

CSR reports in English and in Italian:

Self-presentation and Performance-reporting across languages

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The talk explores different levels of analysis with a view to a better understanding of the nature of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports. CSR reports are chosen as an interesting testing ground for an exploration of genre characteristics across languages and cultures. It is in the nature of CSR itself to pay heightened attention to the local community, but the global dimension of the economy and its fragmented nature pose increasing challenges: on the one hand, CSR reports can be taken as an example of corporate disclosure, and therefore deeply influenced by the immediate cultural context, in terms of local guidelines or orientations, local business culture and specific corporate culture; on the other hand, because of the global dimension of both sustainability issues and business in general, disclosure documents and CSR reports in particular are also clearly related to the global and international contexts, with a clear dominance of international guidelines.

The analysis looks at a comparable corpus of CSR reports in the banking sector. The language backgrounds explored are those of Italian and English as an International Language (EIL). Keeping in mind the complexity of lingua-cultural issues involved in any comparison between a national and an international language, the study looks at the main structure of the CSR report, focusing on the main divide between self-presentation sections and performance-reporting sections. The analysis starts with an exploration of keywords, i. e. the elements whose frequency varies significantly across the two main sections of the report in both contexts. This preliminary analysis highlights the characteristic language features of the two sections, as well as convergent and divergent elements across the two cultures. Focusing on concordance analysis of selected elements, we then explore the importance of lexico-semantic patterns (collocation, semantic preference, semantic sequences) in a cross-linguistic perspective. Conclusions are drawn as to the nature of the genre and the usefulness of cross-linguistic comparison for the purposes of genre analysis.