

ENGLISH VERSIONS OF CORPORATE WEBSITES

A linguacultural contrastive study of Germany and Spain

COSTANZA CUCCHI
UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

Abstract – If local companies in Europe target international visitors as well as national ones, they generally set up an English version of their corporate websites alongside the version in their native language. In their attempt to portray themselves in ways that are engaging to visitors, companies address topics such as corporate history, values and practices on their websites. However, the relevance given to the various topics and the style used may vary across cultures. The present study aims, first, to unveil whether discursive differences exist in website versions in English which were set up by European local companies. Second, it is investigated whether the differences may be explained with reference to Hofstede’s model. Because of its importance in Europe, the companies belong to the dairy sector. The countries chosen for the present investigation are Germany and Spain, the cultural differences of which, with reference to Hofstede’s model (Hofstede *et al.* 2010), are less marked when contrasted with the countries in previous linguistic studies on corporate websites (Cucchi 2010a, 2012, 2016, 2019). Methodologically, the study, based on a corpus of self-representative discourse from the websites of 12 German and 12 Spanish companies, draws on the Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies tradition (Partington 2004; Baker 2006), so as to verify the extent to which the findings are compatible with those obtained, within linguistics, from other countries and/or other genres, and with those in other disciplinary domains. The study relies on *Wmatrix* (Rayson 2009) for content analysis and on *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2012) for the analysis of dispersion plots. Results show that German websites are more informal and give more prominence to data, while Spanish websites rely more on ‘self-celebratory’ discourse, emphasising tradition, quality and awards. Overall, the findings show that Hofstede’s model is helpful for the study of the English versions of websites of European local companies, even in countries where cultural differences are less marked. Since cross-cultural differences still exist among the websites of European companies, future research should address the issue of what content and style are appropriate when targeting international customers in English used as a lingua franca.

Keywords: corporate websites; Hofstede’s model; ELF; BELF; language and culture.

1. Introduction

When companies target foreign customers, they need to solve the “dilemma” (de Mooij 2010, p. 14) regarding whether to standardise one or more elements of the marketing mix, e.g. the product, advertising motives and advertising style, or to adapt them to the target culture(s). Standardisation will obviously cut costs and help maintain a unified brand image, but adaptation will arguably attract more customers.

The Standardisation-Adaptation dilemma clearly affects the translation of advertising. De Mooij (e.g. 2004; 2010), who has written extensively on the influence of culture on marketing, argues that advertising should be adapted to be fully effective. In particular, the adaptation process may involve substantial changes in advertising texts and, therefore, translators should cooperate with copywriters in a joint, interdisciplinary effort and be able to “advise about culture-specific aspects” (de Mooij 2004, p. 179). These aspects are advertising appeals – “the values and motives that define the central message” (de Mooij 2010, p. 217) – and communication styles and, according to de Mooij (e.g. 2004, pp. 184, 193; 2010, pp. 221-239, pp. 165-173), their differences across cultures may be understood with reference to Hofstede’s model.

The Standardisation-Adaptation dilemma also affects corporate websites. As Pym (2010, p.1) observed, website localisation, which involves translating and adapting content, is also an interdisciplinary field, which “often involve[s] marketing, design, and software engineering, as well as linguistic processes”. The views on the elements which need localising vary greatly. For example, Pym mentions date and currency formats, colour and images, legal conventions and the insertion of local content, such as “news on the opening of new offices in Paris only for the French version of the site” (Pym 2010, p. 4). In their work, in Pym’s words (2010, p. 12) one of “[t]he few textbooks that address website localization”, Singh and Pereira (2005) offer a much more radical view on localisation and provide guidelines regarding website features (e.g. clubs and chatrooms, free trials) and topics (e.g. family and awards) to be included in websites targeting consumers in specific countries. The guidelines are based on the *Cultural Value Framework* devised by the two authors, which draws on Hofstede’s (Hofstede 2001) and Hall’s (Hall and Reed Hall 1990) cultural models.

Beside being used in marketing and in website localisation, Hofstede’s model was also used for research in linguistics and communications studies (e.g. Bjørge 2007; Crawford Camiciottoli 2017; Dekker *et al.* 2008; Gudykunst and Ting Toomey 1988; Hooker 2008; Kang and Mastin 2008; Katan 2004, 2006; Loukianenko Wolfe 2008; Manca 2016a, 2016b; Vishwanath 2003). However, a limited amount of cross-referencing was noted both among linguistics and communication studies and between them and advertising and

localisation studies. If this, on the one hand, enables one to verify the extent to which similar hypotheses and observations were made independently by different authors, on the other hand, there is a need to verify whether the findings from different disciplinary fields are consistent.

The present investigation intends to explore, first, the extent to which the English website versions of selected European companies exhibit different discursive choices, both in content and in style and, second, whether Hofstede's model may account for the differences. In particular, the study investigates website discourse of companies in Germany and Spain. The two countries were chosen so as to verify whether previous findings on corporate websites in Europe – based on Italy and the U.K. (Cucchi 2010a), Greece and Sweden (Cucchi 2012), Austria, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal (Cucchi 2016), Austria, Denmark, Poland and Portugal (Cucchi 2019), – may be extended to countries which are less far apart along Hofstede's dimensions.

Methodologically, the present study aims to verify whether the findings which emerge using Corpus Assisted Discourse Studies (Partington 2004; Baker 2006), which is a bottom-up approach rooted in linguistic data, are consistent with those which emerged from previous studies relying on different methodologies – a case study on a single website (Cucchi 2010a), a top-down corpus study aimed to verify pre-formulated hypotheses (Cucchi 2012), a corpus investigation of a single noun phrase (Cucchi 2016) and a qualitative investigation of corporate homepages (Cucchi 2019). Clearly, if similar findings result from different data sets and with different methodologies, the findings may be considered reliable. A further aim of the study is to contrast the findings with those from selected studies in the fields of linguistics, communications, localisation and advertising.

2. Review of the literature

Devised in the 1970s to describe differences across cultures, Hofstede's model is characterised by scores along cultural dimensions, which makes cross-cultural comparisons particularly convenient. The model originally consisted of four cultural dimensions, to which further two were later added. The dimensions represent the shared problems that people face, no matter their nationality, but to which they give different responses. The original dimensions are: Individualism (IDV) versus Collectivism (COL) – the relative importance attributed to single individuals or to groups; Power Distance (PD) – the tolerance for power asymmetries; Uncertainty Avoidance (UA) – the tolerance for uncertainty; Masculinity (MAS) versus Femininity (FEM) – the preference for success and tough behaviour versus for the quality of life and modest behavior. The dimensions which were later added to the model are Long Term Orientation (LTO) versus Short Term Orientation (STO) – an orientation

towards the future versus an orientation towards the present and the past (Hofstede 2001) – and Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR) – a tendency to enjoy life and have fun versus a belief that this tendency should be regulated by norms (Hofstede *et al.* 2010).

Despite various critiques – for example that the model unduly extends to the whole population the findings obtained from questionnaires to IBM employees, on which it is based, that it assumes that culture is a stable attribute of individuals (Piller 2009), that all the individuals of a specific country share the same culture (McSweeney 2002), and that it is outdated (Jones 2007) – the model was found to be widely used in various disciplinary areas: in global marketing, management and international business, it is “far and away the most prevalent culture framework” (Nakata 2009, p. 248).

Several studies in advertising, localisation, communications and linguistics identified links between Hofstede’s dimensions and content and/or style. The studies are below classified on the basis of the relations between Hofstede’s dimensions and the three components of the context of situation in Halliday and Hasan’s model (1989), namely the field – the topics mentioned in the communicative event; the tenor – the kind of relationship existing between the participants in the communicative event; and the medium, a component of the mode (the role played by language) which refers to the extent to which the text exhibits features which pertain to spoken or written discourse.

Regarding the field, the family theme was associated to low IDV. The *Cultural Value Framework* recommended that “[p]ictures of family, pictures of teams of employees, mention of employee teams and emphasis on team and collective work responsibility [...], and emphasis on customers as a family” (Singh *et al.* 2005, p. 145) should characterise websites targeting low IDV countries. Greek corporate websites in English were indeed characterised by the family theme, often in combination with tradition, thus reflecting Greece’s low IDV (Cucchi 2012). An apparently contradictory finding is in Manca (2016b, p. 138), where ‘famiglia’ is less frequent on the Italian official tourism website as compared to its British counterpart, despite Italy’s IDV scores being lower than the U.K.’s. However, as Manca did, the finding may be explained with reference to de Mooij and Hofstede (2010, p. 103), who claimed that pictures of families may either reflect high COL or high IDV, “where people are afraid that family values are disappearing”.

The themes of innovation and tradition were linked to low and high UA respectively (de Mooij 2010). More occurrences of *experiment*, *invent* and *try* were indeed found on Swedish corporate websites in English than on their Greek counterparts, thus reflecting Sweden’s lower UA compared to Greece’s (Cucchi 2012). The *Cultural Value Framework* recommended that themes such as tradition, nostalgia, country history, veneration of the elderly and the culture should be emphasised when targeting high UA countries and phrases

like ‘most respected company’, ‘keeping the tradition alive’, ‘for generations’, ‘company legacy’” (Singh *et al.* 2005, p. 102, p. 145) should be used. In keeping with this, Manca (2016b, p. 139) found that *tradizione* and *tradizionale* occurred more frequently on the Italian tourism website than the corresponding words on the British and Australian ones, thus mirroring Italy’s higher UA compared to the U.K.’s and Australia’s.

Interestingly, however, the *Cultural Value Framework* attributed motives which may be easily associated with tradition – pictures of national identity, like flags, historic monuments and other images suggesting the “uniqueness of the country” (Singh *et al.* 2005, p. 145; Singh, Pereira 2005, p. 72) – to low IDV rather than to high UA. Similarly, Cucchi (2012) hypothesised that, due to a tendency to stress what is shared, emphasis on tradition may be linked to low IDV. In the same study, more occurrences of *tradition** and *classic** were found on Greek corporate websites in English than in their Swedish counterparts, reflecting Greece’s lower IDV. While in many European countries lower IDV correlates with higher UA (Meeuwesen *et al.* 2009), which could explain why the tradition theme was associated to low IDV in some studies and to high UA in others, it should be noted that mentions of tradition and of recipes, which are shared by the members of a specific community, characterise Portuguese corporate homepages contrasted to Polish ones (Cucchi 2019). Since Portugal and Poland have similarly high UA scores but Portugal’s score on IDV is significantly lower than Poland’s, this finding suggests an association between the tradition theme and low IDV.

The mention of prizes and of quality were variously related to high PD, high UA, high MAS and high IDV in the literature. The *Cultural Value Framework* associated the “[m]ention of awards won, [...] of quality assurance information and quality certification by international and local agencies” to high PD (Singh *et al.* 2005, p. 146; Singh, Pereira 2005, p. 112), since these were interpreted as satisfying the “higher expectation for reassurance” which is considered typical of high PD countries (Singh *et al.* 2005: 130). However, on the basis of its very definition, it would seem more straightforward to associate a need for reassurance to high UA. Drawing on Hofstede (2001, p. 315; 2003, p. 79), a third association can be made, namely between prizes and high MAS, since prizes can be a means to highlight one’s best qualities. Although she did not mention prizes, de Mooij (2010, p. 227) stated that, in advertising, high MAS, when associated with high IDV – “the configuration of Anglo-German cultures” – “leads to a strong need to win, to be successful and show it, combined with the need to dominate”. Cucchi (2019) found that prizes and certificates were significantly present on Polish homepages in English, a finding which is compatible with Poland’s high scores on PD, UA, MAS and IDV. Instead, Cucchi (2012) revealed that *quality*, *award**, *certificate**, *medal** and *prize** were more frequent on Greek corporate websites in English

than in their Swedish equivalents. This suggests a possible association between prizes and quality, on the one hand, and high PD, high UA and high MAS, which characterise Greece, but not high IDV, since this is low in Greece. However, the significant presence of prizes and certificates found on Portuguese homepages in English (Cucchi 2019) suggests a link between prizes and certificates, high UA and high PD, since Portugal scores high on UA and PD, but low on MAS and very low on IDV.

According to de Mooij (2010, p. 233), purity and freshness are popular advertising appeals for the food products of high UA countries, where people generally have a more passive attitude to health than people in low UA countries, who focus more on fitness and sport (de Mooij, Hofstede 2010, p. 90). Interestingly, purity and freshness may reassure customers about the quality of the products, which would strengthen the hypothesis of an association between quality assurance and prizes and high UA. In keeping with this interpretation, Manca (2016b, p. 140) associated the higher frequency of *natura* on the Italian tourism website compared to *nature* on its British and Australian equivalents to a greater need for purity typical of Italy, in keeping with its higher UA.

A need for safety was related to high UA. In high UA countries, advice from experts is valued (Singh, Pereira 2005, p. 98) and, in advertising, manufacturers should prove that they are competent (de Mooij 2010, p. 233). High UA was described as “translat[ing] into the need for explanations, structure, testing, test reports, scientific proof and advice, and testimonials by experts, but also into high technology and design, the latter even more in configuration with high power distance” (de Mooij 2010, p. 232). Various studies in communications and linguistics supported these claims. High UA was found to be linked to the amount of details considered as desirable in on-line eBay auctions (Vishwanath 2003). As compared to British brochures for pension funds, more dependency on expertise and need for advice was found in Italian brochures, thus reflecting Italy’s higher UA (Katan 2006). However, it should be noted that the amount of details may not only be associated to higher UA, but also to higher PD, since the latter arguably leads to a greater need by companies to portray themselves as experts (Cucchi 2010a). In this respect, it is worth mentioning that, in European countries, higher UA and higher PD tend to correlate (Meeuwesen *et al.* 2009).

LTO and IVR were not operationalised in the *Cultural Value Framework*. While IVR is still young, having been introduced only in 2010, LTO seems difficult to understand and operationalise. Hofstede (2001, p. 355) himself claimed that this dimension, which refers to typically Eastern values, “will probably puzzle many Western readers”. Despite the association of LTO to future rewards and of STO to the past and the present made in Hofstede (2001), de Mooij (2010) discarded the past component inherent in STO,

linking it to “the sense of urgency so often encountered in U.S. advertising”, reflected in expressions such as ‘Hurry’, ‘Don’t wait’, and the emphasis on “living in the now and not thinking about the future” (de Mooij 2010, p. 236).

Linguistics and communications studies unanimously related lower PD to more interacting roles in terms of tenor and to a more marked spoken medium in terms of mode. Reportedly, people in low PD societies expect “more responsiveness and empathy” (Singh *et al.* 2005, p. 130). In keeping with this, in lower PD countries roles in doctor-patient consultations were less fixed (Meuweesen *et al.* 2009) and virtual team members were more responsive to messages and deemed it more important to invite contributions to the group (Dekker *et al.* 2008). In American sales promotion letters compared to Russian ones, more attempts to “continue the conversation” were observed, in keeping with the U.S.’s lower PD compared to Russia’s (Loukianenko Wolfe 2008). The official tourism homepages of New Zealand, Germany, France and Italy reflected their PD scores, with New Zealand’s homepage being by far the most interactive one (Manca 2016a).

In lower PD countries a more conversational medium was also found. More informal greetings and closings were observed in e-mails by students from lower PD countries to their university professors (Bjørge 2007) and more occurrences of the vague markers *and so on* and *etcetera* – which are typical of spoken language (Carter, McCarthy 2006, p. 202) – were found in EU parliamentary discourse by British speakers compared to their Italian equivalents *e così via* and *eccetera* in Italian EU parliamentary discourse, which reflected Italy’s higher PD (Cucchi 2010b). Tourism public relation websites of low PD countries featured more casual narratives (Kang, Mastin 2008), which also characterised a British website compared to the English version of its Italian counterpart (Cucchi 2010a). More occurrences of *thing(s)* – one of the most frequent words in spoken English (Carter, McCarthy 1997, p. 16) – were found on Swedish corporate websites in English as compared to Greek ones, which reflected Sweden’s much lower PD. Corporate homepages in English of Austrian, Danish, Polish and Portuguese companies reflected the PD of the four countries, with Austria’s homepages containing many features of spokenness, such as second person pronouns, imperatives, questions, vague language, exclamation marks and suspension marks (Cucchi 2019).

Drawing on Gudykunst and Ting Toomey (1988), de Mooij (2010, pp. 165-166) associated specific styles, as she called them, to a combination of dimensions. High IDV, low PD and low-context communication, in which messages tend to be communicated explicitly (Hall 1976; Hall, Reed Hall 1990), was associated to the *verbal textual style*, which focuses on “personhood”, consists in “individual-centred language, [...] [which] enhances the ‘I’ identity and is person-oriented (e.g. English)” (de Mooij 2010, p. 165). Low IDV, high PD and high-context, more implicit communication was linked

to the *verbal contextual style*, in which the language is “role-centered [...]; [...] emphasises a context-related role identity (e.g. Japanese, Chinese), [...] includes different ways of addressing different persons, related to their status and/or situation” (de Mooij 2010, p. 165).

A further distinction was claimed to exist between the *exacting style*, the *elaborate style* and the *succinct style*. The *exacting style*, also dubbed *precise*, characterises low PD countries, namely Anglo-American and Northern European ones: people “like data” (de Mooij 2010, p. 167), communication is direct and “no more or no less information than required” is provided (de Mooij 2010, p. 165), a definition which appears culture-bound – required by whom? – since the Author is Dutch. On the contrary, in low IDV countries communication is more indirect and implicit. In particular, low IDV countries with high PD and high UA, like Japan, Spain, Italy and the Arab countries, generally utilise the *elaborate style*, which is flowery, characterised by metaphors, long strings of adjectives and proverbs. Instead, low IDV countries with high PD and low UA, like India, China and Singapore, typically use the *succinct style*, characterised by understatements, pauses and silence (de Mooij 2010, p. 167).

Another “major distinction” made by de Mooij (2010, p. 170) was between the *direct style* of high IDV countries and the *indirect style* of low IDV countries. In high IDV countries, “the public tends to be addressed in a direct and personalized way. Words like *you*, *we* and *I* are frequently used. So are imperatives” (de Mooij 2010, p. 223). In low IDV cultures the public is more frequently addressed through indirect methods, such as drama or metaphors (de Mooij 2010, p. 170). The association between high IDV and a more personalised style also emerged from various communications and linguistics studies. More occurrences of *I*, *my*, *you* and *your* were observed on U.S. websites as compared to Chinese ones, in keeping with the U.S.’s higher IDV (Zhao *et al.* 2003). More occurrences of *you*, *your*, *we*, *us*, *our* were found on a British corporate website as compared to its Italian counterpart written in English (Cucchi 2010a) and on Swedish corporate websites in English compared to their Greek counterparts (Cucchi 2012), which reflected the U.K.’s and Sweden’s lower PD compared to Italy’s and Greece’s, respectively. *Welcome*, *contact* and *call* to address customers were also more frequent on Swedish websites in English than in Greek ones (Cucchi 2012). In keeping with these findings, Manca (2016b, p. 103) found that imperatives were absent on the Italian tourist website, but played a significant role in its British and Australian equivalents. It is here worth mentioning that not only are IDV scores in Australia, the U.K. and Sweden higher than in Italy and Greece, but the former three countries’ PD and UA are also lower than in Italy and in Greece. Interestingly, the predictions which can be formulated on the basis of these three dimensions are the same. High IDV was associated, as seen above,

to more personalisation. Lower PD may be linked to more interactive roles and, therefore, to more imperatives and personal pronouns used to interact with website visitors. In turn, more interactive roles may be linked to lower UA, due to a greater tolerance for unpredictable situations resulting from increased interaction.

De Mooij (2010, p. 167) associated, respectively, “[w]ordings such as *absolutely* and *definitely* to express buying intentions” with the direct style and high IDV, and *probably* and *somewhat* with the indirect style and low IDV. Drawing on this claim, Crawford Camiciottoli (2017) hypothesised that boosters would be more frequent in the earnings conference calls from European companies, while diminishers would be more frequent in Asian companies. In fact, results contradicted this hypothesis, showing that both boosters and diminishers were more frequent in the discourse of European companies. However, it should be noted that boosters and diminishers are both markers of personalised discourse – more informal and conversational than impersonal discourse – which de Mooij associated to high IDV, as seen above. Indeed, Chafe (1982, p. 47) mentioned *really* and *just* – a booster and a hedge – as examples of the ‘emphatic particles’ which “express enthusiastic involvement in what is being said” and characterise spoken discourse. Similarly, Biber (1988, p. 108) found emphatics, amplifiers and hedges to be typical of spoken texts, characterised by an interactive and involved purpose. Following this interpretation, a higher frequency of both boosters and diminishers would be expected in high IDV countries, where communication is typically more personalised, which is what Crawford Camiciottoli’s findings indicate (2007, p. 117).

3. Methodological issues and corpus

To verify whether Hofstede’s model may account for the discursive choices made on the English website versions of local companies in Europe, a corpus of German and Spanish corporate websites was set up. The corpus was examined through a CADS approach so as to unveil whether the findings are compatible with those obtained with other methodologies and in other research fields. Before illustrating the rationale for corpus building, it should be mentioned that English as used on local corporate websites may be qualified as ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) or BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca). Big multinationals generally set up website versions in many different languages to address international customers in their native languages: English is just one of the many available languages. Some multinationals (e.g. Nestlé) even exhibit various versions in English which target consumers from different geographic areas, for example, the U.K., the U.S. and India. Instead, local

companies typically set up a single translation into English of their websites along with the original version in their national language.

The purpose of the English version is clearly to target consumers whose mother tongue is different from the national language of the country in which the companies operate. Therefore, English functions as a lingua franca, intended as “the common language” which enables communication “among speakers who come from different linguacultural backgrounds” (Jenkins 2009, p. 200). Given that the specific function of English on national corporate websites consists in “conducting business within the global business discourse community” (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005, p. 404), English may be labelled as BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca), a term coined as a result of the transfer of the ELF paradigm to the business context (Louhiala-Salminen *et al.* 2005). Unlike what happens on the websites of multinationals, on the websites of local companies English is used to reach consumers who belong, in Kachru’s (1992) terminology, to the Inner Circle, the Outer Circle and the Expanding Circle, i.e. respectively, native, second language, and foreign language speakers of English. This is in line with current conceptualisations of ELF (e.g. Hülmbauer *et al.* 2008, Seidlhofer 2009, Jenkins 2009; European Commission 2011), which promote an inclusive view of ELF, intended as a means of communication between speakers of all the three Circles. In terms of form, the ELF and BELF paradigm is characterised by emphasis on effectiveness rather than on native-like correctness (e.g. Kankaaranta and Planken 2010, European Commission 2011), which is reflected in the presence of minor grammatical and lexical deviations on corporate websites.

Germany and Spain were chosen for analysis because the two countries – located in Europe, a geographically limited territory in which cultural differences may be thought to be blurred due to globalisation – exhibit the correlation among the dimensions which is typical of European countries, with higher IDV, lower PD and lower UA and the other way round (Meeuwesen *et al.* 2009). In addition, the two countries differ along Hofstede’s dimensions (Table 1), but not so markedly as the countries considered in previous studies on English website versions in Europe (Cucchi 2010a, 2012, 2016, 2019).

<i>Countries</i>	<i>IDV</i>	<i>PD</i>	<i>UA</i>	<i>MAS</i>	<i>LTO</i>	<i>IRV</i>
Germany	67	35	65	66	83	40
Spain	51	57	86	42	48	44

Table 1
Country scores.¹

¹ The scores are taken from Hofstede *et al.*’s (2010), which offers comprehensive grids for the scores on all the dimensions but LTO. For this dimensions, scores are reported (p. 240) for only 23 countries and Spain is not among these. LTO scores for Spain are obtained from Hofstede

For an interpretation of the scores, it should be mentioned that countries are measured on a scale from 1 to 100 and that a few scores in the model exceed 100, since the respective countries were added later. Scores below 50 are conventionally considered low, those above 50 are considered high. To fully appreciate the scores, the highest and lowest scores both in Europe and in the world are worth mentioning. U.K.'s IDV (89) and the U.S.'s (91) are the highest in Europe and in the world, respectively, while Serbia (IDV=25) and Guatemala (IDV=6) score the lowest. Austria's PD (11) is the lowest in the world, while Slovakia's and Malaysia's (104) is the highest. The highest UA in the world is Greece's (112), while Denmark (UA=23) and Singapore (UA=8) score lowest, in Europe and in the world respectively. Slovakia is the most MAS country in the world (MAS=110) and Sweden the least one (MAS=5). Sweden (78) is the most indulgent country in Europe and Venezuela (IVR=100) in the world, while Latvia (IVR=13) and Pakistan (IVR=0) are the least indulgent countries in Europe and in the world.²

The cheese sector was chosen because of its importance in Europe. According to the *European Food Information Council*, “[c]heese, when consumed in moderation, is an important part of a healthy, balanced diet and at the centre of European culture”.³ Given the difficulties in developing “a workable method to identify representative [...] discourse in an erratic Web site universe” (Isaksson, Jørgensen 2010, p. 128), the national dairy associations mentioned on the website of the *European Dairy Association* were considered representative of the dairy sector in each country.⁴

The member companies of the German and Spanish national dairy associations were examined, for a total of 90 and 47 companies respectively. Companies which did not deal with cheese, multinationals, local companies whose websites did not have an English version and the companies whose website was protected and could not be copied in a word file were eliminated. This yielded 12 German and 12 Spanish companies.

The following texts were included in the corpus:

- Self-representative texts describing values, history, achievements, production, corporate and social responsibility, news;
- Texts regulating the company's relationship with visitors and customers, e.g. sections about data protection and training.

Insights (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>), which enables comparison among the dimensions of up to four countries.

² Neither Hofstede *et al.* (2010) nor *Hofstede Insights* (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>) provide comprehensive grids with LTO scores. Therefore, overall comparisons along this dimension are not included in this study.

³ <https://www.eufic.org/en/food-today/article/cheese-a-european-tradition>

⁴ <http://www.euromilk.org/eda/members.aspx?cid=15>

To ensure greater comparability, product descriptions were not included. The corpus is illustrated in Table 2 and consists of two sections, which contain respectively the English versions of German and Spanish websites. The two sections were called DE and ES with reference to the two-letter country code used to identify the Member States of the European Union (*Eurostat*, Statistics Explained).

Although the number of websites included in the two sections is equal, the number of tokens is much lower in ES, which indicates that less information is generally displayed on Spanish websites. This is in keeping with the fact that Spain is, compared to Germany, a high-context culture: more information is conveyed verbally or not conveyed at all, since it is considered shared.

<i>DE</i> 35.308 tokens		<i>ES</i> 17.121 tokens	
Alpenhein	Exquisa	Aldonza y DonIsmael	Los Cameros
Ammerland	Goldsteig	Coqueya	Maxorata
Andechser Natur	Kohrener	El Gran Cardenal	Monteverdesa
Bauer Milch	Petrella	El Pastor	Palancares
Bechtel	Rücker	Eusebio Manzano	Pastoret
Bergader	Weideglück	Garcia Baquero	San Vincente

Table 2
The corpus.

Content analysis was conducted with *Wmatrix* (Rayson 2009), since this software enables identification not only of the most frequent words, as *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2012) does, but also of the most frequent semantic domains and of the words belonging to them, which makes content analysis more accurate. As a part of content analysis, dispersion plots were examined with *WordSmith Tools* (Scott 2012). Compared to *Wmatrix*, which can only process the two sections of the corpora as two individual files, *WordSmith Tools* makes it possible to keep the website texts of the single companies separate. Dispersion plots, one of the facilities of *WordSmith Tools*, reveal the distribution of the investigated features across the corpus: the significance of a given feature is clearly very different if it occurs across a large number of companies or, albeit very frequently, in very few of them. In Section 4, data about the dispersion plots is given in the form of the number of companies where specific features appear. Section 4 compares the findings from content analysis with those emerged from previous studies – from various disciplinary fields – which relied on Hofstede’s framework, to find out whether content and stylistic features may be explained with reference to the framework.

4. Content Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Semantic Domains

Table 3 shows the top ten semantic domains along with the top ten words in each domain, in DE and ES.

Rank	DE semantic domains	DE top ten words	ES semantic domains	ES top ten words
1	Grammatical bin 28.84%	the, and, of, to, in, for, a, with, is, or	Grammatical bin 30.84%	the, of, and, in, to, a, with, for, from
2	Pronouns 5.75%	our, we, you, your, that, it, us, this, its, which	Pronouns 5.39%	our, its, it, we, that, which, you, us, their, who
3	Unmatched 4.64%	Bergader, Goldsteig, Alpenhain, Karwendel, Ammerland, Schwarzenfeld, Exquisa, Andechser, Bauer, DLG	Unmatched 4.84%	Pastoret, Cameros, industrias, cheesemaking, manchego, lacteas, Lcteos, lcteas, Oscos, villacenteno
4	Numbers 2.52%	0,+49, 1, one, 3, 2, 6, three, 5	Food 4.08%	cheese, cheeses, food, yougurt, recipe, curd, dessert, raw, whey, youghurt
5	Food 2.03%	cheese, food, dairy products, cookies, cheeses, yoghurt, butter, raw, cookie, fruit	Personal names 2.52%	Garca_Baquero, Los_Cameros, La_Rioja, del, tel., Los_Oscos, Hijos_de_Salvador, Castilla_La_Mancha, Villanueva_de, El_Gran_Cardenal
6	General actions, making 1.95%	production, processes, process, processing, made, make, activities, committed, waging, making	Numbers 2.24%	one, three, +34, 2010, 2012, 2007,2005, 2008, 1, 4
7	Existing 1.56%	is, are, be, 's, available, event, were, been, 're, was	General actions, making 2.22%	production, process, made, make, processes, manufacturing, makes, making, activities, committed
8	Objects generally 1.41%	products, product, goods, things, packaging, files, mould, trail, provisions, equipment	Geographical names 1.59%	Spanish, S.A., San Vicente, Spain, ewes, la, Greek, ewe, Spains, Canary Island
9	Location and direction 1.35%	this, here, where, top, external, there, direct, northern, located, route	Existing 1.45%	is, are, be, was, were, real, been, available, event, being
10	Personal names 1.32%	tel., Privatmolkerei_Bechtel, Andechser_Molkerei_Scheitz, GOLDSTEIG_Ksereien_Bayerwald, Google_Analytics, Kohrener_Landmolkerei_GmbH, Privatmolkerei_Bauer_GmbH, Molkerei_Ammerland, Hans, european_union	Objects generally 1.35%	products, product, medal, packaging, pack, moulds, packs, wedges, SIAL, ⁵ medals

Table 3
Top ten semantic domains and top ten corresponding words.

⁵ SIAL is an international exhibition in the food sector.

In both DE and ES, pronouns play an important role, being the second semantic domain after the ‘Grammatical bin’, which contains function words (Table 3). However, the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives used to interact with website visitors are invariably more prominent in DE than in ES, both in terms of overall frequency and of the number of companies which use them (Table 4), making DE discourse more informal (Example 1). The higher personalisation in DE may be associated to the *verbal textual style* (de Mooij 2010), which reflects Germany’s higher IDV and lower PD compared to Spain.

<i>Pronouns / possessive adjectives</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>ES</i>
our	1.31% all companies	0.92% 11 companies
we	0.92% all companies	0.44% all companies
you	0.60% 11 companies	0.40% 9 companies
your	0.38% all companies	0.12% 5 companies
Total	3.21%	1.88%

Table 4
Selected pronouns and possessive adjectives.

- (1) “Heeeeyyy, heeeeere! We are here!” Questions? Questions! Suggestions? Suggestions! Simply fill out the form below and your request is with us. We are happy to help! (Rcker)

The higher frequency of *we* to refer to companies in DE explains why *Personal names*, which comprises company names, is more frequent in ES (Table 3). As a result, sentences in which companies refer to themselves by their names (Example 2, from ES) are more frequent in ES, making ES discourse more impersonal.

- (2) Since 1962, Garca Baquero, originally a family business founded by Hersilio Garca Baquero, has specialised in the production of cheese. (Garca Baquero)

Interestingly, unlike in ES, in DE various nouns denoting people collocate with *our* – *customers*, *employees*, *farmers*, *suppliers* and *partners*, thus showing their contribution to the success of the company. These findings, which confirm Cucchi (2010a, 2016), may be attributed to greater attention to single individuals, possibly due to higher IDV, as well as to lower PD, which is associated to symmetrical relationships within companies, as illustrated in (3).

- (3) We value our employees highly [...]. The tasks carried out by each and every employee are important, and everyone is responsible for achieving our corporate goals. Moreover, we respect the dignity of each and every employee. We expect all our employees to behave in a cooperative way. [...] And every member of our management team practises an “open door” policy.
(Ammerland)

The semantic domain *Numbers* is more frequent in DE than in ES (Table 3), reflecting the features of the *exacting style* typical of low PD countries (de Mooij 2010).

- (4) Within the beautifully appointed landscape of the Rupertiwinkel (up to 827 m above sea level) and close to the old royal city of Burghausen in south-eastern Bavaria there are around 520 farms [...].

Recipe, possibly associated to low IDV countries (Cucchi 2019), features in ES among the top ten words in *Food* (Table 3). Although the frequency of *recipe** is notably higher in ES, the word features in a limited number of companies in both ES and DE (Table 5). However, the importance of traditional values in ES constantly emerges from the co-text of *recipe** (Example 5). These findings may be related to Spain’s lower IDV compared to Germany.

<i>Word</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>ES</i>
recipe*	0.01% 5 companies	0.11% 4 companies

Table 5
*Recipe**.

- (5) At Pastoret our goal is to make fresh products for you to enjoy. To do this, we have maintained our original family recipes and traditional artisan production techniques. (Pastoret)

Existing comprises the contracted forms *'s* and *'re* in DE (Table 3), which make DE discourse more informal (Example 6), thus reflecting Germany’s lower PD. Although contracted forms feature only in a few German companies, they notably never occur in ES (Table 6).

<i>Contracted forms</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>ES</i>
's	0.04% 5 companies	/
're	0.02% 3 companies	/
Total	0.06%	/

Table 6
Contracted forms.

- (6) If you're a cow in Ammerland, you're certain to be a happy cow. Because you're surrounded by unspoilt nature, luscious meadows and so much space you can graze outside on our green fields. (Ammerland)

Within *Objects, generally*, the informal noun *thing* (Example 7) appears among the top ten words in DE (Table 3). Table 7 shows that *thing** is more frequent in DE, both in terms of frequency and of number of companies, in keeping with Germany's lower PD. On the contrary, *medal* and *medals* are among the top ten words in *Objects, generally* in ES, but not in DE (Table 3), where their frequency is much lower (Table 7). This result could point to an association between the mention of quality and prizes, on the one hand, and high PD (Singh *et al.* 2005) and high UA, on the other, rather than to high IDV and high MAS, as claimed by de Mooij (2010). Indeed, Spain's PD and UA are higher than Germany's, but its IDV and MAS are lower.

<i>Objects, generally</i>	<i>DE</i>	<i>ES</i>
<i>thing*</i>	0.05% 7 companies	0.01% 1 company
<i>medal*</i>	0.02% 4 companies	0.13% 5 companies

Table 7
Selected objects: *thing** and *medal**.

- (7) The tenet of the entire ANDECHSER NATUR product range is “Leave natural things natural!” (Andechser)
- (8) El Gran Cardenal's best kept secret has been revealed. This secret closely guarded by our brother, we have shared with expert cheesemakers around the world and have honored us in 2009 and 2010 with the gold medal. (El Cardenal)

4.2. Most frequent content words

Table 8 illustrates the top ten content words in DE and in ES, identified with *Wmatrix*. The words in italics were chosen for analysis, since they were mentioned in previous literature on Hofstede's dimensions.

Table 9 illustrates the frequencies of the selected words and the number of companies in which they feature.

Rank	DE	ES
1	milk 0.73%	cheese 2.06%
2	cheese 0.69%	quality 0.55%
3	quality 0.46%	milk 0.54%
4	products 0.44%	cheeses 0.44%
5	dairy 0.40%	products 0.42%
6	production / data 0.36%	production 0.39%
7	company 0.31%	company / process 0.33%
8	product 0.30%	awards 0.30%
9	training 0.29%	traditional 0.29%
10	website 0.28%	natural 0.27%

Table 8
Top ten content words.

Words	DE	ES
quality	0.46% all companies	0.55% all companies
award*	/	0.38% 7 companies
data	0.36% 10 companies	0.12% 3 companies
tradition*	0.09% 8 companies	0.71% 11 companies
natural	0.13% 12 companies	0.27% 9 companies

Table 9
Selected words.

The fact that *quality* is slightly more frequent in ES and that *award** is absent in DE suggests an association between the mention of quality and awards, on the one hand, and higher PD and UA, on the other, as stated in Section 4.1. Examples (9) and (10) illustrate *quality* and *award** in ES.

- (9) From the outset the basic philosophy was always, above all, to offer the highest quality product [...]. (Monteverdesa)
- (10) Throughout its career, the company and its brands have been awarded numerous prizes and mentions. (Maxorata)

Data, which is more frequent in DE, is embedded in legal discourse regulating the disclosure of personal data (Example 11).

- (11) We collect and use your personal data solely in accordance with the provisions of the data protection law of the Federal Republic of Germany. (Bauer)

The greater presence of legal discourse in DE is in keeping with the importance of contracts and explicit rules in *rule-based cultures* (Hooker

2008), which are characterised by lower PD and where human beings are conceived as autonomous individuals. Consequently, no individual has natural authority over others and sources of authority apart from individuals need to be established. Instead, in *relationship-based cultures*, characterised by higher PD, “[i]t is not necessary to write everything (or perhaps anything) down, because mutual understanding and a handshake suffice” (Hooker 2008: 4).

*Tradition** is more frequent in ES and tends to co-occur with other words associated to tradition, like *artisan*, *family*, *original* and *recipe* (Example 12). Instead, in DE *traditional* invariably occurs in combination with words indicating modernity (Example 13). These findings could be related both to Spain’s lower IDV and to its higher UA, as in previous literature (Singh *et al.* 2005; Cucchi 2012).

(12) At Pastoret [...] we have maintained our original family recipes and *traditional artisan* production techniques. (Pastoret)

(13) Even though we have one of Europe 's largest and most advanced cheese dairies and an ultra-modern plant for fresh dairy products, we still produce by *traditional* methods without exception. (Ammerland)

Natural is more frequent in ES, in keeping with Spain’s higher UA, confirming the association made in de Mooij (2010). Example 14 shows *natural* in ES.

(14) Over 35 years ago our cheese began to be produced in the same original way it was made at the very sheepfolds: natural milk and rennet. (Quesos Aldonza y Don Ismael)

5. Concluding remarks

Results show that, despite globalisation, linguacultural differences are still visible in the English versions of corporate websites of two European countries which are not exceedingly far apart on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. In particular, a CADS approach which combined the study of semantic domains, frequent words, dispersion plots and collocations has proved effective for the identification of linguacultural differences which can be explained with reference to Hofstede’s framework.

In some cases, a single dimension can explain the field of discourse quite well, for example *natural* was more frequent in ES, reflecting the association between freshness and high UA (de Mooij 2010). In other cases, more dimensions may be associated to specific linguistic choices. For

example, the emphasis on tradition in ES may be interpreted as a means of reducing uncertainty, but also of emphasising shared values, and thus be related to high UA (Singh *et al.* 2005, Manca 2016b) and to low IDV (Cucchi 2012, 2019). Similarly, being a sign of authority, the mention of quality and awards in ES may be associated to high PD (Singh *et al.* 2005; Singh, Pereira 2005) and, since it may reduce the customers' uncertainty about the products, to high UA (Cucchi 2012, 2019).

Regarding the tenor and the medium, findings confirm a link between interactive roles, spokenness and low PD. Interestingly, linguistics studies grouped and, at times, even coined specific terms to refer to features co-occurring in spoken discourse, which were found to characterise DE in the present investigation. Chafe (1982, p. 46) considered first person references, including *we*, as a “symptom of involvement”, which points to the typical interactive relationship in speech as opposed to writing, characterised by detachment. Vagueness and hedges – a category to which the vague noun *thing* belongs – are also a sign of involvement typical of speech (Chafe 1982, p. 48). Biber (1988; p. 107) found that first person pronouns, contractions and hedges typically co-occur in spoken texts, which have an “interactive, affective, and involved” purpose. Hyland (2004, p. 113) termed ‘engagement markers’ the second person pronoun *you*, imperatives and questions and defined them as devices that “explicitly address readers, either to focus their attention or to include them as discourse participants”. On the basis of these observations, in texts targeting idealised readers like websites and brochures an association may be made between lower PD and *synthetic personalisation*, defined as the practice, popular in advertising, of giving “the impression of treating each of the people ‘handled’ *en masse* as an individual” (Fairclough 1989, p. 62).

Since English versions of European corporate websites do differ and Hofstede's model has proved to be helpful for explaining the differences, future research could consider whether the versions in English, which reflect national source texts in content and style, are effective in reaching a culturally diverse audience. Clearly, this issue has far-reaching implications for the content and style which is deemed appropriate for an international public and for all those involved in website localisation, including translators.

Bionote: Costanza Cucchi, PhD in Applied Linguistics and Communication, is an Associate Professor in English Language and Translation at the Faculty of Linguistic Sciences and Foreign Literatures at the Catholic University of Milan. She teaches undergraduate courses in English Linguistics, Professional Communication in English and Negotiation Strategies and holds workshops in intercultural communication. Her current research interests are the use of BELF (Business English as a Lingua Franca) in corporate

settings and the relationship between language and identity. She has published and presented papers at national and international conferences on non-native English in the European Parliament, vague language in parliamentary discourse, national identity as manifested in corporate websites and in CLIL textbooks, the teaching of English lexis and international classroom exchanges.

Author's address: costanza.cucchi@unicatt.it

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