Dialogue in Business Communication
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This paper presents the results of a linguistic analysis focusing on the use of the word dialogue in annual reports from 2008 published by German and Danish chemical companies.

In the context of increasing focus on Corporate Social Responsibility, transparency and openness, the word dialogue has become a buzzword in corporate communication. It is expected that companies engage in dialogue with different stakeholder groups in the surrounding society and that they, to a certain extent, report on their dialogue activities. Among others, the UN Global Compact promotes dialogue between business and stakeholders around critical sustainability issues. The paper argues that dialogue may be seen as a useful factor in relation to shaping corporate identity and differentiating the company from its competitors.

The study investigates how chemical companies choose to respond to these expectations and how this is reflected in their annual reports. It offers linguistic insights into the way the companies construct themselves as dialogue oriented, including the dialogue partners, dialogue issues, purposes and results of the stakeholder dialogue they describe and evaluate.

The methodological framework of the study is based on systemic functional linguistics (Halliday/Matthiessen 2004). Within the interpersonal metafunction, lexical choices and evaluation are in focus, the ideational metafunction deals with the choice of processes and participants and the textual metafunction looks at the information structure where the word dialogue occurs.