Accepted version

"Paper for DISCOURSE & COMMUNICATION"

Title of paper: Move structure and communication style of leaders' messages in corporate discourse: A cross-cultural perspective

Name of Authors: **Cindy SB Ngai (Corresponding Author), Rita Gill Singh**

Version Number and Date: 2 (Jan 15, 2017)

Address for Proof and Offprint: The Department of Chinese and Bilingual Studies, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hung Hom, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Email Address:

cindy.sb.ngai@polyu.edu.hk

ritagill@hkbu.edu.hk

Short Title: Structure and communication style of leaders' messages in global corporations.

Size in Words: 8793 words (including Abstract, Main Text, Reference, Appendices) / 7865 words (including Abstract, Main Text, Reference)

Move structure and communication style of leaders' messages in corporate discourse: A cross-cultural perspective

Abstract

As an important tool to influence stakeholders' perception, leader messages subsumed under public relations discourse, play an integral role in corporate communication. Drawing on the analysis of linguistic move structure and communication styles employed by researchers, this study adopts a multidimensional framework by using both discourse and quantitative analysis to compare how leaders in Global 500 corporations in China and the US rely upon specific linguistic features to engage stakeholders in corporate discourse published on their websites. The results show pertinent differences in communication styles where Chinese corporations tend to be more instrumental, elaborate and competitive while US corporations are more affective, succinct and harmonious. These observations depart from previous findings on interpersonal communication styles in cross-cultural research. This study also extends the boundary of corporate genre analysis by suggesting that the moves adopted in the structure of corporate messages are highly specific to the particular genre.

Autobiographical Note

Cindy Sing-Bik Ngai (PhD) is an Assistant Professor and Programme Leader of MA in Bilingual Corporate Communication at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Her research interests include bilingual communication in the corporate context, leader communication and intercultural communication in new media. Cindy has published two research books titled *New Trends in Corporate Communication: Language, Strategies and Practices* (2012) and *Role of Language & Corporate Communication in Greater China: From Academic to Practitioner Perspectives* (2015). Her work has also appeared in peer-reviewed international journals like *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, International Journal of Business Communication, Public Relations Review,* and *Babel*.

Rita Gill Singh is a Senior Lecturer in the Language Centre at Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU). She teaches undergraduate academic English and business communication courses. She has published papers in the *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* and *International Journal of Business Communication.* Her research interests include corporate communication, web-based language learning, and materials development.

Introduction

Corporate leader-stakeholder communication is imperative in the globalized world where the Internet has facilitated the use of narrative discourse as a means of securing stakeholders' support (Segars and Kohut, 2001). Through the construction of public relations discourse, corporate leaders are able to extend a 'positive image of the company' to their stakeholders in order to 'sustain their confidence in future corporate performance' (Bhatia, 2010: 43). Web-based messages posted on corporate websites thus serve as a major form of corporate public relations (Olasky, 1987) discourse. Specifically, Corporate Public Relations (CPR in short) discourse is defined as communication from senior management (comprising CEOs, chairmen, presidents and managing directors) to stakeholders with a view to promoting the image, strategy and mission of the corporation, as well as establishing solidarity with stakeholders (Bhatia, 2008; Hamm, 2006; Kitchen and Schultz, 2001). Horton (1995: 180) views corporate messages as 'instruments of or complements to actions', aiming to meet business objectives and achieve business success, while corporate addresses are defined as formal speeches targeted at stakeholders.

Corporate documents and reports have a wide range of audiences (Bhatia, 2008; Kong, 2001), who include stakeholders from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Amernic and Craig, 2006), such as capital market stakeholders (i.e. shareholders/stockholders), product market stakeholders (i.e. customers and suppliers), and organizational stakeholders (i.e. employees and managers) (Hitt et al., 2005).

Similarly, although the main purpose of corporate documents and reports is to inform shareholders about the performance of the corporation, such communication is also intended to be persuasive and directive (Bhatia, 2008; Kong, 2001). To ensure communicative effectiveness in this context, appropriate linguistic resources need to be employed or manipulated. On some occasions, positive news is amplified in messages while negative news is downplayed to allay stakeholders' anxiety about the prospects of the corporation.

Bhatia's (2010) study focused on the four common types of discourses found in annual reports: 1). accounting discourse; 2). economics discourse; 3). public relations discourse; and 4). legal discourse. He suggests that public relations discourse, specifically, Directors' or Chairmen's messages which are placed in the annual report, are carefully worded to achieve the aim of building stakeholders' confidence. Kohut and Segars (1992) and Bhatia (2010) note that the President's or Chairman's letter to shareholders is placed together with the annual report and serves as a communicative tool to highlight the corporation's mission, financial performance and objectives.

Apart from Chairmen's letters, leader messages as another major type of CPR discourse are increasingly used in standalone form in leader-stakeholder communication particularly due to the growth of the Internet with Ngai and Singh's (2015) study noting that web-based leader messages were more common in building relations in major Chinese corporations in 2013 as opposed to 2010. Therefore, the study on leaders' messages in corporate discourse warrants our further investigation. Drawing on discourse

analysis, this study examines how linguistic features such as structural characteristics are employed in leaders' messages published on websites in Fortune Global 500 Chinese and United States (US) corporations. Through discourse and text structure, leaders in Chinese and US corporations exert influence and exhibit different communication styles. In prior cross-cultural interpersonal communication research (see e.g. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1959; Hofstede, 1997), it is assumed that people from a certain culture communicate in a certain way. Highlighting the cross-cultural differences evident in the structure and communication style of leader messages would thus provide further knowledge about how to construct more effective messages to target the intended audience.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we review the literature on leader messages in corporate discourse. By following Bhatia's (2008) outlines of the structural characteristics of discourse, and the communication styles suggested in previous intercultural communication studies, we adopt a multidimensional framework in examining the use of linguistic resources in leader messages. An analysis of the communication styles of leaders with their stakeholders in Global 500 corporations in China and US is then provided as an indication of the key factors involved.

Literature review, research questions and hypotheses

Leaders' messages as corporate public relations discourse

Corporate leader messages posted on websites are complex written texts. They are not static (Fairclough, 1989) as the messages reflect the beliefs and values that leaders have about their intended audience. A leader message in this way can be construed as 'a product of social processes that are subject to further negotiation and interactions' (Kong, 2001: 475). Bhatia (2004, 2010) also points out that genres tend to be in hybrid and mixed forms and often evolve and change. As such, a method of analysis for delineating characteristics of this type of CPR discourse would be significant. Leader messages are dialogic too as they are written taking into account past and present messages, which leaders may have used earlier (Kong, 2001), and this has been coined as 'intertextuality' (Bakhtin, 1981; Fairclough, 1992, 1995) where we are cognizant of various voices of different people in messages. The potential to shed light on the variables that shape leader messages through an extended study is therefore worth pursuing.

Fairclough (1992) suggests that the form and content of a text (e.g. a leader's message) should be analyzed in tandem since content is usually expressed or manifested in form. With respect to CPR discourse, communication from senior management to stakeholders occurs through the use of standardized letters, reports and press releases as suggested by Bhatia (2008). Bhatia's (2008) study of the Chairman's letter as a typical document that has an opening, a body and a closing structured with the clear intent to deliver certain corporate goals and his recommendation to adopt a multidimensional and multi-perspective approach in gaining an in-depth understanding of the broader context, including lexico-grammar and text organization, in addition to the power distance (i.e.

cultural context) between corporate leaders and shareholders, have paved the way for more scrutiny of other corporate texts such as leaders' messages.

The variety of discursive strategies including authoritative language and politeness that leaders employ are indicative of their ability to influence the perceptions of stakeholders and produce a vision and ideals, which in turn influence society (Amernic and Craig, 2006). Svennevig (2012: 18) argues that 'leadership is associated with actions that gain predominance in mobilizing action and shaping organizational reality.' CPR discourse in the form of leader messages is commonly used by world superpowers such as the PRC and the US. In fact, in 2016, there were 103 Chinese and 134 US corporations listed on the Fortune Global 500 list, of which 41 out of 103 (40%) in China and 54 out of 134 (40%) in the US employed such messages for communication with their stakeholders (Fortune, 2016).

Since the content of a text is often expressed in form in genre analysis (Fairclough, 1992), it is believed that the identification of a set of moves (functional units in text organization) that govern the textual structure in leaders' discourse would allow the form and structure of the discourse to be better analyzed. Therefore, the move structure of leader messages is scrutinized to reveal their genre-specific structural characteristics.

Move structure analysis

According to Bhatia (1993), certain lexico-grammatical features are often used in the genre of public relations discourse in the corporate context. In terms of the organization of a Chairman's letter, Bhatia (2008: 171) states that it usually has a standardized structure of seven moves:

- Move 1: Overview of past performance/Looking back ;
- Move 2: Identification of major themes ;
- Move 3: Explanation of the themes, competitive edge and achievements made with evidence and actions cited ;
- Move 4: Expectations and promises for the future ;
- Move 5: Looking forward to the future (positive outlook and challenges) ;
- Move 6: Expression of gratitude to stakeholders ;
- Move 7: Positive and confident closing and revisiting Move 1.

Each move tends to be associated with lexico-grammatical features so that the flow between the various moves is smooth (Bhatia, 2008). For instance, for Move 1, an adverbial of time like 'Last year was …' is given (Bhatia, 2008: 171). For Move 2, some major themes are mentioned using nominalization, for instance, 'contraction of revenue,' and 'challenging environment' (Bhatia, 2008: 171). The way the themes are expressed seems to be objective. As for Move 3, the present perfect verb tense is often used to highlight the corporation's achievements, for instance, verbs such as 'has enhanced' and 'expanded' are used (Bhatia, 2008: 171). Concerning Move 4, which focuses on expectations and promises, the collective pronoun 'we' is often used with verbs like

'expect' and 'plan' (Bhatia, 2008: 171). For Move 5, there is a tendency to use positive nouns including 'prospects for' while affirmative words and nouns are employed in phrases such as 'Thanks to the quality and talent of our staff and management' in Move 6 (Bhatia, 2008: 171). Meanwhile, for Move 7, with its ties to Move 1, an optimistic note on the future performance of the corporation is put forward, for instance, 'As Chairman, I am working with the aim of the making a significant and positive impact on shareholder value' (Bhatia, 2008: 171). Notwithstanding the placement of these letters together with the factual and objective annual reports should shareholders want to refer to the objective data (Bhatia, 2008), the overall tone affirms the performance of the company and shies away from any negative depiction.

Bhatia's (2008) research on the organization and lexico-grammatical features of Chairmen's letters is revealing, but the extent to which this knowledge is transferrable to other CPR discourse such as corporate leader messages warrants further investigation. While our study draws on Bhatia's (2008) research, we acknowledge that there may be variations in the move structure in that not all the moves are present in all examples of leader messages and the same applies to the sequence of moves in such messages. As noted by Bhatia (1993), moves are distinct elements of each genre and when they vary significantly, they may indicate a different genre. Therefore, in order to determine why and how leader messages are constructed, our research questions are:

RQ1: Is there a similar move structure observed in corporate leader messages in Global 500 corporations in the China and the US?

RQ2: What differences are observed in the move structure of corporate leader messages in Global 500 corporations in the China and the US?

It is envisaged that the discourse of an effective leader is intertwined with the leader's communication style in helping him/her achieve the communicative goals, and therefore, the communication styles underpinning leaders' discourse are also investigated. Research suggests that effective communication builds and maintains a corporation's culture (e.g. Hofstede, 1997, 2001; Schein, 1992) and that leaders help to shape and strengthen the culture through their actions and bonds with stakeholders (Holmes et al., 2007; Neuhauser et al., 2000). Based on this, analysis of whether leaders in Fortune Global 500 corporations 2016 in the US and China are more harmonious, affective, indirect and succinct through the discourse that they use provides an opportunity to comparatively examine how leaders in different cultural contexts communicate.

Communication styles in Chinese and American cultural contexts

According to Neuliep (2015), communication is contextual and cultural in that the physical and social setting where communication takes place has a determining influence on how messages are transmitted and perceived. Based on previous studies of communication styles and values in various cultural contexts (e.g. Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hsu, 1986; Zhang and Bond, 1998), we were interested in analysing leader messages from global corporations in the

US and China in terms of binding characteristics that facilitate the attainment of their communicative intent.

Cultures are inherently difficult to define but can be identified by the similar values and shared beliefs among certain groups of people (Neuliep, 2015). Keeping with Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), who examined communication styles (affective-instrumental, indirect-direct, elaborate-succinct), we added the harmonious-competitive style, a communication style as observed from previous research (e.g. Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hsu, 1986; Zhang and Bond, 1998) in order to broaden the scope of insight to be gained in relation to the values embedded in leader messages.

The first style of communication involves an emphasis on feelings and empathy with subtle use of language to express emotions known as affective communication and more practical expression that is directed towards outcomes would be a contrasting style known as instrumental (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). The affective style presupposes a sense of being receiver- and process-oriented whereas the instrumental style focuses on results, goals and persuading others to take action, and is more sender-oriented. The affective style is more likely to be found in Chinese corporations since China is a high-context culture (Hall, 1959, 1976). Oyserman et al.'s (2002) notion of collectivism where a group of people bond, are interdependent on each other and have a duty to the group, seems to be more in tune with the Chinese culture. Becker (1986) also highlights that the Chinese tend to be more affective as they avoid arguments during communication and Lustig and Koester (2013) corroborate that in Chinese

communication, the sender and receiver are both actively participating in the process to build relationships. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: Corporations in China are more affective in their communication whereas those in the US are more instrumental.

With regard to the second communication style, considerations of indirect versus direct style are made. The extent to which leaders communicate their intentions by using precise and direct language is what this style is concerned with (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). The indirect style entails expressing ideas using indirect, tentative, broad, ambiguous and vague statements. Leaders' intentions are usually hidden with reading between the lines often seen. This style is typical in high-context cultures (Hall, 1959, 1976) like China. In contrast, leaders using the direct style of communication explicitly and clearly state their intentions, desires, needs and plans. This style tends to be seen in low-context cultures (Hall, 1976) including the US. Thus, we infer the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Corporations in China are more indirect in their communication whereas those in the US are more direct.

The next communication style involves the elaborate versus succinct style of communication (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988). This style is concerned with the quantity of talk that is preferred by people from different cultures. Leaders who

communicate in an elaborate style are more likely to use flashy, exaggerated, wordy and embellished forms (e.g. with additional information about company history and major incidents) whereas those who communicate in a succinct style tend to use concise sentences and understatements. For the Chinese, silence allows social control to be exercised and Yum (1988) highlights that the Chinese look up to those who listen more but talk less, while corporations in the US tend to communicate in a more elaborate style with the use of lengthy verbal expressions. Therefore, we derive the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Corporations in China are more succinct in their communication whereas those in the US are more elaborate.

Another communication style comprises the harmonious/cooperative versus the competitive/personal uniqueness style (Chinese Culture Connection, 1987; Hsu, 1986; Zhang and Bond, 1998). For the former style, conformity to group norms is often seen and words such as 'united', 'partner', 'cooperation' and 'diversity' are a manifestation of this style. For the competitive style, individual/company improvements, achievements and qualities are valued and rewarded. These two styles of communication are at opposite poles of the same continuum and are similar to the cultural dimensions of collectivism versus individualism of Hofstede (1997). Leaders in China tend to be collectivistic (Hofstede, 1997), aiming to strengthen relations with stakeholders by referring to them as a collective entity and focusing on harmony. The last hypothesis thus follows as:

Hypothesis 4: Corporations in China are more harmonious in their communication

whereas those in the US are more competitive.

In summary, there is a dearth of literature on leader messages as a form of CPR discourse and how the language as well as structure of such communication contribute to the promotion of the image of the corporation. This gap can be filled by evaluating whether Bhatia's (2008) seven move structure might be observed in the analysis of other CPR discourse types, namely leader messages, and comparing the cross-cultural nature of this communication in a contemporary context.

Method

We conducted discourse analysis of authentic English leader messages published on the websites of Fortune Global 500 2016 corporations in China and the US. We also investigated the communication styles adopted by leaders in communicating with stakeholders from these regions by analyzing the wording that they used. Our research objective was to identify the structural text organization and communication styles of leader messages in global corporations. A multidimensional framework was adopted with an integrated use of quantitative and qualitative methods with respect to identifying the move structure in messages in which a descriptive counting of the moves was undertaken, while for uncovering the difference in communication styles from messages, a two-tailed t-test was adopted. Since the communication styles could also be gleaned from the messages, this rendered our investigation more qualitative.

Data sampling

The Fortune Global 500 list in 2016 was screened for Chinese and US corporations. In total, there were 103 corporations in China and 134 corporations in the US garnered. Then, corporations which had leader messages on their websites with high visibility and accessibility were catalogued. The leader messages had to be visible mainly from the homepage of the corporation or under the page 'Overview' or 'About our Company.' In addition, the selected leader messages had to be complete messages with full sentences instead of focusing on specific issues or annual reports. Messages focusing on financial reporting and corporate social responsibility issues were excluded to avoid content bias. As a result, we distinguished 70 authentic English leader messages in high-performing, moderate-performing and satisfactory-performing corporations from China and the US. Please refer to Supplementary Table 1 for the list of selected corporations.

Data analysis

Discourse analysis. For RQ1 and RQ2, we examined whether there was a similar move structure (in terms of number of steps and sequence) observed in corporate leader messages and what differences were observed in the move structure in global corporations in China and the US. The selected 70 English leader messages from corporations in China and the US (35 English messages each) were coded for their move

structure on a sentence-by-sentence and paragraph basis as adopted by Bhatia (2008) in his investigation of Hong Kong corporations' Chairmen's letters.

As Bhatia's (2008) move structure was mainly intended for the analysis of Chairmen's letters and given that variations are apparent in move structures for different genres, a few modifications to the description of the lexico-grammatical features in the move structure based on our observations of the samples collected were made to better reflect the characteristics of leader messages. Table 1 illustrates our adopted seven-move structure for structural analysis of leader messages.

Table 1.The adopted seven-move structure

Move	Description	Examples of Lexico-grammatical Features
1	Overview/ Looking back	Our company established… Long history… We have developed… Last year… For the past decades of development
2	Major Themes	Challenging environment Our mission Our values

		Our responsibility
		…has dedicated to …
		…committed ourselves to serve
		We strived to become
3	Achievements (Major Achievements related to the themes/ Evidence/ Action Details)	We have achieved/ enhanced/ improved/ stepped up/ strengthened
		…has ranked
		… has grown…
		successfully completed
4	Expectations and Promises (Promises/ Detailed account of future actions/ Measures/ Plans)	Great opportunities and challenges
		…to push forward
		…will work to become
5	Looking forward (Positive outlook/ Continued challenges/ Prospects)	In the journey towards…
		…step forward… tomorrow
		Moving forward…will continue to grow
		Looking ahead…
6	Expressions of Gratitude (Appreciation to all/ Specific stakeholders)	Thank you for your support
		Sincere thanks to our partners and friends…
7	Positive and confident Closing (Revisiting Move 1/ Summarizing the message)	Work together for a bright future
		We are confident …
		I'm proud of what we accomplished…

Hypotheses testing

To examine the hypotheses proposed, we trained two coders to code the communication styles embedded in leader messages on a sentence-by-sentence basis. Then, we measured the intensity of each communication style by dividing the number of coded sentences of each communication style by the total number of sentences in the message. Please refer to Supplementary Table 2 for coding exemplifications of each communication style.

Since coding communication styles in messages might involve different interpretations and subjectivity, the two coders were trained comprehensively for the coding exercise. They were required to co-code 10% of all the sentences, accounting for approximately 165 sentences for inter-rater checking. The percentage of agreement for the coders ranged between 86.7% and 93.3% with the Cohen's Kappa in the range 0.657-0.833 (please see Supplementary Table 3 for details). Subsequently, a two-tailed t-test was conducted to test whether a significant difference between the communication styles in Chinese and the US corporations was observed.

Findings and discussion

Different move structure employed in leaders' messages

Following Bhatia's (2008) move structure in Chairmen's letters, our research question 1 was to examine the move structure of leader messages to identify whether a similar move structure would be observed in the messages of Global 500 corporations in China and the US. Our findings suggest that Bhatia's move structure comprising seven moves was exhibited in the leader messages of these corporations yet not every message was comprised of these seven moves. Only one message in a Chinese corporation CN27 aligned with the move structure and specific sequence as suggested in Bhatia's study. However, this finding is not surprising given that not all the moves would be exhibited in all leader messages and that the sequence of moves may vary too depending on the function of these moves and the specific genre that one is investigating.

Concerning research question 2, a number of notable differences were observed in the move structure of leader messages in China and the US. In particular, 32 (91%) Chinese messages had missing moves or a difference in the sequence of moves whereas 35 (100%) US messages exhibited this. In relation to the number of missing moves, it was found that most corporations had between two and three moves missing in their messages. Specifically, 24 China corporations (69%) and 20 US corporations (57%) had two to three moves missing in their messages.

Referring to Figure 1, the most obvious moves that were missing were moves 5 and 6. Move 5, which is concerned with looking forward and expressing the challenges ahead, was missing in the messages of 19 (54%) Chinese and 25 (71%) US corporations

respectively. Move 6, which encompassed expressing gratitude to stakeholders, was absent from the messages of 22 (63%) Chinese corporations and 30 (86%) US corporations respectively.
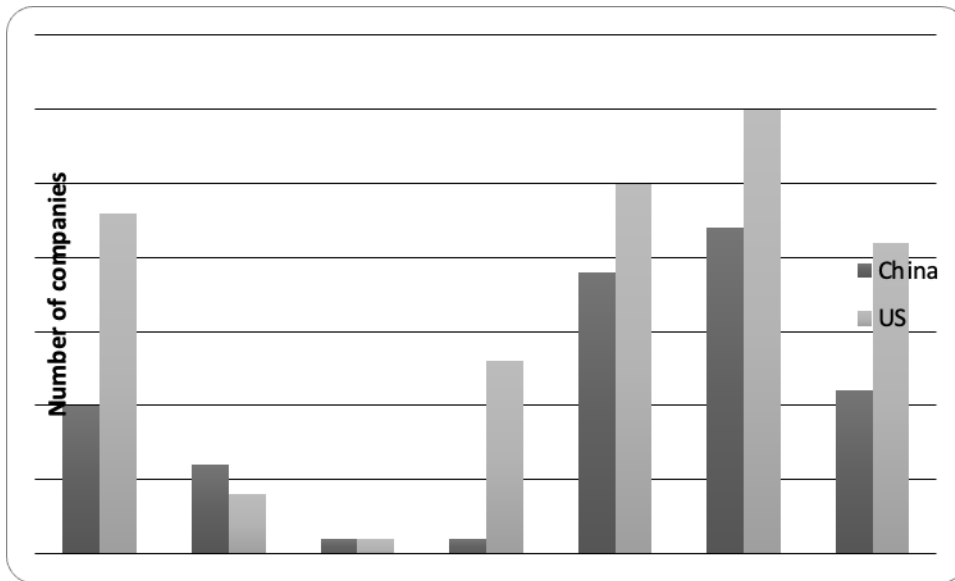

Figure 1. Comparative missing moves in the structure of PRC and US leaders' messages

For example, the CEO message from General Electric (US03), exhibited moves 3-4 which are concerned with achievements and promises/plans respectively, but moves 5-6 were absent. A positive closing (move 7) was observed.

Example text 1

> *Through our startup Current, we launched a new business model to accelerate the adoption of energy saving solutions* [move 3]. *Current brings together GE's LED, Solar, Energy Storage and Electric Vehicle businesses as an integrated offering for customers,*

and leverages GE's Predix platform to collect data and help customers understand how they're using, and losing, energy. This new offering will reduce energy consumption and related emissions, shave 10-20 percent off energy bills and help utilities better manage demand on the grid. [move 4]

Drawing on our long history of integrity, business ethics and sustainability results, GE remains focused on pushing for positive change while delivering value for our investors as we embark on this exciting new phase of our company. [move 7]

In terms of messages with a reverse order of consecutive and non-consecutive moves, it was found that 19 (54%) of Chinese corporations exhibited this while only 6 (17%) of US corporations revealed this trend. This was mainly attributed to the sequence of move 6 which usually appeared after move 3 in the Chinese corporations. For example, the Chairman of Sinomach Group (CN22) mentioned the achievements of the corporation followed by thanking his/her stakeholders and then moving on to express future promises and prospects.

Example text 2

Sinomach Group has evolved into an internationally influential modern enterprise, and witnessed rapid development [move 3], *thanks to our staff's wisdom and hard work.* [move 6] *We are also grateful for the generous support and trust from our partners and customers in China and abroad.* [move 6] *It is our obligation to repay our investors, customers, employees and society with more achievements.* [move 4] *The world will come into a new stage of development defined by technological revolution, industry integration and global competition.* [move 5]

It is worth noting that 6 corporations (17%) in the PRC and 10 (29%) in the US had one additional move in their messages. These corporations usually included additional information about a reading guide, the company history, duties, values and policy compliance such as improving the corporate governance structure and governing the company strictly. For example, the Chairman and CEO of Philips 66 (US07) said:

Example text 3

'*We encourage you to explore our sustainability site to learn more about how we live our values.'*

Meanwhile, the CEO of Citigroup (US06) impressed upon readers the duty of the corporation by asserting:

Example text 4

As the leader of a U.S. based bank with a distinctly global footprint and focus, I spend a fair amount of my time traveling around the world, meeting with clients, customers and colleagues in the more than 100 countries where we open our doors every morning.

As indicated by the findings, the move structure of Bhatia (2008) could be observed in leader messages but the sequence of moves varied and a possible explanation is that

Bhatia was investigating Chairmen's letters while our study was primarily concerned with CPR discourse (i.e. leader messages). It would be reasonable to infer that a different move structure is adopted by specific types of discourse in different genres. Although both Chairmen's letters and leader messages encapsulate what comes under CPR discourse, it seems that the fact that their communicative purpose and intent differ constitutes them as different genres, which have their distinct structures. In other words, for each specific genre, there is a particular move structure observed and extending one move structure to all kinds of CPR discourse seems unwarranted.

Leader messages constitute a genre in itself and following our research, we propose a move structure for messages in most Global US corporations:

- Move 1 Overview of past performance/ looking back ;
- Move 2 Major values/ mission/ vision ;
- Move 3 Major achievements/ performance ;
- Move 4 Future plans, actions and promises ;
- Move 5 Looking ahead/ concluding remarks.

With regard to Chinese corporations, some of them included a note on expression of gratitude to their stakeholders i.e. move 6 in Bhatia's study. In fact, move 6, which was observed in almost 37% of all messages of the Chinese corporations compared to about 14% of messages in US corporations, is consistent with the research done by the Chinese Culture Connection (1987) who found that the Chinese value filial piety (respect for

seniors), loyalty to superiors and harmony with others. To establish solidarity and bond with stakeholders who are viewed as superiors, leaders in these corporations are likely to resort to the strategy of thanking and showing appreciation to their stakeholders. It is interesting to note that what is referred to as in move 6 according to Bhatia (2008) is taking place in leader messages as move 3 in our proposed move structure for PRC corporations below:

- Move 1 Overview/ looking back ;

- Move 2 Major values/ mission/ vision ;

- Move 3 Expression of gratitude to stakeholders ;

- Move 4 Major achievements/ performance ;

- Move 5 Future plans, actions and promises ;

- Move 6 Looking ahead/ concluding remarks .

Move 5, which focused on the positive outlook and challenges ahead, was not present in the above move structure for both the PRC and US corporations. This could be ascribed to the fact that corporations might be unlikely to speculate on uncertain future developments, which may potentially and unnecessarily worry stakeholders as well as project a negative image of the corporation.

In the following section, the hypotheses for communication styles are tested.

Variations in communication styles observed

Hypothesis 1

Since the *p-value* for the US being more affective than the Chinese was 1.13355E-05, while the *p-value* for the Chinese being more instrumental than the US was 0.000169636, both of which were statistically significant, hypothesis 1 was not supported. As seen in Figure 3, on average, 36% of corporate messages in Chinese corporations exhibited the affective style while a staggering 74% of messages in the US were indicative of this style. With regard to the instrumental style, as seen in Figure 2, on average, 50% of messages in Chinese corporations represented this style whereas only 21% of messages in the US demonstrated this style.
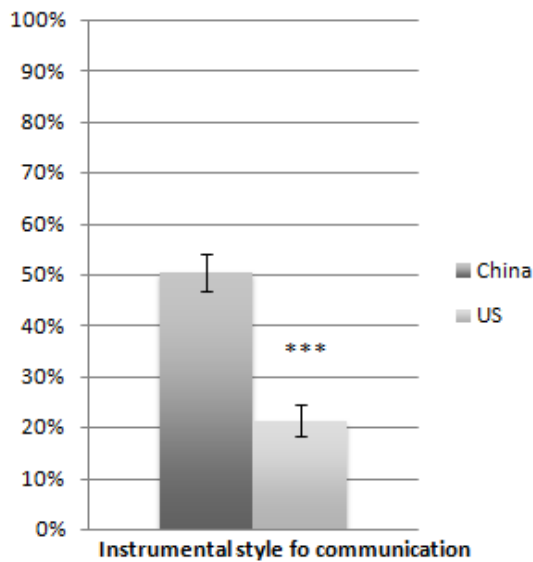

Figure 2. Instrumental style of communication in Chinese and US corporations
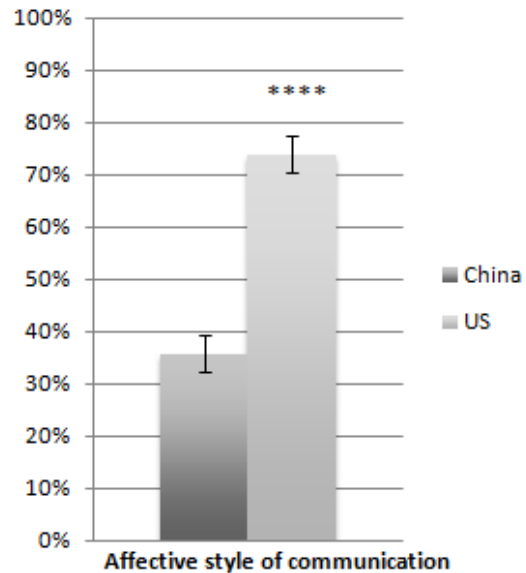
*** = p<0.001

Figure 3. Affective style of communication in Chinese and US corporations

**** = p<0.0001

This finding is inconsistent with the literature of Chinese Culture Connection (1987), Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), Hsu (1986), and Zhang and Bond (1998). It is also inconsistent with Becker's (1986) research which suggests that Chinese communication is more affective, and Yum's (1988) finding that Confucianism has had a great influence on Chinese communication in that the Chinese focus on the process of communication and tend to be receiver-oriented. Corporations in China tend to be more instrumental as they highlight the progress of the corporation and focus on outcomes such as profit. It seems that the corporate context in China is driven more by pragmatic and economic concerns (Osnos, 2014) rather than culture. Krauss and Bradsher (2015) add weight to the notion that China's growing economic power coupled with its ambition and assertive foreign policy has extended its influence on a global scale. The corollary is that economic forces may prevail over other factors such as culture in dictating the communication style of leaders from the Chinese corporations.

However, messages in US corporations tend to be more affective since an overriding theme of inclusion and diversity are salient in them, suggesting that these messages are more catered to recipients and focused on the process of communication rather than outcomes. As highlighted by Salomon and Schork (2003), almost all US corporations have a policy on diversity which goes beyond age, gender and race to encompass education and a number of other factors. Considerable factual data exist on the benefits of diversity and inclusion, which include better financial performance, improved productivity, stronger stakeholder relationships and increased access to talented staff

(Salomon and Schork, 2003), and this may account for why messages from US corporations tend to more affective, accommodative and inclusive.

Hypothesis 2

Our findings show that there were no significant differences found for both the indirect and direct style of communication (*p-value* 0.328 for US corporations being more indirect and 0.598 for Chinese corporations being more direct). This shows that hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Although no major differences were observed between the countries, a marginally higher average percentage of messages in PRC corporations (52%) exhibited the indirect style of communication as opposed to those in the US (42%). Chinese leaders still appear to lean towards the indirect style. As Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) argue, this style is often seen in high-context and collectivistic cultures where ambiguous words are often used to prevent any loss of face should issues arise. Hall (1976) reflects that in these cultures, communicators rely on their physical and socio-relational environment including others' status for information and as such, meaning does not necessarily have to be communicated via words with shorter sentences as communicators are more attuned to the social roles of others.

Hypothesis 3

The *p-value*, which was 3.94537E-07, was significant for the US corporations being more succinct than the Chinese ones, while the p-value which was 3.1206E-05, was also

significant for the Chinese being more elaborate when compared to the US. In view of this, hypothesis 3 was not supported. As shown in Figure 4, on average, 27% of messages in Chinese corporations showed the succinct style while a striking 74% of messages in the US illustrated this style. As shown in Figure 5, on average, 67% of messages in Chinese corporations demonstrated the elaborate style in comparison to only 29% of messages in the US corporations.
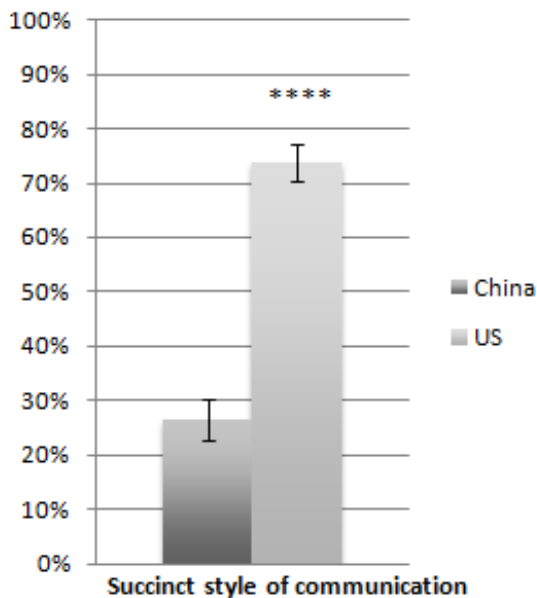

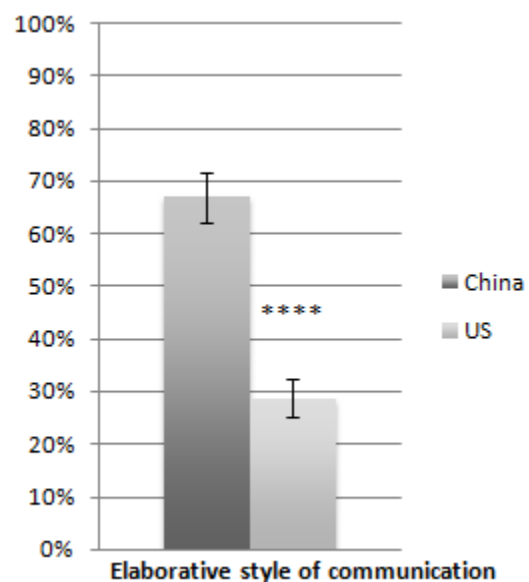**Figure 4. Succinct style of communication in Chinese and US corporations**

**** = p<0.0001

Figure 5. Elaborate style of communication in Chinese and US corporations

**** = p<0.0001

The finding that messages of US leaders were more succinct but, on the other hand, those of Chinese leaders were more elaborate, is contrary to what Yum (1988) found about the

Chinese, who tend not to place much importance on verbal communication but instead focus more on listening to others. In our study, some US leaders' messages just identified the themes or provided an overview of the company but Chinese leaders' messages embedded more information including the goals, history and achievements of the corporation. This might be explained by Wu (2008), who suggests that corporations in China have an intention to enter the global arena, so they tend to engage their stakeholders by being more detailed in their messages. It appears that in the corporate context, cultural influences do not take precedence over other factors like economic and political ones in determining the communication style that corporate leaders adopt. With policies of affirmative action and corporate compliance in the workplace, US corporations might avoid elaborating on issues in messages that might be perceived as inappropriate or exaggerated.

Hypothesis 4

The results were statistically significant for US corporations adopting a more harmonious/cooperative style of communication as the *p-value* was 0.000154802. However, since the *p-value* was 0.208 for Chinese corporations adopting a more competitive style of communication, the result was statistically insignificant. As a result, hypothesis 4 was not supported. As seen in Figure 6, on average, 21% of messages in the PRC exhibited a harmonious style of communication while 52% of messages in the US manifested this communication style.
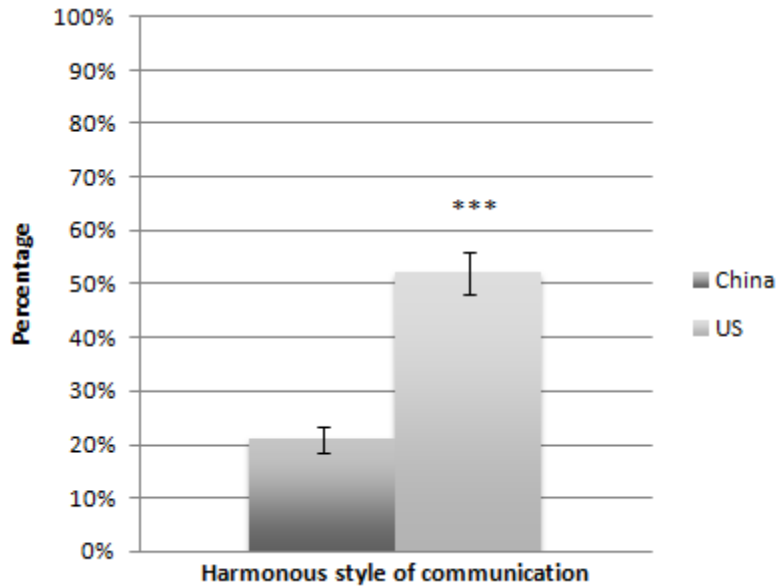
Figure 6. Harmonious style of communication in Chinese and US corporations

*** = $p < 0.001$

The observation that messages in Global 500 US corporations were more harmonious can be attributed to the fact that these corporations usually embrace policies such as inclusion and diversity and these themes were often noted in leaders' messages. In contrast, Chinese leader messages appeared to be more competitive with accomplishments recognized to emphasize the success of corporations. Studies have found that leaders' messages are often used as a strategic communication tool to create identities and influence stakeholders' perception of corporations in China (Ngai and Singh, 2014; Zorn, 2001), and therefore, it is likely that Chinese corporations employ messages as a tool to showcase their achievements. For these corporations, economic factors seem to exert a major influence on their corporate communication given their desire to expand. China has become the world's second largest trading economy and foreign investment has led to its

rapid growth and high productivity (Lin, 2012; Morrison, 2013). It is also a key member of the G20 and B20 Summit. The post-80 generation of Chinese employees is better educated and more ambitious (Gu et al., 2010; Stanat, 2006) and has been instilled with the values of hard work and making a good income, which shapes them into more competitive individuals (Stanat, 2006).

Our results are consistent with Hofstede's (2001) and Osnos' (2014) view that the Chinese have developed an inclination towards more individualistic values on the spectrum of collectivism versus individualism. Given that China adopted the open-door policy in the 1980s and has been transformed into a world power, the need for her to be perceived as more competitive and results-driven is more apparent, and, therefore, these findings are not entirely surprising.

Conclusion, contributions and limitations

Our study has shed light on the emerging field of knowledge relating to CPR discourse with respect to revealing a distinct move structure for leader messages. This finding has extended the boundaries of genre analysis by suggesting that there are different move structures including the sequence of moves for each specific kind of genre. Leaders' messages as a genre (Bhatia, 2010; Koskela, 2013), which express opinions, factual information and emotions, have been used for building relationships with stakeholders (Bhatia, 2010; Kong, 2001), and as a strategic communication tool (Zorn, 2001) since

stakeholders' views of corporations have an impact on corporations' performance. Leaders select various linguistic devices in their messages with the intention to realize their communicative purpose, which is but not limited to, influencing their stakeholders for the benefit of the corporation. Since leaders might have different communicative intents, it is possible that there might be a renegotiation of CPR discourse as not one genre in itself but a more complicated set of actions embodying the genre.

Another contribution of our study lies in the uncovering of noticeable differences between the communication styles exhibited in leader messages by US corporations and Chinese corporations. Messages of US corporate leaders are more indicative of harmonious, affective and succinct styles of communication while those in corporations in the PRC are more competitive, instrumental, and elaborate. These findings highlight that in the CPR context, cultural influences are often downplayed but economic and political factors take precedence over culture in dictating communication style. In light of this, the interpersonal communication styles attributed to people from different cultures in the cross-cultural context might be disputed and not applicable to leader messages in the corporate communication context since leaders focus on issues that they perceive to be important to the corporation, and these issues are intricately intertwined with and determined by complex economic and political concerns.

This study is not discounting the value of cultural differences put forward by researchers (see e.g. Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, 1988; Hall, 1959; Hofstede, 1997; Hsu, 1986;

Zhang and Bond, 1998) since they are applicable in certain contexts but rather, corporate communication, as manifested in leader messages, takes on a more functional aim which may not be congruent with the research on intercultural communication. This has implications for practitioners and researchers with a view to understanding how choices are made by corporate leaders in their use of linguistic features to achieve their communicative purposes and intent.

Since this study was based on a small sample despite the fact that we used 65% and 85% of English leader messages from Fortune Global 500 corporations 2016 in the US and China, caution should be exercised in generalizing its findings to a larger population. However, our study is meaningful as one of only few to closely investigate the differences between leader messages in the US and Chinese corporations in terms of aspects such as their text structure and communication styles. Furthermore, our study employed a multidimensional method incorporating the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in our examination of leader messages. By offering a comparative analysis of leader messages in different cultures, this study suggests ways in which corporate leaders position their corporations in order to influence and engage their stakeholders. This paper contributes to the communication field by linking corporate messages to inter-cultural communication.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the Editor-in-Chief, Prof. van Dijk, and the reviewer for their constructive feedback and invaluable suggestions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and publication of this article.

References

Amernic, J.H. and Craig, R.J. (2006) *CEO-speak: The Language of Corporate Leadership.*

Montreal, Quebec, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Bakhtin, M. (1981) *The Dialogical Imagination* (trans C. Emerson and M. Holquist).

Austin: University of Texas Press.

Becker, C.B. (1986) 'Reasons for the Lack of Argumentation and Debate in the Far East',

International Journal of Intercultural Relations 10: 75-92.

Bhatia, V.K. (1993) *Analysing Genre: Language Use in Professional Settings.* London:

Longman.

Bhatia, V.K. (2004) *Words of Written Discourse: A Genre-based View*. London:

Continuum.

Bhatia, V.K. (2008) 'Towards Critical Genre Analysis', in: V.K. Bhatia, J. Flowerdew and

R. H. Jones (eds) *Advances in Discourse Studies*, pp. 166-177. London & New

York, NY: Routledge.

Bhatia, V.K. (2010) 'Interdiscursivity in Professional Communication', *Discourse & Communication* 4 : 32-50.

Chinese Culture Connection (1987) 'Chinese Values and the Search for Culture-free

Dimensions of Culture', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 18: 143-164.

Fairclough, N. (1989) *Language and Power*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (1992) 'Discourse and Text: Linguistic and Intertextual Analysis within

      Discourse Analysis', *Discourse & Society* 3: 193-217.

Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*.

      London: Longman.

Fortune (2016) *Fortune Global 500*. Available at: beta.fortune.com/global500/list

      (accessed 8 July 2016).

Gu. Q., Wang. L., Sun. J.Y. and Xu, Y. (2010) 'Understanding China's Post-80

      Employees' Work Attitudes: An Explorative Study', *Journal of Chinese Human*

      Resource Management 1: 74-94.

Gudykunst, W.B. and Ting-Toomey, S. (1988) 'Verbal Communication Styles', in:

      W.B. Gudykunst and S. Ting-Toomey (eds) *Culture and Interpersonal*

      Communication, pp.99-115. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hall, E.T. (1959) *The Silent Language*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Hall, E.T. (1976) *Beyond Culture*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.

Hamm, J. (May, 2006) 'The Five Messages Leaders Must Manage', *Harvard Business*

      Review : 1-8. Available at hbr.org/2006/05/the-five-messages-leaders-must-

      manage (accessed 15 July 2016)

Hitt, M.A., Ireland, R.E. and Hoskisson, R.D. (2005) *Strategic Management:*

      Competitiveness and Globalization. US: South-Western Publishing.

Hofstede, G.H. (1997) *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. New York,

      NY:

      McGraw-Hill.

Hofstede, G.H. (2001) *Cultures' Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations across Nations* (2nd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Holmes, J., Schnurr, S. and Marra, M. (2007) 'Leadership and Communication: Discursive

Evidence of a Workplace Culture Change', *Discourse & Communication* 1: 433-451.

Horton, J.L. *(*1995) *Integrating Corporate Communications: The Cost-effective Use of Message and Medium*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Hsu, F.L.K. (1986) *Americans and Chinese: Passage to Differences*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

Kitchen, P.J. and Schultz, D.E. (2001) *Raising the Corporate Umbrella: Corporate Communications in the 21st Century*. New York, NY: Palgrave.

Kohut, G. and Segars, A. (1992) 'The President's Letter to Stockholders: An Examination of Corporate Communication Strategy', *Journal of Business Communication* 29: 7-21.

Kong, K. (2001) 'Marketing of Belief: Intertextual Construction of Network Marketers' Identities', *Discourse & Society* 12: 473-503.

Koskela, M. (2013) 'Same, Same but Different: Intertextual and Interdiscursive Features of

Communication Strategy Texts', *Discourse & Communication* 7: 389-407.

Krauss, C. and Bradsher, K. (July 24, 2015) 'China's Global Ambitions, Cash and Strings

Attached', *The New York Times.* Available at

www.nytimes.com/2015/07/26/business/international/chinas-global-

ambitions-with-loans-and-strings-attached.html?_r=0 (accessed 30 July 2016)

Lin, J.Y. (2012) *Demystifying the Chinese Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press.

Lustig, M.W. and Koester, J. (2013) *Intercultural Competence: Interpersonal*

Communication across Cultures (7th ed). New York, NY: Pearson.

Morrison, W.M. (2013) *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and*

Implications for the United States (CRS Report for Congress). Washington DC,

WA: Congressional Research Service.

Neuhauser, P., Bender, R. and Stromberg, K.L. (2000) *Culture.com. Building Corporate*

Culture in the Connected Workplace. Toronto: Wiley.

Neuliep, J.W. (2015) *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (6th ed).

Thomas Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ngai, C.S.B. and Singh, R.G. (2014) 'Communication with Stakeholders through

Corporate Web Sites: An Exploratory Study on the CEO Messages of Major

Corporations in Greater China', *Journal of Business and Technical*

Communication 28: 1-43.

Ngai, C.S.B. and Singh, R.G. (2015) 'Communication Styles Embedded in the Bilingual

E-Messages of Corporate Leaders in Greater China', in: P. Ng and C.S.B. Ngai

(eds) *The Role of Language and Corporate Communication in Greater China:*

From Academic to Practitioner Perspectives, pp. 91-108. New York, NY:

Springer Verlag.

Olasky, M.N. (1987) *Corporate Public Relations: A New Historical Perspective*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Osnos, E. (2014) *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth and Faith in the New China*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux.

Oyserman, D., Coon, H.M. and Kemmelmeier, M. (2002) 'Rethinking Individualism and Collectivism: Evaluation of Theoretical Assumptions and Meta-analyses', *Psychological Bulletin* 128: 3-72.

Salomon, M.F. and Schork, J.M. (July/August 2003) 'Turn Diversity to your Advantage', *Research Technology Management* 46: 37-44.

Schein, E.H. (1992) *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco, NC: Jossey-Bass.

Segars, A.H. and Kohut, G.F. (2001) 'Strategic Communication through the World Wide Web: An Empirical Model of Effectiveness in the CEO's Letter to Shareholders', *Journal of Management Studies* 38: 535-556.

Stanat, M. (2006) *China's Generation Y: Understanding the Future Leaders of the World's*
Next Superpower. Paramus, NJ: Homa and Sekey.

Svennevig, J. (2012) 'Leadership Style in Managers' Feedback in Meetings', in: J. Angouri
and M. Marra (eds) *Constructing Identities at Work*, pp. 17-39. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wu, D, (2008) 'Glocalization and the Discourses of Cultural China: An Introduction', in: D. Wu (ed) *Discourses of Cultural China in the Globalizing Age*, pp. 1-10. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

Yum, J.O. (1988) 'The Impact of Confucianism on Interpersonal Relationships and Communication Patterns in East Asia'*, Communication Monographs* 55: 374-388.

Zhang, J. and Bond, M.H. (1998) 'Personality and Filial Piety among College Students in Two Chinese societies: The Added Value of Indigenous Constructs', *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 29: 402-417.

Zorn, T. (2001) 'Talking Heads: The CEOs as Spokesperson', in: P.J. Kitchen and D.E. Schultz (eds) *Raising the Corporate Umbrella: Corporate Communication in the 21st Century*, pp. 23-42. New York, NY: Palgrave.

Appendix

Supplementary Table 1. List of selected corporations

Subject Code	Ranking	PRC Corporations	Subject Code	Ranking	US Corporations
CN01	2	State Grid	US01	6	Exxon Mobil
CN02	54	China Life Insurance	US02	9	Apple
CN03	57	China Railway Engineering	US03	26	General Electric
CN04	81	Dongfeng Motor Group	US04	50	Cardinal Health
CN05	99	Pacific Construction Group	US05	64	Bank of America Corp.
CN06	102	China South Industries Group	US06	70	Citigroup
CN07	110	China Communications Construction	US07	74	Phillips 66
CN08	129	Huawei Investment & Holding	US08	120	Marathon Petroleum

CN09	139	Sinochem Group	US09	127	PepsiCo
CN10	143	Aviation Industry Corp. of China	US10	142	Aetna
CN11	156	CITIC Group	US11	148	Lowe's
CN12	160	Beijing Automotive Group	US12	152	Prudential Financial
CN13	189	China Merchants Bank	US13	158	Intel
CN14	190	Amer International Group	US14	162	Humana
CN15	200	PowerChina	US15	194	Caterpillar
CN16	207	China United Network Communications	US16	197	Lockheed Martin
CN17	217	China Huaneng Group	US17	198	New York Life Insurance
CN18	234	ChemChina	US18	235	Tyson Foods
CN19	266	CRRC	US19	236	American Airlines Group
CN20	275	Baosteel Group	US20	239	Delta Air Lines
CN21	290	China Metallurgical Group	US21	258	Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance
CN22	293	Sinomach	US22	260	Oracle
CN23	303	Guangzhou Automobile Industry Group	US23	263	Morgan Stanley
CN24	309	China Energy Engineering Group	US24	283	Allstate

CN25	311	Greenland Holding Group	US25	287	Schlumberger
CN26	314	Jiangsu Shagang Group	US26	291	TIAA
CN27	323	China Minmetals	US27	338	TJX
CN28	327	China National Building Materials Group	US28	340	Rita Aid
CN29	329	China Electronics	US29	348	3M
CN30	383	China General Technology	US30	375	Tesoro
CN31	386	China Nonferrous Metal Mining (Group)	US31	377	Northwesten Mutual
CN32	402	China Poly Group	US32	409	Tech Data
CN33	426	Shandong Energy Group	US33	436	EMC
CN34	495	WH Group	US34	469	AbbVie
CN35	496	Evergrande Real Estate Group	US35	479	International Paper

Supplementary Table 2. Exemplification on various communication styles examined

Communication styles	Examples extracted from the leader message database
Affective	'…better by listening to our customers and clients, and connecting them to …' 'We value the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of others and are committed to collaborating with our stakeholders to create …' 'Our goal is to help give children and youth a better chance to realize their potential…'
Instrumental	'The Foundation has awarded over … million in grants since its inception.' '… has also constructed more than 14,000 kilometers long highways, including over 8,000 kilometers long expressways.'
Indirect	'…Corporation, the birthplace of China national industry and the cradle of the defense industry, boasts a long history and a profound culture.' 'Nowadays, the third industrial revolution is being conceived with the breakthroughs from new energy technology, smart technology, information technology and the Internet technology, bringing an unprecedented historical opportunity to China's sustainable

	development of energy and electric power.' '…is a catalyst for the 3rd Industrial Revolution.'
Direct	'I encourage you to learn more by reviewing our Annual Report to Shareholders and Global Corporate Social Responsibility Report.' 'We invite you to explore this website and learn more about what we do.' 'Future energy reforms will focus on cleaner and more economical electricity generation, safer and more efficient resource allocation, and more convenient and reliable power consumption.'
Succinct	'Thank you for your interest in...' 'One is our recruiting and selecting process, how we get talent here. The second is really training… and then third how…' 'Approximately half of the members of our Board of Directors are either … or people…'
Elaborate	'In recent years, Chinese companies have carried out fruitful work and made a series of major breakthroughs in theoretical research, technical innovation, equipment development, standard formulation, engineering construction, and test capacity building, leading the edge in the world.' 'Since China's reform and opening up and especially in the past decade…'

	'In the rare freezing snowstorm in southern China in early 2008 and the "May 12" big earthquake in Wenchuan County of Sichuan Province, … staff responded in concerted efforts and with a high sense of responsibility to provide agile and robust communications support and a vast array of disaster relief services.'
Harmonious/ Cooperative	'When we work together, sharing and challenging one another's ideas…' 'Cooperation is also a key success factor, finding the right partners in the right markets, sharing knowledge …' 'We look forward to continuing on this journey and to fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion at our company.' 'We would like to express sincere thanks to our business partners and friends from all walks of life for your concern and support.'
Competitive/ Personal uniqueness	'We measure our success not only by the bottom line, but by how well we perform as...' 'The successes of Britain and the U.S. during the first and second industrial revolution tell us that whoever takes the initiative establishes a competitive advantage and can finally win.' 'We are committed to being part of the solutions.' 'With the development of…has experienced an extraordinary history and created a host of branded projects, enjoying global influence,

	showcasing the splendor of its iconic brands like…in over 120 counties and regions in the world.'

Supplementary Table 3. **Inter-rater checking results on various communication styles**

H	Communication Styles	% of Agreement	Cohen's Kappa	Krippendorff's Alpha	N
1	Affective	92.1%	0.791	0.791	165
	Instrumental	89.1%	0.773	0.773	165
2	Indirect	93.3%	0.833	0.834	165
	Direct	86.7%	0.72	0.72	165
3	Succinct	91.5%	0.829	0.83	165
	Elaborate	89.7%	0.794	0.795	165
4	Harmonious/ Cooperative	87.3%	0.657	0.657	165
	Competitive/ Personal uniqueness	93.3%	0.784	0.785	165