The Discursive Representation of Social Actors in the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Integrated Annual (IA) Reports of Two South African Mining Companies

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Abstract

Growing awareness of the negative environmental and social impact of corporate activities has prompted large South African mining companies to publish reports that communicate their awareness of such issues. This study draws on Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic framework to analyse the ways in which two South African companies construct social actors in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) and Integrated Annual (IA) reports. The analysis reveals that the companies draw on a fixed set of linguistic devices and strategies when representing higher- and lower-wage employees respectively. With these findings in mind, the study argues that these linguistic representations have an important role in maintaining relationships of power, dominance and social inequality in the South African mining industry.

Key words: *CDA, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), corporate discourse, mining industry, South Africa.*

1. Background and Rationale

In recent years corporations have begun to focus on sustainable development and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and to relate their commitment to environmental and social issues through CSR reports and, even more recently, Integrated Annual (IA) reports. CSR reports are textual representations and corporate communication of CSR concerns which are often also referred to as 'sustainable development reports'. In this study, the term 'CSR report' is used to refer to standalone corporate reports that articulate the company's approach to the three-pillar model of sustainable development - which includes initiatives aimed at increasing the economic standing of the institution, initiatives directed towards addressing the needs of stakeholders or social development, and initiatives which aim to reduce the likely unwanted environmental impact of the company. The term 'IA report' is used to refer to an integrated report produced by the company to provide an overview of both their sustainability and CSR initiatives as well as their yearly financial performance.

CSR is often contrasted to shareholder theories of the firm and business models designed solely to maximise profit. However, CSR has been criticised by scholars working within sociology, organisational theory and critical management studies (see Banerjee 2003; Palazzo and Richter 2005; Lin 2010 and Amazeen 2011). These scholars have argued that CSR and other weak models of sustainability[1] do little to alter social and environmental issues frequently identified as being caused by a neoliberal economic system[2]. This means that there is no significant change in terms of halting resource depletion or social inequality. Rather, weak models of sustainability permit the continued domination of economic and corporate elites and assign even greater power to the market and corporate actors to control economic, social and political processes.

In light of the above, CSR has been viewed by researchers in critical applied linguistics as a way for companies to legitimate their own existence (see Livesey 2001, 2002; Parsons 2008; Alexander 2009; Caimotto and Molino 2011; Fuoli 2012; Mason and Mason 2012; Breeze 2012, 2013; and Bernard 2015, 2016). Scholars such as Livesey (2001), Fuoli (2012) and Bernard (2015) have all noted that, particularly when facing negative media publicity, companies typically use CSR and IA reports to promote themselves and to justify their role in activities that are otherwise considered environmentally or socially damaging.

However, the studies mentioned above have all focused on companies operating in developed economies such as Europe and the United States, as well as the reports of multinational corporations (MNCs) such as Shell, BP and IKEA. In comparison, there has been little attention from scholars on the reports from the Global South or emerging market economies. This is a significant shortfall in the applied linguistic literature on CSR practices, particularly because companies in the Global South are frequently operating in circumstances that are remarkably different from companies in developed economies. Companies located in Sub-Saharan Africa are, for example, not only competing to attract foreign investment, but are operating in the context of enormous social and environmental challenges, often as a result of political conflict (see Dawkins and Ngunjiri 2008). Because of this, the claims of companies located in these countries 'warrant additional scrutiny' (Dawkins and Ngunjiri 2008: 287).

In addition to the problems highlighted above, South African mining companies have, since the time of apartheid, played an enormous role in environmental degradation as well as social segregation and inequality. Many of the problems in the mining industry have been identified by scholars such as Semilane and Modisha (2008), as well as Bond (2013), as problems typically associated with a capitalist mode of production. These problems include: (a) the employment of foreign migrant workers as casual workers and the establishment of a formalised migrancy system stemming from the need for cheap labour (Simelane and Modisha 2008), (b) enormous wage disparities, (c) the rise of debt among mine workers as a result of being targets of loan sharks (Bond 2013), and (d) widespread strikes which have not only disrupted the mining industry and South African economy, but have also caused civil unrest, injury and death[3]. In this context, the publication of CSR

reports by the mining companies may highlight bigger and more general issues with CSR and CSR reporting in South Africa.

2. *Research Aims and Questions*

Given the apparent challenges and disparities in the South African mining industry it is important to investigate how the mining companies represent themselves and their employees in their reports. Such an analysis will illuminate discursive representations that contribute to or reinforce existing power dynamics in the mining industry. It is suggested that these representations work to sustain social inequalities in the mining sector which, given its size, has a significant effect on South African society as a whole. With this in mind, the research aims to answer the following question: how do South African mining companies represent and construct social actors in their CSR and IA reports?

3. *Methodological Approach*

This study takes primarily a CDA approach to analysing the CSR and IA reports. In this study, the CSR and IA reports are conceptualised as texts which have representational qualities and which work to sustain a particular ideological view. CDA considers texts and discourses to be embedded in society and social practices in complex ways. Particular discourses are formed in ways which are appropriate to the interests of social actors in given social contexts (Machin and van Leeuwen 2007: 60). The more powerful social actors regulate how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others. Thus, discourses are also conceptualised in CDA as a form of social action. This means that a discourse of one kind, particularly when perpetuated by powerful social institutions, can limit and restrict other ways of talking and producing knowledge about the topic (Mayr 2008: 8).

For scholars such as Fairclough (2003: 126) texts and discourses represent the world; they represent processes, relations and structures in the material world; they represent the mental world of thoughts and ideas, and they represent the social world. Discourses differ in their 'scale', in how much of the world they include and exclude. Furthermore, discourse figures in social practices in three ways: as part of the social activity, as ways of representing, and in ways of being, in constituting identities (Fairclough 1989: 17; Chiapello and Fairclough 2002: 192-193). This notion of 'discourse' will be drawn on when analysing the data in section 4.

3.1. The Selection of Companies and Texts

Companies and texts were purposively selected according to specific criteria which included the industry in which they operate (mining) as well as their standing as public and not private companies – they had to have a primary listing on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). This essentially means that the companies are public and not private companies. Public companies are listed on the stock exchange and are categorised as 'profit' companies. Selecting public, profit-driven companies not only means that the CSR and IA reports are likely to be read by a greater amount of people, including the

company's shareholders, but also that there is a basic understanding about the role of the company as a profit-maximizing organization. Of the many public mining companies in South Africa, two of the largest were selected for this study: Impala Platinum Limited (hereafter referred to as Implats) and Gold Fields Limited.

Implats is one of the largest producers of platinum and associated base metals, and contributes to approximately 25% of the global platinum output (Implats 2011 IA: 1). The company operates in South Africa as well as in Zimbabwe under the name of Zimplats. In 2013, Implat's revenue was just over thirty million Rand[4], while the company's gross profit was just over five million Rand (Implats 2013 IA: 11). In 2013, Implats employed 46 671 people, including contractors (Implats 2013 IA: 18).

Gold Fields is one of the largest gold mining companies in South Africa, producing just over two million ounces of gold in 2013 (Gold Fields IA 2013: 1). In 2013 the company achieved revenue of nearly twenty-eight million Rand, but did not make any profit. The company is in debt to the total of R17, 941 million Rand (Gold Fields IA 2013: 2). In 2013, Gold Fields employed 10 167 people.

Since 'CSR' is a relatively new concept, and taking into account that the context and approach to CSR has shifted and is shifting all the time, the most recent reports published by the companies were considered to be the most informative and most worthy objects of investigation for this study. Thus, the selection of the reports was limited to a three year period starting in 2011 and ending in 2013. The sample of three years was chosen in order to get a larger set of data, but also to investigate possible changes in representations of company CSR practices over a three-year period.

During the years 2011, 2012 and 2013, the two selected South African companies published their CSR and sustainability information in the form of IA reports. In addition to this, Implats published stand-alone CSR reports in 2011, 2012 and 2013. Since CSR information is reported in both report types (CSR and IA reports), both report types were selected and analysed. In total, nine reports were examined.

Portable Document Folder (PDF) versions of the documents are easily available on each company's website. The PDF versions of the document permitted easy reading and searching; they can be converted to text format (.txt) using freeware software such as AntFileConverter[5]. The .txt documents were later analysed using corpus linguistic techniques and the freeware software AntConc version 3.2.4[6]. Corpus linguistics is generally conceptualised as the use of computer software to analyse 'a large collections of electronically stored, naturally occurring texts' (Baker et al. 2008: 274).

IA reports are typically longer than CSR reports since they incorporate more detailed financial information, including financial statements. The following table indicates the size of each report, including the number of pages, words and tokens.

Company	Total pages	Total words	Total tokens
Gold Fields 2011 IA	172	6694	73051
Gold Fields 2012 IA	212	6852	82113
Gold Fields 2013 IA	166	6588	70037
Implats 2011 IA	220	5687	64638
Implats 2012 IA	154	5485	48365
Implats 2013 IA	168	5375	51150
Implats 2011 CSR	120	5273	39993
Implats 2012 CSR	106	4867	39595
Implats 2013 CSR	96	4528	34415

Figure 1: Size of selected reports according to the number of pages, words and tokens

3.2. Van Leeuwen's Socio-Semantic Categories for Analysing Social Actors

This study views CSR and IA reports as texts which draw on corporate discourses of various kinds. Drawing on the understanding of discourse highlighted above, the purpose of this study is to understand how social actors, as one element of the social practice of CSR, are represented in CSR and IA reports. It is argued that such representations not only reveal corporate ideologies, but that they have the power to construct and/or maintain unequal power relations and widespread social inequality.

Van Leeuwen (2008: 32) reiterates that active and passive tense, as well as transitivity structures, have an important function in the representation of social actors. However, social actors and agency are not only realised through grammatical roles, but through other complex processes of exclusion and inclusion. Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework is useful in articulating the role of social actors in the text by drawing socio-semantic categories rather than grammatical categories. In this framework social actors can be excluded for ideological reasons, or realised for ideological reasons through the following mechanisms: *genericisation* and *specification*, *assimilation*, *association* and *dissociation*, *intertermination* and *differentiation*, *nomination* and *categorisation*, *functionalization* and *identification* as well as *over-determination*.

From a grammatical perspective, social actors are generally the participants in clauses, but not all participants are social actors as they may also be physical objects. On a grammatical level, the 'agent' is the doer of an action, a conscious entity that acts with purpose and performs an action which has a visible effect. The agent of the clause is realised as the subject of the verb in an active clause, while the 'patient' is the recipient of the action. In terms of *exclusion*, Van Leeuwen (2008: 28) asserts that some texts exclude reference to social actors altogether. In some cases, the exclusion in the text does leave a trace and readers are left asking questions about actors and events, or can deduce information, or links between information, by a process of inference.

This 'less radical' type of *exclusion* is termed *backgrounding* by Van Leeuwen (2008: 29). Due to the fact that text producers often exclude social actors in ways that suit their interests and purposes, Van Leeuwen (2008: 29) claims that *exclusion* is an important aspect that CDA research should attend to.

Van Leeuwen (2008: 22) identifies the choice between *generic* and *specific* representation as an important factor in the representation of social actors. In this category, Van Leeuwen directs attention to the differences when social actors are represented as part of a class of people (*genericised*), or represented as identifiable individuals (*specified*). To exemplify, Van Leeuwen (2008: 23) illustrates how print media directed at middle class readers represents experts specifically, while 'ordinary people' are represented generically.

Social actors can also be referred to as individuals through a process of *individualisation*, or as groups, in a process termed *assimilation* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 24). There are two types of *assimilation*: *aggregation* and *collectivisation*. *Aggregation* quantifies groups of people through the use of statistics, while *collectivisation* does not.

Social actors can also be represented as groups through *association* and *dissociation* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 39). *Association* refers to groups formed by social actors, which are never labelled in the text, although the actors or groups who make up the association may be referred to. *Dissociation* refers to unformed association, which means that a text at first associates two actors, and then dissociates them.

Indetermination occurs when social actors are unspecified or anonymous (for example, through the use of 'someone'), while *determination* is when their identity is specified. On the other hand, social actors may be *nominated*, or represented in terms of their unique identity, or in terms of the identities or functions they share with others (Van Leeuwen 2008: 42). Categorization here provides two subcategories: *functionalisation* and *identification*. The former refers to representations which characterize social actors in terms of what they do, while *identification* refers to social actors not in terms of what they do but in terms of what they, more or less permanently, are. There are three categories of *identification*: *classification*, where social actors are referred to in terms of major classification systems defined by a society which many include race, gender, religion etc.; *relational identification*, which represents social actors in terms of their personal, kinship or work relations to each other (i.e. 'colleague' or 'friend'); and *personal identification*, which usually occurs in stories and entails the identification of social actors through a personal attribute such as 'blonde' which often has cultural connotations (Van Leeuwen 2008: 43).

Social actors can also be *personalised* or *impersonalised*. Representational choices which *personalise* social actors represent them as human beings through personal pronouns, proper names, nouns or any other choice which has the semantic feature of 'human' (Van Leeuwen 2008: 46). *Impersonalisation* is a textual action by means of which human social actors are represented with words which do not have the semantic feature of 'human'. Such *impersonalisation* often uses abstract or concrete nouns which typically are used for non-human subjects. There are two categories of

impersonalisation: *abstraction* and *objectification*. The former occurs when social actors are represented in terms of a quality that is assigned to them in the representation (e.g. describing immigrants as 'problems'). Conversely, *objectification* occurs when social actors are represented by means of reference to a place or thing closely associated with the person with whom – or the activity in which – they are engaging (Van Leeuwen 2008: 47). Four categories of *objectification* have been identified: *spatialization*, in which social actors are represented by means of a place with which they are closely associated (i.e. 'South African'); *utterance autonomization*, in which social actors are represented in terms of their utterances; *instrumentalization*, in which social actors are represented in terms of the instruments they use to carry out an action, and *somatization*, where social actors are represented in terms of reference to a body part (Van Leeuwen 2008: 4).

Finally, Van Leeuwen (2008) identifies *overdetermination* as a process in which social actors are represented as participants in more than once social practice, at the same time. The different categories of *overdetermination* refer to processes distinguished as *inversion*, *symbolization*, *connotation*, and *distillation* which will not be detailed here as they were not significantly applicable to this study.

4. Analysis

Throughout the reports, the companies frequently draw on the metaphor COMPANIES ARE HUMAN BODIES[7]. In the following examples, Gold Fields and Implats construct themselves as being focused and lean, as being composed of DNA, and as being 'attuned and sensitive':

1) In 2013, Gold Fields emerged as a more focused, leaner business – having undergone one of its most significant transformations since its foundation 127 years ago (Gold Fields IA 2013: 66).
2) The evolution of our 'DNA' is reflected in our new stakeholder charters. These establish a clear set of commitments to our employees, investors, host governments and communities – as well as clear benchmarks for our own performance (Gold Fields IA 2013: 7).
3) As a large mining company we need to be particularly attuned and sensitive (Implats CSR 2012: 33).

In contrast to the metaphor COMPANIES ARE HUMAN BODIES, the companies also draw on the metaphor HUMANS ARE CAPITAL. In economic contexts, 'human capital' refers to the stock of competencies needed to perform labour for economic profit. However, it is also a metaphor which describes humans in terms of economic entities which are evaluated according to certain criteria, and in a very crude sense, 'sold on the market'. This has caused many scholars to criticise the concept, including Bourdieu (1987: 49), who stated that 'despite its humanistic connotations, [human capital] does not move beyond economism'. Further, Hyslop-Margison and Sears (2006: 81), who were writing about educational policy, state 'the human capital discourse establishes artificial parameters on the boundaries of social reality by circumscribing transformative possibilities within the bounds of neo-liberal ideology'. 'Human capital' is also a good example of what Fairclough (2003)

terms 'marketization', which refers to the transformation of social spheres into aspects of the financial market.

Both Gold Fields and Implats frequently refer to employees as entities or resources which are needed to generate profit. Employees are described as entities which enable the execution of a business strategy:

> 4) An integral part of the Group strategy to ensure long-term business sustainability involves a productive workforce (Implats CSR 2011: 36).

A similar statement can be found in the 2011 Implats report, only here the company refers to 'our goals' rather than 'business strategy' or 'strategic plan':

> 5) Our leadership team is responsible for ensuring we have the best people, functioning at optimum capacity, in the most effective relationships, because anything less would inhibit our ability to achieve our goals (Implats CSR 2011: 57).

Düzenli (2006: 9-30) offered insight into the ways in which neoliberal discourse not only constructs labour as human capital, but also constructs labour as necessary to leading a fulfilling life, and as a human right. Managers often consciously or unconsciously construct a particular type of organisational experience for consumption by employees (Alvesson and Willmott 2001: 13). In most cases the CSR and IA reports construct 'work' in positive ways, as necessary and as a human right. Such constructions may work to legitimise corporate practices that are in some way unethical in terms of employee relations. To illustrate, in their 2012 CSR report, Implats constructs employee safety as a pre-requisite for the creation of 'value for shareholders and society' rather than an inalienable human right:

> 6) If we are to create sustainable value for shareholders and society we need our people to be healthy, safe, motivated and equipped with the requisite skills (Implats CSR 2012: 29).

In the following example from the 2012 Implats CSR report, employee health and safety is constructed as necessary for the 'productivity and efficiency' of the company, rather than a desirable attribute of individual employees:

> 7) Ensuring a safe and healthy workforce has obvious implications for productivity and efficiency (Implats CSR 2012: 39).

The discursive construction of health and safety as being a prerequisite for profit maximisation is common in the reports. Note, for example, the extract (8) from the 2013 Implats CSR report:

> 8) Promoting the health and well-being of our employees, and contributing to the broader health of their family members and communities, is critical to our ability to create value (Implats CSR 2013: 22).

In their 2011 CSR report, Implats also uses the term 'surveillance' in relation to employee health and safety issues. The metaphor invokes images of Bentham's panopticon, where the company takes the role of the central watcher, surveying the inmates of a prison:

9) Annual occupational health surveillance of employees and contractors ensures that they are fit for work in their specific environments and occupations, and that occupational ill-health is detected early and receives immediate attention (Implats CSR 2011: 53).

10) Underpinning our processes and procedures is a comprehensive system of occupational healthcare surveillance aimed not only at the early detection and treatment of occupational disease, but also at preventing such disease in the first place (Implats CSR 2011: 49).

The way in which health and safety issues are addressed in the reports constructs an image of employees as entities and objects, rather than as individuals with distinct needs and desires. This is reiterated when companies address fatalities in the workplace. In terms of Van Leeuwen's (2008) categories, individuals are not only *assimilated* into the group of 'fatalities', they are *aggregated* and represented as statistics. In some cases, the deceased employees are named, but only prior to indicating the statistical, FIFR rate of the deaths. Extract 11 provides evidence of this:

11) Mr Rui Wamba Tila died in a fall of ground accident on 25 June 2011 at Impala Rustenburg 5 Shaft. This fatality occurred subsequent to the current year-end statistical close and will be included in the reported statistics for financial year 2012 (Implats CSR 2011: 52; Implats IA 2011: 44).

The representation of employees as entities or objects is also evident in the following example from the 2011 Gold Fields report. In this report, employees are constructed as potential thieves, only the term 'steal' is substituted with 'illegally smuggle', which may have more positive associations in this context. Furthermore, the nominalisation 'applied repeatedly' deletes agency, or the person or group responsible for repeatedly applying 'very low X-ray doses':

12) In addition to our standard security controls, in 2011 we piloted the application of Xscann Body Scanner technology in South Africa. This low-dose X-ray technology produces images of sufficient resolution to detect even very small amounts of gold on a person – making it a key deterrent to those tempted to illegally smuggle gold out of our shafts. The fact that Xscann uses only very low X-ray doses means it can be applied repeatedly at no risk to human health (Gold Fields IA 2011: 158).

The representation of employees as entities or objects also transpires through the use of the term 'workforce' which invokes images of the military and likens employees to army troops:

13) We produce approximately 25% of the world's platinum with a workforce estimated at 63 000, including 23 000 contractors (Implats CSR 2012: 4).

14) At the start of 2011, the mine's operational costs fell as a result of our cost-saving initiatives, including workforce reduction, lower electricity consumption and decreased store costs (Gold Fields IA 2011: 83).

In excerpts (15) and (16) from the Implats 2011 CSR report and the Gold Fields 2012 IA report, employees are described metaphorically in terms of objects moving along a circular tube or pipe ('pipeline'). It is also important to

note that, in these examples, employees are referred to by a process of metonymy, as 'talent' and 'skills', which works to depersonalise the employees:

> 15) In the medium to long term, this means building and maintaining a solid, self-sustaining skills pipeline to ensure we have a constant feed-through of equally strong replacements – and that we maintain an employee base that can offer predictability and flexibility (Gold Fields IA 2012: 42).
>
> 16) The programme is designed to train people with grade 12 qualifications as rock breakers in order to strengthen our talent pipeline with better educated employees for future miners (Implats CSR 2011: 61).

The terms 'workforce' and 'pipeline' reiterate that individual employees are generally not the focus of CSR and IA reports, unless they are (1) featured in a case study (which simultaneously has the rhetorical function of constructing the company as diverse or ethical), or (2) a member of the board or higher management (see below). In terms of Van Leeuwen's (2008) categories, 'low-wage employees' are *genericised* or represented as part of a class of people. They are also *assimilated*, or referred to as groups which are then *aggregated*, or represented through the use of statistics. Low-wage employees are also *categorised*, or represented in terms of the identities and functions they share with others (Van Leeuwen 2008: 42). In this regard, low-wage employees are realised through a process of *functionalisation* (represented in terms of what they do), and *classified* in terms of race and gender.

Apart from the term 'workforce', the common phrase 'our people' represents employees not as individuals, but as part of a group which is controlled by the company and which functions to create economic profit. 'Our people' is a common phrase used to refer to employees in almost all the company reports. Referring back to Van Leeuwen's (2008) representation of social actors and the realisation of agency, the possessive pronoun 'our' is a powerful means of realising agency in a text as well as realising active and passive roles for agents and patients. The use of the possessive pronoun 'our' can activate a social actor, or represent the companies as the active, dynamic force in the activity. For example:

> 17) Our people continue to be the most important driver of value in our business (Gold Fields IA 2013: 27).

The phrase 'our people' has two dominant functions within the text: in some cases, it constructs employees as commodities that are owned by the company, while in other cases it creates a sense of cohesive, almost familial relations within the company and simultaneously constructs the company as caring and concerned. When contrasted to a phrase like 'the company's employees' or a term such as 'they', the cohesive effect of the phrase 'our people' is more apparent:

> 18) We believe that with the right leadership, safety culture, procedures and engineering controls, deep underground mining can be carried out in a way that does not put our employees at risk (Gold Fields IA 2011: 14).

19) We continue to provide leading-edge solutions to address the education, training and wellness of our people (Implats IA 2012: 11).

In contrast to these *generic* representations, the Implats CSR 2013 report offers more insight into the social and corporate conditions that led to the mining strikes, and represents employees as 'poorly educated men' who are restricted by social circumstances:

20) The industry is still predominantly using labour-intensive manual mining methods. It remains reliant on a migrant labour workforce mainly comprised of poorly educated men who perform manual tasks that offer limited opportunities for personal development and career progression (Implats CSR 2013: 16).

The use of the word 'men' stands out as male employees are typically referred to in terms of their affiliation to a group in terms of the work that they do ('employees', 'miners', 'workforce'), rather than identified in terms of their gender. In terms of Van Leeuwen's categories, this is one of the few examples of *personalisation* and *identification*. *Personalisation* refers to the representation of social actors as human beings, which is a subclass of *identification*. However, it must be noted that Implats refers to 'the industry' when identifying problems and reasons for the strike, and not the company specifically. Taking this into account, this section of the report may work as a way for the company to acknowledge that the impact of the strikes can no longer be denied, yet still present themselves as concerned social actors.

In contrast to the passive representation of lower wage workers, 'the board' frequently takes on the role of agent in the clause, or the entity performing the action. For example:

21) The Board takes ultimate responsibility for the company's adherence to sound corporate governance standards and sees to it that all business judgements are made with reasonable care, skill and diligence (Gold Fields IA 2011: 28).

22) The Implats Board assumes overall responsibility for managing the system of internal control and for ensuring that controls are effective in providing reasonable assurance that governance, risk management and controls are in place and that our defined business objectives will be achieved (Implats CSR 2012: 44).

Van Leeuwen (2008) makes an important distinction in terms of the choice to represent social actors in generic or specific terms. 'The board' is considered to be a generic form of representation, since the term is often used without reference to specific members of the board. However, rather than aggregated and represented through statistics (as is the case with low-wage workers), members of the board are realised through a process of *collectivisation*. This means that 'social actors are presented as 'community', as a homogenous, consensual group' (Calsamiglia and Ferrero 2003: 157). The sense of cohesion is also created in the shift from the generic from 'the board', to the personal pronoun 'we'. For example:

23) The Board remains resolute in its belief that safety is not considered a cost but an imperative, and a key to our licence to operate. Our commitment to safety over production is evidenced for example by the

> voluntary safety stoppages that we undertook this year and the initiatives aimed at reducing fall-of-ground incidents (Implats IA 2012: 7).

In the context of CSR and IA reports, members of the board of directors of a company are also represented as identifiable individuals through a process of *individualisation* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 24). In terms of *individualisation*, in the context of CSR and IA reports, members of the board are *personalised* rather than *impersonalised* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 46). In other words, members of the board are represented human through the use of proper names, nouns, but also through titles and by listing their age and qualifications (see Gold Fields IA 2011: 30). These features do not only have the semantic feature of 'human', but they work to construct a particular image of the members of the board as educated and able to manage the company. On a visual level, members of the board are also *individualised* through photographs. These images typically represent board members as professional, yet charismatic and open.

On the level of language, members of the board are *categorised* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 42) according to *functionalisation* (Van Leeuwen 2008: 42). In other words, individuals are characterised in terms of what they do ('the director', 'the executive director'), or in terms of their role in the organisation. For example:

> 24) The Directors are responsible for the selection, preparation and presentation of the sustainability information, the identification of stakeholder requirements and material issues (Implats CSR 2012: 98).

While this form of categorisation is also evident when representing low-wage employees ('mineworker', 'cashier'), it must be noted that the current economic and political order assigns a higher value to these identities and functions. This is demonstrated not only in the fact that lower-wage employees are not identified by their names, but it is also evident in grammatical constructions: 'the board' is never assigned a passive role.

In the corporate governance section of the reports, the board is often assigned attributes similar to 'custodian of corporate governance' or 'the highest governing authority'. For example:

> 25) The Board is the highest governing authority of the company (Gold Fields 2011: 27; Gold Fields IA 2012: 61; Gold Fields 2013: 39).

In the reports, the members of the board are portrayed as powerful social actors who are not driven by their own self-interest, nor corrupt, nor potentially reckless, nor overpaid:

> 26) We will not engage in any activities [including bribery and corruption] that undermine the legitimate business environment in any form (Gold Fields IA 2011: 154).

Corporate governance discourse shifts the focus from the CEO (a prominent figure in more outdated AFRs), to a group of people who are assigned equal responsibility. In doing so, the company installs a sense of trust in the reader which may work to legitimise dominant forms of organisational reality.

However, what is evident from the examples above is that, unlike governance discourse, corporate governance discourse does not remove social actors from the processes of governing and represent governance as a process taking place often without the significant force of human or institutional agents. On the contrary, corporate governance discourse assigns the highest responsibility to members of the board, or 'the board' as a whole.

In addition to the representation of lower-wage workers and the Board of Directors, the reports also construct people who affect, or are affected by, their activities as 'stakeholders'. In terms of Van Leeuwen's (2008) categories of social actors in discourse, identifying 'stakeholders' as a category, is a form of assimilation, where individual people are referred to in terms of the groups of which they are a part. This makes it possible for the companies to refer to 'people in general' rather than to particular groups of stakeholders. In other words, a reader might be convinced that the company is engaging with stakeholders, but this statement may refer to nothing more than communicating with customers in ways that simultaneously promote the companies. This simultaneously constructs the companies as active participants who are willing to engage in a dialogue with a group of people identified as stakeholders. For example:

> 27) Various structures are in place to facilitate dialogue with both the internal and external stakeholders we have identified (Implats CSR 2011: 25).

The use of the words 'dialogue', 'open dialogue' and 'meaningful discussion' construct the relationship between the companies and their stakeholders as characterised by equality. They frame corporate communication processes as those involving an exchange of ideas or opinions, rather than a process by which the companies dictate to a predetermined group of people. While many scholars outside the field of linguistics have shown that the relationship between companies and their stakeholders is not characterised by equality (see, for example, Banerjee 2003, Palazzo and Richter 2005; Lin 2010; and Amazeen 2011), this contradiction can also be illustrated by looking at the textual features of the reports: the reports exhibit low levels of 'dialogicality' (Fairclough 2003: 41). This means that the voices of stakeholders are hardly evident in the text, apart from case studies which simultaneously work to promote the company and present them as initiating social change. In fact the only other dominant 'voices' in the text apart from the speaker, the CEOs and the chairmen are those of the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and King III Code of Governing Principles which are present through intertextuality. The absence of stakeholder voices, including voices of the government, the media, local communities and employees, suggests that the companies do not orientate themselves towards different perspectives, towards 'difference' (Fairclough 2003: 42) in the text. Rather than expressing an openness to, or acceptance of difference (a ''dialogue' in the richest sense of the term' (Fairclough 2003: 42)), the reports generally normalise and accept 'differences of power which suppresses differences of meanings and norms' (Fairclough 2003: 42).

The company's claims to 'dialogue' are not only evident through words and phrases such as 'dialogue', 'open dialogue' and 'meaningful discussion', but also through repetition of the word 'engage'. For example:

> 28) All our mines identify, prioritise and engage stakeholder groups that have the potential to affect their operational, sustainability or financial performance (Goldfields IA 2011: 40).

According to Noland and Phillips (2010: 40), rather than 'interact', 'engage' is a type of interaction that involves recognition of common humanity. In addition, 'engage' has connotations of participation and being absorbed in an activity. 'Stakeholder engagement' is also a nominalisation which has implications for how the process of engaging is understood. For example:

> 29) Constructive and transparent engagement with local stakeholders is a critical prerequisite for a strong social licence to operate (Goldfields IA 2011: 141).

By using the nominal phrase 'stakeholder engagement', the companies convey that the entities denoted by the nominalization, 'have a real and necessary existence' (Billig 2008: 786). The ideological implication of this is that the companies are then able to amass stakeholder groups, clump them together and 'parade them like possessions' (Billig 2008: 786). Further, given the prominence of the term in CSR texts, and the apparent lack of a concrete meaning, 'stakeholder engagement' is an empty concept, but its positive associations cannot be overlooked.

5. Conclusion

Utilising Van Leeuwen's (2008) socio-semantic framework for analysing the representation of social actors, this paper reported on the discursive devices used by two South African mining companies to construct social actors in CSR and IA reports. From the outset it was established that both Implats and Gold Fields draw on metaphors constructing themselves as having positive human qualities. Further, the inclusion of stakeholder discourse in the reports works to construct the companies as active participants who are willing to engage in a dialogue with a group of people identified as stakeholders. However, nominalisations such as 'stakeholder engagement' convey the idea that the entities denoted by the nominalisation 'have a real and necessary existence' (Billig 2008: 786). This allows companies to group diverse groups of people together, including the media, government and impoverished communities, an act which begs the question whether the companies are actually contributing to social transformation.

The analysis further revealed that the companies construct company employees in a *generic* way. However, rather than aggregated and represented through statistics (as is the case with lower-wage workers), members of the board are represented through a process of *collectivisation*. In the process, this discourse legitimises 'the board' and corporate governance practices and delegitimises alternative discourses and constructions that prioritise public welfare or public decision making processes. These delegitimised public processes include government responsibility and the accountability of the

governments in planning, directing and implementing in a way that would subvert corporations. By assigning responsibility to the board for governing processes, and then constructing them as trustworthy, the reports perpetuate the idea that corporate control is better than government control. In this way other concepts of societal development are pushed aside or rendered 'implausible'.

A critical analysis of the nine reports reveals that ideologies regarding the role of the corporation in social contexts are shared, and that they are being reproduced through the particular representations in the text. These shared representations have become conventionalised across the three years and report types, and thus may be said to contribute to the maintenance of ideology and power in the South African mining industry. This is largely because the shared discourses and representations function to structure systems of presence and absence, so that conceptions of reality are textured in the report, but other possible conceptions are organised out. In saying this, the South African companies in this study have considerable control over the shaping of routine experiences of the world as well as identity construction.

Notes

1   Weak models of sustainability have been developed within the field of economics. Green economists like Pearce and Atkinson (1993), view environmental degradation as a market failure which can be rectified in primarily three ways: (1) reconceptualising natural resources like water, forests and minerals as a form of natural capital, (2) assigning the appropriate price or economic value to natural resources (see Hawkins 2006: 70), and (3) developing technological advancements to protect natural resources.

2   This study draws on the more recent understanding of 'neoliberalism' as a dominant economic, political and social order (Fairclough 2006).

3   The most recent series of wildcat mineworker strikes occurred in 2012 in the Marikana area of the South African platinum belt. During this time thirty-four striking mineworkers were killed by policemen who were called upon to control the mineworkers.

4   At the time of writing, the South African Rand is 0.070 to the Euro.

5   AntFileConverter is a freeware tool designed by Laurence Anthony and can be used to convert PDF files to plain text for use in corpus tool. See http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html for more information and downloads.

6   AntConc is a freeware concordance program developed by Laurence Anthony for Windows and Macintosh. See http://www.antlab.sci.waseda.ac.jp/software.html for more information and downloads.

7   These metaphors can most likely be attributed to the concept of 'corporate personhood', which describes how companies are legally recognised as individuals. The concept was derived subsequent to the Industrial Revolution and the formation of the first corporation. Prior to the legal fiction of 'corporate personhood', corporations could not be sued and were therefore not held liable for any wrong doings. Many scholars have critiqued the concept of 'corporate personhood', particularly as it relates to corporate responsibility and questions of moral agency (see Banerjee 2007). One also cannot forget Bakan's (2003) compelling argument that, when conceptualised as a person, the corporation exhibits characteristics close to that of a psychopath.

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