Organizational mission: what does critical discourse analysis reveal?

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Abstract

The object of our study is the political and ideological content underlying the corporate discourse in mission statements by the largest companies in Brazil. Mission statements published in the institutional homepages of the 64 companies that make up the theoretical portfolio of IBOVESPA were analyzed. Data was analyzed through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and grouped into lexical categories according to their meaning and their role in the organizational mission statement. The results revealed the underlying structure of mission discourses, allowing the identification of companies' specific profiles according to their discursive features; they also suggest that the corporate discourse appropriates the symbolic dimension in order to control and manipulate workers, legitimate companies' action in society, and naturalize the principles of the neoliberal ideology by presenting the current capitalist system as the best, only relentless mode of corporate organization and production.

Keywords: Organizational Mission. Critical Discourse Analysis. Symbolic. Corporate Discourses.

Missão organizacional: o que a análise crítica do discurso revela?

Resumo

Nosso objeto de estudo é o conteúdo político e ideológico subjacente ao discurso empresarial das missões declaradas das maiores empresas do Brasil. Foram analisadas as missões divulgadas nas *homepages* institucionais das 64 empresas que compõem a carteira teórica do Ibovespa. Os dados foram analisados por meio da análise crítica do discurso (ACD) e agrupados em categorias lexicais em função de seu significado e de seu papel na declaração de missão organizacional. Os resultados revelaram a estrutura subjacente do discurso das missões, possibilitando a identificação de perfis específicos de empresas segundo suas características discursivas, bem como sugerem que o discurso empresarial se apropria da dimensão simbólica com o propósito de controlar e manipular os trabalhadores, legitimar a atuação das empresas perante a sociedade e naturalizar os preceitos da ideologia neoliberal, apresentando o sistema capitalista atual como a única, melhor e inexorável forma de organização e de produção societária.

Palavras-chave: Missão Organizacional. Análise Crítica do Discurso. Simbólico. Discursos Empresariais.

Misión organizacional: lo que revela el análisis crítico del discurso?

Resumen

Nuestro objeto de estudio es el contenido político e ideológico subyacente al discurso de negocio de las misiones declaradas de las empresas más grandes de Brasil. Se analizaron las misiones dadas a conocer en las páginas de inicio institucionales de 64 empresas que componen el índice Ibovespa. Los datos fueron analizados mediante el análisis crítico del discurso (ACD) y se agrupan en categorías léxicas de acuerdo con su significado y su papel en la misión de la organización. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto la estructura subyacente del discurso de las misiones, lo que permite la identificación de los perfiles específicos de las empresas en función de sus características discursivas y sugieren que el discurso empresarial se apropia de la dimensión simbólica con el fin de controlar y manipular a los trabajadores, legitimar las acciones de empresas ante la sociedad y naturalizan los preceptos de la ideología neoliberal, que presenta el actual sistema capitalista como la única, la mejor e implacable forma de organización y de producción societaria.

Palabras clave: Misión de la organización. Análisis crítico del discurso. Simbólica. Discursos de negocios.

INTRODUCTION

Financial capitalism is informed by the premise of the minimal or night-watchman state (FRIEDMAN, 1962), thus delegating to large corporations the responsibility of operating not only in the economic sphere, but also in the political, social and cultural ones (BARLEY, 2007). This ubiquity confers on those organizations a symbolic dimension in society. In fact, organizations are immersed in a greater social picture, no matter how totalizing organizational experiences might be (SARAIVA and CARRIERI, 2008). In effect, by means of symbolic manipulation and a sort of management oriented towards affection, companies appropriate employees' subjectivity by offering them not only employment, but also the right to belong to a victorious organizational culture. Accordingly, the corporate world is transformed into a "magical universe" (WOOD JR. and PAULA, 2002) ruled by excellence and full of discourses that convey myths and stories of success.

The organizational mission discourse occupies the top position in this discourse hierarchy (COLLINS and RUKSTAD, 2008), being the starting point of strategic business formulation (HAX and MAJLUF, 1984) and the synthesis of its main purpose (PEARCE II and ROBINSON, 2008), since it constitutes "the underlying motivation to act in business" (COLLINS and RUKSTAD, 2008, p. 85). In its limits, it conveys the organizations' main purposes to publics of their interest. However, what is the underlying political and ideological content of the method businesses use to define and diffuse their raison d'etre? The aim of this paper is to seek for an answer to this question.

In order to answer it, and using the theoretical and methodological framework of the critical discourse analysis (CDA), we analyzed the mission statements of the 64 companies that compose Ibovespa (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013), the main indicator of the Brazilian stock market performance, which confirms its relevance in our society.

This study is important because it ruptures the abridgement of the organizational symbolic perspective, thus revealing a mechanism of power maintenance disguised as functionalistic impersonality.

This paper is divided in four sections, plus this introduction. Next section presents the theoretical landmark; the third shows the methodological course; and, finally, results are discussed in light of CDA.

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* Image: Picture by Goya- Saturn devouring one of his sons (Exhibited at Museu do Prado – Madrid).

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS: A THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL POINT OF REFERENCE

CDA presents itself as a "paradigm established within Linguistics" (WODAK, 2004, p. 228), and it seeks to combine theoretical contributions of the Social Sciences (Karl Marx, Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Anthony Giddens), the Philosophy of Language (Mikhail Bakhtin, Valentin Volochínov), the francophone Discourse Analysis (Michel Pêcheux, Dominique Maingueneau, Jacqueline Authier-Revuz), and the Systemic Functional Linguistics (Michel Halliday, Ruqayia Hasan, Christian Matthiessen). In its different lines, this approach adopts a critical dimension towards language, one that sees language as determinant of social transformation and crucial to the understanding of how social and ideological practices perpetuate themselves, since CDA "is a kind of discursive analytical investigation that especially studies the way abuse of power, domination, and inequality are represented, reproduced, and fought against by oral and written texts in a social and political context" (VAN DIJK, 2008, p. 113).

One of the principles of CDA is that discourse has a constitutive power, since it creates forms of knowledge and belief, identities and social relationships. It presupposes that the understanding of how discourse creates, maintains, and questions domination and power relationships requires an interdisciplinary perspective. Also, it seeks to explain discourse structures by studying the properties of social interaction, and especially the larger social structure (MEURER, 2005), thus revealing how discourse structures produce, reproduce, legitimize, or challenge power and domination relationships in society. Accordingly, CDA has an explicit emancipating role for dominated subjects, since it endeavors to provide them with appropriate analytical resources and tools, so that they can critically read their own and others' discourses, taking a stand against situations of domination they are not aware of.

In CDA, discourse is created through a circular process in which social practices influence texts (by molding the context and the way texts are produced), while texts, in turn, help influence society, molding the opinions of those who read or consume those texts (FAIRCLOUGH, 2008). Therefore, criticizing is "making the interconnection of things visible" (FAIRCLOUGH, 1995, p. 36) by explicitly adopting a political position and focusing on self-reflection (WODAK, 2004). Hence, CDA reveals the inconsistencies, contradictions and dilemmas in the internal structures of texts and discourses.

This paper adopts chiefly contributions of the CDA proposed by Fairclough (1992, p. 28), who thinks discourse "is more than mere use of language: it is the use of language, whether spoken or written, as a kind of social practice". Therefore, discourse should not be understood as a communication tool, but as a social practice, and, for this very reason, discourse structures and social structures have complex relationships of mutual influence. After all, in order to understand society, it is necessary to understand the discourse that is produced and circulated in it; and to understand discourse, it is necessary to understand the society that creates it.

Fairclough (1989) proposes a model that studies discourse as a tridimensional phenomenon. Thus, in order to understand discourse and show how it participates in the creation, maintenance and questioning of domination and power relations, that author conceives of discourse as a result of three practices that complement one another: the social practice, the discourse practice, and the textual practice.

Social practice has to do with the macro-social dimension of discourse, that is to say, how the production, circulation and reception of discourses are regulated in a larger socio-political context. The importance of considering this larger dimension in discourse studies lies on the fact that "the discursive constitution of society does not spring from a free play of ideas in people's minds, but from a social practice that is firmly rooted in solid, material, social structures and which is informed by them" (FAIRCLOUGH, 2008, p. 93). This dimension of discourse is studied through the contemplation of notions such as power, ideology, and hegemony.

Ideologies are implicit in the production and interpretation of discourses, which leads individuals to unknowingly reproduce ideologies that are harmful for themselves and others. The notions of hegemony and power are strongly attached to the concept of ideology. Hegemony means both leadership and domination in the economic, political, cultural, and ideological spheres of society, "a constant focus of conflict over matters of greater instability between classes and groups in order to build, keep, or break up alliances and domination/subordination relations that take on economic, political, and ideological forms" (FAIRCLOUGH, 2008, p. 122). This interplay of influences between dominant and dominated classes evidences the power relations in society.

While social practice seeks to manage how the social-historical context governs and, to some extent, determines the process of production, circulation, and reception of discourse, *discursive practice* tries to explain exactly how that process takes place in private institutional contexts; that is, it has to do with how the inter-textual and inter-discursive regulation and constitution of discourses happen in specific situations of communication, such as in classrooms, businesses, hospitals, etc. Therefore, from the perspective of the social practice, state and market are able to reduce a high-school or even an undergraduate lesson to a tool that helps reproduce certain ideology, thus educating citizens according to a logic that repeats economic power relations between a dominated class and a dominant class.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the discursive practice, if teachers or professors are not aware of this larger social-historical interplay in which they inevitably participate, they may create a discourse (a lesson) that contributes to the reproduction of those power relations, when choosing both the contents taught and the relationship established with students. As to contents, teachers or professors may limit themselves to teaching subjects and training skills that are useful for introducing students into the job market. From the perspective of the relationship with students, teachers or professors may reproduce, through explanatory lessons, for instance, the power relation between he who gives orders and he who obeys them, between he who has certain knowledge and he who does not have it, between he who speaks and he who listens; in other words, a relationship similar to that between employer and employee.

Finally, *textual practice* corresponds to the linguistic dimension of discourse, that of its textual building. In this dimension, the goal is not to describe the abstract linguistic system (Ferdinand de Saussure's *langue*) or the lexical, syntactical and textual characteristics of a discourse. The aim is to analyze to what extent the lexical selection, the syntactic structures, the employment of cohesive mechanisms, the allotment of turns to speak, and the mobilization of certain arguments contribute to the reproduction or subversion of hegemonic discourses, the naturalization of certain ideologies, or the maintenance and strengthening of power relations.

In the CDA by Fairclough (2008), analysis of the textual dimension of discourse is carried out by means of contributions chiefly of M. A. K. Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics, dimension in which the following aspects of a text are usually studied: vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and macro-textual structure.

As it can be observed from this presentation, the dimensions of the tridimensional model by Fairclough (2009) are strongly hinged. Thus, the choice of certain syntactic structures (*textual practice*) is dependent on how speakers represent both themselves and a specific activity (*discursive practice*), being this activity governed by the power relations and ideologies that design society (*social practice*). The differences between such dimensions are mainly theoretical and methodological in nature.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES ROUTE

Our methodological procedures consisted of three stages: 1) data collection and pre-analysis; 2) exploration of materials; and 3) treatment of results, inferences and interpretation.

Pre-analysis of data showed the existence of numerous methodologies for classifying companies according to their size and relevance. Since our goal involved analyzing the organizational mission statements of the largest companies in Brazil, our choice was to limit our data-collection activity to companies that integrate Ibovespa's theoretical equity portfolio, valid for the period from May to August, 2013 (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013), and which communicate their mission statements on their official homepages, in a total of 64 companies.

Then, the 64 homepages were accessed, and the organizational mission statements were copied. These were submitted to content analysis, both in their quantitative (lexicometry) and quantitative (CDA) aspects.

The aim of the lexicometric analysis through the program *Hermetic Word Frequency Counter 11.713* was to calculate the frequency in the use of words, thus identifying the most recurrent terms in the creation of discourses by companies formulating their mission statements, and consequently those with greater discursive relevance.

Afterwards, the most frequently used words underwent qualitative analysis according to the CDA methodological prerequisites. The trimming criterion was their grammatical category. Therefore, the study was focused on analyzing the most recurrent

nouns, adjectives, and verbs, ignoring words from other grammatical categories, in order to identify the underlying world-views and values to the mission discourses of the largest companies in Brazil.

As to the methodological procedure, independent analyses of each of the dimensions proposed in the model by Fairclough (2008) were carried out, beginning with the largest analysis (the social dimension) and then on to the most local one (the textual dimension), according to the perspective of the descending analysis proposed by Bakhtin and Volochínov (1986).

In the social dimension, the focus was the neoliberal ideology and the explanation of how it has been governing not only employment relations, but also relationships between countries, thus reaching a planetary scale. In the discursive dimension, we restored the idea of organizational mission statements as corporate discourse by explaining what their purpose is, and how the neoliberal ideology underlies such a discourse. Finally, in the textual dimension, we studied the vocabulary used to formulate those mission statements.

SOCIAL PRACTICE: CORPORATE DISCOURSE AND THE INSTAURATION OF THE NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Mission statements are part of a broader discourse that is typical of the corporate universe, and which is called *corporate discourse* in this paper. It is our aim to understand its underlying political and ideological contents; and, in order to achieve this, we resort to the principles of discourse exclusion (FOUCAULT, 2011), relating them to the constitution of a will of truth that satisfies the interests of the neoliberal ideology, and which are based on the naturalization of the concepts of (free) market, globalization, and development.

The neoliberal ideology is grounded on the dynamics of the market. In this context, free competition is essential in order to create a competitive scenario, where the only companies that can survive are those able to build competitive advantages through strategic management, thus becoming fit to fulfill the longings of ever-more demanding consumers. Under this view-point, the market would govern itself in a strictly economic, meritocratic, and consequently (supposedly) neutral, rational way, without any political or ideological prejudices. The competition is won by the company that offers the best value for money.

In this context, the role of the state should be minimal, that is to say, its task is simply to assure the necessary conditions so that the market can operate freely. And if there is no ideology to be fought against or resorted to, given the alleged neutrality of the market, then the room for difference and criticism is eliminated, which enables the consolidation of a hegemonic discourse (FAIRCLOUGH, 2008). Therefore, in this perspective, the (now global) free market presents itself as an ideal democratic proposal, since it enables the social ascent of citizens, companies and nations that have the best strategy for acting in a competitive scenario. Accordingly, one that maximizes its economic operations becomes "developed". On the other hand, the derogatory idea of being "underdeveloped" is created and applied to all and every alternative that does not fulfill the requirements of the neoliberal ideology

The role of the so-called developed nations becomes, therefore, that of exporting the best practices of strategic management to promote development around the planet, while nations known as underdeveloped have no choice but to interfere as little as possible in this process. After all, according to this logic, the more developed the market, the more competitive it becomes. And by increasing competitiveness, the room for inefficient companies is reduced, and a virtuous circle of worldwide reach is promoted.

In this worldwide scenario or social context, the developmentalistic race turns into a global civilizing project, and companies are not only seen as the ablest institutions to lead that project, but they also present themselves as such, because they are the ones that have the strategic management knowledge, an indispensable tool for promoting worldwide economic development and avoiding the consolidation of backward and underdeveloped alternatives, such as totalitarian, anti-democratic or – even worse – communist governments.

Corporate discourse thus becomes what Foucault (2011) calls a "discipline", a principle of discourse exclusion that is able to delimit a field of truth according to which concepts of right and wrong, good and bad are defined regarding the notion of development. The proliferation of the mercantilization discourse, which considers inefficient that which is not inside the

management paradigm, is an example of that delimitation. As a result of this discourse and its underlying ideology, privatization is always seen as better than nationalization; non-corporate organizations, such as sports clubs, are derogatorily considered as amateur organizations that need to become businesses in order to thrive; educational institutions start to encourage students to become entrepreneurs so that they can grow into successful professionals and agents for the (economic) development of society; these same institutions begin to design courses and offer them as products; knowledge turns into a consumer good; personal life management becomes a requirement for happiness; and affective relationships are measured according to their economic success.

If discourse has the power to mold society or larger social structures (FAIRCLOUGH, 2008), corporate discourse, in turn, promotes the emergence of a new character in society: the management guru, who proclaims to be able to promote worldwide development, to consult for foreign nations, dictating and propagating truths as if he or she could understand local cultural and social peculiarities. However, because these gurus' discourses are molded according to the neoliberal ideology, they just try to homogenize reality in the light of the prerequisites of that ideology, which is suitable for the maintenance of power relations in which few give orders and many obey them, that is, for the maintenance of the *status quo*.

The profusion of the pop-management discourse (WOOD JR., 2000) also reveals the relationship between discourse and social structures, and it can be associated with another principle of discourse restriction pointed out by Foucault (2011): the "comment". Although they present themselves as indispensable novelties, the numerous publications on business and their sequential best sellers do not bring anything new, except for the new guise (on a large scale) for that which did exist already. Thus, the pop-management discourse acts as the principle of comment, muffling the room for critical reflection with its avalanche of contents, but limiting itself to repeat principles of the neoliberal ideology.

The wide and unrestrained dissemination of business logic in different spheres of society, including individuals' subjective dimension, may be associated with the establishment of a doctrine, another principle of discourse exclusion pointed out by Foucault (2012). This doctrine typically restricts its members' access to other discursive forms while disseminating its own discourse. Similarly, by naturalizing and diffusing the principles of free market, globalization, and development, the current capitalist system disqualifies all and every attempt to look at reality from a different viewpoint, thus ignoring the political and ideological dimensions of reality, and presenting itself as a consequence of fate.

The appropriation of rituals is recurrent in corporate discourse, as well as in other doctrines. Rituals define the signs that must accompany discourses and dictate rules to the individuals who utter them. If these rules are not followed, discourse loses efficiency. Thus, corporate discourse may be associated with the principle of discourse restriction. Perceived in different spheres of the corporate universe, rituals are an integral part of companies' organizational cultures. In language, one can notice the adoption of a dialect of its own, full of monograms and borrowings, often unintelligible for those who do not belong to a certain company. The very formalization of an organizational mission statement may be also seen as a ritual, a mimetic practice in order to restrict possibilities of reflection about its essential purpose to employees and the rest of society.

As to its limits, the relationship between corporate discourse and the principles of discourse restriction proposed by Foucault (2012) indicates that, in corporate discourse, the neoliberal ideology is naturalized, reproduced and legitimized, as in the mission statements studied in this paper, which inaugurates a will of truth that satisfies its interests, and exemplifies the fight for power that permeates the right to discourse.

Believing that the neoliberal ideology is a consequence of the supremacy of a specific worldview that was historically and socially elevated to the status of an absolute truth, we refute the inexorability of the current capitalist system and its (alleged) superiority over other forms of social organization, considering it as a political and ideological choice, thus susceptible of criticism and opposition.

DISCURSIVE PRACTICE: MISSION, SYMBOLISM, AND THE ORGANIZATIONAL DISCOURSE

Discursive practice is the dimension of discourse that is responsible for the way discursive production is carried out, circulated and consumed in specific institutional contexts. Therefore, in this study, it amounts to specifying the conditions for a more local production and reception of organizational mission statements – in other words, to revealing the purpose of those

missions in the context of their organizations. This purpose is strongly hinged to the neoliberal ideology underlying that organizational discourse. The neoliberal ideology was approached in the previous item, when we gave the definition of the social structures that mold missions.

The idea of mission can be understood from two different theoretical perspectives. The first reflects a functionalistic view, which sees companies in their formal, rational and objective aspects, such as, for instance, their hierarchical structures, distribution of positions, and business plans. The second regards organizations as systems of socially built meanings, and focus its study on their subjective, emotional aspects, such as beliefs, organizational culture, and the creation of informal labor relations. Under the functionalistic viewpoint, the goal of a mission statement is to establish a company's rational foundation, which is the starting point for the definition of its purposes and aims. Accordingly, a business is not defined by its name, bylaws and articles of incorporation, but by its mission statement. And only a clearly defined mission will render the organization's aims clear and realistic (DRUCKER, 1973). Certo and Peter (1993, p. 76) agree with Peter Drucker (1973) when they state that the mission statement expresses "the proposal or reason for which an organization exists". In the functionalistic perspective, one can notice that the concept of mission is associated with objective, actual, tangible aspects, which are directly related to a company's core business. However, the mission also plays a role in the symbolic dimension of companies, supporting the construction of their culture and organizational identity. Furman (1998) thinks that defining mission amounts to endowing companies with human qualities for a higher purpose. This characterization enables their different stakeholders to decide if associating with companies is worthwhile (BARTKUS, GLASSMAN, and MCAFEE, 2004).

Richers (1994, p. 55) highlights the symbolic aspect of a mission statement as corporate discourse by asserting that it "not only defines the overriding areas of action which must receive the resources available, but also formulates a kind of belief, or opinion consensus, that efforts made towards certain goals will be successful".

Consequently, a company's mission statement presents itself as discourse capable of summarizing the company's main purpose and highlighting that which identifies and distinguishes it from other companies by joining rational aspects (its purpose and strategic goals) with symbolic ones (its beliefs and code of conduct). In other words, "a company's mission statement describes the company's product, market and technology so as to reflect its values and the priorities that inform its strategic decisions" (MUSSOI, LUNKES, and DA SILVA, 2011, p. 364). Thus, there appears the notion that new values and meanings can be developed in order to improve organizational performance; that is, there is the acceptance of the existence of an abstract, irrational world, which is not governed by the mere logic of metrics, and which supports organizations (SARAIVA and CARRIERI, 2008).

These values and meanings represented by mission statements enforce a "new social contract" (WOOD JR., 2000) between the managerial team and its subordinates, that is to say, a new workplace relationship, based on power decentralization, commitment, and engagement on the part of employees, as a substitute for the bureaucratic, hierarchical model founded on the oppression of employees by means of authoritarian leadership and the giving of power only to managerial positions, which are unreachable for the majority.

Nevertheless, by sharing power, this new social contract renders employees co-responsible for business management, theoretically eliminating the oppression imposed by the bureaucratic, hierarchical model. But this elimination of oppression is an illusion because, in order to ensure their operation, organizations resort to the symbolic universe, to discourse, so as to control their employees' behavior and attitude, thus soothing and/or replacing control mechanisms and rules for mission statements and shared viewpoints, symbols, artifacts, and rhetoric (WOOD JR. and PAULA, 2002). Accordingly, missions should be understood as strategies through which managers control employees, and as such they are aligned with the maintenance of the neoliberal ideology, thus being mere representatives of a hegemonic discourse.

By appropriating symbolism, that is, by using discourse as a symbolic force, companies transform the corporate world into a "magic universe" (WOOD JR. and PAULA, 2002), but one with limited access, and highly competitive. Moreover, companies absorb the individual's imagery and psychic life, changing their direction through affection and the passion management in managerial practices (ENRIQUEZ, 2000).

By imposing control through the feeling of love as a substitute for traditional bureaucracy, companies encourage workers to identify and merge with a fascinating being (the organization itself), which claims that everyone can be gods in their own

likeness (MOTTA, 2000). Accordingly, individuals feel that they can be as powerful as the organizations to which they belong, provided that they share the companies' ideals (FREITAS, 2000), which are conveyed in their mission statements.

Elevated to the status of strategies (SARAIVA, PIMENTA, and CORRÊA, 2004), mission statements are powerful tools in the maintenance and reinforcement of unequal labor relations, for they disseminate and naturalize a coherent, univocal view of the organization and its actions (IRIGARAY and VERGARA, 2011). Thus, hinging the social and discursive dimensions of corporate mission statements, one can realize that the latter legitimize companies' actions before society by presenting companies as affectionate and indispensable institutions.

TEXTUAL PRACTICE: WHAT MISSION VOCABULARY REVEALS ABOUT COMPANIES

Vocabulary employed in mission texts helps identify the political and ideological contents that underlie the way companies define and diffuse their raison d'etre. Therefore, by investigating lexical choices in the creation of mission statements, one finds evidence of the companies' ideologies. This undertaking aims to hinge the three dimensions of discourse: the social, the discursive, and the textual.

The lexicometric analysis of mission statements published on the official homepages of the 64 companies that make up Ibovespa revealed the use of 432 different words that, repeatedly used, made a total of 1,145 occurrences. In an attempt to focus the analysis on the most relevant terms and notions, organizational mission statements were reprocessed, this time considering the frequency in the use of words that belonged to three specific lexical categories, for they represent the signification core of a sentence: nouns (which name beings, actions and ideas), adjectives (which ascribe qualities to nouns), and verbs (which express actions, states, or phenomena). Analysis showed that the universe of 432 words comprised 378 nouns, adjectives, and verbs. The 54 remaining words, which belonged to the other lexical categories (conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, etc.), were disregarded.

Most of the 378 words are used only once or twice (86% of the sample, or 325 words: 69.9% only once; 16.1% twice). A hypothesis for this result is the fact that the companies comprised in this research belong to 21 different sectors, according to the classification by *Bolsa de Valores, Mercadorias & Futuros de São Paulo* (BM&FBOVESPA). Thus, the number of terms and/or notions that do not repeat themselves is high, for they are specific to each sector and/or organizational culture. On the other hand, this study revealed the list of nouns, adjectives and verbs that are recurrently used in different mission statements. In this paper, the most frequently used terms are considered as the most relevant and, therefore, appropriate to CDA. Accordingly, the 378 words were arranged in two categories: recurrent ones and non-recurrent ones.

The first contemplates the 53 words that will be analyzed here, since each was used 9 times or more. Some examples of these words are: *clients* and *services* (15 occurrences), *energy* and *quality* (11 occurrences), forms of the verb *to be* and *solutions* (10 occurrences), *shareholders*, *development*, and *products* (9 occurrences).

The 53 recurrent words were arranged in 5 lexical categories: "what" (the 12 words regarding what companies offer their public of interest); "how" (the 14 ones that qualify the way companies try to influence their public of interest); "to whom" (the 10 ones that define the companies' publics of interest, that is, who they want to influence); "action" (the 12 ones regarding the actions and transformations that companies propose to carry out); and "no category" (the 5 words that do not fill in with any of the previous lexical categories, because they are specific to a sector, or their only function is to compose the mission statement structure).

Lexical category 1 – *what* – comprises the 12 words that describe what companies offer. This description happens according to two distinct and complementary theoretical perspectives, which are called objective/tangible/transactional and subjective/intangible/relational. In the first, terms bear a closer relationship to the functionalistic approach, that is, to the essential strategy and purpose of business: producing profitability for shareholders and investors by selling products and/or services. Examples of words used in the objective/tangible/transactional perspective are *services*, *energy*, *products*, *quality*, and *profitability*.

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On the other hand, in the second perspective, terms are associated with the symbolic dimension, which means that they go beyond the company's core business, showing the company is aware not only of its consumers' needs and desires, but also of the whole society's, thus creating the image of a capable company, able to proactively transform society. Examples of words used in the subjective/intangible/relational perspective are *solutions*, *development*, *good*, *value*, *expectations*, *needs*, and *life*. One may infer that the relevance of both perspectives in lexical category 1 – *what* – is similar, since both present words among those that are most recurrently used.

Lexical category 2, *how*, comprises 14 words that qualify the way companies act. Once companies' offers are defined, this category qualifies them by specifying the values that will inform their *modus operandi*. Again, it is possible to identify two different, though complementary perspectives regarding the limits of corporate action: an objective/tangible/transactional outlook, which expresses a functionalistic view by associating the company's conduct with the main purpose of the business, the production of profits, and the payment of dividends to shareholders; and a subjective/intangible/relational outlook, which suggests the transcendence of the core business and the company's action in larger spheres related to the symbolic dimension of organizations.

When analyzing the relevance of words according to their recurrence, the subjective/intangible/relational perspective turns out to be stronger, since words like *social*, *sustainable*, *excellence*, *environmental*, and *responsibility* are employed more often than terms related to the objective/tangible/transactional perspective, such as *efficiency*, *innovative*, etc. Therefore, lexical category 2 – *how* – enables us to realize that, in order to achieve their goals in business, rather than efficiency and/or innovation, companies create the image that they aim to act directly in political, economic, social and cultural spheres heretofore relegated to the state and/or social activists and their institutions, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Lexical category 3, *to whom*, comprises 10 words that indicate the target(s) of the offers defined and qualified by categories 1 and 2. It identifies the different publics the company wants to influence and sensitize with its offer and conduct. Again, one can observe the ambivalent perspectives: objective/tangible/transactional and subjective/intangible/relational, now in naming those publics.

However, differently from lexical category 2, the frequency in the use of words related to the first perspective (objective/tangible/transactional) is higher. Accordingly, words like *clients*, *shareholders*, *cooperators*, *suppliers*, and *market*, which name publics that are directly affected by the business, are more recurrent than words associated with a broader and more symbolic view of corporate action, such as *people*, *community*, *society*, and *environment*. In other words, lexical category 3 – *to whom* – enables us to infer that, although companies may act in larger spheres, as illustrated by the subjective/intangible/relational perspective, their main focus is ultimately the public that has a direct effect on its main goal: the production of profit.

Lexical category 4, *action*, comprises 12 verbs that were employed 9 times or more in mission statements. In a statement, verbs constitute the grammatical category which is responsible for expressing the ideas of action and state, even without being supported by other words, as is the case with intransitive verbs. Thus, the analysis of verbs enables the study of how companies define and disseminate their action.

As in the lexical categories mentioned above, one can identify in the 12 verbs the dichotomy of perspectives regarding the role and limits of a company's action. According to a solely functionalistic outlook, a company's mission is essentially to produce profit in order to satisfy its shareholders and investors. In the sample under analysis, the verbs that represent this perspective are in a minority: *to trade*, *to produce*, *to keep*, and *to supply*. On the other hand, from a symbolic perspective, the role of a company is ultimately to produce value for society in general, satisfying not only its shareholders' longings, but also those of other publics of interest. Verbs like *to contribute*, *to create*, *to endeavor*, *to offer*, *to be*, *to act* represent this perspective and are a majority in lexical category 4 – *action*. One can infer that their use aims to create empathy with companies' action, thus keeping companies away from their transactional dimension, and adding relational features to them, whether personifying them (*be*), or promoting the idea of sustainability, which usually sounds like philanthropy and legitimizes corporate participation in larger political, economic and social spheres.

Finally, lexical category 5 comprises words that do not fit in with any of the four categories mentioned above, and thus were not analyzed. They are: *company*, *mission*, *bank*, *reason*, and *sector*. Their function is only to compose the structure of mission statements, or they are specific to a certain sector.

Lexicometric analysis of mission statements is important inasmuch as it can throw some light on companies' specific images and profiles. It is so because the texts that express companies' missions are the result of an amalgam of four lexical categories, but companies will use, each to a different extent, words that express both the objective/tangible/transactional perspective (functionalistic approach) and the subjective/intangible/relational one (symbolic approach). The analysis of vocabulary employed in mission statements thus proves to be a valuable tool for understanding the values and purposes that permeate corporate action, and consequently recognizing that missions constitute an important strategy for the maintenance and perpetuation of the neoliberal ideology.

Accordingly, after analyzing the vocabulary of their organizational mission statements, we were able to classify the 64 companies in terms of the quantity of words in their mission statements that, taken from the four categories above, express the functionalistic and the symbolic perspectives. As a result of this classification, four corporate profiles or images were achieved: the *pragmatic*, the *idealistic*, the *omnipresent*, and the *good Samaritan*.

The *pragmatic* corporate profile defines companies whose mission statements are composed of words that focus on the business itself. Therefore, these mission statements use a vocabulary with little symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) appeal. This is the case with Bradespar, which declares that its mission is "to create value and to optimize its shareholders' remuneration" (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013). One can notice an emphasis on the functionalistic approach, focusing on the aspects related to the company's core business, that is, aspects that have a direct effect on shareholders, such as optimization of shareholders' remuneration. The mission statement has words from three out of the four lexical categories: *produce* and *optimize* (*action*), *remuneration* (*what*), and *shareholders* (*to whom*).

In this company's mission statement, the absence of category 2 (*how*) shows that the mode of the corporate action is secondary in relation to the goal to be achieved: the maximization of profit (at any cost). Such a mission statement is typical of a pragmatic corporate profile, which presents itself in a direct, objective way as an institution that seeks the best remuneration of the capital invested in it without any concern for working in the subjective/intangible/relational perspective, thus not coming forward as socially responsible.

The second profile, the *idealistic* one, defines companies that characteristically use few words in their mission statements, but these words have strong symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) appeal. This is the case with Lojas Americanas, whose mission is "to conveniently fulfill consumers' dreams" (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013). This mission statement has words from the four lexical categories: *fulfill* (*action*), *dreams* (*what*), *consumers* (*to whom*), and *conveniently* (*how*).

The emphasis on the subjective/intangible/relational perspective is clear in this mission statement. This retailer, a distribution channel of durable and nondurable consumer goods, shows it is exclusively concerned with fulfilling a subjective aspect related to the consumer (fulfillment of dreams) and just briefly mentions its action *per se* (convenience), ignoring numerous aspects of its business, such as its relationship with consumers, shareholders, suppliers, the activity of selling, trading, profiting, and the products and services it truly offers.

This mission statement is typical of an idealistic corporate profile, which through affection and symbolism seeks to present itself as an organization that keeps away from its essential activity and presents itself as able to fulfill both consumers' and society's subjective aspects. It is interesting to observe that, if a company's mission statement is analyzed out of its context, away from broader social restrictions, such as the neoliberal ideology, it is nearly impossible to associate an idealistic company's mission with its core business or any corporate activity at all. In this case, the excerpt *fulfill consumers' dreams*, for instance, refers rather to the image of an organization concerned with performing actions of a social nature than to the image of a company that seeks profit. However, this lexical choice evidently consists of a discursive strategy of a company that knows the larger social context in which it is immersed and is interested in creating a favorable self-image in order to captivate new clients.

The *omnipresent* corporate profile, in turn, defines companies whose mission statements are marked by a large quantity of words, among which the majority have a symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) load. An example is Marfrig, which, according to its mission, seeks to:

> [...] come up to and exceed our clients' and partners' expectations by supplying safe, high-quality products through modern technologies and highly-qualified staff, working with social and environmental

responsibility, thus creating value for our clients, partners, employees, shareholders, and society (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013).

This mission statement shows long and repeatedly the four lexical categories: *come up to*, *exceed*, *supplying*, *working*, *creating* (*action*); *expectations*, *products*, *technologies*, *value* (*what*); *safe*, *high-quality*, *modern*, *highly-qualified*, *social and environmental responsibility* (*how*); *clients*, *partners*, *staff*, *employees*, *shareholders*, and *society* (*to whom*).

In this mission, the co-existence of the functionalistic (objective/tangible/transactional) and symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) perspectives can be noticed in view of the excessive use of terms related to each of them. The mission statement makes it seem as if the company has carefully read a manual with instructions on how to establish the ideal mission, since it made thoroughly sure not to forget any word. This mission is typical of an omnipresent corporate profile, in which the company presents itself to the reader as a sort of hero: inspired by noble, altruistic ideals, able to admirably overcome an epic problem and satisfy all and everyone. After all, it seems to combine both distribution of dividends and creation of value with social, environmental and cultural development, thus equally benefiting all manners of shareholders and stakeholders. Accordingly, meeting clients and partners expectations is not enough. It is necessary to go beyond. Also, high quality and highly-qualified professionals are required.

Lastly, there is the *good Samaritan* corporate profile, which defines companies whose mission statements have a large amount of words, of which the majority belong to a symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) perspective. This is the case with CCR S/A, whose mission is to "work with excellence in the energy sector by adopting practices that reflect the commitment to corporate sustainability" (BM&FBOVESPA, 2013). This company's mission statement shows words from three out of the four lexical categories: *work*, *adopting* (*action*); *excellence*, *corporate sustainability* (*how*); *practices*, *energy* (*what*). This mission reveals a kind of balance between the objective/tangible/transactional perspective and the subjective/intangible/transactional perspective in its terms. Thus, the focus on the core business (excellence in the energy sector) is accompanied by a concern with a larger sphere (sustainability). This is the typical mission of a good Samaritan corporate profile, since (differently from the heroism of the omnipresent profile) it soberly shows the company as able to offer results and mitigate their social and environmental impacts, thus joining social and marketing interests.

The four corporate profiles that were identified, and which are summarized in Chart 1, define and show companies according to similar characteristics in the discursive structure of their mission statements. Such a classification enabled us to have a broad overview of how companies present themselves, which contributes to the understanding of the values and worldviews that underlie their activity.

Chart 1

Business profiles according to the discursive structure of the business mission

Profile	Description
Pragmatic	Companies whose mission statements use words that focus on the business itself; thus, the vocabulary employed has little symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) appeal.
Idealistic	Companies that typically present a succinct mission statement; however, the words employed have highly symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) appeal.
Omnipresent	Companies whose mission statements are marked by the large quantity of words, of which the majority have a symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) load.
Good Samaritan	Companies whose mission statements have a large amount of words, but not all of them are encompassed in a symbolic (subjective/intangible/relational) perspective.

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

In the limit, what the four categories of corporate discourse have in common is that they reproduce the three main pillars of the neoliberal ideology: valorization of the notions of free market, globalization, and economic development.

The valorization of free market advocates that the market governs itself in a meritocratic, neutral way; therefore, it does not have an ideology to oppose, which eliminates room for criticism. The support to globalization consolidates the idea that multinational companies are essential to survival in a global competitive scenario, which privileges the big business. Finally, one can notice the presence of the principles of neoliberal economy, and that developed countries have the right (and duty) to promote the project of civilizing the world, in which companies are the apt institutions to lead the process.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Global market capitalism has transformed large corporations in institutions that exercise their power in the political, economic, social, environmental, and cultural spheres (AKTOUF, 2006). This paper presents an investigation of the political and ideological contents underlying the way companies define and diffuse their raison d'etre. To this purpose, the corporate missions of the 64 companies that compose Ibovespa were analyzed, since they are texts that synthesize the essence of those companies.

In the CDA by Norman Fairclough (2008), discourse should be understood as a phenomenon resulting from three dimensions: social, discursive, and textual. Based on this tridimensional model of discourse analysis, we identified a strong relationship between the social, the discursive and the textual dimensions in corporate mission statements. Thus, mission statements aim to influence "employees' behavior by encouraging them to achieve extraordinary performance" (RICHERS, 1994, p. 430) (*discursive dimension*), since their production is part of a larger social context, which is marked by the neoliberal ideology (*social dimension*). These two dimensions make up a strongly ideological context, which determines, to a great extent, the vocabulary used in mission statements, and which is simultaneously reproduced and reinforced by that same vocabulary (*textual dimension*).

The main contribution of this study consists in showing that, in order to legitimize their action in society, companies avail themselves of what is understood in the neoliberal ideology as *windows of opportunity* left by the state, thus beginning to act in the social and environmental spheres so as to transform them into marketing variables. Accordingly, the neoliberal ideology disseminates a will of truth that advocates the active participation of companies in the solution of society's challenges through a synergy between corporate strategy, social and governmental interests, profit being present as a mere consequence of the process, not as its only purpose.

It is no coincidence that the word *profit* does not figure in any of the mission statements studied here. Therefore, it is noteworthy that the term that best summarizes the main raison d'etre of companies is disregarded. Our analysis suggests that companies have characterized *profit* as a taboo subject; or else, that it is a way companies have found to avoid questionings regarding their legitimacy or need for regulation. At the same time, suppression of the profitability dimension turns companies away from real, objective aspects, and strengthens their symbolic and emotional dimensions in order to reinforce the feeling that corporate action is indispensable for the good functioning of society.

Profit production, formerly seen as a sinful practice by the medieval Catholic Church, is so naturally accepted today that it does not even need to be mentioned by companies, and may be understood as the result of a successful instauration of a will of truth that legitimizes the interests of the current capitalist system. In their relationship with clients, employees, and retailers, companies are especially concerned with creating mission statements by using a vocabulary that, as a discursive strategy, enables them to present themselves through profiles (or masks) of *pragmatic*, *idealistic*, *omnipresent*, or *good Samaritan* organizations. By doing this, when interacting, companies can disguise their basic intention, which is making the other unknowingly follow the (or their) rules of the game.

It is our hope that this study provides public administrators and professors with a reflection on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) discourses and practices, and the need for these not to be seen as another managerial tool.

Moreover, as research agenda, we propose an analysis of how these mission statements are written: are they really the result of the collective work of all of the companies' employees, or only the product of an external advisory service? This future study will provide another standpoint for the analysis of CSR discourses and practices.

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