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From “Environmental Impact” to “Environmental Performance”: the evolution of “green communication” in the annual letters of oil and gas companies between 2003 and 2009

ABSTRACT:

This analysis focuses on the “green communication” of oil and gas companies and more specifically on how their environmental values are asserted. From a linguist’s perspective, it examines how company discourse is influenced by the climate change controversy, paying particular attention to the message conveyed in two distinct genres of company discourse, the letter to the shareholders and the letter to the stakeholders.

Traditionally represented as risk companies, Exxon, BP and Chevron have had to face an image deficit, chiefly because of the negative impact of their activities on the environment. With the increasing focus of stakeholders on environmental values, how have oil and gas companies been using green communication to improve their tarnished image? This analysis concentrates on the annual letters published by Exxon, Chevron and BP between 2003 and 2009. The representations of the environmental controversy, the rhetorical strategies and the lexical choices implemented in the annual letters were analyzed to demonstrate how environmental values have gradually become valorization tools for oil and gas companies.