

Allen Wood (Purdue University)

The Language of Fifty Shades of Green: Sustainability and Business Communication

wooda@purdue.edu

For several decades businesses and institutions around the world have taken measures in all aspects of their operations that are more beneficial to the natural environment and humanity at large. Yet business communication, especially in the US, has been slow to incorporate this movement into its field, with little attention paid in classes or in research. In my own journal (*Global Business Languages*), only four articles have dealt with the subject in the last 20 years, and two of them were in the latest issue. Articles basically explore “green” advertising or case studies of sustainability in a real or fictive company.

In my paper I propose to present several ways in which discourse analysis (Gee 1999, van Dijk 2014) can be applied to texts which establishments produce to promote their efforts at “going green” (although there are as many different interpretations or “shades” of green as there are companies). This study will compare French and American companies, with a primary example drawn from sustainability studies issued by Renault and Ford Motors.

On a basic level, a lexical corpus of vocabulary items and a list of key concepts can be established (for the classroom or research), after which frequency, repetitions and variations can be observed. Discursive elements can be analyzed, such as verb/noun interplay, the importance of verbal tenses (claims made for the past, present, or future), and strategies for verbal emphasis. Thematic clusters often present themselves, such as clean/dirty, recycling/garbage, maximize/minimize, and inclusion/exclusion. Finally, sustainability reports by academic institutions (Purdue, WU) will be discussed, as we all are trying to be more “green”.

*Allen Wood is Professor of French at Purdue University, where he has taught for the past thirty years. For the past twenty years he has edited *Global Business Languages*, an annual publication devoted to teaching and research in the field of international business communication. For over ten years he was an associate director of the Purdue Center for International Business Education and Research, until it was defunded in 2014. He has presented several papers on various topics of business language throughout the United States.*