

## New ideology emerging in public discourse: A systemic functional approach to two decades of corporate profiles

This study investigates evolving language use in public spaces by analyzing corporate discourse over two decades. Existing research on public discourse, which often employs critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1993) and audience design (Bell, 1984), has not fully explored how undefined audiences impact language use in public settings. This study addresses this gap by diachronically analyzing corporate statements and contends that as audience indeterminacy has grown, the message has become more mass-oriented, as evidenced by changes in address terms and word generalization.

This study analyzes two decades of annual reports from 20 corporations, focusing on ideational and interpersonal aspects of their messages (Halliday, 1985). Data were imported into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA and manually tagged using existing transitivity and modality classifications. A corpus was also created by assigning POS tags to the data to analyze lexical changes in constituent participants that could not be detected through clause-based analysis.

According to the SFL analysis results, there was little change in each company's main description as an actor performing a certain action on the customer. However, focusing on the constituents revealed that the self-description of each company as an actor changed its terms from "company name" to "we" and changed the customer's address term to "you." More recently, there was a tendency for companies to be backgrounded (*At Best Buy*) and for recipients (*people* and *lives*) and products (*technology*) to be abstractly described, as shown in (1) and (2) below:

- (1) "We improve **people**'s lives by making technology and entertainment products affordable and easy to use" (extracted from Best Buy's annual report, 2001);
- (2) "**At Best Buy**, our purpose is to enrich **lives** through **technology**" (extracted from Best Buy's annual report, 2021).

This use of abstract vocabulary and obscuring of actors has only recently become apparent, and it can be attributed to a shift in the public context surrounding the company. This study points out the possibility that a new ideology has emerged: namely, text must be aware of mass audiences if it is transmitted publicly, thereby resulting in restricted language use.

Bell, A. (1984). Language style as audience design. *Language in Society*, 13(2), 145–204.

Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133–168.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. E. Arnold.