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Trust dynamics in multimodal corporate discourse

the role of metaphor

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Theme session paper. Theme session title: “Meaning Making in Multimodal Discourse and its relevance for Cognitive Linguistic Theory”

Paper title: “Trust dynamics in multimodal corporate discourse: the role of metaphor”
Author: Matteo Fuoli, Lund University

Keywords: *pictorial and multimodal metaphor, conceptual metaphor theory, blending, trust, corporate multimodal discourse*

This paper investigates how large multinational corporations use multimodal meaning-making resources to communicate a trustworthy corporate identity. It combines insights from Forceville’s work on pictorial and multimodal metaphor (Forceville 1996, 2002; Forceville and Urios-Aparisi, 2009) and key features of Fuoli and Paradis’ (2014) model of trust-repair discourse to examine the discursive dynamics of trust-building in a corpus of promotional corporate videos produced by some of the world’s largest corporations. The analysis shows that multimodal metaphors are deployed as key persuasive devices to promote three fundamental attributes of the companies’ trustworthiness, i.e. *ability, integrity* and *benevolence*.

This paper sheds some light on how trustworthiness is constructed through multimodal resources in corporate discourse and contributes to our understanding of the discursive dynamics of trust, which is still limited and fragmentary (Fuoli and Paradis, 2014; Linell and Keselman, 2011). But the study also carries implications for cognitive linguistic theory, in particular for conceptual metaphor theory. Three theoretical issues requiring further discussion are highlighted: (i) the distinction between conventional and novel metaphor and the question of ‘deliberateness’ (Steen, 2008), (ii) the usefulness of the notion of *metaphor scenario* (Musolff, 2006) as a descriptive tool in the realm of multimodal discourse, and (iii) the adequacy of Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) model versus Blending Theory (Fauconnier and Turner, 1996, 1998; Grady et al. 1999) for describing novel multimodal metaphors and accounting for the evaluative function they can perform in persuasive multimodal discourse.

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