



# ***Anglicisms in Italian as Alerts to Greenwashing: A Case Study***

Copyright © 2011

*Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*

<http://cadaad.net/journal>

Vol. 5 (1): 1 – 16

ISSN: 1752-3079

M. CRISTINA CAIMOTTO  
ALESSANDRA MOLINO<sup>1</sup>

University of Turin

[mariacristina.caimotto@unito.it](mailto:mariacristina.caimotto@unito.it)

[alessandra.molino@unito.it](mailto:alessandra.molino@unito.it)

## **Abstract**

*As the economic crisis tightens itself upon businesses, many companies, especially those whose activities tend to be considered unfriendly towards the environment, have tried to 'green market' themselves, that is, they have worked on their brand image in order to reposition it as more interested in and caring about environmental issues. The attempt at making environmentalism a payable business venture, however, may induce companies to claim to be more sustainable than what they really are. This phenomenon, called 'greenwashing', is notably related to car manufacturing, energy (electricity and gas providers), tourism and petrol.*

*This paper analyses the use of Anglicisms in Italian in texts taken from ERG's website. This Italian petrol company has recently carried out an important brand restructuring, redesigning its logo and modifying its petrol stations by colouring both in a strong, vibrant shade of green. We argue that Anglicisms are an integral part of ERG's green marketing discourse strategy and that their use can be considered a persuasive rhetorical device. In addition, through an analysis of two Anglicisms in particular, i.e. 'stakeholder' and 'performance', which are investigated in terms of their semantic referent and their co-occurrence with other linguistic and semiotic resources, we also argue that these Anglicisms may lend themselves to being used manipulatively. We finally suggest that such an analysis may be useful in the attempt to develop critical tools to help the recipients distinguish legitimate marketing persuasion from manipulation.*

**Key words:** Greenwashing, Anglicisms in Italian, Green marketing, ERG website, Stakeholder economy, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

## **1. Introduction**

The Guardian's columnist Fred Pierce has contributed to making the term *greenwashing* known to the general public. According to his definition, *greenwashing* consists 'in the exaggeration, absurd claims or downright lies that big business makes about its green credentials' (Pierce's web page 2009). However we believe it is necessary to distinguish *greenwashing* from *green marketing* (see section 1.1.). Following van Dijk (2006), we employ the first term to indicate manipulation of the recipients by presenting information about the company's environment policies which the recipients are not able to

verify and resist; while we use the second term to indicate legitimate persuasion based on the promotion of environment-friendly policies. The goal of the present paper is to investigate the possibility of analysing green marketing techniques and greenwashing strategies through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Companies worldwide are increasingly showing interest in the environmental impact of their operations. However, until a new sustainable economy is born which effectively strikes a balance between economic, social and environmental issues, any attempt at promoting greater consumption will inevitably support and reaffirm the current *status quo*. Our basic assumption is, therefore, that a strong contradiction exists between the environmental problems we are facing on a global level and the attempt to turn environmentalism into a profitable business, following the logics of capitalism and consumption (Alexander 2009: 27). Hence the importance for laypeople to be able to identify green marketing strategies and to detect possible attempts at greenwashing, and the need for critical discourse analysts to find ways of distinguishing between legitimate persuasion and illegitimate manipulation.

This case study focuses on the use of Anglicisms on ERG's website, as our preliminary hypothesis is that the use of such words can be ascribed to a backgrounding strategy willing to obfuscate the tension between business goals and environment-friendly policies. ERG is an Italian company working in the field of energy, which originally dealt mainly with petrol and has recently started exploiting other forms of energy. Since 2008 the company has been promoting itself through an important rebranding campaign, which can broadly be labelled as 'green marketing' (see section 1.1). The reason for choosing ERG originated from the way their petrol stations in Italy were modified through 2008: from their old blue logo on a white background, ERG moved to a totally green version, in which the whole petrol station is painted in a vibrant shade of green. Given the basic contradiction described above between the need to face environmental problems and the attempt to make them a profitable venture, we believe that such an important rebranding operation concerning a company that is moving from a highly polluting activity to an allegedly sustainable one calls for attention and critical analysis.

## 1.1 Green Marketing and Greenwashing

In his article *Discourse and manipulation*, van Dijk (2006) traces the boundary between legitimate persuasion and manipulation and points out that the main difference lies in the recipients' ability to understand the real intentions or to see the full consequences of the beliefs or actions advocated by the manipulator. Those who, for various reasons, are not able to resist manipulation are victims and in those cases, the persuasion is to be considered manipulative and not legitimate. Van Dijk's case study is about the false information provided by Tony Blair in a speech addressed to the Parliament and concerning the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Van Dijk labels the speech as manipulative because, at the time in which van Dijk's research was published, the falsity of the then Prime Minister's claims had already been demonstrated. Hence, van Dijk was able to sustain

his point and analyse Blair's speech as false, because its falsity had been confirmed by different sources.

As van Dijk explains, manipulation can only be detected through a 'triangulated approach'; it is not something that can be demonstrated by carrying out pure linguistic analysis. Differently from van Dijk's case study, the object of our analysis is not information which was later proved blatantly false; consequently, we cannot consider ERG's communication as *a priori* manipulative. Our aim, therefore, is not to show that greenwashing is implemented on ERG's website, but to select and identify discourse features, namely Anglicisms, that may be considered a warning bell which should alert the recipients to raise the attention level in order to avoid potential manipulation.

## **2. The Use of Visual Resources on ERG's Website**

In order to evaluate ERG's image in terms of green marketing, we started by analysing their website from a multimodal approach based on the work by Hansen and Machin, *Visually branding the environment: climate change as a marketing opportunity* (2008). In their article, Hansen and Machin analyse the 'Green collection' offered by Getty Images, a commercial image bank, and identify a series of characteristics belonging to such images. We believe that some of the characteristics identified by Hansen and Machin can be detected on ERG's website. According to the two scholars, Getty's visual language is transforming photography from a way of recording reality into a way of introducing symbols which become part of the layout design. They specify

These changes in visual languages, and particularly in the case of representations of climate issues, are driven by the needs of global corporations, more specifically by the requirements of the concept of 'branding'. Marketing in the era of branding does not rely much on describing product details but on loading the product with certain values: a beer with friendship, an insurance policy with freedom from worry. (2008: 783)

Further on in their article they add

Indexes of artifice, of un-reality, can be added [...]. This kind of unreality has long been common to advertising. The difference is that, today, the images we find accompanying texts that refer to real issues and responses to environmental problems and climate change also carry such characteristics. (2008: 787)

The images we can find on ERG's website tend to correspond to the description provided by Hansen and Machin: the place where the picture was taken is not clearly recognizable, the surrounding environment is generally out of focus if the picture depicts a person, and people are normally absent from pictures of nature, where nature is, in Hansen and Machin's words, 'not rugged or dangerous, but peaceful and depicted much as in romantic painting' (2008: 785) (see Figure 1). Moreover, they explain, it is an environment we look at, not one we interact with. People in the pictures often represent a type rather than an individual identity, while pictures depicting plants are always

very bright and the machines look shiny and clean (Fig. 2). These strategies enable the product and the corporation to be loaded with positive values, such as 'new age' ideas of serenity, purity, escape and freedom. As a consequence, green issues are recontextualised visually as a marketing opportunity and no longer presented as a specific set of problems. Ultimately this has the effect of moving away from concrete environmental issues and promoting greater consumption, a fact which certainly conflicts with measures to deal with environmental problems. This preliminary analysis suggests how important public image has been for ERG since its rebranding and underscores ERG's interest towards a green marketing strategy.

**Figure 1:** Representation of the environment on ERG's website



**Figure 2:** Representation of people on ERG's website



### **3. Analytical Framework for the Analysis of Anglicisms**

CDA considers discourse as a form of social practice which stands in a 'dialectical relationship' (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999: 92) to the social contexts in which it is embedded. Discourse is seen as socially conditioned as well as socially constitutive. On the one hand, discourse is influenced by the institutions and social structures in which discursive events are produced and received; on the other hand, it is through discourse that social roles, knowledge, and particular social conditions are created (Fairclough and Wodak 1997: 258).

According to van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999), four macro-strategies account for the socially constitutive power of discourse:

1. Constructive strategies;
2. Strategies of perpetuation and justification;
3. Strategies of transformation;
4. Destructive strategies.

Constructive strategies are linguistic acts that enable speakers to create groups of agents or participants, such as a 'we' group or a 'they' group. Examples taken from the corpus (see section 3) are 'il Gruppo' ('the Group', referring to ERG), 'le sue persone' ('its people', referring to those who work for ERG), 'i manager del futuro' ('future managers') and 'il consumatore' ('the consumer'). Strategies of perpetuation and justification include those linguistic events that attempt to maintain a particular social *status quo* by supporting and reproducing identities. These strategies come into play when an established situation is perceived as threatened (see section 4.2). For instance, in such circumstances, discourse producers may have recourse to impersonality to present their arguments as objective and discourage debate. Strategies of transformation are employed to turn a given situation into another by reformulating or redefining a relatively well-known discourse in different terms. An example may be the attempt at transforming environmental issues into a marketing opportunity, as explicitly declared by the ERG group itself (example 1).

(1)

Crescere in modo sostenibile significa per ERG integrare gli obiettivi di crescita economica e di business con la creazione di valore per l'ambiente e la società, al fine di accrescere il valore generato e trasformarlo anche in vantaggio competitivo. (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2007: 20)

[To grow sustainably ERG must integrate its economic growth and business objectives with the creation of value for the environment and the community, in order to enhance the value generated and transform it into also a competitive advantage.] (Sustainability Report 2007: 20)

Finally, destructive strategies encompass linguistic acts that try to demolish a well-established situation. They are used in oppositional discourse, such as in various genres of political discourse; hence, as expected, we could not find significant examples in the corpus.

The framework proposed by van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) is employed in this paper to investigate whether the use of Anglicisms is functional to any of

the four socially constitutive rhetorical strategies. Anglicisms seem to be an important rhetorical choice in persuasive discourse. In advertisements, for instance, they function as attention-getters and operate as an authoritative voice which associates the product with modernity and technological advancement (Martin 2007). Web-based communication on environmental policies can be considered a form of green marketing, hence a form of advertising, because, on the one hand, it is characterised by the intent to present a positive and persuasive public image; on the other hand, it enables corporations to reach a large audience thus ‘mak[ing] it easy for interest groups in civil society to quickly identify which firms have environmental policies in place’ (Ramus and Montiel 2005: 385).

#### **4. Corpus for Analysis**

According to Ramus and Montiel (2005: 378), corporate environmental policy statements are part of an organisation’s environmental reports and publicly available information about the organisation’s environmental policy. We therefore focused on the ‘sustainability’ section of ERG’s website which contains both types of document (see Table 1).

**Table 1:** Corpus for analysis

<b>Types of text</b>	<b>Number of words</b>
Website pages	9,862
Sustainability Reports	193,113
TOT	202,975

Given the relatively small size of the corpus, i.e. approximately 200,000 words, automatic retrieval methods were excluded.<sup>2</sup> Anglicisms were therefore searched manually in the texts. Once Anglicisms were identified, they were classified, quantified and analysed within their context of occurrence according to the framework presented in Section 2.

#### **5. Results**

The Anglicisms found in the corpus (812 occurrences) may be categorized as follows: technical terms related to the type of business; terms related to business management and economy; expressions and terms indicating social actors and their activities; expressions and terms designating activities, initiatives and projects carried out by ERG and proper names of institutions, organisms, regulations, etc. (see Table 2).

**Table 2:** Categories of Anglicisms in the corpus

Category of Anglicisms	Types	Tokens	Examples
Technical terms related to the type of business	41	311	Carbon footprint, repowering, revamping, pump and treat, feedstock, downstream, air sparging, fuel cells, etc.
Business management and economy	21	309	Marketing, house organ, join venture, milestone, holding, benefit, item, risk-based, management, etc.
Social actors and their activities	15	108	Teamworking, stakeholder, coaching, community, engagement, opinion leader, training, manager, etc.
Activities, initiatives, projects carried out by ERG	14	38	Connecting, safety inspection, joint implementation, restyling, customer satisfaction, etc.
Proper names (institutions, organisms, regulations, etc.)	13	46	Energy Intensity Index, Global Reporting Initiative, United Nations Convention on Climate Change, etc.
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>812</b>	

Within these five categories, not all Anglicisms are related to environmental discourse. Examples are *teamworking* and *coaching* which are associated with the training of the staff. Another example is *downstream* which is a technical term related to oil industry indicating the refining, distribution and selling of products derived from gas and crude oil. However, a considerable number of Anglicisms appears in contexts dealing with the presentation of ERG's environmental policies and measures. Among these, the first group is constituted by specialised terms and expressions such as *air sparging*, *soil vapour extraction*, *pump and treat* which convey the image of ERG as a competitive corporation which is at the forefront of sustainable technology (example 2).

(2)

Una delle principali attività del deposito per la salvaguardia dell'ambiente ha riguardato il piano operativo di messa in sicurezza del terreno e bonifica della falda, approvato da parte delle Autorità competenti. Si è così provveduto ad avviare l'installazione dell'impianto per la raccolta ed il trattamento delle acque che utilizza la tecnologia *pump and treat* [...]. (Salute, Sicurezza, Ambiente – Rapporto 2006: 48)

[One of the main activities of the depot in terms of environmental protection concerned the operative plan dealing with land safety and drainage of groundwater, which was approved by the Authorities in charge. Installation works were started of the water collection and treatment plant which uses the pump and treat technology [...].] (our translation)

The second group comprises other terms and expressions referring to environmental initiatives to which ERG subscribes, such as *Save more than*

*fuel* and *CarbonZero*®. These Anglicisms are found in the Italian texts with no translation accompanying them. The choice not to adopt an Italian equivalent may be due to the fact that these expressions are proper names. However, the decision not to clarify their meaning through an Italian translation may also be interpreted as an attempt at catching the attention of recipients and impressing them. In the case of *Save more than fuel*, for instance, ERG exclusively uses the English label, although the European Commission, which launched this project with Europaia and the European Petroleum Industry Association, provided an Italian translation: ‘Risparmia carburante. E molto di più’ (literally, ‘Save fuel. And much more’). The preference for the Anglicism may therefore be regarded as a form of green marketing which the ERG group judges as more rhetorically effective and convincing than its Italian equivalent.

Finally, a third group of Anglicisms refers to international environmental schemes and regulations, such as the *Emission Trading System* and the *Clean Development Mechanism*. In this case, too, no translation is provided. The use of the Anglicism conveys authoritativeness to the ERG group: the readers who are not able to decipher its meaning are in a position of less expertise than the text producers; on the other hand, those who have access to the meaning of the expression, or are familiar with it, will feel a stronger sense of solidarity with the text producers. In either circumstance, the company will profit from this rhetorical choice and appear as competent and reliable.

Among the Anglicisms identified which are related to environmental discourse, some items show a distinctive behaviour in terms of their rate of incidence and use. These are *stakeholder* and *performance* which occur respectively 35 and 94 times in the corpus while most Anglicisms occur much less frequently, even only once or twice. In the remainder of this paper, we offer a detailed analysis of *stakeholder* and *performance* paying particular attention to some of their contexts of use as they may reveal the existence of tensions between the company’s production and financial growth and its environmental claims.

## 5.1 Stakeholder

During our preliminary analysis of the texts, our attention had already been caught by the term *stakeholder*, especially because of the following passage, where a foreign word is employed to clarify the meaning of an Italian expression within an Italian text (example 3):

- (3)  
Fatti coinvolgere  
Gentile lettore,  
il Gruppo ERG ha avviato un percorso di dialogo e confronto con i propri portatori di interesse (*stakeholder*) che vede nel Rapporto di Sostenibilità uno degli strumenti di riferimento.  
(<http://www.erg.it/homeIT/sostenibilita/fattiCoinvolgere.html>)



[Get involved  
Dear reader,  
The ERG group has started a project of dialogue and comparison with its stakeholders (stakeholder) which identifies the Sustainability Report as one of its main tools.] (our translation)

However, most instances in the Sustainability Reports are only in English, as shown by the following examples:

(4)  
Le modalità operative di relazione e di coinvolgimento degli stakeholder sono improntate sui valori fondamentali esplicitati nel Codice Etico [...]. (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2007: 18)

[The operating modalities regarding stakeholders' relationships and involvement are based on the fundamental values included in the Ethical Code [...].] (our translation)

(5)  
I principi che regolano la definizione del contenuto sono: materialità, inclusività degli stakeholder, contesto di sostenibilità, completezza. (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2008: 62)

[The principles regulating the content definition are: materiality, stakeholder inclusiveness, sustainability context, completeness.] (our translation)

(6)  
[...] il nostro obiettivo è di consolidare la nostra reputazione qualificando ulteriormente il dialogo con gli stakeholder, garantendo trasparenza e tempestività nell'informazione. (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2008: 63)

[ [...] our goal is to consolidate our reputation through the further improvement of our dialogue with stakeholders, guaranteeing information transparency and timeliness.] (our translation)

As van Dijk (2001) points out, CDA research is particularly interested in the many forms of implicit or indirect meanings, which include (but are not limited to) implications, presuppositions, allusions and vagueness. Our goal in the analysis of this term was to investigate its intrinsic vagueness and try to establish its role in the discourse. In order to analyse its use on the part of ERG, it may be useful to investigate its origin and meaning.

The use of the term *stakeholder* grew out of the work at the Stanford Research Institute in the 1960s, but it received active academic interest and managerial acceptance following Edward Freeman in his 1984 book *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. In Freeman's words a stakeholder is 'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of [an] organization's objectives' (1984: 46). The concept of *stakeholder* was later criticized for its lack of precision. As specialists observe

We will see stakeholders identified as primary or secondary stakeholders; as owners and nonowners of the firm; as owners of capital or owners of less tangible assets; as actors or those acted upon; as those existing in a voluntary or an involuntary relationship with the firm; as rights-holders, contractors, or moral claimants; as resource providers to or dependents of the firm; as risk-

takers or influencers; and as legal principals to whom agent-managers bear a fiduciary duty. In the stakeholder literature there are a few broad definitions that attempt to specify the empirical reality that virtually anyone can affect or be affected by an organization's actions. What is needed is a theory of stakeholder identification that can reliably separate stakeholders from nonstakeholders. (Mitchell, Agle and Wood 1997: 853-854, our underlining)

A negative consequence of the use of the term *stakeholder* among the general public is pointed out by Fairclough who analyses the language of the New Labour party. According to Fairclough, the term is 'specialist' and 'for most people, unfamiliar' (2000: 86). In 1996 Tony Blair delivered a speech in Singapore which was to be seen as a watershed, introducing the concept of 'stakeholder economy'. As Fairclough argues:

For a time, 'stakeholding' was seen to be the 'big idea' which provided a link between different parts of the emerging political position of New Labour – specifically between its commitment to 'enterprise' and strengthening Britain's competitiveness, and its commitment to social justice and community. However it ran into difficulties. It proved to be a difficult concept to pin down, and was interpreted in many different ways, including ways which evoked forms of ('Old Labour') corporate arrangement between government, business, and labour (trade unions) from which the Government were eager to distance themselves. (Fairclough 2000: 84).

The ambiguity of the term led the New Labour party to drop it. Given these premises, it is interesting to investigate what advantages the use of the term and concept may have for ERG in the Sustainability Reports and website pages on sustainability and the environment that constitute our corpus.

A first question is to see what ERG means by *stakeholder*. This is illustrated on the website section 'Fatti coinvolgere' (Get involved). As shown by the list of stakeholders reported in Figures 3 and 4, potentially anyone can be a stakeholder for ERG, from the Government to Social Organisations and Associations, from Customers and Customer Associations to the Media. Interestingly there is also the open option 'other'.

**Figure 3:** Categories of stakeholder (Italian)

### Respondee category

To which category of stakeholders do you belong?

Government and Central Institutions	<input type="radio"/>
Investors and financial analysts	<input type="radio"/>
Local Authorities	<input type="radio"/>
Employees	<input type="radio"/>
Media	<input type="radio"/>
Customers and consumer associations	<input type="radio"/>
Suppliers	<input type="radio"/>
Union Organisations	<input type="radio"/>
Social organisations and associations	<input type="radio"/>
Operators	<input type="radio"/>
Other (specify) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Figure 4:** Categories of stakeholder (English)**Categoria di appartenenza**

A quale categoria di stakeholder appartiene?

Stato ed Istituzioni centrali	<input type="radio"/>
Investitori ed analisti finanziari	<input type="radio"/>
Enti locali	<input type="radio"/>
Dipendenti	<input type="radio"/>
Media	<input type="radio"/>
Clienti e associazioni di consumatori	<input type="radio"/>
Fornitori	<input type="radio"/>
Organizzazioni sindacali	<input type="radio"/>
Organizzazioni e associazioni per il sociale	<input type="radio"/>
Gestori Punti Vendita	<input type="radio"/>
Altro (specificare) <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>

There is little doubt that all these groups do not carry the same weight in the company's decision making process. Therefore, it may be argued that the term is used as a 'constructive strategy' (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999) which functions as a bonding agent that not only provides ERG with the image of a responsible organization that takes into account the needs of different groups of people; it may also serve to conceal the existence of conflicting interest which inevitably arise from such a varied portion of the society. In addition, because of its lack of precision, the concept of *stakeholder* allows its users to strategically foreground the needs of one group or the other according to the different discourse contexts.<sup>3</sup> It may thus be argued that this ambiguity in the semantic referent enables ERG to market itself as a green company, despite the fact that they mainly produce and sell fossil fuels.

These observations would be equally valid if applied to the use of the term *stakeholder* in a Sustainability Report originally written in English. As Fairclough convincingly argues, *stakeholder* was already employed in English texts with a persuasive, and perhaps manipulative goal. Therefore, we can infer that ERG's choice of the term can be ascribed to a similar communicative strategy. The fact that an Anglicism is employed in an Italian text adds further rhetorical advantages for ERG: the use of a technical term can give an authoritative voice to the company while conferring an obfuscating function. Finally, the choice of *stakeholder* against the Italian *portatori di interesse* is also likely to be linked to its conciseness.

## 5.2 Performance

Originally of French origins, *performance* is an Anglicism which entered the Italian lexicon through contact with English sports terminology in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cortelazzo and Zolli 1999). *Performance* has progressively extended its semantic scope and is now included in most monolingual dictionaries as a loanword (see Sabatini and Coletti 2003; Devoto and Oli 2004), although the Italian language possesses alternative means to express this concepts, such as 'prestazione' or 'prova'.

In our corpus, *performance* is almost always found in connection with environmental discourse and may be modified in terms of the type of environmental performance being described (examples 7 and 8).

(7)

Le performance ambientali in termini di consumi idrici ed elettrici [...]. (Salute, Sicurezza, Ambiente – Rapporto 2004: 60)

[The environmental performance in terms of water and electric consumption [...].] (our translation)

(8)

La performance in materia di emissioni atmosferiche è risultata più che buona. (Salute, Sicurezza, Ambiente – Rapporto 2004: 66)

[The performance in terms of air emissions was better than good.] (our translation)

For the purposes of the present study, the most interesting instances are those in which the reader is not explicitly told what specific type of environmental performance is under discussion (examples 9 and 10).

(9)

La performance ambientale complessiva della Raffinazione Costiera è risultata nel 2006 più che soddisfacente. (Salute, Sicurezza, Ambiente – Rapporto 2006: 27)

[In 2006 the overall coastal refining environmental performance resulted more than satisfactory.] (our translation)

(10)

La certificazione relativa alla gestione ambientale, segnale di forte eco-compatibilità, prevenzione dell'inquinamento e miglioramento continuo delle performance dell'organizzazione rappresenta uno dei maggiori obiettivi raggiunti dal Gruppo negli ultimi anni. (Salute, Sicurezza, Ambiente – Rapporto 2006: 13)

[The environmental management certification, which is indication of strong eco-compatibility, pollution prevention and continuous improvement in terms of organizational performances, represents one of the major objectives that the Group has achieved in the past few years.] (our translation)

From a close reading of the texts, it emerged that when *performance* is used to indicate the overall outcome of the implementation of green policies, this Anglicism may refer to a variety of parameters which taken together determine the general environmental performance of the group. These parameters include positive or negative results in terms of emissions; the use of natural resources; the amount of waste and energy consumption; the revenues and the expenses related to the production of electricity and the exploitation of renewable sources; the environmental impact of fossil fuels; investments in new technologies; and finally, investments in social and pedagogic activities aimed at raising awareness of environmental issues. Therefore, it appears that similarly to *stakeholder*, the use of *performance* as a general parameter may give rise to vagueness in its meaning to the

advantage of the text producers who may use it to make it strategically difficult to assess the impact of single activities in the implementation of green policies.

*Performance* frequently occurs in contexts where ERG's environmental achievements are underscored (examples 9 and 10). The term, therefore, acquires positive overtones. When *performance* is employed in negative contexts (example 11), it may be argued that the positive framing of the concept, the positive connotation given to the Anglicism by its technical and international nuances and the obfuscating effect a foreign word may have on meaning result in the mitigation of the emotional response of the reader faced with unfavourable outcomes.

(11)

Nel 2008 le condizioni meteo sfavorevoli e l'intervento di potenziamento di Terna sulla rete di trasmissione nazionale in Puglia, che ha determinato una riduzione della produzione dei parchi di Troia San Vincenzo e Troia San Ciro, hanno influito sulla performance produttiva. (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2008: 13)

[In 2008 the unfavourable weather conditions and Terna's upgrade intervention on the national grid in the Puglia region, which led to a falloff in production on the part of the Troia San Vincenzo and Troia San Ciro wind farms, have affected the production performance.] (our translation)

The mitigating effect of *performance* is also conveyed by its use as a nominalisation. This choice has important implications for the interpretation of the clause in interpersonal terms. Nominalisations can be considered forms of agency obfuscation which may be employed to provide claims with lower degrees of negotiability (Martin 1992). By conveying a factual tone, nominalisations frame assertions as beyond dispute and shift away responsibility from the agent of the nominalised verb.<sup>4</sup> In example 11, the agency which is being obfuscated is that of ERG itself. By using the expression 'performance produttiva', texts producers avoid encoding ERG as a discourse participant (e.g. 'nel 2008 ERG non ha avuto un buon andamento', 'in 2008 ERG performed badly').

The reason why the company chooses to obfuscate their agency and mitigate the emotional responses of readers becomes clear when considering the context in which example 11 is found. The text producers are talking about an investment plan that ERG launched for 2009-2012 which provides for investments totalling over 300 million Euros. In particular, the company estimated that at the end of the plan, the installed capacity in Italy would equal to a market share of 5%. Consequently, the news that wind production performance was affected negatively might alarm shareholders. It is not surprising, therefore, that the text producers reassure their readers that in the years to come the strategy for investment in renewable sources will be based on 'rigore e concretezza' ('rigour and concreteness') (Rapporto di Sostenibilità 2008: 13). This statement makes it clear that the most crucial aspect ERG will consider in its investments in renewable energies is profitability and not so much the improvement of the environmental performance. Therefore, the mitigating effect of the Anglicism operates in concert with this attempt at reassuring recipients and may be interpreted as a 'strategy of perpetuation

and justification' which stresses that business is still, and will be, on profitable track.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper presented an investigation of the use of Anglicisms by the ERG group in its Sustainability Reports and web pages through the lenses of CDA. Our aim was to verify whether this approach could help us identify tensions between the company's green claims and the actual possibility, or willingness, to respect environmental targets. We are aware, however, of the difficulties in drawing a clear line between manipulation, i.e. greenwashing, and legitimate persuasion, i.e. green marketing. For this reason we do not consider the results presented here as evidence for greenwashing practices but as discursive strategies which should alert recipients to interact critically with potentially manipulative environment-related discourses.

Although some Anglicisms identified in the texts are unrelated to environmental discourse, a significant number of items, particularly technical terms and proper names of environmental initiatives and schemes, is employed by the company in such a way as to convey a positive image to the ERG group and its products, namely one of authoritativeness, reliability and competitiveness. The two Anglicisms which we studied in greater detail are *stakeholder* and *performance* which turned out to be similar not only in their relatively high frequency of use, but also in the vagueness of their semantic referent, a feature which is rather surprising given that specialised lexis is generally characterised by monoreferentiality (Gotti 1991: 17-20). Because of this semantic trait, *stakeholder* and *performance* may give rhetorical advantage to the text producers enabling them to mitigate, or even obfuscate, the tensions that always characterise the relationship between a corporation's search for profit and its green claims.

The analysis we offered for *stakeholder* and *performance* should not be considered as exclusively characterising the communicative practices of the ERG group. Although it remains to be verified in future research, it may be reasonably hypothesised that *stakeholder* and *performance* show similar features in the texts produced by other petrol companies and in environmental discourse in general, especially when green issues are recontextualised as a marketing opportunity. Certainly, the analysis of *stakeholder* and *performance* in terms of their semantic vagueness may also be valid when the two terms are employed in texts in English. However, it may be argued that their rhetorical effect is strengthened when they are used as Anglicisms in Italian texts because of the possible difficulty in accessing their meaning by an Italian readership as varied as the category of *stakeholder* seems to suggest.

Indeed, one of the main characteristics of a website in terms of communication strategy is that it is hard to identify its recipients and tailor the text accordingly. Hence, when analysing ERG's Sustainability Reports and web pages, it is difficult to establish the kind of public they address. As explained above, van Dijk points out that a given text or speech is not manipulative in itself: its manipulative effect depends on the context and on

the situation of its recipients. These can be classified as victims only when ‘they are being acted upon against their fully conscious will and interest’ (van Dijk 2006: 361). Van Dijk also underlines that it is difficult to draw a clear boundary between legitimate persuasion and manipulation.

While bearing these difficulties in mind, we can still attempt to classify the situation readers of ERG’s Sustainability Reports and web pages face. Because the same recipients may be more or less manipulable in different circumstances or states of mind (van Dijk 2006: 361), we think that while analysing a green marketing strategy deployed in 2008-2009 it is necessary to take into account the vast increase of promotion regarding products and services presented as environment-friendly witnessed in Italy as an attempt to react to the global economic crisis triggered by the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in September 2008. We believe that such outburst of green marketing can be considered a potential agent of confusion for the recipients, because the amount of environment-related information to be parsed is immense while the amount of critical information to employ in order to keep a critical attitude is still scarce. This is one of the reasons that could weaken the critical skills of the recipients and turn them into victims of manipulation.

While information currently available does not point to a clearly manipulative intent in ERG’s green campaign, hence we do not think the company is to be accused of greenwashing practices, we believe our linguistic approach can prove useful as a tool enabling the reader to carry out a preliminary analysis and detect signs of potential manipulation. Given the growth of green marketing witnessed since 2008 and the paramount importance of environment-related issues, we think our CDA method can empower recipients and prevent them from becoming victims of greenwashing.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> This article is a joint production and reflects the views of both authors. The Conclusion is jointly authored. Sections 1; 1.1, 2 and 5.1 were written by M. C. Caimotto and sections 3; 4, 5 and 5.2 were written by A. Molino.
- <sup>2</sup> See Furiassi (2008) for a discussion of the drawbacks of automatic procedures.
- <sup>3</sup> See Harré et al. (1998) for the concepts of semantic vagueness, underdifferentiation and misleading encoding.
- <sup>4</sup> Arguably, *performance* is not a nominalisation in the strict sense in example 11, as it does not derive from an Italian verb. However, its use has the same effect as a nominalisation proper, insofar as it allows text producers to avoid encoding ERG as a discourse participant.

## **References**

- Alexander, R.J. (2009). *Framing Discourse on the Environment: A Critical Discourse Approach*. New York: Routledge.
- Cortelazzo, M. and P. Zolli (1999). *Dizionario Etimologico della Lingua Italiana (DELI)*. Bologna: Zanichelli.

- Devoto, G. and G.C. Oli (2004). *Dizionario Devoto Oli della Lingua Italiana*. Firenze: Le Monnier.
- Furiassi, C. (2008). What dictionaries leave out: New non-adapted Anglicisms in Italian. In A. Martelli and V. Pulcini (eds.), *Investigating English with Corpora: Studies in Honour of Maria Teresa Prat*. Milano: Polimetrica. pp. 153-170.
- Fairclough, N. (2000). *New Labour, New Language?* London: Routledge.
- Fairclough, N. and R. Wodak (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction*. London: Sage. pp.285-284.
- Freeman, R.E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Boston, MA: Pitman.
- Gotti, M. (1991). *I linguaggi Specialistici*. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Hansen, A. and D. Machin (2008). Visually branding the environment: climate change as a marketing opportunity. *Discourse Studies* 10 (6): 777-794.
- Harré, R., Brockmeier, J. and P. Mulhausler (1998). *Greenspeak: A Study of Environmental Discourse*. London: Sage.
- Martin, E. (2007). 'Frenglish' for sale: multilingual discourses for addressing today's global consumer. *World Englishes* 26 (2): 170-188.
- Martin, J.R. (1992). *English Text: System and Structure*. Philadelphia/Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Mitchell, R., Agle, B.R. and D.J. Wood (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *The Academy of Management Review* 22 (4): 853-886.
- Ramus, C. and I. Montiel (2005). When are corporate environmental policies a form of greenwashings?. *Business and Society* 44 (4): 377-414.
- Sabatini, F. and V. Coletti (2003). *Il Sabatini Coletti 2004: Dizionario Della Lingua Italiana*. Milano: Rizzoli Larousse.
- van Leeuwen, T. and R. Wodak (1999). Legitimizing immigration control: a discourse-historical analysis. *Discourse Studies* 1 (1): 83-118.
- van Dijk, T.A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage. pp. 95-120.
- van Dijk, T.A. (2006). Discourse and manipulation. *Discourse & Society* 17 (3): 359-383.

## Websites

<http://www.erg.it>

Pierce, F. (2009).web page: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/series/greenwash>