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KYOSEI – AN EXAMPLE OF CULTURAL KEYWORD ARGUMENTATIVELY EXPLOITED IN CORPORATE REPORTING DISCOURSE

By means of a relevant example, this paper shows the appropriateness of the theoretical construct of argumentative keyword proposed by Rigotti & Rocci (2005) in relation to an emergent discourse genre: top management's letters to stakeholders appearing in the introduction to corporate social responsibility/sustainability reports. Analyzing a text fragment extracted from a recent sustainability report, the paper shows the argumentative and the persuasive relevance of the Japanese business concept *kyosei* for this particular type of discourse. The analysis is based on the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti 2009, 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming) and a number of insights coming from adjacent disciplines (corporate communication, discourse analysis and linguistics, cultural studies and the psychology of persuasion).

Keywords: argumentative keywords, Argumentum Model of Topics, persuasion, sustainability reports, corporate philosophy, *kyosei*.

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Cultural keywords are "significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation" (Williams 1976: 20, in Bigi 2006) that, as suggested by the metaphor of the *key,* can provide some sort of access to a body of knowledge to which they are bound and of which they are representative (Rigotti & Rocci 2005). Cultural keywords are claimed to have a special status either because they express important evaluative social meanings, or because they play a special role in the texts in which they appear (Stubbs 2008), but there is still fuzziness regarding their definition and the objective methods for their identification. That is why cultural keywords are easily recognized in texts, however, systematical identification remains problematic (although frequency seems to be a common criteria for both corpus linguistics and anthropological linguistics, e.g. Stubbs 2008; Wierzbicka 1997). Due to their high representativeness, cultural keywords are particularly intriguing for argumentation as they can have a strategic importance, either increasing, or lessening the effectiveness (the persuasiveness) of a specific communication. In this respect, Rigotti & Rocci (2005) developed a theoretical hypothesis for the discovery of cultural keywords, based on the *logical role* of *terminus medius* that these words may play in argumentative structures. According to Rigotti and Rocci, the keywords present in minor explicit premises can act as *lexical pointers* to shared values and beliefs *(endoxa)* that act as (implicit) major premises in support of a certain claim. First defined by Aristotle in the Book of Topics, "*Endoxa* are opinions that are accepted by everyone or by the majority, or by the wise men (all of them or the majority, or by the most notable and illustrious of them)." (*Topica* 100b.21, in Rigotti 2006: 527). As paraphrased by Rigotti (2006) in his study on the contribution of the Topical tradition to contemporary argumentation, "an *endoxon* is an opinion that is accepted by the relevant public or by the opinion leaders of the relevant public" (ibid.: 527). Being presuppositional and culture dependent, *endoxa* can be a source of pragmatic misunderstanding (especially in intercultural communication) resulting from a possible incongruence between the assumed and the real common ground, or differences in the inferential style (Rocci 2006; Rigotti 2008). The *persuasive potential* of cultural keywords would thus reside in their capacity to evoke, from an (appropriately) assumed common ground, those *endoxa* that are shared by both emitter and addressee of an argumentative message.

Most studies on cultural keywords come from the sociological or cultural-anthropological area, such significant and binding words being met in a wide variety of discourse genres. In what follows, we propose an example of cultural keyword employed in a discourse genre that, so far, has not yet been subject of argumentative analysis: the letters to stakeholders that appear in the introductory sections of corporate sustainability reports. The example is part of a wider research, currently in progress, on the role of *endoxa* and cultural keywords in the pragmatics of corporate reporting discourse[1].

According to Gunnarsson (2000), an (effective) organizational discourse is essential in the life of a corporation. First, it is a means of building good and trustful relationships with its stakeholders, especially with those on which the survival of the corporation depends: the customers and the shareholders. Second, it is a means of constructing and transmitting a unique and attractive corporate identity and image, rooted in an own organizational culture created within the limits of the business sector to which the corporation belongs and of the national culture of its country of origin. These two communicative objectives are evident in corporate reporting discourse. *Sustainability* or *corporate social responsibility (CSR) reports* are voluntary disclosures that usually accompany the yearly compulsory financial-economic report of listed corporations. Based on the (relatively recent) globally shared value of *sustainability*, CSR reports present the performance of a company in practicing a *sustainable*[2] development able to "meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (G3 Guidelines: 2). Compared to the financial-economic annual reports,

[1] The title of the project is *Endoxa and keywords in the pragmatics of argumentative discourse. The pragmatic functioning and persuasive exploitation of keywords in corporate reporting,* project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and coordinated by Andrea Rocci at Università della Svizzera italiana in Lugano. The research is conducted on a large corpus of letters to stakeholders from corporate annual reports and sustainability reports published on the internet by listed multinational corporations, during 2008–2009.

[2] *Sustainable* (adj.) – capable of being continued with minimal long-term effect on the environment (The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition, retrieved on 20/12/09 from Dictionary.com: http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/sustainability).

CSR reports are an emergent genre, heterogeneous at the level of topics and communicative conventions (Skulstad 2005), in spite of a tendency to standardization by means of general reporting guidelines (e.g. *GRI* guidelines[3]). CSR reports address a mixed pool of stakeholders (like communities, civil society, customers, employees, shareholders, capital providers, suppliers) presumably less motivated for a systematic reading than the readers of the financial economic reports. In this respect, the model of the *idealized reader* (O'Halloran 2003) can be assumes as representative for the audience of this genre: a reader with general, less specific goals towards the discourse under scrutiny, and with a propensity to a less effortful, but heuristic elaboration of the content, relying on quickly and easily available information.

Similar to financial-economic annual reports, CSR reports are introduced by the management's *letter to stakeholders* – a sub-genre even newer than CSR reports. In financial-economic reports, the letter to shareholders is usually "the most prominent and widely read part, [...] seen as a promotional genre designed to construct and convey a [certain] corporate image" (Hyland 1998: 224); it has a decisive influence on shareholders' confidence in the company (especially in its business strategy) and critically contributes to the first impression created by the whole report (Clarke & Murray 2000). In CSR reports, the letter to stakeholders maintains a high visibility, but it attains a lower decision-making weight than in financial-economic reports (this is also reflected by the fact that they are significantly shorter). In CSR reports, the letter to stakeholders addresses the concept of trust from an ethical and social perspective. And last, but not the least, the letter to stakeholders has the rhetorical task of "establish[ing] a common ground for interaction, due to the higher uncertainty of what is shared knowledge and what needs to be made explicit to the readers" (Skulstad 2005: 83).

The cultural keyword examined in the present paper, the Japanese business concept *kyosei*, is a frequent occurrence in the corporate reports of Canon Inc. of the last few years. Starting from the subtitle of the *Message from Top Management* that appears in the introduction to *Canon's Sustainability Report 2008,* we will observe if and how the

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[3] *Global Reporting Initiative* (GRI) and *GRI Reporting Frameworks.*

word *kyosei* and the key-phrase *corporate philosophy of kyosei* fulfill the two-sided argumentative role predicted by Rigotti & Rocci's construct of argumentative keyword (2005). First, we will analyze the logical validity and the persuasiveness of an argumentative structure that contains the word *kyosei* reconstructed in line with the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti 2009, 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming). Then, we will see if possible questions raised by this primary analysis could receive an answer from alternative interpretations suggested by the denotations and the connotations of *kyosei* (and of the key-phrase *corporate philosophy of kyosei*) within Canon's corporate context and culture. As shown by Schein (1984)[4], corporate artifacts (sustainability reports included) may reflect the overt values and the underlying assumptions present in the corporate culture with regard to the relationship of the corporation with the environment and with the communities in which it operates, or about the nature of the human activity within that corporation. We will seize the representativeness of the keyword *kyosei* in relation to a multi-level construct of culture (Leung et al. 2005) that considers various levels of culture nested within each other (from the macro-level of the global culture, to national and organizational cultures), and according to which local organizations, "although [sharing] some common values of their national cultures, [...] vary in their local organizational cultures, which are also shaped by the type of industry that they represent, the type of ownership, the values of the founders etc." (ibid.: 363). By means of the construct of Leung et al., the values brought into the argumentation by Canon by means of evoked *endoxa* can be situated at specific levels of the corporate context, thus allowing a better estimation of the common ground assumed by the authors of the report, and the possible knowledge gaps or pragmatic misunderstandings that may obstruct the communication with the potential readers of the report.

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[4] According to Schein, "organizational culture is the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 1984: 3, italics omitted).

Third, we will go one step further in the analysis of the persuasive role of the word *kyosei*, trying to observe if it has the potential to influence the extent of elaboration of the text in which it appears. As mentioned before, the model of the *idealized reader* (O'Halloran, 2003), of a parsimonious processor of the text, with a low *sufficiency threshold*[5] and tending to rely only on subsets of available information at hand when judging the validity of a claim, can be assumed as representative for the discourse genre under analysis. On the other hand, the extent of processing of a message directly influences the persistence in time, the resistance to counterarguments, and the decisional influence of the judgments and the attitudes that that message might elicit, regardless of the valence of those attitudes (pro or against the message being processed) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). If cultural keywords were revealed to influence the extent of elaboration of the text in which they appear, they would acquire and important strategic value, that would add a new dimension to their *keyness*[6] in text. Observing the use of the word *kyosei* in the subtitle of the above mentioned *Message from Top Management,* we hope to obtain some support for such a hypothesis.

The subtitle that represents the fragment of text on which we will focus our analysis is reproduced below:

"In keeping with our corporate philosophy of kyosei, *as a global corporation striving for excellence, we will continue to contribute to the realization of a sustainable society."* (Message from Top Management, Canon Sustainability Report 2008: 4)

and out of which we have extracted the following argumentative structure containing the word *kyosei*:

[5] *Sufficiency threshold* – "the degree of confidence a person aspires to attain in a given judgment setting"; [...] "levels of confidence that fall bellow the sufficiency threshold are considered insufficient, whereas those that exceed the sufficiency threshold will be regarded as more than sufficient" (Eagly & Chaiken 1993: 330).
[6] We borrowed the term *keyness* from the Conference *Keyness in Text* organized at Certosa di Pontignano (Italy, 2007) by the University of Siena, and where one of the bibliographical references of this paper has been published (see Stubbs 2008), http://www.disas.unisi.it/keyness/index.php?page=keynote.

SP. Canon contributes to the realization of a sustainable society.

(1.) (Canon is in keeping with its corporate philosophy that entails sustainability.)

    1.1. Canon is in keeping with its *corporate philosophy of kyosei*.

    (1.1.') (The philosophy of *kyosei* entails sustainability.)

(1.') (If a company is in keeping with a corporate philosophy that entails sustainability, then that company contributes to the realization of a sustainable society.)

Developing this argument according to the two-fold *Argumentum Model of Topics* (AMT) (Rigotti 2009, 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming) we obtain the argumentative structure illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Argumentative Structure I

| *Endoxon* |
| The philosophy of *kyosei* entails sustainability. |

| *Maxim* |
| The commitment to the realization of a quality of the whole, entails the obligation of realizing this quality in each of its parts. |

| *Minor Premise (Datum)* |
| Canon, which is a part of the society, is in keeping with its corporate philosophy of *kyosei*. |

| *First Conclusion* | *Minor Premise* |
| Canon is a part of [the whole that is] the society, who fulfills the obligation of being sustainable. |

| *Final Conclusion* |
| Canon contributes to the realization of a sustainable society. |

Canon's declared commitment to contribute to the realization of a sustainable society presupposes that Canon itself, as part of the society, must be a sustainable social reality. We have represented this inferential link on the right side of the Y-shaped structure prompted by the implicit *maxim:*

The commitment to the realization of a quality of the whole, entails the obligation of realizing this quality in each of its parts.

Originated from the Topical tradition (especially Medieval), the concept of *maxim* employed by the *Argumentum Model of Topics* refers to an inferential principle (of the logical form $p \rightarrow q$) that connects two or more factors of an ontological relation on which a certain argumentative reasoning is based (Rigotti 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming). The *maxim* above suggests that we are in the presence of a *syntagmatic locus from extensional implications (whole and parts).*

If this *maxim* is true, and the Minor Premise:

Canon is a part of [the whole that is] society, who fulfils the obligation of being sustainable.

is true, then we should reach a Final Conclusion that coincides with the standpoint of the argumentative structure presented above, more precisely:

Canon contributes to the realization of a sustainable society.

For a reasoning of this type (prompted by the *locus from the parts and the whole)* to be valid, the *quality* envisaged by the *maxim* must be absolute and structure-independent, so as to be transferrable from a part to an (unstructured) whole made of a non-ordered collection of elements and reducible to the sum of these elements (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992). These considerations lead us to the first critical question: is sustainability a transferable property between a company and society? To be transferable, sustainability should be an absolute property, independent of the structure of the social reality to which is assigned, and the society should be no more than the sum of the social entities that compose it. It seems that Canon's

vision of the relation between companies and society assumes these presuppositions as true. It is not the purpose of this paper to analyze the appropriateness of such a vision, but the question remains open.

We will focus instead on another element of the inferential path prompted by the *maxim*, that is on the Minor Premise and on its influence on the validity of the whole argumentative structure. As illustrated in Figure 1, the Minor Premise

> *Canon is a part of [the whole that is] society, who fulfills the obligation of being sustainable.*

should be the link that connects the logical-ontological principle of the parts and the whole (the *maxim*) with real data present in Canon's corporate reality. In other words, the Minor Premise should result, in virtue of a syllogistic relation, from the *datum*:

> *Canon is in keeping with its corporate philosophy of* kyosei.

and the implicit *endoxon*:

> *The corporate philosophy of* kyosei *entails sustainability.*

that can be recovered from the context of Canon's Sustainability Report (that is a demonstration of the company's performance towards sustainability), or directly from the body of the *Message from Top Management*: *kyosei* is an aspiration for all people to "harmoniously live and work together for the common good into the future" (ibid.: 4). As anticipated by the theoretical construct of Rigotti & Rocci (2005), the word *kyosei*, more precisely the key-phrase *the philosophy of kyosei* plays the logical role of *terminus medius* between the *datum* and the *endoxon*.

We observe that the logical First Conclusion resulting from the *datum* and the *endoxon* is:

> *Canon is in keeping with a corporate philosophy that entails sustainability.*

Which is not equivalent with the sentence:

> *Canon puts in practice its commitment to a corporate philosophy that entails sustainability. (Canon fulfills the obligation of being sustainable).*

Taking these two sentences for the former would be a fallacy, reducible to an improper application of a causal relation. In fact, the Minor Premise required for a valid inferential link between the *maxim* and the Final Conclusion is not backed up by data present in Canon's corporate reality that could be recoverable from the fragment of text that we are analyzing. This inferential gap invalidates the whole argumentative structure represented in Figure 1 (we have marked this validity problem in Figure 1 by a discontinue arrow accompanied by a question mark). It seems that the company manipulates the readers, exploiting the confusion between two modalities: *deontic* and *ontological* (Rocci 2008) and presents an entailment of commitments (a commitment to a philosophy that states the way in which things *should be)* as an entailment of facts (acting in real life in line with that philosophy, how things *really are)*. Hence, we may be in the presence of a (intentional or unintentional) *manipulation by insincerity* (Rigotti 2005).

At this point, we can forward a second critical question: how sincere is the company when it declares its commitment to the philosophy of *kyosei*? The answer could come from empirical data able to offer measurable proofs of sustainable behavior, but also from a deeper investigation of the possible meaning(s) of *kyosei* for Canon within the contemporary Japanese business environment. This makes us wonder if the mix-up of modalities could be a strategic maneuver aimed at challenging the readers to verify the sincerity of the company by exploring the meaning of *kyosei* (a concept that is deeply embedded not only in Canon's culture, but also in Japanese business culture) and, finally, at promoting the ethical business model of *kyosei* worldwide. If this were the case, both the word *kyosei* and the mix-up of the modalities could work as potential cues for increasing the elaboration likelihood of the corporate message.

In search of alternative interpretations we had a closer look at a number of characteristics of the company, coming from the context of contemporary Japanese business culture and styles of management, as well as at the wider cultural significance of the concept of *kyosei*, hoping to find some

answers to the questions raised by the presumed, however questionable correspondence between the commitment to a corporate philosophy and the actual performance of a company in the field of sustainability, that might eventually eliminate the fallacy presented above.

First, we have considered the possible normative stance of the corporate philosophies of the contemporary Japanese corporations that apply a philosophy-based management (Wang 2009). Wang makes a distinction between the *organizational values,* that guide the behavior of the individuals at work[7], and the *organizational value orientation,* that determine the fundamental direction of a company[8]. The value orientation generally involves *what* and *how* the company would do in order to satisfy its stakeholders, in line with the underlying values embodied in the corporate management philosophy. Wang brings evidence in supporting the fact that "it is reasonable to infer that the value orientations incorporated in the normative statement of corporate management philosophy might be able to have an impact on the corporate non-financial performance [...] of CSR environmental performance" (ibid.: 4). At the same time, due to its guiding importance at company level, the value orientation is likely to impact on the long-term development of the company – an aspect characteristic and representative for the Asian business culture (Hofstede 1991, in Fang 2003).

Based on these considerations, and on the role of *kyosei* in Canon's business conduct in the vision of Ryazaburo Kaku (Canon's former CEO that adopted *kyosei* as corporate philosophy), and as presented by Canon's recent corporate reports (both financial-economic and sustainability reports), we can assume that:

The corporate philosophy of kyosei *effectively molds (is the* formal cause *of) Canon's corporate behavior in the field of sustainability.*

As we have already seen that:

The philosophy of kyosei *entails sustainability.*

[7] Chatman 1989 and Vandeberghe & Peiro 1999, in Wang 2009: 2.
[8] Studied by Oliver 1999 and Singhapakdi 1993, in Wang 2009: 2.

And we know that:

> *Canon is a Japanese company, a part of the society that is in keeping with the corporate philosophy of* kyosei.

We may arrive at the First Conclusion (see Figure 2) that:

> *Canon may be expected to behave in a sustainable manner. (Canon may be expected to fulfill its obligation of being sustainable.)*
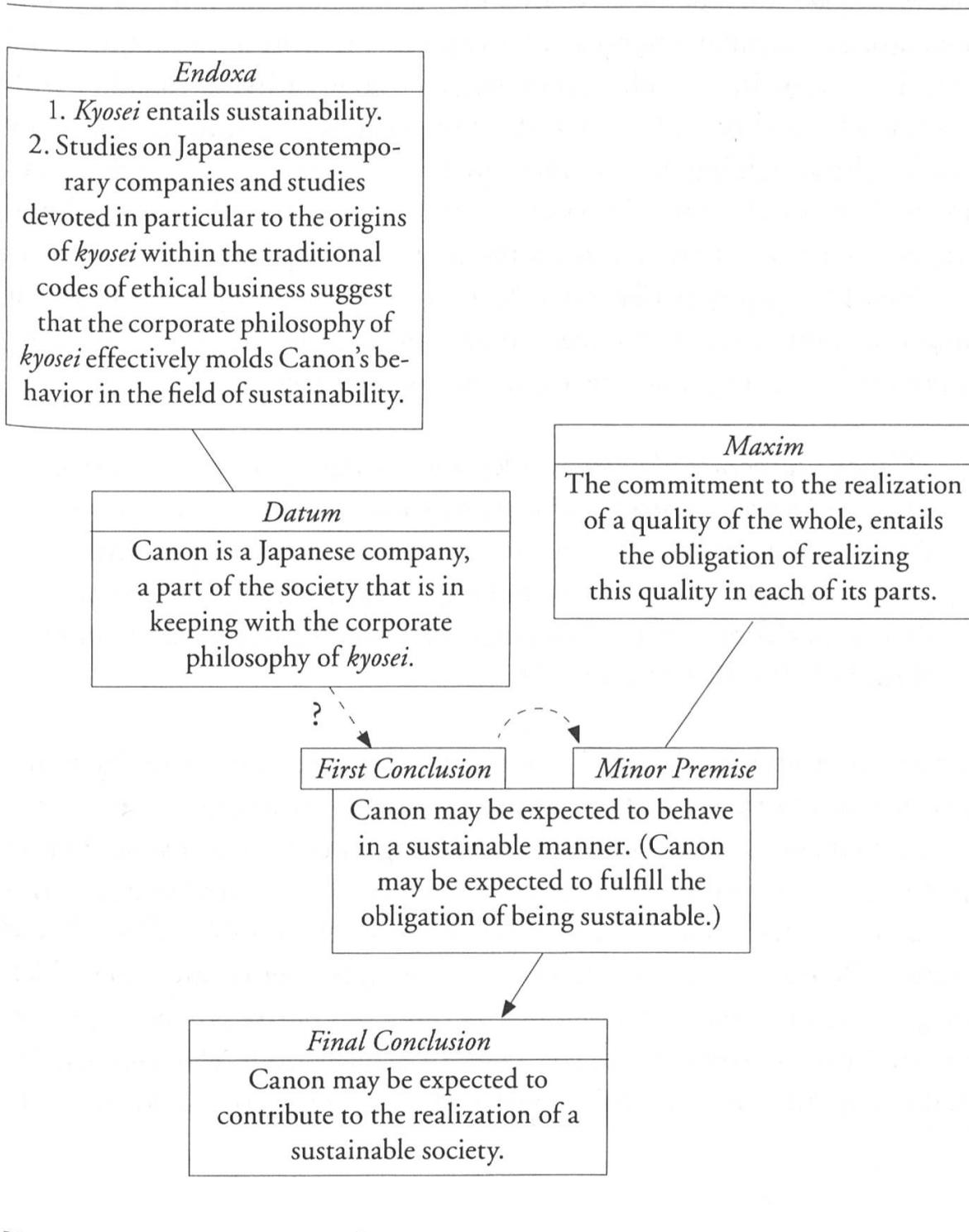
Therefore:

> *Canon may be expected to contribute to the realization of a sustainable society.*

The argumentative structure of the fragment of text presented at the beginning of our analysis (the subtitle of the *Message from Top Management*) could now be differently reconstructed, as illustrated in Figure 2. Although one cannot affirm that Canon behaves in a sustainable manner, one could assume it to do so, on the basis of the new, stronger interpretation of the *corporate philosophy* that points to a new *endoxon* (number 2 in the figure below), hence the argumentation advanced by the company could be reasonable and the presumably fallacious reasoning pointed out in the previous argumentative analysis would be rehabilitated.

Still, the acceptability of this new *endoxon* and of this new interpretation of company's message is conditioned by readers' knowledge in the field of Japanese contemporary management styles, knowledge that cannot be taken for granted by the authors of the report. At the same time, the critical question of the sincerity of company's commitment to *kyosei* remains open.

We have searched for additional insights on the meaning of *kyosei* that may strengthen the significance of the key-phrase *corporate philosophy of kyosei* and support the possible role of formal cause played by *kyosei* in Canon's argumentation. In this respect we have considered both the definition of *kyosei* provided by the company, and the "historical journey" of the concept (Boardman & Kato 2003) from ancient and medieval times to the moment it has been adopted by Canon.

Figure 2: Argumentative Structure II

Endoxa

1. *Kyosei* entails sustainability.
2. Studies on Japanese contemporary companies and studies devoted in particular to the origins of *kyosei* within the traditional codes of ethical business suggest that the corporate philosophy of *kyosei* effectively molds Canon's behavior in the field of sustainability.

Maxim

The commitment to the realization of a quality of the whole, entails the obligation of realizing this quality in each of its parts.

Datum

Canon is a Japanese company, a part of the society that is in keeping with the corporate philosophy of *kyosei*.

First Conclusion   **Minor Premise**

Canon may be expected to behave in a sustainable manner. (Canon may be expected to fulfill the obligation of being sustainable.)

Final Conclusion

Canon may be expected to contribute to the realization of a sustainable society.

Coming from ecology, the term *kyosei* literally means *symbiosis, living together (kyo* – together, *sei* – to live, life) (Satofuka 2007). *Kyosei* became increasingly popular several decades ago in the field of humanities and social sciences, in its wide acceptance of "mode of living together with a sense of equality and mutuality, transforming one another mutually while acknowledging one another's difference, opposition and diversity" (Yoshida & Ozeki 2002, in Satofuka 2007: 635). But, like most cultural keywords, the word *kyosei* is polysemous, its meaning still not being firmly established in Japanese (Satofuka 2007)[9]. This ambiguity leaves room for interpretation, hence to strategic maneuvers like, for instance, providing a personalized, corporate-specific definition of the concept:

> *"Canon's corporate philosophy is* kyosei. Kyosei *aspires to a society in which all people, regardless of race, religion, or culture, harmoniously live and work together for the common good into the future. Kyosei, in other words, is an attempt to bring about a society characterized by sustainable prosperity."* (Message from Top Management, Canon Sustainability Report 2008: 4)

Once being adopted, in 1987, as Canon's corporate philosophy, by Ryuzaburo Kaku (former CEO of Canon), *kyosei* was presented to the international management community, developing in time into a synonymous of corporate responsibility, and eventually becoming a fundamental principle of an international (ethical) business association *(The Caux Round Table*[10]; Boardman & Kato 2003). But the roots of *kyosei* are much older, originating in Confucius' teachings on righteous business conduct, incorporated in a Japanese medieval code of ethical trade *(Shuchu kiyaku)* elaborated in line with the Neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa era

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[9] Some examples of current slogans in Japan: *kyosei* between humanity and the natural environment; *kyosei* among different national and ethnic groups; *kyosei* between male and female components of society; *kyosei* between people in good health and the handicapped people (Satofuka 2007: 635).

[10] *The Caux Round Table – moral capitalism for a better world;* http://www.cauxroundtable.org/

(1603–1867)[11] (Kaku 1997; Boardman & Kato 2003). The codes of conduct, especially as a means of reaching *harmony* (or at least a *pseudo-harmony[12]*) have had a considerable weight in the Confucian rhetoric[13], still present in contemporary Asian business communication (Yunxia & Hildebrandt 2002). Nowadays, too, it is considered that companies that adopt formal codes of ethics might have a higher CSR performance (Wang 2009: 4).

The origins of Canon's *kyosei* within a traditional code of business conduct (Kaku 1997; Boardman & Kato 2003) make *kyosei* particularly suitable to be invoked as a formal cause of ethical business behavior, thus strengthening the persuasiveness of the key-phrase *corporate philosophy of kyosei*, as well as the overall persuasiveness of Canon's corporate message towards sustainability. On one condition: that the positive connotations of the business *kyosei* are still valid, and that both the specific meaning in

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[11] According to Boardman & Kato (2003), that start from the declaration of Kaku himself (1997: 481), the business concept of *kyosei* employed by Canon is assumed to have its origins in Confucius' teachings (b. in 551 BCE) about the necessity of all human life to be sustained – including the life reflected in merchant operations, (as long as this activity brings a "righteous" profit. 2000 years later, Confucius' principles were integrated in the Japanese *Shuchu kiyaku* code for trade conduct, elaborated in line with the Neo-Confucianism of the Tokugawa era (1603–1867). An important role in spreading these trading principles is played by the Kaitokudo Merchant Academy of Osaka (established in 1726). (Boardman & Kato 2003). "The guidelines [of *Shuchu kiyaku]* said, in effect, that trade must be carried on not just for one's own benefit but also for the benefit of the others." (Kaku 1997: 481)

[12] In a study on the Japanese marketing, Lazer, Murata & Kosaka (1985) explain the meaning of *harmony* in Japanese business culture, that would rather refer to a *pseudo-harmonism* – "the importance of maintaining harmony while at the same time acknowledging the existence of an underlying current of discord and disagreement, such as those engendered by an economic rationale; [...] the philosophy of expressed *gemeinschaft* but implied *gesellschaft."* (ibid.: 71). Such a vision might overcome possible objections related to the impossibility of harmonious relations within a competitive, profit oriented business activity.

[13] "Greek and Chinese rhetoric and persuasion were developed to met the needs of the social and cultural environments and this rule still applies to today's business communication. The logical approach has been emphasized in the English rhetorical tradition while both *quing* (emotional approach) and *li* (logical approach) are the focus of persuasion in Chinese tradition. This difference is also root of cultural differences in modern business communication" (Yunxia & Hildebrandt 2003: 89).

a business context and the connotations of *kyosei* are known and agreed upon by authors and addressees of Canon's Sustainability Report. But considering the width and the heterogeneity of the pool of potential readers, both Japanese and non-Japanese (as the report is published in English on the internet), also the fact that these historical and cultural characteristics of *kyosei* are not explicitly mentioned in Canon's 2008 report, the fulfillment of this condition is questionable. Besides, Kaku himself admitted (1997: 478) that "many people criticize the concept of *kyosei* for being too idealistic and theoretical to put into practice," although he continues "the company has put many years of dedicated work into making *kyosei* a reality. I believe we have made great progress" (ibid.).

Finally, but not less importantly, we were interested in observing if the presence of the Japanese word *kyosei* in the text may have an influence on the effectiveness of Canon's message. On the one hand, the original Japanese form could be a necessity, being known that the translation of Japanese keywords in English is considered as problematic. As Wierzbicka said (1991: 334) "one cannot clarify culture-laden words of one language in terms of culture-laden words of another." A similar problem was signaled by Cortazzi & Shen (2001) in a cross-linguistic (Chinese-English) study. The two authors state that a translation may require the use of many English words to translate a single Chinese keyword and still be approximate. Besides, cultural keywords are often polysemous and context-dependent – linguistic characteristics that can only increase the potential of misunderstandings.

On the other hand, maintaining *kyosei* in Japanese in Canon's corporate artifacts written in English may be associated with a series of rhetorical effects. Firstly, it seems that Canon has transformed *kyosei* in what Gunnarsson (2000) calls a *company trademark*. Being deeply embedded in the Japanese national culture, the word *kyosei* contributes to the communication of a unique corporate identity of Canon amongst the global community of multinational corporations (so reaching an important objective of corporate identity communication).

Secondly, for an English language reader, a word in Japanese could foster some likability heuristics that might determine a coarse persuasive effect based on the mere impression. But, more importantly, the peculiarity of a word in a foreign language has the potential to attract the

attention long enough as to increase the memorability of the message *per se*, and possibly, of the company that employed the word in its discourse – that is to contribute to an awareness effect, which is not insignificant for a company. At the same time, by naturally prompting the question "what does it mean?," the Japanese *kyosei* has the potential to determine the reader to scrutinize more carefully the *Message of the Top Management*, passing from the subtitle (the fragment of text that we have analyzed in detail in the previous paragraphs) to the body of the Message, in search of an explanation of the term, and thus, to proceed to a *systematic processing[14]*. But it is also true that an average, parsimonious reader, not willing to spend too much time in searching the meaning of *kyosei*, may simply reject the message due to the incomprehensibility of the word. One could reasonably object that these peripheral effects are not specific to the word *kyosei*, but they can be associated to any foreign word in a text, without diminishing their importance.

We conclude by saying that what we have attempted to illustrate in this paper is just one possible way in which a cultural keyword may be argumentatively exploited in a letter to stakeholders in a corporate sustainability report. We have seen how a culturally-laden word (independently, or integrated in a key-phrase) can fulfill the role of lexical pointer towards corporate values and associated *endoxa* recoverable from different levels of the corporate context (be it national, organizational, or specific to the an activity type, like management) that converge into the definition of a unique corporate identity. We have identified an argumentative fallacy that presents an entailment of commitments (a commitment to a philosophy that states the way in which things *should be)* as an entailment of facts (acting in real life in line with that philosophy, how things *really are)*. Then, we have shown that additional knowledge about the possible significance of *kyosei* and of the key-phrase *corporate philosophy of kyosei* can suggest alternative interpretations that might eliminate this fallacy and increase the persuasiveness of the corporate claim of contributing to a sustainable society. However, considering the heterogeneous audience

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[14] We are here referring to Chaiken & Eagly's Heuristic and Systematic Model of Persuasion (HSM) (Eagly & Chaiken 1993), and to the elaboration Likelihood Model of persuasion (ELM) of Petty & Cacioppo (1986).

of the sustainability reports, is it reasonable to expect the average, non-Japanese, reader to be aware of the full significance of the business *kyosei*? Could possible *endoxa* prompted by these alternative, context-embedded interpretations be reasonably assumed to be part of the common ground? Not very likely, therefore their effective contribution to the persuasiveness of this particular message of Canon is questionable.

We have also hypothesized that the dissonance of modalities, presented above, could be a strategic maneuver that challenges the readers to verify the sincerity of the company's commitment to the philosophy of *kyosei* by going deeper into the corporate message, a maneuver eventually aimed at promoting the *kyosei* model of ethical business worldwide. It is, however, difficult to say to what extent the typical, parsimonious readers of this genre would be willing to proceed to a more elaborate, systematic processing of *Top Management's Message* (or of the whole report). Yet, they could be motivated to do so, by lowering their *sufficiency threshold* (Eagly & Chaiken 1993) either by means of a strategic maneuver that increases their interest in a number of central, relevant aspects of the corporate message, or by means of peripheral cues that appeal to readers' need of comprehension. It is also true that both the hypothesized strategic maneuver, and the peripheral cues (e.g. the Japanese form of the word) might have the opposite effects, blocking the processing of the message either due to the perceived logical invalidity of the argumentation, or due to the incomprehensibility of the term *kyosei*. Although these observations may not be sufficient for predicting a specific persuasive effect, they do allow us to hypothesize that an influence of the cultural keywords on the elaboration likelihood is possible, and worth exploring in further research.

There is, however, one rhetorical effect that seems to persist, regardless of the effectiveness of the argumentation advanced by the company: the association of the concept of *kyosei* with Canon (or at least, with the idea of a Japanese company). In virtue of its cultural connotations, the word *kyosei* could be considered a *company trademark* (in Gunnarsson's meaning of the term), a means of communicating a unique and distinctive Japanese identity of Canon corporation amongst the community of multinational corporations.

Of course, we cannot draw, from one example only, a general conclusion about the argumentative role of keywords in corporate reporting

discourse, but we do hope that the analytical instances illustrated in this paper can sketch a new path towards an integrative multidisciplinary approach to the persuasiveness of cultural keywords in this type of discourse.

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