



**ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSE IN A POLITICAL AND GENDER
PERSPECTIVE**
A corpus-based study

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Abstract

(EN) This study adopts a political and gender perspective to investigate discourse on climate change and environmental protection. After an introductory analysis of the current state of the art in the subject area, the research moves into the realm of corpus linguistics to examine some typical metaphors and rhetorical devices, underlying climate discourse in social media and quality newspapers. The end results show that, based on a skilful use of specific language ploys, environmental narrative markedly varies depending on the political objectives pursued.

KEYWORDS: corpus; climate; metaphor; gender; politics.

(ITA) Questo studio adotta una prospettiva politica e di genere per indagare il discorso sul cambiamento climatico e la protezione ambientale. Dopo un'analisi introduttiva sullo stato dell'arte nella relativa area di ricerca, l'indagine muove nell'ambito della linguistica dei corpora per esaminare alcune metafore tipiche e dispositivi retorici che sostanziano il discorso sul clima nei social media e nella stampa. I risultati dimostrano come il discorso ambientale, basato sull'abile uso di specifici stratagemmi linguistici, differisca notevolmente in funzione degli obiettivi politici perseguiti.

PAROLE CHIAVE corpus; clima; metafora; genere; politica.

1. Environmental discourse in a political and gender perspective: an introduction

This research draws on a multidisciplinary approach, involving the domains of socio-political discourse, gender studies, and corpus linguistics in order to examine the distinctive features of environmental narrative and its perception in the contemporary cultural milieu.

In the first section, a literature review on the current state of the art is carried out, considering the growth of ecolinguistics as a research field, which has gradually gained scholarly attention in the last two decades (Alexander & Stibbe 2014; Fill 2001; Fill & Muhlhausler 2006; Stibbe 2004; Stibbe

2014; Stibbe 2020). *Paragraph 1.1* illustrates how the issue of environmentalism is exploited on the international political stage. In this context, the considerable influence of populism is emphasised, which relies on rhetorical emptiness and ideological flexibility as a strategy to either promote or dismiss the importance of ecological activism on the basis of electoral consensus.

In *Paragraph 1.2*, environmental discourse is analysed from a gender perspective, arguing that research appears to be scant in this area. As will be pointed out below, a socio-anthropological framework apparently explains why climate science today is tainted with negative connotations related to gender, since environmentalism is stereotypically connected with the idea of “feminine weakness” as opposed to “male dominance” embodied by capitalist principles.

The focus of this study then shifts to corpus linguistics in order to explore the defining traits of discourse on climate change and environmental protection, covered on Twitter (*Paragraph 2.2*) and in two quality newspapers, namely *The Times* & *The Sunday Times* (*Paragraph 2.3*). A meticulous examination of phraseology, collocations, and metaphors is conducted to observe the representation of environmental narrative in these two different media outlets. On this account, the following research questions serve as a point of departure in the analysis of the selected corpora:

1. Does the depiction of environmental discourse vary between the two media settings being examined, and if so, how do they differ? Additionally, are there any similarities in their portrayal of environmental issues?
2. In what ways is the issue of climate change manipulated as a highly politicised subject?
3. Does environmentalism have any gender-related implications? If it does, what are the typical connotations associated with it?

1.1. Ideological malleability and rhetorical emptiness. The spectre of populist propaganda in climate change discourse

Global climate change is undeniably one of the most considerable challenges Humankind is facing at the turn of the twenty-first century. As Hultman (2013) points out, awareness about the environmental cause, connected with the phenomenon of global warming, has gradually increased over the past three decades and has become more and more embedded in the current socio-political spectrum, as a need for vigorous action is now urgent in order to stabilize, reduce and then eliminate noxious anthropogenic emissions generated from fossil fuels, such as coal, oil, and natural gas (Hultman 2013).

Climate change is one of the most intensely debated issues in both academia and the international political stage. Nevertheless, a fragile consensus (Goodwin 2019) has been reached regarding both its nature and a range of measures, which need to be implemented to find a permanent solution to the climate conundrum. Differences in terms of views, opinions and political stances have triggered processes of polarization between those who agree with the assumption that it is necessary to clamp down on environmental protection – namely, most political elites, business leaders, activists as well as the scientific community (Hulme 2009) – and a few remaining sceptics who, conversely, dismiss the importance of taking action in favour of the environment.

The fragile consensus around climate change may find an explanation in the multifaceted nature of this issue, which would force humankind to reconsider the inevitability of capitalism and rework market economy (Swyngedouw 2010), so as to find alternatives for the survival of our planet. Yet, it seems to be «easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism» as Jameson (2003: 73) puts it. A shift towards a green economy would be fraught with pitfalls, as it would have massive implications for the world’s basic organizational structure and its socio-economic order (Swyngedouw 2010). Nonetheless, as time goes by, climate change threatens to turn into an irreversible phenomenon, unless political leaders from across the globe rely on mutual cooperation to translate fine words into action. The concept of ecosophy (Viridis 2022), a term coined by

ecolinguists, appropriately fits in this scenario, as it challenges conventional values and beliefs that are deeply ingrained in industrial culture, based on a human-centred perspective and an unyielding desire for economic growth, which ultimately causes harm to the environment and creates social inequality. In contrast, ecosophy advocates for a different perspective that prioritizes the safeguarding and preservation of the environment and the wellbeing of all species as the highest moral principle.

It is worth stressing that the idea of the potentially irreversible nature of climate change contributes to profoundly shaping the environmental debate, which tends to be imbued with «apocalyptic imaginaries» (Swyngedouw 2010: 216), portraying a mutilated world, where human survival is jeopardised, thus prematurely ending civilisation as we know it. This discursive strategy, based on the constant evocation of danger and uncertainty, is intimately connected with the so-called ecologies of fear (Davis 1999), a concept which underlies the current environmental narrative, overwhelmed with recurring themes, which conjure up what Katz (1995) aptly calls phantasmagorical imaginaries of a world without water, beset by natural disasters. Climate discourse is shaped by disturbing images of scorched lands, persistent droughts, frightening floods, ravaging hurricanes, and melting icebergs that disintegrate around the poles, causing sea-level to rise (Swyngedouw 2010). Post-apocalyptic images of wastelands, wildfires, and tsunamis aim to heighten concern about what might happen in the near future.

In the field of political discourse analysis, research has explored the tremendous impact of populism on environmental debate, as it may work as a vehicle for the success of populist propaganda, which shrewdly attempts to exploit fear as an effective *leitmotiv* to divide and polarize social groups. The strategy of scaremongering, typically adopted by populist actors to achieve overwhelming electoral consensus, has been widely discussed by Mudde (2004), Aalberg *et al.* (2017), Aslanidis (2017), and Wodak (2015), to name just a few. It is worth stressing that the populist rhetoric employed in climate change discourse has neither boundaries nor fixed schemes, so that such ideological malleability may ultimately erode the credibility of the environmental cause. As will be argued later in this article, leftist political propaganda tends to often exploit fear as a powerful slogan to give greater emphasis to this issue, persuading people to take action on behalf of the environment. This is the strategy that, for instance, Democratic U.S. President Joe Biden has chosen. In contrast, the right-wing populist discourse of former Conservative U.S. President Donald Trump relies on an attempt to abdicate responsibility (see Milizia, forthcoming; Nordensvard *et al.* 2022) by denying even the existence of global warming which is regarded as a “total hoax” (see the language investigation carried out in *paragraph 2.1*) artfully constructed to put an end to capitalism.

As has been pointed out, climate change seems to express some of the classic tenets of populism, whose rhetoric is constructed on the basis of conflict and opposition. With respect to environmental discourse, Swyngedouw (2010) illustrates how populist propaganda fosters antagonisms between homogeneous groups or categories, e.g., “the environment” vs. “the people”, whereby the latter are depicted as universal victims, who suffer from processes beyond their control. It is worth noting that populist discourse defies idiosyncrasies, as it appeals to “the people” as a whole, thus turning them into a vague concept which actually underestimates the existence of more complex heterogeneous sub-categories (Swyngedouw 2010).

Environmental narrative provides fertile ground for the spread of populist messages, as they are extremely versatile and easily adaptable to many contexts. Therefore, vagueness is a key concept to understand the essence of populism, and any attempt to provide a universal definition of this term appears to be vain. As a matter of fact, “populism” lends itself to multiple interpretations: it has been labelled as a «thin-centred ideology» (Mudde 2004: 544), a «rhetorical style» (Krämer 2014: 45), «a set of ideas» (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 1669), a «political strategy» (Weyland 2001: 14) as well as «a medium of mass mobilization» (Türk 2018: 151). Mudde even defines populism as the «politics of the pub», based on a simplistic discourse, able to arouse the «gut feelings of the people» (Mudde 2004: 542). In this regard, the success of populist political propaganda lies in its ability to polarize society, by creating “friends” and “foes”, and always finding a scapegoat to blame and an enemy to fight, so as to safeguard national identity and the beloved homeland (Wodak 2017).

Following this logic, in climate change discourse, populist demagoguery creates antagonistic groups, which are in fact all ambiguous and vaguely depicted. Populism pays tribute to the pure people, although this category is just an empty signifier (Reinemann *et al.* 2017). Likewise, even enemies appear to have blurred outlines, such as the poisonous CO₂ emissions which pose an invisible threat to the health and well-being of humans and wildlife, a danger which cannot be socially embodied (Swyngedouw 2010). Moreover, when it comes to offering solutions to the climate conundrum, populist narrative fails to provide an answer. Populism does not solve problems, but it simply moves them elsewhere, as Mudde (2004) puts it.

1.2. Hegemonic masculinities and subjugated femininities. The impact of gender frames in environmental discourse

With respect to environmental discourse, there is another avenue worth pursuing in this analysis, a path that has not been fully explored, concerning the relation between climate discourse and gender as well as its political and social implications. One might easily wonder why this link is so relevant. It should be noted that research in the field of ecofeminism has unveiled that a specifically negative representation of gender in environmental debate contributes to further undermining its impact and communicative power (MacGregor 2009). Interestingly, two Swedish scholars have found a connection between misogyny and climate change denial. According to Anshelm and Hultman (2014), negationists would blame environmental policies, as they represent a mere attempt to shift the focus to the climate issue, whereas they actually believe that it is modern industrial society, built on masculinity, to be under attack. In this view, conservative industrialism considers nature an element to be exploited, while climate science is perceived as feminized (Anshelm & Hultman 2014).

A gender perspective should be adopted starting from the assumption that gendered environmental discourses frame and shape the way public opinion understands this issue. Furthermore, Peterson *et al.* (1999) stress that the concept of gender in a sociological context goes beyond a purely empirical category based on the men vs. women paradigm, but it is primarily a discursive construction which organizes the world. Scholars focus on gender analysis to examine power relations between men and women, in terms of “hegemonic masculinities” and “subjugated femininities”, as they are cultural constructions which apparently shape the way media and public opinion perceive, interpret, debate and articulate a wide range of topics, such as war, economic crisis, and climate change (MacGregor 2009; Hultman 2013).

Research shows that environmentalism has undergone a process of *masculinization* (MacGregor 2009), since nowadays men tend to dominate this issue at all levels, as scientific and economic experts, entrepreneurs, policy makers and spokespeople (MacGregor 2009). Conversely, women appear to be partly marginalised from climate debate, although they are traditionally considered the main advocates of the environmental cause (MacGregor 2009). This trend is mainly due to two socio-anthropological factors: First, women make up a small minority in fields that have an influence over climate change policy-making; second, it has been argued that environmental narrative is dominated by stereotypically male-driven discourses (e.g., science and business), which tend to overshadow women and their concerns (MacGregor 2009). In this respect, Swim *et al.* (2018) argue that discourse on climate change is shaped by dominant frames, which turn out to be highly gendered. On this account, it has been stressed that scientific and business frames are more likely to be associated with men than women, as they are directly connected with the concepts of power and status, which are traditional stereotypes of men (Swim *et al.* 2018). On the other hand, ethical and justice frames, focusing on the impacts of environmental problems on others, are more likely to be associated with women (Swim *et al.* 2018), who stereotypically seem more inclined to protect the environment so as to safeguard, in turn, their own families or communities (Nelson *et al.* 2002).

Analysis of dominant frames is herein emphasized in order to illustrate how climate change discourse tends to be pervasively altered by gender connotations, which shape public opinion through the spread of specific messages. In this regard, Swim *et al.* (2018) dwell on the implications of the

so-called gender congruity theory, which states that men behaving congruently with their gender would prefer the stereotypically masculine science-business frame, whereas women who act congruently with their gender would prefer the stereotypically ethical-justice frame (Swim *et al.* 2018). Therefore, those who use incongruent frames are labelled as «gender deviants» (Swim *et al.* 2018: 217), that is, people who have personality traits stereotypically associated with other gender attributes, as with gay and lesbian people, who are depicted in cross-gender terms (see Kite *et al.* 1987). Following this logic, in environmental discourse, feminine traits and homosexuality define a man who adopts an ethical-justice frame, as opposed to a man who uses a business-science frame (Swim *et al.* 2018). Likewise, masculine traits and homosexuality are designated to a woman who uses a business-science frame, as opposed to a woman adopting an ethical-justice frame (Swim *et al.* 2018). Dominant frames have a profound impact on climate debate, which has proven to be rife with gender stereotypes, exploited to offer a negative portrayal of environmentalism. Interestingly, Rome (2006) highlights that the common tactic of juxtaposing male environmentalists with stereotypically feminine traits to throw discredit on environmental issues is not new, since it has its roots in the nineteenth century.

Based on the assumption that discourse is profoundly ideological (Yuniawan *et al.* 2017), as there is a close relation between language and the world in which it is shaped (Yuniawan *et al.* 2017), this research study is conducted bearing in mind the importance of promoting a more respectful and effective environmental communication, whose strength should be increased in the public sphere. The second part of this research adopts a corpus-linguistic approach in order to investigate how the concept of environmental protection is construed in social and traditional media, taking a political and gender perspective into consideration. The analysis focuses specifically on the deliberate use of certain rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, which may enhance the salience of environmental propaganda or successfully sway public opinion against it.

2. Pluralistic representations of environmental issues in the media: A corpus linguistic analysis

2.1. Introduction

In this section, a corpus linguistic approach will be adopted in order to examine how climate discourse is framed in traditional and social media. In particular, Twitter and two quality newspapers, namely *The Times & The Sunday Times*, have been explored in the language investigation. As for the methodological criteria, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative analysis has been applied, laying special emphasis on phraseology and metaphors.

It should be pointed out that these two distinct sources and datasets have been selected according to a specific rationale involving a linguistic standpoint. The primary objective of the study is to examine how political and gender perspectives may potentially coexist in environmental narrative and how this relationship varies across these vastly different media contexts. Twitter is widely regarded as a highly democratic communication platform that allows messages to be conveyed with minimal mediation, relying on a less complex, more sensational and straightforward style (Iosifidis & Nicoli 2021). This unfiltered approach may often result in a biased representation of a given issue, with environmental discourse being, for example, possibly vulnerable to arbitrary factors such as personal opinion and political leanings. Conversely, reputable newspapers are supposed to lean towards impartiality and objectivity in their coverage of various topics (Fuller 1996). For instance, in *The Times & The Sunday Times* climate change is expected to be covered from a neutral perspective, utilizing an advanced and sophisticated language style that includes evocative metaphorical constructions. Hence, analysis of phraseology and metaphors may help to provide a more adequate contextual understanding of the way the climate issue is linguistically and culturally represented in the abovementioned media settings.

2.2. Environmental discourse on Twitter: A language investigation in the corpus of British and American politicians

2.2.1. Data description

A corpus-based and corpus-driven investigation is herein carried out in order to uncover some typical features of environmental discourse, constructed today in the rhetoric of British and American leaders, who rely on Twitter as an effective platform for the dissemination of their messages. Given the global pervasiveness of social networking sites and their considerable impact on public opinion, the language analysis focuses on a large corpus of tweets, posted by former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, as well as current and former U.S. Presidents Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

The software *Twitter Search* (Mazzone 2022) has been used in order to collect Johnson’s and Biden’s tweets over a time span of approximately fourteen years, from 2007 to April 2022. As for Donald Trump, it should be noted that due to his permanent ban from Twitter¹, an alternative way has been considered to retrieve the former U.S. president’s tweets, which have been downloaded from the *Trump Twitter Archive*².

The collected data have been subsequently analysed using *WordSmith Tools 7.0* (Scott 2019). This is a piece of software that works as a database where the corpora have been uploaded to investigate climate discourse at the level of word frequency and phraseology, thanks to its two main facilities, namely, *WordList* and *Concord*.

The *WordList* tool serves to automatically generate lists of words in both alphabetical and frequency order. In this study, however, close attention has been paid to the word frequency information, which proves to be particularly helpful in finding out how often a word occurs in a text. Thus, the generated list would show that the higher a word is ranked, the more frequently it is used in the corpus, providing a relevant starting point to identify and then examine the most recurrent content words in their specific contexts.

It follows that three different word lists have been created with reference to Johnson, Biden, and Trump. In addition, the language investigation focuses specifically on the first five hundred words displayed in each ranking, as these are assumed to be the most regular running words in the analysed corpora, as in the case of *climate*, *change* and *green* (Figures 1-4), which tend to often occur in Biden’s and Johnson’s tweets, falling between entries 130 and 316.

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Dispersion
129	JOB	287	0.11	1	100.00	0.57
130	CLIMATE	286	0.10	1	100.00	0.83
131	CLASS	285	0.10	1	100.00	0.77
132	WHITE	283	0.10	1	100.00	0.79
133	NEVER	282	0.10	1	100.00	0.93
134	LAST	281	0.10	1	100.00	0.79
135	IM	280	0.10	1	100.00	0.79
136	ACT	278	0.10	1	100.00	0.83
137	END	277	0.10	1	100.00	0.84
138	THOSE	274	0.10	1	100.00	0.94
139	HOUSE	272	0.10	1	100.00	0.82
140	YEAR	272	0.10	1	100.00	0.86
141	ECONOMY	271	0.10	1	100.00	0.70
142	CHANGE	270	0.10	1	100.00	0.91
143	CHIP	265	0.10	1	100.00	0.89
144	TUNE	264	0.10	1	100.00	0.72
145	VIOLENCE	264	0.10	1	100.00	0.82
146	FIGHT	263	0.10	1	100.00	0.90
147	FUTURE	262	0.10	1	100.00	0.87
148	JOIN	260	0.10	1	100.00	0.86
149	HERE	257	0.09	1	100.00	0.86
150	BECAUSE	254	0.09	1	100.00	0.87
151	ENSURE	252	0.09	1	100.00	0.84
152	WANT	252	0.09	1	100.00	0.79
153	WAY	252	0.09	1	100.00	0.94
154	ACROSS	245	0.09	1	100.00	0.85
155	OO	242	0.09	1	100.00	0.06
156	MOST	240	0.09	1	100.00	0.89

Figure 1.
Word list in Joe Biden’s corpus.

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Dispersion
185	UNITED	111	0.07	1	100.00	0.78
186	WHICH	111	0.07	1	100.00	0.85
187	CHANGE	110	0.07	1	100.00	0.72
188	TEAM	110	0.07	1	100.00	0.77
189	BRILLIANT	109	0.07	1	100.00	0.76
190	MORNING	109	0.07	1	100.00	0.85
191	EDUCATION	108	0.07	1	100.00	0.72
192	JOB	108	0.07	1	100.00	0.65
193	OCTOBER	108	0.07	1	100.00	0.16
194	VITAL	108	0.07	1	100.00	0.83
195	M	107	0.07	1	100.00	0.80
196	DELIGHTED	106	0.07	1	100.00	0.75
197	ENGLAND	106	0.07	1	100.00	0.70
198	HER	106	0.07	1	100.00	0.83
199	MUCH	105	0.06	1	100.00	0.86
200	ACTION	104	0.06	1	100.00	0.75
201	RIGHT	103	0.06	1	100.00	0.85
202	VISIT	103	0.06	1	100.00	0.78
203	WE'RE	103	0.06	1	100.00	0.79
204	BUILD	102	0.06	1	100.00	0.78
205	ENSURE	101	0.06	1	100.00	0.82
206	LOCAL	101	0.06	1	100.00	0.78
207	MOST	101	0.06	1	100.00	0.87
208	NATIONAL	101	0.06	1	100.00	0.85
209	THESE	101	0.06	1	100.00	0.81
210	AGAIN	100	0.06	1	100.00	0.80
211	PROUD	100	0.06	1	100.00	0.77
212	STRONG	100	0.06	1	100.00	0.67

Figure 2.
Word list in Boris Johnson’s corpus.

¹On January 8th, 2021, the platform decided to suspend Trump’s account, citing «the risk of further incitement of violence» following the violent riots at the U.S. Capitol building on January 6th (*The Guardian*, 2021).

²*Trump Twitter Archive*, online: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Dispersion
232	STAY	91	0,06	1	100,00	0,29
233	CLIMATE	90	0,06	1	100,00	0,55
234	HARD	90	0,06	1	100,00	0,84
235	STREET	90	0,06	1	100,00	0,77
236	YESTERDAY	90	0,06	1	100,00	0,78
237	DAYS	89	0,05	1	100,00	0,68
238	ECONOMY	89	0,05	1	100,00	0,73
239	MAY	89	0,05	1	100,00	0,68
240	COMMUNITY	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,81
241	CONFERENCE	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,67
242	COP26	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,46
243	EVER	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,90
244	LEADERS	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,79
245	WELL	87	0,05	1	100,00	0,83
246	INTERNATIONAL	86	0,05	1	100,00	0,62
247	TONIGHT	86	0,05	1	100,00	0,83
248	AHEAD	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,83
249	BUSINESSES	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,76
250	CRIME	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,62
251	HOPE	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,86
252	KNOW	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,77
253	REMEMBER	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,82
254	STREETS	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,70
255	UN	85	0,05	1	100,00	0,56
256	AFTER	84	0,05	1	100,00	0,80
257	ATTACK	83	0,05	1	100,00	0,64
258	HAD	83	0,05	1	100,00	0,76
259	19	82	0,05	1	100,00	0,58

Figure 3.

Word list in Boris Johnson's corpus.

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Dispersion
315	PARTY	69	0,04	1	100,00	0,56
316	GREEN	68	0,04	1	100,00	0,60
317	PARTNERS	68	0,04	1	100,00	0,70
318	STOP	68	0,04	1	100,00	0,74
319	BEFORE	67	0,04	1	100,00	0,83
320	HIGH	67	0,04	1	100,00	0,84
321	INCREDIBLE	67	0,04	1	100,00	0,79
322	OPPORTUNITY	67	0,04	1	100,00	0,85
323	SYSTEM	67	0,04	1	100,00	0,56
324	ARMED	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,78
325	DISCUSS	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,60
326	EVERYTHING	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,83
327	FOLLOW	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,51
328	FREEDOM	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,78
329	GOT	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,67
330	HIM	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,80
331	INVESTING	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,60
332	LEVEL	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,74
333	SECRETARY	65	0,04	1	100,00	0,65
334	2020	64	0,04	1	100,00	0,54
335	COMMITTED	64	0,04	1	100,00	0,89
336	PUTIN	64	0,04	1	100,00	0,05
337	UNDER	64	0,04	1	100,00	0,81
338	BETWEEN	63	0,04	1	100,00	0,82
339	COMMITMENT	63	0,04	1	100,00	0,75
340	FUNDING	63	0,04	1	100,00	0,74
341	INCLUDING	63	0,04	1	100,00	0,75
342	PRESS	63	0,04	1	100,00	0,48

Figure 4.

Word list in Boris Johnson's corpus.

A separate consideration, nonetheless, deserves to be taken into account in the analysis of the word list generated from the corpus of Donald Trump. As has been pointed out, due to the recent suspension of his official profile (@realDonaldTrump), Trump's tweets have been manually selected from an archive available online³. Therefore, the download has been performed considering a specific set of keywords, such as *warming*, *climate*, *environment*⁴, to narrow down the search. This explains why *global*, *warming*, *climate*, *change*, and *green* outstandingly rank 3rd, 7th, 13th, 14th, and 18th in the corpus.

N	Word	Freq.	%	Texts	%	Dispersion
1	THE	432	4,30	1	100,00	0,92
2	TO	200	1,99	1	100,00	0,91
3	GLOBAL	184	1,83	1	100,00	0,61
4	IS	173	1,72	1	100,00	0,89
5	AND	166	1,65	1	100,00	0,92
6	IN	158	1,57	1	100,00	0,93
7	WARMING	147	1,46	1	100,00	0,56
8	OF	145	1,44	1	100,00	0,87
9	A	123	1,22	1	100,00	0,90
10	T	103	1,03	1	100,00	0,83
11	ON	93	0,93	1	100,00	0,86
12	2013	92	0,92	1	100,00	0,55
13	CLIMATE	92	0,92	1	100,00	0,48
14	CHANGE	79	0,79	1	100,00	0,51
15	FOR	79	0,79	1	100,00	0,87
16	THAT	77	0,77	1	100,00	0,94
17	2014	75	0,75	1	100,00	0,45
18	GREEN	75	0,75	1	100,00	0,38
19	CO	74	0,74	1	100,00	0,79
20	IT	73	0,73	1	100,00	0,84
21	S	66	0,66	1	100,00	0,84
22	THEY	62	0,62	1	100,00	0,87
23	2020	58	0,58	1	100,00	0,59
24	ARE	57	0,57	1	100,00	0,80
25	RT	55	0,55	1	100,00	0,64
26	I	54	0,54	1	100,00	0,85
27	WE	54	0,54	1	100,00	0,88
28	BE	51	0,51	1	100,00	0,81

Figure 5.

Word list in Donald Trump's corpus.

Once detected, the above content words have been subjected to an in-depth language investigation from the perspective of phraseology. This has been achieved thanks to the *Concord* tool, a programme which generates concordance lines whose main purpose is to uncover specific patterns by considering the words that most frequently occur to the left and right of the *node*⁵. Thus, the subsequent analysis

³Trump Twitter Archive, online: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

⁴This symbol implies that the download procedure has involved all tweets that contain the word *environment*, including its various morphemes (e.g., *environment*, *environmental*, *environmentalism*, *environmentalist*, *environmentalists* etc.).

⁵The word under investigation.

of collocations and word clusters has allowed to establish the existence of three diverse representations of the environmental issue, offered by Johnson, Biden, and Trump.

2.2.2. Data Analysis

With respect to Boris Johnson's tweets, it is important to clarify that, according to a corpus-based approach, the phrase *climate change*, as well as the words *environment* and *green*, have been searched separately in order to find out their main collocates. In doing so, as can be noted in *Figure 6*, a corpus-driven analysis has unveiled a recurrent use of the noun *prosperity* and the adjective *prosperous*, as with:

- *to address climate change and deliver prosperity for our people*
- *tackle climate change and foster prosperity for all our nations*
- *You can have prosperity whilst respecting the environment*
- *we can protect the planet and build a greener, more prosperous future*

These examples highlight that, in Johnson's view, capitalism and environmental protection are not mutually incompatible.

N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	Sent #
1	Egypt has an opportunity over next 4 years to build a prosperous & democratic society, building on			122.8804	6 13
2	family, a partnership of 53 countries building a more prosperous , secure, fair and sustainable future https://t.co/ZV507hkjd #G7UK			126.0504	3 41
3	pandemic and create a fairer, greener and more prosperous future. https://t.co/ZV507hkjd #G7UK			48.2521	2 25
4	to active role in #WesternBalkans promoting prosperity , stability & security. Congratulations			134.2455	5 10
5	of the future to address climate change and deliver prosperity for our people. https://t.co/dRUjsXnJQ			24.798	971 21
6	the joyous festival of Eid al-Adha a very peaceful and prosperous time. - PM @BorisJohns... RT			103.3043	5 92
7	working with his administration on global stability and prosperity Discussed UK support for Ukraine's			142.5545	5 40
8	and around the world. I wish you all a very happy and prosperous Year of the Tiger. 春节快乐! https://t.co/			10.404	396 10
9	, business investment & prosperous . #IDAHOBIT @FCOHumanRights			119.2694	2 17
10	we can protect the planet and build a greener, more prosperous future. #COP26 https://t.co/8hWJOPxJJP			19.161	749 23
11	not decline - and the freer we are the more we will prosper ! The British economic establishment always			113.7484	1 31
12	reaffirm our commitment to BIH and its secure and prosperous future. UK leaving the #EU, not Europe			138.1145	2 32
13	and innovation so we can level up opportunity and prosperity across the country. The government's			41.0531	3 52
14	those of Australia or Canada , the United Kingdom will prosper mightily as an independent nation. https://t.co/883FTkd3wU			50.8672	7 18
15	tackle climate change and foster economic prosperity for all our nations. https://t.co/883FTkd3wU			37.2251	9 20
16	https://t.co/EwJ1i7TjR You can have prosperity whilst respecting the environment.			34.4591	1 7
17	tensions. is committed to stability, security and prosperity of the Gulf. https://t.co/ZYBTKvXPKG RT			128.8734	6 113
18	has previously committed . UK will support peace, prosperity and security for our friends in Cameroon			121.4384	3 6
19	We are working to create a safer & more prosperous world for them. https://t.co/8hWJOPxJJP			121.5524	7 11
20	Second World War to an end and restored peace and prosperity to the world. https://t.co/DphDU2pSy			27.5961	2 18
21	support for Ukraine Reform, future stability & prosperity . https://t.co/QTeSzymr1 Delighted to			134.3475	8 51
22	forward to further UK-Mexico cooperation promoting prosperity and tackling poverty & corruption.			116.3794	4 10
23	Herzegovina and reforms. Great opportunity to build a prosperous #BIH for all. https://t.co/92Xox63vMN			142.0525	5 7
24	, I outlined importance of the Gulf to UK security and prosperity & our long term commitment to the			141.0335	0 60
25	is increasingly important for our security and prosperity . I'm delighted that we are bringing			21.149	828 43
26	can help tackle instability , reduce conflict and bring prosperity . That's why today I met key experts to			125.3184	7 25
27	, seeing how the UK is working hard for security, prosperity & stability in #Afghanistan & prosperity .			141.8675	4 83

Figure 6. Concordance lines of *prosperity/prosperous* in Boris Johnson's corpus.

N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	Sent #
1	Our new National Disability Strategy is a clear plan to build back better and fairer for disabled people. This			29.2301	4
2	mark #DPWD2021 This government is determined to build back better and fairer for all disabled people.			14.950	575
3	, the North East will be at the very heart of our plans to build back better and greener . https://t.co/			45.1891	8
4	will create thousands of jobs. It's all part of our plan to build back better and greener from the pandemic.			43.3461	5
5	up a vast new sea of economic opportunity. As we build back better, businesses and governments			36.9361	3
6	First Minister Mic... We will stand side by side as we build back better, constructing the kind of exciting,			59.9162	9
7	: Busy morning setting out our plans to Build Back Better #CPC21 https://t.co/LPr3CnGbb			22.350	878
8	Covid, minimise the risk of another pandemic, and build back better, fairer and greener , for the benefit			32.5601	5
9	together as we tackle climate change at COP26 and build back better, fairer and greener from the			32.3191	1
10	working with you and the Northern Ireland Executive to build back better for the people of Northern Ireland. ¹			31.2871	0
11	can vaccinate the world by the end of next year and build back better from coronavirus . https://t.co/			29.0431	6
12	of our enduring friendship and our ongoing work to build back better from Covid-19 and make the world			46.0111	3
13	wage economy for the British people. Together we will build back better from the pandemic and level up			20.233	790
14	sure we support our children and young people as we build back better from the pandemic. That's why			36.6291	0
15	our friends and allies as we beat COVID and build back better from the pandemic. There will be			49.4131	4
16	trade deal that will help both the UK and New Zealand build back better from the pandemic. Our two			20.987	823
17	you to Cornwall Mr President. Together we're going to build back better from the pandemic, help to			33.8141	5
18	and Social Care. https://t.co/taqH5TUNB3 4. We will build back better from the pandemic and ensure that			25.9351	6
19	strengthen the UK-US trading relationship and work to build back better from the pandemic. https://t.co/			43.4431	8
20	to make sure they can kickstart their careers as we build back better from the pandemic. https://t.co/			53.4012	8
21	dignity and security in older age... 3. Together we will build back better from the pandemic and make sure			25.7901	5
22	to unite and level up the whole country. We will build back better from the pandemic and deliver on			24.881	974
23	Commission report. https://t.co/f6LxGzGPh We can build back better from this pandemic by building			39.1311	8
24	COVID by the end of next year. And together we will build back better, greener and fairer . https://t.co/			33.2071	2
25	been doing during the pandemic. Together we will build back better . https://t.co/y4u3ZeMZWx I will do			42.5391	7
26	jobs and is at the heart of this government's plans to build back better . https://t.co/wD8BC4mm9g Today I			58.5692	6
27	continue to give the NHS the support it needs as we build back better . https://t.co/7MHc1fjNc Sports			35.0271	9

Figure 7. Concordance lines of *build back* in Boris Johnson's corpus.

Moreover, as shown below, Johnson's environmental narrative is surrounded by positive connotations, thus emphasising the beneficial effects arising from the fight of the threatening phenomenon of climate change, which would lead to building a thriving future for all countries around the world, rather than dwelling on its disastrous consequences.

Careful analysis of the concordance lines has highlighted that the phrase *build back* occurs 41 times in Johnson's corpus and tends to collocate with *better*, *fairer*, and *greener*. Moreover, in *Figure 7*, the cluster *build back better* collocates, in turn, with the word *pandemic*, suggesting the former British prime minister's attempt to instil confidence in people that not only will the United Kingdom and the entire world rise from the ashes of the pandemic, but the promise of a bright future lies directly in the transition to a green economy.

Johnson's rhetoric on Twitter avails itself of vivid analogies and figurative language, which make his messages highly pervasive. In this regard, *Figure 8* offers some examples where the metaphor of the journey is emphasised by the verbs *drive*, *drive forward*, and *supercharge*, so that the latter, in particular, conveys the idea of speed on the road to ecological awareness that will bring about a *Green Industrial Revolution*, resulting in net zero carbon emissions whilst creating «hundreds of thousands of green jobs across the country».

N	Concordance	Set	Tag	Word #	Sent #
1	"6 months ago I set out my 10 point plan for a Green Industrial Revolution. Since then we've set			35.7591...	8
2	RT @10DowningStreet: Our Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution will create and support			52.9742...	4
3	in Wales, my 10 point plan will drive forward a Green Industrial Revolution, creating jobs across			53.0232...	5
4	://t.co/s64pe8ex8m We are going to drive forward a Green Industrial Revolution, creating hundreds of			52.9452...	3
5	government and @Breakthrough to supercharge a green industrial revolution across the UK: https://t.			21.297	833
6	has an unprecedented opportunity to drive a global Green Industrial Revolution and transform the way			33.3871...	9
7	why I'm urging @G7 countries to drive a global Green Industrial Revolution to help developing			33.3431...	8
8	on coal, cars, cash and trees: to drive forward our green industrial revolution with clean energy and			23.112	908
9	UK offshore wind is a huge vote of confidence in our Green Industrial Revolution. It's not only going to			21.033	824
10	kind of high-skilled, well-paid jobs at the core of our Green Industrial Revolution. https://t.co/			30.7831...	1
11	boosting electric vehicle production as part of our Green Industrial Revolution. https://t.co/l7Uhi9fb			11.150	423
12	and thriving green industries – powering our green industrial revolution across the country.			21.238	831
13	advanced robots. We're pushing forward with our Green Industrial Revolution, investing in new			16.863	652
14	points across the UK. As we press on with our Green Industrial Revolution, we're accelerating the			2.643	109
15	.https://t.co/RMacGbWUAm I want to see the UK's Green Industrial Revolution go global. The pace of			19.396	758

Figure 8.

Concordance lines of *Green Industrial Revolution* in Boris Johnson's corpus

As can be noted in *Figure 9*, Johnson occasionally resorts to the metaphor of the sea in his rhetoric, connected with the idea of prosperity, as in the following tweet: «The fight against climate change [...] also opens up a vast new sea of economic [opportunities]». Moreover, the U-turn towards a more sustainable future, where rising temperatures will be limited, is expressed with the powerful image of the tide: «Let's keep moving forward, keep 1.5 alive and make this the moment we irrefutably turn the tide against climate change».



Figure 9.

Boris Johnson's official tweets⁶.

An alternative account of the environmental issue is offered by the current President of the United States. It should be emphasised that a comparative analysis of Joe Biden's and Boris Johnson's corpus has shown that the rhetoric of the American president, in contrast to the sustainability propaganda of

⁶ In order to facilitate reading, it was deemed appropriate to directly display Johnson's official tweets rather than the concordance lines generated by *WordSmith Tools* 7.0 (Scott 2019). Tweets retrieved with the software *Twitter search* (Mazzone 2022) from: <https://twitter.com/BorisJohnson> (08.05.2023).

the former British Prime Minister, promotes a rather fatalistic representation of the climate conundrum.

War and game metaphors predominate in Biden’s messages, thus fostering an opposition between two distinct categories: “us” (e.g., the American people, academia, or scientists) united in the fight against a tangible and a less tangible – yet equally threatening – “foe”, namely, climate change, and Donald Trump, who is blamed for his negationist stances on this issue. Trump is depicted as an enemy who must be *beaten* or *defeated* at any cost for the sake of the planet, since he is labelled a *climate change denier*, as is shown in the concordance lines displayed in Figure 10:

- *I won’t put a climate change denier – one who called the scientific community “a bunch of thugs” – in charge of [...]*
- *can’t afford four more years of a climate change denier in the White House*
- *We must get the climate change denier out of the White House*

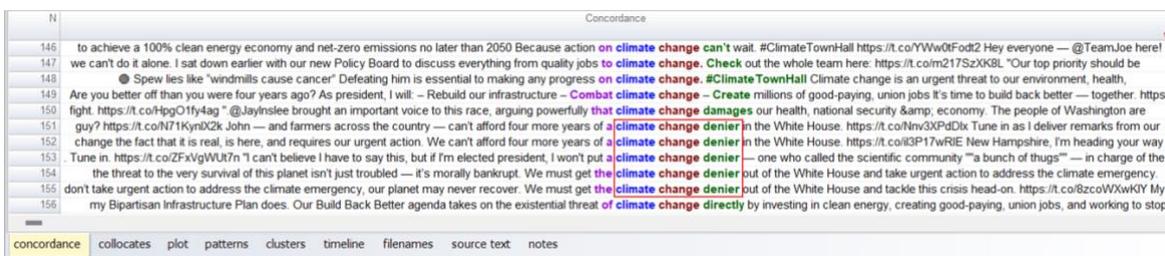


Figure 10.
Concordance lines of *climate* in Joe Biden’s corpus.

Interestingly, the language investigation highlights that Biden’s environmental discourse is also steeped in religious themes connected with the value of morality. Hence, the ideological war on Donald Trump and his reluctance to acknowledge climate change as an existential threat is being waged in the realm of ethics, as is evidenced by the tweets in Figure 11:

- *Scripture is clear: It’s not enough to just wish the world were better. It’s our duty to make it so – including [...]* addressing the climate crisis
- *A country that ignores the threat to the very survival of this planet isn’t just troubled — it’s morally bankrupt. We must get the climate change denier out of the White House and take urgent action to address the climate emergency*



Figure 11.
Joe Biden’s official tweets⁷.

⁷ Tweets retrieved with the software *Twitter search* (Mazzone 2022) from: <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden> (08.05.2023).

Another aspect of Biden’s environmental propaganda deserves greater attention, for the persuasiveness of his messages rests on his masterful use of personification as a rhetorical device, which serves to turn the concept of “climate change” into a living entity, lurking menacingly in people’s lives. This is stressed in the following instances:

- *Climate is on the ballot*
- *Climate change is already here*
- *Climate change is all around us*
- *we’re already feeling the impacts of climate change*

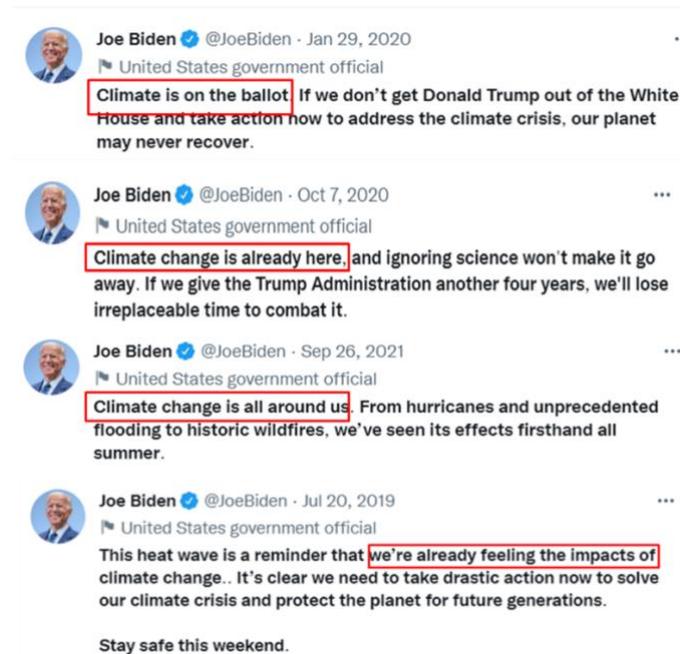


Figure 12.
Joe Biden’s official tweets⁸.

As mentioned above, Biden’s narrative appears to be more focused on the negative impacts of climate change, whose *deadly signs* make it a lethal enemy, bringing death and destruction (Figure 13).



Figure 13.
Joe Biden’s official tweets⁹.

Whereas Johnson’s rhetoric presents climate change as a favourable opportunity to power up a new Green Industrial Revolution, Biden dwells on the catastrophic consequences of this phenomenon, which threatens to be irreversible if bold action is not taken in time. In this regard, the phrases *there is no time to waste / we have no time to waste / time is running out / we are running out of time* occur repeatedly in the corpus. It should also be emphasised that the frequent use of the chunk *before it’s*

⁸ Tweets retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden> (08.05.2023).

⁹ Tweets retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden> (08.05.2023).

too late serves as a reiterated, grim warning that humanity will not survive the deadly threat of climate change, unless governments from across the globe clamp down on this issue.

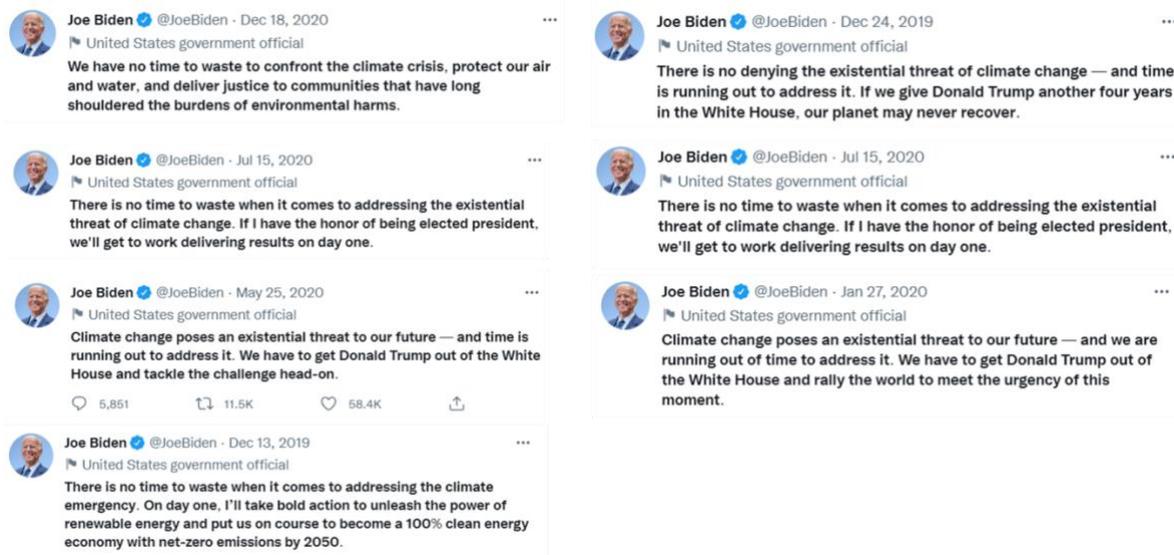


Figure 14.
Joe Biden's official tweets¹⁰.

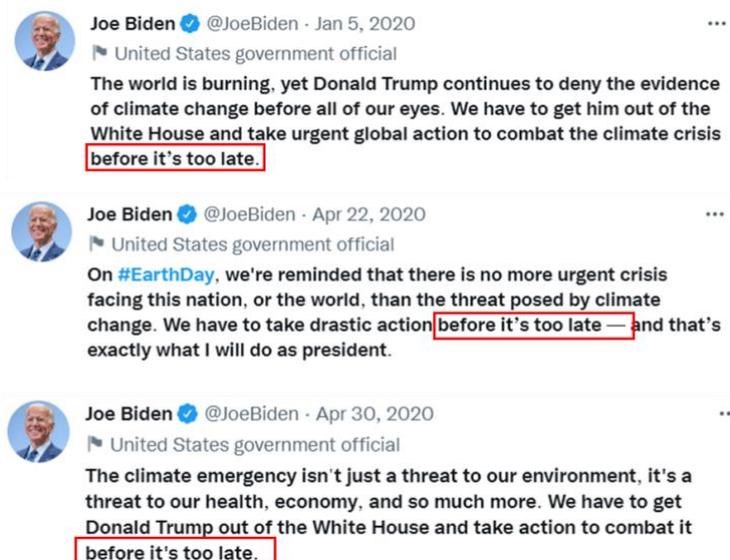


Figure 15.
Joe Biden's official tweets¹¹.

When it comes to the climate issue, there is no denying that Donald Trump's political propaganda is at odds with the ideology of Johnson and Biden. On this account, the linguistic investigation stresses that the former U.S. president tends to dismiss the existence of global warming, which is defined as *a total or expensive hoax*, a *canard* repeated by corrupt scientists, or simply *bullshit* and *nonsense* (Figure 16). Global warming is also regarded as something *mythical* and *non-existent* or *a costly dream*.

¹⁰ Tweets retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden> (08.05.2023).

¹¹ Tweets retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/JoeBiden> (08.05.2023).



Figure 16.
Donald Trump's official tweets¹².



Figure 17.
Donald Trump's official tweets¹³.

In this context, Figures 17 and 18 demonstrate that in his tweets Trump relies heavily on rhetorical questions and interjections, which serve as a strategy to sardonically question the existence of global warming, as with *where is global warming?* / *where the hell is global warming?* / *so much for global warming*. Irony is also employed in the following exclamations (Figure 18):

¹² Tweets retrieved from: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

¹³ Tweets retrieved from: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

- *we could use a big fat dose of global warming!*
- *Perhaps we could use a little bit of that good old Global Warming*
- *Wouldn't be bad to have a little of that good old fashioned Global Warming right now!*



Figure 18.
Donald Trump's official tweets¹⁴.

Furthermore, consistent with the mechanisms of populist discourse, Trump's propaganda tends to draw on empty slogans, in which two unrelated issues are juxtaposed with the purpose of increasing sensationalism in his messages and arousing the gut-feelings of voters:

- *We should be focused on clean and beautiful air, not expensive and business closing GLOBAL WARMING – a total hoax!*
- *We should be focused on magnificently clean and healthy air and not distracted by the expensive hoax that is global warming!*



Figure 19.
Donald Trump's official tweets¹⁵.

Finally, Trump's rhetoric is populist as it shrewdly aims to foster polarizations between antagonistic groups: "us" – the pure American people – and "them" – the faceless foes, who hardly have a clear identity. Trump's enemies may be sometimes *the corrupt media*, or the corrupt scientists who *manipulate data* to prove the existence of global warming. They can be *the wealthy environmentalists* who pollute with their *private jets* and cause disruption wherever they go. He sometimes attacks the so-called *global warming hoaxsters*, *the disciples of global warming*, who are also ironically named *global warming geniuses* or *wiseguys*, sometimes, *dollar sucking wiseguys* or *con artists*.

¹⁴ Tweets retrieved from: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

¹⁵ Tweets retrieved from: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).



Figure 20.
Donald Trump's official tweets¹⁶.

Nonetheless, their true identity is still unknown, emphasising that rivals must have vague contours for a populist actor like Donald Trump to maximise the effectiveness of his propaganda.

2.3. *Eco-activism, mighty warriors, and gender clichés: An analysis of metaphors in The Times & The Sunday Times*

The second part of this study focuses on a linguistic analysis which takes traditional media into account. For this purpose, a corpus of seventy-four articles, published in *The Times & The Sunday Times* between April 2019 and April 2022, has been created by manual selection from the *Environment* section available online¹⁷. The articles have been retrieved by considering a set of keywords, such as *climate*, *environment**, *activis**, and *warming*. The data have been subsequently examined using *WordSmith Tools 7.0* (Scott 2019).

The first step consisted in creating a list of words rearranged in frequency order. Figure 21 shows that *climate* is the first content word ranking 25th in the word list, followed by *people*, *change*, *countries*, *emissions*, *Greta*, *year*, *world*, *new*, and *Thunberg* (Figure 22).

¹⁶ Tweets retrieved from: <https://www.thetrumparchive.com/> (08.05.2023).

¹⁷ *The Times & The Sunday Times*, online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/environment> (08.05.2023).

N	Word	Freq	%	Texts	%
1	THE	3 125	5.13	1	100.00
2	TO	1 908	3.13	1	100.00
3	AND	1 498	2.46	1	100.00
4	OF	1 483	2.44	1	100.00
5	A	1 376	2.26	1	100.00
6	IN	1 012	1.66	1	100.00
7	IS	709	1.16	1	100.00
8	THAT	702	1.15	1	100.00
9	Æ	630	1.03	1	100.00
10	FOR	547	0.90	1	100.00
11	ON	547	0.90	1	100.00
12	BY	431	0.71	1	100.00
13	IT	424	0.70	1	100.00
14	AS	353	0.58	1	100.00
15	WAS	349	0.57	1	100.00
16	ARE	347	0.57	1	100.00
17	BE	346	0.57	1	100.00
18	WITH	342	0.56	1	100.00
19	SAID	308	0.51	1	100.00
20	AT	302	0.50	1	100.00
21	BUT	291	0.48	1	100.00
22	I	288	0.47	1	100.00
23	FROM	287	0.47	1	100.00
24	HAVE	282	0.46	1	100.00
25	CLIMATE	275	0.45	1	100.00
26	HAS	270	0.44	1	100.00
27	WE	255	0.42	1	100.00
28	HE	254	0.42	1	100.00
29	THEY	252	0.41	1	100.00
30	SHE	243	0.40	1	100.00
31	NOT	239	0.39	1	100.00
32	HER	215	0.35	1	100.00

Figure 21. Word list in *The Times & Sunday Times*.

N	Word	Freq	%	Texts	%
38	MORE	184	0.30	1	100.00
39	YOU	177	0.29	1	100.00
40	THEIR	175	0.29	1	100.00
41	WHICH	171	0.28	1	100.00
42	PEOPLE	159	0.26	1	100.00
43	CHANGE	154	0.25	1	100.00
44	ALL	152	0.25	1	100.00
45	ONE	152	0.25	1	100.00
46	COUNTRIES	148	0.24	1	100.00
47	OR	144	0.24	1	100.00
48	EMISSIONS	143	0.23	1	100.00
49	THAN	141	0.23	1	100.00
50	WHO	141	0.23	1	100.00
51	WOULD	141	0.23	1	100.00
52	BEN	138	0.23	1	100.00
53	CAN	138	0.23	1	100.00
54	OUT	138	0.23	1	100.00
55	GRETA	135	0.22	1	100.00
56	YEAR	135	0.22	1	100.00
57	HAD	131	0.22	1	100.00
58	WORLD	131	0.22	1	100.00
59	SO	126	0.21	1	100.00
60	WHEN	122	0.20	1	100.00
61	NEW	118	0.19	1	100.00
62	DO	117	0.19	1	100.00
63	IF	114	0.19	1	100.00
64	THERE	110	0.18	1	100.00
65	WHAT	110	0.18	1	100.00
66	PER	109	0.18	1	100.00
67	WERE	109	0.18	1	100.00
68	THUNBERG	108	0.18	1	100.00
69	ALSO	107	0.18	1	100.00

Figure 22. Word list in *The Times & Sunday Times*.

Based on the achieved results, it should be highlighted that the frequent occurrence of some words was rather expected, especially when it comes to those that are inherently anchored in environmental jargon (e.g., *climate*, *change*, and *emissions*). Conversely, with respect to *Greta* and *Thunberg*, it was not obvious that these words would rank so highly in the corpus. This suggests that Greta Thunberg, the popular young Swedish climate activist, appears to be a pivotal figure within the climate crisis narrative exploited in *The Times & The Sunday Times*.

The analysis of phraseology, conducted with the *Concord* tool, has brought to light the tendency towards a more complex and sophisticated style, typical of press language, based on a rich vocabulary and an exceptionally creative use of metaphors. A qualitative approach applied to this research has unveiled instances in which Thunberg is ambiguously depicted as a legendary character or even a divine entity, admired and dreaded at the same time. Greta is regarded as a *climate* or *eco-warrior* who stands at the head of a *teen army*. She is also referred to as a *modern-day Viking* or a *teenage environmental crusader*.

Ireland has its very own Greta Thunberg. Flossie Donnelly, aged 13, is being heralded as this country’s version of the Swedish **climate warrior**, thanks to her environmental advocacy¹⁸.

The adolescent egotism of **eco-warriors** like Thunberg raises an important question: do these activists actually want to help find solutions to the climate crisis or is the priority throwing tantrums and droning on about the end of times?¹⁹

Skarsgard cycled past Greta on his way [...] she was on a protest. “She’s how we sell our country now,” he reflects. “And I almost hit her with my bike.”. Skarsgard smiles. “Greta is like a **modern-day Viking** – and, like Greta, the Vikings refused to fly”²⁰.

The teenage **environmental crusader** Greta Thunberg gave up flying to fight climate change – and the rest of us are now being encouraged to switch from planes to trains and other less polluting ways to travel²¹.

¹⁸ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/meet-flossie-the-gaelic-greta-thunberg-gvpsb9sbc> (08.05.2023).

¹⁹ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/greta-thunberg-and-her-band-of-climate-alarmists-have-to-grow-up-6br3tf37s> (08.05.2023).

²⁰ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/alexander-skarsgard-interview-i-nearly-ran-over-greta-thunberg-vnxshwt0d> (08.05.2023).

²¹ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/extra-day-off-work-if-you-go-the-slow-way-like-greta-thunberg-and-ditch-flights-dq38pk50h> (08.05.2023).

Moreover, a religious aura seems to surround Greta, who is transfigured into a *modern-day doom-laden medieval mystic*, or an *oracle for all the political and social forces*.

Greta Thunberg, the **modern-day doom-laden medieval mystic** who channels these fears, [...] is right to raise the questions she does but it's the obstructive, noncommittal responses from most adults that alarm children²².

In Poland [...] conservatives often link [Greta] and her Fridays for Future movement to gay rights activists, human rights groups and pro-refugee campaigners. [...] the archbishop of Cracow described her as “**an oracle for all political and social forces**” seeking to shatter his country's Christian identity²³.

On the other hand, in the excerpt above, it is worth noting how the conservatives deliberately try to discredit Greta's strive for environment by equating her with «gay rights activists», «human rights groups», and «pro-refugee campaigners», all of whom are portrayed negatively.

Greta is even perceived as an *enemy of Christianity*, as she embodies the idea of a new Messiah, who has come to *threaten the traditional way of life*. On this account, the phrase *Greta's young disciples* as well as the powerful image of *children who fall in behind Greta* both strengthen this link.

A Catholic archbishop in Poland considers [Greta] the **enemy of Christianity**. The Czech prime minister says she is hysterical. In Hungary journalists must seek their bosses' permission before they mention her name on state TV²⁴.

“The climate has been turned into a new front in the culture war. Even Greta is portrayed as someone who **threatens the traditional way of life**,” [...]”²⁵.

Greta's young disciples should act, not panic. Followers of the climate activist are increasingly anxious about the future so let's give them positive steps to take²⁶.

COP26: **Children fall in behind Greta Thunberg**. “COP26 has failed and the world is already burning”, Greta Thunberg has told a crowd of activists in Glasgow, including hundreds of striking schoolchildren²⁷.

Nevertheless, the reported findings also offer examples in which Greta is treated with a sexist approach, tainted with gender stereotypical connotations, as is evidenced below:

Left Bank French intellectuals grumble at Greta Thunberg — “**not sexy enough**.” Jealous male French intellectuals have provoked uproar by turning on Greta Thunberg, the 16-year-old, Swedish climate activist, for not being like the sexy Swedish girls of their youth²⁸.

Bolshy Greta so reminds me of my wife. The green princess is a **bossy, fearless blonde** who is super-determined and unequivocally correct about all that matters. [...] I guess I must be

²² *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gretas-young-disciples-should-act-not-panic-7k8hk0hrt> (08.05.2023).

²³ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-populists-are-trying-to-demonise-greta-thunberg-0npnk9ql9> (08.05.2023).

²⁴ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-populists-are-trying-to-demonise-greta-thunberg-0npnk9ql9> (08.05.2023).

²⁵ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/how-populists-are-trying-to-demonise-greta-thunberg-0npnk9ql9> (08.05.2023).

²⁶ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/gretas-young-disciples-should-act-not-panic-7k8hk0hrt> (08.05.2023).

²⁷ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/cop26-children-fall-in-behind-greta-thunberg-jznhn0mbq> (08.05.2023).

²⁸ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/left-bank-french-intellectuals-grumble-at-greta-thunberg-not-sexy-enough-6wwj5vjjs> (08.05.2023).

predisposed to **idolise** small, bossy, fearless blondes. **And seek to protect** them too [...] I'm concerned at the moment, for instance, that **Greta is getting too thin**²⁹.

On this account, it can be noted that the young activist becomes the addressee of a set of established clichés that revolve around the female universe portrayed by men, such as the traditional image of the «feeble angel of the house who seeks the protection of the man». Hence, Greta is no longer a mighty warrior, but a «green princess». She is as «bossy» and «fearless» as she is «blonde», an adjective vaguely loaded with sexual nuances, so that Greta, «the bossy, fearless blonde», is *idolised* and becomes a sort of «object of desire».

In some ways, the reported findings support a crucial point made by Anshelm and Hultman (2014) in their seminal work, for the negationists' attempt to shift the focus from environment to gender, by promoting derogatory associations between climate activism, feminine weakness, and gay rights, works as a shrewd strategy to ultimately undermine the credibility and the punch of the environmental cause.

3. Conclusion

The end results of this research show that climate change and environmental protection tend to be extremely politicised on Twitter through a strategic use of metaphors, exploited by leaders with opposing political leanings in order to offer diverse representations of these issues.

In particular, it has been highlighted that support for the environmental cause may be expressed by adopting two distinct patterns. On the one hand, positive connotations surround Boris Johnson's rhetoric, which is imbued with movement and sea metaphors to emphasise that global economic growth and green policies are not mutually exclusive goals. Joe Biden's climate propaganda, on the other hand, is based on a more fatalistic narrative, so that war, game, and religious metaphors prevail with the purpose to ultimately reinforce concern for the environment. As for Donald Trump, his messages borrow the typical rhetorical devices of right-wing populist discourse. Trump's slogans, conveyed through a simple, clear-cut, highly graspable style, aim to foster polarization processes by promoting climate denialism, thus delegitimising the role of environmental activists, science, and academia.

Finally, analysis of articles from *The Times & The Sunday Times* has revealed how environmentalism is a topic constructed through creative metaphors involving, in particular, Greta Thunberg, the popular climate activist, who ends up being represented from different perspectives. War and religious metaphors contribute to strengthening Greta's role as an advocate for the environment, as she is turned into a mythical character, a warrior, or a divine entity, able to give fresh impetus to the climate change campaign. Nevertheless, the language investigation has also unveiled that the image of Greta and her supporters is not immune to gender stereotypical connotations, tainted with sexism and homophobic overtones, which mockingly undermine the forcefulness of their environmental propaganda.

Overall, the analysis of the data has brought to light that both media outlets infuse politics into discourse surrounding climate change. However, Twitter conversations lack a noticeable gender perspective in contrast to *The Times & The Sunday Times*'s corpus, in which environmental discourse tends to be distinctly gender-driven. It has also been found that this topic is prone to manipulation for political purposes, which is deployed through the strategic use of metaphors and rhetorical devices to sway public opinion. For instance, Boris Johnson's tweets convey a sense of urgency in addressing climate change while maintaining a generally optimistic tone. Conversely, Joe Biden's greatest asset lies in his efforts to raise awareness by presenting the climate crisis in a more pessimistic light. With respect to Donald Trump, the typical mechanisms of populist

²⁹ *The Times & The Sunday Times*. Excerpt retrieved online: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/bolshy-greta-so-reminds-me-of-my-wife-3ggrbw271> (08.05.2023).

propaganda are adopted (i.e., the promotion of simple slogans, aimed at fostering polarizations between categories of people) in order to erode the significance of climate change. As for the articles retrieved from *The Times & The Sunday Times*, analysis reveals an intersection of political and gender perspectives within environmental discourse. Key to this topic is the polarizing figure of Greta Thunberg, whose image is often associated with commendation and criticism. Greta's unwavering dedication to environmental activism is expressed through powerful war and religious references, which turn her into a formidable champion who can both inspire constructive change and intimidate those who stand against her cause. Nevertheless, the language investigation has unveiled the existence of certain gender stereotypes and derogatory associations with regard to Thunberg as a woman, thus showing how long-standing prejudices and misconceptions surrounding the female universe still persist in the media.

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