

“Dieselgate is Made in Germany” – Framing Volkswagen Emissions Scandal in the German Economy

This paper presents and discusses the findings of a cross-linguistic corpus-assisted analysis (Partington/Duguid/Taylor 2013, Taylor 2014) of the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal Discourse in German and Italian news. It was conducted to answer the following research questions:

- which framings are recurrently used to represent the Emission Scandal as an economic issue?
- how do these language patterns influence its representation as a primarily environmental issue?

The analysis was conducted by applying Frame Theory (Goffman 1974, Tannen 1993, Lakoff/Wehling 2012), Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/Johnson 2003², Larson 2011) and Erasure Theory (Van Leeuwen 2008, Stibbe 2015) within the more general framework of Ecological Linguistics (Fill/Penz 2018) – “an eco-linguistic approach to the analysis of [...] ‘discourses’, ‘lexicogrammatical patterns’, ‘sense-making resources’” (Steffensen/Fill 2014).

The data sets include news articles (totally 230) published from 20th September to 20th October 2015 on the websites of “Die Zeit” (115 articles) and “La Repubblica” (115 articles), and containing at least one of the following keywords of the scandal in the respective language: *Abgasskandal* or *Abgas-Skandal*, *Abgasaffäre* or *Abgas-affäre*, *VW-Skandal*, *VW-Affäre*, *Diesel-Skandal*; *scandalo Volkswagen*, *scandalo emissioni*, *scandalo delle emissioni*, *caso Volkswagen*.

The quantitative-qualitative analysis of collocations (Baker 2006) and concordances suggests that the framing DIESELGATE DAMAGES THE GERMAN ECONOMY emerges in discourse, thus backgrounding (Stibbe 2015) the environmental and ecological issues related to the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal (DIESELGATE DAMAGES ENVIRONMENT AND HUMAN HEALTH).

Keywords: Dieselgate, Abgasskandal, Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies, Framing

„Dieselgate is Made in Germany“ – Beispiele für wirtschaftliches Framing der Abgas-Debatte

Im Mittelpunkt dieses Beitrags stehen die Ergebnisse einer sprachvergleichenden Analyse des deutschen und italienischen Mediendiskurses zum Volkswagen-Abgasskandal, welche den Ansatz der Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS, vgl. Partington/Duguid/Taylor 2013, Taylor 2014) verfolgt und von den folgenden Forschungsfragen ausgeht:

- Welche Sprachmuster werden dazu verwendet, den Dieselgate-Skandal als eine wirtschaftliche Frage darzustellen?
- Wie beeinflusst ein solches Narrativ die Rezeption des – in erster Linie umweltbezogenen – Dieselgate-Begriffes?

Dem gewählten Thema entsprechend verortet sich die Untersuchung im umfassenden Rahmen der Ökologischen Linguistik (Fill/Penz 2018, Steffensen/Fill 2014), innerhalb dessen folgende Theorien zur Analyse und Interpretation der identifizierten Sprachmuster angewandt werden: Frame Theory (Goffman 1974, Tannen 1993, Lakoff/Wehling 2012), Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/Johnson 2003², Larson 2011) and Erasure Theory (Van Leeuwen 2008, Stibbe 2015).

Untersucht wurden 230 Presseartikel, die in der Zeitspanne vom 20. September bis zum 15. Oktober 2015 auf den Webseiten der Zeitungen „Die Zeit“ (115 Artikel) und „La Repubblica“ (115 Artikel) erschienen. Zur Korpuserstellung wurde das Vorkommen von mindestens einer deutsch- bzw.

italienischsprachigen Bezeichnung des Skandals im Text als Auswahlkriterium berücksichtigt, nämlich *Abgasskandal, Abgas-Skandal, Abgasaffäre, Abgas-affäre, VW-Skandal, VW-Affäre, Diesel-Skandal* bzw. *scandalo Volkswagen, scandalo emissioni, scandalo delle emissioni, caso Volkswagen*.

Die quantitative und qualitative Analyse von Kollokationen (Baker 2006) und Konkordanzen lässt das Muster DER DIESELGATE-SKANDAL BESCHÄDIGT DIE DEUTSCHE WIRTSCHAFT im Korpus auftauchen, wobei die öko- und soziologischen Aspekte des Skandals (DER DIESELGATE-SKANDAL SCHADET DER UMWELT UND DER MENSCHLICHEN GESUNDHEIT) nicht zum Ausdruck kommen (vgl. Stibbe 2015 und die Erasure Theory).

Schlüsselwörter: Dieseltgate, Abgasskandal, Corpus-assisted Discourse Studies, Framing

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Introduction

This paper aims to present and discuss recurring framings in the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal discourse in German and Italian news from 20th September to 20th October 2015. Specifically, the analysis focuses on those language patterns which frame the Emission Scandal in the domain of the German economy, and fail to represent it as a primarily ecological issue.

Frame Theory (Goffman 1974, Tannen 1993, Lakoff/Wehling 2012), Metaphor Theory (Lakoff/Johnson 2003², Larson 2011) and the notion of erasure (Van Leeuwen 2008, Stibbe 2015) will be used to reveal and investigate language patterns, within the theoretical framework of Ecological Linguistics (Steffensen/Fill 2014, Fill/Penz 2018). The investigated language patterns suggest, on the one hand, that *Dieseltgate* is an economic issue and, on the other, that it damages the German economy.

Before describing the previously mentioned theoretical framework, its terminology, and the research questions of the present work (Section 2), the following part of the paper will define the expression *Volkswagen Emissions Scandal*, and the main technical aspects and events related to the software manipulations of diesel vehicles. In Section 3, the applied methodology will be further clarified, along with the analysed news corpus. Finally, the findings of the analysis will be presented and discussed on the basis of textual examples from the corpus.

1. Context of research: the *Volkswagen Emissions Scandal*

The expression *Volkswagen Emissions Scandal* along with *Dieseltgate* or *Emissiongate* refers to the events related to the software manipulation of diesel vehicles carried out by the German company Volkswagen AG¹. On 18th September 2015 the American EPA

¹ Volkswagen AG refers to the holding group to which different brands (Audi, Volkswagen, Seat, Skoda) belong.

(Environmental Protection Agency) issued a *Notice of Violation*², claiming that the company had placed 500,000 vehicles on the market which did not respect the legislation on emission limits. Later, it was estimated that the manipulated vehicles were more than 11 million. The manipulation involved software which purposefully adapted the car’s functioning in order for the vehicle not to emit carbon dioxide during the emission test. However, in normal urban driving the car emits more carbon dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Volkswagen AG was therefore accused of violating the legislation on emissions and cheating the clients, and was consecutively investigated for fraud and environmental scandal. More specifically, some studies by the International Council on Clean Transportation ICCT, published in collaboration with the West Virginia University³, revealed that the substances emitted by the manipulated vehicles were linked with the death of some people in the USA and are environmentally harmful.

Since 18th September 2015 several news articles have been published, in which the economic consequences of the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal are brought to the foreground: due to the role played by the concern in Germany, the whole national economy could be affected by this outrage, and many jobs could be lost causing economic and social problems.

As the analysis will show, from the Italian perspective the scandal is represented as a mistake of German politicians, since the federal government and Lower Saxony participate in the share capital of the company. Therefore, the media focus often shifts to more general economic and political considerations concerning Germany as a whole. From the point of view of the German press, this scandal could represent a danger for the country, as it affects the image of a company with a strong national symbolic value. In both contexts, the environmental issue is often not even mentioned. Therefore, in this paper the related media coverage will be analysed from the perspective of Ecological Linguistics, whose theoretical framework is described in the following section.

2. Research questions and theoretical framework

By means of an analysis of a news corpus and the framework provided by Ecological Linguistics, the present paper aims to answer the following research questions:

- which language patterns in the news discourse on the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal frame the issue as related to German economy?
- how do they influence the representation of the scandal as a primarily environmental issue?

In this paper, “an ecolinguistic approach to the analysis of symbolic structures such as ‘discourses’, ‘lexicogrammatical patterns’, ‘sense-making resources’” (Steffensen/Fill

² The document is available at <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/vw-nov-cao-09-18-15.pdf>, date of access: 5.8.2018.

³ All publications are available at <http://www.theicct.org/publications>, date of access: 25.8.2018.

2014: 15) is applied to the representation of the Volkswagen Emission Scandal in German and Italian news. In this sense, the analysis should be considered as following principles of Ecological Linguistics. According to Fill (2018: 4), this strand of “ecolinguistics deals with the impact of language and discourse in describing, but also aggravating and perhaps alleviating, environmental problems”. As Stibbe (2015: 10) points out, Ecological Linguistics analyses in particular “cognitive structures which influence how multiple people think, talk and act”. Among these structures, the present research focuses on **framings** in discourse (see Tannen 1993), which Stibbe (2015: 48) defines as “the cognitive imposition of a story from one area of life onto another area”. Specifically, the analysis focuses on precise words and collocations (“the patterned way that words group together” – Biber 1998: 24) which make the reader perceive the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal as an economical and not as an environmental issue.

The analysis of this framing process will also take into account the metaphors, which can activate some associations in the reader’s mind. In the case of the Volkswagen Emission Scandal there are also prejudices. They can define as **metaphors-we-live-by**, which “structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003: 4). At the same time, the use of metaphors can distract the reader from other aspects. According to Lakoff and Johnson, “when we say that a concept is structured by a metaphor, we mean that it is partially structured and that it can be extended in some ways but not others” (2003: 13).

According to Lakoff and Johnson’s Metaphor Theory, the use of personifications and metonymies is not only linked to the rhetorical field but it is rather a matter of influencing the way the reader deals with the topic. In the summary to their publication, Lakoff and Johnson claim that: “metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another. [...] in the case of metonymy, **THE PART FOR THE WHOLE**⁴ there are many parts that can stand for the whole. Which part we pick out determines which aspect of the whole we are focusing on” (Lakoff/Johnson 2003: 36). It is our assumption that also an accurate use of metonymies plays an important role in framing the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal in the domain of economy. As the subsequent discussion of the data will show, a relevant consequence is the erasure of the scandal as a primarily environmental and ecological issue. The term **erasure**, defined by Stibbe as “a story in people’s minds that an area of life is unimportant or unworthy of consideration” (2015: 146), refers to a fact or an aspect which is not considered significant or one which is overshadowed.

3. Methodology and analysed data set

The present cross-linguistic analysis was carried out by adopting a corpus-assisted discourse studies approach, whose aim “is the uncovering, in the discourse type under

⁴ Lower case letters in original.

study, of what we might call “non obvious meaning”, that is, meaning which might not be readily available to naked-eye perusal” (Partington/Duguid/Taylor 2013: 11). In order to identify recurring language patterns framing the scandal within the domain of German economy, a quantitative-qualitative analysis of words and collocations was carried out, which are semantically associated with this frame. According to Baker (2006: 114), “a collocation analysis [...] gives us the most salient and obvious lexical patterns surrounding a subject, from which a number of discourses can be obtained. When two words frequently collocate, there is evidence that the discourses surrounding them are particularly powerful”.

In spite of the difficulty of comparing the German and Italian language and the respective structures, a number of common discourse patterns was identified and investigated – which was the aim of the cross-linguistic approach. As the following section shows, particularly significant in this sense are the collocation *made in Germany* (template *made in* + name of a country, referring to the production of a certain good) and the word *Wolfsburg* – the name of the city in Lower Saxony where the Company Headquarters are situated. The analysis of the identified language patterns in their concordances – namely in the “collection of the occurrences of a wordform, each in its own textual environment” (Sinclair 1991: 32) – has then allowed a qualitative interpretation of the discourse from the perspective of Ecological Linguistics.

The data sets include 115 German and 115 Italian news articles, in which at least one of the following expressions defining the scandal in the respective language occurs: *Abgasskandal* and *Abgasaffäre* (also in the forms *Abgas-Skandal* and *Abgas-Affäre*), *VW-Skandal*, *VW-Affäre*, *Diesel-Skandal*; *scandalo Volkswagen*, *scandalo emissioni*, *scandalo delle emissioni*, *caso Volkswagen*. All the analysed articles were published between 20th September and 20th October 2015 on the websites of the mastheads “Die Zeit” or “La Repubblica”.

4. The findings: framing *Dieselgate* in the domain of Germany economy

4.1 Dieselgate damages the German economy

The findings of the analysis indicate that Dieselgate is framed as an economic issue. It is visible in the collocation *made in Germany* (16 instances), which often occurs in the pattern VOLKSWAGEN EMISSION SCANDAL + DAMAGE + MADE IN GERMANY⁵:

Schadet die Abgas-Affäre der Marke „Made in Germany“?

[‘Does the Emission Scandal damage the “Made in Germany” brand?’].

Die Zeit Online, 22nd September 2015, 08:40 a.m.

⁵ All the following passages from the corpus have been translated into English by the present authors.

Das vermutlich ‚erotischste‘ Industrielabel der Welt, nämlich ‚Made in Germany‘, wurde durch den Skandal beschädigt

[The label “Made in Germany” – probably the most “erotic” industrial brand in the world – was damaged by the scandal].

Die Zeit Online, 29th September 2015, 03:53 p.m.

Bisogna correre rapidamente ai ripari per evitare ulteriori danni al Made in Germany

[Something must be done immediately to prevent further damage to the Made in Germany brand].

La Repubblica, 3rd October 2015, p. 12.

È fondamentale una riparazione tempestiva allo scandalo, affinché il marchio made in Germany non subisca danni fondamentali

[‘A prompt reaction to the scandal is crucial to prevent the Made in Germany brand from being severely damaged].

Repubblica.it, 2nd October 2015, section “Economia”.

Both in the German and the Italian texts, this template suggests to the reader that the stereotype of a good quality German product is harmed by this scandal. Nevertheless, it frames the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal as an *economic* (template MADE IN) and a *German* phenomenon. This encourages further discourses regarding *Dieselgate* – which will also be discussed in this paper – and it is, at the same time, a pretext to talk about the German economy and political situation.

In this representation of the Emission Scandal, another important role is played by the element DAMAGE (*schadet – beschädigt* in German, *danni* in Italian), which is associated with the brand rather than to the environment and to human health. Consequently, the environmental issue – which is deemed to be the central problem in this event – remains in the background, or it is exploited to stress the damage to the *German*-stereotype:

Per anni Vw e forse altri produttori hanno mentito al mondo. Proprio loro simbolo del Made in Germany, di eccellenze di un Paese ecologista come pochi altri, hanno detto il falso

[‘For years VW, and maybe many other manufacturers, have lied to the world. It was them who told a lie, the icon of Made in Germany, of Germany’s excellence – an environmentally-friendly country like few others’].

La Repubblica, 26th September 2015, p. 32.

This popular expression is used here to describe the problem afflicting the German economy: if a big company such as Volkswagen AG is publicly damaged, the entire German production apparatus could be damaged. Furthermore, the idea of a *made-in-Germany*-product which is environmentally harmful could cause loss of customers’ confidence. However, it also conveys the idea of a country which is not so strong and rigorous as the collective imagination has it.

The element DAMAGE often refers to *Volkswagens* itself, which is subjected to the effects of the scandal in terms of harm to its *image* and the millions of dollars in compensations:

Der Abgas-Skandal hat für VW in den USA gewaltige Folgen. Der Imageschaden dürfte nur schwer zu reparieren sein

[‘The Emission Scandal has enormous consequences for VW in the USA. The image damage may be hard to repair’].

Die Zeit Online, 24th September 2015, 12.11 p.m.

Der Imageschaden wird VW nicht nur in den USA, sondern auch global teuer zu stehen kommen

[‘The damage image will cost VW dearly, and not only in the USA, but also globally’].

Die Zeit Online, 22nd September 2015, 02.27 p.m.

Fast ebenso schwer wie die Klagen könnte der Image-Schaden auf dem Konzern lasten

[‘The burdens posed on the company by the image damage might be as heavy as the one posed by the lawsuits’].

Die Zeit Online, 24th September 2015, 12.11 p.m.

Il Dieselgate ha svelato la debolezza sistema [sic!] di difesa della Volkswagen, provocando ingentissimi danni economici e di immagine. [...] Volkswagen si è causata un danno reputazionale ed economico, che l’azienda non ha saputo evitare

[‘The Dieselgate scandal has revealed the weakness [of] Volkswagen’s protection system by causing considerable economic and image damage. [...] Volkswagen was not able to avoid a self-inflicted economic and reputational damage’].

Repubblica.it, 5th October 2015, section “Affari e Finanza”.

E’ un grave colpo all’immagine della Germania come potenza attendibile [...] non solo per il colosso dell’auto che ne è protagonista

[‘It is a heavy blow to the image of Germany as a reliable power [...] not only for the car manufacturing colossus – the protagonist in the scandal’].

La Repubblica, 22nd September 2015, p. 6.

In the German texts, the compound *Imageschaden* (template DAMAGE + IMAGE) is directly referred to *Volkswagen*, also defined as *der Konzern* (*the company*). Moreover, the use of the metaphor THE CORPORATE IS A PERSON (Stibbe 2015: 75–81), and specifically the metonymy INSTITUTION FOR PERSON RESPONSIBLE (Lakoff/Johnson 2003²: 38) represents the *VW-Konzern* – that should be the agent – as the victim. Consequently, “it becomes very difficult to locate responsibility for behavior that damages people’s wellbeing and the environment” (Stibbe 2015: 77). In contrast, the Italian texts show how the template DAMAGE + IMAGE (*danni d’immagine* and *colpo all’immagine*) in discourse does not only refer to the agent (*Volkswagen*), but also to Germany (*della Germania*). This further strengthens the evoked association with the whole German economic production.

In general, the analysis of concordances shows that the element DAMAGE (*Schaden, schaden, schädlich, (be)schädigen, danno, danni, dannoso, dannosi*) co-occurs – in compounds or clusters of up to five words – more often with the element IMAGE (*Image, immagine*) (10 occurrences in German, 6 in Italian) than with the element ENVIRONMENT (*Umwelt, ambiente, ambientale, ambientali*) (7 occurrences in German, 2 in Italian). Once again, this suggests that the event is represented more as an economic and a media scandal than as an environmental one.

4.2 Volkswagen is a German city

Another language pattern framing the scandal in the German context, which emerged from the research, is based on the association THE CORPORATE IS A GERMAN CITY, and more specifically, on the metonymy THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION (Lakoff/Johnson 2003²: 38). In the analysed data, the name *Wolfsburg* (the city in Lower Saxony, where the Company Headquarters are situated) is not only used as a deictic element, that is, “to locate entities in spatio-temporal, social and discursal context” (Marmaridou 2000: 65); it also co-occurs with verbs which actually refer to the Company Headquarters:

Wolfsburg hat ein Problem – und damit auch Berlin
[‘Wolfsburg has a problem – and so does Berlin’].
Die Zeit, 15th October 2015, p. 25.

In den nächsten Wochen will Wolfsburg viel Geld bereitstellen, um den Schaden so gut wie möglich zu begrenzen
[‘In the coming weeks, Wolfsburg wants to make a lot of money available to limit the amount of damage as much as possible’].
Die Zeit Online, 3rd October 2015, 04.25 p.m.

Sommando le decine di cause che le pioveranno addosso, i costi per riparazioni e sostituzione veicoli e le pene pecuniarie nei processi penali, il conto finale per Wolfsburg non sarà inferiore agli 80 miliardi di euro, calcola il Credit Suisse
[‘Considering the dozens of lawsuits which will follow, the repair and replacement costs related to the vehicles, and the fines related to the penal trials, Wolfsburg’s bill for the full amount will not be lower than 80 billion euros, so estimates the Credit Suisse Institute’].
Repubblica.it, 19th October 2015, section “Affari e Finanza”.

L’impasse in cui si trova Wolfsburg non è semplice
[‘Wolfsburg has reached an impasse, and it will be difficult to break it’].
La Repubblica, 28th September 2015, p. 10.

As the first quote shows, also this metonymy is used to associate the scandal with the more general German politics (here *Berlin*), since the federal government and Lower Saxony participate in the share capital of the company. In the Italian news, it is the capital city – and not Volkswagen – that cheats clients and betrays them:

Quando è Berlino a tradire i consumatori
[‘When Berlin is the one who betrays the consumers’].
Repubblica.it, 28th September 2015, section “Affari e Finanza”.

Expressions such as *Wolfsburg* and *Berlin* offer the opportunity to argue about the political and lobbying affairs related to the events. This influences the reader’s perception of the scandal, which is here associated with the whole country and political system.

4.3 Dieselgate is not an environmental issue

As the data prove, the use of the presented framings implies an erasure of the environmental issues related to the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal, since “something important, something we should be giving attention to, has been ignored, sidelined or overlooked within a text or discourse” (Stibbe 2015: 146). The corpus also shows occurrences of a language pattern which denies the environmental dimension of the scandal even more explicitly, namely DIESELGATE IS NOT AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCANDAL. According to the analysed news, this erasure occurs specifically in Italian political and economic discourse:

Ed ecco Renzi commentare il caso Volkswagen [...] Qui non siamo in presenza di un disastro ambientale ma di una truffa. L’Italia chiede che sia punita severamente
[‘So Renzi commented on the Volkswagen scandal [...] We are not facing an environmental disaster, but rather a fraud. Italy demands that this is severely punished’].
Repubblica.it, 25th September 2015, section “Politica”.

Il premier Matteo Renzi [...] ha dichiarato: “Non sono preoccupato, non temo ripercussioni sulla crescita italiana”. “Non è una catastrofe ambientale, è uno scandalo e come tale andrà punito”
[‘The Prime minister Renzi [...] stated: “I am not concerned, I do not fear consequences for Italy’s growth”. “This is not an environmental disaster, this is a scandal and, as such, it must be punished’].
Repubblica.it, 27th September 2015, section “Economia”.

“Non sono preoccupato per la crescita dell’Italia perché la crescita dell’Italia è nelle mani degli italiani”. Quanto allo scandalo, “non si tratta di un disastro ambientale ma di una truffa che non inciderà sulla crescita italiana”
[‘I am not worried about Italy’s growth, because Italy’s growth is in the hands of Italians”. As far as the scandal is concerned, “it is not an environmental disaster, but rather a fraud which will not affect the growth of Italy”].
La Repubblica, 28th September 2015, p. 10.

All quotes contain the explicit denial (*non*) of the environmental dimension of the Volkswagen Emission Scandal, which is defined rather as a fraud (*truffa*) or simply as a scandal (*scandalo*). Furthermore, the second and the third fragment show how the discourse focuses once again on economy, and more specifically, on economic

growth (*crescita*) (see also Stibbe 2015: 33). Even before denying that the Volkswagen Emission Scandal is an environmental issue, the Italian Prime minister points out that THE SCANDAL DOES NOT AFFECT THE ECONOMIC GROWTH of Italy, which is why he is not concerned (*non sono preoccupato*). Therefore, the discussed linguistic pattern is not only a misrepresentation of the Volkswagen Emission Scandal – whose ecological and environmental consequences are erased in discourse – it is also a further example of how economy is constantly represented as the main area of life, which is affected by the scandal.

Finally, the analysis of concordances has allowed us to identify contexts in which the element ENVIRONMENT co-occurs with the one of ECONOMY. Depending on the representation of the two elements, other discourses emerge, which may be investigated in further research studies within the theoretical framework of Ecological Linguistics:

Der im Vergleich zu Benzinern geringere Verbrauch führt dazu, dass auch weniger Kohlendioxid aus dem Auspuff kommt. Das erfreut nicht nur die Umwelt, sondern auch die deutsche Autoindustrie. Dieser hilft der Diesel nämlich beim Erreichen der künftigen CO2-Grenzwerte

[‘The lower consumption compared to petrol cars leads to reduced carbon dioxide emissions from the exhaust system. This pleases not only the environment, but also the German car manufacturing. It benefits from the diesel, particularly in terms of reaching the future CO2-Threshold Limit Values’].

Die Zeit Online, 5th October 2015, 02.01 p.m.

The idea that lower carbon dioxide emissions are good NOT ONLY for the environment BUT ALSO for the German car production (pattern *nicht nur – sondern auch*) might be investigated as an example of what Stibbe defines as *ambivalent discourse* (2015: 29–30). Another input provided by this research is the identification of discourses which focus on *Dieselgate* as an environmental issue, thus “explicitly calling attention to the erasure of an important area of life in a particular text or discourse and demanding that it be brought back into consideration” (Stibbe 2015: 162):

Die Politik sollte eigentlich die Umwelt schützen, und nicht die Geschäfte der Industrie unterstützen [...]

[‘Politics should actually protect the environment, it should not support manufacturing business [...]’].

Die Zeit Online, 23rd September 2015, 10:33 a.m.

Here the economic interests (*Geschäfte*) are addressed and considered as problematic, because the most important target must be the protection of the environment (*Umwelt*) and the promotion of social justice. The investigation of such discourses would therefore represent a contribution to achieving a central aim of Ecological Linguistics: “the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world” (Stibbe 2015: 1).

Conclusions

The findings of this research show how both the German and the Italian analysed news articles about the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal are characterized by some framing patterns which are recurrent in the first month after the outbreak of the scandal, and can distract the reader from the central issue: a company that placed on the market (on purpose) millions of vehicles which turned out to be more polluting than what it declared.

Even though the German and Italian news sometimes focus on different aspects of the scandal – respectively, the concern about its national and international repercussions – a common element is the framing of the scandal in the domain of economy, especially in terms of harm (DIESELGATE DAMAGES MADE IN GERMANY). As a consequence, the environmental harm and the related damage to human health caused by the manipulation of the engines do not emerge as key. At some point they are even erased in this discourse (DIESELGATE IS NOT AN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE). Furthermore, the personification of the company and its identification with a German city suggest to the reader that this scandal is A GERMAN FACT and not A SCANDAL CONCERNING A GERMAN COMPANY.

Among the elements which stand out in the development of this discourse, the reaction of German people to this frame is worth mentioning. The article entitled *Wir sind nicht VW* [‘we are not Volkswagen’] is particularly significant in this sense:

Die Wolfsburger sind nicht unser Schicksal, [...] Deutschland ist in Wahrheit nicht VW, [...], ist nicht nur die Industrie. [...] Kontrollieren wir also nicht nur Banken, sondern auch Autofirmen hart, und kompromittieren wir dabei nicht den Anspruch des Landes, ein Vorreiter im Klima- und Umweltschutz zu sein

[‘The Wolfsburgers are not our destiny, [...] in fact, Germany is not VW, [...] it is not only industry. [...] We control very strictly not only banks, but also car companies, and so we do not compromise Germany’s claim to being a pioneer in climate and environment protection’].

Die Zeit, 8th October 2015, p. 23.

The metonymy THE CORPORATE IS A GERMAN CITY (*die Wolfsburger*) is present here once again. This shows how such discourses easily become stories-we-live-by, that is, “cognitive structures which influence how multiple people think, talk and act” (Stibbe 2015: 10). Furthermore, the discourse in this quote resists the generalization and association between the company and the whole country (“Wolfsburg is not our destiny – Germany is not Volkswagen”). In order to do this, the author mentions other *German* elements, which should not be erased by the analysed framings: in spite of the Volkswagen Emission Scandal, German people can still ensure respect for the rules, and Germany is still a pioneer country in climate and environmental protection. Therefore, such ideas should “be brought back into consideration” (Stibbe 2015: 162), since Germany can also represent an example of “a sustainable relationship between humans and the natural world” (Larson 2011: 17).

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