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## **CORPORATE LANGUAGE AS PART OF CORPORATE IDENTITY**

**Hans Schwarz**

PhD. Associate Professor.

Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal, Germany

**Abstract:** Corporate language is commonly used as a term that covers the language used within a company. Sometimes it just refers to the domination of English or any other language to be used in this company. In other cases, corporate language is reduced to a unique vocabulary that evolves within this company.

However, corporate language may as well be understood as the expression of corporate culture. Corporate culture is used to control, coordinate, and integrate company subsidiaries (cf. Wikipedia ‘Organizational culture’). And, corporate language is the specific language that identifies a company and sets it apart from its competitors. It expresses the culture and values of this company. Hence, successful communication depends on corporate language.

Corporate language must be clear, authentic and unmistakable. It has to be used by every individual working for a company, i.e. in-house employees as well as technical writers, technical translators and communication agencies. Therefore, the company has to establish a corporate style guide in each language that is being used. The distinguishing characteristics of the corporate language have to be laid down in this style guide. This paper covers the main aspects to be observed when compiling a style guide.

An example of a style guide worked out in a company is given at the end of the paper.

**Keywords:** intercultural communication, corporate language, culture, translation studies, cultural untranslatability, style guide.

### **Basic principles of corporate identity**

“A corporate identity is the overall image of a corporation or firm or business in the minds of diverse publics, such as customers and investors and employees.” (Wikipedia ‘Corporate identity’)

The corporate identity concept can be seen as a strategic concept for positioning a company. Furthermore, it can be considered as a manifestation of a clearly structured, uniform business culture both within the company and outside. (cf. Gabler: Wirtschaftslexikon ‘Corporate identity’) Through the development of a collective consciousness, an internal corporate culture is established as a network of

embodied behavioral patterns and standards to ensure that the various decision makers are acting on the basis of a uniform corporate image. Externally, the objective is to establish a convergence between verbal and non-verbal signals on the one hand and the elaborated concept on the other hand and to set up a corporate image in view of the various parties involved, e.g. customers, investors, suppliers, potential employees, or the public.

Furthermore, corporate identity can be regarded as a key element of strategic corporate management and planning. In this sense, it is not just a communication concept, but an essential element for success in

continuously implementing strategic plans in operational business.

Companies are investing large amounts of money in controlling their brand perception. In most cases, emphasis is placed on their visual appearance, i.e. their corporate design. Logos, colors, typography and the use of images constitute their 'visual language'. However, it is frequently ignored that corporate design is only one of three pillars for a consistent brand image, the corporate identity. The two others are corporate behavior and corporate communication.

Corporate design: "A corporate design is the official graphical design of the logo and name of a company or institution used on letterheads, envelopes, forms, folders, brochures, etc. The house style is created in such a way that all the elements are arranged in a distinctive design and pattern." (Wikipedia "Corporate Design")

A strong corporate design begins with the company's mark. It has been proven that the consistent application of a mark over a period of time far outweighs the value of the design itself. But it is not only the logo itself. Any means of communication, such as business cards or stationery, and any means of advertising are part of the corporate design of a company.

Corporate behavior: "Expresses the company's approach to business, its values and business culture. It is reflected in everything from the quality of the products and/or services, to the marketing strategies, communication media, and working environment." (2Wire [2000]) Corporate behaviour enables the company to build recognition among clients, to

communicate its values and special approach to business in a memorable way, to establish a benchmark to set goals, and to give employees a sense of belonging to a team.

There are three aspects to be distinguished:

instrumental behavior, e.g. pricing policy, leadership style, etc.,

personal behavior, i.e. behavior among employees as well as between employees and outsiders,

media behavior, e.g. public relations style, relationship to journalists and media representatives, advertising style, selection of advertising media, etc.

Corporate communication is characterized by a holistic view of all internal and external communicative activities of a company with the aim of establishing a clearly structured image—a corporate image—in the public and among the employees of this company. It is "the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed at creating favourable point-of-view among stakeholders on which the company depends." (Wikipedia "Corporate Communication")

### **The role of language in corporate identity**

There is a wide range of scientific literature covering the facets of corporate identity and its role in business communication. Within the framework of the corporate identity concept, discussion is in most cases concentrating on visual (corporate design) and verbal (corporate

communication) aspects. Linguistic and stylistic matters are largely overcome, however, by communicative, strategic and content-related issues. The main focus is on communication tools and dissemination channels that are available and the content of the message to be conveyed as well as communication strategies in general.

According to Vogel (2012), the function of company communication may be roughly divided into:

Market-oriented communication (product brochures, catalogs, advertisements, ...)

Staff-oriented communication (employee magazines, e-mails, circulars, ...)

Press- and public-oriented communication (press releases, annual reports, image brochures, ...)

Only a few publications have been focussing on the relation between corporate identity and the style-oriented application of corporate language (Reins [2006]) or corporate wording (Förster [1994]) in companies.

“Corporate language is the specific language that identifies a company and sets it apart from its competitors, making the company as well as its language unique and distinctive. Corporate language expresses the essence, culture and values of the company.” (Interlanguage)

Corporate language is one of the conditions for successful communication. This means, it must be clear, authentic and unmistakable and it must be used in exactly the same way by every individual representing the company. It is not only the in-house employees who must be proficient in corporate language, but also technical

writers as well as translators. Therefore, the company must establish a linguistic style for their basic language as well as for each target language in translation in line with that adopted in the original language.

A corporate language aligned with the brand’s core values contributes to the image of a company to the same extent as a corporate design does. But it is not only the recognition factor of a communication as in case of a logo. By using a distinctive corporate language, communication with customers is optimized and more efficient than with inconsistent language. And a standardised language will remove uncertainties from in-house authors of texts as well as translators.

Another area where the development of a corporate language may be useful is the improved comprehensibility within a direct customer contact. Quite frequently, both sides are using a different language, because companies tend to see products and services from their own perspective, which is not in accordance with the customer’s perspective. This lack of mutual comprehensibility may result in a negative perception. A consistent use of language that anticipates the needs of the customer will certainly show a positive effect.

Furthermore, written correspondence is handled in a shorter time when using a company-wide language because ready-to-use text blocks can be made available for many standard phrases. And—last but not least—the development and use of a corporate language saves costs.

Certainly, corporate language is subject to the respective company. A

brand name company uses a language different from that of a discount store. An insurance company has other words than a fashion label.

Nevertheless, it is the same set of questions that govern corporate language: Which words suggest customer orientation and which words don't? Which words have a positive connotation and which words result in rejection? Which vocabulary does correspond to the mark, is it an abstract or a pictorial vocabulary? These are questions that aim at a more conscious and pragmatic use of language.

### **Style guides as part of a corporate identity concept**

A style guide is a “set of standards for the writing and design of documents, either for general use or for a specific publication, organization or field. The implementation of a style guide provides uniformity in style and formatting within a document and across multiple documents.” (Wikipedia, ‘Style guide’)

Style guides can be found for general applications, i.e. for the general reading and writing audience, as well as for specific topics, such as a certain industrial field, and for different disciplines, e.g. medicine, government, law, business, and industry. Companies increasingly define their corporate style laid down in a style guide. Authors are required to follow the rules to obey consistency principles.

One of the most comprehensive general-purpose style guides is The Chicago Manual of Style published by the University of Chicago. (University

of Chicago [2010]) This style guide gives rules regarding

- Grammar and use
- Punctuation
- Spelling, distinctive treatment of words and compounds
- Names and terms
- Numbers
- Abbreviations
- Foreign languages
- Mathematics in type
- Quotations and dialogue

As an example of a style guide for specific topics, the Cunard Brand Guidelines of the Cunard Line (Cunard [2012]), a shipping company, lays its emphasis on the optical appearance of this company rather than language-related aspects. It contains rules for:

- The Cunard brand
- The Cunard identity (brand colors, brand identity, photography, typefaces, terminology
- Templates (brochure covers, red stripe, letter sizes, portrait front cover, stationery)
- A style guide for a specific discipline may refer to:
  - Citation,
  - Transcription,
  - Terminology,
  - Pronunciation, or
  - Archive function.

As an example, this is a stylebook compiled by Associated Press referring to the London Summer Olympics in 2012.

A style guide for a specific company or institution may contain rules for:

- Spelling of words,
- Names and terms,
- Grammar and usage,

- Numbers,
- Abbreviations,
- Punctuation,
- Document structure,
- Style, and
- Company-oriented and consumer-oriented principles.

This is the Apple style guide (Apple [2013]). It has chapters on:

Style and usage

Units of measure (prefixes for units of measure, names and unit symbols for units of measure)

Apple product names

Technical notation (code, syntax descriptions, code font in text, variables in text)

How to write a glossary (format and structure of glossary entries, alphabetization)

### **Style guides as part of a corporate language concept**

Style guides with emphasis on language application describe the basic language standards for the process of writing for a company with respect to spelling rules, terms, grammar and style. The standards cover general writing standards as well as decisions concerning the structural influence on the phrasing. In addition, specific writing standards address specific writing rules concerning sentence structure and the use of words and symbols.

#### **Spelling of words**

In case of language varieties, a decision must be made in favor of one language.

For general matters of spelling, it is recommended to use standard

dictionaries in the respective language, such as Duden. Die deutsche Rechtschreibung for German, the Oxford English Dictionary for British English and Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary for American English.

#### **Names and terms**

The same decision for a language variety as for the spelling of words must be made regarding the use of vocabulary.

Furthermore, terminology determined by the company and contained in a terminological database has to be observed.

#### **Grammar and usage**

This refers to structural rules regarding the composition of clauses, phrases and words in every language that is being used in the company.

#### **Numbers**

There is the choice between spelling numbers out and using numerals. Such a choice is governed by the question whether the number is large or small and whether it is an exact quantity or an approximation. Furthermore, the kind of entity and the kind of text has to be considered.

#### **Abbreviations**

This concerns the use of less familiar abbreviations that should be limited to those terms that occur frequently enough to warrant abbreviation—roughly five times or more within an article or chapter—, the terms must be spelled out on their first occurrence.

## **Punctuation**

Punctuation should be governed by its function, which usually is to promote ease of reading by clarifying relationships within and between sentences.

## **Style**

Technical documentations give the user an appropriate, comprehensible and simplified description of the product and its usage. These objectives are achieved with specific elements of style. Elements of style depend on the following features: document structure, conciseness of expressions, and comprehensiveness of language.

## **Recipient orientation**

Texts in technical documentation have three essential functions:

From a legal point of view, they are part of the product.

They support the user to safely use the product and its functions.

They offer a competitive advantage.

Before creating a document, the specific audience has to be determined. The following questions have to be answered:

- What are the benefits of this product?
- How is the user going to operate this product?
- What prior knowledge does the user have?
- What information does the user need to know?

In the ideal case, the user is provided with necessary information in a short, immediately comprehensible, unique and clear way.

After completing the document a usability test may be conducted with persons having the same prior knowledge as the potential user.

The tasks of a Technical Documentation Department include more than merely creating and managing user manuals. Intensive research enables technical writers to ascertain defects with the product and to determine possible improvements for the product. Technical writers actively develop the product process with the help of their ideas. The technical documentation professionally supports the user throughout the entire product life cycle. Thus, high-quality technical documentations increase the competitive advantage of a company.

## **Document structure**

The structure of a document needs to be thorough and clear. Thus the usage of the document is facilitated for the user and the proper usage of the company's products is supported. There are a number of issues regarding document structure:

Structure your document chronologically from a simple to a complex pattern.

Structure your instructions, chapter contents as well as the entire document in a logical order.

Structure your document with useful headings.

Create cross-references to link topics accurately together.

## **Company-oriented principles**

Use the active voice in preference to emphasize the innovative strength of the company.



Avoid phrases that risk a negative publicity.

Avoid words and expressions that the user possibly understands as implicit or explicit guarantee.

Avoid idealizations of the product in the product description. The user is justifiably disappointed when a product cannot fulfill his falsely raised expectations. An unfulfilled guarantee claim may cause the user to file damage compensation claims against the company.

### **Foreign languages**

Foreign words, phrases, or titles that occur in a work in a language other than the original language must include special characters—if any—that appear in the original language.

Many of the letters and symbols required by the world's languages are included in the Unicode standard for character encoding. This standard, which is widely supported by modern operating systems and browsers and many other applications (including many word processors) and is required by such standards as XML, assigns a unique identifying hexadecimal number (or code point) and description to tens of thousands of characters.

### **Style guide for Hirschmann**

Hirschmann Automation and Control GmbH

Hirschmann Automation and Control GmbH is a German company based in Neckartenzlingen, near Stuttgart. It is a specialist in automation, control and networking systems and offers a complete, integrated structure for data communication throughout a

company. In 2007, it was taken over by Belden Inc., a U.S. company with headquarters in St. Louis, MO, and a world leader in providing signal transmission solutions. Belden designs, manufactures, and markets highly engineered signal transmission products for demanding applications. (cf. Belden)

In 2013, Hirschmann decided to prepare a style guide – called Language Guide – in both German and English taking into account the different issues of the respective language.

This Language Guide has two main sections:

Section 1 – General writing rules

Section 2 – Specific writing rules

Section 1 gives an introduction into the basic process of writing technical documents. It contains, for example, different text structures as well as decisions concerning the influence of the structure on the phrasing. In Section 2 specific writing rules are listed concerning sentence structure, word usage, and symbols. Each rule is amended by a separate table with a positive and a negative example as well as further explanations, if necessary.

There are three further parts:

Appendix – examples regarding “Safety instructions”, “Positive product representation” and “Preventing claiming compensation”

Glossary – explanations of specific technical terms

Index – keywords for the subjects of this language guide

General writing rules

There are a few general writing rules that Hirschmann has set up to be followed when writing texts.

As Belden Inc. is a U.S.-based company, Hirschmann decided to use the American spelling, e.g. meter and liter. In cases of doubt, the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11th ed., Merriam-Webster Inc., Springfield, Mass., 2003 will be binding.

As the company develops and produces technological high-quality products, phrases should be avoided that might create a negative picture of Hirschmann. On the other hand, words and phrases should not be used that might be regarded as a promise of guarantee, as an exaggerative description possibly leads to a claim for compensation against the Hirschmann company.

Before creating a document, the intended text recipient has to be determined. As mentioned above, the following questions have to be answered:

What are the benefits of this product?

How is the user going to operate this product?

What prior knowledge does the user have?

What information does the user need to know?

The necessary information shall be presented in a short form. It shall be accurate, immediately comprehensible, unambiguous and clear.

After the document is finished, a usability test should follow. A person with the same degree of prior knowledge as the intended recipient should proceed according to the text. In

case of problems the text should be rewritten.

The structure of the document needs to be thorough and comprehensive. Instructions should be given in a logical order using subheadings to break up the running text.

Terms, acronyms, abbreviations, and symbols should be defined beforehand.

Safety instructions should be written and placed according to the American ANSI Z535 standard, which presents information on safety issues and accident prevention.

A high consistency in text structure, sentence structure, terminology and phrasing of the safety instructions should be achieved to ease the use of documents. As the company has just begun to create a terminological database, they decided to emphasize their efforts in defining the terms to be used in all technical documents.

#### Specific writing rules

This section contains a set of writing rules both on sentence and word levels as well as on punctuation. Each rule is illustrated by a table with positive and negative examples as well as other information.

Here are a few examples of writing rules on sentence level:

- Use verbs.

*Verify that the cable is not defective.*

instead of

*Cable defective?*

- Use articles.

*Remove the power plug.*

instead of

*Remove power plug.*

- Create unambiguous references.

*Remove the lever from the ball valve. You will need the lever later.*

instead of

*Remove the lever from the ball valve. You will need it later.*

- Each sentence should contain only one instruction. Write instructions in a logical order.

1. *Remove the power plug.*

2. *Unscrew the device from the rail.*

3. *Place the device on a solid surface.*

4. *Remove the cover.*

instead of

*Remove the power plug, unscrew the device from the rail and remove the cover after you placed the device on a solid surface.*

- Avoid sentence structures with multiple prepositions. Use several short sentences instead.

*Two green LEDs are installed below the panel. A label is attached between these two LEDs. This label indicates the voltage.*

instead of

*The voltage is printed on the label between the two green LEDs installed below the panel.*

- Avoid multiple genitive constructions within a sentence. Use several short sentences instead.

*The device is attached to the front test wall. The device has a cover that is fastened with type C screws. These screws are blue.*

instead of

*The type C screws of the front test wall's cover of the device are blue.*

- Use the active voice, if possible.

*Remove the cover.*

instead of

*The cover must be removed.*

- Avoid unnecessary nominalizations.

*Complete the installation.*

instead of

*Bring the installation to an end.*

- Use standard phrases for specific situations.

*The device enables you to ...*

instead of

(1) *The device allows you to ...*

(2) *Here you can ...*

These are examples of writing rules on word level:

- Avoid the following words and expressions as they contain only imprecise information: from time to time, usually, regularly, mostly, about, approximately, etc.

*Check the sight glass once a week.*

instead of

*Check the sight glass regularly.*

- Use full forms instead of abbreviations.

*Harmonized standards are European standards and are prepared on behalf of the European Commission.*

instead of

*Harm. standards are EN and are prepared p. p. the EC.*

- Write two-part compounds as closed compounds, if included in Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, otherwise as open compounds.

*breakdown*

instead of

*break down or break-down*

- Write compound modifiers in multiple-part compounds with hyphen(s).

*plug-in connector*

instead of

*plug in connector or plug-in-connector*

- Write values and units used as compound modifiers with hyphen only if the unit is spelled out.

*12-feet gap*

but

*12 ft gap*

Here are some examples of punctuation rules:

- Quotation marks:

In English-language texts use the following quotation marks:

“ [ALT + 0147]

” [ALT + 0148]

In German-language texts use the following quotation marks:

„ [ALT + 0132]

“ [ALT + 0147]

In French-language texts use the following quotation marks:

« [ALT + 0171]

» [ALT + 0187]

- en dash (– [ALT + 0150]):

Use the en dash for denoting a break in a sentence, for setting off parenthetical statements (set with spaces), or for indicating spans and differentiation.

12–48 V DC

instead of

12-48 V DC

- multiplication sign (× [ALT + 0215]):

Use × instead of the letter x.

8 × 8 in

instead of

8 x 8 in

- non-breakable space ([Alt + 0160]):

Use a non-breakable space between a number and its units.

150 ft

instead of

150ft

But:

78 °F

instead of

78°F or 78° F

Appendix

The following signal words refer to safety markings as listed in ANSI Z535.6 standard:

- DANGER

Indicates a hazardous situation which, if not avoided, will result in death or serious injury.

- WARNING

Indicates a hazardous situation which, if not avoided, could result in death or serious injury.

- CAUTION

Indicates a hazardous situation which, if not avoided, could result in minor or moderate injury.

- NOTICE

Used to address practices not related to personal injury.

The following words and expressions might create negative feelings for the user. When associated with Hirschmann products, they would cause a negative product representation.

- failed, defective, error:

*The login was unsuccessful.*

instead of

*The login has failed.*

- malfunction:

*If the device does not receive any packets, a data line is disabled.*

instead of

*If the device does not receive any packets, there is a malfunction of a data line.*

- old:

*When using the previous software version ...*

instead of

*When using the old software version ...*

The following words and expressions might be understood as implicite or explicite warranty claim. They might entail claiming compensation and should therefore be avoided and replaced by other expressions.

- ensure, guarantee:

*The firewall helps provide for the user authentication.*

instead of

*The firewall ensures the user authentication.*

- secure:

*When creating your password, use ...*

instead of

*For a secure password, use ...*

- protect:

*This function helps protect your internal network.*

instead of

*This function protects your internal network.*

- superlatives:

*The firewall is easy to operate ...*

instead of

*The firewall provides best usability by ...*

This English-language style guide has now been in use in the Hirschmann company since April 1, 2013. It provides uniformity in terminology, style and formatting across the technical documents of the company.

## **Glossary**

This section contains a few terms describing the functionality of the company's terminological database. This data collection is still in progress. The objective is to define product names

and technical terms used throughout the Hirschmann documentation. It covers both American English and German terms.

Although not part of the Language Guide, the terminological database pursues the same objectives as the Guide: consistency and comprehensiveness of language.

## **Conclusions**

Corporate language identifies a company and is an essential prerequisite for successful communication. It can significantly enhance the image and visibility of a company and its products.

The implementation of a style guide is necessary for a consistent use of language. It simplifies the process of translating into other languages allowing company-specific vocabulary to be created for every language in use.

The objective of this paper was to show the main aspects to be observed when compiling a style guide.

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## КОРПОРАТИВНЫЙ ЯЗЫК КАК ЧАСТЬ КОРПОРАТИВНОЙ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

### Ханс Шварц

PhD. Associate Professor.

Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal, Germany

Хохшуле Магдебург-Стендаль, Германия

**Аннотация:** Корпоративный язык обычно используется как термин, который охватывает язык, используемый в компании. Иногда это относится только к доминированию английского или любого другого языка, который будет использоваться в этой компании. В других случаях корпоративный язык сводится к уникальному словарю, который развивается внутри этой компании.

Однако корпоративный язык также можно понимать, как выражение корпоративной культуры. Корпоративная культура используется для контроля, координации и интеграции дочерних компаний компании (см. Википедию «Организационная культура»). И корпоративный язык - это особый язык, который идентифицирует компанию и отличает ее от конкурентов. Он выражает культуру и ценности этой компании. Следовательно, успешное общение зависит от корпоративного языка.

Корпоративный язык должен быть ясным, аутентичным и безошибочным. Он должен использоваться каждым человеком, работающим в компании, например, с персоналом, а также с техническими специалистами, техническими переводчиками и агентствами связи. Поэтому компания должна создать руководство по корпоративному стилю на каждом используемом языке. Отличительные особенности корпоративного языка должны быть заложены в этом руководстве по стилю. В этом документе рассматриваются основные аспекты, которые необходимо соблюдать при составлении руководства по стилю.

Пример руководства по стилю, разработанный в компании, приведен в конце статьи.

**Ключевые слова:** межкультурная коммуникация, корпоративный язык, культура, исследования перевода, культурная непереводаемость, руководство по стилю.

## КОРПОРАТИВТІК ТІЛДЕ КОРПОРАТИВТІК КЕЗ КЕЛГЕНДІҢ БӨЛІГІ

**Ханс Шварц**

**PhD. Доцент.**

**Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal, Германия**

**Андатпа:** Корпоративтік тіл көбінесе компанияда қолданылатын тілді қамтитын термин ретінде пайдаланылады. Кейде ол тек осы компанияда қолданылатын ағылшын немесе басқа тілдің үстемдігіне қатысты. Басқа жағдайларда, корпоративтік тіл бұл компанияда дамып келе жатқан бірегей сөздікке дейін азаяды.

Дегенмен, корпоративтік мәдениет корпоративтік мәдениеттің өрнегі ретінде түсінікті де болуы мүмкін. Корпоративтік мәдениет компанияның еншілес ұйымдарын басқару, үйлестіру және интеграциялау үшін қолданылады (Уикипедия «Ұйымдық мәдениет»). Сонымен қатар, корпоративтік тіл компанияны анықтайтын және оны бәсекелестерінен бөлетін нақты тіл болып табылады. Ол осы компанияның мәдениеті мен құндылықтарын білдіреді. Осылайша, сәтті қарым-қатынас корпоративтік тілге байланысты.

Корпоративтік тілі анық, шынайы және анық болмауы керек. Ол компанияда жұмыс істейтін әр қызметкердің, яғни іскери қызметкерлердің, сондай-ақ техникалық жазушылармен, техникалық аудармашылармен және байланыс агенттіктерімен қолданылуы тиіс. Сондықтан компания пайдаланылатын әр тілде корпоративтік стильдік нұсқаулықты құруы керек. Корпоративтік тілдің ерекшеліктері осы стильдік нұсқаулықта жазылуы керек. Бұл мақалада стилистикалық нұсқаулықты құрастыру кезінде байқалатын негізгі аспектілер қамтылған.

Компанияда жасалған стилистикалық нұсқаулықтың үлгісі қағаздың соңында берілген.

**Тірек сөздер:** мәдениетаралық қарым-қатынас, корпоративтік тіл, мәдениет, аударма зерттеулері, мәдени алмасу, стильдік нұсқаулық.