

## LEARN TO DIG DEEPER WITH LINGUISTICS

*Getting to grips with linguistics – the scientific study of language – can shed light on what makes for successful corporate communications*

by Judy Delin



**U**nderstanding something of the way language works can make a valuable contribution to communicating effectively with all kinds of audiences. And the science of linguistics offers many potential insights into how, and why, certain uses of language are likely to be more effective than others. It will be obvious to the casual observer that, as well as many different languages, there are many different varieties of language. These can differ at every level – including in pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. The reason for all this variety is that we use language, and languages, as a signalling system to indicate two basic things: status and solidarity. We can either move our speech patterns towards the norms of the group we want to belong to for status or solidarity reasons, or, conversely, diverge away. In this way, our speech patterns indicate to others something of our identity and something of who we want to be. As communicators, we can similarly use language to indicate group and personal identity on behalf of our organisations as a means of constructing relationships with audiences, and as a way of encoding personal qualities and characteristics.

### HOW LANGUAGE CONSTRUCTS SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Here is an example from the CEO's welcoming statement at the front of a 2001 Annual Report. The company is a European insurer, and the context is immediately post-9/11.

*In the year under review, we have come a long way [...]. But we still have a lot to do. That is why the year 2002 will, more than anything else, be a year of consolidation. In this context, we will concentrate on three major projects. First of all, we will energetically pursue our efforts to integrate X Bank and take appropriate profit-driven measures to restructure its operations. Secondly, we will continue to enhance the operational efficiency of our property and casualty insurance activities, especially in the area of industrial insurance, and the same applies to our asset management business. We are making a concerted effort to accelerate growth in these segments. Thirdly, we intend to leverage our solid, broad-based platform in the areas of private retirement insurance and corporate pension plans to further strengthen our position of leadership in this growth market throughout Europe in general and in Germany in particular. Ladies and gentlemen, a difficult*

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## FACTS & FIGURES

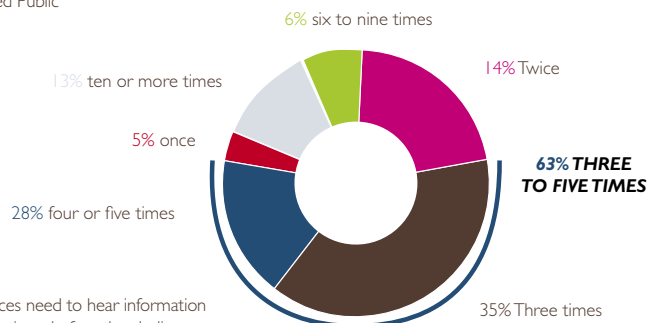
Blame for the financial and political chaos of 2011 landed at the doorstep of government, as trust in that institution fell a record nine points to 43 percent globally, according to the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer. In 17 of the 25 countries surveyed, government is now trusted by less than half to do what is right. In 12, it trails business, media, and non-governmental organizations as the least trusted institution. France, Spain, Brazil, China, Russia, and Japan, as well as six other countries, saw government trust drop by more than 10 points. Government officials are now the least credible spokespeople, with only 29 per cent considering them credible. Nearly half of the general population say they do not trust government leaders to tell the truth. Although business experienced fewer and generally less severe declines in trust, it has its own hurdles to clear. Trust in business fell globally from 56 per cent to 53 per cent, with countries like France and Germany, in the heart of the Eurozone economic crisis, experiencing double-digit de-

creases. Lack of confidence in business spread to South Korea, where trust dropped 15 points. China was the only country to see a significant increase in trust in business, rising from 61 to 71 per cent. CEO credibility declined 12 points to 38 per cent, its biggest drop in nine years. In South Korea and Japan, it dropped by 34 and 43 points, respectively. In the midst of this systemic decline in trust, a "person like me" has re-emerged as one of the three most credible spokespeople, with the biggest increase in credibility since 2004, and now trails only academics and technical experts. Regular employees jumped from least credible spokesperson to tied for fourth on the list, with a 16-point record rise. Social-networking, micro-blogging, and content-sharing sites witnessed the most dramatic percentage increase as trusted sources of information about a company, rising by 88, 86, and 75 percent, respectively. *Taken from Edelman Trust Barometer Global Press Release*

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### Skepticism requires repetition

Informed Public



Audiences need to hear information multiple times before they believe its accuracy.

### Diversification of media

	General Public Percent	Informed Public % Change 2011-2012
Traditional	30%	+10%
Online Multiple Sources	26%	+18%
Corporate	17%	+23%
Social Media	14%	+75%

While traditional media sources are still the most trusted, social media saw the biggest percentage increase (75 per cent) in trust among media sources

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### Speakers



Dr. Kerstin Liehr-Gobbers, Reputation Inc.



Sean MacNiven, SAP Germany



Dr. Jan Dietrich Müller, Deutsche Post DHL



Richard Stacy, MD Stacy Consulting



Markus Beeko, Amnesty International Germany



Prof. Rosa Chun, IMD Lausanne



Robert Höglund, Médecins sans Frontières, Sweden



Rita Dantas, Quadriga University of Applied Sciences



Dr. Christopher Storck, Hering Schuppener



Philip Thomson, GSK



Inge Wallage, Greenpeace International



Ed Williams, Edelman UK

## PERSONNEL



Thorsten Strauss  
(Global Head, Communications & CSR)  
Institution: Deutsche Bank  
Start: June 1, 2012



### DE: Strauss to succeed Baron at Deutsche Bank

THORSTEN STRAUSS, Bertelsmann AG's former head of corporate communications, has been appointed Deutsche Bank's new global head of communications and corporate social responsibility, effective June 1, 2012. He is succeeding Stefan Baron who is retiring on May 31, 2012, as planned. Strauss will join Deutsche Bank on March 1, 2012, in order to prepare for his future role.



Adeline Challon-Kemoun  
(SVP Corporate Communications)  
Institution: Air France  
Start: March 5, 2012



### FR: Challon-Kemoun appointed SVP Corporate Comms

ADELINE CHALLON-KEMOUN has been appointed senior vice-president corporate communications at Air France, as well as member of the executive committee. She replaces François Brousse, who will shortly be taking up a new position within the Air France-KLM Group. Challon-Kemoun's most recent role was as senior vice-president external communications and brand marketing at France Télévisions.



Gunnar Bender  
(Director of Policy)  
Institution: Facebook



### DE: Gunnar Bender logs in to Facebook

In mid-April, GUNNAR BENDER will take up the newly created position of director of policy at Facebook, and will therefore be responsible for the political communication of the company in Germany. His previous position – director of corporate affairs and communications at mobile telephone operator the E-Plus Group – will be filled by Mike Cosse.

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## EVENTS



### 08- 09.03.2012 *The Corporate Communications Experience 2*

The largest public relations and communications event in Central and Eastern Europe, this year's event features speakers from Microsoft International France (Wendy Gold, Consumer PR Director, pictured left), Philips, Pfizer, and more.

► The PWorld, Belgrade

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### 08- 09.03.2012 *Strategically Planning & Managing Corporate Communications and PR*

PR and corporate communications managers, in-house PR and marcoms executives and all those taking responsibility for setting up and managing integrated corporate communications are invited to attend this special course.

► Marcus Evans, London

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### 22 - 23.03.2012 *The Ritual of Public Apology*

Apologies are important to mend damaged interpersonal relations. The ritual of apology has also become important in intergroup relations. This programme will investigate how the concept of apology is applied in the fields of communication and media, law and diplomacy, business and public relations.

► UCSIA, the University of Antwerp

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### 27.03.2012 *Digital Communications For The Healthcare & Pharmaceutical Industry*

This seminar will explore the implications of social media for healthcare communications. It will provide case studies from companies who are making the most of the digital channels.

► PR Week, CBI Conference Centre, London

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