

**DISCOURSE IN THE MARKETPLACE**  
**The Making of Meaning**  
**in**  
**Annual Reports**

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Language can be considered as the semiotic realization of the public and private relationships of a community. These relationships often operate at a subliminal level of consciousness, and their transference into language forms often results in deceptive conventions that have the sole purpose of maintaining and supporting current social structures (Lemke, 1984, 85, 88, 89). Bakhtin describes a community of languages as one which consists of a multiplicity of relationships, which would include historical, social, generational, and ideological relationships, co-existing in a "heteroglossic" world of sign (Bakhtin, Discourse 291). Each of these languages in a heteroglossic community has its own characteristics and its own principles, yet functions dialogically with the other languages within the community of which it is a part. One of Bakhtin's major motifs is that all the languages of this heteroglossic community represent "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meaning, and values (Bakhtin, Discourse 292).

When we try to conceptualize a group of languages operating in a single community, we are faced with a picture with fuzzy edges of which the individual parts are not equally represented. Some parts of the picture dominate, while others remain in the background. As the community changes, so does the picture, playing out what Bakhtin calls "socio-ideological contradictions" and revealing, sometimes only in retrospect, the relationships of power and suppression that operate in the society. What Bakhtin refers to as "heteroglossia," J. Lemke terms "intertextuality," and describes this as the system of texts constructed by the discourse practices of a community which establish relationships according to agendas both conscious and subliminal. When the community can construct the relationships in ways that certain kinds of texts are seen as related to each other in certain ways, then it "...can also insure that some kinds of texts are seen as *not* related to one another in particular ways, or at all, thus providing a powerful means for the maintenance of ideologies that serve wider social functions" (Lemke, Ideology 275-6).

One of the most important products generated by looking at language in the way that Bakhtin and Lemke do is an awareness that language is never value neutral. Bakhtin asserts that "...there are no 'neutral' words and forms--words and forms that can belong to 'no one';" (Discourse 293). Every word is charged with beliefs, assumptions, values, and desires. Bakhtin continues:

For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (293)

Though this idea makes perfect sense when described by as an articulate a writer as Bakhtin, it is the nature of intertextuality itself to maintain a balance that highlights some texts while keeping others hidden. For example, we often see the multiple texts in our community as having varying degrees of neutrality. A political treatise is never seen as objective, nor are works of fiction or poetry. Scientific writings, on the other hand, *are* seen as objective, or if not completely objective, then *more* objective than political or creative writing. Most forms of information-sharing are perceived as being relatively neutral because there is an underlying assumption that 'information' consists of 'facts,' and information consisting of 'facts' is more objective than communication consisting of fiction or polemic. Richard Rorty takes issue with this view in Contingency, irony, and solidarity where he argues for a recognition that all things are contingent, science as well as philosophy, 'facts' as well as fiction. There is nothing "out there" to be discovered, and facts do not exist beyond the contingencies of the human experience creating them (Rorty 5). Lemke discusses 'facts' and the so-called objectivity of science in an article about science education. We are taught that science deals in propositions about the "natural" world and that those descriptions are 'facts' rather than " social constructions with which we make

meaning" (Lemke, *Semiotics and Science Education* 228). This ideology suggests that there is an objective truth about certain things that simply cannot be questioned.

Business language is a text which operates within the community in a dominant way, its dominance recognized and approved of by the community as a whole. Its language is perceived as being closer to the objective, if we see the question of neutrality of language in terms of a gradience from subjective to objective. Two points can be made about business language as an example of a highly approved text in the community: First, its spoken agendas are visible and looked upon with approval; second, its unspoken agendas, when perceived, are most often looked upon with approval as well. To a great degree, this support is due to the ways in which those who use business language are able to construct meanings--ways that situate the language and the attendant priorities in what is perceived as a just reality, imperfect, of course, but not to be questioned. The dialogic role that business language plays among the various texts of the community is usually not perceived, and if perceived, ignored because of its success in presenting itself as part of a reality not dependent on contingencies.

The philosophy that wraps up language, relationships, and the contingencies that attend them in the same package is realized by the functional approach to language study, or functional linguistics. M.A.K. Halliday and others, such as Robin Fawcett and Kevin Butler, have devised a way of looking at language, both spoken and written, through systems--an approach that considers language in the various ways it is used in a social context. This approach offers opportunities for both interpreting and evaluating texts that throw into relief the various language voices of the community. The approach is complex yet sensible and offers concrete examples for use in interpretation, where intuition alone must be relied on in alternate approaches. Evaluating texts by this method is more difficult and cannot be done satisfactorily without making connections with the theoretical bases of language philosophy.

Halliday, Lemke, and others do make these connections, usually successfully, in evaluating the texts they have earlier interpreted.

One idea developed by Halliday in building his bridge between the systemic approach to language study and the theoretical basis of sign is the notion of register. Halliday defines this notion simply as referring to the idea that we speak or write different varieties of the language according to the type of social situation in operation. Halliday's systemic theory deals with the general principles that govern the variation. In other words, what contextual factors determine which linguistic features? The notion of register provides a way to group together the various texts of a community that are relevant to each other's interpretation. That certain texts can be grouped together means "...that socially significant meanings are being made by the community through the interrelations of these texts" (Lemke, *Ideology* 276). Lemke views registers as being meaningful only within the total discourse practices of a community and sees the relationships between different discourses as defining the situational context and maintaining or contesting social systems.

Using the descriptions of Halliday and Lemke, business language can be regarded as a register of standard English. Language used within the business context contains domain specific linguistic features, realizes restricted kinds of meaning, and can be easily classified in terms of Halliday's systems of Field, Tenor, and Mode. The field is business itself; the tenor of business language refers to the relations among the participants in the particular business activity (and this can be very complex in terms of the level of formality); and mode is the choice of medium on any specific business occasion. Further, business English can be considered in terms of its textual relationships within the business context as well as its textual relationships to the social community as a whole. Where business texts converge and where they diverge (in a system Lemke calls *disjunction* in "Textual Politics" 39) make it possible to view the business register as a social construct within the social system of which it is a part.

When a company must communicate a message, the considerations become complex. The communications may be internal or external, spoken or written. When the communication is

external--that is, when the audience is the public or some segment of it--the challenge of the company to present itself in a way that maintains its established position becomes critical. A close look at the external messages of a company presents an opportunity to see that company in a new way, a way that throws into relief not only what the company wants to present about itself, but also what it may not wish to reveal. The purpose of this paper is to examine the language choices made by a company in the context of public communications to determine if there are, aside from semantic content, structural clues that might give us additional information about the realities underlying the prose. In addition to this question, how the structure of the language choices correlates to the overt and covert priorities of the company, there is the question of how the message itself situates the company within the desired parameters of the community.

A series of annual reports will form the basis of this study with an emphasis on a five-year period of the reports of one particular company. As business documents, annual reports consist of many kinds of information, communicated in a variety of ways from charts and graphs to signed management prose. Management prose will be the focus of my analysis in the form of the one or two page introductory statement by the Chairman of the Board and the President entitled Management Reports, signed by the Chairman and the President, and found at or near the beginning of the company's Annual Report. My methodology is based on systemic theory and utilizes the systems of transitivity and thematic structure to analyze the structural choices employed by the company through the writer (or writers) of the document. The documents I have looked at cover the years 1984 through 1988. I have given the closest scrutiny to the first and last paragraphs of the Management Reports for these years and have checked my findings by analyzing in detail (but less comprehensively) the intermediate paragraphs. The first and last paragraphs are fairly representative, and in addition, offer the extra linguistic information involved in the first contact and the final summing up. I tried to begin with as few assumptions as possible, but one assumption I did have was that the company would

naturally try to present itself in as positive a light as possible. The results of my analysis have proved that assumption false and have suggested that a company's public communications are more complex than has been thought. It isn't simply a matter of describing the company with a pretty pen, but of positioning that company according to the priorities of those who are in control.

### **BACKGROUND :**

#### **The Cross & Trecker Company**

Cross & Trecker is a Bloomfield Hills-based company that manufactures machine tools, which are machines that are used in the manufacture of other machines (for example, auto transfer lines, the giant machines that shape metal parts for automobiles). It is a relatively large company--about 430 million in sales in 1988--and has traditionally been a leader in the machine tool industry. Like the rest of the industry, Cross & Trecker fell into hard times in the mid '80's and is currently trying to become profitable once again and to recapture its strong position in the market.

Cross & Trecker Corporation was formed in 1979 as a result of the merger of the Cross Company and the Kearney and Trecker Corporation. In late 1981, when the company was still on its roller coaster ride of profitability as a result of the big automakers' downsizing spending spree, Richard Lindgren was brought in as President and CEO. Lindgren had been recruited by headhunters and had no direct experience in the machine tool industry, though he did have twenty-one years of experience in the automotive business and another six running a construction equipment manufacturing company. According to Lindgren, he saw trouble coming from the beginning, but in true Cassandra fashion, was unable to get anyone to believe him. "Look, the bloom is off the rose in the oil patch," he said in an interview in *Forbes* in 1983 (120-122), and subsequent events, unfortunately for Cross & Trecker, proved him right.

The first problem was the general recession, which depressed the earnings of most of the country's large manufacturers (and put



out of business many of the small ones). But the recession itself brought with it the seeds of recovery for the machine tool industry in that partly as a result of it, the big automobile manufacturers made the decision to downsize cars thus creating the need for retooling machines. Another problem was created by the decision of the Japanese and the Koreans to flood the American market with machine tools which cost much less than the American-made varieties. A third problem was the periodic strength of the dollar, which had a negative impact on exports. These problems produced industry-wide chaos, and the various machine tool companies took a number of steps to offset their losses and to reposition themselves in the market.

Lindgren and his management team at Cross & Trecker took aggressive steps during this period. At the same time it was streamlining operations, C & T spent millions of dollars on acquisitions. While other machine tool companies were moving South to save on labor costs, Cross & Trecker made a risky move into expensive high-tech computerized production systems which decrease the need for skilled labor and eliminate excess inventory. The results of these bold moves were disastrous. Two of the acquisitions began to lose money within a few months of being acquired. The computerized production systems proved to be too costly, and C & T had to swallow great losses. And finally, C & T lost its share of the automotive transfer line business to another U.S. company due to poor customer relations, according to a Goldman, Sachs representative (C&T: *Eaten Alive* 35).

These company troubles have made Cross & Trecker an interesting company to study in terms of its public communications. In 1984 and 1985, though problems were developing, C & T made a profit. In 1986, it broke even. In 1987 and 1988, it lost money. How did management communicate this information in the Management Reports section of its Annual Reports? The following analyses offer some surprising (and some not-so-surprising) insights into the motivation and the priorities of the Cross & Trecker management.

## **TRANSITIVITY**

One writing strategy often suggested to students of business communication is to use "active" verbs, or verbs of "doing," more often than verbs of "being," and to use the active voice rather than the passive. The presumed concept underlying this advice is that active voice and active verbs promote the idea of a company that is moving (forward, of course) and that is aggressive and successful in the marketplace. Use of the passive voice is reserved for those occasions when the writer finds it advantageous to distance him/herself from the message. In approaching the analysis of the processes, participants, and circumstances, I expected this conventional business communication wisdom to be confirmed.

In order to look comprehensively at the verb complexes, I separated each sentence of the Management Reports paragraphs into its constituent clauses, both independent and subordinate. With most items in the analysis, I looked closely at the first and last paragraphs and then verified the results by looking at the same items in the intermediate paragraphs. In addition, I studied the entire text in terms of passive voice. There turned out to be a fairly predictable progression in the use of passive constructions from '84 to '88, with an increase in passives correlating with a decrease in profit. The number of passive constructions used in the Management Reports can be summarized as follows:

<u>year</u>	<u>times used</u>
1984	8
1985	7
1986	10
1987	16
1988	17

It is interesting to note that the passive voice was used twice as many times in the two years in which the company lost money as in the two years in which the company made money. This is not

surprising if we accept the assumption that the passive voice distances the messenger from the message.

The analysis of the processes and participants shows more refined results than that of the simple passive. Material process verbs, those verbs of doing and action that we who teach business communication consider with so much favor, might be expected to decrease as company actions coincide with decreased profitability. However, the analysis of the first and last paragraphs shows insignificant differences in the use of material process verbs, and a look at the intervening paragraphs confirms this finding. What the analysis of transitivity does reveal is a rather dramatic increase in the use of relational process verbs. The use of these verbs of "being" doubled from 1984 to 1988. The results can be summarized as follows:

<u>year</u>	<u>times and percentages</u>
1984	33% (3X in 9)
1985	22% (2X in 9)
1986	40% (4X in 10)
1987	50% (5X in 10)
1988	66% (8X in 12)

These results cover the first and last paragraphs, and they are confirmed by an increase in relational process verbs throughout the message.

Combined with the increase in relational verbs is the comparable increase in non-human participants operating as agents. In the first and last paragraphs, the non-human agents occurred in the following proportions:

<u>year</u>	<u>non-human agents</u>
1984	25% (2 X)
1985	66% (6 X)
1986	57% (4 X)
1987	87% (7 X)
1988	73% (8 X)

As we read through the Management Reports from 1984 through 1988, there seems to be an increase in the "objectivity" of the message, an appearance of a "just the facts, ma'am" approach to relating the news, which is increasingly negative. This "objectivity," which suggests a basis of facts, is also used in such genres as scientific language, where it also suggests a world that cannot be questioned (Lemke, *Social Semiotics and Science Education* 228). When the particular forms of non-human agents are considered (such terms conventional to business as "operating results," "goal," "fiscal 1988," and "machine tool market"), the total message becomes more than simply the sum of its constituents. The appearance of "objectivity" suggested by the use of relational process verbs together with non-human participants gives a strong but subtle impression of a factual situation (part of the "real" world and not to be questioned) caused by circumstances (opportunities, machine tool markets, etc.) not attributable to any person or persons who might otherwise be thought responsible. Charts of these conclusions as well as charts of the analysis are located at the end of this paper.

### ***THEME***

The thematic structure in the Management Reports sections of the Annual Reports showed change and development from 1984 to 1988. There are two types of themes used: the first consists entirely of the personal pronoun *we* ; the second is a variety of inanimate nominal groups, such as *fiscal 1988* and other typical business terms. There are distinctions to be noted in each of these types of themes. In the first case, the pronoun *we* most often refers to the management of Cross & Trecker, but on occasion it refers to the company itself. A consideration of this distinction does not change the results of the analysis, and therefore, I have analyzed the *we* pronouns as one group instead of two. In the themes consisting of inanimate nominal groups, there is an occasional use of *the company* , which I have included along with the other

inanimate groups for the same reason stated above. Charts of the analysis which show when and where these distinctions occur are at the end of the paper, along with the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

Although there is not a completely predictable progression in the use of the pronoun *we* from 1984 to 1988, there is a significant decrease in its use along with a corresponding increase in inanimate nominal groups used as themes. The themes used in the first and last paragraphs of the texts can be summarized as follows:

<u>year</u>	<u>We</u>	<u>inanimate nominal groups</u>
1984	75% (6X)	25% (2X)
1985	33% (3X)	66% (6X)
1986	42% (3X)	57% (4X)
1987	12% (1)	87% (7X)
1988	27% (3X)	73% (8X)

In the two later years, the pronoun is often preceded by an adversative or concessive conjunctive adjunct. The adversative *but* precedes the only use of *we* in the first and last paragraphs of the 1987 text; in 1988, the concessive *nevertheless* precedes one of the *we* 's in the text. In the 1984 text, however, there is an adjunct preceding only one of the thematic *we* 's, and it is a corrective (the word *rather*) used to expand the confident nature of the message.

There were differences in the distribution of the two kinds of thematic structures between the first and last paragraphs and the message as a whole. The themes in the entire message can be summarized as follows:

<u>year</u>	<u>We</u>	<u>inanimate nominal groups</u>
1984	41% (22X)	59% (34X)
1985	31% (12X)	67% (25X)
1986	18% (7X)	82% (33X)
1987	31% (16X)	69% (36X)
1988	20% (11X)	80% (44X)

These differences do not affect the general development and change in thematic structure from 1984 to 1988. The 1984 text loads up on

*we* 's in the first paragraph as part of the aggressive and confident nature of the message. This does not occur in the 1988 text.

The implications of the changes in the thematic structure of these texts are similar to the conclusions postulated as a result of the analysis of transitivity. The use of the pronoun *we* in the years when the company was still profitable suggests a correlation between the success of the company and the personal involvement of its management. Or to put it another way, the credit for success can be attributed to the initiatives of the Chairman, the President, and their management team. On the other hand, in the years when the company did not make a profit, there is an emphasis on outside factors as the source of the problems. The management team increasingly distances itself from the cause of the problems by presenting as themes such circumstantial factors as "machine tool markets" and "fiscal 1988." This seems to be fairly predictable except for one thing: my earlier assumption that the company would present itself in as positive a light as possible now seems questionable. There seems to be no attempt by the company to make a bad picture look good; in fact, there is an appearance of mounting objectivity in the transitivity structure of relational verbs. However, there *is* an appearance of the two top officers of the company presenting themselves *personally* in as favorable a way as possible. They seem to want to take credit for the successes, but to distance themselves from the failures. When things are going well it is because of their far-sighted decisions; when things are going badly it is because of the machine tool market, fiscal 1988, and other circumstances beyond anyone's control.

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A study of the language of any specific text in any specific register can be made more relevant by a consideration of how that text relates to others within the register and to other texts within the community. A part of this notion of intertextuality is realized by Lemke's question: "Who is doing what to whom with this text?"

and How?" (Thematic Analysis 159). Although these are very difficult questions to answer, they can be addressed by expanding the concept of thematic structure to include the discourse practices of the register as well as those of the community as a whole. Lemke provides a model for this kind of approach in "Ideology, Intertextuality, and Register." A thematic *field* would include lexical taxonomic relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyponymy, and meronymy), ideational-grammatical relations (processes and participants), actional relations (similar to speech acts), rhetorical relations, discourse structure relations, and relations in systems of heteroglossia (163). These thematic relations occur in texts on a gradience from "possible" to "foregrounded," but whether they are weak or strong, they weave a pattern in a text that makes connections with the register and the community of which it is a part.

If we look at the lexical taxonomic relations, including cohesive items, in the first and last paragraphs, there are some subtle but meaningful differences between the first two and the last two years studied. For example, the relevant paragraphs of 1984 show an emphasis on management expressed by lexical and structural relations (see fig. 1, page 21 ). The framing for the message is "fiscal 1984," which occurs in the first sentence. The message is completely positive--every sentence is good news--and this good news is introduced by the pronoun *we* in every independent clause except for one, where it is introduced by a synonym for *we* (Cross & Trecker). In the first paragraph, the three key statements not only begin with the pronoun *we* , but are also preceded by bullet points for emphasis. The ideas that follow the *we* pronouns are *profitable, acquisition, new products, and innovations* . The thematic relations between the management and the positive nature of the message are strongly foregrounded. These connections continue in the final paragraph by the lexically cohesive items *we* and *Cross & Trecker* , which are cohesive not only in the final paragraph but provide cohesion with the first paragraph as well, and take the message one step further to assert that "we aim to be the best." All these thematic relations add up to a final point for 1984,

expressed in the lexical cohesion in the last sentence of the first paragraph and the last sentence of the final paragraph of the words *leadership* and *leader*. The most important point to make, I think, is that, because of the way the thematic relations are constructed, we see a picture of a company that is very successful *due to* the actions and leadership of its management. There is nothing very unexpected in this kind of connection, and to a great degree, it may even be true that the company's success in this period was a direct result of good management decisions. However, the picture changes in the 1988 message (see fig. 2 page 21 ).

The frame for the message, like the 1984 frame, is *fiscal 1988*, but this term is only used to begin the last paragraph, where it provides a cohesive tie to the words *operating results in 1988* which begin the first paragraph. The first paragraph also provides cohesion in the equation of *priorities* with *return to profitability*, *fair return*, and *resume paying a dividend*. In the last paragraph, *fiscal 1988* is equated with *setback*. What follows is a number of lexically cohesive items such as *strong financial condition*, *organization with resources*, and *opportunities*. The structure in the 1988 paragraphs is more complex than that of the 1984 paragraphs; whereas the 1984 message had a single level of good news leading to an inference of leadership, the 1988 message has at least two levels: the first level is the bad news, and the second is the suggestion that things will get better. Each of the two paragraphs begins with negative information, expressed by non-human participants (*operating results* and *fiscal 1988*) and relational verbs (*were* and *represented*). What follows each of these sentences is a concessive (*nevertheless*) and an adversative (*however*) which introduce more positive information. The pronoun *we* is only used once in each paragraph and in unemphasized positions, unlike 1984, where it is used to begin almost every clause. There do not seem to be any cohesive items in the 1988 text that lead up to a conclusion, such as the *leader/leadership* tie in 1984. There is a suggestion that business will improve, but the confidence of 1984 is noticeably lacking.



Business English as a whole and the annual report as a specific instance of that whole make meaning through conventions both lexical and structural that reflect a certain position within the discourse practices of the community. One such convention, which is common to the various types of technical registers, is what Lemke calls "degree of condensation" (Technocratic Discourse 14), which is "the number of unexpressed thematic items and relations that are needed to make sense of those that are expressed." All registers have their own customs of discourse which, in varying degrees, exclude the uninitiated. Business English, since it is one of the dominant discourses in American culture, employs conventions that are moderately familiar--or seem to be. Many words originally used primarily in terms of business practice are now common in everyday English, e.g. *bottom line*, *priority* (also conventional in the language of the law), and *negotiate*. A possible problem in the moderate familiarity of business language is that it may seem more inclusionary than it is, and thus encourage interpretations that reflect desired expectations rather than less attractive realities. Condensations are one way of expressing certain ideas that encourage, and in fact, demand, reader interpretation. One brief example of a typical condensation in business English is the use of the word *transition* as in "*a transition year* ." These words are used in the first sentence of the 1985 Cross & Trecker message. Though the first part of the sentence is positive, the condensation *transition year* is used at the end--after a dash. The information referred to in the first sentence of the first paragraph is the fact that profits had declined. So a filled out thematic formation of *transition year* might be <THINGS ARE CHANGING--AND NOT FOR THE BETTER>. The word *transition* used in financial statements of any kind may be ringing warning bells to more people as the word is used increasingly in the context of negative information. One knowledgeable man who owns stock in several corporations recently told me, "When the words 'transition year' pop up in the first paragraph of the annual report, I know there's trouble."

Other condensations, however, are not so obvious, and their familiarity may mask the negative nature of their thematic

structures. There are many condensations throughout the messages from 1984 through 1988. Two condensations of particular interest appear in the 1984 message:

\*gradually improving market = <ORDERS AND SALES  
HAVE DECLINED BUT ARE NOW INCREASING>

\*profitability = <ABILITY TO MAKE MONEY AND PAY A  
DIVIDEND>

Considering the confident and positive tone of the 1984 message, the suggestion of trouble in the marketplace in the words *gradually improving market* is disturbing. However, even if the full thematic relation is understood, the way the sentence is constructed would tend to allay any fears. The words themselves are not foregrounded, and they follow a clause that suggests the company can turn a profit regardless of adverse circumstances. The second condensation of interest, *profitability*, suggests that all is well with the company, when in fact, the company had been facing problems since the beginning of the decade.

In 1986, the company had to take drastic measures to stay in business. A few of these measures are reflected in condensations:

\*cost controls and improved operating margins =  
<THE COMPANY STOPPED MAKING SOME PRODUCTS,  
LAID OFF WORKERS, AND CLOSED PLANTS>

This condensation eliminates any reference to people losing jobs, but of course, people losing jobs is the ultimate result of all the cost-cutting "programs" Cross & Trecker "implemented."

\*bottom line = <THE MOST IMPORTANT GOAL OF THE  
COMPANY -- MAKING MONEY>

Cross & Trecker neither made nor lost money in 1986, but the clause "Our strategy is to bring *more* (italics mine) to the bottom line...." suggests there was something to add to in terms of profits. These two condensations mask the severity of the problems and suggest a better future than actually transpired.

The 1987 text shows some of the most interesting condensations as well as one of the clearest examples of abdication

of responsibility in the face of disaster. A few of the condensations are:

- \*markets proved weaker = <CUSTOMERS DID NOT BUY C & T PRODUCTS>
- \*pricing pressures = <OTHER COMPANIES WERE SELLING THE PRODUCTS FOR LESS MONEY>
- \*other factors = <READER FILLS IN THE BLANKS>
- \*erode margins = <THE COMPANY DID NOT MAKE (LOST) MONEY>

All these condensations occur in the first sentence of the first paragraph of the 1987 document. What this sentence means is that Cross & Trecker lost money. What the sentence suggests is that the company lost money *because* of "weak markets," "pricing pressures," and "other factors." It actually goes even further: it says that "pricing pressures and other factors *combined* (italics mine) to severely erode margins." In other words, non-human agents took action to make the company lose money.

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The practice and teaching of rhetoric is by its nature self-reflective, for the questions that one learns to ask of others can be asked of oneself as well. We have asked, for example, what kind of community and culture a speaker or writer makes when he or she engages in a particular kind of intellectual analysis, say cost-benefit analysis. Those communities and cultures, performed and tentatively offered to the world, can be analyzed and judged. But the same question can be asked of what we ourselves say and what we think.....Whenever we speak or write, we should be prepared to ask ourselves what kind of community and culture we make, what kind of meaning they shall have. (Jame Boyd White, Rhetoric and Law, 316)

The language choices made by the writer(s) of the Management Reports sections of Cross & Trecker's Annual Reports in the five years studied reflect skill and intelligence. They are carefully

written and provide all the essential information for a reader who owns or is thinking of buying stock in the company. The reports suggest and imply, but they do not lie. In terms of the company's probable goals concerning the reports, they are successful. By 1988, even though the company was having severe problems, its position in the business world was maintained--a position of a company simply having a run of bad luck that would no doubt change in the following year. (A few analysts think C & T stock is a good buy, according to an article in Financial World , May 2, 1989, page 26.)

The underlying assumptions of this kind of discourse are, however, left unquestioned. If, as Richard Rorty suggests in his article "Science as Solidarity," there is an attempt to blur the distinctions between the objective and the subjective, between fact and values into a "new fuzziness," it has not yet, I think, reached the world of business language. Nevertheless, the underlying philosophy of substituting the idea of objectivity with that of "unforced agreement" is indeed at work in the marketplace. Joseph Vining, in his philosophical book on law entitled The Authoritative and the Authoritarian, mirrors this concept in his correlation between "authoritative" and "unforced agreement" and "authoritarian" and "forced agreement." Most teachers of business communication and most business people in general would not argue that business language is completely objective; but they would argue, I think, that the overt and covert agendas have been agreed upon in an "authoritative" or "unforced agreement" sense and that the values represented by business discourse contribute to the social well-being of the majority of society's members. That business priorities and values are accepted and acceptable to the majority of society's members I do not doubt. Our culture is permeated with these priorities in ways that are too obvious to mention. Many of us operate as though we were small businesses ourselves--our major goal is the "bottom line"--profit, power, and prestige.

At the same time that most of our institutions, including the business community, are supporting and maintaining current social hierarchies, we as individuals are doing the same, no matter where we are in those hierarchies. We give this support because we accept

the goals of the bottom line and want the opportunities to achieve them. So while it is useful to ask our institutions, such as business, to question their fundamental assumptions, we must, as James Boyd White says, also ask ourselves what kind of community and culture we are constructing in our speaking, our writing, our teaching, and our other activities.

White would argue with Rorty that we can't keep our private and public selves separate, that it is our private selves that ultimately construct our public ones, and that our public selves are the essential constituents in our institutions. Every semiotic action, especially spoken and written, changes the community discourse, a discourse that is continually shifting under the weight of individuals' contributions. We construct or deconstruct our community with every communicative act; when there are enough acts that construct or deconstruct in the same way, our institutions are either maintained or changed.

As teachers of English, whether the language is that of academia, business, law, or other, we must always question the assumptions from which we are working. In the language of business, the questions are often uncomfortable. Why do we teach conventions that construct such terms as "improved operating margins" as a way to describe putting people out of work? Why do we teach language choices that privilege profits over people? How might we open those language choices so that the discourse becomes more inclusionary? How can we bring into business discourse a polyphonic value system, a more dialogic rather than monologic approach to making meaning?

Many teachers in business communication departments are aware of these questions and seek to address them, if not answer them. Business voices do not always sing in tune, although it may seem as though they do. And there is no less humanity in the business community than in the other communities that make up our culture. Within the business discourse itself, there is great potential, both individually and institutionally, for empowerment and change.

.....it has been the world of the crafts and, later, of industry that have for the most part provided the well-understood realities (well-understood because, *certum quod factum* , as Vico said, man had made them) with which the ill-understood ones (ill-understood because he had not) could be brought into the circle of the known. Science owes more to the steam engine than the steam engine owes to science; without the dyer's art there would be no chemistry; metallurgy is mining theorized. In the social sciences, or at least in those that have abandoned a reductionist conception of what they are about, the analogies are coming more and more from the contrivances of cultural performance than from those of physical manipulation--from theater, painting, grammar, literature, law, play. What the lever did for physics, the chess move promises to do for sociology.  
(Geertz, Local Knowledge, 22)

Geertz articulates well the concept of blurring edges of genres and the dependencies of each voice on every other for its construction of meaning. We who teach business communication must also abandon a reductionist conception of what we are about and address Geertz's question of the what is/what ought to be relationship. The centrality of business communication in Western culture makes this and other fundamental questions exciting to consider. "The woods are full of eager interpreters," Geertz says. I say that's good. The more voices we can hear, the more opportunities there are for positive change.



THEMES IN 1ST AND LAST PARAGRAPHS

year	"We"	inanimate nominal groups
1984	75% (6 X)	25% (2 X)
1985	33% (3 X)	66% (6 X)
1986	42% (3 X)	57% (4 X)
1987	12% (1 X)	87% (7 X)
1988	27% (3 X)	73% (8 X)

THEMES IN ENTIRE MESSAGE

year	"We"	inanimate nominal groups
1984	41% (22 X)	59% (34 X)
1985	31% (12 X)	67% (25 X)
1986	18% (7 X)	82% (33 X)
1987	31% (16 X)	69% (36 X)
1988	20% (11 X)	80 % (44 X)

TRANSITIVITY ( Relational processes)

year	times and percentages
1984	33% (3X in 9)
1985	22% (2X in 9)
1986	40% (4X in 10)
1987	50% (5X in 10)
1988	66% (8X in 12)

non-human agents

same as theme above
---------------------

PASSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENTIRE MESSAGE

year	times used
1984	8
1985	7
1986	10
1987	16
1988	17



## 1984 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Fiscal 1984 was a year of accomplishment and future-shaping change

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

for Cross & Trecker.

Rheme
-------

Specifically: We remained profitable despite intense domestic and

Theme	Rheme
Textual	Top.
Conj.	

foreign competition in a gradually improving market.

Rheme
-------

We made a major acquisition on favorable terms, // which enhances our

Theme	Rheme
Top.	

business and about doubles our size.

Rheme
-------

We introduced many new products and technological innovations,

Theme	Rheme
Top.	

reinforcing leadership in key markets.

Rheme
-------

Cross & Trecker's goal is not to be the biggest machine tool company.

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

Rather, we aim to be the best--measured by profitability and by our

Theme	Rheme
Conj.	Top.

ability to help manufacturers meet urgent needs for lower costs, better quality and higher productivity.

Rheme
-------

We believe that, as a leader in machine tool technology //

Theme	Rheme
Top.	

we will capitalize on future opportunities.

Theme	Rheme
Top.	

### 1985 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Cross & Trecker continued to reinforce its competitive position

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

in fiscal 1985--a transition year.

Rheme
-------

We are now the nation's largest, strongest and broadest-based

Theme	Rheme
Top.	

machine tool company.

Rheme
-------

Cross & Trecker expects continued gains over the next two years.

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

Proposal activity is intense // and significant customer commitments

Theme	Rheme	Theme
Topical		Topical

are anticipated in 1986.

Rheme
-------

We know // that the users of machines tools need the

Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme
Top.		conj.	
		struct.	

dramatic efficiency gains // that our equipment can supply, //

Rheme	Theme	Rheme
	conj., struct.	

and we should command a healthy share of this business.

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

### 1986 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Fiscal 1986 was a more difficult period in machine tool markets //

Theme	Rheme
conj.	top.

than we expected it would be // and the company took steps

Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme
conj.	top.	cont.	topical
		text.	

during the year to bring expenses in line with current levels of business.

Rheme
-------

A \$12 million cost reduction program was implemented during the

Theme (marked)	Rheme
Topical	

second half of the fiscal year and should benefit the company in 1987.

Rheme
-------

However, we take the realistic view // that the market for

Theme	Rheme	Theme	
conj.	top.	sub.conj	top.
text.			

machine tools may remain flat in the months to come, perhaps through fiscal 1987.

Theme	Rheme
-------	-------

Our strategy is to bring more to the bottom line in this period

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

through cost controls and improved operating margins.

Rheme
-------

Thus, we expect a better year in 1987.

Theme		Rheme	
conj.	top.		
text.			

### 1987 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Cross & Trecker had a difficult year in fiscal 1987 // as markets

Theme		Rheme		Theme	
topical				text.	top.
				sub.conj.	

proved weaker than expected// and pricing pressures and other factors

Rheme		Theme	
		text.	topical
		conj.	

combined to severely erode margins.

Rheme	
-------	--

Our aggressive cost-cutting programs brought down costs//

Theme		Rheme	
Topical			

but the reductions did not balance the year's problems.

Theme		Rheme	
text.	topical		
conj.			

It was a year of restructuring and tough decisions, with the

Theme	Rheme		
-------	-------	--	--

objective of enabling the company to contend more effectively with weak markets and to benefit more fully from future market improvements.

Rheme			
-------	--	--	--

Fiscal 1987 was very disappointing// but we believe //

Theme		Rheme		Theme		Rheme	
topical				text.	top.		
				conj.			

that our basic position as a supplier of advanced manufacturing

Theme	
struct.	topical
sub.conj.	

technology has never been stronger.

Theme	Rheme
topical	

### 1988 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Operating results in 1988 for Cross & Trecker were unsatisfactory

Theme	Rheme
Topical	

and disappointing.

Rheme
-------

Nevertheless, we believe// that significant progress was made

Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme
conj.	top.	sub.conj.	top.

in reshaping sthe company to achieve our number one priority,//

Rheme
-------

which is a return to profitability.

Theme	Rheme
conj.	

Beyond that our goal is to earn a fair return for shareholders on a

Theme	Rheme
conj.	top.

consistent basis and resume paying a dividend.

Rheme
-------

Fiscal 1988 represented a setback in our timetable for returning

Theme	Rheme
topical	

Cross & Trecker to profitability.

Rheme
-------

However, our financial condition remains strong.

Theme		Rheme
conj.	topical	

We have assembled an organization with the resources necessary

Theme	Rheme	
top.		

to reach our near-term goals, and then to move up from there.

Rheme
-------

Opportunities are not lacking// because we believe//

Theme	Rheme	Theme	Rheme
topical		sub conj.	top

that the future machine tool market will be considerably stronger than//

Theme		Rheme
subconj.	topical	

that which has persisted for most of this decade.

Theme		Rheme	
conj	top.		
sub.	rel.		

1984 TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Fiscal 1984 was a year of accomplishment and future-shaping change for Cross & Trecker.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Cause: behalf
------------	------------------------	------------	---------------

Specifically: We remained profitable despite intense domestic and foreign competition

Carrier	Process: relational- attributive	Attribute	Accompaniment: additive
---------	--	-----------	-------------------------

in a gradually improving market.

Location
----------

We made a major acquisition on favorable terms// which enhances our business

Actor	Process: material	Goal	Manner: quality	B	
				Process: material	Goal

and about doubles our size.

Process: material	Goal

We introduced many new products and technological innovations, <<reinforcing leadership in key markets.>>

Actor	Process: material	Goal
-------	----------------------	------

Cross & Trecker's goal is not to be the biggest machine tool company.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier
------------	------------------------	------------

Rather, we aim to be the best measured by profitability and by our ability to help manufacturers meet urgent needs for lower costs, better quality and higher productivity.

Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon	Manner: means
--------	--------------------	------------	---------------

We believe that, as a leader in machine tool technology, we will capitalize on future opportunities.

Senser	Process: mental	B			
			Actor	Pro: material	Matter

1985 TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Cross & Trecker continued to reinforce its competitive position in fiscal 1985--a transition year.

Actor	Process: material	Goal	Location: temporal
-------	-------------------	------	--------------------

We are now the nation's largest, strongest and broadest-based machine tool company.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier
------------	---------------------	------------

Cross & Trecker expects continued gains over the next two years.

Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon
--------	-----------------	------------

Proposal activity is intense// and significant customer commitments are anticipated in 1986.

Carrier	Process: relational attributive	Attribute	Phenomenon	Process: mental
---------	------------------------------------	-----------	------------	-----------------

We know // that the users of machine tools need the dramatic efficiency gains//

Senser	Process: mental	<i>B</i>		
		Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon

that our equipment can supply,// and we should command a healthy share of this business.

<i>B</i>		Actor	Process: material	Goal
Actor	Process: material			

1986 TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Fiscal 1986 was a more difficult period in machine tool markets than //we expected it would

Carrier	Process: relational attributive	Attribute	Senser	Process: mental	Carrier Pro: relational
---------	------------------------------------	-----------	--------	-----------------	----------------------------

and the company took steps during the year to bring expenses in line with current levels of business

Actor	Process: material	Goal
-------	-------------------	------



A \$12 million cost reduction program was implemented during the second half of the fiscal year

Goal	Process: material	Location: temporal
------	----------------------	--------------------

and should benefit the company in 1987.

Process: material	Goal	Location: temporal
----------------------	------	-----------------------

However, we take the realistic view // that the market for machine tools may remain flat

Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomenon	$\beta$		
			Carrier	Process: relational	att.

in the months to come, perhaps through fiscal 1987.

Location: temporal
--------------------

Our strategy is to bring more to the bottom line in this period through cost controls and improved operating margins.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Manner: means
------------	------------------------	------------	---------------

Thus, we expect a better year in 1987.

Sensor	Process: mental	Phenomenon	Location: temporal
--------	--------------------	------------	-----------------------

#### 1987 TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Cross & Trecker had a difficult year in fiscal 1987 // as markets proved weaker//

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Location: temporal	Carrier	Process: relational	Attribute
------------	------------------------	------------	-----------------------	---------	------------------------	-----------

than expected and pricing pressures and other factors combined to severely erode margins.

Process: mental	Actor	Process: material	Goal
--------------------	-------	----------------------	------

Our aggressive cost-cutting programs brought down costs// but the reductions

Actor	Process: material	Goal	Actor
-------	----------------------	------	-------

did not balance the year's problems.

Process: material	Goal
----------------------	------

It was a year of restructuring and tough decisions, <<with the objective of enabling

exist- ential	Process: relational	Identified	Cause: purpose
------------------	------------------------	------------	----------------

the company to contend more effectively with weak markets and to benefit more fully from future market improvements.

Cause: purpose
----------------

Fiscal 1987 was very disappointing, // but we believe //

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Senser	Process: mental
------------	------------------------	------------	--------	--------------------

that our basic position as a supplier of advanced manufacturing technology has never been stronger.

<i>B</i>		
Carrier	Process: relational attributive	Attribute

### 1988 TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS

Operating results in 1988 for Cross & Trecker were unsatisfactory and disappointing.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier
------------	------------------------	------------

Nevertheless, we believe // that significant progress was made in reshaping the company

Senser	Process: mental	Phenomenon <i>B</i>		
		Goal	Process: material	Manner: quality

<<to achieve our number one priority,>>// which is a return to profitability.

	Identified	Process: relational	Identifier
--	------------	---------------------	------------

Beyond that our goal is <<to earn a fair return for shareholders on a consistent basis and resume paying a dividend.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier
------------	---------------------	------------

Fiscal 1988 represented a setback in our timetable for returning Cross & Trecker to profitability.

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Location: temporal
------------	---------------------	------------	--------------------

However, our financial condition remains strong.

Carrier	Process: relational	Attribute
---------	---------------------	-----------

We have assembled an organization with the resources necessary <<to reach our near-term goals

Actor	Process: material	Goal	Comitative: positive
-------	-------------------	------	----------------------

and then to move up from there.

comitative: positive
----------------------

Opportunities are not lacking // because we believe // that the future machine tool market

Identified	Process: relational	Identifier	Sensor	Process: mental	$\beta$
					Carrier

will be considerably stronger than// that which has persisted for most of this decade.

Process: relational	Attribute	$\beta$		
		Carrier	Process: relational	location: temporal

SYMBOLS USED: // = clause boundary <<>> = downranked clause  $\beta$  = subordinate clause

## 1984 MANAGEMENT REPORTS (1st and Last paragraphs)

Fiscal 1984 was a year of accomplishment and future-shaping change for Cross & Trecker. Specifically:

- \* We remained profitable despite intense domestic and foreign competition in a gradually improving market.
- \* We made a major acquisition on favorable terms, which enhances our business and about doubles our size.
- \* We introduced many new products and technological innovations, reinforcing leadership in key markets.

\*\*\*\*\*

Cross & Trecker's goal is not to be the biggest machine tool company. Rather, we aim to be the best--measured by profitability and by our ability to help manufacturers meet urgent needs for lower costs, better quality and higher productivity.

We believe that, as a leader in machine tool technology, we will capitalize on future opportunities.

## 1985 MANAGEMENT REPORTS

Cross & Trecker continued to reinforce its competitive position in fiscal 1985--a transition year. We are now the nation's largest, strongest and broadest-based machine tool company.

\*\*\*\*\*

Cross & Trecker expects continued gains over the next two years. Proposal activity is intense, and significant customer commitments are anticipated in 1986. We know that the users of machine tools need the dramatic efficiency gains that our equipment can supply, and we should command a healthy share of this business.

## 1986 MANAGEMENT'S REPORT

Fiscal 1986 was a more difficult period in machine tool markets than we expected it would be, and the company took steps during the year to bring expenses in line with current levels of business. A \$12 million cost reduction program was implemented during the second half of the fiscal year and should benefit the company in 1987.

\*\*\*\*\*

However, we take the realistic view that the market for machine tools may remain flat in the months to come, perhaps through fiscal 1987. Our strategy is to bring more to the bottom line in this period through cost controls and improved operating margins. Thus, we expect a better year in 1987.

## 1987 MANAGEMENT'S REPORT

Cross & Trecker had a difficult year in fiscal 1987 as markets proved weaker than expected and pricing pressures and other factors combined to severely erode margins. Our aggressive cost-cutting programs brought down costs, but the reductions did not balance the year's problems. It was a year of restructuring and tough decisions, with the objective of enabling the company to contend more effectively with weak markets and to benefit more fully from future market improvements.

\*\*\*\*\*

Fiscal 1987 was very disappointing, but we believe that our basic position as a supplier of advanced manufacturing technology has never been stronger.

## 1988 MANAGEMENT'S REPORT

Operating results in 1988 for Cross & Trecker were unsatisfactory and disappointing. Nevertheless, we believe that significant progress was made in reshaping the company to achieve our number one priority, which is a return to profitability. Beyond that, our goal is to earn a fair return for shareholders on a consistent basis and resume paying a dividend.

\*\*\*\*\*

Fiscal 1988 represented a setback in our timetable for returning Cross & Trecker to profitability. However, our financial condition remains strong. We have assembled an organization with the resources necessary to reach our near-term goals, and then to move up from there. Opportunities are not lacking because we believe that the future machine tool market will be considerably stronger than that which has persisted for most of this decade.

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