

Department of English

Online Research Seminar

Understanding sustainability narratives: A corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis of corporate genres



3 MARCH 2025 (MONDAY)



4:30PM-5:30PM

ILP : 1 UNIT (IED)



Dr. Esterina Nervino

Esterina Nervino is currently Assistant Professor holding a joint appointment at the Department of English and the Department of Marketing of the City University of Hong Kong, where she is also Co-director of the New Frontiers in Professional Communication Lab and Associate Director of the Sales and Marketing Consulting Unit. For both departments, she teaches subjects in the area of business and professional communication and entertains relationships with industry players for different purposes, including research, student internships, and career development. She is also *Cultore della Materia* (Junior Adjunct Professor) of Intercultural Communication and Language Variation at the Department of Studies on Language and Culture of the Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia (Italy), invited External Member of the Research Centre for Professional Communication in English at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, and the international Communicating Sustainabilities network. She holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics from The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and her research interests include social semiotics, multimodality, business and professional communication, luxury studies in relation to digital transformation, art, space, sustainability, country of origin effect, retail experience, cultural development and city branding.

Zoom link

<https://lingnan.zoom.us/j/92807808807?pwd=fTMt1NaEPIFL9QGj2z60Cn7QCvrfeH.1>

Meeting ID: 928 0780 8807

Passcode: 45767148

Abstract

Although law and business scholars have pioneered studies on sustainability, such research fails to satisfactorily engage with sustainability discourse. While applied linguists focused on discourse, a bibliometric and systematic review on applied linguistics studies investigating sustainability discourse (Nervino et al., 2024) shows that majority of scholars have overlooked the multimodal features which have increasingly appeared in framing sustainability messages across genres. In addition, the review sheds light on the diachronic changes in terms of topics and genres investigated following major events (e.g., Paris agreement). This study aims to determine how ESG commitments, efforts, and achievements are semiotically constructed across different genres, with particular focus on the semiotic construction of ESG dimensions. Drawing upon author's previous work (Wells et al., 2021), this study conducts a corpus-assisted multimodal discourse analysis (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; 2001; Nervino, 2018) on a set of data which reflects the communication practices of the two major conglomerates operating in the luxury industry, namely Kering and LVMH. The dataset includes webpages, press releases, reports, and social media posts construing the two companies' environmental, social, and governance commitments, efforts, and achievements. Preliminary findings show how different semiotic resources are orchestrated to construct environmental discourse across different genres and how discourse changes to adjust to medium and audience. The study promotes the idea that sustainability transformation of businesses, like digital transformation, has spurred the proliferation of hybrid genres which reflect the need to comply to new regulations. This study is part of an overarching project funded by RGC which investigates sustainable corporate discourse and highlights how discourse enables individuals, public and private entities to advocate, influence, and drive change in the society.

Enquiries: tshung@LN.edu.hk