

Geert Jacobs & Jana Declercq (Ghent University)

## **Founder's narrative v. bad pharma: behind the scenes of corporate identity work**

[Geert.Jacobs@UGent.be](mailto:Geert.Jacobs@UGent.be)

This paper reports on transdisciplinary research into how news media cover elderly-related health issues. Applying a holistic or start-to-end approach, we investigate the different interconnected stakeholders that are involved in the 'chain' of health news discourses: the pharmaceutical industry; policy-making bodies; health insurance companies; special-interest groups (health consumer organizations; patient support and advocacy organizations; academic research and expert groups; and associations of health professionals); the news media (traditional and online); and the general public. At the heart of the research action is the question whether the idea of healthism and the related emergence of an 'expert patient' has contributed to his/her empowerment or rather made him/her an easy target for manipulation through misinformation by stakeholders with often conflicting interests.

In particular, drawing on fieldwork conducted at a large-sized pharmaceutical company in Europe (incl. semi-structured interviewing and participant observation), we aim at deconstructing our own critical research perspective and how it impacts on our analysis of the company's identity, its reliance on a traditional founder's narrative and the tension with a bad pharma perspective (Goldacre 2012) as reflected in various stakeholders' individual discursive constructions. While corporate identity has been shown to motivate and attract (new) employees as well as enhancing stakeholder loyalty, we demonstrate that it is highly negotiable and in constant flux. It is "talked into being" (Heritage & Clayman 2010, Brown & Humphreys 2006). In this paper, the proposed backstage, ethnographic perspective provides unique views of how official corporate discourse is reshaped into something multi-dimensional, layered, dynamic, and often conflicting (de Fina et al. 2006:7) and we reflect on how the delicate interplay between researchers and informants plays a central role in unravelling the company's elusive identity work.

### **References**

- Brown, Andrew & Michael Humphreys (2006). 'Organizational Identity and Place: A Discursive Exploration of Hegemony and Resistance.' *Journal of Management Studies* 43:2 (231-257).
- De Fina, Anna; Deborah Schiffrin & Michael Bamberg (eds) (2006). *Discourse and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goldacre, Ben. *Bad Pharma: How drug companies mislead doctors and harm patients*. London: HarperCollins.
- Heritage, John & Steven Clayman (2010). *Talk in Action*. Chichester: Blackwell Publishing.

*Geert Jacobs is a professor in the Department of Linguistics at Ghent University, Belgium. His research focuses on the study of professional and institutional discourse. He has published widely in international peer-reviewed journals and has co-edited a number of collective volumes. He is vice-president of the Association for Business Communication as well as co-founder and head of the NewsTalk&Text research network.*