LANGUAGING IDENTITIES IN CHANGING TIMES
Challenges and opportunities

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(UN)TRANSPARENTLY COMMUNICATING EQUALITY
Diversity and inclusion in the car transportation sector

The last decades have been marked by social changes that have affected civil society and the business world. In particular, the rise of different social movements in recent times, including the women's rights movement, #MeToo, LGBTQIA+ activism, Black Lives Matter, the strikes organised internationally by Fridays for Future and the animal rights movement, has affected companies' way of doing business and their communication practices. Companies, in fact, have progressively acquired awareness of the necessity to show a socially and environmentally responsible behaviour. This is reflected in the number of different types of documents that have been increasingly published by companies to disclose information related to these issues (Point & Singh 2003). These include Corporate and Social responsibility (CSR) reports; Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) reports; Annual Reports, Modern Slavery Statements, Diversity Statements; and web sections where this kind of information is included (e.g., About-us Sections, Mission Statements and People & Communities).

In relation to the commitment of companies to *equality, diversity* and *inclusion* (henceforth EDI), the existing literature has widely focused on this aspect from a management perspective (Oswick and Noon 2014). In this field, *equality* is referred to the belief that all individuals should have the same opportunities irrespective of their ethnical origin, sex and disability. In practical terms, this means, for instance, guaranteeing employees with equal and dignified career opportunities, salaries, and social benefits. *Diversity* is conceptualised in corporate management as the awareness that differences (e.g., age, ethnicities, biological sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disabilities, learning disorders, religious beliefs, and dietary practices) represent an added value. *Inclusion* is concerned with those actions undertaken to support, empower and make different employees contribute together to the future of a company. However, there is still a paucity of studies that investigate the discursive promotion of diversity and inclusion in corporate discourse (Malavasi 2023; Nocella 2023), and scarce attention has been paid to the specific linguistic choices employed to communicate EDI issues. Furthermore, although transparency is a key value that guarantees a successful corporate communication, no linguistic research has been conducted on how EDI is linguistically promoted in a transparent way.

Drawing on this background and considering that some of the companies from the transportation sectors selected for this research have grown in recent times, this study quantitatively and qualitatively examines two ad-hoc monolingual corpora of texts from the sectors of car hiring and sharing. In detail, the corpora contain respectively 2020-2022 ESG reports and web sections, all written in English, created

by international companies operating in this field, including, e.g., *Avis Budget Group* and *Lyft*. The aim of this analysis is to answer the following research questions:

1. What aspects related to EDI are the most or least represented in the communication by the selected companies?
2. How are EDI and related issues discursively constructed in the texts under analysis?
3. Which linguistic and pragmatic strategies are employed by the companies under study to (un)transparently disclose information about EDI practices and initiatives?
4. Do multimodal resources, such as images and visuals, contribute to the (un)transparent expression of companies' approach to EDI?
5. Is it possible to find similarities or differences between ESG reports and web sections?

In terms of methodological procedures, the first stage of the analysis, aimed at providing results to answer the first research question, employs quantitative tools of corpus linguistics, including the observation of lexical keywords and frequency lists. In order to answer the second and the third research questions, the second phase consists in the analysis of the lexico-phraseological patterns around *equality*, *diversity* and *inclusion*, through the analysis of their extended concordance lines, but also by means of close text reading. In particular, to investigate transparency in relation to EDI, the following three dimensions are taken into account: a) *disclosure*, which refers to the quantity, completeness, and relevance of the information; b) *clarity*, *understandability*, or *accessibility* of the information; c) *accuracy*, i.e., its degree of reliability (Schnackenberg & Tomlinson 2016). In addition, to answer research question 4, the analysis of the multimodal resources, if present, makes it possible to assess whether their use contributes to the linguistic promotion of EDI and conveys information with the same degree of transparency observed at a linguistic and content level. This is achieved by observing, for instance, the subjects included in visuals, and the perspective through which they are represented – whether they are foregrounded or backgrounded. Finally, findings are compared to answer research question 5.

Results will show analogies and divergences among the selected companies, but also between ESG reports and web sections, in relation to their choices of specific or vague resources to (un)transparently promote and communicate their commitment to EDI.

Keywords: EDI; transparency; corporate discourse; car hiring; car sharing.

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