosen for my analysis are illustrated in the table below.

TABLE 5.2. European companies dealing with the production of renewable energy from hydropower.

Company Name	Circle in Cramer's Model	Country	URL – Global website in English
enso hydro GmbH	Expanding Circle	Austria	< http://www.enso.at/en/home/ >
IREM SpA	Expanding Circle	Italy	< http://www.irem.it/ENG/index.php >
juwi AG	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< http://www.juwi.com/homepage.html >
PCC Deg Renewables GmbH	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< http://www.pcc.eu/ttw/pcc.nsf/id/EN_Home >
Profish Technology SA	Expanding Circle	Belgium	< http://www.profish-technology.be/en/ >
Smart Hydro Power GmbH	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< http://www.smart-hydro.de/en/home.html >

As apparent from Table 5.2, the production of renewable energy from hydropower in Transition Circle #1 is represented only by Germany. This is due to the fact that at the time of the present research, ESHA does not count any other companies situated in other countries within Cramer's Transition Circle #1.

The European Wind Energy Association (EWEA)¹⁹ was launched in Stockholm in 1982, and it is now based in Brussels. It represents over six hundred international profit and non-profit organizations involved in the production of energy from hydropower, and it includes companies, service providers, banks and universities, to name just a few. The companies affiliated to EWEA which I have selected for my research are included in Table 5.3.

¹⁸ <<http://www.esha.be/>>, last accessed on 1 December 2014.

¹⁹ <<http://www.ewea.org/>>, last accessed on 1 December 2014.

TABLE 5.3. European companies dealing with the production of renewable energy from wind energy.

Company Name	Circle in Cramer's Model	Country	URL – Global website in English
A. Silva Matos Energia SA	Expanding Circle	Portugal	< http://www.asilvamatos.pt/#/en/ >
Avanti Wind Systems AS	Transition Circle #1	Denmark	< http://www.avanti-online.com/en/ >
Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA	Expanding Circle	Italy	< http://www.bonfiglioli.com/en/ >
JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.	Transition Circle #1	The Netherlands	< http://www.a-m-g.com/English-1-t.html >
GOLIATH Wind OÜ	Expanding Circle	Estonia	< http://www.goliath.ee/ >
Mervento Oy	Transition Circle #1	Finland	< http://www.mervento.com/In%20English/HOME/Default.aspx >

The European Biomass Association (AEBIOM)²⁰ is the major European non-profit organization representing companies and associations active in the bioenergy sector.²¹ It was founded in 1990, and its headquarters are in Brussels. AEBIOM has 133 members. Among its members, AEBIOM includes twenty-nine national associations and ninety-four companies. The companies affiliated to AEBIOM which have been chosen for the present analysis are listed in the table below.

TABLE 5.4. European companies dealing with the production of renewable energy from bioenergy (biomass).

Company Name	Circle in Cramer's Model	Country	URL – Global website in English
CHO-Power / Europlasma Group	Expanding Circle	France	< http://www.cho-power.com/ >
Fröling GmbH	Expanding Circle	Austria	< http://www.froeling.com/ww/ >
Mabanaft GmbH	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< http://www.mabanaft.de/Mabanaft/en/home/index.php >
Palazzetti Lelio SpA	Expanding Circle	Italy	< http://www.palazzettigroup.com/en/ >
Sveaskog Förvaltning AB	Transition Circle #1	Sweden	< http://www.sveaskog.se/en/ >
Vapo Oy	Transition Circle #1	Finland	< http://www.vapo.fi/en >

²⁰ <<http://www.aebiom.org/>>, last accessed on 1 December 2014.

²¹ The bioenergy industry sector in Europe is represented by two non-profit organizations, one is AEBIOM, the other the European Biomass Industry Association (EUBIA), which was founded in 1996 and numbers only 35 members. Both organizations are based in Brussels.

Next, the European Photovoltaic Industry Association (EPIA) is a non-profit organization, also based in Brussels, which represents profit and non-profit organizations active in the production of solar energy by means of photovoltaics. EPIA was founded in 1985, and it has 105 members, including, among others, companies, national associations, consultancy firms, governmental institutions and other public authorities. The companies belonging to EPIA which have been chosen for my analysis are included in Table 5.5.

TABLE 5.5. European companies dealing with the production of renewable energy from photovoltaic systems.

Company Name	Circle in Cramer's Model	Country	URL – Global website in English
Acciona Energía Solar SL	Expanding Circle	Spain	< http://www.acciona-energia.com/ >
dnpSolar	Transition Circle #1	Denmark	< http://www.dnpsolar.eu/ >
ib vogt GmbH	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< www.ibvogt.com >
Luvata Pori Oy	Transition Circle #1	Finland	< http://www.luvata.com/ >
Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl	Expanding Circle	Italy	< http://www.micronsun.it/2275?lang=EN#.VJl_9l4AJ >
Silcio SA	Expanding Circle	Greece	< http://www.silcio.gr/en/index.html >

Finally, the European Geothermal Energy Council (EGEC) is a non-profit organization for the promotion of geothermal energy in Europe, located in Brussels. EGEC was founded in 1996, and it has 132 members, including companies, national associations, consultants, research centres and other public authorities. The companies affiliated to EGEC which have been singled out for the present analysis are illustrated in Table 5.6.

TABLE 5.6. European companies dealing with the production of renewable energy from geothermal energy.

Company Name	Circle in Cramer's Model	Country	URL – Global website in English
Cryostar SAS	Expanding Circle	France	< http://www.cryostar.com/ >
Deep Drill Supply Group	Transition Circle #1	The Netherlands	< http://www.deepdrill.nl/ >
EnBW AG	Transition Circle #1	Germany	< https://www.enbw.com/index_en.html >
GA Drilling as	Expanding Circle	Slovakia	< http://www.gadrilling.com/ >
Geotermica AB	Transition Circle #1	Sweden	< http://www.geotermica.se/index_eng.html >
Turboden srl	Expanding Circle	Italy	< http://www.turboden.eu/en/home/index.php >

As it is apparent from the corpus description provided so far, Transition Circle #2 is not accounted for in my analysis. In Cramer's model, Transition Circle #2 includes only Malta. However, at the time of the present research, it was not possible to find any company based in Malta in the online members' directories of the five non-profit organizations which represent the renewable energy industry sector in Europe, according to the source exploited. Beside this, Malta has the lowest share in the generation of energy from renewable sources among the EU member states, according to the data gathered by Eurostat in 2012. The total amount of renewable energy generated in Malta in 2012 corresponded only to 6.2 tonnes of oil (European Commission 2014c).

In the following section, I will elucidate how I have collected the data from the global websites of the companies listed above, and I will describe the methodological approach I have selected for my analysis.

5.3. Data gathering and methods

In the light of the research questions introduced in Chapter 1, and the lexico-grammatical and discursual interest that informs the present research, my corpus consisting of thirty corporate websites has been compiled as follows. First of all, after selecting the companies as illustrated in the previous section, I gathered textual material from the websites in two different stages. During the first and longer stage (November 2013 – November 2014), all the texts included in the websites were manually collected, by copying them from the Web and saving them as plain text (txt extension). This step was taken with a view to making the online texts available off line, and also amenable to quantitative analysis by means of a concordancing tool. The concordancing tool chosen to conduct my analysis is *AntConc*, Version 3.3.5 (Anthony 2012).

In the second and shorter stage of data collection (December 2014), I followed up on the data gathered during the first stage, in order to update my corpus with new texts that had been uploaded by the companies between November 2013 and November 2014. At this stage, the corpus was complemented mainly with press releases published in 2014. Next, the corpus was assigned the name REnEU, i.e. Renewable Energy in the European Union, to account for both the sector and the location of the companies owning the websites. The REnEU corpus can be considered a specialized corpus (Hunston 2002), since it has been compiled for the purposes of the present research, and it is restricted to corporate websites in their global version in English by companies operating in a given sector (renewable energy), based in a particular geo-political area (the EU), and with a particular lingua-culture (the first language

of the headquarters is not English).

When retrieving the online texts, I referred to the navigation bar on the homepage of each website as a starting point to build my corpus. As explained in § 3.2.1, the navigation bar on a homepage includes a set of hyperlinks which are defined by Askehave and Nielsen (2005) as generic links. Generic links provide access to the other pages within the website, which are usually organized as macro-sections. In the case of REnEU, the generic links on the homepage provide a heading to the macro-section they give access to, as it will be illustrated in the analysis in § 6.1. In this way, the generic links provide guidance to navigators who browse a website when looking for a given piece of information. Following from this observation, I renamed the txt files after the generic links in the navigational bars. This type of classification allows for a preview of the main topics tackled in the different macro-sections within each website, and to interrogate the corpus on the basis of the macro-sections themselves. Additionally, this classification might cater for comparisons among the websites, with a view to identifying any common patterns in the way they are structured.

Parallel to this, the txt files were grouped according to the corporate websites to which they belong, thus obtaining thirty sub-corpora, that is, one for each company that was selected at the outset. The thirty sub-corpora were named after the company and its country of origin. Over and above this, in order to account for the companies' positioning in Cramer's (2007) model, the sub-corpora were arranged in two groups, one encompassing the websites of companies in EU member states located in the Expanding Circle, and one encompassing the websites of companies in EU member states in Transition Circle #1. In other words, the REnEU corpus is organized into two levels of sub-corpora. At the first level, the corpus includes two sub-corpora named after the Expanding Circle and Transition Circle #1 in Cramer's model. In turn, the Expanding Circle and Transition Circle #1 sub-corpora include fifteen further sub-corpora each, thus accounting for the second level in which the REnEU corpus is organized.

All in all, the REnEU corpus comprises 951,766 tokens and 26,330 word types, as it results from a word count run in *AntConc*. Table 5.7 offers an overview of the thirty sub-corpora into which the corpus is subdivided. Starting from the left, the first column denotes the first-level sub-corpora in REnEU, while the second includes the second-level sub-corpora. The third and fourth column give information about the number of macro-sections and their headings in each of the thirty second-level sub-corpora. Finally, the fifth column indicates the number of tokens in each second-level sub-corpus, while the sixth columns the number of word types.

TABLE 5.7. The REnEU corpus.

Sub-corpora (first level)	Sub-corpora (second level)	Macro-sections (generic links)		Tokens	Types
Expanding Circle	Acciona Energía Solar SL, Spain	7	About Us/ Activity Areas/ In the World/ Customers/ Sustainability/ Innovation/ Press Room	143,210	7,693
	A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Portugal	7	Home/ About Us/ Group/ People/ Contacts/ Restricted Area/ Media	3,464	947
	Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Italy	4	Home/ Company/ Products & Solutions/ Business Areas	87,872	6,124
	CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, France	7	Home/ CHO Power/ Our Technology/ The Benefits of CHO Power/ References/ Our Proposal/ Contact	3,296	1,016
	Cryostar SAS, France	8	Clean Energy/ Distribution/ LNG Transport & Terminals/ Process Machinery/ Services/ The Cryostar Group/ Media Centre/ Eco Responsible	14,134	2,276
	enso hydro GmbH, Austria	6	Home/ Porfolio/ Asset Manager/ Service/ Karriere/ Contact	2,226	685
	Fröling GmbH, Austria	5	Home/ Company/ Products/ Distribution Partner/ Contact	6,784	1,357
	GA Drilling as, Slovakia	6	Home/ About Us/ Technology/ Applications/ Segments/ News	8,742	1,916
	GOLIATH Wind OÜ, Estonia	6	Home/ The Company/ Solutions/ Career/ News/ Contact Us	2,933	901
	IREM SpA, Italy	7	Company/ Products/ News/ Download/ Faq/ Support/ Contacts	8,759	1,635
	Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl, Italy	7	Home/ About Us/ Solar/ Why Micron/ Products/ Download/ Faq	2,062	730
	Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Italy	7	Customer Assistance/ Helping You to Choose/ Palazzetti Group/ Fireplaces and Stoves/ Kitchen and Garden/ Expos and Promotions/ Palazzetti World	90,933	6,945
	Profish Technology SA, Belgium	8	Home/ News/ Services/ Products/ References/ Tools-Equipment/ Contact	2,207	783
	Silcio SA, Greece	8	Homepage/ Company/ Factory/ Products/ CSR/ Projects/ News/ Contact	2,069	665
	Turboden Srl, Italy	12	Home/ About/ ORC/ Applications/ Products/ Services/ References/ Downloads/ News/ Press/ Jobs/ Contacts	3,389	22,449
Transition Circle #1	Avanti Wind Systems AS, Denmark	7	About Avanti/ Contact Information/ Products and Services/ Standards Approvals/ Manuals/ Jobs/ News	27,291	2,920
	Deep Drill Supply Group, Netherlands	6	Sales/ Rentals/ Services/ Quality/ Company/ Contact	2,233	667
	dnpSolar, Denmark	7	Welcome/ About dnpSolar/ Mission/ Products/ Technology/ Links/ Contacts	1,905	451
	EnBW AG, Germany	3	The Group/ Investors/ Press	198,456	8,189
	ib vogt GmbH,	6	Home/ Solar Power Plants/ Photovoltaic	9,555	1,860

Sub-corpora (first level)	Sub-corpora (second level)	Macro-sections (generic links)		Tokens	Types
	Germany		Factories/ Press & News/ About Us/ Contact		
	Geotermica AB, Sweden	4	Company/ Operations/ Investor Relations/ Contact	850	387
	JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Netherlands	8	Home/ Company/ Solution/ Products/ Markets/ News/ Downloads/ Contact	2,751	768
	juwi AG, Germany	9	Wind Energy/ Solar Energy/ Off-Grid Power Supply/ Energy Mix/ Operations & Maintenance/ juwi Group/ Newsroom/ Career/ Contact	88,207	6,333
	Luvata Pori Oy, Finland	6	Home/ About Luvata/ Products & Markets/ Newss & Downloads/ Job Opportunities/ Contact Us	111,486	8,976
	Mabanaft GmbH, Germany	7	Home/ About Us/ Activities/ News/ Tools/ Career/ Contact	22,2296	2,772
	Mervento Oy, Finland	7	Home/ About Mervento/ Product/ Suppliers/ News/ Careers/ Contact Us	2,780	807
	PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Germany	8	Home/ PCC Group/ Chemicals/ Energy/ Logistics/ Investors/ News/ Contact	42,508	4,327
	Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Germany	8	Home/ Product/ Purchase/ Applications/ Videos and Links/ About Us/ Jobs/ Contact	3,157	1,019
	Sveaskog Förvaltning AB, Sweden	0		2,291	701
	Vapo Oy, Finland	7	Mainpage/ Group/ Business Operations/ Products and Services/ Business Development/ Responsibility/ Media	48,743	3,941
Tot.				951,766	26,330

As it can be seen from Table 5.7, the website of the Swedish company Sveaskog Förvaltning AB does not display any generic links on the homepage, in contrast to all the other websites. This exception will be problematized in the analysis in the next chapter. For the aim of the present discussion, it may suffice to clarify that the data have been gathered from the Sveaskog Förvaltning AB's website by starting from the specific links included on the homepage.²²

It is relevant to specify here that the REnEU corpus does not include any text that is uploaded on the websites as a PDF file. As it is clarified by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) and by Garzone (2007), PDF documents do not have the characteristics of hypertexts. PDF documents “are essentially frozen and present the text in a continuous whole made up of

²² As pointed out in § 3.2.1, specific links lead to specific information within the website, they are less stable than generic links, and they are realized by a lead, often accompanied by a clickable object, such as an icon or an image (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005).

the ‘picture’ of the sequence of the printed images”, and in fact they are usually meant to be printed out “for efficient reading” (Garzone 2007, 24). Along similar lines, Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen maintain that PDF files are not affected by the properties of the medium, and therefore their generic status stays the same as in their printed version. According to them,

An uploaded pdf file of an annual report [...] cannot be said to constitute a new genre [...] because the medium does not significantly change the status and function of the [genre]. However, if the annual report [is] published as [a hypertext] on a web site – and therefore not only provide[s] information about the financial year [...] – but also contain[s] links which provide access to other sites on the web, [its] genre status and function change and thus the media characteristics should be included in [its] identification. (Askehave & Nielsen 2005, 129)

The procedure followed to collect the data from the selected corporate websites allows for a quantitative analysis which aims at disclosing any recurring lexico-grammatical patterns across the whole corpus. In particular, these patterns can be pinned down by investigating frequency word lists and concordance strings obtained by means of the *AntConc* software. In this sense, quantitative methods borrowed from Corpus Linguistics will be used. Furthermore, the recurring lexico-grammatical patterns identified will be evaluated in search of relevant and frequent linguistic choices that seem to characterize the English of companies’ global websites in the renewable energy sector in EU countries.

However, research on the plain text version of the informative and promotional material published in corporate websites does not consider the properties (or affordance) of the Web medium. In fact, the visual, non-linear and dynamic nature of websites is lost. Given that the affordances of the medium affect the communication strategies implemented in corporate website, as it has been often emphasized in the previous chapters, a qualitative approach is needed as well, in order to delve into the hypertextual, interactive and multimodal features of websites. Starting from these premises, the qualitative methods of Genre Analysis and Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) will be tapped into, by drawing upon the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3.

An account of the hypertextual, interactive and multimodal features of the global version in English of corporate websites can be provided by casting an all-embracing look at the websites as they appear online. Hence, it will be possible to focus on the affordances of hypertextuality and interactivity, by mapping the presence of hyperlinks and interactive tools, as for instance search boxes, drop-down menus and fill-in forms. Moreover, attention will be devoted to the multimodal resources exploited in the websites, for instance images, the web page layout and colours, by relying on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design. By doing so, I will try to demonstrate that hyperlinks, interactive tools and

visuals contribute to construct meaning in the websites, and that they influence the rhetorical strategies implemented by companies to respond to the needs of their corporate communication. Eventually, thanks to this comprehensive approach, it will be possible to draw inferences on the generic nature of corporate websites in their global version in English.

As evident from the discussion conducted so far, different yet interdependent approaches have been employed in order to consider the many facets of corporate communication via websites in the most appropriate way. However, since websites are very complex and heterogeneous objects of enquiry, some decisions have been made to investigate their generic features. These decisions regard the types of texts to concentrate upon more in-depth.

Firstly, two particular types of web sections have been selected. These are, on the one hand, the sections devoted to the institutional presentation of the companies (the so called About Us or Company section), and on the other hand the sections devoted to the presentation of the products and services offered by the companies. These types of sections have been singled out as they are particularly meaningful for both their informative and promotional function, as I will seek to demonstrate during my analysis. Besides, the generic characteristics of these sections will be considered by drawing a comparison with traditional, printed forms of corporate communication, i.e. company brochures, mission statements, and CSR reports, which *de facto* bear some resemblance with corporate websites, due to the underlying informative and promotional purposes of the latter.

By focusing on these two sections, I do not attempt to propound a new taxonomy of the content types of corporate website. This is in fact outside the scope of my research. Conversely, I have selected content types dealing with the companies' institutional profile and the companies' products and services portfolio, on the assumption that their investigation from the multiple perspective of lexico-grammar, hypertextuality/interactivity and multimodality will provide valuable insights to answer my research questions. Furthermore, these content types have been selected in the light of their relevance to the companies' promotional purposes, since they are usually made readily accessible by clicking on a generic link on the homepages in the REnEU corpus.

The relevance of these content types is also testified by previous contributions by Esrock and Leichty (2000) and Perry and Bodkin (2002). In both contributions, the authors draw a taxonomy of the content of websites owned by a sample of *Fortune* 500 corporations. In particular, Esrock and Leichty (2000) sample 100 websites, whereas Perry and Bodkin (2002) sample 188 websites. Yet, the analytical approaches adopted vary. To start with, Esrock and Leichty set out to explore the prominence of content types as a function of their

accessibility via hyperlinks available on the homepage. The results indicate that “Product/Service Catalogue” is the most prominent content in 92% of the homepages investigated, followed by “Corporate Profile/History”, which is the most prominent content on 90% of the homepages (Esrock & Leichty 2000).²³

In both contributions, companies’ websites are regarded as multifaceted communication artefacts, consisting of an array of components, and addressing a plethora of audiences. Esrock and Leichty starts from the assumption that “a single website can have multiple sections, each targeted to a different audience (e.g., customers, government officials, news media, employees, dealers, suppliers, and issue activists)” (Esrock & Leichty 2000, 328). Besides, the authors acknowledge the role and function of companies’ websites for the aims of corporate communication: “[m]uch like the corporate logo, a corporate Web site becomes an iconic representation of the corporation. Indeed, these Web sites should be viewed as an intentional act of communication that signifies an organization in its multiple facets to its multiple publics” (Esrock & Leichty 2000, 329).

In turn, Perry and Bodkin acknowledge the role and function of companies’ websites for the aims of marketing communication, which is the umbrella term comprising advertising, sales promotion, public relations and direct marketing. Accordingly, not only are companies’ websites instrumental to the companies’ institutional presentation, but also to the promotion of their products and services: the more efficiently products and services are presented, the more competitive the companies will be.

Nonetheless, the authors point to the fact that the information regarding the companies’ institutional presentation is generally predominant. Perry and Bodkin draw this conclusion after having classified the content types of website according to the number of components for each category previously identified in the sample. “Company-specific components” account for 22% of the total components mapped in the websites sampled for the study, while “Product-specific components” account for 17 % (Perry & Bodkin 2002).²⁴ Hence, the authors state that the websites in their sample, “rather than focusing on specific products and brands, appear to focus much more on institutional advertising” (Perry & Bodkin 2002). This raises the question of whether the companies sampled were effectively

²³ The other components classified by the authors in relation to their prominence are: “Press Releases” (81%), “Contact Information/Dealer and Retailer Locations” (61%), “Affiliate Companies” (55%), “Legal Disclaimer” (48%), “Social Responsibility-Single Issue” (44%), “Press Release Teaser Text” (38%), “Annual Report” (31%), “Online Ordering” (25%), “General Community Service/Charity/Foundation/Social Responsibility” (19%), “Industry Links” (9%), “Message from the CEO” (3%), “Glossary of Terms” (3%), “Press Release Full Text” (1%), “Other” (7%) (Esrock & Leichty 2000).

²⁴ The other components identified are “Web specific”, accounting for 20% of the total components in the sample, “Public relations”, accounting for 11% of the total, “Shareholder information”, 10%, “Place and price”, 1%, “Sales promotion” 1%, “Advertising”, 3% and “Visuals” 15% (Perry & Bodkin 2002).

exploiting the marketing potential of their websites to the full. However, Perry and Bodkin recognize that companies take advantage of “web sites not just for communications with customers, but with many different target audiences. [...] Rather than simply being a vehicle for communication with customers, [companies’] web sites attempt to communicate with multiple audiences” (Perry & Bodkin 2002, 142).

In sum, although the contributions by Esrock and Leichty (2000) and Perry and Bodkin (2002) tackle companies’ websites from different perspectives and obtain different results accordingly, their sets of conclusions seem to integrate each other. Most importantly, they both underscore the complexity of companies’ websites, which is due to the multiplicity of audiences addressed. Besides, by recognizing the functions of websites in terms of both corporate and marketing communication, Esrock and Leichty (2000) and Perry and Bodkin (2002) seem to reconcile the typologies of corporate websites and marketing websites devised by Kotler (1998, see § 5.1).

To sum up, the rationale behind the decisions elucidated above lies with the fact that traditional genres of business discourse have been ‘remediated’ in the Web environment. The sections dedicated to the presentation of the company and of its products exemplify the co-construction of meaning by means of textual information, hyperlinks, interactive features and multimodal resources.

In the following two chapters, the results of my analysis will be presented. In Chapter 6, the structure of the websites will be described by referring to the sections they include. Next, the analysis will pay attention to the communicative strategies implemented in the About Us (or Company) sections sampled in the REnEU corpus. Finally, in Chapter 7, the communicative strategies in the product sections will be investigated.

CHAPTER VI

The ‘who we are’ of companies’ global websites in the REnEU corpus

This chapter seeks to provide an answer to the first research question formulated in the Introduction (Chapter One) of the present dissertation, in that it describes results which will indicate whether companies’ global websites can be categorized in terms of genre, and if so, to what extent. Parallel to this, the second, third and fourth questions will be tackled as well. In fact, textual information will be investigated along with other semiotic modes, e.g. visuals, layout, colours, and the presence of hyperlinks and interactive tools. Next, when concentrating on companies’ rhetorical choices, it will be possible to cast light on the use of English in global corporate websites, thus suggesting a possible conceptualization of the status of English for the purposes of international corporate communication in the web-mediated domain. Finally, since the focus of my dissertation is on companies active in the renewable energy sector, an attempt will be made to define the strategies by means of which this professional community projects its positive corporate image worldwide. Overall, the methodological approach which has been adopted is motivated by the theoretical framework of this dissertation, with particular reference to Chapters 2 and 3.

In order to deal with the issues brought up beforehand, the companies’ global websites in the REnEU corpus will be investigated from a range of vantage points, and by applying a combination of approaches grounded in MDA. Firstly, the structure of the websites will be chartered, with a view to defining the number of macro-sections in which they are subdivided. Since providing a taxonomy of companies’ global websites is beyond the scope of my research, I will concentrate upon regularities or instances of variation concerning the ways in which the companies’ institutional profile and the product pages are managed.¹ The rationale behind this choice is based on the fact that the companies’ institutional profile is gathered around macro-sections which can be retrieved in all the websites. The companies’ institutional profile seems to account for the projection of a positive corporate identity, which is understood as “the collection of attributes that members use to describe an organization” (van Riel & Fombrun 2007, 67, authors’ emphasis).

Secondly, the results of this preliminary survey will be complemented with a more

¹ The product pages are discussed in the next chapter. The macro-sections including them will be designated as ‘product sections’.

detailed investigation aiming at elucidating the rhetorical strategies implemented in the macro-sections previously identified. Having postulated that companies' websites fulfil a promotional function,² I will concentrate especially on instances of *description* and *evaluation*. In fact, these are indicated by Bhatia (2004) as the two rhetorical acts, or generic values, which subtend promotional genres. In particular, description refers "to phenomena in space" (Werlich 1976, 47), and together with *narrative*, *report*, *argument* and *information*, is one of the five *modes of discourse* (Smith 2003). Description can be distinguished from the other modes in terms of its properties, i.e.:

Situations: primarily Events and States, and ongoing Events
 Temporality: static, located in time
 Progression: spatial advancement through the scene or object
 (Smith 2003, 20)

As rightly observed by Bondi (2009), description "may be the dominant text type in a specific text", yet its contribution to "providing support for other dimensions of discourse (argumentative, narrative, expositive, directive) cannot be underestimated" (Bondi 2009, 121). In fact, it is often the case that "description is functional to other discourse purposes" (Merlini Barbaresi 2004, 266). This is what the studies by Bondi (2009), Samson (2009) and Turnbull (2009) among other seem to indicate, and this is the principle supporting Bhatia's (2004) colony of promotional genres, too.

As for evaluation, this gives reality to "the *what* and, especially, the *why* of communication" (Partington, Duguid & Taylor 2013, 43). Generally speaking, "evaluation is the broad cover term for the expression of the speaker or writer's attitude or stance towards, viewpoint on, or feelings about the entities or propositions that he or she is talking about" (Thompson & Hunston 2000, 5). Put briefly, evaluation is "the indication that something is good or bad" (Hunston 2004, 157), and therefore it can be explained in terms of a good-bad parameter.

Thompson and Hunston (2000) identify three aspects which can be drawn upon to identify evaluation. The first is lexis: "[s]ome lexical choices are very clearly evaluative, in the sense that evaluation is their chief function and meaning" (Thompson & Hunston 2000, 14). The second is grammar, as expressed for example by morphology and syntax. As for the grammatical aspect of evaluation, modality is the expression of the writer's opinion about the likelihood of an event, which can be expressed by modals, comparatives, markers of negativity, to name a few. The third aspect is text: "evaluation tends to be found throughout a

² The promotional nature of corporate websites is brought to the fore by Turnbull (2009), who, by drawing upon Shaw (2006), maintains that "they aim to persuade visitors of the prowess of the company and consequently to encourage them to buy its products or services" (Turnbull 2009, 161).

text” (Thompson & Hunston 2000, 19), but sometimes it might be identified in a certain position within a text. For example, the final paragraph of a text might evaluate the paragraphs which precede it.³

Along similar lines, Partington *et al.* point out that evaluation can be signalled both explicitly and implicitly, and they further add that evaluation is “the engine of persuasion” (Partington *et al.* 2013, 46). Finally, evaluation might fulfil a cohesive function, in the sense that it might spread across different sentences and permeate a whole text. As the authors put it, “evaluative meaning is achieved by the cumulative interplay of items” (Partington *et al.* 2013, 58).

Following from these observations, I hold that the analysis of instances of description and of evaluation might prove instrumental in shedding light on the most frequent rhetorical patterns used to disseminate information on the companies' performance and to promote their positive image. Instances of description and evaluation in the macro-sections under scrutiny has already been tackled by Turnbull (2009). By considering websites published by companies based in European non-English speaking countries, my aim is to complement previous research by examining how English is adopted and adapted for the aims of international corporate communication, in line with Poppi's (2011) approach.

Issues related to genre and its interplay with the Web affordances will be given close attention as well, also by drawing a comparison between companies' websites and company brochures. This comparison is motivated by previous contributions on promotional discourse, discussed in Chapter 3, and by research on corporate communication via website, surveyed in § 5.1.⁴ During the analysis of the content of the macro-sections, similarities and differences with other genres of corporate communication will emerge too, as for instance the mission statement⁵ and the CSR report. In this way, I will purport to account for the generic dimension of the macro-sections under scrutiny.

³ Thompson and Hunston quote the example of the pattern “Situation-Problem-Response-Evaluation” articulated by Hoey (1983) with regard to a text about a system used to drop freight from helicopters. In this text, the function of the clauses in the final paragraph is to evaluate, and this function lies with the position of the paragraph in relation to the other paragraphs.

⁴ On the one side, company brochures represent a traditional printed genre of corporate communication, belonging to the colony of promotional genres (Bhatia 2004). On the other side, companies' websites 'remediate' the information traditionally disseminated in print by means of company brochures, as Ellerup Nielsen (2002) claims. Besides, it is to be borne in mind that companies' websites have been defined as “cyberbrochures” by Perry and Bodkin (2003), while proposing a taxonomy of their content.

⁵ The interrelatedness among such forms of communication as company brochures, companies' websites and mission statements, among others, is advocated by Bhatia and Lung (2006), too, who hold that they incorporate “[a] corporation's values, beliefs, attitudes toward employees and customers, aims and objectives, the spread and depth of expertise, and the corporate culture” (Bhatia & Lung 2006, 272).

6.1. The structure of the companies' global websites in the REnEU corpus

The present section starts by offering some provisional remarks on the structure of the companies' global websites included in the REnEU corpus. The thirty homepages in the corpus have been relied upon as a point of departure to charter the structure of their corresponding websites, and so to define the macro-sections in which the websites are subdivided. As discussed in § 3.2.1, one of the functions fulfilled by a homepage is that of introducing the content of a website (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005), thus guiding navigators while they look for information that companies have possibly uploaded on their websites. This function of the homepage is primarily informative, and it is carried out by the so called generic links, which are usually arranged in the navigation bar on the homepage.

In § 5.3., I have presented the generic links displayed on the homepages of the websites in the REnEU corpus. These macro-sections are devised by the message-senders, i.e. the companies, to provide a preliminary idea of the content of the website. The way in which the sections are referred to on the homepage is in keeping with the range of information that the message-senders intend to disseminate in front of their audiences.

As already evident from Table 5.7 in § 5.3, the navigation bar on the homepages in the REnEU corpus might include three to twelve generic links, with the exception of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB, which does not feature any navigation bar. I will delve into the case of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB in § 6.1.1 below. Table 6.1 provides the number of macro-sections that corresponds to the generic links in the navigation bar on the homepages, when this is available.

TABLE 6.1. Number of macro-sections according to the generic links on the homepages of the companies' websites in the REnEU corpus.

No. of generic links / macro-sections	Company name	No. of companies
0	Sveaskog Förvaltning AB (Sweden)	1
3	EnBW AG (Germany)	1
4	Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA (Italy), Geotermica AB (Sweden)	2
5	Fröling GmbH (Austria)	1
6	Deep Drill Supply Group (Denmark), enso hydro GmbH (Austria), GA Drilling as (Slovakia), GOLIATH Wind OÜ (Estonia), ib vogt GmbH (Germany), Luvata Pori Oy (Finland)	6
7	Acciona Energía Solar SL (Spain), A. Silva Matos Energia SA (Portugal), Avanti Wind Systems AS (Denmark), CHO-Power - Europlasma Group (France), dnpSolar (Denmark),	11

No. of generic links / macro-sections	Company name	No. of companies
	IREM SpA (Italy), Mabanft GmbH (Germany), Mervento Oy (Finland), Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl (Italy), Palazzetti Lelio SpA (Italy), Vapo Oy (Finland)	
8	Cryostar SAS (France), JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v (the Netherlands), PCC Deg Renewables GmbH (Germany), Profish Technology SA (Belgium), Silcio SA (Greece), Smart Hydro Power GmbH (Germany)	6
9	juwi AG (Germany)	1
12	Turboden Srl (Italy)	1

As it can be observed from the table above, eleven companies' websites are subdivided into seven macro-sections. These account for less than a half of the whole sample, but still they represent the majority of websites in the corpus. Besides, six companies' websites are composed of six macro-sections, and further six websites are composed of eight macro-sections. Two websites comprise four macro-sections, while the remaining websites comprise three, five, nine and twelve macro-sections respectively.

By focusing on how the generic links, i.e. the headings of the macro-sections, are realized, a high degree of variation can be noticed across the corpus. This might imply that each company decides on how to organize information, in a way which differs from that of other companies. Nonetheless, some common features seem to emerge. Twenty-seven companies, that is, the great majority in the corpus, include at least one macro-section dedicated to the presentation of the company. Broadly speaking, the headings of these macro-sections are realized either as a noun phrase, or as a prepositional phrase introduced by 'about', as elucidated in Table 6.2.

TABLE 6.2. Linguistic realization of the headings introducing the macro-sections including the company's institutional presentation.

Heading	Companies
"About Us"	Acciona Energía Solar SL (Spain), A. Silva Matos Energia SA (Portugal), GA Drilling as (Slovakia), ib vogt GmbH (Germany), Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl (Italy), Mabanft GmbH (Germany), Smart Hydro Power GmbH (Germany)
"About"	Turboden Srl (Italy)
"About", followed by the company name	Avanti Wind Systems AS (Denmark), dnpSolar (Denmark), Luvata Pori Oy (Finland), Mervento Oy (Finland),
"(The) Company" / "(The) Group"	A. Silva Matos Energia SA (Portugal), Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA (Italy), Deep Drill Supply Group (Denmark), EnBW AG (Germany), Fröling GmbH (Austria), Geotermica AB (Sweden), GOLIATH Wind OÜ (Estonia), IREM SpA (Italy), JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v (the Netherlands), Silcio SA (Greece), Vapo Oy (Finland)
Name of the company (also	CHO-Power - Europlasma Group (France), Cryostar SAS (France),

Heading	Companies
followed by “Group”)	juwi AG (Germany), Palazzetti Lelio SpA (Italy), PCC Deg Renewables GmbH (Germany)

To sum up, twelve companies refer to their institutional presentation with a prepositional phrase introduced by “about”. Eleven companies have adopted a noun phrase including “company” or “group”, while the remaining five companies in the sample have included their name in the heading.

Some of the results provided in the table deserve further attention. First of all, A. Silva Matos Energia includes two sections dedicated to the company profile, one with the heading “About”, the other with the heading “Group”. The latter macro-section refers to its subsidiary companies, and it gives information about their activities. Secondly, when the heading includes the name of the company, the noun “Group” might follow, as in the case of companies which have subsidiaries. These companies are Cryostar SAS (“The Cryostar Group”), juwi AG (“juwi Group”) Palazzetti Lelio SpA (“Palazzetti Group”) and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH (“PCC Group”).

The Swedish company Sveaskog Förvaltning AB does not appear in the table, for the reason stated previously. Yet, two other companies are missing. These are enso hydro GmbH (Austria) and Profish Technology SA (Belgium). Taken at face value, the homepages of their websites do not include the company’s profile. It follows that closer attention is to be paid to the homepages, in order to retrieve the companies’ profile. As for enso hydro GmbH, it will be noted that the institutional presentation of the company can be accessed by clicking on two generic links, “Home” and “Asset Manager”. By moving the mouse pointer on the navigation bar, web users are presented with drop-down menus offering a preview of the content of the macro-sections in the website. Hence, it can be inferred that enso hydro GmbH’s company profile is distributed over two macro-sections, i.e. “Home” and “Asset Manager”, as Figures 6.1 and 6.2 exhibit.

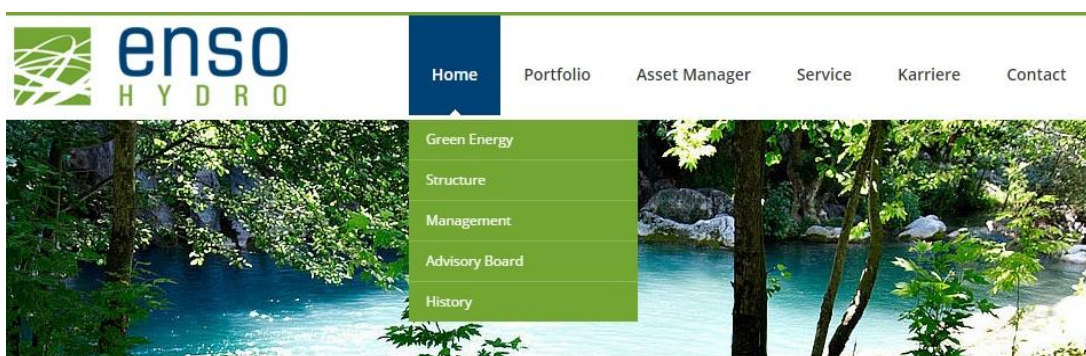


FIGURE 6.1. Access to the company profile of enso hydro GmbH via the “Home” generic link.



FIGURE 6.2. Access to the company profile of enso hydro GmbH via the “Asset Manager” generic link.

As far as Profish Technology SA is concerned, company’s information is included in the main text in the middle of the homepage (Figure 6.3 on the next page). Further search through the website has not revealed the presence of any other pages dedicated to the company’s institutional presentation. Nonetheless, since it is placed on the homepage, the company’s profile of Profish Technology SA gains prominence, as it is the first textual item with which web users are confronted when accessing the website.

From the preliminary survey of the linguistic and hypertextual/interactive features that characterize the various navigation bars, it is possible to observe a certain degree of uniformity in the way in which the company’s profile is organized and structured, despite the instances of variation which have been tracked. The latter are meaningful, as they ensue from the affordances of the Web, which allow companies to exploit the medium in a personalized way. All in all, it seems safe to argue that the so called About Us/Company section is an obligatory component of corporate websites.

As regards the other generic links in the navigation bars, further variation is to be observed. In fact, it seems that each company adopts its own strategies to organize the content of the website, and it devises the navigation bar accordingly. For example, in Chapter 7 I will provide findings that reveal that the macro-sections gathering information about the companies’ products and services are realized in a variety of ways from a linguistic and a hypertextual perspective alike.

In order to wrap up this preliminary exploration of the macro-sections dedicated to the companies’ profile, it seems safe to argue that, despite several regularities, the content of each companies’ website is presented and structured in personalized ways. As a matter of fact, although the macro-sections including the companies’ presentation seem to be a *sine qua non* of corporate websites, a multiplicity of choices can be observed as regards their linguistic realization and hypertextual/interactive features. Hence it can be concluded that creativity and personalization are fundamental elements of companies’ online communication, not only in order to stand out from competition, but also to find viable solutions to design easily

accessible and usable websites.

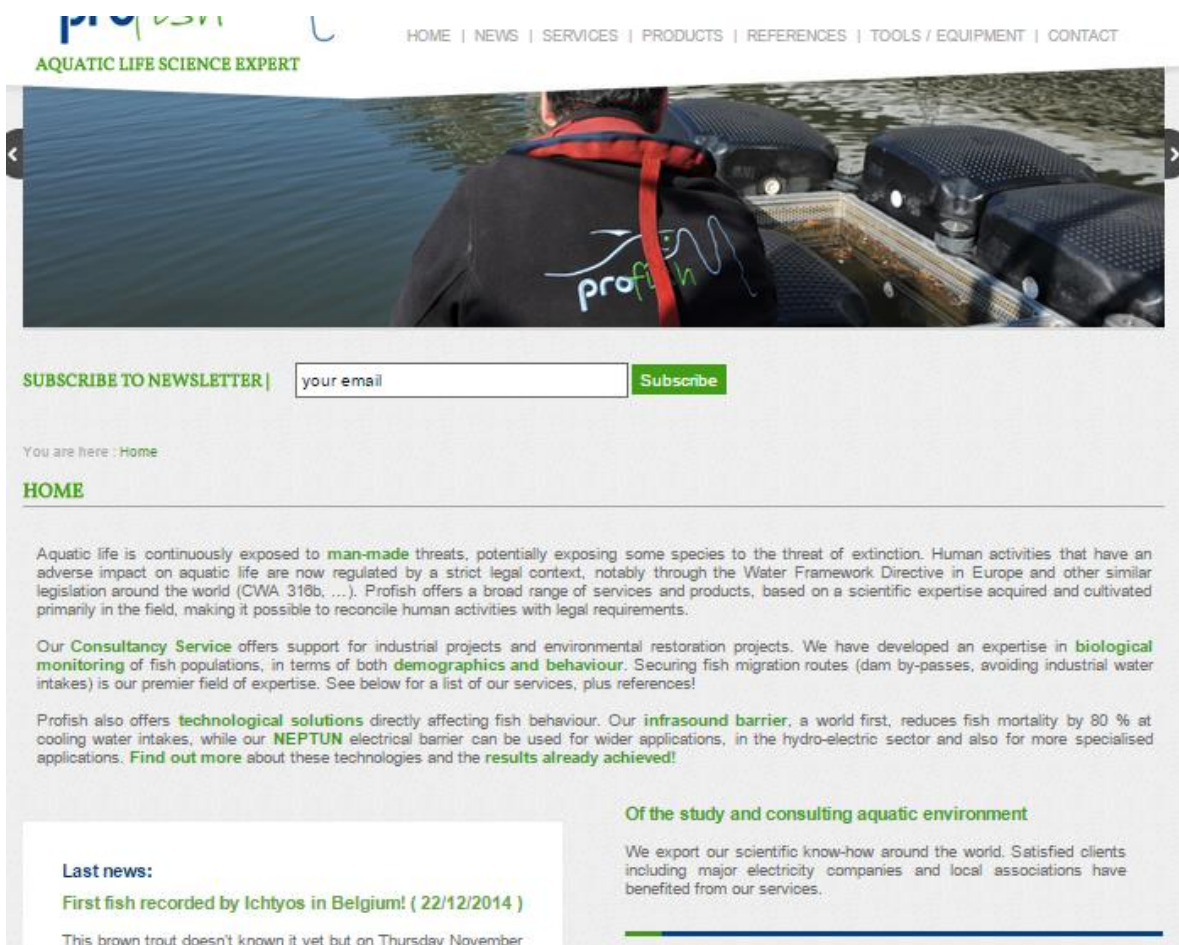


FIGURE 6.3. Detail of the homepage of Profish Technology SA.

Starting from these premises, the following section will take up the structure of the Sveaskog Förvaltning AB's corporate website. In fact, the absence of generic links on its homepage makes it a useful case in point to provide evidence of variation in the hypertextual design of corporate websites. The analysis of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB's corporate website will provide a glimpse of its multimodal characteristics as well, as these seem to partake in the coherence of the structure of the website as a whole.

6.1.1. The case of the Sveaskog Förvaltning AB's global website

As anticipated beforehand, the homepage of the corporate websites of the Swedish company Sveaskog Förvaltning AB does not conform to the general rule of the homepage genre with regard to the presence of generic links, since it does not feature any navigation bar. Hence, it is not possible to make inferences about the macro-sections in the websites by simply looking at its homepage. Instead, the homepage presents a series of clickable objects placed in the

middle of and at the bottom of the screen. Following Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's (2005) framework, these hyperlinks can be categorized as specific links, in consideration of the fact that they are realized by an image and a textual lead. In particular, a wide, rectangular image appears in the middle of the screen, and three other smaller, square images are arranged in the lower section of the homepage, as it can be observed in Figure 6.4.⁶



FIGURE 6.4. Hyperlinks on the homepage of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB.

Nevertheless, the absence of generic links on the homepage of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB does not result in a lack of guidance on the part of web users. Conversely, by clicking on one of the links available on the homepage, web users will be directed to the macro-sections that make up the websites. Therefore, it is safe to argue that the function usually fulfilled by generic links on a homepage, is taken on board by the specific links on the homepage of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB.

For instance, by clicking on the big, rectangular image spanning the width of the screen, i.e. the banner,⁷ straightforward access will be provided to the first web page in the

⁶ Besides the clickable images which are the focus of the analysis in this section, in the screenshot in Figure 6.6 the company's logo is visible on the top left-hand corner of the screen. The logo is clickable, and it leads to the Swedish version of the website. In the top right-hand corner of the screen, the hyperlink "Contact Us" provides access to a web page including the company's contact details, while the hyperlink "Swedish" provides access to the Swedish version of the website. Finally, a search box is placed under the two hyperlinks, allows for queries to be submitted to a browser integrated in the website.

⁷ Bolaños Medina *et al.* define banners as "graphic web elements, usually horizontal, used for various purposes, such as to title the page, head a new section, present a company's or advertiser's message, or

macro-section dedicated to the institutional presentation of the company. This is apparent from the heading included on the web page which has been just opened (“About Sveaskog”). Besides, the web page also carries indication of the path which has been followed within the website. This indication is realized as “Start > About Sveaskog”, written in a small typeface on the top left-hand corner of the screen, under the logo (Figure 6.5). Thanks to the path indication, web users know where they are ‘positioned’ within the website, and they can go back to the homepage (“Start”), since each phrase in the path contains an active link.

It is noteworthy that the web page thus accessed presents a visual element in the middle of the screen, placed in the same position and having the same width as the image displayed on the homepage. The only difference is that the homepage displays one static image, whereas the web page entitled “About Sveaskog” displays three images sliding one after the other. The images slide automatically, or they can be changed by the users by clicking on the arrows on the left and on the right of the image. In spite of this difference, the fact that the main visual elements on the homepage and on the “About Sveaskog” web page are characterized by the same position and width caters for coherence across the website.

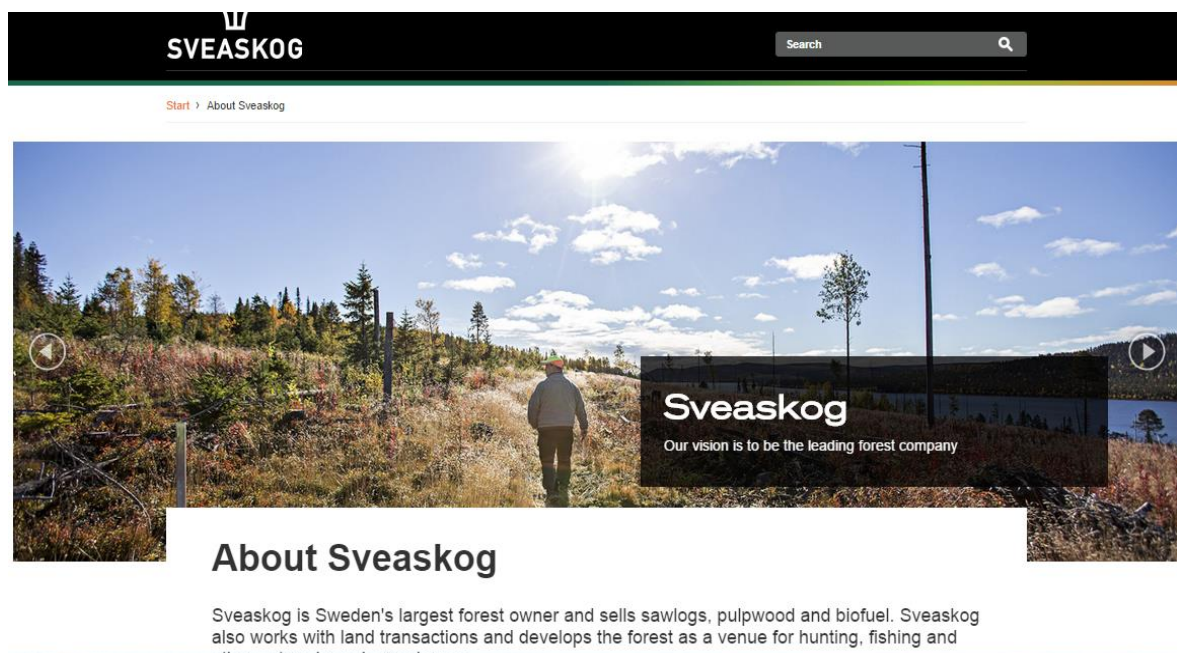


FIGURE 6.5. Detail of “About Sveaskog” web page.

Similar images can be retrieved by clicking on the square images placed at the bottom of the homepage (see Figure 6.4). For example, by clicking on the link “Sveaskog in brief”, web users open a new web page displaying a further wide, rectangular image positioned in the

provide a link to another page. Most banners are also interactive hyperlinks” (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005, 129).

middle of the screen. The heading of the newly accessed web page is the same as the one included in the clickable object on the homepage (“Sveaskog in brief”), and the path which has been followed within the website is indicated too, along the same line as in the “About Sveaskog” web page. In this case, the path that web users have followed is “Start > About Sveaskog > Sveaskog in brief”. The indication provided by the path seem to imply that the page “Sveaskog in brief” belongs to the macro-section dedicated to the institutional presentation of the company.

Finally, coherence via visual elements is enhanced across the Sveaskog Förvaltning AB’s website thanks to the inclusion on web pages other than the homepage of a set of square clickable images placed at the bottom of the screen, which are similar to those on the homepage. For example, the screenshot below, taken from the “Sveaskog in brief” web page, exhibits five hyperlinks, realized by square images accompanied by a lead. These are similar to the three specific links presented on the homepage (Figure 6.6).

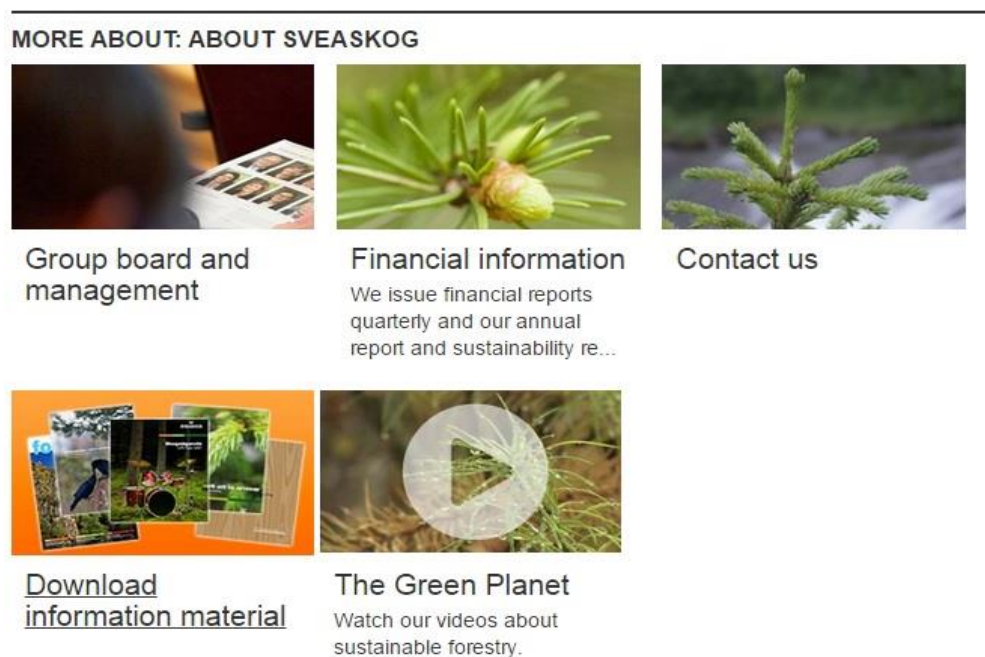


FIGURE 6.6. Square clickable images at the bottom of the “Sveaskog in brief web page”.

A closer look at the text which accompanies the images reveals that these links give access to the pages within the “About Sveaskog” macro-section. First of all, the set of links are introduced by the heading “More about: about Sveaskog”. Next, by clicking on the images, access is provided to web pages whose path begins with the prepositional phrase “About Sveaskog”. To sum up, the paths that mark these further five web pages within the macro-section presenting Sveaskog Förvaltning AB are:

- 1) Start > About Sveaskog > Group board and management

- 2) Start > About Sveaskog > Financial information
- 3) Start > About Sveaskog > Contact us
- 4) Start > About Sveaskog > Download information material
- 5) Start > About Sveaskog > The Green Planet

Going back to the homepage, it can be assumed that the other two square images placed at the bottom of the screen will lead to other two macro-sections within the website. This is not actually the case, since the clickable image accompanied by the lead “Sveaskog reports improved operating profit from continuing operations” gives access to a web page which is embedded in the “About Sveaskog” macro- section.

However, the first image starting from the right on the homepage of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB leads to a new section, “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA”. In this case, the path that is displayed in lower-case letters under the logo is “Start > Sveaskog Baltfor SIA”: this testifies to the fact that the web page does not belong to the macro-section presenting the company’s profile. Conversely, from a more in-depth examination of the web page, it becomes clear that this section presents a subsidiary company of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB, trading in Latvia. Following from this observation, I suggest that the macro-section “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA” might also be considered a ‘micro-website’ embedded in Sveaskog Förvaltning AB’s website, disseminating information about the Latvian subsidiary unit of the Swedish company. However, given that Sveaskog Baltfor SIA is owned by Sveaskog Förvaltning AB, as overtly stated on the web page “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA”, I have decided to include Sveaskog Baltfor SIA and its relative macro-section/micro-website in the REnEU corpus, regarding it as a unit of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB, and not as a company on its own. The same decision has been made in the case of the web-pages in A. Silva Matos Energia SA’s corporate website, dedicated to its subsidiaries (see § 6.1 above).

Going back to the multimodal analysis of “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA”, the web page reiterates the same pattern pinned down in the case of the web pages investigated so far. In the middle, the “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA” web page displays a banner, while at the bottom a set of five smaller square clickable images is presented. In keeping with the other web pages, web users are confronted with the path they have followed to access this page, while the set of links placed at the bottom of the page is introduced by the heading “More about: Sveaskog Baltfor SIA”, which is reminiscent of the title of the set of links included in the other web pages of the Sveaskog Förvaltning AB’s corporate website.

On the basis of these results, there is evidence that the linguistic, hypertextual/interactive and multimodal features of the “Sveaskog Baltfor SIA” macro-

section are consistent with the other web pages in Sveaskog Förvaltning AB's corporate website, thus providing coherence to the website as a whole. Finally, *vis à vis* the personalized structure of the website, which makes it stand out from the the REnEU corpus due to the absence of generic links on its homepage, it can be concluded that companies are in a position to flout the common practices of online communication, while still effectively drawing upon the affordances of the medium, thus providing guidance to potential navigators.

6.2. The About Us/Company sections

The present discussion delves into the macro-sections dedicated to the institutional presentation of the companies included in the REnEU corpus from a lexico-grammatical perspective. These macro-sections are commonly referred to as About Us or Company section,⁸ in consideration of the linguistic realization of the generic links (and therefore headings) that are used to introduce them, as it has been demonstrated in the preliminary analysis conducted in § 6.1. In order to unravel the characteristics of these macro-sections, the present analysis will draw upon a repertoire of methods, and both quantitative and qualitative approaches will be adopted.

First of all, a corpus quantitative analysis will be conducted to charter the most frequent lexico-grammatical elements. Results will be produced for the the Expanding Circle sub-corpus on the one hand, and for the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus on the other hand. Next, the results of the quantitative analysis will be investigated from a qualitative standpoint: following from the premise that description and evaluation are the rhetorical acts, or generic value, that underpin promotional discourse, possible instances of descriptive language on the one end, and of evaluative language on the other end will be disclosed. The qualitative analysis will be complemented by the investigation of form-function correlations as expressed by the hypertextual and interactive features⁹ of the macro-section, and by their visual component, too. Hence, the pattern of analysis adopted is motivated by MDA.

In consideration of the type of information disseminated in the About Us/Company

⁸ In their typology of corporate websites, Esrock and Leichty (2000) categorize the companies' institutional presentation as "Corporate Information" or "About X". One year later, Perry and Bodkin (2001) refer to this section of corporate websites as "About Us". More recently, Turnbull (2009) has adopted the terms "About Us" and "Company" section interchangeably. "About Us" has been employed by Poppi (2011) as well.

⁹ As elucidated in § 3.2.1, the Web affordances of hypertextuality and interactivity are interrelated. Hypertextuality (or hypermediality) designates the capability of web documents to be connected to each other by means of hyperlinks. Interactivity is a function of hypertextuality, and it refers to the fact that hyperlinks connecting web documents allow web users to access them along personalized paths (Garzone 2007). Nonetheless, it is to be borne in mind that web documents are co-articulated, too, since the various paths along which they can be accessed are devised beforehand by the web designers (Garzone 2007).

section, and in consideration of its partly descriptive and partly evaluative nature, a parallel with one of the traditional genres of corporate discourse will be drawn, i.e. the company brochure. As discussed in §§ 3.1.3 and 5.1, Bhatia (2004) categorizes the company brochure as a peripheral member of the colony of promotional genres, due to the fact that it fulfils both an information-giving and a promotional function. In a prior study, Askehave (1998) argues that, “the purpose of company brochures is to present the company as a qualified partner. [...] [M]anufacturers use their company brochures to demonstrate that they possess the qualities needed to enter into long-lasting trading relationships with potential customers” (Askehave 1998, 199).

Along similar lines, Nielsen (2001) maintains that company brochures partake of the communication of a company. Their focus is on the company itself, and they are used as a PR instruments: “[f]irstly the company brochure is a part of a company’s communication and in that way an instrument that eventually serves financial interests, and secondly the very subject of the company’s brochure is the company itself, i.e. an economic unit is described and praised in the brochure” (Nielsen 2001, 217). Besides information on the company, its history, employees, etc., Nielsen holds that company brochures might inform of the company’s products as well.¹⁰ In addition to this, company brochures are polysemiotic, since they have both textual and visual elements. In conclusion, Nielsen indicates a certain degree of overlap between company’s brochure and the company’s websites, to which he refers as “the virtual relative of company brochure” (Nielsen 2001, 226). Nielsen rounds off his contribution by envisaging new avenues for research. To this aim, the author poses the question of how closely related company brochures and websites are, and which similarities or differences can be observed between the two.

Following from this premises, Nielsen’s question will be addressed, and the issue will be tackled whether and to what extent corporate websites, and in particular the About Us/Company section ‘remediates’ traditional genres of corporate discourse, by appropriating their characteristics and functions, and importing them to the Web. In fact, the analysis of the About Us sections conducted in the following section will reveal that not only the genre of company brochures has been transferred and adapted to the new medium, but also other textual instantiations of corporate discourse such as the mission statement and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) report now conflate into the macro-sections dedicated to the companies’ self-presentation in corporate websites.

¹⁰ As we have seen in § 5.1, Ellerup Nielsen (2002) banks on the same assumption while providing a theoretical framework for her analysis. Therefore, Nielsen’s and Ellerup Nielsen’s stance will be adopted to analyze the product section in the websites sampled for the present analysis.

6.2.1. *Lexico-grammatical analysis*

To start with, a quantitative analysis of the REnEU corpus has been conducted by referring to its first-level sub-corpora, that is, the Expanding Circle sub-corpus and the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. This decision has been implemented in order to obtain as homogeneous results as possible, in keeping with the English proficiency level defined by Cramer (2007), characterizing the European countries where the companies are headquartered. Therefore, the plain text files referring to the macro-sections devoted to the companies' self-presentation in each second-level sub-corpus¹¹ have been selected, so as to obtain two frequency word lists, one for each first-level sub-corpus. The macro-sections dedicated to the companies' institutional self-presentation included in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus amount to 26,324 tokens and 4,334 word types, while the macro-sections in the Transition Circle #1 amount to 46,057 token and 5,571 types. In the following tables, the twenty-five most frequent words in the two sub-corpora are shown, ranked according to the number of hits.

TABLE 6.3. Frequency word lists of the About Us/Company sections in the Expanding Circle and in Transition Circle #1.

Expanding Circle			Transition Circle #1		
<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>	<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>
1	1509	the	1	2601	the
2	1085	and	2	1777	of
3	913	of	3	1751	and
4	701	in	4	1241	in
5	693	to	5	872	to
6	523	a	6	638	a
7	337	for	7	562	for
8	294	we	8	458	is
9	278	is	9	405	our
10	211	are	10	376	with
11	211	with	11	374	we
12	196	that	12	349	on
13	174	on	13	345	pcc
14	162	bonfiglioli	14	295	as
15	153	as	15	283	are
16	144	by	16	263	luvata
17	137	company	17	230	at
18	120	this	18	221	company
19	114	at	19	206	board
20	109	from	20	204	by
21	108	energy	21	199	energy
22	105	has	22	198	group
23	102	you	23	186	vapo
24	99	group	24	174	from

¹¹ The second-level sub-corpora gather the plain text files according to the company owning the websites (see § 5.3).

Expanding Circle			Transition Circle #1		
<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>	<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>
25	98	an	25	172	has

In the table above, three group of words have been identified for both sub-corpora, as they are deemed significant for the reasons spelled out below.

To start with, except for “Bonfiglioli” in the Expanding Circle, and “PCC” and “Luvata” in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, “company” is the most frequent content word in both sub-corpora. The high incidence of the names of these three companies is perhaps due to the size of their About Us/Company sections. In other words, the larger the corpus, the higher the chances of finding the name of the company. More precisely, the Company section of Bonfiglioli SpA amounts to 7,211 tokens, i.e. about one third of the whole Expanding Circle sub-corpus, while PCC Deg Renewables GmbH amounts to 10,910 and Luvata Pori Oy to 10,468 tokens, which together account for almost half of the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. However, neither the high incidence of “company” nor of the name of three companies is surprising, due to the focus of the sections here analyzed. “Energy” is the second most frequently occurring content word in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, while it is the third most frequently occurring content word in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, as “board” ranks third. Next, “group” is the third most frequently occurring content word in the Expanding Circle, while it ranks fourth in the Transition Circle # 1 sub-corpus.

As for the most frequent function words, the high incidence of the first person plural pronoun “we” across the two sub-corpora, and of the possessive “our” in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus is particularly meaningful. In the Expanding Circle corpus, the pronoun “you” ranks rather high, too, but it surprisingly ranks forty-eighth in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus.

To sum up, the most frequent content words in both first-level sub-corpora in REnEU directly refer to the company itself or to the people who are responsible for its organization.¹², as in the case of “board” in Transition Circle #1. As for “energy”, this word obviously foregrounds the business area in which the companies are active. Not only are the companies referred to by means of the content words which has been highlighted so far, but also and above all by means of the pronoun “we” (and of the possessive “our”). In fact, “we” occurs more frequently than the content words denoting the companies, and in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus the use of “we” seems to be complemented by the high incidence of the pronoun “you”, which denotes the companies’ stakeholders.

¹² This is the case of the noun “board” in Transition Circle #1. However, this noun occurs only ten times in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, where it ranks 374th.

Having identified relevant content and function words in the word lists of both sub-corpora, and having ascertained common or similar choices across the two sub-corpora, the co-text surrounding these words will be explored in the following sections, in order to pin down rhetorically significant lexico-grammatical patterns, and in order to disclose examples of descriptive and evaluative language.

Company

First of all, a simple concordance search of the word “company” has revealed that it is used in both sub-corpora to describe the company’s history and location, and to hint at the services it offers, as in the following examples.

Expanding Circle

As shown by the Concordance Plot tool integrated in *AntConc*, the word “company” occurs in the the About Us/Company sections of thirteen out of the fifteen companies in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. These are Acciona Energía Solar SL, A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, Cryostar SAS, enso hydro GmbH, Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ, IREM SpA, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Silcio SA and Turboden Srl. The examples that follow have been singled out to from the concordance lines to shed light on the co-text surrounding the search term “company”.

(6.1) The **company** has a turnover of *around €200 million*, 90% of which are exports. (Cryostar SAS)

(6.2) *1961*

The *Fröling* **company** is founded. (Fröling GmbH)

(6.3) The **company** was established *in 1954 in Porcia (PN)* for the manufacturing of cement products for interior furnishings [...]. (Palazzetti Lelio Spa)

(6.4) The **company** was founded *in 2005*, and *in spring 2009* its *Patras, Greece* plant started production [...]. (Silcio SA)

(6.5) Turboden is a *leading European* **company** in development and production of *ORC (Organic Rankine Cycle)* turbogenerators. (Turboden Srl)

In the examples above, the companies are referred to indirectly by means of the third person singular. In (6.3) and (6.4), the simple past is used to describe meaningful past events in the company’s history. Overall, the language used is descriptive, as it provides time and place information, as in (6.2), (6.3) and (6.4).

Numerical data are provided in (6.1) with reference to the company's turnover and exports. These are instances of factual information. Yet, it can be assumed that by disseminating these data, the company aims at promoting itself as a reliable partner. Next, in (6.5) the lexical booster "leading", employed as a premodifier, is an example of overt evaluation. In this example, the message-sender provides factual information about the company's activity by hinting at the specific technology it develops. The acronym is explained in brackets, to make the information transparent also to lay people who have accessed the website by chance.

Finally, it is worth to point to the theme-rheme structure that characterizes the examples. In all the examples the company is thematized, although a certain degree of variation can be noticed. In fact, the noun "company" is premodified by the name of the organization (Fröling) in (6.2), while in (6.5) the name of the company (Turboden) is foregrounded.

Comparable results have been obtained by analyzing the concordance lines of "company" in the Transition Circle sub-corpus, as I will illustrate below.

Transition Circle #1

The word "company" occurs in the About Us/Company sections included in all the companies' websites in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, as displayed by *AntConc* Concordance Plot tool. The following examples selected after close investigation of the concordance lines will be discussed to delve into the lexico-grammatical patterns surrounding the search term.

(6.6) Given **our** origins, and as a **company** which is majority *owned by the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg* and *Oberschwäbische Elektrizitätswerke*, a municipal special-purpose association, *our connections to Baden-Württemberg are particularly strong.* (EnBW AG)

(6.7) The *Deep Drill* **Company** was founded by *B.G.H van Amsterdam in 1980*. The **company** now has *over 30 years of industry experience* and is still *family owned.* (Deep Drill Supply Group)

(6.8) Due to *rapid growth* the **company** moves its headquarters to *Wörrstadt, to the world's most energy efficient office building*. The main focus of juwi wind activities is in *France, the USA, Costa Rica, Poland and the Czech Republic.* (juwi AG)

(6.9) Mervento Oy is a Finnish **company** *owned by the founders* Martti Ala-Vainio and Patrik Holm and *the investors* Power Fund II, which is *managed by* VNT Management Oy, Soldino Oy, Mutual Pension Insurance Company

Varma, AC Cleantech Growth Fund I Holding AB, EPV Energia Oy and company's own personnel. (Mervento Oy)

(6.10) The **company** is located in *Piedmont close to Greenville/SC* [...]. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

Similarly to the examples taken from the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, the examples in (6.7), (6.8), (6.9), and (6.10) above are in the third person singular. In (6.7), the past simple is used to refer to past events, while the historical present is used in (6.8). Overall, information about the companies' headquarters is provided, along with the geographical areas in which the companies trade.

In (6.6), the message-sender is referred to by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun "we", as implied by the possessive adjective in "our connections". This phrase has a positive connotation,¹³ in that it shows the company's involvement in fostering the wealth of the area in which it operates. This idea is reinforced by the phrase "particularly strong", used to describe the type of "connections" to the area. However, the hypotactic structure of the sentence might make the message not easily accessible by an intercultural and international audience of English users. It can be hypothesized that the convoluted structure of the sentence depends on a case of L1 interference (German is the first language of the company's headquarters).

In (6.6), (6.7) and (6.9), information about the companies' founders and owners is offered. The names of the investors and of other organizations involved in the business of the companies are disclosed in (6.7) and (6.9), too. Therefore, the examples are highly informative, and it can be assumed that by disclosing these data, the companies aim at presenting the people responsible for the company's management to the outside audience, while at the same time projecting their image as trustworthy business partners.

Besides, the year in which the company was founded is indicated in (6.8). This is an instance of factual information with an underlying promotional functions, as the message-sender seeks to build his/her positive identity, and project his/her image accordingly, by referring to his/her experience in the sector. The message-sender expands on this information by claiming his/her "over 30 years of industry experience". Finally, the fact that the company is "family owned" is to be perceived as an asset by its stakeholders: once again, factual information aims at fulfilling the company's hidden agenda, i.e. building its positive corporate identity, and projecting its positive corporate image.

As far as instances of overt evaluation are concerned, the premodifiers "rapid" and

¹³ I have adopted the term *connotation* as postulated by Lyons. In the author's words, the connotation of a word designates "an emotive or affective component additional to its central meaning" (Lyons 1977, 176).

“the world’s most energy efficient” (6.8) are deployed as lexical boosters. Finally, the companies are thematized in all the examples, with the exception of (6.6) and (6.8). As pointed out previously, the syntax of (6.6) is complex, and the main clause is shifted towards the end of the period. As regards (6.8), the fact that the company has grown has been foregrounded, in order to highlight the company’s success in the renewable energy sector.

We

The analysis of (6.1) in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus has disclosed that “we” is usually employed as a receiver-excluding pronoun to refer to the message-sender. While the use of the third singular pronoun makes communication between the message-sender (the company) and the message-receiver (its stakeholders) indirect and formal, the first person plural pronoun personifies the message-sender. This is apparent in the following examples, which have been selected by first retrieving the co-text of the concordance lines where “we” is the node word.

Expanding Circle

The pronoun “we” occurs in the About Us/Company sections of twelve out of the fifteen companies’ websites in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. The companies owning the websites are A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, Cryostar SAS, Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ, IREM SpA, Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Profish Technology SA, Silcio SA, Turboden Srl, as attested by the Concordance Plot tool. Selected examples will be investigated below, to shed light on form-function correlations which emerge from the co-text in which the pronoun is used.

(6.11) **We** keep **our** *Vision, Mission and Initial Values* aiming to be the *best* in the market that **we** work, with *a strong sense of responsibility in society* [...].
(A. Silva Matos Energia SA)

(6.12) *Vision and mission*
We promote *sustainable development worldwide* (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

(6.13) **We** are *very ambitious*, and therefore **we** are *committed to promoting* the photovoltaic industry as *sustainable and ecological technology* (Micron – Cappello Alluminio Srl)

(6.14) **We** export our *scientific know-how around the world*. (Profish Technology SA)

(6.15) **Our People**
We consider that **our people** are *the most valuable assets* of **our company**.

(Silcio SA)

It is apparent from these examples that the co-text surrounding the pronoun “we” refers to the values, vision and mission of the companies. The content of the propositions verbalizes the company’s positive principles and attitude by using the present simple. This is a common rhetorical feature of the mission statement (Swales & Rogers 1995), one of the traditional genres of corporate communication, as pointed out in § 2.3.¹⁴

In (6.11), the notions of corporate mission, vision and values are referred to the company by means of the possessive “our”. The same notions are made explicit in the heading of the example in (6.12), i.e. “Vision and Mission”. Going back to (6.11), “a strong sense of responsibility in society” denotes the company’s positive attitude towards society. The adjective “strong” is used as a premodifier with a positive connotation. The idea of the company’s positive attitude towards society is underlined by the lexical booster “best”, which underlines the company’s expertise and continuous effort to expand its business.

Furthermore, the adjective “sustainable” is used in (6.12) and in (6.13). In (6.12), it premodifies “development”, while in (6.13) it premodifies “technology”. Besides, it is relevant to point out that in (6.13) “sustainable” is used in combination with “ecological”, hence foregrounding the company’s commitment towards the production of energy from renewable resources.

In (6.12), the adverb “worldwide” informs that the company trades internationally, but it is positively connoted too, as it implies that the company is successful and can be relied upon as a business partner. The same function is fulfilled by the adverbial phrase “around the world” in (6.14). Over and above this, the adjective “scientific” premodifying “know-how” foregrounds the company’s expertise. Going back to the example in (6.13) the use of “very ambitious” and of “committed to promoting” go hand in hand, as they denote the company’s willingness to encourage the development of the photovoltaic industry, and stand out from competition.

Finally, (6.15) attracts the reader’s/navigator’s attention by concentrating on the company’s employees, whose role as internal stakeholders is considered crucial. The employees are designated by the heading “Our people”. This noun phrase is repeated in the body of the text. The focus on the employees aims at building consensus in this stakeholder group, but also to captivate the benevolence of readers/navigators. In fact the employees are referred to as “people”, thus thematizing their identity as individuals rather than as workers,

¹⁴ The presence of web pages designed to ‘remediate’ the mission statement in the companies’ websites in the REnEU corpus will be chartered in the next section, by relying on the results of my hypertextual and multimodal analysis, which has cast further light on the content of the About Us/Company sections.

while the possessive “our” shows that the company places high value on its relationship with them. Over and above this, the positively connoted noun “asset” is intensified by the superlative adjective “most valuable”, which functions as an instance of overt valuation.

Therefore, the role-relationship which is represented in (6.15) is one which is based primarily on mutual trust between the company and its employees. The company aims at appearing as a fair employer in front of its internal stakeholders, but also as a reliable business partner in front of other external stakeholders, or in front of the general public, as represented by causal navigators reading the institutional presentation by chance. In a nutshell, the emphasis placed on the company’s employees is in keeping with the function of mission statements, as categorized by Swales and Rogers (1995), who hold that “[a]lthough [...] the precise sets of motives and purposes underlining a particular Mission Statement can vary quite widely, perhaps all share the aim of facilitating employee ‘buy-in’ and of fostering identification with the company” (Swales & Rogers 1995, 227).

The analysis of the examples below, taken from the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, seem to provide findings in line with those obtained from the investigation of the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. In fact, these examples further testify to the fact that some web pages embedded within the About Us/Company sections, are instances of the mission statement genre, which has been ‘remediated’ into the hypertextual and multimodal domain of the Web.

Transition Circle #1

As shown by the Concordance Plot tool included in the *AntConc* software, the first person plural pronoun “we” occurs in the About Us/Company sections of all the websites included in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, except for the website owned by Geotermica AB.

(6.16) **We** are part of an industry which works *with sustainable and non-polluting energy production*, which means **we** *focus constantly on the environment*. (Avanti Wind Systems AS)

(6.17) [...] **we** *rely on comprehensive specialist knowledge and 15 years of experience in the industry* [...]. (ib vogt GmbH)

(6.18) **We** *are specialized in supplying high quality, custom-made* permanent magnets and magnetic systems. As all **our** products are *custom-made* **we** *will give full customer support* with **our** own R&D, Engineering, Logistics and Quality departments. (JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.)

(6.19) **We** *are the world’s leading producer* of finned pack heat exchangers and *a major player* in the field of air ventilated units for refrigeration. (juwi AG)

- (6.20) **We** operate *responsibly*
We are a *reliable* partner.
We have a *responsibility* to *society* and the *environment*.
We each attend to our own area of *responsibility*.
We pay attention to the whole.
We ensure that information flows *openly*.
We *maintain our* working capacity and *develop ourselves*. (Vapo Oy)

Like the five examples taken from the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, the examples listed above are mainly in the simple present, and they consist of general statements about the companies' philosophy and behaviour, in keeping with the mission statement genre (Swales & Rogers 1995). In (6.18), the use of the modal "will" both indicates the company's intentions and commitment, so in this case it can be categorized as an instance of deontic and of dynamic modality alike.

As for lexical choices, the premodifiers "sustainable" and "non-polluting" are tapped into in (6.16) to describe the company's activities in the "energy production" sector. These premodifiers are in line with the lexical choices identified above in (6.17) and in (6.18) in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus ("sustainable" and "ecological"). The field of meaning to which these adjectives belong designates the company's responsible attitude towards the environment and society. The company's commitment is in fact made explicit by the verb "focus", followed by the adverb "constantly" and the indirect object "on the environment".

In (6.17), the field of meaning to which reference is made deals with the company's expertise, as it has been illustrated for (6.14) in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. Firstly, the underlying company's competence is verbalized by the noun "knowledge", premodified by the positively connoted adjectives "comprehensive" and "specialist". Secondly, the time indication included in "15 years of experience in the industry" quantifies the company's experience by relying on numerical, factual information with covert promotional purposes.

Along similar lines, the example in (6.18) focuses on the company's expertise and competence by means of the past participle "specialized" and of the compound "high quality" used to premodify the products manufactured by the company ("permanent magnets and magnetic systems"). The products are premodified by a further compound, i.e. "custom-made", which is reiterated in the sentence that follows to postmodify the word "products". "Custom-made" designates another fundamental stakeholder groups, i.e. customers. Reference to the costumers is made also in the compound noun "customer support", which in turn is premodified by the lexical booster "full". Albeit costumers are mentioned indirectly, they are the focus of attention in this example. Thus, the company seeks to make a good impression on its potential and returning customers by projecting its image as a reliable and

expert business partner. This idea is further substantiated by indicating the company's "R&D, Engineering, Logistics and Quality departments". This item of factual information contributes to the company's communicative agenda, as it implies that the company is a competent business partner in that it supports its customers with a variety of services.

In (6.19), "world's leading" is used as a lexical booster to premodify "producer", while "major" is used as a premodifier to positively connote "player". These are instances of evaluative language, and in particular, "world's leading" is employed similarly to "worldwide" in (6.12) and to "around the world" in (6.14) in the Expanding Circle.

Finally, the example in (6.20) lists a series of statements made by the company to describe its corporate philosophy, which again are reminiscent of the mission statement genre. All the sentences are in simple present, and their structure is paratactic, a part from the that-clause in "We ensure that information flows openly". The receiver-excluding pronoun "we" is in thematic position, and it is deployed to make an anaphoric reference, thus fulfilling a cohesive function across the text. These statements are informed by the same field of meaning, that is, they all indicate the company's involvement towards society and the environment, its reliability and its responsibility, and its effort in further developing its business. The company's positive identity and image are projected by the noun "responsibility", used twice, along with the adverb "responsibly", by the adjective "reliable" and by the adverb "openly". "Society" and the "environment" are directly referred to support the company's claims, while the company's vision and willingness to grow in the future is designated by the positively connoted verb "maintain" and "develop". The direct objects that accompany both verbs are linked to the company itself: the direct object of "maintain", i.e. "working capacity", is introduced by "our", while the direct object of "develop" is the company itself, as expressed by "ourselves".

You

After having delved into the co-text of "company" and of "we", which are both employed to refer to the message-sender, attention will be diverted to the message-receiver as directly indicated by the personal pronoun "you". As I will point out during the analysis of selected occurrences of "you" in the About Us/Company sections in my corpus, "you" refers to a multiplicity of addressees. These are specific stakeholder groups, i.e. customers, investors, job applicants, potential business partners and suppliers. In addition, the pronoun "you" is deployed in contexts where hyperlinks are made available, to prompt navigators to take action, and to brows further into the website, or contact the company. In this sense, the intended addressees to whom the pronoun "you" refers are all the navigators who have

accessed the website, regardless of the stakeholder group to which they belong.

Before discussing the examples singled out for each sub-corpus, a word of caution is needed. As illustrated in Table 6.3, “you” ranks twenty-third in the word list of the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, whereas it does not feature in the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, where in fact it ranks forty-eighth. Nonetheless, I have decided to analyze occurrences of “you” and its co-text in both sub-corpora, to account for the strategies deployed by the companies to address their intended audiences.

Expanding Circle

As revealed by the Concordance Plot tool integrated in *AntConc*, the pronoun “you” occurs in the About Us/Company sections of eight out of the fifteen companies in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus: Acciona Energía Solar SL, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Profish Technology SA, Turboden Srl. A discussion of the examples below will seek to disclose meaningful lexico-grammatical patterns in the co-text of “you”.

(6.21) **You** are *here*:
Home Company About us (Fröling GmbH)

(6.22) How **you** can find **us**
click here (GA Drilling as)

(6.23) If **you** are an *investor or drilling related company*, please feel free to contact the company using the details *below*. (GA Drilling as)

(6.24) *Suppliers*
Are **you** interested in offering **us** a product or service? *Fill in the request form* for suppliers and *send us* the information on **your company**. (Palazzetti Lelio SpA)

(6.25) If **you** *would like* to become self-employed or **you** already have a business in the home heating, plumbing and heating or garden furniture sectors and **you** are looking for a *reliable partner* with a *complete* range of *unique* and *exclusive* products, **we** offer **you** the possibility of collaborating with **us**. (Palazzetti Lelio SpA)

In the example in (6.21), “you” and “here” are used deictically to position the message-receiver in relation to the message-sender, and in relation to the website. Not only is the message-receiver’s position indicated with language, but also by means of one of the properties (or affordances) of Web communication, that is the presence of hyperlinks. In fact, the path which the navigator has followed to access this page is provided (“Home Company

About Us”), and the word “Home” functions as an active link to the homepage.

Examples of deixis can be observed in (6.22), as well: the pronoun “you” designates the message-receiver, whereas “us” indicates the message-sender. “Here” follows the directive “click”, which invites the navigator to take action. In fact, the short text in (6.22) is placed on a clickable item, which directs the navigator to a PDF file including a map and a range of information to arrive at the company’s headquarters. Hence, the linguistic form and the hypertextual function of (6.22) are strongly correlated.

In (6.23), the personal pronoun “you” designates one particular stakeholder group, i.e. investors. Hence, investors (i.e. the message-receivers) are invited to take action by contacting the company. Nonetheless, the message-sender seeks to persuade the intended message-receivers by using politeness markers such as “please” and “feel free to”, instead of using “contact” in the imperative. Additionally, the if-clause functions as a hedging device. In this case, the text does not contain any active link, but intratextual reference is made to the contact details which are listed at the bottom of the page (the company’s address, e-mail and phone number).

In (6.24), the implied message-receivers are restricted to the company’s suppliers, who represent another stakeholder group. In this example, the you-we pattern illustrated in (6.21) and (6.23) is adopted. Reference to the suppliers’ organization is made as well (“your company”). The message-sender addresses the message-receivers by means of a rhetorical question. In addition to this, the directives “fill in” and “send” are used to prompt the message-receivers to contact the company. The text does not feature any active links, but intratextual reference is made to the interactive form included in the web page. Therefore, communication with the company’s stakeholders is established first of all by relying on language choices, and then by relying on the interactive property of the medium, which affords the presence of such tools as fill-in forms, along with textual information. Hence, not only is information provided, but action on the part of the message-receivers is encouraged too by tapping into the affordances of the Web.

As for the language strategies in (6.25), the you-we pattern is reiterated. In this case, the company is addressing a further group of stakeholders, that is, potential partners willing to collaborate with the company by selling its products. The message-sender tries to captivate the message-receivers’ benevolence firstly by politely addressing them. The if-clause and “would like” are in fact employed as hedging devices. Secondly, the company projects its positive image by means of rhetorical choices that can be characterized as overt evaluation. The noun “partner”, which in this case designates the message-sender, is premodified by the positive adjective “reliable”, which functions as a lexical booster. Finally, the products

manufactured by the company are positively evaluated thanks to the adjectives “complete”, “unique” and “exclusive”.

Transition Circle #1

The pronoun “you” occurs in the About Us/Company sections in the websites of eight of the fifteen companies in Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. The companies, as shown by the Concordance Plot tool, are Avanti Wind Systems AS, Deep Drill Supply Group, ib vogt GmbH, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH and Vapo Oy. The selected examples will be discussed to highlight significant form-function correlations in the co-text of the pronoun under scrutiny.

(6.26) **You** can expect *excellent* service and support at **our** center, while **our** partners supply hardware to **you** worldwide. (Deep Drill Supply Group)

(6.27) If **you** would like to have more information, *please do not hesitate to contact us*. **You** can call **us** directly 24/7, send an *email* or use the *contact form*. (Deep Drill Supply Group)

(6.28) **You** didn't find what you were looking for when you read through our job vacancies? But you still think **you**'d be a good fit to us? Then *please apply* anyway. **We**'re *curious*! (juwi AG)

(6.29) **You** can get further information on our *worldwide* offices *here*. (juwi AG)

(6.30) Are **you** a new *customer*? Have **you** got any contact at ECO? For *quotations* or *information* about our products and services, *fill in the form* with the details required [...]. (Luvata Pori Oy)

The examples in (6.26), (6.27) and (6.28) above are characterized by the you-we pattern pinned down in (6.22), (6.24) and (6.25) in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. The possessive “our” is used as a determiner in (6.26), in order to establish a relation between the message-sender on the one side, and “center” and “partner” on the other side. In the same example, the adjective “excellent” is adopted as a lexical booster to premodify the company’s “service” and “support”. As in the examples previously analyzed with regard to the co-text of “company” and of “we”, “worldwide” is used to describe the area in which the company trades, but it positively evaluates the company’s activities as well. The same adverb is used in (6.29) as well with the same positive connotation.

The example in (6.27) includes the politeness markers identified in (6.23) and (6.25) in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. The if-clause and “would like” are hedging devices, while

“please” and the negative form in “do not hesitate” mitigate the message-sender’s suggestion to contact the company. The same function is present in the sentence that follows, where the modal “can” is employed before the verbs “call”, “send” and “use”. Details on how to contact the company are provided by indicating when to contact the company (“24/7”), and how (i.e. by sending an email). Besides, intratextual reference is made to the interactive tool available on the web page, i.e. a fill-in form. Therefore, the affordance of interactivity integrates the textual mode, and it is signalled by lexico-grammatical choices.

In the example in (6.28), the message-receiver is addressed by means of two rhetorical questions and one directive (“apply”), which is in turn mitigated by the politeness marker “please”. It is the job applicants who are referred to here. Hence, the rhetorical strategies implemented here are geared towards projecting a positive image as a fair employer, in line with one of the communicative functions of mission statements, as indicated previously. By directly addressing the message-receivers, the overall tone of the example is informal and rapport-building. Rapport is built also by means of the exclamation “we’re curious!”, which is emphatic and friendly.

The use of questions and exclamations in (6.28) is reminiscent of advertising strategies, and in fact the propositions in (6.28) ought to be persuasive, in order to attract job applicants. Besides, it is here argued that questions and exclamation are features of the spoken language, which the written language on web pages endeavours to recreate. As a matter of fact, the language on the Web often displays features of both the written and the spoken mode (Poppi 2011). As Crystal puts it, it is a “kind of written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech, and which is identical to neither speech nor writing, but selectively and adaptively displays properties of both” (Crystal 2001, 47).

In (6.29), the message-receiver is prompted to take action, that is, to look for more information about the company. The message-sender addresses the message receiver by means of the pronoun “you” followed by the modal “can”. The choice of the modal “can” mitigates the force of the message-sender’s instruction. It might be argued that this grammatical choice makes the instruction less direct and interactive than, for instance, the use of an imperative form. However, interactivity is catered for by the presence on the web page of hypertextual tools to access more information in a straightforward way. In fact, “here” corresponds to an active link, and to this effect it is highlighted in a colour different from the rest of the text. Therefore, it can be argued that, from a linguistic perspective, “here” functions as a deictic to position the message-receivers in relation to the information they look for, while from a hypertextual perspective, it functions as a communication device which depends on the properties of the medium.

Finally, rhetorical questions are employed in (6.30) too, but in this context the message-receivers are new customers. In the second part of the example, the theme, i.e. the given information, is represented by the reference to the quotation which new costumers might require, while the rheme, i.e. the new information is represented by the intratextual reference to the fill-in form made available on the web page. The message-sender encourages the message-receiver to take action by means of the directive “fill in”, and instruction is provided as to how to use the interactive form, given that reference to the “details required” is made.

Frequently occurring company names: Bonfiglioli, Luvata, PCC, Vapo

In order to integrate and further support the analysis conducted so far, few observations about the use of the company names will be presented here, which seem to corroborate the results obtained by investigating the co-text of the propositions including the noun “company” and the personal pronouns “we” and “you”. The investigation which follows is limited to the company names which rank among the twenty-five most frequently occurring word in the two sub-corpora, that is, “Bonfiglioli” in the Expanding Circle, and “Luvata”, “PCC” and “Vapo” in the Transition Circle #1.

Expanding Circle

(6.31) **Bonfiglioli** has also implemented a Quality Policy which sets *customer focus* as a *primary goal*. (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

Transition Circle #1

(6.32) *Every year* **Luvata** sells enough *high performance tube to go around the earth twice*. (Luvata Pori Oy)

(6.33) **PCC** is an *internationally* operating group of companies under the leadership of PCC SE (formerly PCC AG) based in *Duisburg, Germany*. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

(6.34) **Vapo** is the *leading* supplier and developer of bioenergy in the *Baltic Sea region*. (Vapo Oy)

As for the structure of the propositions which have been selected from the concordance lines obtained with *AntCon*, it can be observed that the company name is thematized in (6.31), (6.33) and (6.34). In (6.32), the company name is preceded by the time adverbial “every year”. This adverbial provides factual information about the company’s performance, but it also implies a positive evaluation by hinting at the company’s reliability. Positive evaluation is implied also by the lexical booster “high”, used as a premodifier, and by an instance of

figurative language (“to go around the world twice”), which denotes the quality and quantity of the products manufactured by the company every year. Examples of factual information are provided in (6.33) and in (6.34), where the location of the companies’ headquarters is provided.

Further instances of lexical evaluation are represented by “primary” in (6.31), “internationally” in (6.33) and “leading” in (6.34). The adjective “primary” describes the company’s priority in conducting its business, that is, attention to its customers. This idea is reinforced by the compound “customer focus”, and it testifies to the fact that the intended message-receivers are potential and returning customers. The adverb “internationally” designates the area in which the company’s operates. As in the case of the adverbials “worldwide” and “around the world”, and of the premodifier “world’s leading” which have been previously pinned down, “internationally” is positively connoted. Finally, the adjective “leading” is a lexical booster.

The close investigation of the concordance lines obtained by searching the companies’ names has revealed that these are often used to form compound nouns. In particular, the pattern “company name” followed by “group” is common, and it testifies to the fact that “group” collocates frequently with the companies’ names. For instance, the compound “Bonfiglioli Group” occurs twenty-nine times, “PCC Group” sixteen times, “Vapo Group” fourteen times and “Luvata Group” four times. This might also explain why “group” ranks among the first twenty-five word in the frequency lists of both first-level sub-corpora in the Transition Circle. The examples below illustrate selected occurrences of the pattern (company name) plus “group”.

Expanding Circle

(6.35) The **Bonfiglioli Group** *has grown by understanding and interpreting the times in which it operates* (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

Transition Circle #1

(6.36) **We- the PCC Group** - conduct **our** business in areas that **we know like our own pocket**: Chemicals - Energy – Logistics (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

(6.37) **Luvata Group** *comprises a parent company and three divisions*. (Luvata Pori Oy)

(6.38) As a rule, the companies with minority *shareholders* from outside the **Vapo Group** comply with the above procedure [...] (Vapo Oy)

The co-text of the compound “Bonfiglioli Group” in (6.35) is characterized by positively connoted verbs (“has grown”, “understanding” and “interpreting”). The third person singular is used, similarly to (6.37) and (6.38), whereas in (6.39) the receiver-excluding pronoun “we” is employed to refer to the company (or group).

The example in (6.36) presents an instance of figurative language, which implies that the message-sender is particularly competent in the sectors in which it operates. Nevertheless, this figurative use of “pocket” is not codified in English.¹⁵ Therefore, the question arises whether the message-sender has been influenced by the first language spoken at the company’s headquarters, i.e. German.

As a matter of fact, the phrase *etwas wie seine Hosentasche kennen* is common in informal exchanges in German (*Duden* 1979, Band 3). Thus, it might be expected that the German version of the company’s website includes this phrase, which accordingly has been literally translated. Surprisingly, the text uploaded on German version of the website¹⁶ reads as follows: “*Als umsichtiger Konzern sind wir ausschließlich in Bereichen aktiv, in denen wir uns bestens auskennen: Chemie, Energie und Logistik*” (“As a responsible company, we operate exclusively in areas which we know very well: Chemicals, Energy, Logistics”). This seems to demonstrate that, at least as regards this example, the global website of PCC Deg Renewables GmbH has not been literally translated from German into English. However, the influence of German is apparent in the way in which English has been figuratively and creatively adopted and adapted in the global website, to project the company’s positive image as competent a business partner. In this sense, this lexical choice might testify to the hybridity which characterizes the language of companies’ websites in English, as claimed by Taviano (2010).

Finally, the content of the propositions in (6.37) and (6.38) is characterized by factual information. In (6.37), the structure of the group is described. This information is addressed to all stakeholders, and to the general public as well. Conversely, information in (6.37) is addressed to a specific stakeholder group, i.e. shareholders.

Energy

So far, frequently occurring words which refer on the one side to the company, and to the other side to its various stakeholders, have been investigated, in order to outline how the message-sender and the message-receivers are positioned in relation to each other.

¹⁵ “Pocket, n. and adj.”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/146402>>, last accessed on 14 January 2015.

¹⁶ <http://www.pcc.eu/ttw/pcc.nsf/id/DE_Home>, last accessed on 14 January 2015.

Nonetheless, Table 6.3 above also attests to the fact that the word “energy” ranks particularly high in both sub-corpora. Accordingly, the word “energy” deserves attention, as it foregrounds the business area in which the companies are active.

In order to disclose meaningful patterns in which the word “energy” is used, a list of the most frequent collocates of “energy” has been obtained for each first-level sub-corpus. In so doing, it is possible to shed light on the rhetorical strategies implemented by the companies to position themselves in relation to the industry sector in which they are trading. The most frequent collocates of “energy” in the Expanding Circle and in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpora are ranked in the Table 6.4 on the following page. Details about the frequency of the collocation, and about the position of the collocate on the left and/or on the right of the node are provided as well.

TABLE 6.4. Collocates of “energy” in the About Us/Company sections in the REnEU Corpus.

Expanding Circle					Transition Circle #1				
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>collocate</i>	<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>R</i>	<i>collocate</i>
1	21	21	0	renewable	1	23	7	16	and
2	17	6	11	and	2	21	21	0	the
3	12	12	0	acciona	3	12	6	6	in
4	9	6	3	the	4	11	10	1	of
5	5	0	5	sources	5	10	9	1	wind
6	5	5	0	of	6	10	9	1	solar
7	5	5	0	clean	7	8	8	0	renewable
8	4	0	4	in	8	7	0	7	efficient
9	4	4	0	green	9	6	1	5	division
10	3	3	0	wind	10	6	6	0	chemicals

Expanding Circle

As for the Expanding Circle, the most frequent collocate of “energy” is “renewable”. This pattern is to be retrieved in the About Us/Company sections of eight out of the fifteen companies in the Expanding Circle, as testified by the Concordance Plot: Acciona Energía Solar SL, A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Fröling GmbH, GOLIATH Wind OÜ, IREM SpA, Silcio SA and Turboden Srl.

In all the occurrences, “renewable” collocates on the left of the node, and so it premodifies it, in order to define the particular type of energy produced by the company, as in the following example. The adjective “renewable” not only describes the type of energy, but is also positively connoted, as it implies that the type of energy produced is not subject to depletion. This is well illustrated by the example below.

(6.39) *Our work mirrors the idea of Sustainability that begins with productivity*

optimization [...] and goes on in the appliances for the production of **renewable energy** and lighting energy saving. (IREM SpA)

The co-text of the frequent pattern “renewable energy” in the example above displays some linguistic choices that have already pinned down in the analysis conducted so far. The presence of the possessive “our” testify to the fact that the message-sender is referred to by means of the exclusive “we”, while the noun “sustainability” aims at building the company’s positive images, by displaying its commitment to the production of affordable energy.

The second most frequent collocate of “energy” in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus is “Acciona”, i.e. the name of one of the companies included in the corpus, i.e. the Spanish company Acciona Energía Solar SL. A close investigation of the concordance lines reveals that “Acciona Energy” is a frequent collocate, since the name of the company has been translated from Spanish into English, as apparent from the example below.

The example in (6.40) also provides evidence of a further frequent collocate of energy, i.e. “sources”. In all five occurrences “sources” collocates on the right of the node, to form the compound “energy sources”. A part from Acciona Energía Solar SL, the pattern occurs in the About Us/Company sections of the following companies: CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, Fröling GmbH, Palazzetti Lelio SpA and Silcio SA. Interestingly, in the example below the compound “energy sources” is also premodified by the the adjective “renewable”.

(6.40) **ACCIONA Energy**, the energy division of the ACCIONA Group, is a *world leader* in the field of **renewable energy sources**. (Acciona Energía Solar SL)

It is relevant to note that this example shows an instance of positive evaluation, too, as expressed by the compound “world leader”, implying the company’s expertise and success.

A further adjective that qualifies the type of energy produced by the company is “clean”. The pattern “clean energy” occurs in the About Us/Company sections of Acciona Energía Solar SL, Cryostar SAS, Turboden Srl. The adjective “clean” emphasizes one of the characteristics of the energy produced by the company, that is, it does not pollute. Hence, it is used to describe the type of energy, but it also implies a positive evaluation, as in the case of “renewable”. In a similar way, the example in (6.41) below provides evidence of factual information, as expressed by a time indication.

(6.41) *The 21st century* has seen Cryostar extend its offering to process plants in the fields of natural gas and **clean energy** [...] (Cryostar SAS)

A further adjective belonging to the same field of meaning of “renewable” and “clean”, which collocates with “energy” in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus is “green”. Occurrences of

“green energy” are attested in the Company section of Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA. This adjective is employed figuratively to connote the positive characteristics of these energy sources, that is, being renewable and clean, and hence it can be regarded as a sort of umbrella term.

(6.42) In all fields, from industry to mobile machinery and **green energy**, the Bonfiglioli Group places its *customers* at the *centre of its activities* [...]. (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

The example in (6.42) indicates the field in which the company operates. Similarly to other examples investigated previously, it appeals to costumers, by emphasizing their importance with the phrase “centre of its activities”.

The adjectives “renewable”, “clean” and “green” define the type of energy produced regardless of the source actually exploited. However, the tenth most frequent collocate of “energy” in the Expanding Circle Sub-corpus is “wind”. The pattern “wind energy” occurs in the About Us/Company section of Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA and of GOLIATH Wind OÜ. In this pattern, “wind” is used as a premodifier, and it is specific about the energy source with which the company deals, as the example below demonstrates.

(6.43) **Wind energy** has grown out of its niche and become the *backbone* of **renewable energy** installations *in the world*. (GOLIATH Wind OÜ)

The focus in the previous example is “wind energy”, which in fact is thematized. The importance of this source is verbalized by means of the positively connoted expressions “has grown” and “backbone”. Thus, the message-sender seeks to persuade the message-receiver of the relevance of wind as source of renewable energy.¹⁷ In the example, “wind energy” and “renewable energy” are interrelated, since the former can be regarded as a hyponym and the latter as hyperonym.

Transition Circle #1

The first ten most frequent collocates of “energy” in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus present some variation compared to the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. To start with, the most frequent collocate is “wind”, thus demonstrating once again the key role of this particular energy source within the whole sector, as the example in (6.44) seem to testify. The pattern “wind energy” is attested in the About Us/Company section of Avanti Wind Systems AS and juwi AG.

¹⁷ As elucidated in § 5.2., wind is the second most important source for the production of renewable energy in Europe (Šturk 2012).

(6.44) Every year AVANTI takes part in *numerous* **wind energy** *related exhibitions*, conferences and trade shows *around the world*. (Avanti Wind Systems AS)

In the example above, information is provided about the company's contributions to activities related to its particular business. Besides being informative, the example is also persuasive. "Wind energy" is embedded in a long noun phrase, where the head is "exhibitions". The noun phrase is positively evaluated by the adjective "numerous". A further instance of positive evaluation is implied in the adverbial *around the world*. Overall, the company aims at presenting itself as competent, committed and successful.

The Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus provides evidence of another specific energy source, which frequently collocates with "energy", i.e. "solar". The cluster "solar energy" occurs in the About Us/Company sections of dnpSolar, ib vogt GmbH, juwi AG and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. Similarly to the example in (6.44), in the example (6.45) below the collocation "solar energy" is embedded in a noun phrase to premodify the head "market". The noun phrase includes an example of positive evaluation as represented by the lexical booster "fast-growing".

(6.45) PCC *is aiming to* gain access to the *fast-growing* **solar energy market**.
(PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

PCC Deg Renewables GmbH is at the moment active in the production of renewable energy from hydropower. In the above example, the company states its future intention to enter a new business area (i.e. the production of solar energy) by the future form "is aiming".

The Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus provides examples of the "renewable energy" collocation. This is to be retrieved in the About Us/Company sections of Avanti Wind Systems AS, ib vogt GmbH, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. The collocation "renewable energy" designates the area in which a company is active more broadly, as in the following example.

(6.46) JL MAG Europe's markets are: E-Mobility, **Renewable Energy**, High Tech Systems. (JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe)

Overall, (6.46) is informative, as it lists the areas in which the company operates.

With regard to "efficient", it is to be noted here that this adjective collocates on the right of the keyword. The pattern "energy efficient" occurs in the About Us/Company sections of juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, and it is used as a premodifier in larger noun phrases. For instance, in the example below, it premodifies the binomial

“equipment and systems”.

(6.47) [...] the *excellent* conductivity of copper helps us to design **energy efficient equipment and systems**. (Luvata Pori Oy)

“Energy efficient” positively evaluates the products of the company. Besides, positive evaluation is provided by the lexical booster “excellent”, which denotes the material employed by the company to manufacture its products.

Finally, a word of caution needs to be expressed about the collocates “division” and “chemicals”, as these collocations emerge exclusively in the About Us section of the PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. Accordingly, it might be contended that these patterns lie with the linguistic choices that characterize this company only. To start with, regardless of its left or right collocation, “division” is used to premodify or postmodify “energy” with reference to one of the business areas¹⁸ in which the company operates, as in the example below.

(6.48) This transaction represents the final step in PCC SE’s realignment of its **Energy Division** [...]. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

Secondly, when “energy” collocates with “chemicals” reference is again made to one of the company’s business areas. Yet, a close investigation of the concordance lines reveals that this pattern is used either to outline the structure of the group, as illustrated in (6.48), or as an active link leading to the web pages dedicated to this business areas. The names of the company’s business areas in fact feature among the generic links in the navigation bar on the homepage, and they are replicated on other web pages within the website as well.

(6.49) PCC’s three pillars: **Chemicals - Energy – Logistics** (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

Hence, “chemicals” and “energy” do not actually collocate. Conversely, they frequently occur next to each other in the corpus, as a consequence of the linguistic and hypertextual choices of one particular company.

Having tackled meaningful lexico-grammatical patterns that emerge from the REnEU corpus with regard to the company’s presentation in the About Us sections, and having disclosed instances of descriptive and of evaluative language, as well the interplay between the two, in the next section attention will be devoted to the influence of the Web affordances on the projection of the company’s image. Some preliminary results of the correlation between language and the hypertextual and interactive features of the companies’ websites

¹⁸ PCC Deg Renewables GmbH operates in three industry areas: energy, chemicals and logistics.

have already been brought forward while conducting the lexico-grammatical analysis. In what follows, these results will be complemented by a mapping further frequent hypertextual and interactive strategies implemented to connect the web pages included in the About Us sections, and by conducting a qualitative analysis of significant visual elements.

6.2.2. *Analysis of hypertextual, interactive and visual elements*

The analysis conducted in this section is predominantly qualitative and multimodal, in that it focuses on how meaning is constructed in the About Us/Company sections in the REnEU corpus by means of hypertextual/interactive and visual elements. Therefore, the qualitative approach which I have adopted is grounded in Lemke's (2002) notion of hypermodality, i.e. the combination of multimodality and hypertextuality (see § 5.1.). This approach will provide guidance in tackling the generic dimension of the macro-sections under scrutiny. Additionally, significant rhetorical features which will emerge from the 'hypermodal' context of the macro-sections will be isolated and examined, when these seem to be interrelated with both the multimodal/hypertextual and the generic dimension of the About Us/Company sections.

To start with, the hypertextual dimension of the About Us/Company sections will be accounted for, since the macro-sections under scrutiny are often made up of a number of web pages, as the lexico-grammatical analysis carried out in § 6.2.1 has indicated. The About Us/Company sections are comparable to company brochures, as they provide an institutional presentation of the companies. Yet, the analysis of the hypertextual dimension of the macro-sections will show that some companies have embedded other corporate texts such as the mission statement into this macro-sections, as some of the examples in § 6.2.1 seem to imply. In this sense, the About Us section might be conceptualized as a constellation of texts, which together contribute to building and projecting the companies' positive image. The analysis conducted in this section will provide further evidence to this, as the presence of another texts typical of the corporate world, e.g. the CSR report, will be revealed.¹⁹

Furthermore, given that in web-mediated communication meaning is co-constructed by textual and visual elements alike (Spitzberg 2006), and given that company brochures are polysemiotic (Martin 2001), images are paramount as they contribute to the overall communicative function of the websites.

¹⁹ The present analysis will disclose how the CSR report has been 'remediated' in the companies' websites in the REnEU corpus, by taking advantage of the Web affordances. Nonetheless, the presence of CSR in corporate websites is attested in two studies by Esrock and Leichty (1999, 2000), conducted on a sample of *Fortune* 500 corporation during the early years of web-mediated corporate communication. The content analysis carried out in the first study retrieved CSR issues in 80% of the websites sampled. Conversely, the analysis carried out in the second study purported to measure the prominence of content types in the websites. Accordingly, CSR issues were given prominence in 44% of the websites.

Three companies will not be considered in the present analysis, i.e. enso hydro GmbH, Profish Technology SA and Sveaskog Förvaltning AB. In fact, the composition of their institutional profiles has been extensively discussed in §§ 6.1 and 6.1.1, since their homepages do not present any generic link providing direct access to the company's profile. However, the analysis conducted in §§ 6.1 and 6.1.1 has demonstrated that the companies *de facto* deploy other hypertextual strategies to lead navigators to the company's self-presentation, thus rearranging the usual composition of About Us/company sections, which seem to characterize the other websites in my corpus.

In sum, the hypertextual/interactive and multimodal elements retrieved on the web pages will be analyzed in the light of Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's (2005) categorization of the functional units on the homepage of corporate websites, on the assumption that their framework seems to provide a springboard for the investigation of the generic features of other online texts. The visual elements will be categorized according to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design (see also § 3.3 in this work).

In general, once accessed the macro-section by clicking on the corresponding link on the homepage, the navigator is presented with a graphical control element which resembles a 'table of contents', since it showcases the web pages included in the macro-section. The table of contents might be static or dynamic. In the former case, it is organized either vertically or horizontally, while in the latter case it is realized by means of a drop-down menu. In the few cases where the company's institutional self-presentation occupies one single web page, no table of contents is provided. Overall, when a table of contents is provided, the links which it includes can be conceptualized as functional units: on the one side, the links offer an overview of the content of the macro-section, while on the other side they provide access to it. In this sense, they bear resemblance to the generic links included in homepages, as categorized by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005, see also § 3.2.1).

In what follows, I have adopted the graphic control element featured in the About Us/Company sections, here referred to as 'table of contents', as the springboard for my hypertextual and multimodal analysis. The table of contents will provide guidance in retrieving web-mediated instances of mission statements and CSR reports.

Static, vertically oriented table of contents

As for the first pattern, the table of contents is showcased on the left side of the screen, and it presents the links as stacked one on top of the other, as shown in the screenshot in Figure 6.9 on the following page. The companies which present a static, vertically oriented table of contents in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus are Acciona Energía Solar SL, Bonfiglioli

Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, Cryostar SAS and Turboden Srl, while the companies in the Transition Circle sub-corpus are Avanti Wind Systems As, Geotermica AB, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Mervento Oy. Besides, juwi AG and Mabanafit GmbH also feature a vertical table of contents, but it is positioned on the left-hand side of the page. In order to exemplify the composition of the web pages within the About Us/Company sections organized around a static, vertically oriented table of contents, I will illustrate the case of Turboden Srl.

As it can be gleaned from Figure 6.7, the elements on the web page can be organized along two axes, i.e. along a horizontal axis and along a vertical axis. Here it is argued that the elements organized along the horizontal axis realize a Given-New polarization (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996 [2006]). In fact, not only the static table of contents is placed on the left, but also the company logo is positioned in the top right-hand corner of the page.²⁰ As for the logo, it can be assumed that it fulfils the same function theorized by Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005) in the case of homepages (see § 3.2.1), i.e. establishing the company's credentials, when the message-receiver accesses a homepage in the reading mode.

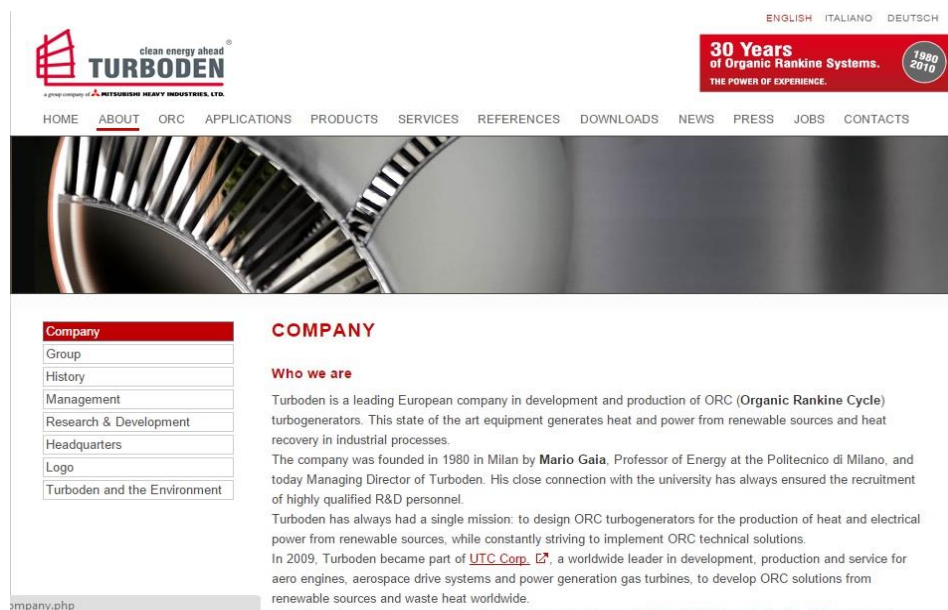


FIGURE 6.7. Detail of a web page within the About Us/Company section of Turboden Srl.

Therefore, it is here contended that, by placing the table of contents and the logo on the left side of the screen, the message-sender (or sign-maker, in keeping with the framework proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996[2006]), makes sure that web users understand the meaning encoded in the composition when they scan the web page from the left to the right.

²⁰ The logo is an active hyperlink leading to the homepage of the website.

New information is positioned on the top right-hand corner of the screen, where a rectangular clickable object leads the navigator to a further web page within the Company section, celebrating the company's 30 years of experience in the area of Organic Rankine Systems (ORC). This web page is introduced by the heading "History", and it can be selected from the table of contents as well.

As for the elements arranged along the vertical axis, they realize the Ideal-Real polarization, which is common in promotional texts (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]). Hence, the elements positioned on the top section of the web page, i.e. the company logo on the left, the square clickable object on the right, and the rectangular image spanning the width of the screen, i.e. the banner, fulfil a persuasive function. The banner can be regarded as a framing device too, as suggested by Bolaños Medina *et al.* (2005), since it divides the screen into two sections. Hence, the elements on the lower section of the web page fulfil an informative function. Accordingly, the lower section of the web page includes the company's self-presentation, which is encoded both by textual and by audiovisual information. As a matter of fact, the preview of a YouTube video²¹ is exhibited on the web page.

Next, the use of colours on the web page in the About Us section of Turboden Srl deserves attention. Three colours are used: white, red and grey. These colours characterize the company logo, which consists of grey text accompanied by red graphic elements placed on a white background. In this sense, the colours fulfil the ideal function conceptualized by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]), as they are used to identify the sign-maker. Red is used for the heading "Company" and the sub-heading "Who we are", thus fulfilling the so-called textual function (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]). In fact, red is used to distinguish the various elements of the composition. Besides, the colour scheme that emerges in Figure 6.7 is to be retrieved across all the web pages in the macro-section, and in the rest of the website, too.

Banking on these observations, it is here suggested that the potential of language, of hyperlinks, of (audio)visuals and of colours is exploited in a congruent way in the macro-section dedicated to the company's self-presentation in Turboden Srl's website. This testifies to the fact that the About Us/Company sections are polysemiotic, just as much as company brochures. Accordingly, all the texts that are embedded in this macro-section are complemented by multimodal resources to construct meaning. It follows that those genres which traditionally constructed meaning predominantly via the textual mode, are now polysemiotic too, as a consequence of the process of 'remediation' they have undergone on

²¹ <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOhVQPevQvk>>, last accessed on 15 January 2015. The video is 3'59" long, and it has an English voice-over.

the Web.

This applies for instance to the mission statement. The presence of the mission statement is usually revealed by the table of contents. With regard to the macro-sections organized around the static, vertically oriented table of contents, the following companies have uploaded a mission statement: Avanti Wind Systems As, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, Geotermica AB, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Mabanaft GmbH and Mervento Oy. Each company phrases the hyperlink to (and therefore the heading of) the mission statement in a different way. In some cases, the text of the mission statement is organized on more than one web page, as illustrated below:

- 1) Avanti Wind Systems As: one web page with heading "Mission and Vision"
- 2) Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA: one web page with the heading "Vision & Mission";
- 3) CHO-Power - Europlasma Group: two web pages with the headings "Our Values" and "Our Vision";
- 4) Geotermica AB: one web page with the heading "Business idea, Strategy & Vision";
- 5) JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.: one web page with the heading "Mission Statement";
- 6) Mabanaft GmbH: one web page with the heading "Philosophy";
- 7) Mervento Oy: two web pages with the heading "Vision" and "Values".

With regard to the latter company, the table of contents displays two more generic links, respectively phrased as "Business Idea" and "Business Model". A close reading of the texts accessed by clicking on these links reveals features which can be attributed to the mission statement genre, as revealed by the lexico-grammatical analysis conducted in the previous section. These are for instance the receiver-excluding "we" and the possessive "our" to refer to the message sender, and the use of "will" to signal both deontic and dynamic modality, as in the following example taken from the "Business Idea" web page:

(6.50) *Our* target is to be a technology leader in wind turbine direct drive technology. As a provider of wind turbine power plant solutions *we will* concentrate on advanced system integration with a full understanding of all the wind turbine power plant processes. (Mervento Oy)

As far as the multimodal dimension of web-mediated mission statements is concerned, Figure 6.8 illustrates how textual information and visuals are integrated into the mission statement of JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.. The mission statement consists of a block of text followed by an image. The text and the image are placed on the right-hand side of the screen,

thus representing new information, while the company logo and the static table of contents are placed on the left-hand side, thus representing given information. The main colour used in the image is grey. This visual choice is congruent to the colour used in the navigation bar positioned under the logo, and it contributes to making the whole composition cohesive and coherent from a visual perspective, thus fulfilling the textual function of colours.



FIGURE 6.8. JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.'s mission statement.

The image portrays two robot-like figures pushing together the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. The intended meaning of the image is correlated to the heading “Connecting Mine to Application”, which in turn designates the company’s mission, as verbalized in the text:

(6.51) *Unlike traditional traders*, JL Mag Europe is directly connected to *HRE & LRE-material mining and magnet manufacturing*. (JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.)

In sum, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.'s mission is that of effectively combining two different activities characterizing the industry sector in which the company operates, i.e. “HRE & LRE-material mining and magnet manufacturing”. The proposition in (6.51) does not only provide factual information about the company’s activities, but it also promotes its positive image, by foregrounding the fact that it is different from its competitors. The prepositional phrase “Unlike traditional traders”, which is in a thematic position, implies that

the company is more efficient than its competitors. Besides, the use of terminology and of acronyms in (6.51) is noteworthy. These make the text opaque to an audience of lay people, thus indicating that the mission statement is mainly addressed to a specialized audience.

Finally, with regard to the 'remediation' of the CSR report into the About Us/Company section, there is only one company in the group so far considered which displays a direct link to the web-mediated version of this text of corporate communication. This is the "Social Responsibility" web page in Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA's web site (Figure 6.9), which is to be accessed by clicking on "Social Project" in the table of contents.

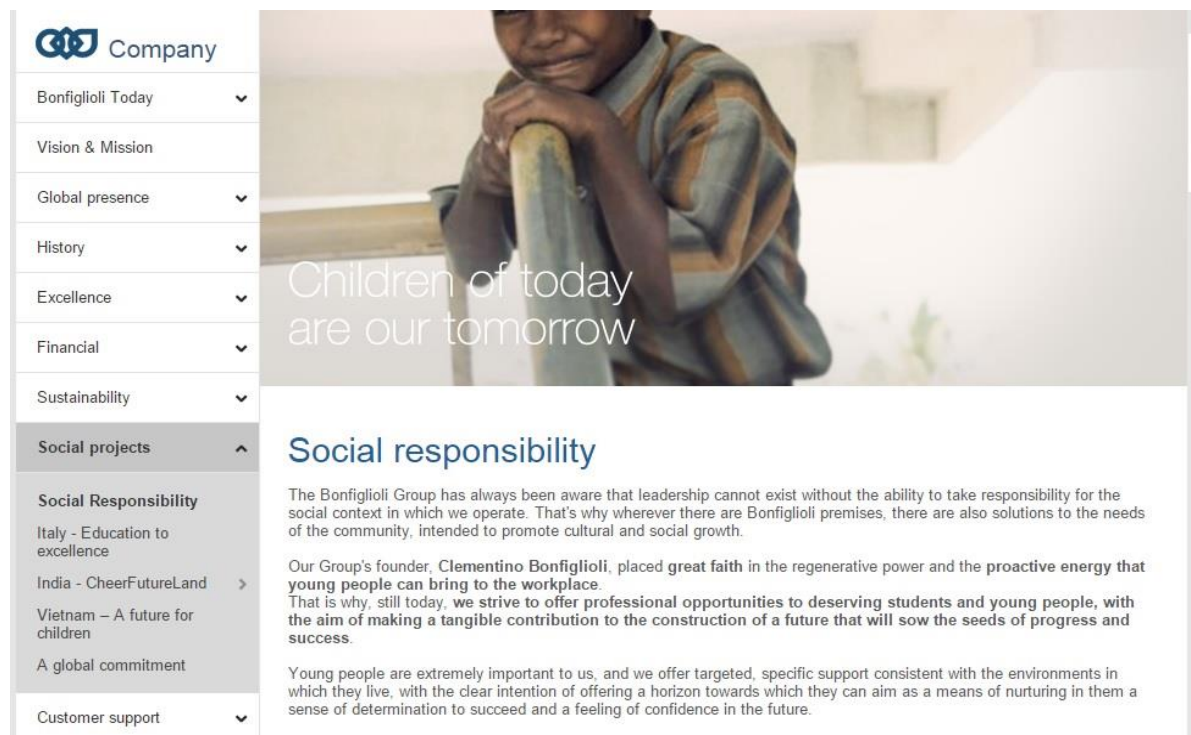


FIGURE 6.9. Detail of the "Social responsibility" web page in Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA's web site.

According to the framework propounded by Dahlsrud (2008, see also § 2.3) to conceptualize the dimensions of CSR, the social dimension seems to predominate in Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA's "Social responsibility". This is attested by the phrase "take responsibility for the social context" in the example in (6.52).

(6.52) The Bonfiglioli Group has always been aware that leadership cannot exist without the ability to take *responsibility for the social context* in which we operate. (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

As pointed out beforehand (§ 2.3), CSR is a fuzzy concept. However, CSR reports are paramount for corporate communication in today's globalized world: they substantiate the companies' responsibility in front of their stakeholders, and thus they are instrumental in

building and projecting the companies' positive identity.

From a generic standpoint, the CSR report has been conceptualized as a “colony-in-loops” by Bondi (2014), following from Parodi's (2010) theorization of the rhetorical organization of textbooks. Likewise textbooks, CSR reports are characterized by a recursive pattern, in the sense that they exhibit the same structure chapter by chapter, which is constituted by a preamble, a main report and a corollary. However, the CSR in Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA's website is *de facto* limited to one web page. This might be due to the fact that in this website, the CSR has been designed as a subordinate text contributing to the overarching communicative function of the Company section, that is, providing the company's institutional self-presentation. In this case, the CSR fits the screen in such a way that navigators do not need to continuously scroll down the page. This is in line with the property of granularity, which characterizes web-mediated discourse (Garzone 2007). Hence, the textual information is provided in block style (Bondi 2009).

Static, horizontally oriented table of contents

The companies presenting a static, horizontally oriented table of contents in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus are A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Fröling GmbH, IREM SpA, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, while in the Transition Circle 1# sub-corpus only EnBW AG is characterized by this pattern. As far as the latter company is concerned, by clicking on the hyperlink “Group” on the homepage of the website, the navigator is presented with the web page illustrated in the screenshot in Figure 6.10 on the next page.

As apparent from the screenshot, the hyperlink which is textually realized as “Group” in the navigation bar on the homepage is phrased as “Company” on the web pages in the macro-section. The “Company” hyperlink is placed in the left side of the company logo. The logo is positioned in the top left-hand corner of the screen across all the web pages in the website, in much the same way as the logo of Turboden Srl and of JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.. In the top right-hand corner of the screen, a search box has been provided, in order to allow navigators to submit queries to be processed by the search engine integrated in the website.

Below the table of contents, the path which the navigator has followed to access this page is indicated: “Company>The Group”. The terms featured in the path are two active links, while below the path, three further links are realized by clickable images. The image positioned in the upper section of the web page is a rectangular banner, and it spans the width of the screen. The two other images positioned below the rectangular image are square, and smaller than the rectangular image. The rectangular image is an active link to the “About Us”

section, as apparent from the heading on the image. The square image on the left is accompanied by the heading “Energy Production”, but it leads to a “404 Not Found”²² web page in German.²³ The square image on the right is characterized by the heading “Download Centre”, and it leads to the same page which is accessed by clicking on the “Publications” link in the table of contents.

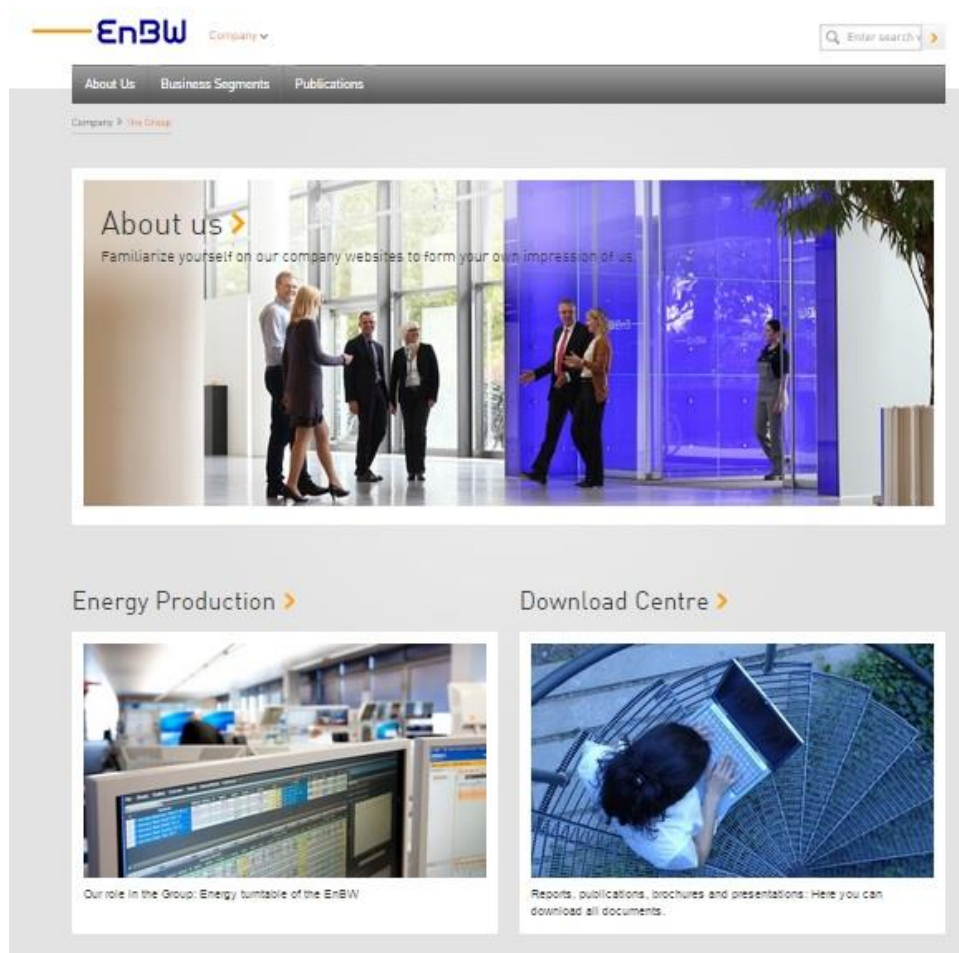


FIGURE 6.10. Detail of the first page of the Company section in EnBW AG's website.

Overall, the three clickable images are functional units realized in both the textual and the visual mode, that offer a preview of the content of the macro-section. In fact, along with the headings highlighted beforehand, the images include a lead as well. The lead placed on the rectangular image is noteworthy:

(6.53) *Familiarize yourself on our company websites* to form your own

²² This type of web pages is defined by Crowston and Williams (2000) as “Custom 404”, and it is categorized as a new genre emerged to serve the communicative needs of the Web medium. The authors describe Custom 404 as “customized pages reporting that the requested page could not be found, typically with information about the service provider and its logo” (Crowston & Williams 2000, 209).

²³ <https://www.enbw.com/company/the-group/energieerzeugung_neu/index_en.html>, last accessed on 15 January 2015.

impression of us. (EnBW AG)

The lead addresses the message receiver by means of the directive “familiarize”. This is part of a phrasal verb, yet it is not followed by the “with”, as codified by the *OED Online*,²⁴ but it is instead followed by “on”. However, this deviation from StE norms does not seem to prevent the message from getting across to its international receivers: the implied function of the lead, which correlates to the hyperlinks it accompanies, is to persuade navigators to browse further into the macro-section, in order to gather knowledge of the company.

Nonetheless, what actually seems to be misleading in the lead is the plural form “company websites”. This implies that EnBW AG owns more than one website. This does not seem to be the case. In fact, the company has published one website in two language versions, one in German, addressing all German-speaking stakeholders, and one in English, addressing all international stakeholders. The company website is complemented by an online annual report,²⁵ available in German and in English, which can be accessed by clicking on the link provided on the homepage. A whole website has been dedicated to the company’s annual report. This includes financial documents, and therefore it is primarily addressed to investors. The fact that EnBW AG’s has issued a hypertextual annual report is in keeping with Garzone’s (2009) contention that financial documents are sometimes made available as hypertext rather than in PDF format in order to appeal not only to their intended audience (i.e. investors), but also to extend their participation framework to include other stakeholder groups (Garzone 2009, see also § 3.3.1).

Following from these premises, it is here claimed that EnBW AG’s hypertextual annual report is a hypertext which is connected to the corporate website, and which has adapted the generic features of annual reports to the Web. EnBW AG’s hypertextual annual report partakes of the company’s online corporate communication, and on this assumption it has been included in the REnEU corpus as part of EnBW AG’s corporate website. As for the plural form “websites” in the lead in (6.53), this might be explained by referring to the lead in the German company’s website.²⁶ This includes the plural compound noun *Unternehmensseiten*, i.e. “pages about the company”. It is my contention that this plural noun refers to the array of web pages that make up the company’s profile, and not to the existence

²⁴ “Familiarize, v.”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67962?redirectedFrom=familiarize>>, last accessed on 14 January 2015.

²⁵ <<http://report2013.enbw.com/home.html>>, last accessed on 15 January 2015. According to Bhatia (2004), annual reports are primary members of the colony of reporting genre, but secondary members of the colony of promotional genre (see § 3.13).

²⁶ “*Machen Sie sich auf unseren Unternehmensseiten selbst ein Bild von uns*”, <<https://www.enbw.com/unternehmen/konzern/index.html>>, last accessed on 15 January 2015.

of any other company's websites.²⁷ If that is the case, the reference to other hypothetical yet unavailable company's websites in the English rendition of *Unternehmensseiten* might actually be misleading for a non-German speaking navigator.

Finally, the three clickable images deserve attention, as they are dynamic. In fact, by moving the mouse pointer on the images, the images become yellow, and an arrow head appears on the right side of image, as shown in Figure 6.11 below.

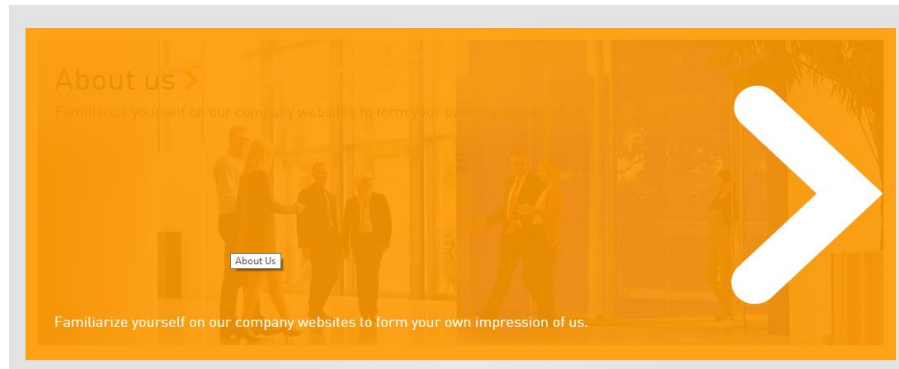


FIGURE 6.11. Dynamic clickable image in the Company section of EnBW AG.

Together with blue, yellow is included in the colour scheme of the website, and it characterizes the company's logo, too, thus fulfilling both the ideal and the textual function. As for the ideal function, yellow identifies the company, while as for the textual function, it integrates the clickable images within the web page layout in a congruent way.

As for the 'remediation' of mission statements and of CSR reports in the group of macro-sections considered here, it has been observed that only the website of A. Silva Matos Energia SA features a web-mediated version of the mission statement. This is realized on three web pages, which are accessible from the table of contents by clicking on the links "Mission", "Vision" and "Values". None of the macro-sections seem to include a CSR report. Nonetheless, close reading of the web page "Our 2020 Goals" embedded in EnBW AG's company's profile (Figure 6.12) has revealed the presence of the dimensions of CSR (Dahlsrud 2008).

²⁷ The company's (or corporate) website is referred to as *Unternehmenswebsite* (Fischer 2013) in research conducted in German. The spelling forms *Unternehmenswebseite* (Schloffer 2013) and *Unternehmens-Webseite* (Limbach, Wulf, Zarnekow, & Dueser 2012) are attested as well.

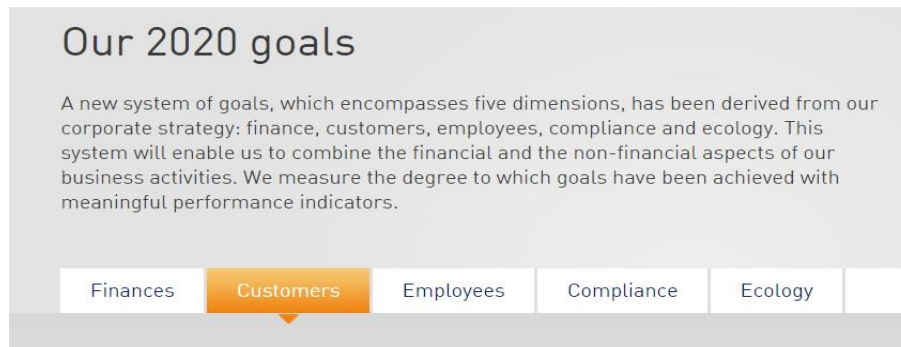


FIGURE 6.12. Detail of “Our 2020 goals” web page in EnBW AG’s website.

As evident from the screenshot in Figure 6.12 above, the company’s goals for the year 2020 are substantiated by the notions of “Finance”, “Customer”, “Employees”, “Compliance” and “Ecology”.²⁸ Each of EnBW AG’s notions corresponds to a hyperlink, which provides access to a web page with further textual information. This in turn shows the characteristics of four out of the five dimensions of CSR, as demonstrated by the following examples:

(6.54) One of the Energiewende’s overriding objectives is *climate protection*.

(6.55) We have anchored the *protection of the environment and climate* in our corporate goals. (EnBW AG)

The examples above, which are taken from the “Ecology” web page, testify to the environmental dimension of CSR by means of the phrases “climate protection” and “protection of the environment and climate”. The use of the receiver-excluding pronoun “we” and the possessive adjective “our” to refer to the message-sender is to be noted as well, as they aim at personalizing the company. The possessive “our” occurs in the following examples as well. These are taken from the “Finance” web page, and they testify to the economic dimension:

(6.56) Our primary objective is *to secure our profitability*.

(6.57) Our declared long-term goal is *to raise the value of the company*. (EnBW AG)

The economic dimension is substantiated by the to-infinitive patterns, both followed by a direct object, i.e. “to secure our profitability” and “to raise the values of the company”. The following examples, taken from the “Customers” and “Employees” web pages respectively, verbalize the stakeholders dimension:

²⁸ These five notions are designated as “dimensions” by the message-sender.

(6.58) Supplying *our customers* reliably and safely with energy has been given the utmost priority.

(6.59) [...] *we* are dedicated to *sustainability* and take *our commitment to employees and corporate social responsibility* very seriously. (EnBW AG)

Firstly, it can be noticed that “we” and “our” are used consistently on this web page too. Secondly, the lexical choices which verbalize the stakeholder dimension are “customer”, “sustainability” and “commitment to employees and corporate social responsibility”. Obviously, two stakeholder groups are addressed on these web pages, i.e. customers and employees. In addition to this, it is noteworthy that the notion of sustainability is taken into consideration, and that the concept of corporate social responsibility is mentioned as well.

Finally, the voluntariness dimension is made explicit on the “Compliance” web page. On this web page, a variety of measures taken by the company to perform its business, and which are “above regulatory requirements” (Dahlsrud 2008, 6) are listed:

(6.60) *Our* compliance activities, meaning *our measures* to comply with *statutory rules and regulations* as well as corporate guidelines, comprise *prevention, detection and the sanctioning of corruption*, as well as *violations of competition and anti-trust law and data protection*. (EnBW AG)

In sum, the survey carried out so far seems to attest to the fact that the web pages made accessible via the hyperlink “Our 2020 goals” adapt the role and function of CSR to the Web medium. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the message-sender refers explicitly to “corporate social responsibility” in (6.59). On top of this, it is possible to assume that the recursive structure of the CSR report has been applied to the five web pages from the point of view of the layout, since the web pages display the same composition: the information is in fact organized in blocks of text followed by charts, while images are absent.

Dynamic table of contents (drop-down menu)

The companies which feature a drop-down menu in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus are GOLIATH Wind OÜ, Micron – Cappello Alluminio Srl, Silcio SA, while in the Transition Circle 1# sub-corpus the companies are Deep Drill Supply Group, ib vogt GmbH, Luvata Pori Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH and Vapo Oy. Among the companies in the Transition Circle #1, the case of ib vogt GmbH’s website is interesting for two reasons. First of all, the menu in this website does not ‘drop down’, but it actually goes upwards, once the navigators point the mouse cursor on the navigation bar. Secondly, the web pages in the About Us section are provided with a static table of contents as well, as exhibited by Figure 6.13 on the following page.

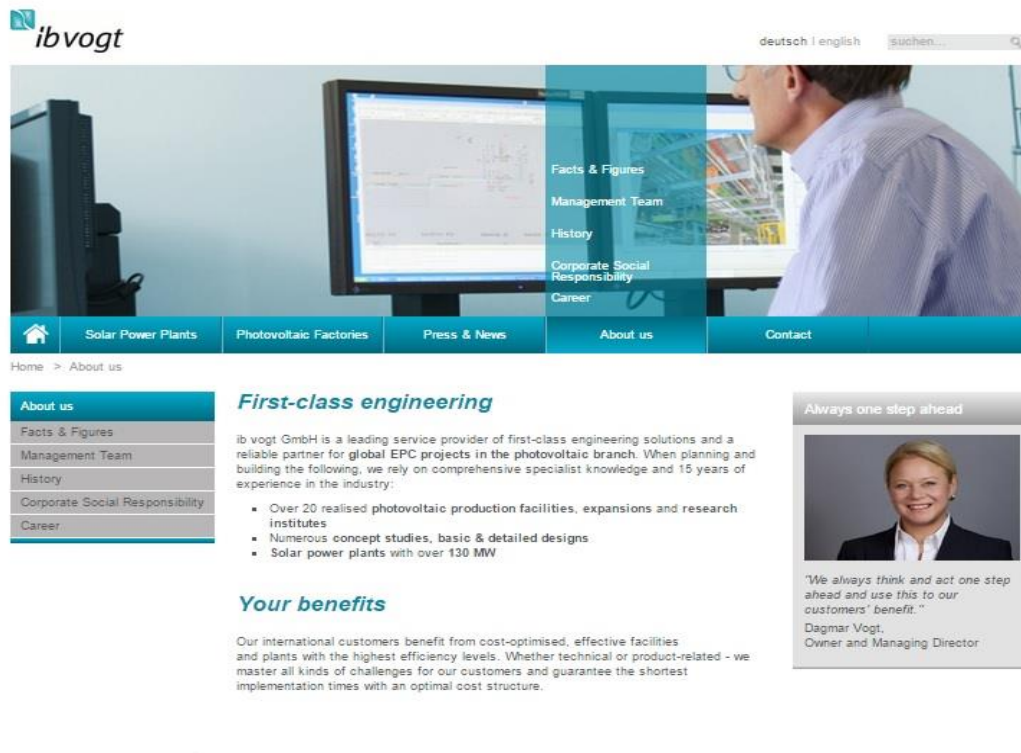


FIGURE 6.13. A web page within the About Us section of ib vogt GmbH.

The analysis of the composition of the web pages in the About Us section of ib vogt GmbH offers interesting insights, as it displays some of the characteristics that are congruent to the strategies taken on board by the other companies analyzed so far. Firstly, the web page illustrated in Figure 6.13 is organized along the horizontal as well as on the vertical axis. As for the horizontal axis, the company logo and the table of contents are placed on the left side of the screen, thus representing given information. Two hyperlinks which allow users to choose the language of the website (German or English), a search box, and the picture of ib vogt GmbH's owner and Managing Director, Dagmar Vogt, are placed on the right side of the web page, thus representing new information. Dagmar Vogt's picture is complemented by two textual items. The first is a heading ("Always one step ahead"), the second is a quotation summing up the company's philosophy. The receiver-excluding "we" is used to refer to Dagmar Vogt and the company, and emphasis is placed on one stakeholder group, that is, customer. Dagmar Vogt and her position within the company are identified in a caption after the quotation.

(6.61) "*We always think and act one step ahead and use this to our **customers'** benefit.*" Dagmar Vogt, Owner and Managing Director (ib vogt GmbH)

The quotation in (6.61) can be conceptualized as a general statement or claim, similar to those

that can be retrieved in mission statements. This is attested by the use of the receiver-excluding “we” and of the present tense.

As for the vertical axis, the logo and the rectangular image spanning the width of the screen represent the Ideal, while the table of contents, the text, and Dagmar Vogt’s picture represent the Real. The links allowing to change language and the search box placed in the top right-hand corner of the web page do not seem to fit in the Ideal-Real polarization, as they are understood mainly as interactive tools, rather than elements designating the ‘ideal’ dimension of the company. The path which navigators have followed to access the web page is displayed on the left, under the bigger image.

Moreover, the section below the image can be subdivided into three parts: the textual element is placed in the middle of the composition, thus representing “the nucleus of the information” (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996 [2006]), while the table of contents and the picture are placed on the left and right margin respectively, thus representing items which are subordinate to the text. Since the composition of *ib vogt GmbH*’s About Us section integrates the Given and New, the Ideal and Real, the and Centre and Margin dimensions into its composition, it is characterized by the Cross pattern (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]). This in turn reminds of the triptych composition adopted in the university websites investigated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]). However, the other web pages in the macro-section do not include Dagmar Vogt’s picture, thus leaving an empty space on the right side of the textual information. Hence, only the composition of first web page in the About Us section can be understood in categorized as a triptych pattern. As for the colour scheme, light blue, white and grey are used consistently across all the web page in the macro-section and in the website as well, thus fulfilling two functions, the ideal function, as they identify the sign-maker, and the textual function, as they integrate the web pages into the overall composition characterizing the website.

The screenshot in Figure 6.13 offers an overview of the content of the About Us section, as it can be gleaned from the hyperlinks/headings in the static table of contents and in the menu. Among others, the macro-section encompasses a web page disseminating information about the company’s history. A similar page can be observed in the company’s profile of *Turboden Srl*. As for the presence of the mission statement and of the CSR report in this group of macro-sections, three companies have uploaded a mission statement into their About Us/Company section. These are *Luvata Pori Oy* (“Strategy”), *Vapo Oy* (“Our Strategy”) and *Silcio SA* (“Our Goal”).

As for CSR reports, *ib vogt GmbH* and *PCC Deg Renewable GmbH* have one, named “Corporate social responsibility” and “Social Responsibility” respectively. Both CSR reports

by ib vogt GmbH and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH are limited to one web page. Nonetheless, three links are provided on ib vogt GmbH's CSR report, as it can be observed in Figure 6.14 below. By clicking on these hyperlinks, further blocks of text are displayed on the screen, along with hyperlinks leading to external websites owned by organizations collaborating with ib vogt GmbH.



FIGURE 6.14. CSR in ib vogt GmbH's website.

It is relevant to point out that the three hyperlinks seem to indicate that ib vogt GmbH's CSR is characterized by three of the dimensions outlined by Dahlsrud (2008, see also § 2.3), i.e. the social dimension ("Society"), the economic dimension ("Market and Innovation") and the environmental dimension ("Environment"). As for the stakeholder and the voluntariness dimensions, these can be gleaned from the text which is accessed by clicking on "Environment". Here reference is made to the company's "sustainability ethos", implying that the company operates "above regulatory requirements" (Dahlsrud 2008, 6). Besides, the relevance of customers and of employees is thematized as well, as apparent from the example in (6.62), thus accounting for the stakeholder dimension in ib vogt GmbH's CSR:

(6.62) We transfer *our sustainability ethos* to our *customers*. [...] It goes without saying that all of our *employees* are encouraged to use resources in a sustainable way in their daily work. (ib vogt GmbH)

In sum, ib vogt GmbH's CSR report incorporates the five dimensions categorized by Dahlsrud (2008), yet it does not exhibit the recursive pattern pinpointed by Bondi (2014). This might be due to the fact that the company has decided to embed its CSR into the About Us section, along with other texts, thus adapting its CSR to the properties (and constraints) of the medium. Yet, the macro-section as a whole can be *de facto* conceptualized as a colony-in-

loops (Parodi 2010) as it show the same hypertextual/interactive and visual patterns web page after web page.

Interestingly, as regards the exploitation of Web affordances and the choice of rhetorical strategies, ib vogt GmbH's CSR bears some resemblance to the mission statement of JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., which has been tackled in this section, and with the mission statement of the other companies tackled in the previous section. In fact, ib vogt GmbH's CSR fits one page, it is textually realized by relying on the receiver-excluding "we" and the present simple, it includes general statements, and it focuses on the company's stakeholders, as much as the mission statements analyzed so far. This further attests to the complexity and degree of ambiguity which characterizes the notion of CSR and its textual realization, and it might be explained in the light of the changes which texts undergo when they migrate onto the Web, due to the properties of the medium. In particular, it seems safe to argue that granularity is the property that affects these texts the most, as they are so designed as to fit within the boundaries of the screen.

At the same time, however, some companies might decide not to embed their CSR report into their company's profile, but to upload it into a separate macro-section, accessible via one generic link on the navigation bar on the homepage. This is the case of Silcio SA. In the navigation bar of Silcio SA's website, the hyperlink "CSR" is provided.²⁹ By moving with the mouse pointer on the hyperlinks, a drop-down menu with two further links appears, thus implying that the hypertextual CSR report of Silcio SA includes two web pages. These are "Environment" and "Sustainability". The text on both web pages complies with the block style typical of web writing.

From the perspective of rhetorical choices, the company is referred to by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun "we" and of the possessive adjective "our". With regard to Dahlsrud's (2008) dimensions of CSR, Silcio SA's CSR is characterized by the environmental, social, stakeholder and voluntariness dimension, as it can be gleaned from the excerpt that follows, taken from the "Sustainability" web page.

(6.63) *Integrity, sincerity and fair business contact* are values according to which *we* operate. This can be seen by the way *we* contact our business, by the work conditions of *our employees*, by the added value *we* are able to offer to our *clients and partners* and, finally, by our commitment to the *environmental preservation*. [...] SILCIO S.A. and its parent company groups are *actively*

²⁹ The "CSR" section of Silcio SA has been included neither in the survey of the macro-sections dedicated to the companies' institutional presentation (§ 6.1) nor in the word count run prior to the lexico-grammatical analysis conducted (§ 6.2.1). This is due to the fact that, while mapping the About Us/Company sections during the preliminary steps of the analysis, it was not possible to establish *a priori* that CSR reports are a common feature of the companies' profile.

engaged in the Green Economy that will revive the society and help the Environment. (Silcio SA)

The environmental dimension is catered for by reference to “environmental preservation” and “the Environment”. This is one of the main concerns of the company, alongside with “society”, which in fact testifies to the social dimension of the CSR. As for the stakeholder dimension, this is attested by reference to the company’s “employees”, “clients and partners”, while the voluntariness dimension is made explicit by the company’s claim that it operates according to such values as “Integrity, sincerity and fair business contact”.

About Us/Company section with no table of contents

Finally, the About Us sections of three companies in the REnEU corpus do not seem to fit in any of the three patterns outlined above, as their institutional presentation occupies a single web page, and therefore no graphical control element is required to navigate it. These companies are GA Drilling as in the Expanding Circle, and dnpSolar and Smart Hydro Power GmbH in the Transition Circle #1. In particular, the composition and the visual dimension of GA Drilling as’s About Us section deserves attention.

The web page dedicated to GA Drilling as’s institutional presentation consists of six vertically arranged segments, including textual and visual elements alike. The first four segments are introduced by headings which function as framing devices (“About Us”, “Vision & Core Values”, “History”, “Management”). The two segments in the bottom part of the screen are framed by the colour used on the background (see Figure 6.15 on the next page). The four upper segments have a white background, whereas the fifth segments has a grey background, and the sixth segments a dark brown background. In this sense, the colours chosen for the background are used as framing devices, thus fulfilling the textual function theorized by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]).

Besides, the two lower segments are vertically subdivided into two further segments. Each of the four segments thus framed is provided with a heading, which introduces a block of text and hyperlinks to other pages within the website. The four headings are “Investors relations” and “Latest News” in the upper segment, and “Research Projects” and “Contact Us” in the lower segment. Overall, the web page dedicated to GA Drilling as’s presentation is organized on the vertical axis. The upper segments of the page correspond to the Ideal, and fulfil a persuasive function. The upper segments are “About Us” and “Vision & Core Values”. As apparent from the latter segment, also GA Drilling as has embedded a mission statement within its company’s profile. As for the lower segments, these correspond to the Real, and

they provide factual information. These segments are “History”, “Management”, “Investors relations”, “Latest News”, “Research Projects” and “Contact Us”.

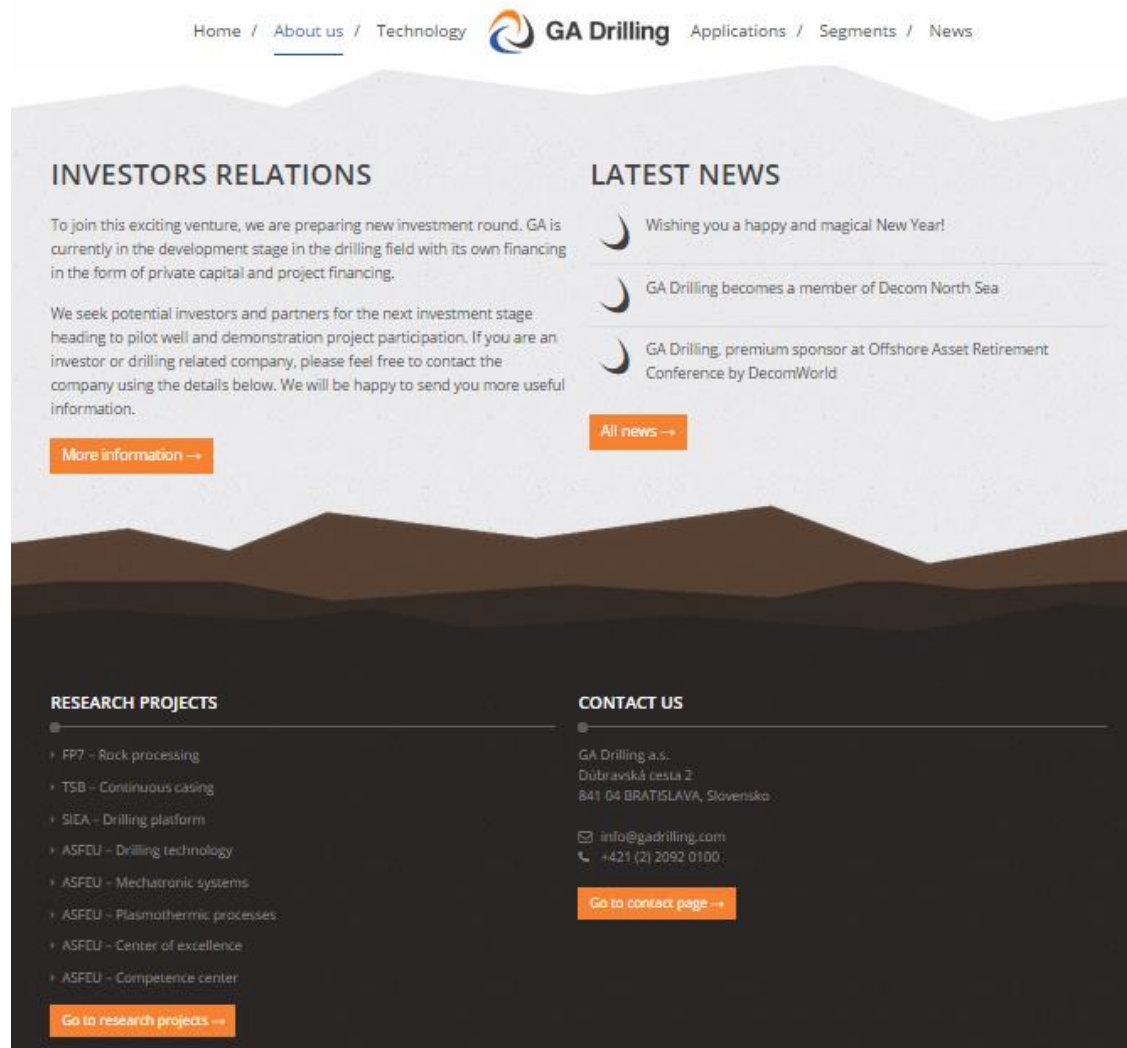


FIGURE 6.15. Lower segments of GA Drilling as's About Us section.

It is worth noticing that, since the company's profile has been organized on a single web page, rather than by connecting the different blocks with hyperlinks, navigators need to scroll up and down while looking for information. Therefore, it is here suggested that granularity has not been accounted for in the most appropriate way, since the organization of information on a single long web page does not seem to cater for optimal accessibility and readability on the navigators' part. However, it is also to be noted that, while scrolling down, the navigation map is displayed on the top of the screen, as it can be observed in Figure 6.15, hence providing navigators with a hypertextual/interactive tool which enables them to conveniently access other pages in the website.

Over and above this, GA Drilling as company's profile is noteworthy for its visual

characteristics. First of all, in contrast to what has been observed in the websites analyzed so far, the company's logo³⁰ is positioned in the middle of the navigation map, rather than in the left-hand corner of the screen. GA Drilling as's choice is congruent with the fact that the composition is organized along the vertical axis, rather than on the horizontal axis. Furthermore, given that the logo is placed in the navigation bar, it is always displayed on the screen, even when navigators scroll down till the bottom of the page. In this way, the logo is given prominence by its particular position within the web page layout.

Secondly, the four upper segments are all accompanied by images. The segment introduced by the heading "About Us" presents textual information on the right, and a picture of the company's staff on the right. On the background, the company's building is visible (Figure 6.16). The visual representation can be categorized as a classificational process, an in particular as a covert taxonomy (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], see also § 3.3 in this work). In this sense, the company's building might be regarded as the Superordinate, while the company's staff might be regarded as its Subordinate. This representation implies a hierarchical order between the company and its employees.



FIGURE 6.16. GA Drilling as's staff.

A further representation of the company's staff, and in particular of the company's executives, is included in the "Management" segment. In contrast to the representation in Figure 6.16, the company's executives are not represented as a group, but they are portrayed in single square pictures, followed by a textual presentation (Figure 6.17 on the following page).

³⁰ The logo is an active link leading to the homepage.

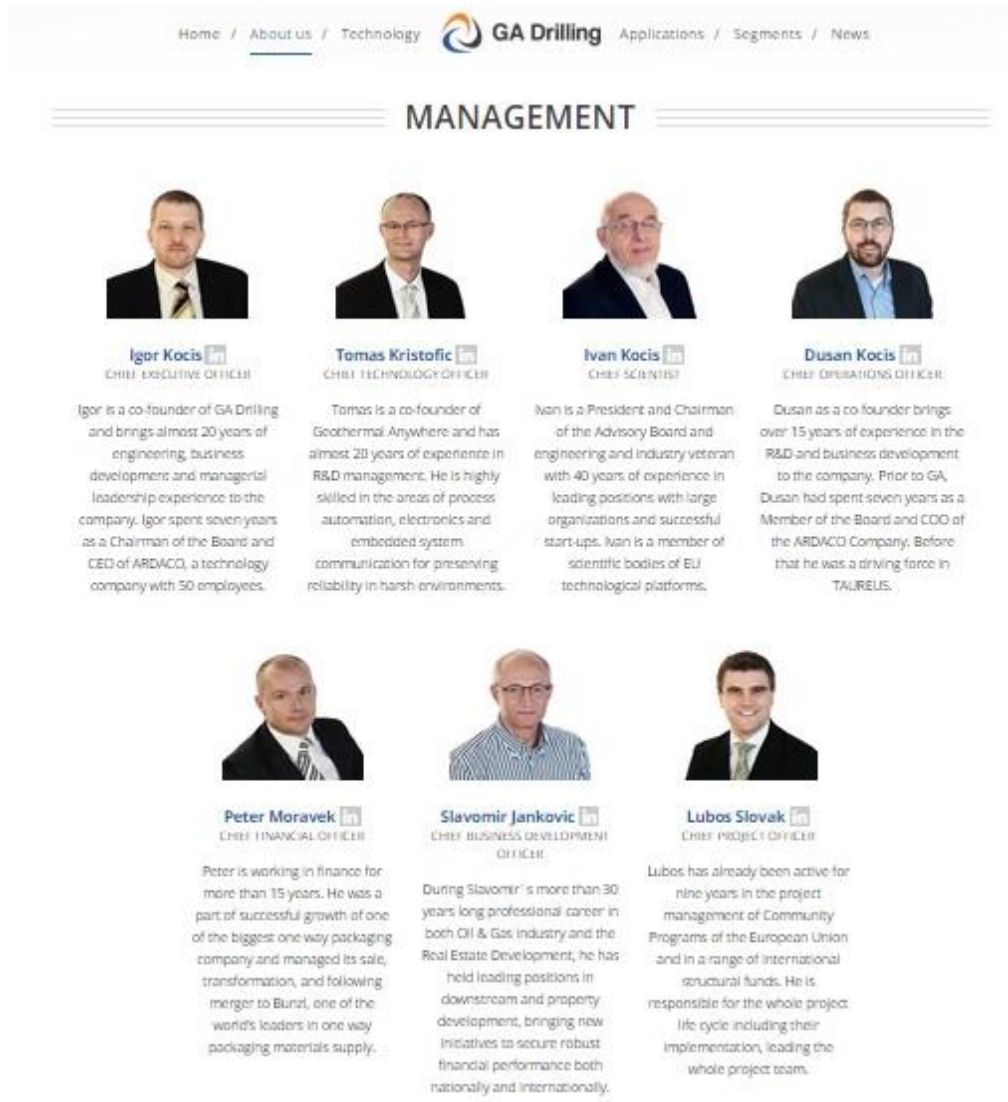


FIGURE 6.17. GA Drilling as's management.

The textual presentation is introduced by the executive's name and surname, and by his job title.³¹ As for the the visual representation of GA Drilling as's executive in the "Management" segment, this might be conceptualized as an analytical process (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]): the Carrier is represented by the management group as a whole, while the Possessive Attribute are represented by the individual executives' pictures. As postulated by Kress and Van Leeuwen, the representation of analytical processes is frequently used for the promotional purposes of advertising, so that the viewer can examine the Possessive Attributes of the Carrier in detail. In a similar vein, the representation of GA Drilling as's management is promotional, as it aims at projecting the company's positive image as a function of its staff's experience and competence. In fact, in the text placed below the pictures, the executives'

³¹ The small clickable icon "in" which is placed beside the name of each officer (see Figure 6.17) directs the web user to the officer's professional profile's published on the social network LinkedIn (<<http://www.linkedin.com>>. Retrieved on 15 January 2015). In fact, "in" is the short form for "LinkedIn", and it symbolizes this social network, which is targeted to professional audiences.

previous experience is presented, as in the following example:

(6.64) *Igor is a co-founder of GA Drilling and brings almost 20 years of engineering, business development and managerial leadership experience to the company. Igor spent seven years as a Chairman of the Board and CEO of ARDACO, a technology company with 50 employees. (GA Drilling as)*

The executive is referred to by his first name, and he is presented in the third person singular. Factual information is provided in terms of the number of years which he has spent working for different organizations in a position of authority. Overall, the factual information provided has an underlying persuasive function, as it aims at projecting the executive's image as somebody who is highly experienced, competent and reliable in its professional field. In sum, the executive and his colleague's positive image as constructed in the "Management" segment contributes to projecting the company's positive image as a whole.

Other images are displayed in the "History" segment. This segment is organized as a vertical timeline. The timeline spans from 2008, when GA was founded, to 2012. Important events are described for each year, and the textual information is complemented by small, rectangular pictures referring to the events which are highlighted. Finally, the company's mission statement, included in the segment entitled "Vision & Core Values", combines both text and visuals, and its overall composition resembles the one characterizing the "Management" segments. Nevertheless, some meaningful differences are to be pointed out.

First of all, from a textual point of view the heading is followed by a sub-heading. The sub-heading is positively connoted, as it foregrounds the company's leading role in the industry sector in which it operates:

(6.65) *Leader in Bringing 21st Century Technologies to Drilling Industry (GA Drilling as)*

Then, the textual information is organized into five small blocks describing the five company's value, i.e. trust, creativity, excellence, teamwork and responsibility. The receiver-excluding "we" and the simple present are used in all the five blocks of text, along the same line as the mission statements described beforehand in my analysis. The syntactic structure relies predominantly on parataxis. The lexis is positively connoted, and it revolves around concepts that are relevant to the company's stakeholders, as for instance employees, customers, investors and the community. These concepts are realized by the following nouns: "competence", "integrity", "honesty", "reliability", "trustworthiness", "persistence", "excellence", "out of box thinking", "teamwork", "knowledge and skills", "safety", "personal and professional growth", "stable financial position", "safe and healthy environment",

“balance between work and family”.

From a visual point of view, each text is preceded by a graphic, symbolic representation of the value, realized in orange and white, and enclosed in a circle, as displayed in Figure 6.18 below.

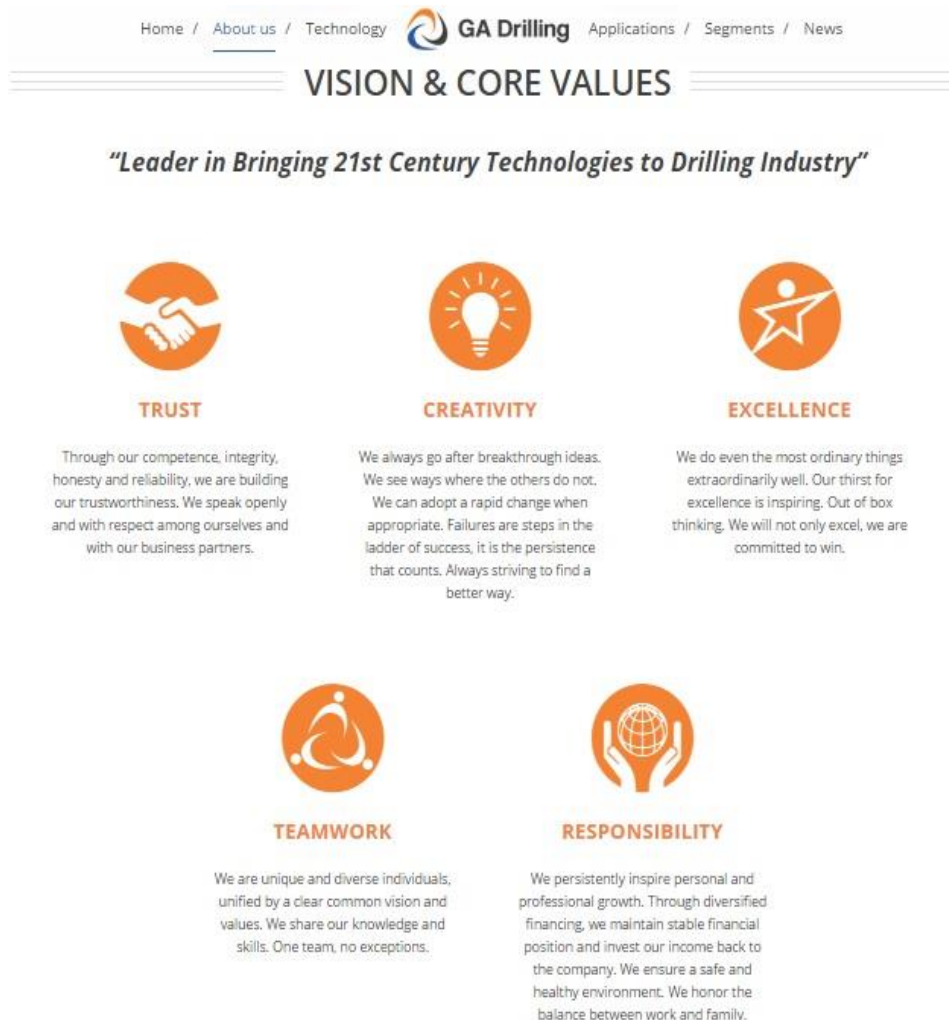


FIGURE 6.18. GA Drilling as's mission statement.

In contrast to the pictures published in the other segments, portraying the company's staff, or designating milestones in the company's developments, the visuals in GA Drilling as's mission statement are not naturalistic. Hence, it might be argued that the sign-maker has decided to represent abstract concepts graphically. Moreover, their graphic representation is not enclosed in a rectangle or in a square, as in the case of the pictures analyzed previously. As Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]) claim, circles are self-contained, and they are used to represent elements related to nature, while rectangular shapes designate the building blocks of the world. In this sense, GA Drilling as's staff have been represented as the “building blocks” of the company. Finally, orange is used in the names of the five values, and it is one

of the colours used in the company's logo as well. Hence, orange identifies the company, and it combines the element of the composition in a congruent whole. Accordingly, orange fulfils both the ideal and the textual function of colours.

As indicated previously, from the point of view of granularity, GA Drilling as's institutional presentation does not seem to guarantee optimal readability/accessibility, as the navigators need to scroll down the page to look for information. Hence the question arises whether it would have been more appropriate to devise an About Us/Company section comprising more web pages to be accessed via hyperlinks, as in the case of the other companies in the corpus. As for the other two companies which have uploaded their institutional self-presentation on a single web page, i.e. Smart Hydro Power GmbH and dnpSolar, it is to be pointed out that these aptly account for the property of granularity. As a matter of fact, the block of text fits the screen in both case. As regards Smart Hydro Power GmbH, navigators are presented with textual information in the upper section of the screen, yet they navigator need to scroll down the page to upload a visual element in the bottom section of the screen.

As for dnpSolar, the company's presentation fits the screenshot, and scrolling is not required. Nonetheless, as evident from the navigation map, the company's mission statement is on a separate web page, and it is made accessible from the generic links on the homepage, rather than being connected to the company's profile.³² The composition of dnpSolar's mission statement is noteworthy, as it is organized around the triptych pattern, in the same way as the first page in ib vogt GmbH's About Us section. The triptych pattern has been deployed consistently in dnpSolar's website, as it can be observed by navigating it.

As illustrated in Figure 6.19 on the next page, the composition of dnpSolar mission statement is a function of its vertical axis, its horizontal axis, and its centre and margins. As for the vertical axis, the Ideal is represented by the company's logo, the navigation map, and three images in the upper section of the page, which are arranged to form a banner, whereas the Real is represented by the textual information in the lower section. As for the horizontal axis, the logo represents given information, whereas the mission statement represents new information. To conclude, as regards the left and right margins of the composition, these are occupied in the upper section by a square picture, while the lower section is occupied by the corporate values on the left, and the by business values on the right. The margins are narrower than the centre of the composition, which is occupied by a rectangular image in the upper

³² Similarly to Silcio SA's "CSR" section, dnpSolar's "Mission" web page has been accounted for neither in the survey of the About Us/Company sections nor in the word count run prior to the lexico-grammatical analysis, since only the results of the analysis have revealed that the mission statement is frequently included in the macro-section dedicated to the companies' profile.

section, and by the mission statement in the lower section. Therefore, the block of text referring to the mission statement is visually represented as the nucleus of the composition, whereas the other elements are subservient to it.

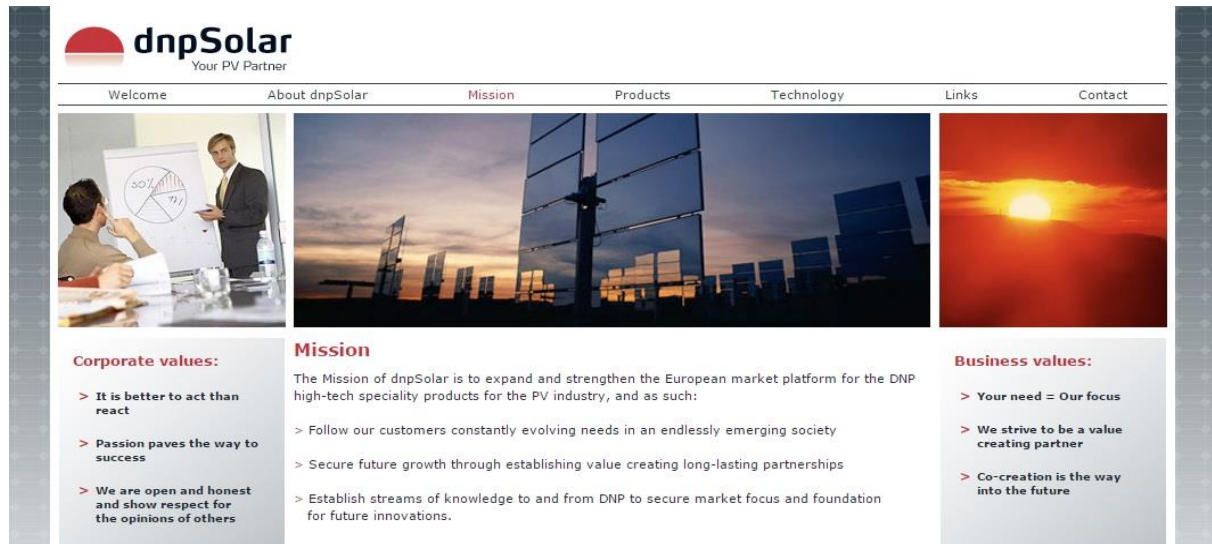


FIGURE 6.19. dnpSolar's mission statement.

As for the use of colours, the colour scheme includes grey, white and dark orange. Grey characterizes the margins of the composition, and the rectangular image above the mission statement. White is the colour used in the background of the upper section, and in the background of the mission statement, while dark orange characterizes the logo on the left, the square image on the right, and the headings introducing the textual information. Once again, the colour scheme carries out both the ideal and the textual function, since it identifies the sign-maker, and it is used to combine the elements of the composition into a coherent whole.

6.2.3. Discussion

The results of the lexico-grammatical analysis conducted in § 6.2.1 have shown that the companies' identity is built around information which regards their history, geographical location, industry sector, turnover, as well as around the positive evaluation of their philosophy and performance. The former elements are described by referring to the companies in the third person singular. Conversely, the latter elements are described by referring to the companies in the first person plural pronoun "we". The quantitative analysis of the word list has in fact revealed that in general companies try to personify themselves and reach out to their audiences by means of the receiver-excluding "we", rather than using the third person. Nonetheless, when the third person singular pronoun is adopted, communication is more formal, and the companies' image as authoritative is projected. Both references to the

company in the third person singular and in the second person plural are usually given prominence by being thematized.

With regard to the pronoun “we”, this might be combined with the second person pronoun “you”, which designates the stakeholders. Some of the stakeholder groups addressed in the examples selected for my analysis are those identified by van Riel and Fombrun (2007), i.e. employees, customers, investors. Additionally, suppliers, prospective partners and job seekers are mentioned. Hence, the use of both pronouns is instrumental in positioning the message-sender and the message-receiver in relation to each other. By addressing their stakeholders by means of the pronoun “you”, the companies seek to engage but also to invite them to take action. In fact, “you” is usually found in contexts where hyperlinks and interactive tools are provided. In other words, the pronoun “you” establishes an intratextual reference to interactive tools made available on the web page. In this sense, the pronoun “you” and the hyperlinks and interactive tools are interrelated, as they both prompt navigators to stay on the website, and navigate further.

Going back to the receiver-excluding pronoun “we”, the analysis of the lexicogrammatical patterns in the co-text accompanying the use of the receiver-excluding “we” has indicated that this pronoun frequently occurs on those web pages within the About Us/Company section which present the companies’ mission statement. Therefore, with regard to the genre properties of About Us/Company sections, it might be suggested that they have not only ‘remediated’ the company’s brochure, but they also serve as repositories for other genres of corporate communication, which have been translated into the Web medium, as for instance the mission statement.

A further genre of corporate communication which has been translated into the Web medium is the CSR report. Its presence has emerged during the qualitative analysis of the hypertextual/interactive and multimodal features of the macro-sections in the corpus. Nonetheless, when a CSR report is integrated into the About Us section, it complies with the properties (and constraints) of the Web in terms of granularity. In other words, it does not present the recursive structure of printed CSR reports, but it is realized in a block of text which fits the screen, so as to prevent navigators from scrolling up and down the page.

Conversely, there are cases which seem to attest that the properties of the medium have not been exploited to the full. This occurs when the About Us/Company section is organized on one single long web page, rather than on multiple web pages connected to each other via hyperlinks. If the page is long, navigators need to scroll down to access the item of information they are looking for. This choice does not seem to appropriately account for the property of granularity.

Besides, granularity seems to determine the block style that usually characterizes Web writing. Furthermore, Web writing is often pithy, and it displays features of the spoken language, as observed by Crystal (2001) and confirmed by Poppi (2011). Features of spoken language which are attested in my analysis are for instance the use of the pronoun “you” to directly address navigators, along with the presence of exclamation marks and questions. These textual realizations can be retrieved when navigators are invited to take action, or when they are provided with instructions as to how to access information within the website.

However, it has been indicated that the pronoun “you” ranks relatively low in the frequency word lists of both sub-corpora. In general, “you” occurs less frequently than the pronoun “we”, and in particular it ranks twenty-third in the Expanding Circle, and forty-eighth in Transition Circle #1. Moreover, it is sometimes the case that instructions are verbalized by employing hypotaxis, hedges and politeness markers. Hence, some linguistic choices do not seem to comply with the interactivity which is inherent in the Web medium. Communication is in fact more formal, it seems to rely heavily on textual information, rather than taking full advantage of the hypertextual and visual properties of the medium, and overall the promotional function of the websites is fulfilled only in part.

With regard to the promotional function of the macro-sections under scrutiny, the analysis has disclosed several instances of overt positive evaluation, which is realized by lexical boosters and positively connoted nouns. Overt positive evaluation is frequent in the co-text of the pronoun “we”. In particular, the notions which lie at the core of the positive corporate image, as evident from the companies’ lexical choices, are that of responsibility, reliability and sustainability. In particular, with regard to the industry sector in which the companies in the REnEU corpus operate, the adjective “sustainable” is paramount. This adjective is employed with both a descriptive and an evaluative function. “Sustainable” designates “forms of human activity (esp. of an economic nature) in which environmental degradation is minimized, esp. by avoiding the long-term depletion of natural resources”.³³

Nowadays, “sustainable” and “sustainability” are keywords in business discourse, not only in the area of renewable energy. In fact, in every industry sectors, companies aim at building and presenting their positive image by trying to minimize the impact of their activities on the environment and on human health, and by showing awareness of ecological issues. Relying on this assumption, it is apparent that the adjective “sustainable” is used not only at face value, that is, to describe the company’s performance, but also to persuade the audience about its commitment to environmental safety. Further instances of overt positive

³³ “sustainable, adj.”. OED Online. December 2014. Oxford University Press.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/195210?redirectedFrom=sustainable>>. Retrieved on 14 January, 2015.

evaluation are attested by lexical choices referring to the companies' expertise and to their international success.

However, it ought to be borne in mind that factual information can also be instrumental in positively evaluating the message-sender, as pointed out by Turnbull (2009). In my analysis, covert positive evaluation is sustained by instances of factual information, which describe the companies' performance in a transparent way, to further support the companies' image as expert and reliable. This is especially the case when numerical information is disseminated.

On top of this, evidence of the companies' communicative strategies to position themselves within the sector in which they operate is attested by the high incidence of the word "energy". This noun serves to foreground their business. The analysis of the co-text of "energy" has demonstrated how the companies' business is described by specifying the type of energy source exploited. Instances of covert evaluation have been chartered as well: by denoting energy as renewable, clean, and green, positive evaluation is implied. The rhetorical strategies adopted to denote energy go hand in hand with the focus on sustainability previously mentioned. Following from these observations, I hold that, by positively qualifying the sector in which they trade, the companies aim at extending their participation framework beyond their stakeholders to address the general public, on the assumption that contemporary issues of environmental degradation concern everybody.

As for the ways in which the macro-sections are structured and made accessible, these seem to be organized around the presence of graphic control elements, which I have named tables of content. A table of contents is provided when the About Us/Company section is made of various web pages, to provide guidance in the navigation. The survey of the macro-sections in the corpus has revealed that the affordances of the medium allow companies to realize the table of contents in a personalized way, and to organize the section accordingly.

With regard to the visuals, these appear as multifunctional units. To start with, they are used as framing and/or as cohesive devices. This is the case of the colour scheme adopted, and of the images featured on the various web pages. As for the latter, these are often characterized by the same size, or they appear in the same position on the screen, across the various web pages in the macro-section. A consistent pattern is therefore obtained not only across the About Us section, but also across the website as a whole.

In addition to these, both colours and images are used to identify the message-sender (or sign-maker). This is attested for example by the presence of the companies' logo, which is generally positioned in the top left-hand corner of the screen. The colours used in the logo usually determine the colour scheme of the website. The role and function of the logo is

meaningful to construct the companies' identity. As a matter of fact, according to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) logos are among the symbols utilized by companies to construe their identity (see § 2.3). Finally, the message-sender/sign-maker might as well be identified by pictures of the companies' management and staff. This visual strategy is integrated by textual elements presenting the people represented in the pictures uploaded in the About Us sections, as in the case of *ib vogt GmbH* and *GA Drilling as*.

Before concluding these preliminary discussion of the results presented so far, I would like to comment on the role of English by drawing upon the results scrutinized in § 6.2.1. Overall, the linguistic patterns analyzed seem to comply with NS norms in both Transition Circle #1 and Expanding Circle sub-corpora. This is in line with Ehrenreich's contention (2010) that corporate communication is conceived so as to abide by StE, for the sake of the companies' prestige. However, instances of the hybrid language which characterizes global websites in English (Taviano 2010) have also been disclosed. For example, the use of figurative language in (6.36) ('to know something like one's own pocket') seems to demonstrate that English has been appropriated to coin a new idiomatic form. The idiomatic form thus obtained might have been influenced by the message-sender's first language. Therefore, it is here suggested that English has been used in a creative way. Yet, the question arises if this might compromise understanding on the part of the international audiences.

Understanding might be as well compromised by the wrong word choice. In the example in (6.53), the compound "company websites" might bring about some ambiguity. In fact, the whole proposition seems to refer to the web pages in the About Us sections. This might be inferred by the context in which the proposition is located, i.e. on the first web page of an About Us section, designed to introduce navigators to the other web pages in the macro-section. However, deviations from StE in terms of grammar structures, as for example the phrasal verb in (6.53) do not seem to negatively affect understanding of the message.

6.2.4. *Final remarks*

The analysis carried out in this chapter has provided insights into the communicative strategies deployed by companies to shape their identity as reliable business partners, and to project their positive image in front of their international stakeholders, in the so-called About Us/Company section of corporate websites. As stated by Bhatia and Lung (2006), in today's world of business, "a corporation will never miss an opportunity to appraise its identity to interested audiences whether potential or real" (Bhatia & Lung 2006, 273). The communicative strategies which have been disclosed in this chapter with regard to lexicogrammatical patterns on the one side, and hypertextual/interactive and multimodal features on

the other side, are consistently integrated to contribute to the meaning-making process. In particular, the About Us/Company sections in the REnEU corpus have been analyzed from a hypertextual standpoint, with a view to nailing down common strategies implemented to link the web pages to each other within the macro-sections. Besides, while mapping the internal organization of the macro-sections, it has been observed how the potential of images, of the layout and of the colour scheme is exploited to encode meaning and thus fulfil the communicative function of the About Us/Company section.

In sum, the About Us/Company sections might be considered repositories of texts that can be classified under the umbrella term of corporate communication. The texts are usually uploaded on a variety of web pages interconnected by hyperlinks, and they all contribute to the companies' communicative agenda by shaping a positive corporate identity. The function of this macro-section is carried out by both textual and visual elements, while hyperlinks and interactive tools make navigation possible across the web pages. The macro-sections are realized as coherent and cohesive textual constellations, where the various web pages are characterized by the same multimodal pattern. Due to their recursive features, the About Us/Company sections might be categorized as instances of a colony-in-loops.

CHAPTER VII

The ‘what we do’ of companies’ global websites in the REnEU corpus

In this chapter I will pursue the objectives set up by the research questions formulated in the Introduction (Chapter 1) of this dissertation by analyzing the web pages included in the products and services portfolios of the companies’ websites in the REnEU corpus. Similarly to the companies’ institutional profile, the web pages scrutinized in this chapter are usually organized into macro-sections, as it will be pointed out in § 7.1. The approach adopted to conduct the analysis in the present chapter is multimethod, similarly to the approach adopted in Chapter 6. Banking on the conceptual framework of MDA surveyed in Chapter 3, the macro-sections will be investigated to cast light on the rhetorical strategies, hypertextual/interactive features and visual components they display.

The macro-sections dedicated to the companies’ products and services are given attention in the present Chapter in order to integrate the discussion conducted in Chapter 6. The results presented in the previous chapter report on the promotional purposes of companies’ websites, as substantiated by the construction of a positive corporate identity, which is in turn reflected in the positive corporate image which ensues. According to Perry and Bodkin (2002), the About Us/Company sections are focused on the companies’ institutional advertising (see also § 5.3). Conversely, in this chapter I attempt to demonstrate that the web pages about the companies’ products and services subtend the communicative purposes of companies’ websites by focusing on product promotion. To this effect, I will bank on Ellerup Nielsen’s (2002) conceptualization of the three functions of corporate websites, i.e. promoting a company, brand or product (which corresponds to the act of recommending), selling products or advertising space (which corresponds to the act of persuading into purchase), and providing customer support and offering information services support (which corresponds to the act of informing) (see also § 5.1).

However, in my analysis I will account for the fact that companies cater for their marketing needs by also using non-promotional language to present their products and services. The use of non-promotional language in promotional discourse is attested by Shaw (2006), who argues that, in such genres as agents’ particulars and software design proposals, “one can assume that everything, whether explicitly marked as positive or not, [...] is included in order to achieve the writer’s goals” (Shaw 2006, 162). Therefore, overt positive evaluation

might trigger a sceptical reaction in readers accessing these genres. In turn, in order to reassure readers about the writer's good intentions, the most effective rhetorical strategies might be those which give "an impression of modesty and humility" (Shaw 2006, 163).

Furthermore, the relevance of the macro-sections dedicated to product presentation is underlined by the fact that they are to be retrieved in all the websites in my corpus. Therefore, it seems safe to argue that these macro-sections are *de facto* a standard component of corporate websites. Together with the About Us/Company sections, the product sections are crucial to online corporate communication, yet their intended focus is not on the companies themselves, but on their performance as exemplified by the products and services they offer.

Another difference between the two macro-sections lies with the high degree of variation in the overall organization of the product sections, as I will show in § 7.1. For instance, some websites include more than one macro-section to present the companies' products and services portfolio. Moreover, the generic links on the homepages which provide access to the macro-section are phrased in several ways.¹ Hence, it is difficult to establish one label to define these macro-sections. As a matter of convenience, I will designate these macro-sections as 'product sections', with the proviso that this is an *ad hoc* term which I have taken on board so as to encompass the presentation of products and services alike.²

In a nutshell, in this chapter I attempt to explore how the product sections are designed to show and promote the companies' products and services, on the assumption that they might provide valuable insights into how textual, hypertextual and multimodal strategies are combined to cater for the companies' promotional purposes. The analytical framework adopted in this chapter is to a large extent borrowed from Chapter 6. First of all, I will map the macro-sections in the REnEU corpus which include information about products and services. This preliminary stage in my analysis is instrumental in shedding light on the strategies implemented by the companies to consistently organize the products and services portfolio in their websites.

Secondly, I will present the results of the lexico-grammatical analysis conducted in the Expanding Circle and in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpora. The two sub-corpora will be processed by means of the *AntConc* software program to obtain their relative word lists. I will rely upon the word lists to disclose frequently occurring patterns, which will guide the investigation of the most effective rhetorical choices displayed in the Concordance tool

1 As in the case of the About Us/Company sections analyzed in Chapter 7, the textual realization of the generic links available on the homepage corresponds to the heading of the macro-section.

2 As illustrated in § 5.3, in previous taxonomies of the content of websites, the web pages disseminating information about the companies' products and services have been defined as "Product/Service Catalogue" (Esrock & Leichty 2000) and "Product-specific components" (Perry & Bodkin 2002).

included in *AntConc*. Hence, close reading of the concordance lines will concentrate on possible instances of descriptive and evaluative language. In this sense, my approach is similar to Samson's (2009), who has analysed the use of descriptive and evaluative language in a specialized corpus of product sections taken from companies' websites (see § 5.2).

In my analysis I will also rely on Shaw's (2006) stance about the use of non-promotional language for promotional purposes. Indeed, in the analysis of the About Us/Company sections in the previous chapter I have pointed out that the companies disseminate factual information to achieve their promotional purposes, as indicated by Turnbull (2009) as well (see § 6.2.3). In this chapter I will investigate the use of non-promotional discourse for promotional purposes by concentrating on the use of scientific language. To this effect, the analysis of the first-level sub-corpora will attest to the presence of linguistic patterns borrowed from the disciplinary domain of science. Here it is assumed that the companies appropriate scientific language to show their positive image as experts in front of an audience of peers, or to expand the knowledge of the renewable energy domain in lay people accessing the companies' websites.

In this sense, my results seem to be in agreement with Bhatia and Lung (2006). The authors claim that companies often use technical expressions to display their disciplinary expertise and to substantiate their professional identity. The authors distinguish professional identity on the one side and disciplinary identity on the other side: "[p]rofessional identity is essentially practice-based, and can be viewed as a multidimensional and multi-perspective showcasing of disciplinary expertise, whereas disciplinary expertise is essentially knowledge-based understanding of the field" (Bhatia & Lung 2006, 276). As a consequence, in professional discourse, "it is possible and is often a common practice to combine the expressions of disciplinary and professional identities in the same document" (Bhatia & Lung 2006, 276). Following from these premises, in my analysis I will set out to demonstrate how the product sections are instrumental in fulfilling the purposes of corporate communication by reconciling professional identity with the presentation of disciplinary expertise. I will eventually argue that the showcasing of disciplinary expertise is fundamental for the companies to gain credibility dealing with the production of renewable energy. This is due to the high stakes implicit in the sector in which the companies operate, and to the fact that the companies are mainly involved in business-to-business exchanges, hence in trading activities involving other experts in the field of renewable energy.

I will complete my investigation by surveying the results of the analysis of the hypertextual/interactive and multimodal elements in the product sections. This analysis aims at disclosing the strategies deployed by the companies to present their products and services

in the web-mediated environment. To this effect, I will draw upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design (see also § 3.3 in this work) to categorize the product pages according to their compositional structure. Additionally, I will discuss the presence of images and hyperlinks by applying Bolaños Medina *et al.* (2005, see also § 5.1)'s analytical pattern.

7.1. The product sections

This section illustrates the preliminary stage in my analysis of the product sections by first of all defining how they are organized into the companies' websites collected in my corpus. The macro-sections disseminating information about products and services in the REnEU corpus have been retrieved manually by delving into the content of the companies' websites. In fact, whereas in Chapter 6 I could rely on the coding of About Us/Company sections suggested in previous studies (Esrock & Leichty 2000, Perry & Bodkin 2001, Turnbull 2009, Poppi 2011) in order to map the companies' institutional profile, in this chapter I have faced a relatively elusive endeavour, as only about half of the generic links leading to the products and services portfolios are coded with the nouns "products" or "services". The close investigation of the websites has revealed that, along with hypertextual information about the companies' products and services, PDF catalogues are sometimes made available, too. These have not been included, for the reasons stated in § 5.3.: PDF files lack the properties of the Web medium, since they are not hypertexts, and their status is similar to that of printed texts (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, Garzone 2007).

While retrieving the About Us/Company sections in § 6.1, some uniformity has been noted with regard to the coding of the generic links on the homepages leading to the macro-section under scrutiny. Put differently, the generic links correspond to the headings of the macro-sections. With regard to the product sections, it has been noticed that their corresponding generic links are linguistically realized by a variety of noun phrases, as it can be observed from the following overview:

1. macro-sections introduced by generic links encoding the nouns "products" and/or "services":
 - a. "Product(s)" (dnpSolar, Fröling GmbH, IREM SpA, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Mervento Oy, Micron – Cappello Alluminio Srl, Profish Technology SA, Silcio SA, Smart Hydro Power GmbH),
 - b. "Products & Markets" (Luvata Pori Oy),
 - c. "Products and Services" (Avanti Wind Systems AS, Vapo Oy),

- d. “Products & Solutions” (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Turboden Srl),
 - e. “Services” (Cryostar SAS, Deep Drill Supply Group, Turboden Srl);
2. macro-sections introduced by generic links referring to the companies’ products and services with nouns which are different from “products” and “services”, but which can be considered as belonging to the same area of meaning:
- a. “Activities” (Mabanaft),
 - b. “Activity Areas” (Acciona Energía Solar SL),
 - c. “Applications” (GA Drilling as, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Turboden Srl),
 - d. “Business Operations”, “Business Development” (Vapo Oy),
 - e. “Markets”, “Solution” (JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.),
 - f. “Operations” (Geotermica AB),
 - g. “Portfolio” (enso hydro GmbH),
 - h. “Projects” (Silcio SA),
 - i. “References” (CHO-Power – Europlasma Group, Turboden Srl),
 - j. “Segments” (GA Drilling as),
 - k. “Solutions” (GOLIATH Wind OÜ);
3. macro-sections introduced by generic links encoding reference to the companies’ business areas or to the type of products and services offered:
- a. “Chemicals”, “Energy”, “Logistics” (PCC Group),
 - b. “Distribution”, “LNG Transport & Terminals”, “Process Machinery” (Cryostar SAS),
 - c. “Fireplaces and Stoves”, “Kitchen and Garden” (Palazzetti Lelio SpA),
 - d. “Sales”, “Rentals” (Deep Drill Supply Group),
 - e. “Solar Power Plants”, “Photovoltaic Factories” (ib vogt GmbH),
 - f. “Wind Energy”, “Solar Energy”, “Off-Grid Power Supply”, “Energy Mix”, “Operations & Maintenance” (juwi AG).

Some provisional remarks are to be expressed about the overview above. Overall, the generic links are realized by means of nouns, compound nouns and binomials. The nouns “product(s)” and/or “services” are encoded in the generic links displayed on the homepage of sixteen companies’ websites, i.e. more than half of the REnEU corpus. Nouns other than “products” and “services”, but which *de facto* belong to the same area of meaning, are encoded in the generic links on the homepage of thirteen companies’ websites. With regard to the first and second group of websites, it emerges that some homepages display more than one generic link leading to information about products and services. For instance, the websites by JL Mag

Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Silcio SA, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Turboden Srl and Vapo Oy have generic links encoding both the nouns “products” and/or “services”, together with other nouns belonging to the same area of meaning. Additionally, GA Drilling as has two generic links encoding reference to its products and services by means of nouns other than “products” and “services”.

Next, the third group includes six companies, whose generic links on the homepage encode reference to the specific business contexts in which the companies operate, or to the types of products and services they supply. In this group, all websites have at least two macro-sections dedicated to products and services information. The lexical choices seem to emphasize the fact the companies have diversified into several business areas. Besides, the nouns used to realize the generic links are more informative with regard to the companies’ portfolio in comparison to the generic links in the first and second group, which in turn are more ambiguous. Besides, in the third group of companies, Cryostar SAS and Deep Drill Supply Group also display generic links verbalized as those in the first and second group.

On top of this, three companies have devised a macro-section providing information about the technology they have developed. These are CHO-Power – Europlasma Group (“Our Technology”), dnpSolar and GA Drilling as (“Technology”). Similarly, the homepage of Turboden Srl shows a generic link realized by the acronym “ORC”, which designate the technology on which the company’s products are based. Macro-sections dedicated to technology will also be investigated in this chapter, as they seem to complement the information on the companies’ product and services, while foregrounding the competence and innovation that distinguish the companies’ performance, as I will seek to demonstrate later on in my analysis.

Sveaskog Förvaltning AB is missing from the present overview, as the homepage does not include any generic links (see § 6.1), and therefore no links are provided which might lead to the product pages in a straightforward way. However, information about the company’s products and services can be retrieved by close investigation of the section dedicated to its subsidiary Sveaskog Baltfor SIA. In this section, the web pages entitled “Products” and “Logistics” describe the activities of the company’s subsidiary, and therefore they have been selected for the analysis in the present chapter.

Besides, two further companies, i.e. A. Silva Matos Energia SA and EnBW AG have not been included in the overview above, as they do not exhibit any generic links in their corresponding navigation bars, which might guide users to the products pages. A thorough examination of the website of A. Silva Matos Energia SA reveals that the pages dedicated to the product description are to be found in the “Group” macro-section. More specifically, the

product pages have been merged into the sections presenting the company's subsidiaries: by clicking on the hyperlink "Business Area" available on each web page describing A. Silva Matos Energia SA's subsidiaries, web users are presented with information about their products, as shown in Figure 7.1 below.

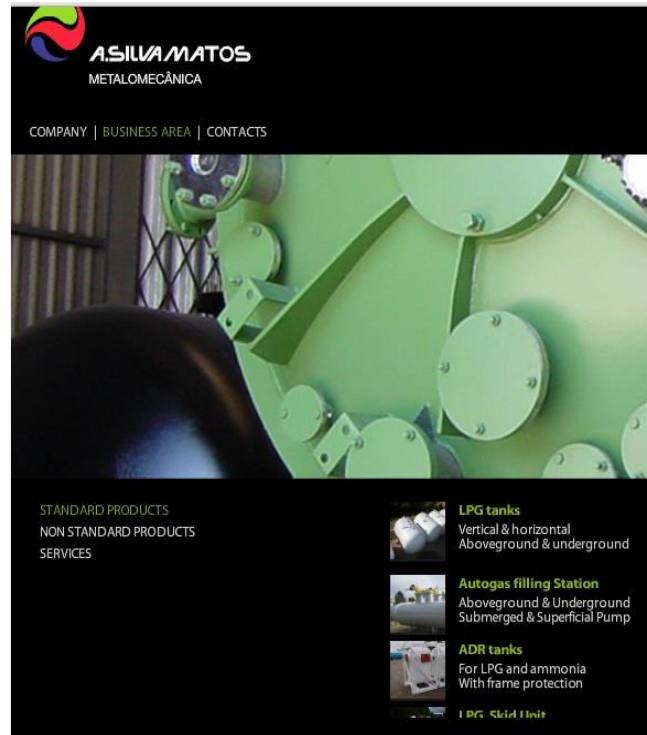


FIGURE 7.1. Links to the product pages in A. Silva Matos Energia SA's website.

Given that the product pages in A. Silva Matos Energia SA's website are included in the sections devoted to the presentation of its subsidiaries, web users need to browse the website more in-depth, in order to obtain the required piece of information. Additionally, these sections can be regarded as 'micro-websites', which might as well exist on their own, but which are *de facto* functional units in the overall framework of A. Silva Matos Energia SAs corporate website.

As for EnBW AG, the navigation bar includes only three generic links, and at face value none of these seems to provide direct access to information about the companies' services. Nonetheless, a preview is offered of the web pages included in each macro-section, by means of a static menu placed below each generic link. For instance, the generic link phrased as "The Group" is accompanied by a preview of the topics that can be explored by clicking on it: one of these topics is "Business Segments", i.e. information about EnBW AG's activities. Thus, web users are presented with a link leading to the information they are looking for, as Figure 7.2 on the following page illustrates.

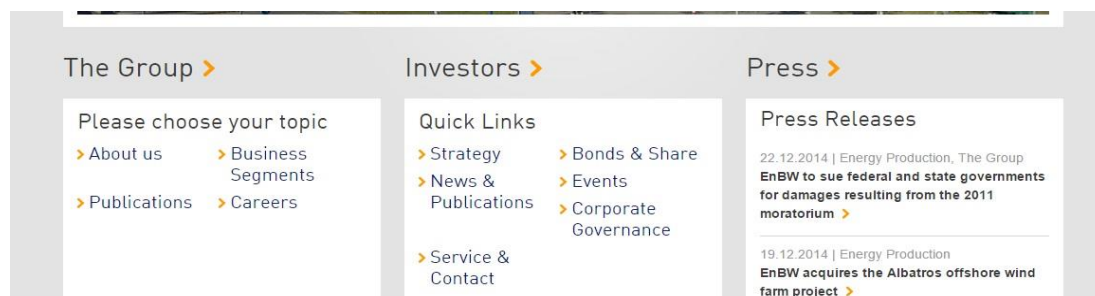


FIGURE 7.2. EnBW AG's navigation bar.

After having identified the product sections in the REnEU corpus, and made some provisional observations about the textual realization of the generic links which lead to them, I will report on the results of the lexico-grammatical analysis of the macro-sections (§ 7.1.1), and of the multimodal analysis of their hypertextual/interactive and visual contents (§ 7.1.2).

7.1.1. Lexico-grammatical analysis

Following from the survey conducted in § 7.1, it might be argued that the product sections represent a standard component of all the websites in the REnEU corpus, although the textual realization of their respective generic links is marked by variation. In this section, a lexico-grammatical analysis of two first-level sub-corpora in the REnEU corpus will be carried out contrastively, and further instances of variation will be attested, in particular with reference to the type of information which is foregrounded in the two sub-corpora.

The methodological approach informing the lexico-grammatical analysis of the product sections is similar to the one adopted in § 6.2.1 to discuss the rhetorical patterns of the About Us/Company sections. This decision has been reached so that the analysis carried out in this chapter is consistent with the one conducted in Chapter 6. Hence, a quantitative corpus analysis of the REnEU corpus has been conducted by referring to the Expanding Circle sub-corpus on the one side, and the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus on the other side. This has been done with a view to obtaining results which account for the English proficiency level of the European countries where the companies are based, as defined by Cramer (2007).

Therefore, the plain text files of the macro-sections devoted to the companies' products and services portfolios have been singled out from the two first-level sub-corpora, and processed in the *AntConc* software program in order to obtain a frequency word list for each first-level sub-corpus. The word count of the two first-level sub-corpora has produced the following results: the product sections in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus amount to 128,430 tokens and 8,772 word types, while the product sections in the Transition Circle #1 amount to 63,903 tokens and 6,298 types. The word count reveals that the product sections in

the Expanding Circle sub-corpus comprise more textual information than those in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. The table below lists the twenty-five most frequent words in the two sub-corpora, order by ranking, and accompanied by the number of occurrences.

TABLE 7.1. Frequency word lists of the product sections in the Expanding Circle and in Transition Circle #1.

Expanding Circle			Transition Circle #1		
<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>	<i>rank</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>word</i>
1	5885	the	1	3615	the
2	4080	and	2	2057	and
3	3270	of	3	1943	of
4	2800	to	4	1285	in
5	2513	in	5	1180	to
6	2096	a	6	1046	a
7	1586	for	7	864	for
8	1551	with	8	722	is
9	1311	is	9	713	with
10	1189	power	10	487	are
11	1072	kw	11	411	as
12	822	are	12	409	our
13	641	from	13	394	on
14	619	that	14	381	from
15	607	it	15	373	we
16	589	on	16	284	can
17	549	or	17	267	or
18	542	system	18	264	be
19	531	by	19	263	copper
20	509	bonfiglioli	20	240	power
21	493	cm	21	239	at
22	469	high	22	231	by
23	468	thermal	23	225	high
24	443	total	24	215	energy
25	437	be	25	214	water

On initial consideration, the word lists above seem to indicate that different linguistic choices are made between the two sub-corpora. This contrasts with the results presented in Table 6.3 (see § 6.2.1), which show comparable linguistic choices between the About Us/Company sections in the two first-level sub-corpora.³ Therefore, the textual information collected in the

3 As I have elucidated in § 6.2.1, the word lists of the Expanding Circle and of Transition Circle #1 display similar frequently occurring words across the two sub-corpora. Hence, it can be stated that the most frequent words in the About Us/Company sections in the REnEU corpus generally designates the company itself (i.e. the message-senders), or they denote the business area in which the companies are active. Besides, the companies are frequently referred to by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun "we", along with the possessive "our". Conversely, the companies' stakeholders (i.e. the message-receivers) are referred by means of the pronoun "you".

macro-sections seems to be characterized by linguistic variation, in keeping with the linguistic realization of the generic links leading to the macro-sections (see § 7.1 above).

In what follows I will first focus on the linguistic choices which mark the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, and second on the linguistic choices which mark the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. For both sub-corpora, instances of descriptive and evaluative language will be indicated, and particular attention will be devoted also to linguistic patterns which might have been borrowed from the language of science and technology. To this effect, I will single out frequently occurring content words. In addition to these, pronouns and possessive will be explored, when they imply reference to the companies, their products and services, or their stakeholders.

Expanding Circle

The most frequently occurring content words in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus are “power”, “kW”, “system”, “Bonfiglioli”, “cm”, “high”, “thermal” and “total”. Below I will report on the results of the analysis of the word “power” and of the patterns in which it is to be retrieved. These in turn will attest to the presence of the abbreviations “kW” and “cm”, along with the adjectives “thermal” and “total”.

Next, I will discuss the use of “system”, and I will point out how this noun is used to designate the companies’ products and their technologies. Conversely, the company’s name “Bonfiglioli” will be considered so as to disclose communicative strategies subsuming institutional advertising.

Finally, the most frequent collocates of the adjective “high” will be surveyed in order to reveal instances of promotional and non-promotional language alike in the description of the products and services supplied by the companies.

Power

“Power” is attested in the product sections of all the companies in the Expanding Circle. The high incidence of the term is due to the industry sector in which the companies operate. The noun is in fact used in the following meaning codified by the *OED Online*: “[a] supply of energy, esp. a public supply of electricity (often viewed as a commodity); (also) electricity as used for purposes other than lighting; heat, motion, etc., obtained using an electricity supply”.⁴

4 “power, n.1”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/149167?rskey=jRaL8A&result=1>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015.

In order to shed light on the co-text surrounding “power”, and in order to pinpoint possible instances of scientific language, I have set out to explore the patterns in which the term is most effectively employed. To this effect, I have tapped into the Cluster tool included in *AntConc*, in order to single out meaningful patterns among the concordance lines obtained by processing the sub-corpus in the software. To start with, I have set the cluster size between two and four words, and I have done a frequency sort with the keyword “power” on the right of the cluster. Table 7.2 below summarizes the first ten results, ordered by ranking, and indicating the number of occurrences.

TABLE 7.2. The ten most frequent clusters including “power” in the Expanding Circle (keyword on the right).

<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	Power <i>cluster</i>
1	410	thermal power
2	375	total thermal power
3	45	the power
4	30	direct thermal power
5	21	electric power
6	21	of power
7	20	solar power
8	17	wind power
9	16	cho-power
10	16	description: power

In order to discuss possible instances of scientific language, I will focus on the noun phrases included among the clusters in Table 7.2.

The most frequent cluster is “thermal power”. This, in turn, is embedded in the second most frequent cluster, “total thermal power”, and in the fourth most frequent cluster, “direct thermal power”. *AntConc* Concordance Plot tool reveals that “total thermal power” and “direct thermal power” are used exclusively in the product sections of Palazzetti Lelio SpA. Hence, the great majority of the cluster “thermal power” is to be retrieved in Palazzetti Lelio Spa’s product sections, too. This in fact is testified by the Concordance Plot: “thermal power” scores 405 hits in Palazzetti Lelio Spa’s products sections, four hits in Turboden Srl’s product sections, and only one hit in Acciona Energía Solar SL. The two most frequent clusters also include the adjectives “thermal” and “total”, which rank high in the Expanding Circle word list illustrated in Table 7.1.

Therefore, it could be argued that the product section of a given company is generally characterized by recurring patterns, which distinguish it from the other companies’ product sections. Furthermore, it is to be pointed out that the high number of hits of the clusters

described above is *de facto* proportional to the size of Palazzetti Lelio Spa's product section. This amounts to 41,592 tokens, thus corresponding to over one third of the tokens in the product sections in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus.

In order to shed light on the co-text in which the clusters outlined above are embedded, I have searched for “total thermal power” and “direct thermal power” in the Concordance tool integrated in *AntConc*. A selection of the concordance lines is illustrated in the two tables below.

TABLE 7.3. Pattern “total thermal power” in Palazzetti Lelio Spa's product sections.

Keyword in context (KWIC)
Dimensions: 120.5x125.5x95.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw Cladding made from whit
Dimensions: 116.0x140.0x21.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw "Consisting of four el
Dimensions: 120.0x119.5x18.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw The base of this cladding
Dimensions: 122.0x250.0x110.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw An absolutely innovative
Dimensions: 145.0x110.0x84.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw Modular programme map
Dimensions: 83.0x142.0x83.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw Made of cement mix with
Dimensions: 113.5x98.0x 113.5 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw In topped, grouted Trani
Dimensions: 182.0x87.0x75.0 cm Total thermal power: Kw, Kcal/h Kw Cladding realised in brush

TABLE 7.4. Pattern “direct thermal power” in Palazzetti Lelio SpA's product sections.

Keyword in context (KWIC)
rmal power: 13.2 Kw, 11352 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 8.7 Kw, 7516.4 Kcal/h Avera
ermal power: 10.1 Kw, 8686 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
ermal power: 10.1 Kw, 8686 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
ermal power: 10.1 Kw, 8686 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
ermal power: 10.1 Kw, 8686 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
ermal power: 10.1 Kw, 8686 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
rmal power: 14.6 Kw, 12556 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 8.9 Kw, 7697 Kcal/h Average
rmal power: 14.3 Kw, 12298 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 6.9 Kw, 5934 Kcal/h Average
rmal power: 14.6 Kw, 12556 Kcal/h Direct thermal power to the water: 8.9 Kw, 7697 Kcal/h Average

A preliminary observation of the concordance lines in Tables 7.3 and 7.4 reveals that the cluster is included in the same pattern across the results obtained. In particular, “power” is pre-modified by two adjectives, which describe the type of power output generated by the products. The data regarding the products are mainly represented by numerical information, accompanied by the acronym “kW”. This stands for “kilowatt”, i.e. “a thousand watts”, and it is a unit to measure power.⁵ The occurrence of “kW” in the co-text surrounding “power” is in keeping with the fact that the acronym is the second most frequently occurring content words in the sub-corpus.

⁵ “watt, n.”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/226360?redirectedFrom=watt>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015.

In Table 7.3, further numerical information is followed by the unit of measure “cm”. The occurrence of the acronym is in line with its high incidence in the Expanding Circle. In both tables, the concordance lines present a further acronym, i.e. “Kcal/h”. This acronym stands for “kilocalories (a thousand calories) per hour”, and it is used to measure “heat or energy based on the specific heat of water”.⁶

However, the co-text of “total thermal power” reveals not only that the products are described in terms of technical and numerical data, but also that they are textually described and evaluated. For instance, by expanding on one of the hits in Table 7.3, the following text appears on the right of the cluster under scrutiny:

(7.1) An *absolutely innovative* cladding for *free-standing installation* in the centre of the room. Made from the *latest* generation of *high-performance* cement. It includes an *Insert 45 firebox with a flat door and a smokepipe* (maximum height from the floor 2.70 m) [...]. (Palazzetti Lelio Spa)

The main characteristic of the product (“cladding”) are included in the short description: “free standing installation”, “cement”, “Insert 45 firebox with a flat door and a smokepipe”. These are instances of factual information. Numerical information is provided (“2.70 m”), too. However, the product is positively evaluated by means of the intensifiers “absolutely innovative”, “latest (generation)”, “high-performance”.

Furthermore, the example in (7.1) is noteworthy for my discussion about the use of English in international corporate communication, as it testifies to the hybrid language typical of companies' global websites, as conceptualized by Taviano (2010, see § 4.4.2). The phrase “free-standing installation” is in fact an instance of nominalization, a phenomenon which can be frequently observed in EU documents and in promotional texts by international companies (Taviano 2010). This example of nominalization in the product description of Palazzetti Lelio SpA is at variance with the preference for the verbal style which usually characterizes StE.

Going back to the results of the cluster search, “electric power” is the fifth most frequent pattern. In this case, the search term placed on the right of the cluster is pre-modified by the adjective “electric”. This adjective is connected to the industry sector in which the companies operate. The cluster is to be retrieved in the macro-sections of Acciona Energía Solar SL, IREM SpA, and Turboden Srl. A close look at the wider context in which the phrase “electric power” is employed, reveals the different linguistic strategies adopted by the companies.

6 “calorie, n.”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/26513>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015.

To start with, on the product pages of Acciona Energía Solar SL, “electric power” is used as a premodifier to denote the business area in which the company operates, as in the following example:

(7.2) The *different lines of business* in which ACCIONA Green Energy work give it a *broader vision* of the **electric power business** [...] (Acciona Energía Solar SL)

The focus in the example in (7.2) is on the activities (“lines of business”) of the company. In fact, unlike Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Acciona Energía Solar SL is not a manufacturing company, but a group dealing with projects in the construction and engineering sectors. All in all, the language employed in (7.2) is positively connoted (“broader vision”), but also ambiguous (“different lines of business”), since no numerical information is provided.

As for the linguistic strategies in IREM SpA, the products of the company are textually described, as illustrated below:

(7.3) The *turbine-generator group* constantly transforms hydraulic energy into **electric power**, regardless of the electric users requirements. (IREM SpA)

In the example in (7.3), the product is in thematic position. The name of the product is a compound noun, made out of technical words (“turbine”, “generator” and “group”). The performance of the product is described in the present tense.

As for Turboden Srl, the products are described in terms of numerical information:

(7.4) *TURBODEN 6 CHP*: around 600 kW **net active electric power** (Turboden Srl)

In (7.4), the name of the product (“TURBODEN 6 CHP”) is in thematic position, and it is followed by numerical information expressed in kW describing its performance. The cluster “electric power” is premodified by the compound “net active”.

As regards the clusters “solar power” and “wind power”, these refer to the source of renewable energy used. These seem to be in line with the results surveyed in § 6.2.1: “wind” is the tenth most frequent collocate of the word “energy” in the About Us/Company sections in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, while “wind” and “solar” are the fifth and sixth most frequent collocate in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. As for the product sections in the Expanding circle, “solar power” is used in the product sections of Acciona Energía Solar SL, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Fröling GmbH, Palazzetti Lelio SpA and Turboden Srl. The following example is taken from the product section in Fröling GmbH.

(7.5) [...], the *solar panel system* not only heats water, it can also be used to *boost your* heating system, especially for preheating domestic hot water in the bottom of *your* tank. Which means *you* can maximise *your* use of **solar power**. (Fröling GmbH)

In the example in (7.5), the performance of the product (“solar panel system”) is described by referring to the advantages it offers to its users. These are denoted by the use of the positively connoted verb “boost”. Users are directly referred to by means of the possessive adjective “your”. This makes communication interactive, and so information about the product is disseminated in a straightforward and friendly way.

The cluster “wind power” occurs in the product pages of Acciona Energía Solar SL and A. Silva Matos Energia SA. The following example is taken from A. Silva Matos Energia SA.

(7.6) With a *strong presence* in the world, **Wind Power** is *essential* to answer to the present energy needs. (A. Silva Matos Energia SA)

As for the example in (7.6), the company indirectly promotes itself and its products and services by foregrounding the importance of power generated by wind to supply today’s energy needs. The promotional function of the message is correlated to the noun phrase “strong presence” and to the adjective “essential”.

Finally, the cluster “Cho-Power” has a high incidence, since it is included in the name of one of the companies in the sub-corpus (CHO-Power – Europlasma Group). A close examination of the concordance lines where “Cho-Power” is the search term reveals that the cluster is used to build compound nouns. In these way, new terms are coined to designate the company’s products (“Cho-Power commercial pipe”, “Cho-Power unit/s”), its technology (“Cho-Power technology”, “Cho-Power process”, “Cho-Power plasma gasification process”), and the company’s buildings and internal organization (“Cho-Power Plant”, “Cho-Power SAS”).

So far, the discussion conducted on the clusters where “power” is placed on the right of the pattern has disclosed linguistic strategies aimed at foregrounding the companies’ activities and products. In the examples selected, instances of descriptive, evaluative and scientific language have been indicated. Numerical information has also been pointed out. The results of the cluster search of “power” placed on the left of the pattern, by setting the cluster size between two and four terms, confirms that “power” is used in contexts where numerical information is disseminated to account for the performance of the product. Table 7.5 illustrates the clusters which are ranked according to the number of hits.

TABLE 7.5. The ten most frequent clusters including “power” in the Expanding Circle (keyword on the left).

<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	Power <i>cluster</i>
1	160	power: kw
2	160	power: kw, kcal
3	160	power: kw, kcal/h
4	47	power to
5	45	power: 999 kw
6	44	power to the
7	43	power to the water
8	41	power transmission
9	30	power: 1500 kw
10	29	power: 600 kw

In line with the analysis of the clusters resulted by searching the keyword “power” on the right of the pattern (see Table 7.2), I will concentrate on instances of noun phrases, with a view to revealing the companies’ lexical choices.

The only noun phrase included in the ten most frequent clusters above is the compound “power transmission”, which characterizes Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA’s product sections only. In the product sections of this company, the cluster under consideration might be used either to disseminate information about the company’s products, or to define one of the business areas⁷ in which the company is active, as illustrated below. In the example in (7.7), “power transmission” is embedded in a larger noun phrase, where it premodifies the head noun “solutions”. The latter is an umbrella term to designate the company’s products.

(7.7) *Special, complete and custom* **power transmission solutions** are available for specific applications involving:

- Torque arms
- Base plates
- Fluid couplings
- Shoe brakes
- Other accessories [...] (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

In (7.7), the products (“power transmission solutions”) are presented in a bulleted list. The list is introduced by a proposition, which describes the products as “special”, “complete” and “custom”. These premodifiers evaluate the products positively.

In the example below, “power transmission” denotes a particular business area in which the company trades. In fact, the cluster is used to premodify “industry”.

⁷ Overall, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA trades in four business areas: wind energy, industrial applications, mobile machinery and photovoltaic energy.

(7.8) Bonfiglioli Riduttori's *constant and targeted investments* in R&D, performed at *centres of excellence* around the world, have established the group as a *global leader* in the **power transmission industry** for *product quality, innovation and performance*. (Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA)

In the example, the company is thematized. Its activities are positively evaluated by means of the adjectives in the noun phrase “constant and targeted investments”. Further instances of positive evaluation are “centres of excellence”, “global leader”, “product quality, innovation and performance”. These linguistic strategies fulfil the aims of institutional advertising, rather than those of product promotion, and they are in line with the results discussed in § 6.2.1 when dealing with the companies' self-presentation. Beside this, the example in (7.8) testifies to the hybridity of the texts published in companies' global websites, as pointed out beforehand in the case of the product description in Palazzetti Lelio SpA's macro-sections. Similarly to Palazzetti Lelio SpA, hybridity in (7.7) is linked to the use of the nominal style.

Next, the analysis will devote attention to occurrences of “system” and to form-function correlations that the use of this term implies.

System

An in-depth analysis of the term “system” reveals that its use is spread across the macro-sections of several companies. This term is in fact employed by fourteen companies to designate their products and technologies. The companies are Acciona Energía Solar SL, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Cryostar SAS, GA Drilling as, Goliath Wind OÜ, IREM SpA, Fröling GmbH, Micronsun – Cappello Alluminio Srl, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Profish Technology SA, Silcio SA and Turboden Srl. Close reading of the concordance lines has revealed that the noun “system” is used in three different types of context. Below I will discuss an example for each context identified.

In the first type of context, factual information is presented about the products designated by the nouns “system”, as evident in the example below.

(7.9) The **peak shaving system** allows storing and supplying natural gas on demand in case of *increasing gas consumption*, or *lack of gas supply* from the natural gas grid. (Cryostar SAS)

In (7.9), the performance of the product is referred to in the present simple. The noun “system” is included in a compound, coined to designate the product under consideration. Hence, the compound includes technical words, i.e. “peak” and “shaving”, which are known to an expert audience. As for instances of hybridity, this seems to be attested by the nominal forms “increasing gas consumption” and “lack of gas supply”.

In the second type of context, the product description is accompanied by information about the technology developed by the company, as in (7.10).

(7.10) The *Organic Rankine Cycle's principle* is based on a *turbogenerator* working as a normal *steam turbine* to transform *thermal energy* into *mechanical energy* and finally into *electric energy* through an *electric generator*. Instead of the water steam, the **ORC system** vaporizes an *organic fluid*, characterized by a *molecular mass* higher than water, which leads to a slower *rotation* of the turbine and lower *pressure* and *erosion* of the metallic parts and blades. (Turboden Srl)

In the example above, the “Organic Rankine Cycle’s principle” is explained. This is a type of technology developed by Turboden Srl, also referred to with the acronym “ORC”, which in the example premodifies “system”. In addition to this, the example presents several terms and expressions borrowed from scientific and technical discourse. These are nouns and noun phrases (“turbogenerator”, “steam turbine”, “thermal/mechanical/electric energy”, “electric generator”, “organic fluid”, “molecular mass”, “rotation”, “pressure”, “erosion”) and a verb (“vaporizes”).

In the third type of context, the product description is accompanied by evaluative language, as apparent from the following example.

(7.11) It is the **first system** *on the market* to *easily and quickly* create your fireplace cladding, *all by yourself*. (Palazzetti Lelio SpA)

The product is positively evaluated by the adjective “first”, which premodifies “system”. The prepositional phrase “on the market” is related to the adjective “first”, and it is an instance of evaluative language, too. Further instances of evaluative language are the adverbs “easily” and “quickly” are. Moreover, reference to the message-receiver is entailed in the use of the reflexive form “yourself”. In this way, the message-sender seeks to appeal to potential customers.

After having discussed form-function correlations implied in the occurrences of “system”, I will focus on the term “Bonfiglioli”. The analysis of this term will indicate instances of promotional language to build the company’s positive identity.

Bonfiglioli

The high incidence of the company name “Bonfiglioli” in the word list of the Expanding Circle might be due to the fact that the product sections of Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA amount to 39,371 tokens, that is, over one third of the tokens in the product sections in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. Nonetheless, the term “Bonfiglioli” seems to attest to the company’s

institutional advertising strategies in web pages dedicated to product promotion. In this sense, it might be argued that the company has decided to foreground its institutional self-presentation beyond the limits of its Company section. This is apparent from the example below, where the company's logistic and trade services are described.

(7.12) Worldwide service

[...] with *over 80 logistic and commercial centres* covering *five continents*, **Bonfiglioli** delivers a global support service through *qualified personnel* who are ready to intervene anywhere in the world. (Bonfiglioli SpA)

The company's activities are referred to in the present simple. Numerical information is provided ("80 logistic and commercial centres", "five continents"), yet this has covert promotional purposes, as it implies the company's expertise and success. Besides, positive evaluation is overtly employed to denote the company's staff ("qualified personnel").

After having exemplified the use and function of the company name "Bonfiglioli" in the sub-corpus, I will conclude the analysis of the most frequently occurring words in the product sections by offering an overview of the findings related to the adjective "high" and to the patterns in which it occurs.

High

The adjective "high" occurs in all the product sections included in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, except for the product section of Turboden Srl. In order to investigate the patterns in which "high" is most effectively employed, I have searched for the most frequent right collocates of this adjective. The results presented in Table 7.6 display the nouns which are most often premodified by "high" in the product sections in the Expanding Circle, ranked by number of hits.

TABLE 7.6. Right collocates of "high" in the product sections in the Expanding Circle.

High		
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq(R)</i>	<i>collocate</i>
1	46	performance
2	45	efficiency
3	35	quality
4	25	voltage
5	24	pressure
6	19	temperature
7	16	torque
8	13	level
9	13	efficiencies
10	10	speed

By observing the collocates in Table 7.6, it can be inferred that “high” occurs in two categories of patterns. The former category includes patterns where “high” has the function of a lexical booster. The patterns which are obtained are therefore instances of promotional language. The patterns in this category are “high performance”, “high efficiency”, “high quality”, and “high efficiencies”. The total number of patterns in this category amount to 139 items.

Conversely, the latter category includes patterns where “high” describes the noun which follows. In this sense, the patterns obtained are instances of non-promotional language, and in particular of scientific or technical language. The patterns in this category are “high voltage”, “high pressure”, “high temperature”, “high torque”, “high level” and “high speed”. The total number of patterns in this category amount to 107 items. Hence, in the majority of the patterns outlined here, “high” is used as a positively evaluative adjective with a promotional function.

In order to cast light on the co-text of these patterns, and to account for their function, I will illustrate one example for the first category, and one example for the second category, by selecting the patterns which are more frequently attested in the product sections, i.e. “high performance”⁸ and “high voltage”.

To start with, “high performance” is attested in the product sections of six companies. These are Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, Fröling GmbH, Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Profish Technology SA, Turboden Srl, as displayed by the Concordance Plot included in *AntConc*. The analysis of the co-text of these cluster seems to indicate that it is used in noun phrases where the head noun designates a product or its components, as in the example below.

(7.13) The Fröling H3 is a *hot water tank, layered tank and solar layered tank* all in one. Two **high performance solar elements** guarantee *efficient* solar integration. (Fröling GmbH)

In the first part of the example in (7.13), one of the company’s product (“Fröling H3”) is thematized and described by means of three noun phrases, i.e. “hot water tank”, “layered tank” and “solar layered tank”. These noun phrases are instances of non-promotional, factual language. The second part of the example includes the pattern “high performance”, which positively connotes the components (i.e. “solar elements”) of the product thematized in the first part of the example. The second part of the example include a further instance of promotional language, that is, the adjective “efficient”, which premodifies “solar integration”.

⁸ The use of “high” in the cluster “high performance”, employed as an instance of promotional language, has been indicated in the example in (7.1), too.

Conversely, the non-promotional pattern “high voltage” can be regarded as an instance of scientific language. The cluster occurs in the product sections of four companies, i.e. Acciona Energía Solar SL, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Europlasma Group and IREM SpA. “Voltage” stands for “[e]lectromotive force reckoned or expressed in volts”,⁹ hence it represents a concept related to the industry area in which the companies sampled operate. In the example below, the pattern scrutinized here describes the performance of one of the products manufactured by IREM SpA.

(7.14) *IREM igniters are able to generate **high voltage impulse** ensuring both cold ignition and hot restrike.* (IREM SpA)

The example above includes factual information about the products described (“IREM igniters”), which are foregrounded in thematic position. The pattern “high voltage” is used to premodify the noun “impulse”. Beside factual information, the example in (7.14) seems to include instances of promotional language. In fact, the expressions “are able” and “ensuring” might be regarded as rhetorical choices which imply the promise, on the part of the message-sender, that the products offered are suitable to the needs of the message-receiver.

So far, the analysis of the rhetorical strategies in the product sections in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus has indicated that the companies draw on factual language, evaluative language, along with scientific language, to present and promote the products and/or services they offer. In addition to this, the analysis has indicated that the companies might decide promote institutional advertising also on those web pages dedicated to product description. In what follows, I will analyze the most frequently occurring patterns in the product sections in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. While doing this, I will seek to disclose possible similarities or differences between the two sub-corpora.

Transition Circle #1

To start with, I have singled out an example to account for the use of the possessive “our” and the personal pronoun “we” in Transition Circle #1. The high incidence of these words in the product sections included in the sub-corpus under scrutiny is noteworthy for two reasons. Firstly, their presence indicates that the rhetorical strategies deployed in the product sections are different across the two sub-corpora, as “we” and “our” rank lower in the Expanding

⁹ “voltage, n.2”. *OED Online*.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/224498?rskey=5QwfhZ&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015. A definition of “high voltage” is also included in the *OED Online*: “Voltage that is higher than some usual or standard voltage (stated or implied), esp. when capable of causing injury or damage; an instance of this. Also in figurative contexts and *fig.* (“high voltage, n. and adj.”. *OED Online*. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/399343?redirectedFrom=high+voltage>, last accessed on 30 January 2015).

Circle: “our” ranks thirtieth, and “we” thirty-eighth. Secondly, these words rank high in the About Us/Company sections in both first-level sub-corpora, as already pointed out in § 6.2.1.

A further term which ranks high in the Transition Circle sub-corpus, but which does not appear among the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in the Expanding Circle, is the modal “can”. This modal will be analysed in relation to its use with personal pronouns, nouns and the relative pronoun “which”.

In what follows, I will also discuss the use of “copper”. This term ranks high in the frequency word list of the Transition Circle sub-corpus, whereas it occurs only once in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, thus ranking at the bottom of the word list.

Conversely, the noun “power” and the adjective “high” are attested in both word lists, although they both rank higher in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. Similarly to the analysis conducted beforehand, I will illustrate meaningful patterns including “power” and “high” in Transition Circle #1.

Finally, I will discuss form-function correlations implied in the use of the terms “energy” and “water”. These are not featured in the twenty-five most frequently occurring terms in the Expanding Circle. Yet, as illustrated in § 6.2.1, “energy” ranks high in the word lists of the About Us/Company sections in both sub-corpora.

Our and We

The possessive “our” occurs in the macro-sections of the following companies: Avanti Wind Systems AS, Deep Drill Supply Group, dnpSolar, EnBW AG, ib vogt GmbH, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mabanaft GmbH, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH and Vapo Oy. The first person plural pronoun “we” occurs in the same macro-sections, with the addition to Mervento Oy. Similarly to the About Us/Company sections investigated in the previous chapter, in the product sections as well the pronoun “we” and the possessive “our” refer to the company, i.e. to the message-sender, as the example below testifies.

(7.15) **We** supply **our** *products* to *energy retailers, service stations, and major commercial customers*, with whom **we** have earned an *excellent reputation* as a *competent and committed partner*. (Mabanaft GmbH)

In (7.15), the receiver-excluding pronoun “we” designates the company. The company is positively connoted with instances of evaluative language (“excellent reputation”, “competent and committed business partner”). The possessive “our” is also used to refer to the company, and it premodifies the noun “products”. The tense used is the present simple. Reference to one

of the company’s stakeholder groups, i.e. customers, is made too. This group is identified by a sequence of noun phrases: “energy retailers”, “service stations” and “major commercial customers”.

Can

Similarly to “our” and “we”, the modal “can” ranks among the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in the product sections in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, whereas it ranks thirty-third in in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. The modal “can” occurs in the macro-sections of Avanti Wind Systems AS, Deep Drill Supply Group, dnpSolar, Geotermica AB, ib vogt GmbH, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mabanafit GmbH, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Sveaskog Förvaltning AB and Vapo Oy. A left-sorted collocation search of the term reveals which subjects is usually to be found with “can”. Table 7.7 lists the ten most frequent collocates, ranked by number of hits.

TABLE 7.7. Left collocates of “can” in the product sections Transition Circle #1.

Can		
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq(L)</i>	<i>collocate</i>
1	41	we
2	31	you
3	15	it
4	11	and
5	7	casing
6	6	lift
7	6	copper
8	5	which
9	5	they
10	4	turbine

As it can be observed from the table above, “can” is used in combination with three categories of subject: four personal pronouns, three nouns and one relative pronoun. As for the first category, “we”, “you” and “it” are the three most frequently occurring pronouns introducing “can”, while “they” ranks ninth. When “can” is used with “we”, the pronoun designates the company, and it is receiver-excluding, while the modal expresses both possibility and ability on the part of the company to offer certain products or services, as in the example in (7.16).

(7.16) *With years of experience in project development and implementing, we can adapt the systems to your local conditions and establish the solar system on-site.* (juwi AG)

In the example, promotional language is employed: the prepositional phrase “with years of experience” projects the company’s image as competent. Besides, the message-receiver is directly address by means of the possessive “your”.

When *can* is used with “you”, the pronoun is referred to the message-receivers, i.e. to the company’s stakeholders. The modal expresses possibility on the part of the message-receiver, as in the following example. In this case, “you” is referred to a particular stakeholder group.

(7.17) As a *non-governmental organization*, **you can** profit from tax exemptions. (juwi AG)

Furthermore, the pattern “you can” is employed to provide guidance to web user while accessing information, or to invite the user to take action, as in the two examples which follow.

(7.18) On the right **you can** see the power cable (black) and the signalling cable (red), which will connect the water intake and the powerhouse. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

(7.19) **You can** download the product leaflet for Avanti Ladders as pdf here. (Avanti Wind Systems AS)

To start with, the example in (7.18) describes the image of a plant by indicating its details. In this sense, textual information expands on visual information, and vice versa. In fact, the position of the details on the image is textually indicated (“on the right”), along with their colours (“black” and “red”). As for the example in (7.19), the pattern “you can” is used to prompt the user to download a product leaflet. Hence, this textual instance gives instructions on what is to be accessed by clicking on a given link which is available on the web pages. The use of the modal “can” mitigates the force of the instruction given by the message-sender. In a nutshell, the examples in (7.18) and in (7.19) seem to attest that communication results from the combination of the textual mode with the visual mode and with hyperlinks.

As regards the pattern “it can”, the third personal singular pronoun “it” is used with reference to one of the companies’ products. For example, in (7.20), the pronoun refers to a turbine manufactured and installed by the company.

(7.20) On one hand *the turbine* is individually useable as **it can** be installed for a remote village in the Brazilian Amazonas [...]. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

The language used in the example above disseminates factual information about the product. Nonetheless, in one case out of the fourteen occurrences of “it can”, the pronoun refers to a company, as in (7.21).

(7.21) *Luvata is committed to doing all **it can** to help its partners in this sector make tomorrow brighter and cleaner than today.* (Luvata Pori Oy)

In the previous example, the modal “can” expresses the company’s reliability. This idea is expressed also by the past participle “committed”. Overall, the proposition aims at promoting the company’s positive identity in front of its stakeholders, which are indicated by the noun “partner”. Finally, the promotional function of the proposition is further substantiated by the positively connoted comparative adjectives “brighter” and “cleaner”.

The pattern “they can” also refers to the companies’ products, as testified by the following example.

(7.22) *Anodes come in different shapes and sizes, or **they can** be tailor-made to your specification.* (Luvata Pori Oy)

In (7.22), “they” refers to “anodes”. The proposition provides information about the availability of the product in terms of shape and size. Yet, a certain degree of ambiguity is entailed in the adjective “different” which premodifies the binomial “shapes and sizes”. The message-sender appeals to the message-receiver by means of the possessive “your”.

In one out of the five occurrences of “they can”, reference is made not to the products but to the people operating the product itself.

(7.23) *the technicians **can** climb out, or **they can** work from the lift without climbing out* (Avanti Wind Systems AS)

The language used in example (7.23) is informative, as it explains how the lift is to be used by technicians.

So far I have singled out examples to shed light on form-function correlations implied in the use of the modal “can” when the subject is a pronoun. As shown in Table 7.7, “can” might be used in combination with nouns. These refer to the companies’ products and their characteristics. However, each pattern is used in the product section of a given company. For instance the pattern “casing” plus modal “can” is to be retrieved only in Luvata Pori Oy’s website. “Casing” is one of the products manufactured by the company, while evidence of this product is missing from the product sections of the other companies in the sub-corpus.

The example in (7.24) reveals that the noun is embedded in a prepositional phrase which postmodifies the compound “connection flanges”. In turn, this compound denotes the components of the product.

(7.24) The *coil casing* is made of 2 mm thick acid-proof sheet steel (to special order, the **connection flanges of the casing can be provided with 15 x 24 mm mounting holes**).

In general, the example in (7.24) describes one of the company's products ("coil casing"). This is thematized, and it is presented in terms of its size ("2 mm thick") and material ("acid-proof sheet steel"). Information about the components of the product is also disseminated. These are referred to as "connection flanges" and "mounting holes". With regard to the latter, further numerical data about their size are provided ("15 x 24 mm"). The terms "coil casing", "acid-proof sheet steel" and "connection flanges" are instances of technical language.

The pattern "lift" followed by "can" is to be retrieved in Avanti Wind Systems AS.

(7.25) The *Service Lift can only operate with closed doors*. (Avanti Wind Systems AS)

In the example above, the noun "lift" is premodified by "Service", to specify the type of lift under consideration. Overall, the proposition provides information about how the product is to be operated, as indicated by the prepositional phrase "with closed doors".

As for the pattern "copper" plus modal "can", this characterizes the product pages in Luvata Pori Oy's website only.

(7.26) Only *oxygen-free copper can be used* for this application. (Luvata Pori Oy)

The noun "copper" is premodified by the adjective "oxygen free". The proposition is in the passive voice, which is a structure often found in scientific discourse. Overall, the text in the example in (7.26) is descriptive, as it includes information about the material used by the company to manufacture its products.

Finally, the pattern "turbine" followed by the modal "can" occurs only in Smart Hydro Power GmbH's product sections.

(7.27) The **Smart Hydro Power turbine can be integrated** as a source of energy into an existing micro grid. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

The noun designating the product under consideration is premodified by the name of the company ("Smart Hydro Power"), so as to highlight the fact that this is especially manufactured by the company. Similarly to the example in (7.26), the passive is used.

Going back to the patterns outlined in Table 7.7 above, the pattern "which can" is used in contexts where information about the products and services offered by the company is

provided. In this contexts, particular reference to the performance and benefits of the products is made, as the following example taken from Luvata Pori Oy's product section seems to imply.

(7.28) [...] *formicary corrosion* appears as a wandering pit **which can lead to** leaks in the indoor coils of vented AC systems. *Luvata* offers two primary solutions *effective* against formicary corrosion (Luvata Pori Oy)

In the example above, the pronoun "which" followed by "can" introduces a relative clause describing the consequences of a phenomenon called "formicary corrosion". Hence, the first part of the example in (7.28) identifies a problem. Solutions to this problem are suggested in the second part of the example in terms of the company's products, which are positively connoted by means of evaluative language ("primary" and "effective").

In the analysis of (7.26) I have discussed one pattern including the modal "can" where the noun "copper" is also employed. "Copper" ranks among the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in the Transition Circle #1, thus, as anticipated above, I will discuss further examples where this noun occurs, to account for the lexical choices of the companies in their product sections.

Copper

Although the noun "copper" ranks high in the product sections in Transition Circle #1, all the hits are to be retrieved in the product section of Luvata Pori Oy (262 hits), with the exception of one hit in the product sections of JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v. A close reading of the occurrences of "copper" in Luvata Pori Oy's product sections reveals further contexts in which the term is used. For instance, "copper" is employed to describe the material in which the products are made, as in (7.29).

(7.29) *Designed with special profile aluminium fins* and **inner grooved copper tubes** (Luvata Pori Oy)

The phrase in (7.29) is taken from the description of one of the products by Luvata Pori Oy. The past participle "designed" is followed by a prepositional phrase introduced by "with". Within this phrase, reference is made to the components of the product, "fins" and "tubes". First, the noun "fins" is described in terms of the material of which it is made out ("aluminium"). This in turn is premodified by the compound "special profile". The noun "tubes" is also described in terms of the material used to produce it ("copper"), which is premodified by the compound "inner grooved". In sum, the phrase is informative, yet the

positively connoted adjective “special” is to be regarded as an instance of evaluative language.

Next, in Luvata Pori Oy’s product sections, the term “copper” is used not only in contexts where the products and their components are described, but also in contexts where the message-sender seeks to disseminate knowledge about the materials and technologies adopted by the company to manufacture its products. This can be gleaned from the following example.

(7.30) **Oxygen-free copper** is the *purest* form of the metal, offering *unparalleled thermal and electrical conductivity* as well as *superior weldability*.

In the example above, the noun “copper” is premodified by the adjective “oxygen-free”. The material is described in the light of its positive characteristics. In fact, it is referred to as “the purest form of metal”: this noun phrase includes a superlative adjective with a positive connotation. The adjectives “unparalleled” and “superior” are further instances of positively connoted language with a promotional function. However, non-promotional language is used as well. In particular, the noun phrase “thermal and electrical conductivity” and the noun “weldability” are borrowed from the field of science. Finally, these two expressions seem to testify to the hybridity of the language used in companies’ global websites, as they represent regarded as instances of nominalization.

After having discussed examples where “copper” is used, I will now focus on the use of “power” in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. Form-function correlations implied in the use of this noun have already been discussed with regard to the Expanding Circle, as it is the most frequently occurring content word in the product sections in this sub-corpus. Hence, the present analysis of “power” aims at integrating the findings presented beforehand.

Power

First of all, it is to be noted that in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus “power” ranks lower than in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. This seems to provide further evidence of the different linguistic choices adopted by the two groups of companies sampled. Similarly to the analysis conducted in the case of the Expanding Circle sub-corpus to investigate the co-text of the term, I have carried out a cluster search, by setting the length of the cluster between two and four words. Table 7.8 illustrates the ten most frequent clusters with the search term arranged on the left, ranked by number of hits.

TABLE 7.8. The ten most frequent clusters including “power” in Transition Circle #1 (keyword on the right).

<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	Power <i>cluster</i>
1	39	solar power
2	24	the power
3	20	hydro power
4	17	smart hydro power
5	11	and power
6	8	hydroelectric power
7	7	electrical power
8	7	the smart hydro power
9	6	of the power
10	4	for power

As in the investigation conducted beforehand, I will concentrate on significant noun phrases and compounds, in consideration of my interest for lexical choices which might disclose instances of scientific/technical language.

The most frequent cluster is “solar power”. This occurs in the macro-sections of ib vogt GmbH and juwi AG. This cluster is related to one of the sources of renewable energy with which the companies sampled deal, i.e. photovoltaic energy. Close reading of the concordance lines reveals that the cluster “solar power” is employed eight times to refer to the type of power generated by photovoltaic energy, while in the remaining occurrences it is used as a premodifier for such words as “output” (one hit), “systems” (four hits), “project” (five times) and “plant(s)” (nineteen hits). These nouns are referred to the products and services supplied by the companies. As it can be inferred from the example below, these lexical choices are made when the companies disseminate information about their activities.

(7.31) *We have implemented **solar power plants** with a total output of 140 MW and developed projects with over 300 MW worldwide.* (ib vogt GmbH)

In (7.31), the company is referred to by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun “we”, which is in thematic position. Instances of factual information are provided, as for instance the amount of energy produced, expressed in figures followed by a unit of measure (“140 MW”, “300 MW”). However, the non-promotional language employed is used to present the company as a competent business partner. Finally, the adverb “worldwide” is positively connoted.

As regards the cluster “hydro power”, this refers to power generated by water.¹⁰ This cluster is embedded in another cluster, that is, “smart hydro power”, which in fact is the name of one of the companies sampled, i.e. Smart Hydro Power GmbH. Nineteen out of twenty occurrences of the cluster are included in the macro-section of Smart Hydro Power GmbH. The only occurrence which is not included in the macro-section of Smart Hydro Power GmbH is to be retrieved in the macro-section of PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. In this context, “hydro power” is used with reference to one of the company’s project, as evident from the example below.

(7.32) For its first environmental conservation project, *PCC* brought the **Mujada micro-hydro power plant** online on 2 February 2009. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

The example in (7.32) contains factual information about a given project. This is described by indicating a particular date (“2 February 2009”). The company is referred to in the third person singular, and the simple past is used. The cluster “hydro power” is embedded within a longer noun phrase, “Mujada micro-hydro power plant”. In this noun phrase, the type of energy obtained by water is further specified by the term “micro”. This in fact designates the power obtained from flowing water, which is usually distinguished from the power generated by waves and tidal energy (see § 5.2).

As for the occurrences of the cluster “hydro power” in the macro-sections of Smart Hydro Power GmbH, two out of nineteen occurrences do not refer to the company’s name. In this case the cluster under scrutiny actually denotes the type of power generated by hydroelectric energy, as in the example below.

(7.33) The *pure grid tie* [...] is *specifically tailored* for those locations where the use of feed-in tariffs for **hydro power** encourages feeding electricity to the grid [...]. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

As for the occurrences of “Smart Hydro Power”, these either refer to the company as an organization, or they are used to premodify the company’s products (“system” and “turbine”). In the example that follows, the cluster designates the company as organization, to describe its activities.

(7.34) **Smart Hydro Power** *enables agricultural enterprises* to use existing resources to generate electricity. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

¹⁰ “Hydro” is the short form of “hydroelectric” (“hydro, n.2”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/89912?rskey=zm6plv&result=2>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015).

In (7.34), the company is thematized. The tense used is the present simple. “Agricultural enterprises” are the implied readership, i.e. the stakeholders addressed.

As for the use of “Smart Hydro Power” to premodify “turbine”, one example has already been explored above (7.27) when tackling occurrences of the pattern “turbine can”. (7.35) below further illustrates how “smart hydro power” is used to characterize one of the company’s product, namely turbines.

(7.35) The **Smart Hydro Power turbine** was developed to produce a *maximum amount of electrical power* with the kinetic energy of flowing waters. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

In (7.35), the product is thematized. The tense used is the past simple, while the voice is passive. By using the passive voice, the product is foregrounded while the company is backgrounded. However, the name of the company appears in the product name. Information about the performance of the product is provided, along with a positive evaluation of it, which is implied in the use of the expression “maximum amount”.

The cluster “hydroelectric power” is the long form of “hydro power”. Again, this occurs in the macro-sections of PCC Deg Renewables GmbH (seven occurrences) and of Smart Hydro Power GmbH. Table 7.9 below displays the eight concordance lines which are to be obtained in *AntConc* by searching for “hydroelectric power”.

TABLE 7.9. Concordance lines of the cluster “hydroelectric power” in the product sections in Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus.

Keyword in context (KWIC)
currently at the planning or construction phase Hydroelectric power plant projects in the Republic er plant projects in the Republic of Macedonia Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bosnia- Herz c power plant projects in Bosnia- Herzegovina Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bulgaria A ed (scheduled start of operation: 2013-2015). Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bosnia and H electricity output of approx. 2.8 million kWh Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bulgaria L Kristian Gligorovski (project manager, right) Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bosnia- Herz ed, next step: application for building permit. Hydroelectric power plant projects in Bulgaria El a microgrid. If 5 kW is not enough, other micro- hydroelectric power plants or (in future) also oth

The first seven concordance lines are to be retrieved in the product sections of PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. The cluster “hydroelectric power” is here used as a premodifier in the longer noun phrase “hydroelectric power plant projects”. The eighth concordance line is included in the product sections of Smart Hydro Power GmbH. In this case, “hydroelectric power” is used to premodify “plants”. Hence, information about the type of products supplied by the company is provided.

As for the cluster “electric power”, this occurs in the macro-sections of four companies: JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v. and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH (one occurrence each), Smart Hydro Power GmbH (two occurrences) and juwi AG (three occurrences). The cluster is used to explain how the products function, as in the example below.

(7.36) Alongside the *pipeline, cables* for the transmission of **electrical power** and signals to the water intakes *are laid* into the ground. (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

In (7.36), details of a plant are described (“pipeline”, “cables”). The present simple passive is used.

After having surveyed clusters where “power” is on the right of the pattern, I will now survey clusters where “power” is on the left. The ten most frequent patterns are shown in the table below, arranged by number of occurrences.

TABLE 7.10. The ten most frequent clusters of “power” in Transition Circle #1 (keyword on the left).

<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	Power <i>cluster</i>
1	40	power plant
2	17	power supply
3	15	power plants
4	10	power plant projects
5	9	power turbine
6	8	power generation
7	8	power plant projects in
8	8	power production
9	6	power and
10	5	power is

The clusters in the table above seem to be interrelated with the findings obtained while investigating the selection of clusters with “power” on the right of the pattern. In fact, “power plant” is the most frequent pattern which emerges by setting the search term on the left of the cluster. This cluster occurs in the macro-sections of three companies, that is, ib vogt GmbH, juwi AG and PCC Deg Renewables GmbH. In the analysis conducted beforehand, I have presented examples where “plant” was included in larger noun phrases to designate the companies’ activity and products, as for instance in the examples in (7.30) and (7.31), as well as in Table 7.9. Close reading of the concordance lines obtained by searching the cluster

“power plant” provides further examples where the companies disseminate information about their products, as in the example below.

(7.37) *We hand over the **solar power plant** in a *turnkey* condition together with comprehensive plant documentation.* (ib vogt GmbH)

The example in (7.37) provides factual information. In general, the language is non-promotional, yet the term “turnkey” is positively connoted as it implies a promise on the part of the message-sender regarding the efficiency and usability of the plant. Besides, the message-sender is personalized by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun “we”.

Along similar lines, the cluster “power supply” occurs when the performance of a certain product is described. This cluster occurs in the macro-sections of Avanti Wind Systems AS, ib vogt GmbH, juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy and Smart Hydro Power GmbH. The following example is taken from the product pages of juwi AG.

(7.38) *Backup systems are a *suitable solution* to deliver a *sustainable* **power supply** even during grid failures.* (juwi AG)

In this example, the product (“backup systems”) is thematized. Moreover, it is positively connoted by means of the evaluative noun phrase “suitable solution” and of the adjective “sustainable”. This seem to testify to the fact that evaluative language is still employed to promote the companies’ products, along with the use of expressions borrowed from scientific and technical language, which contribute to building the companies’ image as competent business partners.

The cluster “power plants” is the plural form of the most frequently occurring cluster which I have discussed beforehand. “Power plants” occurs in the product sections of EnBW AG, ib vogt GmbH, juwi AG, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH and Vapo Oy. In the example below, the cluster is employed to provide details about the use of a given type of products.

(7.39) *Peat and wood pellets are also *ideally suited* for use as a main or auxiliary fuel in **power plants** of all sizes.* (Vapo Oy)

The products are thematized, and they are positively connoted by means of the evaluative phrase “ideally suited”. Moreover, a certain degree of ambiguity can be noticed in the example. In fact, the actual size of the power plant is not indicated. Conversely, these are described by the prepositional phrase “of all sizes”, which aims at appealing to potential

customers. Nonetheless, this phrase can be considered an instance of vague language, comparable to the one retrieved in the example in (7.22).

The cluster “power plant projects” includes the most frequently occurring cluster “power plant”. Furthermore, its concordance lines overlap to a large extent with the concordance lines of the pattern “hydroelectric power plants. Eight out of the ten occurrences of the cluster under consideration coincide with the findings in Table 7.9. The remaining two concordance lines belong respectively to *ib vogt GmbH* and to *PCC Deg Renewables GmbH*.

In the example taken from *ib vogt GmbH* product sections, the cluster is premodified by the adjective “solar”, so as to inform about the type of renewable energy exploited.

(7.40) [...] *we take on all planning tasks, calculations of yield and profitability, procurement, construction management and grid connection for your solar power plant projects.* (*ib vogt GmbH*)

In (7.40), the message-sender (i.e. the company) is referred by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun “we”. The example contains factual information, as the message-receiver is confronted with a list of the company’s activities. The use of the possessive “your” to refer to the message-receiver implies that the company reaches out to its audiences.

In the following example taken from *PCC Deg Renewables GmbH*’s product sections, information is disclosed about the company’s financial activities.

(7.41) Capital investment in the *Energy segment* focuses on **power plant projects**, primarily on the basis of *renewable resources*. (*PCC Deg Renewables GmbH*)

The example in (7.41) includes instances of factual information about how capital investment is made by the company. The industry sector in which the company is active is also mentioned (“Energy segment”, “renewable resources”). Overall, the example is characterized by non-promotional language, yet, the implied function of this textual instance is that of projecting the company’s image as a transparent and responsible business partner. This seems to account for the company’s willingness to disclose information about its investments in renewable energy.

As for the cluster “power turbine”, this designates the products manufactured by *Smart Hydro Power GmbH*, as already discussed in the examples (7.27) and (7.35) above. As a matter of fact, the cluster “power turbine” is attested only in the product sections of this company, where it is always premodified by the name of the company. In this sense, the

cluster “power turbine” is embedded in the name which designates the specific product manufactured by Smart Hydro Power GmbH, as the example below demonstrates.

(7.42) For the *safe and efficient operation* of the **Smart Hydro Power turbine**, following data should be considered:

River Flow Rate at Maximum Power Output: 2.75 m/s

Minimum River Flow: 1.5 m/s

Maximum River Flow: 3.5 m/s

Minimum River Depth: 1.8m

Minimum Width: 2 meters

Maximum recommended depth: 10 meters (generator rating) (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

(7.39) is relevant for my analysis, as it combines instances of promotional language with factual information. Promotional language is represented by the adjectives “safe” and “efficient” which premodify “operation”. Factual and numerical information accompanied by units of measure is represented by the list of data outlined by the company to provide guidance to possible business partners who wish to install the turbine manufactured by Smart Hydro Power GmbH. These data can also be regarded as instances of technical language.

The next most frequently occurring cluster including “power” on the left of the pattern is “power generation”. This is attested in the product sections of EnBW AG, Geotermica AB, juwi AG and Luvata Pori Oy. The cluster “power generation” refers to the industry sector in which the companies operate, as the following example taken from Geotermica AB’s product section seems to demonstrate.

(7.43) *Geotermica AB [...] explores and develops geothermal resources for **power generation** and district heating with environmentally friendly solutions.*
(Geotermica AB)

In (7.43), the company is thematized. The tense used is the present simple, and reference to the company’s activity is implied in the use of the noun phrase “geothermal resources” followed by the prepositional phrase “for power generation and district heating”. These represent evidence of the use of factual, non-promotional language to define the company’s activity. Nonetheless, the prepositional phrase “with environmentally friendly solutions” is positively connoted, and therefore it testifies to the use of promotional language, too.

Finally, the cluster “power production” occurs in the product sections of Geotermica AB and juwi AG. This cluster might be regarded as belonging to the same area of meaning of “power generation”, and indeed “power production” is attested in the product sections of two companies where “power generation” is also used. I will discuss one occurrence of “power

production” from Geotermica AB’s product sections, in order to compare the use of the two clusters by the same message sender.

(7.44) The *company* works in a *lower temperature interval* than classic **geothermal power production**, *between 120 and 200oC*. (Geotermica AB)

Similarly to the example in (7.43), the company is thematized, yet it is not designated by its name, but by the noun “company”. The proposition is in the present tense, and information is provided about the company’s practices in the geothermal sector. This is referred to by means of the cluster “power production” premodified by the adjectives “classic” and “geothermal”. Numerical information is also provided. Moreover, the language used in this proposition seems to belong to the field of science, and it might be obscure to lay audiences accessing Geotermica AB’s website. In fact, the message-sender seems to assume that the message-receiver already has some knowledge of what the temperature interval of “classic geothermal power production” is.

At face value, instances of evaluative language seem to be missing, as the proposition under scrutiny is characterized by factual language. However, it might be argued that the promotional function of the proposition is covert. In fact, the company seeks to stand out from competition by implying that it operates differently from other companies in this industry area. This information might be regarded as the added value which makes the company a competent and successful business partner.

In what follows, I will further discuss the most frequently occurring words in Transition Circle #1 by analysing the right collocates of the adjective “high”. A comparison with the findings obtained in the analysis of the Expanding Circle sub-corpus will be also draw, as this adjective is included in the word lists of both sub-corpora (see Table 7.1).

High

Similarly to the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, the adjective “high” is included among the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in Transition Circle #1, as shown by Table 7.1 above. The adjective “high” occurs in twelve out of the fifteen companies in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus. These companies are Avanti Wind Systems AS, dnpSolar, ib vogt GmbH, Geotermica AB, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mabanaft GmbH, Mervento Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Sveaskog Förvaltning AB. Table 7.11 presents the ten most frequent right collocates of “high”, ranked by number of hits.

TABLE 7.11. Right collocates of “high” in the product sections in Transition Circle #1.

High		
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq(R)</i>	<i>collocate</i>
1	32	heat
2	23	quality
3	20	temperatures
4	13	performance
5	10	air
6	8	purity
7	7	strength
8	7	conductivity
9	6	temperature
10	5	tech

Similarly to the collocates surveyed in the analysis of the Expanding Circle, in Transition Circle #1, “high” occurs in two categories of patterns. The former includes patterns where “high” has the function of a lexical booster, the latter includes patterns where “high” describes the noun which follows. In Transition Circle #1, the following patterns are included in the former category: “high heat”, “high temperatures”, “high air”, “high strength”, “high conductivity” and “high temperature”. The latter category comprises the following patterns: “high quality”, “high performance”, “high purity” and “high tech”.

Nonetheless, the patterns in which “high” is used with a descriptive functions are more frequent than the patterns in which it has an evaluative function. The adjective “high” is used in eighty-two patterns to describe the noun which it premodifies, whereas it is used forty-eight times to positively evaluate the noun which it premodifies. This seems to represent a difference with the findings obtained above in the case of the product sections in the Expanding Circle.

Similarly to the analysis carried out for the patterns including “high” in the product sections in the Expanding Circle, I will discuss an example for the most frequent pattern where “high” has an evaluative function (i.e. “high quality”), along with an example for the most frequent pattern where “high” has a descriptive function (i.e. “high heat”). To start with, “high quality” occurs in the product sections of the following companies: Avanti Wind Systems AS, dnpSolar, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mabanaft GmbH, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH and Vapo Oy. (7.45) below exemplifies the promotional function of the pattern under consideration.

(7.45) In *our* Technology center in The Netherlands *we* produce **high quality** *prototypes and small series.* (JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.)

In the example above, the company is referred to by means of the receiver-excluding pronoun “we” along with the possessive “our”. Factual information about the company is provided, as the location of the company’s “Technology center” is indicated. “High quality” represents an instance of promotional language, as it is included in a larger noun phrase to premodify “prototypes and small series”.

As for “high heat”, this occurs in the product section of Luvata Pori Oy, and it is included on web pages which disclose technical details about the company’s products, as in the example below.

(7.46) MTE
 Specifications
 Air flow scheme
 Performance ranges
 Cooling capacity: from 0,79 to 4,53 kW *
 Airflow: from 600 to 2.840 m3/h
 Brine coolers and CO2 coolers: customized on demand
High heat exchange efficiency (Luvata Pori Oy)

In the example above, technical information about the product (“MTE”) is organized into a list. Numerical information along with units of measure is shown as well. The pattern “high heat” is included in a larger noun phrase which is repeated across all the thirty-two occurrences of the pattern. The noun phrase can be considered an instance of factual language, yet the noun “efficiency”, which is the head word in the phrase, is actually positively connoted, as it implies the quality and reliability of the product.

Next, attention will be devoted to the noun “energy” and its co-text, to outline meaningful patterns in which this word is used in the product sections scrutinized here.

Energy

“Energy” is a word foregrounding the business sector in which the companies are active, as I have stated in the analysis in § 6.2.1. In fact, the findings of the analysis in Chapter 6, which is dedicated to the About Us/Company sections, have attested that “energy” ranks among the twenty-five most frequently occurring words in both sub-corpora. Moreover, it can be argued that “energy” belongs to the same area of meaning of “power”, which in fact is included in the both word lists in Table 7.1 above. Nonetheless, “energy” ranks thirty-fifth in the product sections in the Expanding Circle, whereas it ranks twenty-fourth in the product sections in Transition Circle #1.

The word “energy” is attested in the sub-corpora of the following twelve companies: dnpSolar, EnBW AG, ib vogt GmbH, Geotermica AB, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v.,

juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mabanaft GmbH, Mervento Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Sveaskog Förvaltning AB. In order to pin down significant patterns in which “energy” is used, I will present a list of the most frequent collocates on the left and on the right of the search term, so as to draw a comparison with the patterns disclosed in § 6.2.1.

TABLE 7.12. Collocates of “energy” in the product sections in Transition Circle #1.

<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	Energy		<i>collocate</i>
		<i>L</i>	<i>R</i>	
1	32	30	2	wind
2	21	20	1	the
3	18	17	1	solar
4	11	11	0	renewable
5	11	10	1	of
6	11	5	6	and
7	10	0	10	sources
8	10	0	10	production
9	10	0	10	in
10	7	1	6	is

The content words which most frequently collocates with “energy” in the product sections in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus are “wind”, “solar”, “renewable”, “sources” and “production”. Some of these collocates of “energy” have been pinpointed in § 6.2.1 during the lexico-grammatical analysis of the About Us/Company sections. As a matter of fact, as illustrated in Table 6.4, “wind” and “renewable” are frequent collocates of “energy” in the companies’ profiles included in both the Expanding and Transition Circle #1. Next, “solar” is a frequent collocate of “energy” in the About Us/Company sections in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, while “sources” is a frequent collocate of “energy” in the Expanding Circle. This selection of collocates from the analysis of the About Us/Company sections leaves out the noun “production” only, which does not rank among the ten most frequent collocates of “energy” in either sub-corpora discussed in § 6.2.1.

Furthermore, it is to be borne in mind that the noun “production” is a frequent collocate of “power” in the product sections in Transition Circle #1, as indicated above. The discussion of the cluster “power production” in (7.44) has revealed that it occurs in contexts where information about the companies’ activities and products is disclosed. Yet, the analysis of (7.44) has revealed that the promotional function of the proposition is to be read between the lines. In fact, it is implied that the company operates differently from competitors in the field, and so it seeks to stand out.

Following from this premises, the pattern “energy production” and its co-text will be exemplified here by discussing the proposition in (7.47) below, with a view to pinning down instances of factual and evaluative language alike.

(7.47) *Our innovative solutions* increases [sic.] the **energy production** resulting in *higher revenues* for the *owners*. (Mervento Oy)

In the example above, the company’s products (“solutions”) are thematized. These are introduced by the possessive “our”, which refers to the message-sender, and by the lexical booster “innovative”. This is an instance of overt positive evaluation. The noun phrase “energy production” designates the performance of the company’s products. “Energy production” is positively connoted by the use of the verb “to increase”, which intensifies the meaning of the proposition.

Another instance of positive evaluation is the comparative “higher”, which premodifies “revenues”. “Higher revenues” are the promise which is entailed in the use of the companies’ products, and they are related to prospective customers (“owners”). In this way, reference is made to a group of stakeholders, too. In sum, the overall function of the proposition is promotional, as it aims at appealing to the company’s customers.

Before concluding the analysis of the most frequently occurring content words in the product sections in Transition Circle #1, I will discuss occurrences of “water”, with a view to disclosing instances of promotional and/or non-promotional language.

Water

As shown by the Concordance Plot tool integrated in *AntConc*, the noun “water” is present in the product sections of the following companies: Avanti Wind Systems AS, dnpSolar, EnBW AG, Geotermica AB, juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, Mervento Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH, Vapo Oy. In order to outline meaningful patterns in which the word is most frequently employed, and in order to guide my close reading of the concordance lines obtained in *AntConc*, I have processed the noun under scrutiny in a way similar to “power” in the previous analysis. To this effect, I have deployed the *AntConc* Cluster tool: I have set the cluster size between two and four words, and I have done a frequency sort with the keyword on the right of the cluster. Table 7.13 summarizes the first ten results, ordered by ranking, and indicating the number of occurrences.

TABLE 7.13. The ten most frequent clusters of “water” in Transition Circle #1 (keyword on the right).

Water			
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>cluster</i>	
1	41	5	the water
2	14	4	of water
3	12	1	brajcino water
4	12	1	the brajcino water
5	11	1	ka water
6	11	1	patiska water
7	10	2	of the water
8	10	1	staniser water
9	10	1	the staniser water
10	9	1	of the staniser water

As shown by Table 7.13, the most meaningful clusters including “water” on the right of the pattern are “brajcino water”, “patiska water” and “staniser water”. These clusters are to be retrieved in PCC Deg Renewable GmbH, and they refer to plants built by the company in the Republic of Macedonia. Moreover, as revealed by the Concordance tool, the clusters thus outlined always premodify the noun “intake”,¹¹ so as to form the pattern “name of the area” plus “intake”. Hence, it seems safe to argue that this pattern has been coined by the message-sender to provide information about the performance of its plants. As a matter of fact, the word “intake” denotes a “place where water is taken into a channel or pipe from a river or other body of water, to drive a mill, or supply a canal, waterworks, etc.”.¹² The example below illustrates the context in which the pattern considered is used by PCC Deg Renewables GmbH.

(7.48) *From the left, **water** arrives from the **Brajcino water intake**, to be directed to the powerhouse together with the Staniser water (top-centre of the photo).* (PCC Deg Renewables GmbH)

The example above is informative, in that it describes details of a picture illustrating the plant in Brajcino. By describing the picture, information is disclosed regarding the way in which the plant functions. Moreover, by means of the expressions “from the left” and “top-centre of the photo”, the message-sender guides the message-receiver while s/he observes the picture.

After having exemplified the form and function of clusters including the noun “water” on the left of the pattern, I will now concentrate on clusters including “water” on the right of the cluster. These are displayed in Table 7.14, ranked by frequency.

¹¹ This noun is present in the examples in (7.18) and (7.36) retrieved from the product sections of PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, which I have discussed above.

¹² “intake, n.”. *OED Online*. <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/97325?rskey=4WXPJj&result=1>>, last accessed on 30 January 2015.

TABLE 7.14. The ten most frequent clusters of “water” in Transition Circle #1 (keyword on the left).

Water		
<i>rank</i>	<i>freq</i>	<i>cluster</i>
1	67	water intake
2	9	water and
3	8	water, oil
4	8	water, oil or
5	8	water, oil or other
6	7	water is
7	6	water intake. the
8	5	water from
9	5	water velocity
10	4	water for

The findings obtained are consistent with the discussion of the cluster including “water” on the left of the “pattern”, since the table shows that “intake” is the most frequent right collocate of water.

In addition to the cluster “water intake”, which has already been discussed while illustrating the example in (7.48), “water velocity” deserves attention. The five instances of this cluster occur in the product sections of Smart Hydro Power GmbH, and they appear in contexts where scientific and technical information is provided. However, instances of positively connoted language with a promotional function can be retrieved as well, as the example below seems to demonstrate.

(7.49) Just as with sun and wind energy where one must evaluate the sun and wind hours of a certain location, determining **the water velocity** of *your* river, or canal is *important* when *purchasing* a kinetic turbine. (Smart Hydro Power GmbH)

The proposition in (7.49) regards the measure of water velocity. The information provided is intended to expand the message receivers’ knowledge. Besides, this information is defined as “important” by the message-sender, as it guides the message-receivers while purchasing the most appropriate product for his/her needs. Hence, in this case the intended message-receivers are customers, and they are directly addressed by means of the possessive “you”.

In a nutshell, the proposition above testifies to the fact that non-promotional language, and in particular scientific language, is aptly appropriated by the companies to promote their products. This is in agreement with the other findings discussed in this section, which have purported to demonstrate that promotional and non-promotional language go hand in hand in the product sections’ of companies’ global websites.

In the following section, the results of lexico-grammatical analysis will be complemented with the results of the analysis conducted on the hypertextual/interactive and on the visual elements displayed by the product pages. By doing so, I will account for the multimodal strategies deployed in the macro-sections under scrutiny to disseminate information about the products and services supplied by the companies, and to promote them. The analysis conducted in § 7.1.2 is qualitative, and it aims at exemplifying the most frequent and effective multimodal strategies adopted by the companies.

7.1.2. *Analysis of hypertextual, interactive and visual elements*

In what follows, I will investigate the product sections from a qualitative and multimodal perspective, similarly to the analysis of the About Us/Company sections in § 6.2.2. By doing so, I will root my investigation into the concept of hypermodality construed by Lemke (2002), which has been introduced in § 5.1. This concept is instrumental to my internal investigation of the product sections, as it accounts for the fact that meaning in web-mediated communication lies the interplay of hyperlinks and multimodal resources.

Thus, such elements as hyperlinks, blocks of text and visuals will be treated as the functional units of the web pages embedded in the product sections. In order to classify these elements, I will adopt the analytical pattern devised by Bolaños Medina *et al.* (2005) with special reference to hyperlinks and visuals. As it has been discussed in § 5.1., Bolaños Medina *et al.*'s pattern comprises three categories, i.e. images, linguistic markers, and the category of functionality as expressed by hyperlinks and other interactive tools (Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005).¹³ Since the category of linguistic markers has been tackled in the lexico-grammatical analysis in the previous section, here I will account for the presence of images and hyperlinks. Nonetheless, some rhetorical choices will be isolated and discussed, when their form and function is interconnected with that of images and/or hyperlinks. As for images and the composition of the web pages, I will integrate Bolaños Medina *et al.*'s pattern by relying upon Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design.

Following from these premises, I will firstly classify the websites in the REnEU corpus according to the type of compositional structure (Kress and Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], see also § 3.3), which characterizes the pages in their corresponding product sections. The compositional structures which seem to emerge from my corpus are:

1. product pages organized along the vertical and horizontal axes;

¹³ Bolaños Medina *et al.* have borrowed the notion of functionality from Shepherd and Watters's (1998), as discussed in § 5.1. Additionally, this notion is in line with Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen's (2005) categorization of hyperlinks on homepages as functional units (see 3.2.1).

2. product pages characterized by the triptych pattern.¹⁴

Both compositional structures will be exemplified by selecting meaningful web pages from my corpus. I will discuss the types of images displayed in the product sections by indicating the presence of logos, banners and other images illustrating the companies' products. Furthermore, I will report on hyperlinks and on other graphic control elements which allow for navigation within the websites, or enable web users to contact the company. The analysis will demonstrate that the product sections tend to replicate the same hypertextual, interactive and visual pattern web page after web page. Hence, the results of the analysis will demonstrate that the product sections can be regarded as colony-in-loops, similarly to the About Us/Company sections discussed in Chapter 6.

Product pages organized along the vertical and horizontal axes

The product pages in the REnEU corpus which are organized along both vertical and horizontal axes display elements arranged at the top and at the bottom of the screen, and on the left and on the right of the screen. Fourteen out of the fifteen companies in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus are characterized by this compositional structure. These are Acciona Energía Solar SL, A. Silva Matos Energia SA, Bonfiglioli Riduttori SpA, CHO-Power - Eurolasma Group, enso hydro GmbH, Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ, IREM SpA, Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl, Palazzetti Lelio SpA, Profish Technology SA, Silcio SA and Turboden Srl. In addition to these, six out of the fifteen companies in Transition Circle #1 display web pages combining the horizontal and vertical axes, that is, Deep Drill Supply Group, EnBW AG, JL MAG Rare-Earth Co. Europe b.v., Mabanaft GmbH, Mervento Oy and Sveaskog Förvaltning AB. In what follows, I will report on the elements in the top section and bottom section, and on the left and right side of the web pages by selecting examples to illustrate the most effective hypertextual/interactive and multimodal strategies.

The top sections of the product pages might present a logo, a banner, a navigation bar, and other hyperlinks. Logos and banners belong to the category of images (Bolaños Medina *et al.*'s 2005), while the navigation bar and other hyperlinks represent functional elements (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, Bolaños Medina *et al.*'s 2005) which are instrumental to accessing information in the macro-sections.

In the product pages characterized by the compositional structure under scrutiny, the logo is usually positioned in the top-left hand corner of the screen. Only in the websites of

¹⁴ As elucidated in 3.3, the triptych pattern is a compositional structure integrating the horizontal and vertical axes with the centre-margin pattern (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006], see also § 3.3).

Deep Drill Supply Group and GA Drilling as, the company logo is positioned in the middle of the navigation bar, i.e. in the upper section of the screen. The logo symbolizes the identity of a company, as discussed in § 2.3. When the logo is placed on the left, it represents given information, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) theories. Conversely, when the logo is in the middle of the top section, the symbol of the company's identity seems to stand out more.

Since logos are usually present on all the web pages, as testified by the websites in my corpus, they provide visual cohesion and coherence across the companies' websites. Furthermore, as already pointed out in § 6.2.2, logos identify the message-sender (or sign-maker, in consideration of the fact that multimodal elements are scrutinized here) hence they foreground the company. In addition to this, logos are often functional units, as they might be clickable objects leading navigators back to the homepage in the majority of websites in my corpus. All the web pages considered here have a clickable logo, with the exception of Deep Drill Supply Group, Fröling GmbH, Micron - Cappello Alluminio Srl, Mervento Oy and Silcio SA, whose logos are inactive. In turn, the logo of A. Silva Matos Energia SA is an active link to the Group section, while the logo of Profish Technology SA and the logo of Sveaskog Förvaltning AB lead respectively to the homepages in French and Swedish.

Similarly to logos, banners are usually placed in the upper section of a web page. In general, banners are large, rectangular images which span the width of the screen. This has been indicated in § 6.2.2 as well, when tackling the composition of the web pages within the About Us/Company sections. However, banners are not always present. In fact, some of the product pages arranged along the vertical and horizontal axes do not display a banner. These companies are Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ and Mervento Oy. In addition to these, the product sections of CHO-Power - Europlasma Group and EnBW do not show any banners, either, although their corresponding homepages have one.

Hence, it could be argue that companies personalize their use of banners. Accordingly, banners are characterized by variation. This is in contrast to logos, as these seem to be a must on all pages within a website. Moreover, banners can be realized as dynamic elements, consisting of moving or sliding images. This is the case of A. Silva Matos Energia SA, enso GmbH, Profish Technogy SA and Silcio SA. Banners are also used as framing devices dividing the web page into an upper and a bottom section. By dividing the web page into two sections, banners seem to represent the Ideal dimension of the composition, since they are positioned in the upper section of a web page. Conversely, the elements in the lower sections can be considered the Real dimension (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]).

The upper section of the web pages usually includes the same navigation bar displayed on the homepage. As mentioned beforehand, the navigation bar gathers the generic links which guide navigation through the content of a websites (Askehave & Ellerup Nielsen 2005, see also § 3.2.1). In general, the navigation bar is arranged on the horizontal axis, hence it functions as a framing device, especially on those web pages which are not provided with a banner. This is indeed the case of the product pages in the websites of CHO-Power - Europlasma Group, EnBW AG, Fröling GmbH, GA Drilling as, GOLIATH Wind OÜ and Mervento Oy. This pattern is exemplified by Figure 7.3, which displays a screenshot from one of the product pages in GOLIATH Wind OÜ's website.

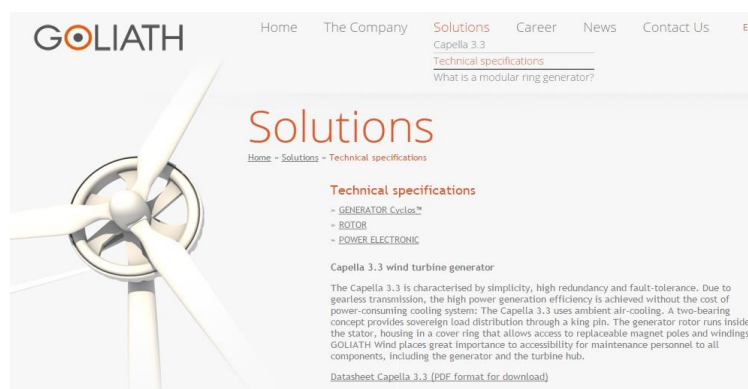


FIGURE 7.3. Detail of one of the product pages in GOLIATH Wind OÜ's websites.

Figure 7.3 also displays the combination of elements on the left- and right-hand sides of the screen. In the case of GOLIATH Wind OÜ, the image of the product (a wind mill) is placed on the left, thus corresponding to given information. The textual description of the product is provided on the right, thus corresponding to new information. This pattern is in agreement with Kress and Van Leeuwen's description of corporate websites in the automotive industry. In their example quoted in § 3.3, the authors point out that the image of the car is on the left-hand side of the screen, while the block of text is on the right-hand side. A closer investigation of GOLIATH Wind OÜ's website indicates that the image of the wind mill is placed on the left-hand side of all the other web pages, except for the homepage.¹⁵ The fact that this pattern is replicated across the whole websites makes the company's visual communication cohesive and coherent.

The polarization between left and right side / given and new information is attested by the elements in the upper section of the product pages in Fröling GmbH's website, yet the order of the elements is reversed. As illustrated in Figure 7.4, the block of text is on the left,

¹⁵ The homepage of GOLIATH Wind OÜ's website is provided with an animated 3D visual element, representing six wind mills.

thus representing given information, whereas the image is placed on the right, thus representing new information.

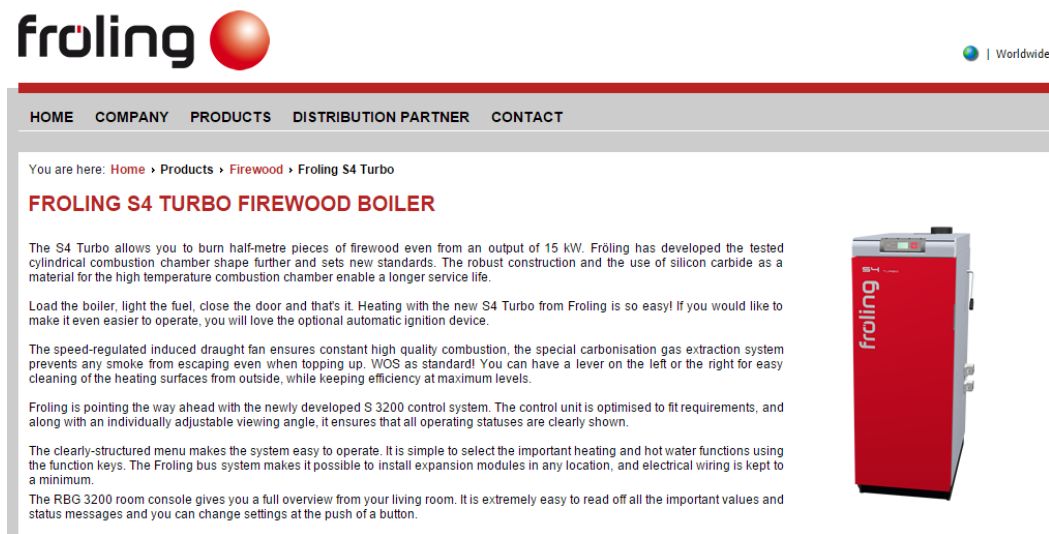


FIGURE 7.4. Detail of the upper section of one of the product pages in Fröling GmbH's website.

From the screenshot above it is also evident that the presentation of the product relies mainly on textual information. As a matter of fact, the block of text is spread over a larger area than the one covered by the product image. In general, it might be stated that in Figure 7.4 the textual mode is predominant with respect to the visual mode, as no other visual elements are displayed a part from the company's logo and the image of the product.

Although textual information prevails over visuals, the use of colour is still relevant from a symbolic and a compositional perspective. The colours used are red and grey. On the one side, red characterizes both the company's logo and the product image. In this way, the company's identity, as symbolized by the logo, reflects on its products on a visual level. On the other side, grey is used to highlight the navigation bar and to frame the left side of the block of text.

By scrolling down the page, the navigator is confronted with further textual and visual information. The lower section of the page is subdivided into two parts which list the "Advantages" of the product. The "Advantages" are realized by seven textual items provided with a heading, and introducing textual information organized in bullet points. Each textual item is accompanied by a small, square image, representing a detail of the product. The relationship which is established between the product image in the right upper section of the web page and the details in the lower section can be categorized as an analytical process (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1006[2006], see also § 3.3). In this sense, the seven square are the Possessive Attributes and the product image is the Carrier. Over and above this, the images

are active links: by clicking on them, the image is zoomed-in, and it appears in a larger frame in the middle of the screen, complemented by further textual information, as depicted in Figure 7.5 below.

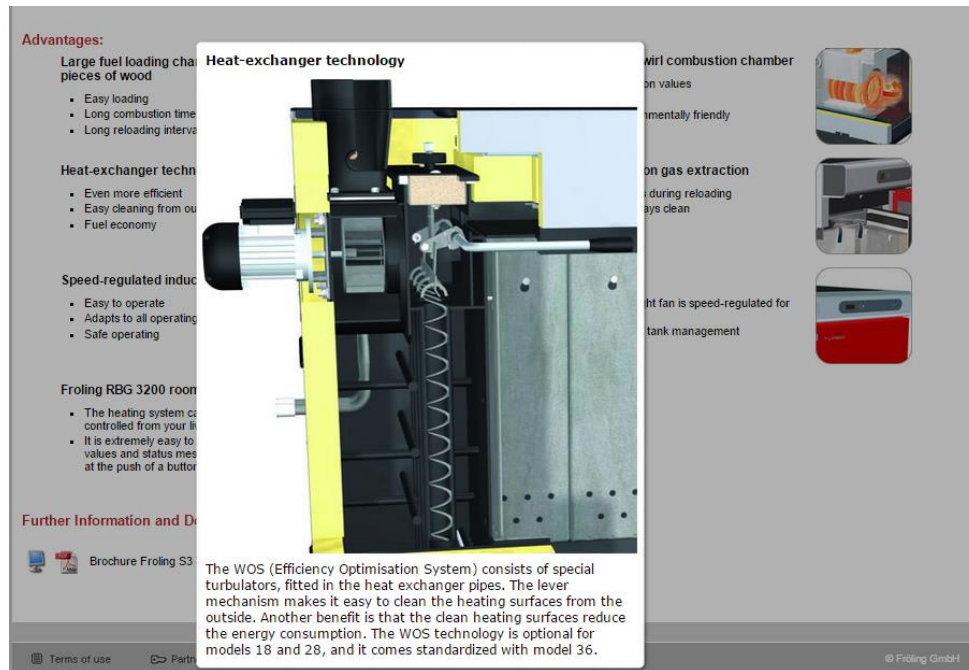


FIGURE 7.5. Zoomed-in image on one of the product pages in Fröling GmbH's website.

The image in Figure 7.5 is accompanied by a further block of text, describing how the product functions. Hence, the sign-maker has exploited the affordances of the medium to make visuals stand out more, and to provide additional information. All in all, the design of the web page in the lower section makes information easily accessible and usable on the part of the addressees.

As mentioned before, the product pages of Fröling GmbH do not display a banner. In order to account for the presence of banners on the product pages, I will focus on the case of IREM SpA. Its product sections are characterized by a pattern which is similar to the one adopted by Fröling GmbH, as its textual, hypertextual and visual elements are arranged in the upper and lower section, as well as on the left and on the right side of the screen, as shown in Figure 7.6.

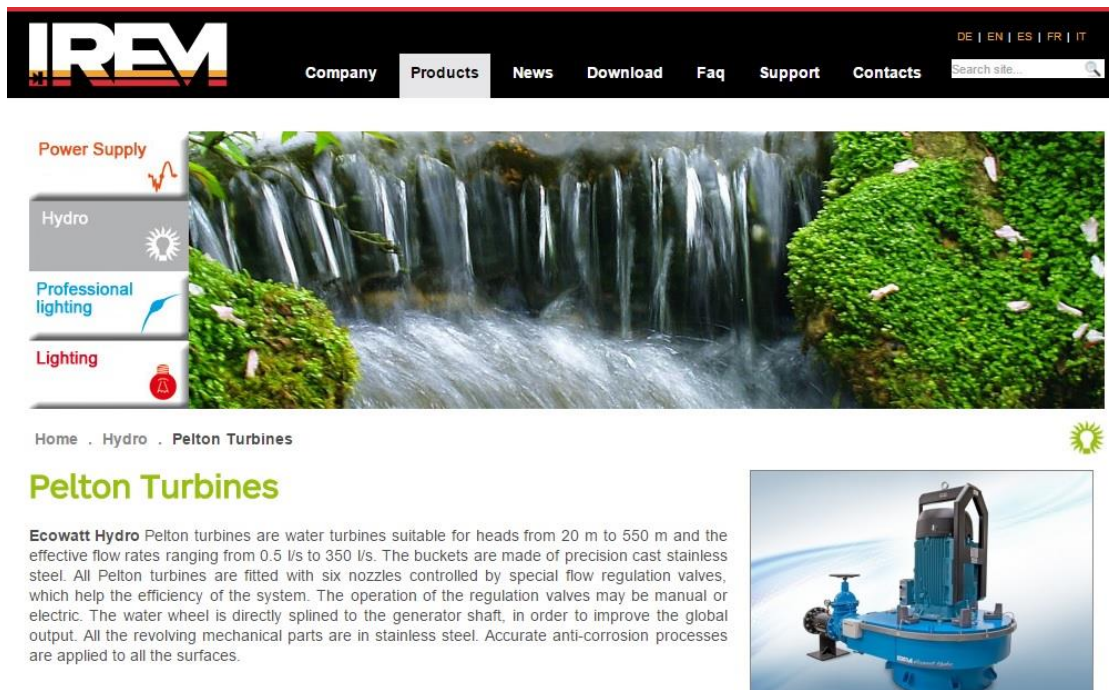


FIGURE 7.6. Detail of one of the product pages in IREM SpA's website.

In the upper section, a banner spans approximately the whole width of the screen. On the left of the banner, the web user is presented with a graphic control element gathering hyperlinks which lead to other macro-sections in the websites. Each macro-section is dedicated to a given source of renewable energy, and it includes web pages describing other products manufactured by the company. From a functional perspective, the graphic control element provides a navigational map to web users to conveniently access the product pages collected in the website.

Next, the lower section of the web page is subdivided into two parts. A block of text is placed on the left, describing one of the company's product. The image of the product is displayed on the right. The block of text spreads over a wider area than the image of the product, similarly to Fröling GmbH's product presentation. However, the presence of the banner on the web page makes visual information more prominent than textual information. Furthermore, following Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) theorization of the Ideal-Real polarization, it might be argued that the banner represents the Ideal element in the composition, while the block of text and the image of the product in the bottom section represent the Real elements.

This polarization is further testified by the visual representation in the banner. The banner illustrates a landscape with waterfalls. This representation can be considered as a symbol of hydroelectric energy, thus confirming that the web page under scrutiny is to be retrieved in the macro-section dedicated to this particular source of energy. Conversely, the

image in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen illustrates one of the products manufactured by the company. This accounts for the Real dimension of the composition.

The same compositional and visual pattern is replicated across the web pages included in the macro-sections dedicated to the other sources of renewable energy: the different banners symbolize the energy sources exploited, while the images in the bottom right-hand corner of the screen display the products described in the blocks of text on the left. Owing to the recursive pattern characterizing the web pages in the product sections of IREM SpA's website, it is here argued that they could be conceptualized as colony-in-loops (Parodi 2010).

So far, I have accounted for the presence of blocks of text and images in the lower section of product pages. Here, I would like to report on the presence of interactive tools which enable web users to contact the company. This is for instance the case of the "Rentals" and "Services" pages in Deep Drill Supply Group. The compositional structure of these two pages is exemplified by Figure 7.7 on the next page, which is a screenshot of the "Rentals" web page.¹⁶

The top section of the screen displays a navigation bar, the company's logo, and a banner. As mentioned previously, the logo is placed among the generic links in the navigation bar, but it is not clickable. The logo stands out for its position and for its colour, i.e. red. Red is a cohesive device across the page: in fact, the navigation bar, the headings on the bottom of the screen, as well as the icons and clickable buttons on the right-hand side of the web page are red. Red elements are depicted in the banner, too. The banner is the largest visual element on the page. It illustrates a panoramic photo the company's premises, and so it corresponds to the Ideal dimension of the composition by projecting the company's image. Three small images are aligned above the banner, on the right of the logo. These symbolize the company's activities.

¹⁶ The "Services" and "Rental" web pages have the same compositional structure, but the banners they display are different from each other. Deep Drill Supply Group has a further web page dedicated to product description, i.e. "Sales", as indicated in § 7.1. This web page displays a banner too, but it is larger than the banners on the "Rentals" and "Services" web pages. Below the banner, six products are described by images arranged vertically on the left, and blocks of text on the right. The compositional structure of the "Sales" web page resembles that of Goliath Wind OÜ, in that the images of the products are on the left, while textual information is on the right.

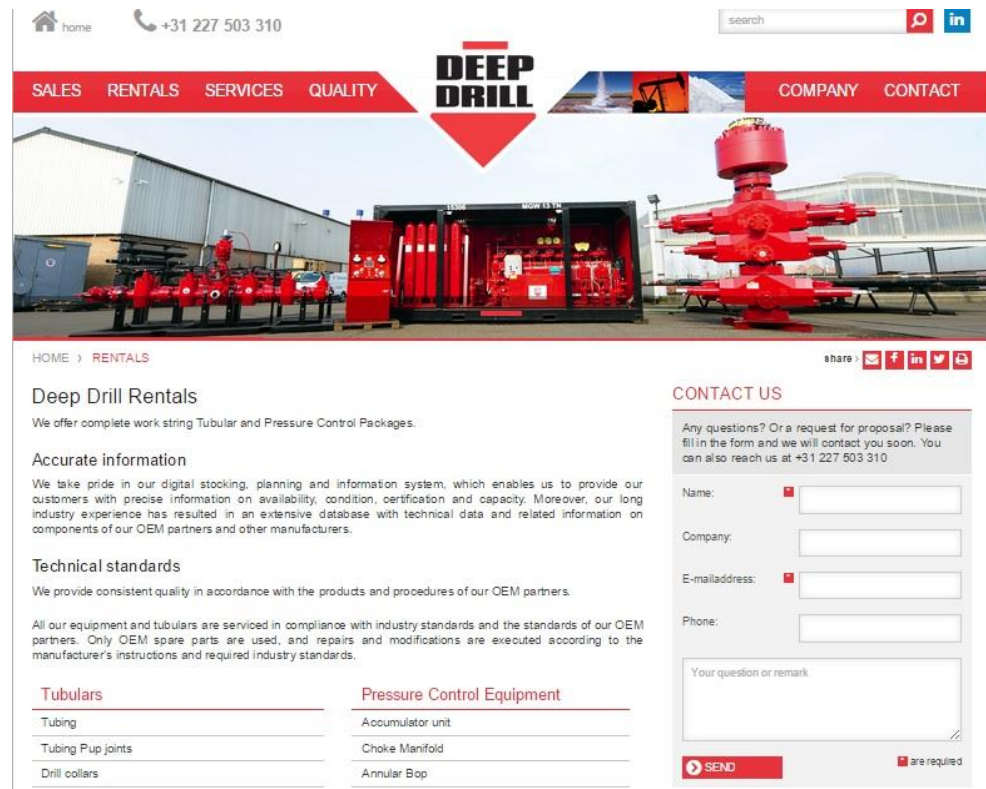


FIGURE 7.7. Detail of one of the product pages in Deep Drill Supply Group's website.

Below the banner, the page is subdivided into two parts. On the left, a block of text describing the companies' activities and technical standards is followed by a list of the company's products. The texts on the left side of the screen represent new information. The company's products are not visually represented. In turn, the right-hand side of the page include a fill-form. Hence, by tapping into the affordances of the medium, the sign-maker has provided his/her addressees with a tool which enables them to directly contact the company. The fill-in form is accompanied by instructions, which are textually realized so as to directly address its intended audience. The instructions are presented in (7.50) below.

(7.50) *CONTACT US*

Any questions? Or a request for proposal? Please fill in the form and we will contact you soon. You can also reach us at +31[...] (Deep Drill Supply Group)

To start with, the company invites its stakeholders to take action by means of the directives "contact us" (in upper-case letters) and "fill in". Yet, the latter is hedged by the politeness markers "please". The company is personalized by means of the receiver-excluding "we", while its stakeholders are referred to by the personal pronoun "you". Next, the stakeholders are directly addressed by means of two questions ("Any questions?" "Or a request for proposal?"). In both questions, the verb and the subject are omitted: this rhetorical strategy

makes communication informal, and similar to spoken discourse. The company also prompts its stakeholders to contact the company on the phone, yet the use of the modal “can” introduced by “you” mitigates the force of the instruction. Finally, the text includes a promise on the part of the company, indicated by the use of modal “will”, which gives an idea of commitment.

In sum, the case of Deep Drill Group accounts for the fact that product pages, and company’s websites in general, might as well include interactive tools to contact the company, as for instance fill-in forms. When available, fill-in forms integrate contact details, such as phone numbers and address, by exploiting the interactive affordance of the medium. These tools are effective functional units, which allow for direct communication between the company and its audiences, and in this sense they contribute to the promotional purposes of the companies’ websites.

Product pages characterized by the triptych pattern

The product pages in the REnEU corpus which are characterized by the triptych pattern display functional units arranged on the horizontal and the vertical axes, as well as in the centre and in the margin of the composition.¹⁷ Only one company in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus is characterized by this pattern, i.e. Cryostar SAS, while nine out of the fifteen companies in the Transition Circle sub-corpus show it. These are Avanti Wind Systems AS, dnpSolar, ib vogt GmbH, Geotermica AB, juwi AG, Luvata Pori Oy, PCC Deg Renewables GmbH, Smart Hydro Power GmbH and Vapo Oy.. From this preliminary overview, it emerges that only one third of the companies’ websites in the REnEU corpus are characterized by the triptych compositional structure.

Similarly to the discussion of product pages organized along the vertical and horizontal axes, here I will analyze functional units such as images, blocks of texts and hyperlinks and interactive tools, with a view to mapping their position within the triptych pattern. While doing so, I will single out examples in order to discuss the most effective hypertextual/interactive and multimodal choices.

To start with, all the product pages show the company’s logo in the top left-hand corner of the screen, with the exception of juwi AG, whose logo is positioned in the top-right

¹⁷ As I have explained in § 3.3, the triptych pattern was usually adopted by university websites between the late 1990s and early 2000s (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]). Since then, technology and website design have evolved, so it is here hypothesized that the compositional structure of university websites has changed accordingly. Investigating the design of university websites would lead the present discussion to far afield at this point. Nonetheless, I rely on the assumption that the triptych pattern of companies’ website is an updated version of the pattern identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen, which professional sign-makers have adapted to the needs of corporate communication.

hand corner. All the logos are clickable objects directing the web users to the homepage of the company's website. The only exception is represented by the logo of *ib vogt GmbH*, which provides access to the homepage in German.

Next, a banner is to be observed on the web pages of the following companies: Cryostar SAS, *dnpSolar*, *ib vogt GmbH*, *Geotermica AB*, *juwi AG*, *PCC Deg Renewables GmbH*, *Smart Hydro Power GmbH* and *Vapo Oy*. All banners are static images. Besides, it is to be noted that the banner on *dnpSolar*'s product pages consists of three images, that is, one large rectangular image, and two smaller square images, on the left and one on the right. In this way, the three images included in the banner highlight the centre-margin polarization which is implied in the triptych pattern. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that the same pattern characterizes the banner in the upper section of *dnpSolar*'s institutional presentation, as discussed in § 6.2.2. Yet, the images included in the banner on the product pages are different from those in the banner on the web page dedicated to the company's presentation. The banner on *dnpSolar* is shown in Figure 7.8 below.



FIGURE 7.8. Banner on *dnpSolar*'s product pages.

The images in *dnpSolar*'s banner well exemplify the centre-margin polarization embedded in the triptych pattern. In fact, the photograph of a solar plant is brought to the fore in the larger image placed in the middle of the banner. This highlights the type of activity in which the company is involved. Conversely, the two smaller square images are subordinate to the larger one. In particular, the image on the left, which represents two people working on a project,¹⁸ seem to symbolize the stage which precedes the construction of a plant. As for the vertical axis, the banner represents the Ideal dimension of the composition, while the textual information in the lower section represents the Real dimension. Conversely, the logo is

¹⁸ The face of the two people is hidden, as the picture is taken from above. Conversely, the project is the focus of attention in the picture, thus further highlighting the company's activities and its products, rather than the company itself or its staff.

arranged on the horizontal axis, and its presence in the top-left hand corner of the screen accounts for given information on the web page.

In general, the companies which have adopted the triptych composition replicate it across all the web pages within their product sections. This is further evidence of the fact that, in terms of multimodality, the product sections can be regarded as a colony-in-loops. Moreover, the companies' websites which have adopted this compositional structure show web pages which are very similar to each other. In fact, the product pages of the nine companies under consideration here present a middle section which is larger than the sections on the left and on the right. Therefore, the middle section is the centre of the composition, while the left and right sections are the margins, as displayed by one of the product pages retrieved in Cryostar SAS's website (Figure 7.9).

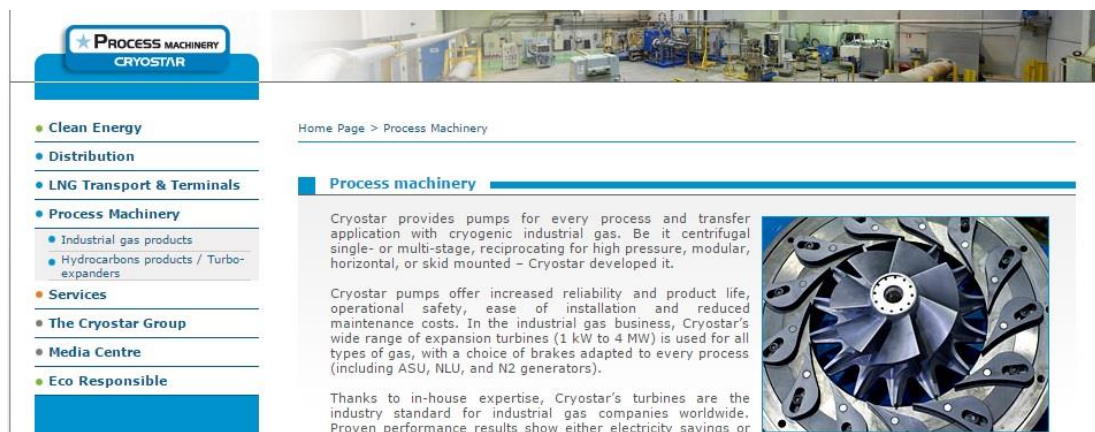


FIGURE 7.9. Detail of one of the product pages in Cryostar SAS's website.

The most prominent element in the screenshot above is the block of text describing the product to which the web page is devoted. This in fact is placed in the middle of the composition. The block of text is framed by a banner in the upper section of the page, by a graphic control element on the left, and by a close-up of the product on the right. The position and content of the graphic control element is noteworthy, as this actually lists the generic links provided on the homepage. As pointed out before, generic links are usually horizontally organized in the upper section of web pages, below the banner, rather than stacked one upon the other on the left-hand side of the screen. Therefore, it could be argued that, when arranged on the vertical axis on the left of the screen, the generic links represent given information. In contrast to this, the links provided below the banner in Figure 7.9 correspond to the path which the navigator has followed within the website. A similar composition is to be noted on the web pages of Avanti Wind Systems AS and Smart Hydro Power GmbH: the generic links

are vertically organized on the left-hand side of the screen, but no banner and no navigation path are present in the upper section of the page.

On top of this, the web pages of juwi AG present a reversed version of this pattern, as the generic links are vertically arranged in the right margin of the screen, as illustrated in Figure 7.10 below. In turn, the left margin of the page is provided with the company's contact detail.



FIGURE 7.10. Detail of one of the product pages in juwi AG's website.

Going back to those web pages which are characterized by the triptych pattern and which display images in the right margin, the website of Geotermica AB represents an interesting case from the perspective of visual representation. In fact, as it can be seen in Figure 7.11, the web page dedicated to the company's operations shows graphic elements rather than photographs. The first element is a map of Europe, illustrating how heat flows in the shallow ground, and thus pinning down the better sites to build a geothermal power plant. This is implied in the caption below the image, as in (7.51) below.

(7.51) *Heat flow map of Europe. Iceland, Italy and Turkey display the highest heat fluxes. Geothermal power plants can be built with relatively shallow wells* (EGEC - European Geothermal Energy Council) (Geotermica AB)

The first two sentences in (7.51) describe the picture by providing factual information. At the same time, possible sites to build geothermal power plants are identified. This information is expanded upon in the third sentence. The noun phrases "heat flow", "heat fluxes" and "shallow wells" are borrowed from scientific/technical language. Broadly speaking, the

caption is informative, in that it disseminates knowledge about the availability of geothermal energy in Europe. The indication of the source in brackets, i.e. EGECE, makes the both visual and textual information reliable.¹⁹

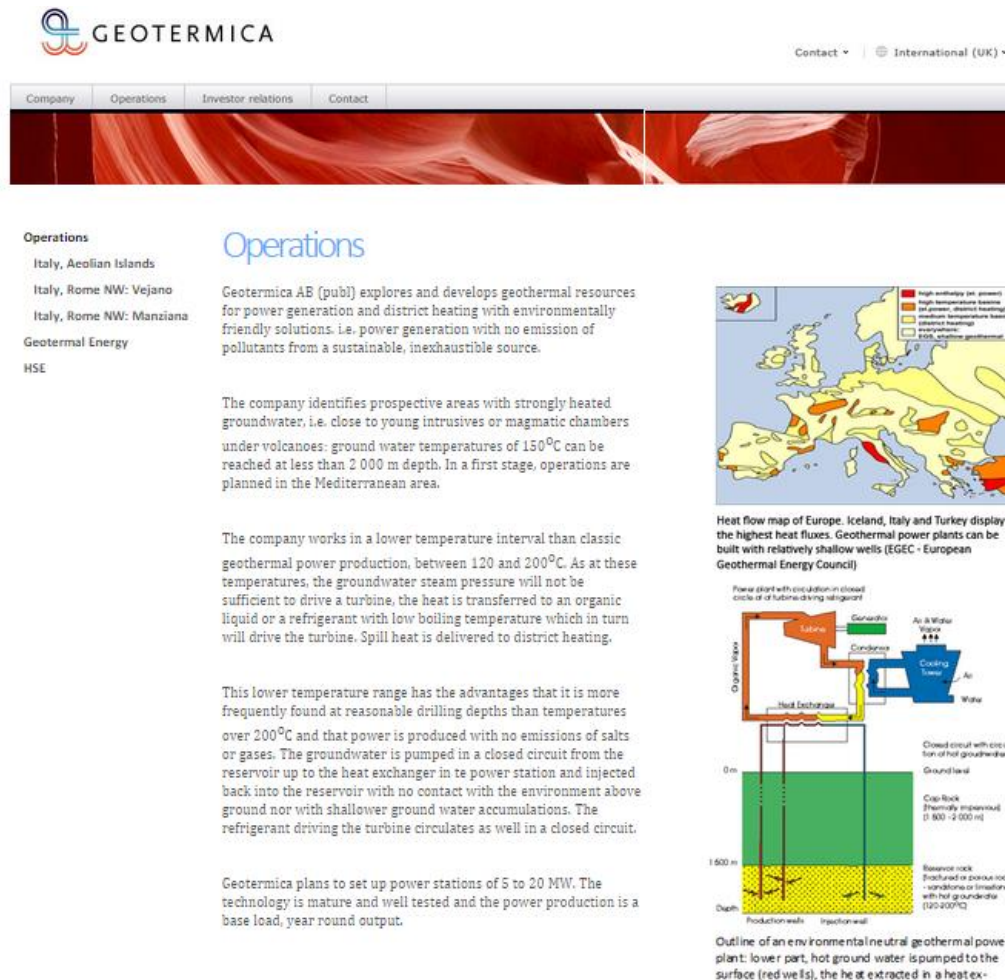


FIGURE 7.11. “Operations” page in Geotermica AB’s website.

The second graphic element, which is placed below the map of Europe, illustrates the different parts of a geothermal power plant. Textual information is provided as well, to explain how the plant extracts geothermal power from the shallow ground.

By disseminating specialized knowledge, and by quoting an external organization which endorses the production of geothermal energy, the graphic elements and their corresponding captions fulfil promotional purposes, as they represent the company as a competent and reliable business partner.

Similarly to Geotermica AB, the product section of Smart Hydro Power GmbH draws upon visual elements to provide information about its products and about the way they work.

¹⁹ EGECE is the non-profit organization promoting geothermal energy in Europe (see the description of the corpus in § 5.2).

In particular, the first page in the product section presents a large animated 3D visual element (Figure 7.12), which spreads over the centre and the right margin of the page. On the left-hand side of the screen, the visual element is framed by the generic links, stacked one upon the other.

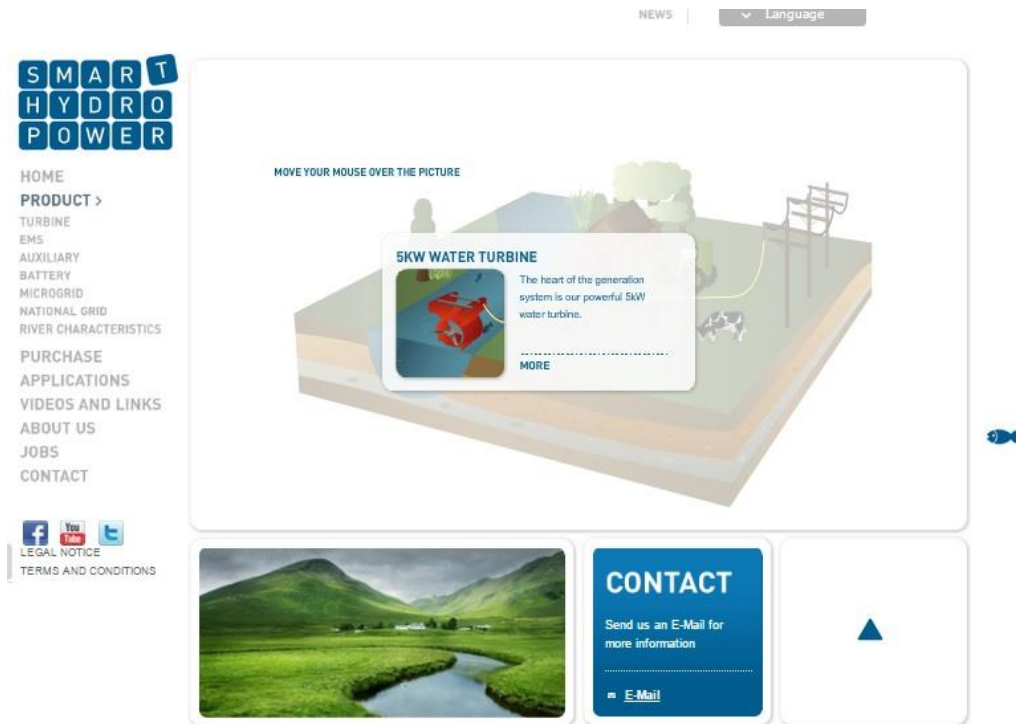


FIGURE 7.12. The first page in the product section of Smart Hydro Power GmbH's website.

The visual element shows how a water turbine works. In the top left-hand corner, the company invites navigators to move the mouse pointer on the image by means of the instruction in (7.52).

(7.52) *MOVE YOUR MOUSE OVER THE PICTURE.*

Navigators are referred to by the possessive “you”, and they are directly addressed by means of the imperative form “move”. By moving the mouse pointer over the visual element, five small windows appear on the screen. These frames one detail of the visual element at a time, and they provide a short description of it. The description accompanying the detail framed in the screenshot above reads as follow.

(7.53) *5KW WATER TURBINE*

The heart of the generation system is *our powerful 5kW* water turbine
MORE

The name of the product, written in upper-case letters, is foregrounded in the heading, but it is in rhematic position in the description which follows. However, it is positively connoted by the phrase “the heart of the generation system” in thematic position, and by the lexical booster “powerful”. The message-sender/sign-maker is referred to by means of the possessive “our”. Below the description, the word “more”, in upper-case letters, is an active link, which invites navigators to access further information disseminated on the other web pages in the product section.

In the lower section of the web page, the animated visual element is framed by a rectangular static image, and two square clickable objects. One allows web users to send an email to the company, but it is not available on the other web pages in the macro-section, while the other allows to go back to the top section of the web page, without using the scroll bar. This clickable object is available on all the other product pages. The presence of an interactive tool to contact the company is a strategy similar to the one deployed by Deep Drill Supply Group, which I have discussed above. This seems to testify to the fact that the functional units of websites are relied upon similarly by all companies, although each sign-maker seeks to personalize them, as I have indicated also with reference to the presence of images and hyperlinks on the product pages.

7.1.3. *Discussion*

The analysis of the product sections in the REnEU corpus conducted in this chapter has revealed that the information gathered in the product sections is not limited to a description or to a positive evaluation of the products. The results of the investigation of the most frequently occurring rhetorical patterns seem to indicate that the product sections include several instances of institutional advertising, along with those of product promotion. Institutional advertising is implied in the high incidence of one the companies’ name (“Bonfiglioli”) in the Expanding Circle sub-corpus, and in the high incidence of the pronoun “we” and the possessive “our” in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus, which designate the companies. In the co-text surrounding these words, the presence of evaluative language projecting the companies’ positive image has been found, which is reminiscent of the rhetorical choices characterizing the About Us/Company sections explored in Chapter 6.

Beside rhetorical patterns which are instrumental to the company’s institutional advertising, it has been noticed that factual information and the use of scientific/technical language in particular play a crucial role in the presentation of the products. The high incidence of such words as “power” in both sub-corpora and “energy” in the Transition Circle #1 accounts for the companies’ attempt to position themselves and their products in the

industry sector in which they operate. These words give rise to patterns that demonstrate that the message-sender aptly appropriates scientific language for his/her covert promotional purposes. Nevertheless, while investigating the most meaningful patterns, some examples of the hybrid language of global websites in English (Taviano 2010) have also been found. In fact, cases have been highlighted where the nominal style is used instead of the verbal style.

Numerical information accompanied by the indication of units of measure has been retrieved as well, while reference to the products has been identified in patterns including the word "system" in the Expanding Circle and "copper" in the Transition Circle #1. Meaningful patterns have been disclosed also with regard to the adjective "high". In both sub-corpora, this adjective is used either to positively evaluate the noun it premodifies, or it is used in compound nouns borrowed from the domain of science.

While concentrating on textual information in the product sections, several instances of variation have been chartered across the companies' rhetorical choices. Instances of variation regard the ways in which the product sections are organized within each website, and the way in which the generic links leading to them are verbalized. This might be due to the fact that the companies in the REnEU corpus deal with different renewable sources, they are involved in several types of activities, and they manufacture a range of products, although they all operate within the energy sector. Variation has been noticed also with regard to the most frequently occurring words. The word lists obtained by means of *AntConc* display different results, which accordingly have led to the investigation of a variety of patterns across the two sub-corpora.

All these instances of variation might depend on the size of the two sub-corpora respectively. In the fact, the total number of tokens in the product sections in the Transition Circle #1 sub-corpus corresponds to roughly a half of the Expanding Circle sub-corpus. Nonetheless, the analysis of the lexico-grammatical patterns seems to demonstrate that companies share a similar communicative agenda. Therefore, some generalization about the use of promotional and non-promotional language in the product sections in the REnEU corpus seems reasonable.

Variation has been noticed in the qualitative and multimodal analysis of the product sections, too. In this case, I would like to argue that variation is due to the affordances of the Web, which allow companies to personalize the compositional structure of their product pages, in order to stand out from competition. However, the companies draw upon the same functional units, although these are organized differently by every company. Additionally, it emerges that two types of compositional structure are consistently adopted across the web pages in the product sections of a given company. The first type of compositional structure is

represented by product pages organized along the vertical and horizontal axes, while the second type is represented by product pages characterized by the triptych pattern.

Moreover, it has been noted that the choice of visual elements seems to go hand in hand with the textual information provided in the product sections. For instance, the company's identity is always implied by the logo, which is displayed on all the web pages scrutinized. In a similar way, scientific information can be disseminated by means of static or animated visuals, accompanied by short texts.

As for the compositional structures which I have identified, I have pointed out that the visuals, the blocks of texts, hyperlinks and other interactive tools are organized in terms of Given-New and Ideal-Real polarizations on those web pages arranged along the vertical and horizontal axes. In this type of composition, the presence of a banner might encode the Ideal dimension, while the Real is made explicit by textual information and product images in the lower section of the page. As for the Given-New polarization, the sign-maker might decide to place the product image on the left, thus treating it as given information, and the block of text on the right, thus treating it as new information. This pattern is in line with the one presented by the websites of automotive companies, as indicated by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]). Yet, a reversed version of this pattern has been also mapped in my corpus, so that generalization seems not be viable with regard to the left-right / Given-New polarization, as attested by my findings.

Conversely, in the triptych pattern, the focus of attention is usually the block of text, which is placed at the centre of the composition. Nonetheless, the Given-New and Ideal-Real polarizations are relied upon as well, as the visuals and hyperlinks are placed in the upper or lower section of the composition, and in the right or left margin, as appropriate to the companies' communicative purposes.

Finally, in my investigation I have mapped the presence of fill-in forms and clickable objects, which web users might use to contact the company in a straightforward way. These components of the product sections, and of companies' websites in general, are crucial tools to fulfill the companies' promotional aims. By making these tools available, companies reach out to their stakeholders. Hence, what seems to be relevant in the companies' communication via website, is to deploy those strategies that appeal to their stakeholders in the most effective way. Stakeholders are involved in the companies' communication, when they wish to stay on a website, and find out more. For this to be achieved, the right balance among textual information, hyperlinks, interactive tools and images needs to be struck, so that the website, and the product sections as well, can be conveniently accessed.

7.1.4. Final remarks

The starting point for the present analysis of the product sections in the REnEU corpus has been Ellerup Nielsen's (2002) conceptualization of the three functions of corporate websites and their relative acts. The functions are: promoting a company, brand or product (i.e. the act of recommending), selling products or advertising space (i.e. the act of persuading into purchase), and providing customer support and offering information services support (i.e. the act of informing). Banking on the findings obtained during the analysis of lexico-grammar and of the hypertextual/interactive and visual elements, it is proposed that the product sections largely contribute to the first function of corporate websites, that is, they promote a company and its products. The second function has not been attested in the product sections sampled, as facilities for online sale have not been retrieved. As regards the third function, this seems to be fulfilled by the presence of interactive tools to directly contact the company, which have been noticed in the product sections of two websites (Deep Drill Supply Group and Smart Hydro Power GmbH). Hence, the features of marketing websites as postulated by Kotler (1998) have emerged only in part. This is in contrast with Ellerup Nielsen (2002), who maintains that the functions of corporate websites and marketing website have merged into the same hypertextual artefact now commonly referred to as 'corporate website'.

Besides, it has been observed that instances of the scientific and technical language also subsume the companies' communicative agenda. Therefore, it is my contention that companies take advantage of scientific and technical terminology firstly to demonstrate their competence in the industry sector in which they operate, and secondly to claim that their products are appropriate for their costumers' needs. By tapping into scientific language, companies address an audience of peers, although in some cases information is disseminated so as to expand the message-receivers' knowledge, on the assumption that lay people might also access companies' websites. This is due to the fact that websites have dramatically broadened the participation framework of corporate communication, to include casual navigators. Companies account for this type of audience too, for example by explaining the technology they have developed, or by elucidating how their products function.

Thus, the use of scientific language, which *de facto* falls under the rubric of non-promotional language, is used to fulfil the companies' promotional purposes. As stated beforehand, not only products are promoted, but also the companies' positive image is projected. By skillfully deploying scientific language, the companies showcase their disciplinary expertise (Bhatia & Lung 2006), which in turn is instrumental to building their professional identity, and to projecting their positive image. This is particularly significant in the light of the fact that the companies in the REnEU corpus operate in the renewable energy

sector, where stakes are particularly high, and where in practice everyone is a stakeholder, since the production of clean and renewable energy should concern the present-day society at large. Therefore, displaying disciplinary expertise is even more important for these companies, so as to appear reliable in front of their multiple stakeholders.

From the perspective of their hypertextual/interactive and multimodal organization, the product sections could be conceptualized as company-in-loops (Parody 2010), similarly to the About Us/Company sections. As a matter of fact, they present the same pattern web page after web page.

In sum, it could be argued that the information included in the product sections is not restricted to a list of the products manufactured (or the services supplied) by the companies. In contrast, the companies strategically disseminate information about their performance, in line with the image of competent and reliable business partners they want to project. Hence, product promotion is realized by means of promotional language and non-promotional language alike, and in particular, by means of terms and expressions borrowed from scientific discourse. Textual information is complemented by the presence of visuals representing the products, or disseminating scientific information with covert promotional purposes. In this context, hyperlinks are designed to as to allow for navigation within the website, while interactive tools might be provided so that web users are in a position to directly contact the company. All these components of the product sections are strategically integrated in a consistent constellation of texts, which caters for the companies' communicative agenda.

CHAPTER VIII

Conclusions

Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe once wrote that “[t]he price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use” (Achebe 1965, 29). The present work intended to provide some evidence to this by reporting on the use of English for the aims of online corporate communication by international companies operating in today’s globalized business scenario. The use of English in this domain has been captured by concentrating on companies’ websites in their global version in English. By focusing on two standard components of companies websites, namely About Us/Company sections and product sections, the analysis has investigated the strategies deployed by international companies which adopt and adapt English to project their identity and promote their products and services in front of a multicultural and multilingual audience.

Communication via companies’ global website in English is a multifaceted object of enquiry. Indeed, companies’ websites well represent the present-day global business context. This is described by Louhiala-Salminen (2012) as multicultural, since it involves a multiplicity of cultural backgrounds, multilingual, since professional interactants employ a variety of languages, and multimodal, since different technologies are taken on board to carry out communication. Banking on these assumptions, the need has been felt to ground the empirical analysis in a wide ranging frame of reference.

In Chapter 1 I have introduced the background of my study along with my research objectives. In particular, four questions have been posed. The first has thrown up issues about the textual and generic dimension of companies’ websites, the second has prompted a discussion of modes other than the textual to convey meaning via companies’ websites, the third has tackled the status and function of the English language within companies’ communicative agenda, while the fourth question has been aimed at outlining the communicative practices followed by professionals when taking advantage of websites for the aims of business communication.

In Chapter 2 I have surveyed a selection of definitions and models explaining the notions of communication and culture. In order to account for the role of communication and culture in globalized business, I have provided an overview of disciplines in the area of Intercultural and International Business Communication. While doing so, I have focused on

the discipline of Corporate Communication, and on the constructs that subsume this area of enquiry, i.e. *corporate branding*, *corporate image*, *corporate reputation* and *corporate identity*. This discussion has provided a general background to categorize companies' websites as tools for corporate communication. The constructs of corporate image and identity have also been accounted for during the analysis.

Chapter 3 has profiled concepts and theories which fall under the rubric of Genre Analysis, with a view to shedding light on those factors that guide professionals while shaping the texts they use in their daily communicative activities. In order to articulate my theoretical underpinnings, I have endeavoured to systematize the theories of the New Rhetoric and of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The former focuses on the social context in which text production is embedded, while the latter focuses on the formal features and the purpose(s) of texts. Insights provided by both strands of research prove to be invaluable when dealing with corporate websites.

In consideration of the impact of new technologies on textual production, Chapter 3 has also offered an overview of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC). Particular attention has been paid to the Web medium and its properties. In fact, with the introduction of the Web, traditional printed texts of business discourse have undergone a process of 'remediation' while being transferred to the new medium. On the Web, the form and content of texts have been affected by the Web properties, or affordances, as for instance by hypertextuality and multimodality. Hence, new reconceptualization of discourse in the light of web-mediated communication have been indicated, with a view to explaining the changes undergone by traditional genres, and to categorizing novel genres which have emerged following the advent of the medium.

As I mentioned before, hypertextuality plays a relevant role. This affects the form and accessibility of texts, which are connected to each other via hyperlinks. Thus, message-receivers partake in the meaning-making process, since they can devise their own navigation path by selecting what type of information to access. The concepts of functionality introduced by Shepherd and Watters (1998) well accounts for the impact of this affordance. A further crucial affordance of the Web is multimodality. This affects the content of texts, as web-mediated communication draws on a combination of modes. Texts have undergone a process of 'resemiotization', in that they construct meaning not only by means of textual information, but also by means of visuals. Following from these premises, I have surveyed concepts belonging to Kress and Van Leeuwen's grammar of visual design, and I have considered the theoretical approach of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA). These seem to provide the appropriate analytical tools to address the multimodal aspects of website communication.

Chapter 4 completes the theoretical framework by discussing several conceptualizations of the role and function of English for the purposes of today's intercultural and international business communication. Nowadays English is widely used as the shared code of communication among speakers coming from various lingua-cultural backgrounds. Owing to the spread of English worldwide, NNSs now outnumber NSs. Hence, the role of NNSs is to be taken up for reconsideration: they should not be regarded as mere learners of the language, but as active users capable of shaping English to accomplish their communicative goals. The approach chosen by researchers of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has furthered the understanding of English as adopted and adapted by interactants in intercultural and international communicative events, by shedding light on the lexico-grammar, phonology and pragmatics of this language. This approach presents ELF as a fully-fledged language, and it considers its users as "agents of language change" (Brutt-Griffler 1998). ELF conceptualizations have also contributed to changing the widespread attitude which sees NSs as custodians of the language, and Standard English (StE) the only legitimate variety.

In addition to this, Chapter 4 has placed particular emphasis on an area of enquiry which is connected to ELF, i.e. Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF). BELF provides views to delve into the use of English by professional NNSs during their daily working routine. In the business context, the use of English by NNSs is in fact defined not only as a function of their lingua-cultural backgrounds, but most importantly by the task at hand. Hence BELF is "an instrument for getting the job done" (Kankaanranta & Planken 2010, 400) during written and spoken interpersonal communication exchanges in professional settings. In these settings, being able to adapt one's own language in relation to the business purposes is more important than conforming to NS norms. In order for communication to be effective, BELF users require extensive knowledge of the business domain and its terminology. Besides, BELF users ought to master communicative strategies to build rapport with their interlocutors, and to guarantee that the content of their message is intelligible.

Very often, BELF studies are based on the perceptions of internationally operating business professionals. For example, in the light of the data gathered by means of an online survey and interviews in European MNCs, Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) have described BELF as a simplified, hybrid and dynamic language, where knowledge of the terminology, the ability to convey information accurately, and rapport building strategies are essential.

Similarly, Ehrenreich has collected the opinions of business people working in a German MNC. In her study, she has also pointed to the differences that exist between non-public interpersonal communication exchanges and official texts to be distributed outside a

company for the purposes of corporate communication. Ehrenreich (2010) has argued that official documents tend to conform to StE in order to demonstrate the professionalism of the organization. Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) come to a similar conclusion, too. However, at the end of their contribution, the authors openly wonder whether BELF can be expected to ever cross over into the public domain of corporate websites.

Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta further elaborate on the relationship between non-public interpersonal exchanges and official documents, and they hold that these actually represent the ends of the continuum of intercultural business communication. In this sense, interpersonal exchanges represent the micro-level, whereas official texts belong to the macro level of intercultural business communication. At the same time, Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta have tried to explain BELF communication by propounding the model of Global Communication Competence (GCC). This involves three types of competence. The first is multicultural competence, that is, the ability to face issues related to national, corporate and professional cultures. The second is BELF competence, which stands for the ability to adapt English to the communication task at hand, and to employ specialized terminology if requested. However, BELF competence does not exclude *a priori* that StE norms are adhered to, when these are instrumental to the success of the communicative exchange. The third type is business know-how, i.e. “field-specific professional competence” (Louhiala-Salminen 2011, 259). Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta’s model applies to the micro-level of intercultural business communication, however the authors advocate for more research to be conducted on the macro-level as well, since language issues are equally relevant.

In the final sections of Chapter 4, I have surveyed contributions dealing with the interconnectedness between translation and the use of ELF. Similarly to the English language, translation has also changed as a consequence of new technologies and globalization, intended in its general meaning indicating phenomena of interaction and exchange across countries and across all social domains (Held *et al.* 1999). In the field of high-tech industry, websites are regarded as products to be distributed globally. To this effect, their translation is steeped in the practices of globalization, here intended in its specific meaning designating the activities involved in the global launch of a high-tech product. Within globalization activities in the high-tech industry, texts are translated while the product to which they belong (e.g. a website) is designed and developed. Translation is based on an intermediary version in English, known as internationalized version. Subsequently, this will allow to localize the product in its multilingual version for different international audiences.

Nowadays, globalization practices are so widespread, that multilingual translations are cheaper than in the past. Therefore companies often publish their websites in several versions,

each version corresponding to one of the various languages spoken in the countries where these companies trade. Nonetheless, many companies still seem to rely on a global website in English to address their international audiences, as also indicated by corpus collected for my analysis.

In this scenario, where online texts are translated into English for multilingual audiences, it has been acknowledged that the use of ELF and translation are not mutually exclusive, but they are both products and agents of globalization. Therefore, their approaches need to be reconciled. First of all, translation into English is still relied upon, since this language is the most widely spread all over the world. Indeed, companies often avail themselves of translation into English to publish their global websites, so as to widen their participation framework as much as possible. This demonstrates that English is a flexible and functional code, adequate to both written and spoken communication, as House (2010) rightly claims.

Within the dynamic communicative context of globalization, traditional constructs such as source text/target text and source culture/target culture seem less viable than in the past. In fact, the nature of texts has changed with the advent of new technologies, as explained in Chapter 4. Moreover, it is to be borne in mind that today's communication takes place in a multicultural and supranational environment. On top of this, translation into a second language is becoming more and more accepted, while activities such as proof-reading, post-editing and rewriting are becoming a must in the translators' working routine. Hence, translation practices need to be reconsidered, so that translators are better equipped to produce texts which easily accessible by an unpredictable audience. However, it is often the case that texts translated into English for international audience, such as EU documents and companies' global websites, might present features of a hybrid language which may not be intelligible by all its addressees given the high incidence of nominalization, convoluted syntax and uncommon collocations. In this sense, StE seems still apt to providing reliable parameters to guarantee an understanding of translated texts, as advocated by Stewart (2012). Nonetheless, idiomatic forms typical of native varieties are to be avoided, as these might be opaque to a multicultural audience.

After defining the theoretical frame of reference, in Chapter 5 I have presented the data I have gathered, along with the methods chosen to investigate them. To start with, I have surveyed relevant literature about corporate websites. A wealth of contributions has been offered on this topic in the last decade. However, since corporate websites evolve quickly and can be appropriated by companies in a variety of ways, I have assumed that the analysis of a corpus of companies' websites by European companies active in the renewable energy sector

might still provide fresh insights to current research. My focus on European companies is due to the spread of English all over Europe. In fact, English in Europe represents a shared common communication code in the domains of business, politics and culture, to name but a few. In addition to this, I have selected companies active in the renewable energy sector, as globalization processes have entailed a depletion of fossil fuels, and so there is nowadays a pressing need to resort to alternative sources of energy.

Thirty websites of companies based in EU member states have been singled out and subdivided into two sub-corpora, which account for the levels of proficiency as conceptualized by Cramer (2007)'s concentric circles model of European Englishes. One sub-corpus collects the websites of companies based in EU countries of the Expanding Circle. In these countries, English is usually acquired at school as a foreign language, and it serves the purposes of communication in international encounters. The other sub-corpus collects the websites of companies located in counties in EU countries in Transition Circle #1. Here, English is the chosen code to accomplish the multiple functions of business, institutional communication, culture and education, also on an intranational level.

Within the websites, two components (or macro-sections) have been singled out on the assumption that they incorporate the functions of corporate communication, as supported by institutional advertising and product promotion. These are the About Us/Company sections and the product sections. Their relevance has been emphasized by Esrock and Leichty (2000) and Perry and Bodkin (2002), who indicate that the information gathered in these two types of sections stand out from the other texts gathered in companies' websites.

The methods I have taken on board are borrowed from Corpus Linguistics, as it offers instruments to disclose the most frequently occurring lexico-grammatical patterns. To this effect, I have processed the two sub-corpora by means of the *AntConc* software, which integrates tools to obtain frequency word lists, concordance lines, concordance plots, clusters and collocates. The lexico-grammatical analysis has concentrated on instances of description and of evaluative language to designate the companies and their products for promotional purposes. The use of non-promotional language, and in particular of scientific language, has also been explored, in order to reveal rhetorical strategies employed to disseminate information about the companies' performance, and to project their image as reliable business partners.

With regard to the presence of hyperlinks, interactive tools and visuals in the sections under scrutiny, I have rooted my research into Lemke's (2002) notion of *hypermodality*, which combines the affordances of multimodality and hypertextuality. Hyperlinks and interactive tools have been investigated in their role of functional units (Askehave & Ellerup

Nielsen 2005, Bolaños Medina *et al.* 2005), while visuals have been put into perspective by means of Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996[2006]) grammar of visual design.

The findings obtained during the analysis have provided the following answers to the research questions raised in Chapter 1.

1. Is it possible to categorize companies' websites in terms of genre?

In the first place, websites can be categorized in terms of genre as long as the properties of the medium are properly considered. Companies seem to design their websites similarly to large virtual repositories of the official texts that were once distributed in hard copy. Hypertextuality has impacted on the way in which texts gathered into companies' websites are accessed. Additionally, the Web has widened the participation framework of corporate communication, so that in practice everyone is a stakeholder.

Within companies' websites, the About Us/Company section can be regarded as the digitalized version of company brochures. However, it ought to be considered that the About Us/Company sections include further texts of corporate communication, such as for instance mission statements and CSR reports. These have been not only 'remediated', as they are distributed online, but also 'resemiotized', as textual information is complemented by the visual mode. This is the case of the mission statement, whose traditional printed version relied mainly on the textual mode.

Furthermore, each company seeks to personalize the design and structure of its website, and this applies to the internal organization of the About Us/Company sections and of the product sections alike. Nonetheless, the macro-sections are conceived of in such a way as to present the same textual, hypertextual and visual structure web page after web page. In particular, the adoption of a certain compositional structure, and the organization of hyperlinks, interactive tools, blocks of texts and images which ensues, integrates the macro-sections into the larger framework of websites in a cohesive and coherent way.

Following from these observations, I would like to propose that About Us/Company sections and product sections are the online instantiation of a colony-in-loops (Parodi 2010), in consideration of their recursive structure. As for the generic dimension of companies' websites as a whole, I suggest that the conceptualization of *hyper-genre* offered by Bondi (2009) well captures the impact of hypertextuality on companies' websites, as the construction of meaning is a function of all the texts published online and connected to each other. Another viable concept is that of *genre network* proposed by Swales (2004) and adopted also by Catenaccio (2012) in her case study of the website of the German MNC Siemens. This

concept helps elucidate how different genres are interrelated in websites, and how their combination is instrumental to meaning construction.

2. How does textual information cooperate with and is influenced by other semiotic resources?

As regards the ways in which textual information cooperates with and is influenced by other semiotic resources, the findings seem to prove that the textual and the visual mode are interdependent. An investigation of companies' websites limited to textual information only would not have been fully adequate to provide insights into how meaning is negotiated in online corporate communication. Visuals are a *sine qua non* of companies' websites. This does not apply exclusively to the presentation of the products, which intuitively might be regarded as the most obvious function implied in the presence of visuals.

As mentioned previously, visuals support the compositional structure of the web pages in terms of coherence and cohesion across the websites. The same applies to colours, which are employed by virtue of their textual function (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]). In addition to this, colours are used in their ideal function (Kress & Van Leeuwen 1996[2006]), as they help identify the sign-maker, i.e. the company.

Perhaps even more importantly, visuals such as logos, banners and images contribute to identifying the sign-maker and the sector in which s/he operates. Logos are always present on the web pages, and they symbolize the companies' identity. The sector in which the companies operate might be illustrated by the images included in banners, when these are available. With reference to the latter, banners are placed in the upper section of the web page, so that they represent the Ideal dimension of the multimodal communication. The lower section usually includes blocks of text and further images, which together represent the Real.

The Ideal-Real polarization is therefore substantiated by the web page structure on the vertical axis. Moreover, the elements on web pages can be positioned along the horizontal axis too, or in terms of a centre-margin polarization. The horizontal axis is often combined to the vertical axis, thus giving rise to a particular compositional structure. Elements are arranged on the horizontal axis in terms of given and new information. To this regard, it has been noted that a high degree of personalization characterizes the companies' websites sampled. Firstly, the pattern outlined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996[2006]) with reference to the websites of automotive companies has been attested also in the industry sector under scrutiny, i.e. renewable energy. When this pattern is adopted, images are treated as given information, while blocks of text are treated as new information. Nonetheless, the reversed patterns has also been chartered.

When the composition integrates the vertical and horizontal axes with the centre-margin polarization, the triptych pattern emerges. The triptych pattern was identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen in the case of university websites published between the late 1990s and 2000s. This pattern has been retrieved in only one third of the companies' websites analyzed, so the question arises whether this pattern was actually typical of a given type of website in a given point in time, or whether it has been adopted later for the layout of companies' websites. This question is here left open, as a comparison between university and company websites is outside the scope of my research. However, it is to be considered that with the development of technology, the design of websites has evolved accordingly. Thus, it might be the case that university websites are no longer characterized by the triptych pattern, but by another compositional structure. In order to confirm or invalidate this assumption, more research effort should be put into the diachronic study of university websites, and of websites in general, following Turnbull (2013) analytical approach.

All in all, what seems to be crucial in the interplay of multimodal resources on companies' websites is that the right balance is to be struck among textual information and visual representation. Visuals support texts, but they should not be relegated to a subservient function in order to communication to be efficient. In fact, "reading on the [Web] is characterized by high speed and fragmentation" (Ellerup Nielsen 2002, 12). As a consequence, if the sign-maker relies predominantly on the textual mode, s/he runs the risk to lose his/her audience's attention. In contrast, the presence of visuals makes communication more accessible and appealing. In this sense, it has been noticed during the investigation of the product sections that graphic representations accompanied by short texts might be effectively relied upon to disseminate information about the products and the technologies developed by the companies. Therefore, visual representations are instrumental not only to improving the audience's knowledge, but also to promoting the companies, as they contribute to making meaning while attracting attention.

3. How is English adapted for the purposes of web-mediated intercultural corporate communication?

In order to provide an answer to the third question, I have investigated the most frequently occurring lexico-grammatical patterns, with a view to revealing the most meaningful rhetorical choices in terms of promotional discourse. I have relied on this type of investigation, although in theory BELF research is less interested in language skills *per se* (Charles 2007). However, the studies conducted by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) and by Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta (2011) have demonstrated that professionals using

BELF perceive the use of terminology as an asset in their daily communication exchanges in the workplace. Following from these observations, I believe that the analysis of lexico-grammar is required in order to be able to assess how efficiently companies promote themselves and their products and spread information about their performance. The analysis of descriptive and evaluative language has in fact produced significant data which testify to the skilful use of promotional and non-promotional language to accomplish the companies' communicative agenda.

The findings I have presented in Chapter 6 and 7 seem to show that companies adopt and adapt English to fulfil the purposes of corporate communication. For instance, the linguistic strategies implemented in the About Us/Company sections contribute to building the companies' identity as reliable business partners, and to projecting their positive image in front of their stakeholders. The companies' identity is substantiated by lexical choices which describe their history, their location, the industry sector in which they operate and their turnover. Instances of positive evaluation have been retrieved when companies disclose their philosophy and disseminate information about their performance. Another field of meaning which I have identified is linked to renewable energy. These lexical choices contribute to positioning companies in the industry sector. Similarly, the incidence of such terms as "responsibility", "reliability", "sustainability" contribute to further establishing the companies in the sector of renewable energy, while providing a positive evaluation.

From the point of view of grammar, the third person singular, the receiver-exclusive "we" and the possessive "our" are used to designate the message-sender. The former occurs when factual information is provided, the latter occurs in contexts where the message sender is positively connoted. The message-receiver are addressed with reference to the stakeholder groups to which they belong, or by means of the pronoun "you". The use of this pronoun, together with questions and exclamation marks, make communication interactive and informal. This feature of the language of companies' websites is in line with the style of Web writing, i.e. a "kind of written language which has been pulled some way in the direction of speech" (Crystal 2001, 47).

Linguistic structures which underlie institutional advertising have emerged in the product sections in the co-text surrounding company names. This is for instance the case of the receiver-excluding pronoun "we" and the possessive "our", which refers to the message-sender. Reference to the industry sector is made by means of terms such as "power", "energy", "high", to name a few examples from those discussed in Chapter 7. The investigation of the co-text of these words has helped nail down the terminology used by the companies, as they are often employed to build patterns to describe the products, the way they

work, and the technology which lies behind them. The use of specialized language seems to demonstrate that product promotion is skilfully balanced with the dissemination of information borrowed from the scientific and technical domains. By applying these rhetorical strategies, the companies further substantiate their positive identity, and they manage to successfully address peers, but also to involve lay audiences in their communication.

Nonetheless, lexico-grammatical structures have also emerged that show the hybrid nature of the texts within companies' global websites, as pinpointed by Taviano. This is the case of the nominal style used instead of the verbal style. Moreover, English might also be affected by the companies' L1 when idiomatic forms are created, which are not codified in English, but which can be retrieved in the language spoken in the country where the company is based. These forms might not be transparent enough to the multicultural audiences addressed by companies' websites. In contrast, flouting StE norms, as for instance in the use of phrasal verbs, does not seem to result in a lack of understanding. However, if it is true that compliance to StE norms is required in corporate communication to show the companies' professionalism (Ehrenreich 2010), it might be assumed that deviations from standards might have negative effects on the companies' image. In general, however, the language used in companies' website cannot be regarded as a simplified code. Conversely, the findings surveyed in Chapter 6 and 7 seem to demonstrate that it is rich and varied in its realizations.

In consideration of the findings of my lexico-grammatical analysis I would like to argue that the English of online corporate communication can be reconciled to BELF, considered that they are both part and parcel of intercultural business communication. Hence, they are not mutually exclusive, but they should be considered together in order to fully account for professional communication in the present-day globalized scenario. In fact, it appears that they bear resemblances to each other, since they are both used to 'get the job done' while fulfilling the varied purposes of companies' communicative agenda, which span from spoken and written interpersonal exchanges to official web-mediated texts.

In order to highlight the extent to which the English of international corporate communication and BELF overlap, I applied Louhiala-Salminen and Kankaanranta's (2011) model of GCC to the English of companies' global websites. In my view, when communicating via global website in English, multicultural competence is required, since the participation framework includes international audiences made up of stakeholder groups characterized by their own professional cultures. BELF competence is needed, as the use of specialized language is paramount to promote companies and their products. Moreover, BELF competence admits of compliance to StE norms, when these are instrumental to the communicative agenda. Finally, business know-how is fundamental, as this underlies the

companies' positive identity and image, as shaped by the use of promotional and non-promotional language.

4. How are the capabilities of web-mediated communication appropriated and exploited by companies aiming at fulfilling their “private intentions” when addressing their international stakeholders?

The answer to my last research question can be gleaned from the answers provided above, with special reference to the industry sectors in which the companies sampled in my analysis operate, i.e. renewable energy sector. As explained while presenting my data, the renewable energy sector is characterized by extremely high stakes. The use of fossil fuels has brought concern for the environment and for human health. All this, together with the depletion and rising costs of traditional energy sources, is prompting national governments and supranational institutions to look for alternative ways to supply energy. In these scenario, companies dealing with the production of renewable energy can exploit the potential of web-mediated communication to address a broad international audience.

The findings gathered in Chapter 6 and 7 have pointed to the rhetorical structures implying the companies' “private intentions”, and to the ways in which they are made explicit by the visual mode. Although the thirty companies sampled are based in various countries, offer a range of products and services, and deal with five different types of energy sources, they seem to share the same communicative agenda with regard to institutional advertising and product promotion. These in fact seem to be the communicative purposes encapsulated in the About Us/Company sections and the product sections respectively.

Institutional advertising is expressed in terms of the companies' positive identity and image as reliable business partners directly involved in sustainable business. This in fact is a keyword of today's business discourse, also outside the renewable energy sector. Obviously, it is essential for companies to skilfully appropriate this notion, and verbalize it in order to persuade their audiences about their commitment towards environmental protection and human health. The presence of images and the compositional structures of the web pages complement the textual mode, and contribute to the cohesion and coherence of the websites.

As for product promotion, this is closely connected to the companies' positive identity and image, and it is realized by overt and covert positive evaluation and, above all, by expressions borrowed from science. Hence, it appears that the world of business meets the world of science in the product sections of companies' websites. The rhetorical strategies characterizing these macro-sections reconcile the companies' professional identity with their “disciplinary expertise” (Bhatia & Lung 2006), and by doing so they further contribute to the

communicative agenda of companies' websites. Similarly to the About Us/Company sections, the visual mode is relied upon to meaningfully arrange images and the other functional units on the web pages, while disseminating information by means of photographs and graphic representations.

8.1. Where do we go from here?

The present work aimed to shed further light on some of the communicative elements of the global versions of companies' websites. This has been made possible thanks to a broad theoretical frame of reference and thanks to the methods applied. These have helped shed light upon the complex interplay existing between the use of English as a code and the Web as a medium for the companies' promotional purposes.

This study might bear implications for practitioners and for students of English language and translation. Firstly, the discussion of the textual, hypertextual/interactive and multimodal strategies chartered in Chapter 6 and 7 may help raise awareness in people employed in internationally trading companies, on how to effectively communicate in a globalized setting, by skilfully projecting the identity of their organizations by means of companies' websites in English. A deep understanding of web-mediated communication might be instrumental for companies to standing out from competition.

Secondly, this investigation could provide insights for the teaching of English for business purposes. The focus on English used as the shared language of intercultural and international communication, together with the attempt to reconcile BELF with the English of global websites, could support trainers of future managers in the development of those skills that are necessary to cope with the challenges of communicating in English on the Web. This work could also contribute to a reconceptualization of translation *vis à vis* the role and function of ELF, which might prove valuable in the training and practice of translators, so that the implications involved in translating into English for a multicultural audience are taken into account from a new perspective.

However, the present work is not meant to be either prescriptive or exhaustive. A series of limitations are to be pointed out, which in turn open up new avenues of research on communication via companies' websites in their English global version. First of all, my corpus of thirty websites cannot fully account for the communication practices of all the European companies based in the EU. Hence, it is advisable to build a larger corpus to lend validity to the findings presented in this work, or to find evidence of other functions of corporate communication via website.

Caution is to be expressed with regard to the fact that my analysis focuses on two macro-sections of websites only. These macro-sections have been selected on the basis of their relevance, and the findings I have discussed are in line with the literature about corporate websites. Nonetheless, the investigation of other texts as for instance homepages and press releases could shed further light on the use of promotional discourse in corporate websites. In particular, an investigation of homepages could be conducted to display whether and how this web-mediated genre has evolved since Askehave and Ellerup Nielsen (2005)'s influential article. An analysis of press releases could report on the strategies deployed by the companies to combine news discourse with institutional advertising.

Additionally, contrastive research could be carried out to compare global websites in English with their counterparts in the language spoken at the companies' headquarters. This might prove insightful to disclose instances of hybrid language and of L1 interference. Next, websites by companies based in the BRICS countries where English is not a native language, that is, Brazil, Russia, India and China could also be chosen as an object of enquiry, to explore how companies in these emerging economies claim their role in the renewable energy sector while addressing international audiences by tapping into English and the Web.

Finally, it is crucial to complement the analysis of the companies' websites by taking stock of insider knowledge gained by tools of ethnographic analysis such as online surveys and interviews. This is implied in Bhatia's (2004) shared vision of ESP and professional practice. According to the author,

[t]he ESP profession can no longer position itself on the sidelines serving disciplinary requirements from the outside. The profession must participate more actively and collaboratively in the concerns of the specialist disciplines to develop a deeper and insightful understanding of some of the following questions:

- Why do these professionals use the language the way they do?
- How can we develop an understanding of what they do and how they do it?
- How can we create a common discourse that makes sense to us and at the same time to the members of the disciplinary culture we collaborate with?

(Bhatia 2004, 213)

To this effect, between October 2014 and January 2015 I sent an online questionnaire¹ to 300 companies active in the renewable energy sectors with headquarters in EU member states where English is not a native language. The questionnaire, which is still online at the time of writing, includes thirty-six questions about the facets of communication via companies' global

¹ <<http://goo.gl/C43Pl5>>, last accessed on 28 February 2015.

websites in English tackled in my analysis. The questionnaire includes Yes/No questions, multiple choice questions, rank order scaling questions and open-ended questions, subdivided into four sections:

- Section A: questions about the languages used in the company
- Section B: questions about the English version of the corporate website
- Section C: questions about the use of multimodal resources in the corporate website
- Section D: general information about the company

Unfortunately, only eleven companies accepted to participate in the survey. This sample cannot be representative enough, and so it has been decided not to discuss the findings in the present work. However, some of the answers collected appear to be in agreement with the results of my analysis of the companies' website in my corpus, while other answers seem to call for a problematization of the role and function of global websites in the actual professional practice. Therefore, it seems worthwhile for future research to put more effort to obtain a wider and more representative sample of answers, in order to provide further understanding of how the global version in English of companies' websites is designed and used in today's web-mediated international corporate communication.

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