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*Le discours de l'entreprise dans une perspective interculturelle : la
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financiers des entreprises américaines du risque technologique*

Fanny Domenec

- 1 This paper underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary perspective to characterize specialized varieties of English and their discourse communities. It presents some of the results of a research project focusing on American technological risk companies.
- 2 Following Michel Petit's definition of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as
the branch of English studies which deals with the language, discourse and culture
of English-speaking professional communities and specialized social groups [...] (2002: 2-3)¹
- 3 the study aimed to characterize the milieu, discourse and culture of American multinational companies specialized in oil and gas (ExxonMobil, Chevron and Conoco Phillips) and agricultural biotechnology (Monsanto, Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Pioneer). The purpose was to cast light on the companies' particular communication needs and on their impact in terms of corporate discourse and culture.
- 4 More specifically, this paper aims to show how technological risk companies have taken on a specific approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) within the

corporate world. The agrochemical and energy industries were chosen as representative of the technological risk industry because they share two of the specialization criteria (professional and “thematic”) defined by Michel Petit in 2010². First, as powerful multinational companies, they belong to the corporate world. Moreover, their activities are sometimes considered as a threat to human or animal health and/or the environment: the six companies under study are frequently blamed for pollution (oil spills, contamination of ground water or non-genetically modified – GM– crops) or concerns about some of their products (effects of genetically modified organisms –GMOs–, the extraction of shale gas). This initial assumption raised the following questions: to what extent does this image deficit distinguish these companies from others in the corporate world? How does it influence the corporate culture of technological risk companies and their discourse on CSR?

- 5 A multidisciplinary, threefold methodology was used in order to take into account the discursive and cultural aspects of specialization: corpus analysis was combined with an ethnographic-oriented approach, consisting in on-site and phone interviews with corporate members and specialists, and tools borrowed from sociolinguistics (surveys of the general public).
- 6 This paper is structured as follows: first, a review of the literature on CSR and annual reports in the corporate world is presented, then, the three-step methodology used to characterize the milieu, discourse and culture of technological risk companies is explained. Finally, the specific approach to CSR by technological risk companies and its impact on corporate discourse are discussed.

1. State of the art: CSR and annual reports

- 7 Within the corporate world, corporate social responsibility or CSR has become a decisive reputation tool for companies and as such, a key concept in business discourse. The seminal definition of CSR dates back to 1979: “The social responsibility of business encompasses the economic, legal, ethical and discretionary expectations that society has of organizations at a given point in time” (Carroll 1979: 500). Since then however, CSR has often been confused with other notions:

The term “corporate social responsibility” is still in popular use, even though competing, complementary and overlapping concepts such as corporate citizenship, business ethics, stakeholder management and sustainability are all vying to become the most accepted and widespread descriptor of the field. (Carroll & Shabana 2010: 86)
- 8 In recent years, several studies have focused on a common definition of CSR but also on the specific genres associated with this relatively new concept, especially CSR reports. The recent emergence of CSR reports cannot be distinguished from the tradition of corporate annual reporting, traditionally devoted to financial issues.
- 9 In the field of ESP, several papers have dealt with corpus-based analyses of financial reports. Kristi Yuthas *et al.* investigated “the use of narratives to communicate the firm’s financial position” (2002: 141). Other researchers (Nickerson & De Groot 2005; De Groot *et al.* 2006; De Groot 2008) analysed the CEO letters and other non-financial sections in corporate annual reports in a cross-cultural perspective. More recent papers have broadened the scope of the studies on corporate reporting: Vijay K. Bhatia focused on “corporate disclosure documents” (2012: 79), including “annual and other

periodical performance reports, press releases [...] and other communications from management to (minority) shareholders” (*ibid.*). Belinda C. Camiciottoli has also explored earning calls, which she describes as “a spoken genre that is destined to play an increasingly important role in corporate financial disclosure” (2014: 343). Although all these papers constitute an important bed of research on the topic of corporate reporting, they are restricted to financial disclosure documents which are mostly targeted to shareholders. As such, they do not address the specific genre of CSR reports and do not contribute directly to the characterization of CSR.

- 10 Other studies (Livesey & Kearins 2002; Igalens 2007; Kolk 2008; Biros 2011) have sought to characterize the communicative needs and genres related to CSR. Most of them rely on a textual analysis of the corporate documents, e.g., “the metaphors of transparency and care used to describe corporate rationales for increasing stakeholder communication, including reporting” (Livesey & Kearins 2002: 233) or the study of the argumentative structure in the CSR reports of French companies (Igalens 2007). Ans Kolk (2008) and A. Kolk & J. Pinske (2010) focused on the sections devoted to corporate governance in CSR reports. Brigitte Planken *et al.* chose a diversified approach, taking into account “the CSR platforms presented by top ten corporations operating in the Indian Oil and Gas sector” (2010: 10). More recently, Camille Biros (2011) studied the influence of global norms on the structure and content of CSR reports in the UK. Even though these studies provide insightful contributions to the characterization of the genre of CSR reports, they do not necessarily take into account the production context or the way the companies’ CSR efforts are perceived by the public. However, if we consider genres as “social actions” (Miller 1984), these elements should be included in genre analysis.
- 11 Indeed, specialized languages are necessarily “tied to a general language” (Resche 1999: 131) and they can also be seen as “the use of a natural language to technically account for specialized knowledge” (Lerat 1995: 21); hence, a linguistic approach is not sufficient *per se*. Considering the future of ESP, Michel Van der Yeught (2010: 6) suggested to use language, but also discourse and culture to characterize specialised varieties of English. Beyond the linguistic aspect, specialization can take different forms as

[...] it is the specialized which constitutes the specific object of English for specific purposes as a discipline, and which builds the unifying principle of its different components (analysis of specialized language and discourse, of specialized domains) and different sections (legal English, English for mathematics, journalism, politics, etc.). (Petit 2011: 184)

- 12 With the aim of identifying the various aspects of the specialization of corporate discourse on CSR, an interdisciplinary methodology was used. The method considers both discourse (corpus analysis of documents issued by the companies) and its production context.

2. An interdisciplinary methodology

- 13 The methodology used for the study was applied to various genres of corporate discourse (mission statements, financial reports, press releases, webgenres). However, as this paper focuses on the characterization of CSR, the results presented below are limited to the CSR reports published by the six companies under study.

2.1. Corpus-based analysis

- ¹⁴ In order to contribute to the characterization of CSR, the CSR reports published by Monsanto, Dow AgroSciences, DuPont Pioneer, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Conoco Phillips between 2002 and 2011 were analyzed. Although the dates of the first CSR reports available on the Internet vary depending on the companies, the final corpus comprised 46 final reports and represented 773,608 words (see Table 1).

Table 1. Quantitative data on the corpus of CSR reports under study

	Number of reports (years published)	Number of words
ExxonMobil	8 (2004-2011)	254,890
Chevron	10 (2002-2011)	233,160
Conoco Phillips	4 (2004-2006-2008-2011)	86,697
Monsanto	9 (1999-2011)	195,929
Dow AgroSciences	9 (2003-2011)	2,115 ³
DuPont Pioneer	6 (2005-2011)	817 ⁴
TOTAL	46	773,608

- ¹⁵ The Antconc program⁵ was used to characterize the companies' linguistic choices in terms of CSR. First, the most frequent words used in the CSR reports were identified thanks to the Word List tool, which "counts all the words in the corpus and presents them in an ordered list". The aim was to identify the most frequent lexical units. Following E. De Groot, this lexical approach to corpus analysis allows researchers to determine "text themes [and] recurrent linguistic expressions referring to the same concept" (2008: 107).
- ¹⁶ To check the specificity of technological risk companies' discourse on CSR, similar analyses were conducted on a reference corpus (see Table 2).

Table 2. Companies included in the reference corpus

Industry	Companies
Fast Food industry	Mc Donald's, Starbucks, Yum
Drinks	Constellation Brands, Campari, Coca Cola
Banking/Insurance	Bank of America, Wells Fargo, JP Morgan
Gambling	Las Vegas Sands, Wynn Resorts, Caesars Palace
Information Technology/Telecommunications	Microsoft, Apple, AT&T

Pharmaceutical industry	Johnson & Johnson, Merck, Pfizer
Retail sales	Macy's, Walmart, Target
Tobacco	John Middleton, Philip Morris, Altria

- 17 The reference corpus was made up of CSR reports published by twenty-four companies in eight other industrial sectors. The reference corpus was restricted to the CSR reports published in 2011⁶. For each sector, the best ranked companies in the Fortune 500 list were included, to ensure that all the companies under scrutiny were of similar size and financial scope. Due to this relative homogeneity, any difference between the corpus under study and the reference corpus would prove significant.
- 18 The Keyword list tool was used to compare the word lists of the corpus under study and of the reference corpus (restricted to the CSR reports published in 2011). Using the “keyness” component which highlights words with an unusually low or high frequency in the corpus under study, it was possible to identify characteristic words related to CSR in the discourse of biotechnology and oil and gas companies.
- 19 Finally, the letters to the stakeholders were studied separately. In corporate discourse, the letters to the stakeholders that open the CSR reports are often seen as the equivalent to the letters to the shareholders in financial reports. As such, they pertain to the general category of “corporate reporting” (Conaway & Wardrope 2010: 142), characterized by “strategic [...] organizational rhetoric [...] to influence public policy and to mold popular attitudes or opinions” (*ibid.*). In the field of ESP, C. Nickerson & E. De Groot (2005) and E. De Groot (2008) have focused on chairmen’s statements in financial reports, whose aims are described as follows:
- [...] offering an informative and parental top-line overview of results, contextualizing information in succeeding sections, providing the company with a personal face, establishing reader-writer relationship. (De Groot 2008: 83)
- 20 However, the main topics and target audience of these statements differ from those of the letters to the stakeholders: the former are directed to “a broad audience but focus on shareholders” (*ibid.*), while the latter is intended for “all those directly or indirectly impacted by the decisions and activities of the organisation concerned” (Isani 2007: §23). In addition, letters to the stakeholders do not address financial results but the overall performance of the company, in economic, environmental and social terms. A diachronic analysis of the letters to the stakeholders published by the companies under study between 2004 and 2011 was conducted to better understand the evolution of corporate rhetoric regarding CSR.
- 21 In order to complement this corpus-based approach, the production context of the companies’ CSR discourse was also taken into account by borrowing tools from the field of ethnography.

2.2. An ethnographic-oriented approach to specialized discourse, milieu and culture

- 22 In the introduction to her doctoral dissertation on the milieu of American mountain guides, Séverine Wozniak argued that nowadays, “studying specialized languages starts

from the domain and often pertains to ethnographic studies” (2011: 5). ESP scholars not only aim to characterize the language of the discourse community under study, but also its communicative needs and the context in which discourse is produced. ESP researchers are not experts in the field of ethnography. However, it can prove useful to penetrate the professional milieu at some point, using a form of “*in situ* modularity”:

Such modulations present a high degree of compatibility with ESP researchers whose primary academic focus lies elsewhere but who, nevertheless, need the rich insights afforded by experiential immersion in the culture of reference. (Isani 2014: 37)

- 23 In the field of corporate reporting, E. De Groot supplemented her analysis of financial reports with “in-depth interviews [which] resulted in a relevant and rich description of genre context” (2008: 100-101). Indeed, a brief sociological insight into the professional milieu under study can prove particularly helpful to check the first results of discourse analysis, especially when corpus data is limited.
- 24 Even if it is commonly admitted that ethnographic tools and methods can be useful in ESP research, some scholars have questioned the definition of this particular method, especially in academic settings. Theresa Lillis focused on “linguistic ethnography” (2008: 353) to characterize academic writing, while Sue Starfield observed that “[...] ethnographic techniques [can be seen as] a way of trying to understand the complexities of ESP language use and the worlds in which our students need to use this language” (2014: 11).
- 25 More generally, Dacia Dressen-Hammouda emphasized the increasing importance of “qualitative and ethnographic-oriented approaches [in] ESP research practice” (2012: 502). The broader scope of D. Dressen-Hammouda’s definition corresponds to the approach presented in this paper; hence, it refers to an “ethnographic-oriented approach”.
- 26 During a field trip in October 2011, I visited the headquarters of two of the companies under study in the United States. On this occasion, I met company members from different departments, among others public affairs, digital media or advertising. Members of two other companies were also interviewed, on the phone or during visits in the French branches of the multinationals⁷. To avoid biased conclusions and ensure a variety of sources, I also met various experts of the domains under study. The latter were chosen from three main categories: journalists from the *New York Times*, the *St Louis Post Dispatch*, the *Indianapolis Business Journal*, the *Riverfront Times*; members of professional associations and regulatory authorities (including the SAF⁸, CPDP⁹, UFIP¹⁰, Europaia and the USDA¹¹); and members of the Greenpeace non-governmental organization.
- 27 Following Nicole Berthier (1998), Jean-François Dortier (2004) and Séverine Wozniak (2011), a questionnaire was created for each interviewee. The questionnaires were divided into two main sections (see Appendix 1). The general questions, asked to each employee, focused on their background as well as on corporate culture, corporate communication and the company’s reputation. Depending on each employee’s role in the company, specific questions were asked to gain insight into the production of specific documents, such as annual reports, press releases or webgenres, among others. This paper only includes data related to CSR. The aim was to understand the corporate culture of the milieu under study and to clarify the lexical and rhetorical specificities identified in corpus analysis.

- 28 In addition to this internal perspective, an inclusive study on CSR also requires taking into account the perception of the general public.

2.3. A sociolinguistic perspective on corporate discourse

- 29 To avoid incomplete or biased conclusions, ESP researchers should also consider the place of the specialized milieu in national cultures (Van der Yeught 2010: 6). Carolyn Miller considers that genre should be seen as

[...] a conventional category of discourse based on large-scale typification of rhetorical action; as action, it acquires meaning from situation and from the social context in which that situation arose. (1984: 163)

- 30 Therefore, the methodology includes tools borrowed from sociolinguistics which aimed to cast light on the general context of discourse production. Two surveys (one on agricultural biotechnology, one on the oil and gas industry) were designed. For each survey, a version in French was distributed to French respondents and a version in English was distributed to American respondents through different channels (see Domenec 2013). Not being a specialist in this domain, I relied on the works of Hervé Fenneteau (2007) and François de Singly (2008) to formulate the main questions and decide on the structure of the surveys. All four questionnaires were divided into three parts, from general to specific issues.
- 31 As sociology “[d]oes not always focus on easily identifiable ‘populations’, it rather deals with mobile groups with blurred frontiers”¹² (De Singly 2008: 45), the target audience of these questionnaires was the general public. Indeed, issues related to oil or agricultural biotechnology are no longer restricted to professionals or scientists. Hence, the surveys were distributed to various audiences, in order to collect heterogeneous views (see Table 3).
- 32 Although the sample population was not defined so as to be strictly representative of a specific target population within the general public, the survey represented a first step in an attempt to assess the perception of technological risk companies and their discourse by the respondents. Results cast light on the companies’ reputations and global images and help the analyst understand their specific communication needs.

Table 3. Different categories of respondents to the questionnaires

Q1.F	Q1.E	Q2.F	Q2.E
- Website: 60 Millions de Consommateurs - Website: Mission d'Animation des Agrobiosciences - Doctoral students: ENS Cachan - Relatives and colleagues	- Contact list: member of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) - Twitter account: journalist (St Louis Post Dispatch) - LinkedIn account: Society for Risk Analysis (SRA)	- Website: 60 Millions de Consommateurs - Students: (Bachelor /Master, Paris 2 University) - Relatives and colleagues	- Doctoral students: (University of Albany) - Contact list: senior lecturer (University of Albany) - Amazon Mechanical Turk

Respondents: 99	Respondents: 41	Respondents: 95	Respondents: 51
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3. Results: a “controversy-driven” CSR

- 33 Confronting data from the different sources presented in the second section, results show that technological risk companies share a specific corporate culture and discourse. In response to various incidents mentioned in the introduction section, their main objective is not only to promote their products, but also to legitimize controversial activities.
- 34 On the specific issue of CSR, three main findings are presented below: the predominance of environmental and sustainability issues over social aspects; the argument of the hegemony of the market; a shared culture of safety. For each theme, the results of the three approaches (lexical analysis, interviews with corporate members, surveys of the general public) are described and related to each other: to ensure the relevance of the interdisciplinary approach, this section is restricted to results evidenced by all three approaches.

3.1. The predominance of environmental and sustainability issues

3.1.1. Lexical and structural analysis

- 35 First, the lexical and structural analysis of the CSR reports underscores the particular importance of environmental and sustainability issues over social aspects, which does not correspond to previous definitions of CSR. Whereas Catherine Resche (2005: 17) noted the fundamental importance of the environment in CSR, when analysing the approach to CSR by American firms, Isabelle Maignan and David Ralston found that the social aspect was more prevalent than the environmental one, as compared to European companies:
- Given the active role historically played by businesses in the development of U.S. communities, it is quite logical that U.S. firms depicted CSR processes first and foremost in terms of philanthropic programs and volunteerism. Similarly, the social responsibility issues most commonly discussed by U.S. firms were those linked to the community – e.g., quality of life, education. (2002: 513)
- 36 However, the overall structure of the CSR reports of oil and gas companies reveals the predominance of environmental issues in corporate discourse (see Appendix 2). Over the years, environmental and sustainability issues have gradually been given priority over socioeconomic issues: in CSR reports published by ExxonMobil between 2004 and 2011, environmental performance was always put first, except between 2008 and 2010, when “Safety, Health and the Workplace” were the first issues addressed. “Socioeconomic issues” or “Social performance” ranked first in Chevron’s CSR reports from 2004 to 2008 and in Conoco Phillips’ in 2004 and 2008. However, since 2008, “Energy and Environment”, “Climate Change” or “Renewable Energy” have been the most salient topics in Chevron’s reports.
- 37 The keyword analysis of the CSR reports published in 2011 confirms the structural analysis (see Table 4).

- 38 Results show that words and phrases such as “hse” (health, safety and environment), “emissions”, “biodiversity”, “water”, “climate”, “ghg” (greenhouse gases) are more frequently used in the CSR reports published by the six companies under study than in the reference corpus (reports published in the information technology, banking, retail sales, alcohol, tobacco, gambling, pharmaceutical and fast food industries, see 2.1.).
- 39 The CSR reports published in 2011 followed two major controversial events in the oil and agricultural biotechnology industry: in April 2010, the explosion of the BP oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico damaged the image of the oil industry as a whole. As a consequence, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Conoco Phillips had to redouble their efforts to respond to public concerns. 2010 also marked a major step in the regulation of agricultural biotechnology in Europe: due to widespread public distrust, the European Commission decided to give member states more flexibility to forbid the cultivation of GMOs on their territory¹³. It thus seems that, frequently accused of being responsible for pollution and climate change, technological risk companies lay particular emphasis on their actions in favour of the environment.

Table 4. Keywords in the 2011 CSR reports of the US oil and biotechnology companies

CSR theme	Keyword	Keyness	Frequency	Companies ¹⁴
Health/Safety/ Environment	Hse	231,450	68	CPs ¹⁵
Health/Safety	Safety	220,087	382	EM, CPs, Mto, Chn, DPt Pr
Environment	Emissions	198,653	268	Cps, EM, Chn, Mto
Environment	Land	189,161	83	EM, Mto, CPs, Chn, Dow AS
Environment	biodiversity	177,818	110	CPs, EM, Chn, Mto
Environment	Wildlife	175,219	69	Mto, EM, CPs, Chn
Environment	Water	174,010	277	CPs, EM, Mto, Chn, Dow AS
Environment	ghg (greenhouse gases)	171,509	123	CPs, EM, Chn, Mto
Safety	Security	170,128	123	EM, CPs, Chn, Mto
Safety	Incident	129,062	56	EM, Chn, CPs, Mto
Environment /Safety	(environmental) stewardship (product) stewardship	128,800	107	Mto, EM, Chn, CPs Mto, EM
Environment	Climate	111,561	106	CPs, EM, Mto

Socioeconomics	demand	97,538	63	EM, Mto, CPs, Chn, Dow AS
	Technology	93,603	167	Mto, EM, CPs, Chn, Dow AS

3.1.2. Diachronic letter analysis

- 40 In order to understand the corporate rhetoric behind the focus on environmental aspects in the most recent reports, a diachronic analysis of the letters to the stakeholders was conducted. The results underscore an evolution in the characterization of environmental issues, especially for oil and gas companies. In the first letters to the stakeholders issued by ExxonMobil, Chevron and Conoco Phillips, environmental issues were seen as a contentious topic which could damage the company's reputation ([1] to [4]):

[1] Chevron/CSR_2003

One of the greatest challenges our industry faces is the widespread view that energy development is at odds with a healthy environment.

[2] CP/CSR_2004

Today, our company and our stakeholders are raising expectations. Specifically, stakeholders are challenging our industry to:

- Provide increasingly cleaner fuels to address concerns for local air quality and climate change.
- Further minimize the environmental impacts of our operations.

[3] Chevron/CSR_2006

Given the potential widespread impacts to society, the costs, risks, trade-offs and uncertainties associated with climate policies must be thoughtfully assessed and openly communicated.

[4] EM/CSR_2006

Climate remains an extraordinarily complex area of scientific study. Nevertheless, the risk to society and ecosystems from rising greenhouse gas emissions could prove to be significant. So, despite the areas of uncertainty that exist, it is prudent to develop and implement strategies to address this risk.

- 41 However, they have progressively become a rebranding tool. In more recent letters to the stakeholders, hedging and euphemisation strategies have been replaced by positively-connoted expansions to promote the companies' image or by structures that tie the companies' core business to sustainability ([5] to [7]):

[5] Chevron/CSR_2009

We continued our engagement on the issue of climate change.

In the 2009 Carbon Disclosure Leadership Index, Chevron ranked first among global companies in the energy sector. We have become more energy efficient in our global business functions (...).

[6] EM/CSR_2010

From ExxonMobil's perspective, we are committed to maintaining [...] confidence by continuing to operate safely, responsibly, and in a manner that promotes the long-term economic, environmental, and social health of our communities.

[7] CP/CSR_2012

At ConocoPhillips, we consider sustainable development essential to our mission of supplying the energy that powers modern life.

- 42 I do not mean here that oil and gas companies do not address socioeconomic issues, or that companies in the reference corpus omit environmental themes. What I want to

point out is the particular importance environmental and sustainability issues have gained in oil companies' CSR reports in the last decade.

- 43 Although corpus data were not as detailed for agricultural biotechnology companies, similar strategies were identified in Monsanto's, Dow AgroSciences' and DuPont Pioneer's CSR reports. Monsanto has long been criticized for its environmental impacts, therefore, the company's CSR reports frequently lay emphasis on the association between environmental and technological progress:

[8] Monsanto/CSR_1999-2000

And while solving the bigger problem of environmental degradation and meeting human needs will take the efforts of all of society, I personally believe that we at Monsanto can make a significant contribution.

[9] Monsanto/CSR_2008-2009

Even small improvements in seeds and agronomic practices can have a tremendous effect on the environment and on the lives of countless farmers around the world.

- 44 In [8] and [9], agricultural practices are presented as potentially dangerous while the company's products, which can improve these very practices, are seen as beneficial to the environment. References to Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Pioneer in the reports issued by Dow Chemical and DuPont also mention environmental impacts caused not only by the companies, but also by agricultural practices or society as a whole ([10] and [11]):

[10] Dow/CSR_2011

We minimize our own environmental impact while delivering solutions that help our customers and the rest of society do the same.

[11] DuPont/CSR_2011

Innovative Seed Products: DuPont Pioneer is aggressively developing corn hybrids that exhibit enhanced efficiency in nitrogen use, that require reduced quantities of nitrogen, by up to 30 percent, while maintaining overall yield. Decreasing the amount of nitrogen needed presents the opportunity for farmers to reduce their input cost per bushel of corn produced, while reducing the environmental impact of nitrogen fertilizer production, application and use.

- 45 It thus seems that the approach to environmental issues distinguishes technological risk companies' discourse on CSR from that of other companies: presented as a priority, environmental objectives are now used to promote the company's image as a responsible actor.

3.1.3. Interviews with corporate members

- 46 The interviews with corporate members also stressed the particular need for environmental legitimacy, especially for the two agricultural biotechnology companies that do not issue their own CSR reports. A member acknowledged the increasing importance of the environment in corporate communication:

[I]n the early days when I first started there was a lot of questions about the safety of the products [...] And I think the question has moved now more to "Is it safe for the environment?". (AgBiotech_1/PA, 2011)

- 47 Company members also insisted on the concept of sustainability, to lay emphasis on the environmental progress linked to new technology:

Now, as a corporation we will speak about agricultural sustainability [...] Let's just use the land we have better, make it work harder and be the most efficient that we can be with this soil and the water that's available to us. I'm sure you know agriculture consumes 70% of the water, so it's really important that it's used wisely.

So that's probably the extent of our environmental communications, more in the area of sustainability. (AgBiotech_1/PA, 2011)

Sustainable ag[riculture] however, that's thinking about greener chemistries and we think that's definitely possible. Of course it is, we're doing it [...] in that building over there today. We have a lot of green chemistries and we have a lot of green biotech. We're talking about drought, we're talking about stress, tolerance. (AgBiotech_2/PA, 2011)

- 48 The particular importance of environmental issues for oil and agricultural biotechnology multinationals also appeared in the surveys distributed to French and American respondents. The detailed responses, presented in Appendix 3, reveal widespread distrust of the companies' abilities to protect the environment.

3.1.4. Surveys of the general public

- 49 For each industrial sector (agricultural biotechnology; oil and gas), a survey in French and a survey in English were created. The aim was to assess the perception of corporate discourse and culture by the general public. The French surveys were published online (websites of 60 *Millions de Consommateurs*, *Mission d'Animation des Agrobiosciences*, social media accounts of the author) and distributed to relatives and students (École Normale Supérieure de Cachan, Paris 2 University). 99 people responded to the French questionnaire on agricultural biotechnology and 95 people responded to the oil and gas survey.
- 50 The questionnaires in English were published online (Twitter account of a journalist of the St Louis Post Dispatch, LinkedIn account of the Society for Risk Analysis, Amazon Mechanical Turk), sent to contact lists (member of the USDA, senior lecturer at the University of Albany) and distributed to students at the University of Albany. The total number of American respondents amounts to 41 for the questionnaire on agricultural biotechnology and 51 for the survey on oil and gas.
- 51 Environmental damage was ranked first among the risks linked to oil and gas production by 90% of French respondents and only 18% thought the oil industry's activities were rather or totally compatible with sustainable environment. Besides, the companies' policies dedicated to protecting the environment were considered inefficient or rather inefficient by 90% of French respondents. Overall, American respondents shared the same view: 88% thought that environmental damage was the primary risk of oil and gas production; 68% thought their activities were rather not or not compatible with sustainable development and 76% considered that the companies were not able to protect the environment. Besides, only 7% considered that the primary objective of oil and gas companies was to protect the environment.
- 52 Regarding agricultural biotechnology companies, responses show slight differences between the American and the French respondents. The latter are rather skeptical of the companies' environmental impact: 61% think that agricultural biotechnology is not or not really compatible with sustainable development, 73% that it represents a risk to the environment. However, 51% of American respondents see agricultural biotechnology as an asset for sustainable environment and only 37% consider it as a threat to the environment.
- 53 These responses show that the predominance of environmental issues can be seen as part of a rebranding strategy, in reaction to negative perceptions of the companies' environmental impact. However, in addition to a shared reactive approach to CSR, the

communication strategy of companies associated with technological risk is also marked by a proactive approach.

3.2. “Feeding and fueling the world”: a proactive approach to CSR

3.2.1. Lexical and structural analysis

- 54 The lexical analysis highlights the widespread reference to global needs and demand for food and energy to justify the companies’ missions. In terms of rhetoric, these common lexical choices underscore the particular focus on the “hegemony of the market”, described as follows by Daniel Lee Kleinman and Jack Kloppenburg:

Monsanto’s campaign is an effort to maintain its hegemony by promulgating a vision of biotech that will further enhance its interests and that the public will embrace as being in its interests as well. (1991: 430)

- 55 In the reports under study, the “hegemony of the market” theme mostly appeared in references to global demands or global needs for food or energy. Table 5 summarizes the number of occurrences of the lexical units “need(s)” or “demand(s)” in the companies’ CSR reports. Both lexical units can be found as nouns or verbs. No difference was made in Table 5, provided the lexical unit referred to global needs or demands for food and energy.

Table 5. Frequency of the lexical units “need(s)” or “demand(s)” in the CSR reports¹⁶

	Need(s)	Demand(s)	Percentage of the lexical units ¹⁷
Monsanto (1999-2011)	299	106	0.28%
ExxonMobil (2004-2011)	325	290	0.33%
Chevron (2002-20011)	294	86	0.23%
Conoco Phillips (2004-2012)	88	29	0.16%
Dow AgroSciences (2003-2011)	7	Ø	0.61%

- 56 In the corpus under study, the lexical units presented in Table 5 are used in similar phrases and sentences that underscore the need for technological progress to meet global demand (see Appendix 4). These repeated structures are instances of what Patrick Charaudeau and Dominique Maingueneau labelled as “sloganization processes”:

[Sloganization], derived from the term *slogan* but not to be confused with, refers, in the field of lexicometry, to the degree of stability and repetitiveness that a text presents.

- 57 Notable examples include the following phrases and sentences:

[12] - [...] meet[ing] the growing [global] demand for energy / the growing [global] energy demand.

- [...] meet[ing] the world[’s] [growing]demand for energy / growing energy demand.

EM/CSR (2004-2011)

Chevron/CSR (2002-2011)

CPS/CSR (2004; 2006; 2007; 2012)

[13] - [...] help keep pace with the growing needs of our world's rapidly expanding population.

Dow/CSR_2011

[14] - [...] to meet the food, feed, and fiber needs of the world.

Dow/CSR_2010

[15] - [...] help the world increase the quantity, quality, safety and sustainability of our food supply.

Dupont/CSR_2011

[16] - Meet[ing] the needs of our growing planet / of our fast-growing population.

Monsanto/CSR (2008; 2010; 2011)

- 58 In examples 12 to 16, the companies are presented as responsible *per se*, not because they try to minimize their environmental or social impact, but because their products and activities directly improve the lives of millions of people.

3.2.2. Interviews with corporate members

- 59 This specific view of CSR is confirmed by the interviews of the corporate members, who constantly underscored the global need for food and energy. Indeed, the technological innovations promoted by the companies were presented as the only sustainable solutions to meet the demands of the continuously increasing population.

What this company does is definitely beneficial and it's **feeding this growing world**, figuring out ways, as the population increases and the available land decreases, to address that, **to feed this growing population**. (AgBiotech_2/PA, 2011)

CSR internally we call it "corporate citizenship" and we basically align that corporate citizenship with six different focus areas. Those six different focus areas are related to sustainability, right? So we're talking about economic performance, social development and environmental protection **to allow future generations to meet their needs**, it's based on that definition of sustainability. (Oil/Comm¹⁸ 2012)

- 60 Yet, the surveys reveal that the general public is not entirely convinced by the need for technology to solve global issues.

3.2.3. Surveys to the general public

- 61 As a matter of fact, a majority of respondents believe that alternative solutions could be found (See Appendix 5): 66% of American respondents and 77% of French respondents disagreed with the following statement:

In order to meet growing energy needs while protecting the environment, all the energy sources should be exploited, including unconventional resources (among others, shale gas, shale oil, heavy oil).

- 62 Moreover, the following comments were added by American respondents who were asked whether the benefits of unconventional energy resources outweighed the risks:

I absolutely do not agree with the focus on oil and gas as sole energy solutions—both are limited resources. The tunnel-vision and near exclusive focus on policies prioritizing those forms of energy exploitation is short-sighted at best. They're companies and their goal is profit, not the well-being of human-kind nor the planet. I cannot support this.

- 63 Regarding agricultural biotechnology companies, it also seems that part of the general public does not view GMOs and agrochemistry as a game-changer for world hunger. However, French and American views differed regarding the industry's ability to feed the world: 61% of American respondents considered that agricultural biotechnology

provided a solution to world hunger but only 42% of French respondents shared the same view and 53% disagreed.

- 64 These overall negative views may account for the emphasis on the companies' will to "feed and fuel the world". CSR is not only seen as a means to defend corporate image, but also as a way of promoting the multinationals' products and activities as inherently sustainable.
- 65 In this proactive perspective, safety also represents a fundamental aspect of CSR for technological risk companies.

3.3. A shared culture of safety

3.3.1. Lexical and structural analysis

- 66 Corpus analysis highlights increasingly common references to safety, which has progressively become a keyword in the CSR reports.
- 67 In addition to the priority given to environmental issues, Table 4 also shows the preponderance of themes linked to safety. In fact, the environmental and social dimensions of CSR are systematically associated with safety issues. Similar ternary rhythms and accumulations are often found in the reports published by oil companies:

[17] EM/CSR_2005

It helps ensure that every operating organization has the resources, skills, systems, procedures and tools to perform safely, reliably and with environmental care.

[18] Chevron/CSR_2005

At the core of our corporate responsibility performance are the company's ongoing business investments to develop affordable, reliable energy supplies in a safe, environmentally responsible way.

[19] CPs/CSR_2004

These and other expectations are in addition to our essential requirements to operate safely, remain competitive and contribute toward meeting the growing global demand for energy.

- 68 Just like sustainability, safety is seen as part of the companies' mission, rather than as an additional constraint in response to external regulations. However, the explosion of BP's oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010 led to an evolution in the conception of safety by oil companies, through the concept of "risk management":

[20] EM/RSE_2011

Few industries are called upon to manage as many complex risks as the energy sector. [...] OIMS integrates safety, security, health, environmental and social risk management into every aspect of our business.

[21] Chevron/RSE_2011

[Process safety, environmental stewardship and operational discipline fall] under our Operational Excellence Management System, which guides how we manage risk throughout the company.

[22] CPs/RSE_2011

The past year featured several key achievements in our sustainability efforts. For example, we [...] [c]onducted biodiversity risk assessments at all of our major operated assets around the globe.

- 69 The reference to "risk" is typical of an evolution in the characterization of CSR. Until March 2009, "risk" was only found in the phrase "climate change risks", in an attempt to minimize the threat of global warming. Since 2010 however, the concept has been

systematically linked to the operations conducted by oil companies, thus acknowledging their responsibility in the potential impact of their activities.

- 70 Initially a chemical company, Monsanto is particularly affected by the risk issue. That is why safety concerns were already present in the first CSR report and were still used in 2010:

[23] Monsanto/RSE_1999-2000

I believe that we've managed through it all to provide value to our customers and consumers, insure the safety of our products, maintain exceptional environmental performance, and maintain the safety of our employees and the communities around our plants.

[24] Monsanto/RSE_2010

The seed business is a long-term business, and we approach our environmental and safety performance with that same appreciation for long-term continuous improvement.

3.3.2. Interviews with corporate members

- 71 The passages devoted to Dow AgroSciences and Dupont Pioneer in the CSR reports of their mother companies were not detailed enough to check that specific aspect of CSR. However, interviews with corporate members corroborate the particular importance of safety issues:

If you have a chance to go to Wilmington, Delaware and visit Hagley farm [...], you can see DuPont de Nemour's home and **you can see how even in the early days the company was focused on safety, that's one of our core values.** (AgBiotech_1/PA, 2011)

DuPont is a chemical company (they make gun powder and chemicals now) and they have a very strong safety orientation. So, a couple of things I'd ask you are: Number one, when we get to the laboratories, please wear those glasses or at least take them with you and put them on if you need to; when we're driving, put your seat belt on and... if there's a fire or anything like that, follow me. [...] So it's kind of... the ground rules as DuPont is very safety conscious and so... we're going to play the game. (AgBiotech_1/PA, 2011)

That approach to safety also extends very much to safety in our operations. In our factories where we have seed plants or machinery, the company takes a very proactive approach to safety training and risk management to ensure that our operating environment is as safe as possible. It is addressed in the CSR report. (AgBiotech_3/Comm, 2012)

- 72 Similarly, oil company members and specialists of the oil industry systematically insisted on the "safety culture", which they presented as specific to these industries:

A focus on safety is not understood [externally] for being as holistic as it is here. And you know, internally, safety means for us not just of people, but of assets and of environmental spills and of local communities and things like that. It extends much more. (Oil/Comm, 2012)

- 73 The evolution of the companies' discourse on safety may be tied to increasing public concern over their activities.

3.3.3. Surveys of the general public

- 74 Responses to the questionnaires show that part of the general public is still worried about the health consequences of the energy and agrochemical industries (see Appendix 6). However, concerns differ depending on the nationality of the respondents: two-thirds of American respondents compared to a third of French

respondents thought that the policies implemented by oil and gas companies to improve safety conditions during their operations were not really efficient or inefficient. Regarding agricultural biotechnology, American respondents were split: 46% thought that agricultural biotechnology did not represent a threat to human or animal health. However, French respondents showed more concern: only 17% of them were not worried about the impact of agricultural biotechnology on human and animal health.

- 75 Although figures may vary between France and the United States, the results above show that oil and agrochemical companies still have to prove that they can safely handle their operations, in order to gain public support.

Conclusion

- 76 The analysis of the CSR reports, interviews with corporate members or specialists and responses to the questionnaires help understand the specific nature of CSR in the technological risk industry: first seen as a constraint linked to external regulations, CSR is now presented as the companies' core business and inherent in their culture. The focus on safety and environmental issues, linked to the need for legitimacy, sets agricultural biotechnology and oil companies apart from others in the corporate world.
- 77 Throughout the years, environmental issues have become a major rebranding tool for oil and agricultural biotechnology companies: corpus analysis revealed the predominance of keywords linked to the environment, but also a shift in the characterization of environmental issues in the overall reports and in the CEO letters. The corporate members who were interviewed confirmed the strong impact of the environmental controversy on corporate discourse and culture. However, responses to the survey show that the general public still sees technology as potentially harmful to the environment.
- 78 Regarding the argument of the "hegemony of the market" (Kleinman & Kloppenburg 1991), all the reports under study make use of sloganization processes that present the companies' products and activities as the only solutions to "feed the world" or "fuel the world". Similar phrases were heard during the interviews. Yet, respondents to the questionnaires still doubt that GMOs or unconventional resources are the only solutions to respond to global demand.
- 79 Finally, the six companies under study share a safety culture that distinguishes them from other firms: results of the structural and lexical analyses of the CSR reports show that safety has become a priority, following various accidents. The particular importance of safety was also frequently highlighted by the interviewees. Nevertheless, the surveys reveal that most respondents still think that the firms are not able to prevent negative side effects or industrial risks.
- 80 More generally, this paper aims to show that ESP requires an empirical approach, as "linguistic data must be completed by non-linguistic, contextual interpretation processes" (Kecskes 2014: 130). The interdisciplinary framework helps cast light on the evolution of society regarding specific issues, namely industrial risk, the precautionary principle or technological progress.
- 81 In order to refine the results presented here, similar surveys could be distributed to a more representative sample of the population through a professional network.

Moreover, the local documents issued by the companies (press releases, ads, leaflets, websites) could also be analysed to better understand the companies' specific communication needs in different contexts. Finally, future research could focus on more recent CSR reports, in order to check the results of the present analysis.

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NOTES

1. "[L'anglais de spécialité] traite de la langue, du discours et de la culture des communautés professionnelles et groupes sociaux spécialisés anglophones [...]", (Petit, 2002: 2-3), my translation.
2. In 2010, M. Petit further defined what he had called "third-type specialized" in 2005. To him, "the notion of specialized domain assumes that a domain can be considered worthy of study because of the characteristics of its main activity, which distinguishes the domain within society but also from other domains of the same or different rank" (2010: 21), my translation.
3. As Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Pioneer are subsidiaries of Dow Chemical and DuPont Chemical, they do not issue their own CSR reports. For this study, passages about Dow AgroSciences and DuPont Pioneer were selected from the CSR reports issued by Dow Chemical and DuPont Chemical, which accounts for the limited number of words.
4. See footnote 3.
5. AntConc is a freeware concordancer. For more information, see *AntConc_readme(2)*, retrieved from <<http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software.html>> on 16/12/2014.
6. A diachronic study of the reference corpus would bring further insights, yet it goes beyond the scope of this study.
7. In this paper, the interviewees are anonymous. Codes have been used to identify their company or institution, their specific role and the year the interview was conducted. For example, "AgBiotech_1/PA, 2011" means that the person interviewed was a member of the first agricultural biotechnology company visited in 2011 and works in the department of Public Affairs.
8. Société des Agriculteurs de France, now called SAF agr'iDées
9. Comité Professionnel du Pétrole
10. Union Française des Industries Pétrolières
11. United States Department of Agriculture
12. La sociologie "[...] n'a pas toujours affaire à des « populations » clairement repérables, elle rencontre plutôt des groupes mobiles aux frontières floues" (De Singly 2008 : 45), my translation.
13. Retrieved from <http://ec.europa.eu/food/plant/gmo/legislation/future_rules_en.htm> on 06/12/2014.

14. For each word or phrase, the order in which the company names are mentioned corresponds to the number of occurrences, in decreasing order.
 15. For practical reasons, the following abbreviations have been used: CPs for Conoco Phillips, EM for ExxonMobil, Chn for Chevron, Mto for Monsanto, Dow AS for Dow AgroSciences, DPT Pr for DuPont Pioneer.
 16. Due to the limited data issued by DuPont Pioneer, results were not included.
 17. Proportion of the references to need(s) and demand(s) in all the lexical units of the CSR reports for each company.
 18. "Comm": Member of the Communications Department
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ABSTRACTS

This paper underscores the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to specialized varieties of English and their discourse communities. More specifically, it presents a three-step methodology used to analyze a common approach to corporate social responsibility (CSR) by six American technological risk companies. With the aim of addressing the various aspects of specialization, the author has adopted an interdisciplinary perspective which considers both discourse (through the analysis of documents produced by the companies) and its production context: interviews of corporate members and specialists were used to understand the culture of the milieu under study and to complement corpus analysis. In addition, surveys were created and distributed to assess the perception of technological risk companies and their discourse by the general public. Results show that those risk companies share a specific discourse and culture, based on a legitimization strategy. On the specific issue of CSR, three main findings are discussed: the predominance of environmental and sustainability issues over social aspects, the argument of the hegemony of the market and a shared culture of safety.

Cet article souligne l'importance d'une approche interdisciplinaire pour la caractérisation des variétés spécialisées d'anglais et des communautés discursives qui les produisent. Il présente une analyse menée sur trois axes pour caractériser l'approche spécifique de la responsabilité sociale d'entreprise (RSE) au sein des multinationales américaines du risque technologique. Afin de tenir compte des différents aspects de la spécialisation, l'auteur a privilégié une approche interdisciplinaire qui considère à la fois le discours et son contexte de production : des entretiens avec des membres des multinationales et des spécialistes permettent de mieux comprendre la culture d'entreprise et de compléter l'analyse de corpus. De plus, des questionnaires ont été distribués au grand public pour évaluer la perception des entreprises du risque technologique et de leur discours. Les résultats des analyses montrent que ces entreprises partagent un discours et une culture spécifiques, fondés sur une stratégie de légitimation. Trois aspects liés à la RSE sont traités : la prépondérance des thématiques liées à l'environnement, l'argument de l'hégémonie du marché, une culture de la sécurité commune.

INDEX

Keywords: annual report, corporate discourse, corporate social responsibility, interdisciplinary methodology, risk company, specialized milieu

Mots-clés: discours de l'entreprise, entreprise du risque, méthodologie interdisciplinaire, milieu spécialisé, rapport annuel, responsabilité sociale d'entreprise

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