

Discursive Construction of Corporate Identity on the Web: A Glocalization Perspective

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Abstract: This paper examines the discursive construction of corporate identity on the web from a glocalization perspective. Adopting a corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach, it compares English websites of top 10 energy companies in China and the US. The findings suggest that both global patterns and local preferences can be identified in their corporate identity construction. It is argued that they can be explained in terms of the special functions of the discourse itself and the particular socio-cultural context in which these companies are situated.

Keywords: Intercultural communication, corporate identity, corpus-assisted discourse study, glocalization

1. Introduction

The last several decades have witnessed the growing role of communication in the organization of business activities and the process of corporate identity construction, due to dramatic changes in the structure and organization of the business enterprises and the expansion of markets and business activities on a global scale (Evangelisti-Allori & Garzone, 2010). While previous studies used to view corporate identity as a central, inherent, and invariant property of a company (e.g., Alvesson, 1994; Stuart, 1999), recent studies have turned attention to the multiple and variable nature of corporate identity (e.g., Balmer & Greyser, 2002; Evangelisti-Allori & Garzone, 2010). Corporate identity is no longer regarded as a “given” property to be represented and conveyed, but as “a multi-faceted conceptualization of an organization’s structure, roles and values” (Evangelisti-Allori & Garzone, 2010, p.12). This new conceptualization has given rise to a large wealth of studies on the discursive construction of corporate identity in a number of genres, such as promotional discourse (e.g., Evangelisti-Allori, 2010; Cantenaccio, 2010), financial reporting (e.g., Malavasi, 2010; Degano, 2010), and organizational communication (e.g., Saatci, 2010).

With the rapid growth and expansion of the internet in the last decade, the web has developed into an influential and indispensable means of corporate communication (e.g. Esrock & Leichty, 1999, 2000; Kent & Taylor, 1998; Sullivan, 1999). Even in a developing country like China, companies, small or large, have been found increasingly taking advantage of this new platform to deliver information, promote products, and engage stakeholders (Maynard & Tian, 2004). More importantly, they also utilize this new medium for image building by addressing issues of social responsibility, such

as ecology, the environment, and education (Maynard & Tian, 2004; Esrock & Leichty, 1998), so corporate websites have also been regarded as an important tool for public relations management (Poppi, 2011; Park & Reber, 2008). They have been extensively examined for their roles in corporate identity construction (e.g., Poppi, 2011; Evangelisti-Allori, 2010; Santulli, 2010) as well as for cross-cultural or intercultural communication (e.g., Maynard & Tian, 2004; Lee et al., 2006; Wasserman, 2002; Tian, 2006; Wu et al., 2007).

The present study focuses on the discursive construction of corporate identity on the web by top 10 energy companies in China and the US. The construction of a positive corporate identity or image is especially important for energy companies, because they are meeting increasing scrutiny from consumers, the media, and non-profit organizations for their social performances (Poppi, 2011). Previous studies have also verified that big companies are more likely to employ the internet “for image building or public relations than for direct marketing or transaction processing” (Tian, 2008, p. 480). The present study focuses on English websites of these energy companies, because the adoption of English websites by Chinese energy companies can be viewed as part of the social practice in response to the expansion of their business practices across national, geographical and cultural boundaries and the necessity to address multiple groups of stakeholders inside and outside the country. The primary purpose is to identify the intertwinement of global patterns and local preferences in their discursive construction of corporate identities on the web.

2. Between the Global and Local in Intercultural Communication

One of the key questions for intercultural communication is how to address people on a global scale through the web. A common practice is the choice of English as a medium for international communication. Accordingly, a growing number of companies in China choose English as the “global” lingua franca for international communication, and present an English version of their websites apart from the Chinese version. While the establishment of an English website can be viewed as a move towards globalization, it does not mean an unconditional adoption of global communicative models; nor does it mean a literal translation of Chinese websites (Gotti, 2011; Poppi, 2011). According to Gotti (2011), while the promotion of international brands on a global scale requires the adoption of “a global trend in the construction of discourse” (p. 31), it is subject to the constraints of local communicative norms and practices. As a result, intercultural corporate communication features the constant tension between global concerns and local preferences.

This understanding of intercultural communication is well captured in the new concept of “glocalization”, which emphasizes the coexistence and interpretation of the global and the local (Robertson, 1995; Wu, 2008a). It argues that globalization does not necessarily lead to the suffocation of local cultures and cultural homogenization as some researchers predict (Hall, 1991), but, instead, may contribute to the reproduction of local cultures and facilitate the interaction between global and local cultures (Hongladarom, 1999; Wu, 2008b). For example, Hongladarom’s (1999) study has demonstrated that the internet, instead of contributing to a monolithic culture, has been used by Thai participants of a Usenet news group to preserve and promote their traditional culture. Maynard (2003) argues that the dichotomization of cultural homogenization and heterogenization, universalism and

particularism, globalization and localization, can not explain the complicated process of culture changes transpiring today, so glocalization emphasizes the dialectics and dynamics of “the global and the local, convergence and divergence, homogenization and heterogenization, universalism and particularism” (Maynard & Tian, 2004, p. 288).

Influenced by this perspective, a wealth of studies are devoted to the examination of how global companies are localized in specific cultural contexts (e.g., Koller, 2007; Hongladarom, 1999; Maynard, 2003; Tian, 2006; Maynard & Tian, 2004; An, 2007), but few studies have examined how the global and local elements co-exist in the global websites of local companies. Besides, those studies on corporate websites used to resort to the approach of content analysis, while contributions from discourse analysis are still far and few (exceptions including Wu et al., 2007; Koller, 2007; Gotti, 2011). However, glocalization, as a strategy and a feature in intercultural communication, can be examined at different levels of discourse, and an examination of “the interaction between linguistic and cultural factors in the construction of discourse, both within specialized domains and in wider contexts” may generate more illuminating findings concerning the existence of global and local elements in corporate communication (Gotti, 2011, p. 29). For example, Lee’s (2005) comparison of the sale of credit cards and property in Chinese and English internet texts has revealed different approaches adopted by Chinese and English writers even in the presentation of the same content. Based on an examination of lexico-grammatical patterns in the English websites of six European companies, Poppi (2011) argues that the use of English as a lingua franca for international communication is constrained by two marketing concerns: “the need to promote their products on a global scale, and the need to respond to strictly local and cultural constraints” (p. 146). The unique tension and hybridization of global and local elements in these websites actually contribute to “the specific identity a company is willing to convey to its multiple audiences” (Poppi, 2011, p. 146), so a discursive perspective can contribute to the understanding of not only what kind of identities they want to construct but also the cultural influences on the particular strategies they adopt.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Data

Top 10 energy companies in China and the US are selected for investigation in the present study, based on their ranking in Fortune 500 companies in China and the US (Fortune, 2013). Table 1 shows the names of the top 10 companies in each country.

Table 1. Top 10 Energy Companies in China and the US

Rank	China	US
1	China Petroleum & Chemical Corporation	Exxon Mobil
2	Petrochina Company Limited	Chevron
3	China Shenhua Energy Company Limited	Phillips
4	CEOC Ltd.	Valero Energy
5	Huaneng Power International, Inc.	Marathon Petroleum
6	China Coal Energy Company Limited	ConocoPhillips
7	Datang International Power Generation Co., Ltd.	Hess
8	China Resources Power Holdings Co. Ltd.	Tesoro
9	ENN Energy Holdings Limited.	Murphy Oil
10	Sinopec Kantons Holdings Ltd.	Halliburton

The website of each energy company represents a hypertext, which may consist of a large quantity of web pages at different levels. Each web page may be composed of a number of sub-sections, which may be further linked to a large quantity of sub-sections of their own. It is impractical to collect all web pages for analysis, so the present paper confines the analysis to two major sections on the homepage: “About us” and “Social responsibility”. The “About us” section usually involves a company’s self-introduction, including primarily the general introduction of the company as well as letters from the CEO (Poppi, 2011). The “Social responsibility” section communicates the information about a company’s fulfillment of social responsibilities. Both sections are indispensable to the construction of a positive image for the company, and thus crucial to a company’s identity construction. All the words in these web pages are extracted to build two comparable corpora: the corpus of Chinese energy companies (hereafter CE), and the corpus of the US energy companies (hereafter UE). The CE corpus consists of 53700 tokens, while the UE corpus has 56004 tokens.

3.2. Methodology

The present paper focuses on what Balmer et al. (2007) call “ethical corporate identity”, which requires a company to behave in a socially responsible way apart from pursuing profits. Balmer et al. (2007, p. 7) argue that ethical identity is “formed relationally, between parties, within a community of business and social exchange”. A company has to address not only the needs and interests of its shareholders but also “the needs, interests, and influence of those affected by their policies and operations” (Buchholz & Rosenthal, 2005, p. 137). As Evangelisti-Allori and Garzone (2010, p. 10) state, a company nowadays has to interact with various groups of primary and secondary stakeholders (e.g., investors, shareholders, employees, customers, business partners) and social actors (e.g., local communities, media, NGOs, and lobby groups). An examination of the discursive construction of corporate identity can focus on how the concerns of various groups of stakeholders are addressed.

A corpus-assisted discourse analysis approach is adopted for the present study, which relies on the corpus analytic tool Wmatrix 3.0. Wmatrix 3.0 is an online software for corpus analysis and comparison. It can help to do automatic semantic tagging by classifying English vocabulary into 21 major semantic fields based on their use in texts (see Table 2).

Table 2. Major Semantic Fields in UCREL (<http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/usas/>)

A general and abstract terms	B the body and the individual	C arts and crafts	E emotion
F food and farming	G government and public	H architecture, housing and the home	I money and commerce in industry
K entertainment, sports and games	L life and living things	M movement, location, travel and transport	N numbers and measurement
O substances, materials, objects and equipment	P education	Q language and communication	S social actions, states and processes
T Time	W world and environment	X psychological actions, states and processes	Y science and technology
Z names and grammar			

In order to present fine-grained analyses, these major semantic fields are further sub-divided into 232 category labels. When a text is uploaded, the software can perform automatic semantic tagging on it based on these semantic categories, and help to produce detailed information about the specific use of different semantic categories in this text. Besides, it can also help to compare a corpus with a parallel corpus or a general reference corpus to identify key semantic categories, i.e., semantic categories which are statistically more frequent in the subject corpus than in the parallel or reference corpus. Key semantic category analysis can help to identify the key themes of a subject corpus, which may shed light on the specific characteristics of the context. In the present paper, each corpus is first compared with a general reference corpus, the British National Corpus (hereafter BNC) Sampler written corpus¹, in order to identify the common strategies employed by these energy companies in identity construction. Then the two corpora are further compared with each other in order to identify their different preferences in identity construction.

The present paper takes all the discourse concerned as an argumentation discourse rather than a mere informative discourse, because all the information collected is devoted to the construction of a positive image for these energy companies, thus transforming information into persuasion (Gotti, 2011). Special attention is paid to the specific groups of stakeholders they target as well as the rhetorical strategies employed in constructing ethical corporate identity (Degano, 2010). These common and different strategies are further interpreted in terms of the factors that influence corporate communication, such as the particular industry, the native language, and the particular culture (see Poppi, 2011).

¹BNC Sampler written corpus consists of 1 million words, which was compiled to reflect the full composition of the BNC, see <http://www.natcorp.ox.ac.uk/corpus/sampler/sampler.pdf>.

4. Findings

A detailed analysis of the two corpora reveals both global patterns and local preferences in ethical corporate identity construction.

4.1. Global Patterns in Corporate Identity Construction

Table 3 shows the top 15 key semantic categories in CE and UE when the two corpora are compared respectively with the BNC Sampler written corpus. The high keyness values of these semantic categories suggest that they are most distinctive in the two corpora, so it is posited that they are crucial to the construction of corporate identity for these energy companies.

Table 3. Top 15 Key Semantic Categories (SMCs) in CE and UE (Versus BNC Sampler Written)

Rank	CE			UE		
	Tagset*	LL**	SMCs	Tagset*	LL**	SMCs
1	I2.1	2916.92	Business: Generally	W5	1229.78	Green issues
2	W5	1047.36	Green issues	I2.1	1112	Business: Generally
3	A15+	995.19	Safe	O1.2	1073.76	Substances and materials: Liquid
4	S7.1+	829.98	In power	A15+	1017.19	Safe
5	O1	759.68	Substances and materials: generally	A1.1.1	920.59	General actions/ making
6	A2.1+	724.07	Change	S8+	586.71	Helping
7	A1.1.1	716.72	General actions/ making	I4	572.54	Industry
8	Y1	597.27	Science and technology in general	I3.1	523.48	Work and employment: Generally
9	O1.3	567.29	Substances and materials: Gas	O1	489.3	Substances and materials: Generally
10	I3.1	560.65	Work and employment: Generally	O1.3	481.77	Substances and materials: Gas
11	X5.2+	546.96	Interested/excited/energetic	A9-	438.18	Giving
12	S8+	539.79	Helping	S5+	401.71	Belonging to a group
13	A5.1+	441.1	Evaluation: Good	S1.8+	388.14	Inclusion
14	I4	391.13	Industry	B2	359.3	Health and disease
15	O1.2	384.75	Substances and materials: Liquid	P1	322.51	Health and disease Education in general

*Tagset is a set of tags used to represent semantic categories.

**LL refers to the log-likelihood value. The higher the LL value is, the greater the statistical significance is.

A comparison of the two key semantic category lists finds that 10 key semantic categories can be identified in both corpora, including W5 (“green issues”), I2.1 (“Business: Generally”), O1.2 (“Substances and materials: Liquid”), A15+ (“Safe”), A1.1.1 (“General actions/making”), S8+ (“Helping”), I4 (“Industry”), I3.1 (“Work and employment: Generally”), O1 (“Substances and materials: Generally”), and O1.3 (“Substances and materials: Gas”). It suggests that energy companies in China and the US share many similarities in this type of discourse, and these shared key semantic categories can be regarded as the common themes exclusive to it. In order to examine how they contribute to the construction of corporate identity for energy companies, typical tokens in each semantic category are further examined.

As Table 4 shows, these key semantic categories can be generally classified into three categories based on their target group of stakeholders. The first category takes the majority, consisting of O1.2, I4, O1, O1.3, I2.1 and A1.1.1. They either characterize the energy industry per se (O1.2, O1, O1.3) or refer to general businesses and activities (I4, I2.1, and A1.1.1). They contribute to the construction of these companies as typical energy companies. Semantic categories A15+ and I3.1, however, fall into the second category, which refers to employee relations. The semantic category W5 itself forms another category, which concerns environmental issues. These categories correspond respectively to Moon’s (2002) three waves in social responsibility reporting: (a) social responsible production and process, (b) employee relations, and (c) community involvement. In the view of Strafella (2011), wave (a) addresses shareholders, business partners, and customer relations; wave (b) concerns employee relations, such as health, safety, and training; wave (c) addresses community issues, environment, and philanthropy.

The presence of the above three categories in both corpora, therefore, is not surprising, because they represent global patterns and strategies in ethical corporate identity construction. Nevertheless, the strong emphasis on safety and environment actually sheds light on the particular feature that characterizes ethical identity construction of energy companies. Compared with companies from other industries, energy companies are known for their risky working environment and serious environmental impact. The emphasis on safety and environment thus not only addresses the particular concerns of their stakeholders but also help to construct ethical identities for these energy companies.

Table 4. Examples for Top 10 Shared Key SMCs

Tagset	SMCs	Examples
W5	Green issues	<i>environmental, environment, conservation, etc.</i>
I2.1	Business: Generally	<i>company, business, and enterprise, etc</i>
O1.2	Substances and materials: Liquid	<i>oil, petroleum, gasoline, etc</i>
A15+	Safe	<i>safety, safe, safely, etc.</i>
A1.1.1	General actions/making	<i>operations, activities, production, process, etc.</i>
S8+	Helping	<i>help, services, support, promote, protection, etc.</i>
I4	Industry	<i>refinery, industries, industrial, etc.</i>
I3.1	Work and employment: Generally	<i>employees, jobs, work, etc.</i>
O1	Substances and materials: Generally	<i>fuel, fuels, chemicals, etc</i>
O1.3	Substances and materials: Gas	<i>gas, CO₂, air, etc.</i>

The primary function of this type of discourse in constructing ethical corporate identities is most revealing in the shared key semantic category S8+ (“helping”). In both corpora, the most frequently used tokens include help, support, promote, etc.

- (1) We promote desulfurization and denitrification, leading the domestic industry in desulfurization work.
- (2) The company and our employees also made significant contributions to help others in Houston and the surrounding communities.
- (3) Additionally, we strongly support the Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) Voluntary Protection Program (VPP), which distinguishes work sites that achieve exemplary occupational safety and health standards.

As can be seen from the above examples, these verbs like promote, help, support usually have energy companies as their subjects, and socially responsible activities or policies as their objects, thus helping to construct these companies as active agents for these activities rather than culprits for social and environmental problems. The tokens in this semantic category characterize this type of discourse, because it plays an important role in these companies’ ethical identity construction.

4.2. Local Preferences in Corporate Identity Construction

With the help of Wmatrix 3.0, the two corpora are further compared with each other to identify key semantic categories in each corpus, and Table 5 demonstrates the top 15 key semantic categories in each corpus.

Table 5. Top 15 Key SMCs in CE and UE (Compared with Each Other)

CE				UE		
Rank	Tagset	LL	SMCs	Tagset	LL	SMCs
1	S7.1+	203.92	In power	Z8	142.92	Pronouns
2	I2.1	162.36	Business: Generally	Y2	127.72	Information technology and computing
3	O3	98.53	Electricity and electrical equipment	Z2	109.08	Geographical names
4	A2.1	95.37	Change	G1.2	102.73	Politics
5	O1.1	77.09	Substances and materials: Solid	W3	90.61	Geographical terms
6	N1	55.79	Numbers	B2-	69.63	Health and disease
7	K2	43.38	Music and related activities	O1.2	52.99	Substances and materials: Liquid
8	S1.2.5+	40.75	Tough/strong	Z3	48.83	Other proper names
9	A11.1+	35.74	Unimportant	M6	45.13	Location and direction
10	S1.2.1+	32.32	Informal/Friendly	X7+	44.48	Wanted
11	A5.1+	31.41	Evaluation: Good	X2.3+	40.56	Learning

12	O4.6	28.29	Temperature	I1.3	39.58	Money: Cost and price
13	A9+	27.55	Getting and possession	A15-	34.83	Danger
14	I3.2+	25.35	Professional	A9-	34.15	Giving
15	Q4.3	24.23	The Media: TV, Radio and Cinema	P1	32.8	Education in general

These key semantic categories represent themes that have statistically significant differences in the two comparable corpora, so they reflect their local preferences in ethical identity construction. Viewing reporting discourse as argumentation discourse (Coupland, 2005), the present paper seeks to analyze their local preferences from three perspectives: (1) strategies, (2) style, and (3) persuasive appeals. The first examines the particular strategies adopted in corporate reporting; the second addresses how they position themselves in relation to their putative readers; and the third concerns how they try to convince their putative readers through the discourse.

4.2.1. Strategies

According to Williams (2008), voluntary corporate reports vary in their different degrees of “proactivity”, i.e., “the willingness of the company to meet expectations by anticipating issues and, most importantly, by shaping the agenda in advance” (Strafella, 2011, p. 220). The proactive strategy allows a company to go beyond the present concerns which may bring damages to a company’s image to take the initiative in defining the content of corporate social responsibility. A company relying too much on this strategy tends to report information in a self-tailored fashion. The consequence is that it may seek to provide a surplus of highly positive and descriptive information with a view to enhancing its legitimacy and image. Proactive strategy stands in contrast to the reactive strategy, whose primary concern is to respond to a crisis or comply with external regulations. Corporate reports adopting reactive strategy often take into account their stakeholders’ primary concerns and address issues that may pose direct threats to their image. It follows that negative issues tend to be more properly addressed in these reports. These distinct strategies in corporate reports, therefore, can be well detected through their different perspectives in presenting the content of corporate reports.

A comparison of the top 15 key semantic categories in the two corpora finds that CE is characterized by a preference for the proactive reporting strategy, while UE is distinguished for a preference for the reactive strategy.

Table 6. Typical Tokens for Key SMCs in CE

Rank	Tagset	Semantic	Examples
1	S7.1+	In power	e.g., management, director, control, leading
2	A2.1+	Change	e.g., development, change, become, reform
3	K2	Music and related activities	harmonious, harmonic
4	S1.2.5+	Tough/strong	strengthen, strong, strictly

5	S1.2.1+	Informal/Friendly	friendly, harmony
6	A5.1+	Evaluation: Good	e.g., improve, enhance, award, great, good
7	A9+	Getting and possession	e.g., resources, has, achieve
8	I3.2+	Professional	professional, reputable

Table 6 shows the typical tokens in some selected top key semantic categories in CE. China's energy companies tend to report the information from their own perspectives by highlighting their efforts (A2.1+, S1.2.5+) and competence (e.g., S7.1+, A5.1+, A9+, I3.2+) in fulfilling their social responsibilities. Compared with top energy companies in the US, China's energy companies, therefore, still tend to show their eagerness to be responsible corporate citizens rather than to correct a possibly negative image (cf. Staffella, 2011, p. 221). This can also be witnessed in their preference for these highly positive and descriptive expressions, such as strong, great, good, reputable, professional, etc. Besides, China's energy companies are also distinguished for their preference for popular expressions in political propaganda. Such expressions as harmonious and harmony in K2, sustainable development in A2.1+, and environmental friendly in S1.2.1+ have been constantly borrowed to enhance their corporate image and legitimacy. This is not surprising, because the state has been a key "player and referee" in China's CSR communication as a result of the state-owned nature of many Chinese companies (e.g., Kimber & Lipton, 2005; Staffella, 2011). The state serves as "the origin of directives and legislation that shapes the values and principles of social responsibility" reference. Political slogans of political propaganda, therefore, are often taken as "the mantras of Chinese CSR reporting" (Staffella, 2011, p. 223).

Table 7. Typical Tokens for Key SMCs in UE

Rank	Tagset	Semantic	Examples
1	Y2	Information technology and computing	e.g., program, programs
2	G1.2	Politics	e.g., political, candidates, lobbying
3	B2-	Health and disease	e.g., HIV/Aids, malaria, HIV
4	X7+	Wanted	e.g., policy, policies, requirements, plans
5	X2.3+	Learning	e.g., learning, learn, learned
6	I1.3	Money: Cost and price	e.g., costs, prices, examples, billings
7	A15-	Danger	e.g., risk, risks, hazards, hazards
8	A9-	Giving	e.g., emissions, contributions, provide, supply
9	P1	Education in general	e.g., education, training, students, school

In contrast, the key semantic categories (see Table 7) in UE suggest that American energy companies show a preference for the reactive strategy. They tend to address the primary concerns of their stakeholders directly and in a specific way. Detailed information such as health (B2-), education (P1), and political engagement (G1.2) are more valued in UE than in CE. Instead of presenting the

general description of their competence and efforts, American energy companies also value the specific programs (Y2) designed to solve these social and environmental problems. Besides, negative sides in fulfilling their social responsibilities have also been more properly addressed by American energy companies than by Chinese energy companies, as can be witnessed in their emphasis on the costs involved (I1.3) and the danger in their business operations (A15-).

4.2.2. Style

One key issue in corporate reporting is how a company positions itself in the report in respect of its putative readers. This is often reflected in the personal or impersonal style of corporate reporting. Chinese and American energy companies' particular preferences in positioning can be well captured in UE's emphasis on the use of pronouns (Z8) and CE's emphasis on general businesses (I2.1). The frequent use of pronouns can "strengthen the writer's presence in the text, while conveying a sense of competence and authority" (Degano, 2011, p. 243; see also Hyland, 1998, p. 236).

An examination of the tokens in the semantic category Z8 ("Pronouns") finds that first person plural pronouns *we* and *our* are most frequently used in both corpora. In UE, the most frequently used are *our* (715, 1.37%) and *we* (617, 1.18%), while in CE, the most frequently used are *we* (546, 1.11%) and *our* (367, 0.74%). They are frequently used in both corpora for these energy companies' self reference, but they are much more frequently used in UE than in CE. According to Degano (2010), first person pronouns are "a strategy commonly used in corporate external communication to personalize the communication" (p. 257). It can help to reduce the distance between these companies and their putative readers and emphasize the sense of leadership. Therefore, it can be concluded that American energy companies position themselves in a more personal way with their putative readers than Chinese energy companies. This conclusion can be further supported by the use of the second person pronouns *you* and *your*, which are used directly to address the putative readers, thus constituting important signs of personal communication. Although not very frequently used, they have a total of 27 occurrences (0.06%) in UE but only a total of 6 occurrences in CE (0.02%).

China's energy companies' less personal style in reporting can also be witnessed in CE's emphasis on the semantic category I2.1, which consists of expressions referring to general businesses. In both corpora, the most frequently used token is *company*. It has 591 occurrences (1.2%) in CE, but only 192 (0.37%) in UE. In both corpora, an examination of the use of *company* in its concordances reveals that it is most frequently used with the definite article *the* by these energy companies to designate themselves.

- (4) The *company* has formulated and implemented incentive schemes such as
Standards for Senior Management Share Option Scheme and Remuneration
Standards for Senior Management.

This particular way of reference thus constitutes a typical impersonal communication style that is used to characterize the writing conventions of this specialized discourse (Degano, 2010; Garzone, 2005). The preference for impersonal communication style can be attributed to the influence of traditional communication style of Chinese texts.

English texts tend to shorten the distance between the company and its clients by adopting a less formal style, while writers for Chinese texts prefer to maintain the hierarchy between the company and its clients in order to show respect for its clients. Therefore, English texts prefer to use first-person pronouns (*we/our/us*), while the direct reference of the company (*the/our company*) is favored in Chinese texts. (Gotti, 2011, p.34)

4.2.3. Persuasive Appeals

Based on the above two differences, one more distinction which can be made is their different preferences for persuasive appeals. Persuasive appeals address the particular strategies an argumentation discourse takes to convince their putative readers. Hyland (1998, p. 233) makes a distinction between three kinds of appeals in persuasive and argumentative discourse: rational, credibility, and affective. Among them, affective and credibility appeals are centered on participants. Credibility appeals aim at creating an ethos by constructing the writer as a “competent, trustworthy, authoritative and honest persona” (Hyland, 1998, p. 235). One of the typical ways of constructing a reliable company is to brag about the achievements a company has made (Hyland, 1998; Degano, 2010). In contrast, affective appeals take into account the readers’ attitudes towards the themes to be addressed. According to Degano (2010), “it implies that the writer looks at the text from the reader’s perspective, while conveying a message which might not be welcome to the audience or at least to a part of it” (p. 240). It can be achieved through signaling that the writer shares the same values with the readers, or takes their values into account.

As Table 6 shows, these key SMCs in CE contribute to the construction of a competent and trustworthy energy companies by highlighting the power as well as the achievements of these companies. They are realized by the frequent use of evaluative adjectives and verbs. They represent a language of assertiveness, and the concerns of stakeholders are not properly taken into account, so “corporate rhetoric is prevented from dealing with real practices and scenarios” (Strafella, 2011, pp. 221-224). Therefore, CE is characterized by a preference for credibility appeals. In contrast, UE starts from the practical concerns of stakeholders, and highlights those negative problems that need to be addressed, such as money and costs, emissions, and risks and hazards of their working environment (see Table 7), so it features a preference for affective appeals.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

To sum up, based on a corpus-assisted discourse study, the present paper compares the discursive construction of corporate identity on the web by the top 10 energy companies in China and the US. The findings suggest that both global patterns and local preferences can be identified in the web-based corporate reporting by Chinese and American energy companies. The global patterns can be readily attributed to the general moves in ethical identity construction as well as the particular nature of the energy industry. Nonetheless, their local preferences can only be explained in terms of different communication norms and practices in different cultural contexts. China is a high-context culture with a high power distance, while the US is a low-context culture with a low power distance (see Hofstede,

1991). High-context culture values harmony, beauty, and oneness with nature (Cho et al., 1999). In communication, it prefers the use of indirect, implicit, polite, modest and even ambiguous expressions (de Mooij, 1998; Singh et al., 2003). In contrast, low context cultures prefer the use of direct, explicit, and even confrontational appeals in communication (Singh et al., 2003). The preference for credibility appeals and the emphasis on the proactive strategy can be attributed to the high-context culture of China. The preference for affective appeals as well as the emphasis on the reactive strategy can be explained in terms of the low-context culture of the US. Besides, culture with high power distance emphasizes “social status, referent power, authority, and legitimacy”, and culture with low power distance stresses “egalitarian, equal rights, and less hierarchy” (Singh et al., 2003, p. 135). The preference for impersonal reporting style in CE and for personal style in UE can also be explained in terms of the different preferences for power distance in Chinese and American culture, because Chinese culture favors high power distance, while American culture values low power distance.

The present paper has further confirmed that while adopting English as a lingua franca for international communication, corporate reporting discourse is still subject to the competing influences of global communication needs and local communication practices and norms (cf. Poppi, 2011). The English discourse of Chinese energy companies can be viewed as a hybridized product, which represents a typical example of glocalization (Maynard & Tian, 2004). This paper, therefore, also demonstrates that the worry about the movement towards a homogeneous communicative model is unfounded. As Poppi (2011) suggests, the unique hybridization of global communication models and local constraints actually contributes to the unique identity of these energy companies in each country. This unique hybridization is not static and invariable but in a constant process of appropriation and recreation (see Wu, 2008a), so the dynamics and dialects of the global and the local, universalism and particularism should be a central focus of corporate identity study in a globalizing context.

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This work was supported by "the Fundamental Research Funds for the Central Universities" [#1409101-21000-31610105] and by RGC Directly Allocated Research Grant, Hong Kong (#G-UA93).