

Online news readers' metaphorical conceptions of climate change

Comprehending climate change is difficult given its severity and far-reaching nature. Likely for this reason, studies applying Conceptual Metaphor Theory have been popular within discourse-analytic work on climate change. Such work to date has identified four prominent metaphorical conceptions for communicating climate change: as CONFLICT, RELIGION, ILLNESS and JOURNEYING (e.g. Atanasova & Koteyko, 2017). However, such work has predominantly focused on bricks-and-mortar institutions (e.g. parliamentary politics and traditional news). Among others, Boykoff (2011) has argued that there is a risk hegemonic, neo-liberal discourses both: (i) dominate the climate change debate, naturalising such conceptualisations and their consequences, and (ii) limit our understanding of climate change phenomena, precluding other ways that they are – and can be – discussed and comprehended.

Here, a 75 million word corpus of newsreader comments on all the Guardian Online climate change articles (2009-2023) are analysed using a corpus-assisted discourse studies methodology. Such data are a unique, highly opinionated and informationally-rich digital genre (Ehret & Taboada, 2021), free from strict institutional logics. This study reports findings for three analytical inquiries concerning metaphorical conceptualisations of climate change: first, it assesses the presence and pragmatic characteristics of the aforementioned conceptual metaphors, finding JOURNEYING and CONFLICT to be most salient. Second, the presence of other conceptual metaphors not previously reported in the literature from prior studies, and their characteristics are noted. Third, given the polylogic (Marcochia, 2004) nature of this digital media, of the metaphorical conceptualisations identified, it is determined which are most challenged by fellow commenters (typically, CONFLICT metaphors) and how so discursively.

Atanasova, D. & Koteyko, N. (2017). "Metaphors in Guardian Online and Mail Online opinion-page content on climate change: War, religion, and politics." *Environmental Communication*, 11(4), 452–469.

Boykoff, M. T. (2011). *Who speaks for the climate? Making sense of media reporting on climate change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ehret, K., & Taboada, M. (2021). Characterising online news comments: A multi-dimensional cruise through online registers. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 4: 79, 643770.

Marcocchia, M. (2004). 'On-line polylogues: Conversation structure and participation framework in internet newsgroups'. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 36: 1, 115-145.

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