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Language of the Climate Crisis: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Climate Activism

Abstract

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Keywords: Climate Activism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Rhetoric, Climate Justice, Linguistic Strategies

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Abstract

This study analyzes the language of climate activism using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, which reveals how activists construct urgency, moral responsibility, and systemic critique. The dataset comprises over 800 texts produced between 2018 and 2024, including speeches, social media posts, and protest signs. The study identifies rhetorical strategies that promote solidarity and mobilization, such as the use of collective pronouns (e.g., we, our) and crisis metaphors (e.g., climate emergency). Quantitative indicators TF-IDF, chi-square tests, and sentiment analysis reveal notable regional variation: activists in the Global South often appeal to colonial histories and justice, while those in the Global North emphasize generational responsibility. A further distinction is observed between youth-led and institutional movements. By combining discourse and quantitative analysis, the research demonstrates how language not only mobilizes action but also transforms climate discourse across sociopolitical contexts, offering deeper insight into environmental communication strategies in the 21st century.

Keywords:

[Climate Activism](#), [Critical Discourse Analysis](#), [Rhetoric](#), [Climate Justice](#), [Linguistic Strategies](#)

Introduction

The climate crisis turned out to be not only an environmental and ecological emergency but a highly discursive object. Over the past few decades, the heating climate concern has been carrying the world, as the debate of anthropogenic climate change accelerated and resulted in the extension of climate activism, both at the grassroots level and within transnational advocacy networks (Dunlap & Brulle, 2020). This mobilization centers around the strategic deployment of language, which is an

important tool in the hands of activists to develop discourses of urgency, justice, and resistance and to generate public opinion and political support (Lakoff, 2010; O Neil et al., 2015). Although climate activism is becoming a familiar topic in many global discussions, the linguistic aspects of climate activism, especially under the critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective, do not enjoy systematic and critical treatment.

The literature on communication of climate change has been built on scholarly debates on



scientific language/story, the media reporting, and popular perception (Nerlich, Koteyko, & Brown, 2010; Boykoff, 2011). The contribution of framing, metaphor, and narrative to understanding climate change action by the mass population has been studied in terms of environmental communication (Nisbet, 2009; Cox & Pezzullo, 2016). Nevertheless, such literature usually focuses on the institutional accounts or journalistic coverage, neglecting to recognize that activists use their voices to realize alternative discursive arguments that question prominent socio-political paradigms. Specifically in light of a dominant focus on activism in climate politics since the advent and the global spread of activist groups such as Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, and the Sunrise Movement, the important question arises of how climate discourse is constructed by activists themselves, how the mobilization of publics takes place, and how systemic injustices are contested.

This climate activism is an essential counterpublic that rearticulates climate politics as being centered around issues of environmental justice, histories of colonialism, generational equality, and change to the system (Temper et al., 2020; Martinez-Alier et al., 2016). Activists, using language, do not just inform people; they are out to recruit, agitate, and fight, and their terrain can be power-dominated. By means of language, these movements begin to recontain the crisis beyond technocratic solutions and place it in a moral, political, and existential struggle. However, although a few recent works have already started looking into the rhetorical patterns of environmental protests (Delina, 2021; Flottum and colleagues, 2021), very few studies have engaged in in-depth linguistic analysis of the discourse of the activists in a variety of geopolitical contexts. The intellectual gap generated by the lack of representation of the activist voices, in addition to the lack of adequate connection between the discourse theory and the explanation of patterns and trends through the means of computational linguistics, is also a study gap.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a very convenient framework to challenge the power relations inherent in the climate activism discourse. The operational epistemology of CDA is a social constructivist one, which allows scholars to explore discourse in terms of how language creates social

realities, ideologies, and hierarchies of socially constructed power (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2015). Applying the CDA to climatic activism, one can determine how climate activists frame climate change as a matter of morality and agency, as well as their construction of the narrative of emergency and opposition. It is also used in exploring the variability of discursive practices by movement, region, and targeted audiences, to argue the situated nature of environmental struggle.

In addition, such a combination of CDA with corpus linguistics and sentiment analysis subjects not only the qualitative side of discourse to investigation, but also the quantitative one (Baker et al., 2008; Gabrielatos & Baker, 2008). New methods of natural language processing (NLP) and text mining have recently become available to accurately analyze vast specific language corpora of protest slogans and speeches on social media to campaign messages and placards, thus revealing linguistic regularities that would not otherwise be visible. These mixed-methods strategies are vital in the design of the multidimensional and changeable activist communication that may tap into various rhetorical repertoires and react to the fast-changing political environment in which they are embedded.

The current research helps to fill such a gap by critically comparing the discursive tactics available in climate activism of regions and movements between 2018 and 2024. The research considers activists' linguistic conceptions of themes and frames like ecological justice, temporal urgency, and institutional critique, by drawing on a collection of more than 800 individual textual items created through climate activist organizations: speeches, social media connections, and signage. It applies CDA structures to examine the proliferating themes, and so does the quantitative, such as TF-IDF, chi-square, and sentence analysis, to determine statistically significant design and changes.

The applied research question that informs the study is as follows: How do climate activists use language in order to create urgency, agency, and systemic criticism in their discourse, and how are these discursive practices different across geographies and organizations? In answering this question, the research contribution is made to the interdisciplinary domains of environmental communication, sociolinguistics, and political ecology, and new knowledge on how discourse as a

form of resistance and world-making works out in the climate crisis is provided.

Moreover, the relevance of this research will be mentioned, as this research may bring some light to the role of activist discourse questioning and transforming the mainstream environmental discourse. In a situation of ecological insecurity, politicalization, and deepening of the global crisis of democratic participation and political representation, the rhetoric building of climate activism is not just an intellectual game; it is the key to realizing the way popular participation and collective action can be created in the Anthropocene (Latour, 2018; Haraway, 2016). This study focuses on the voices of activists and examines their linguistic practices to bring out how discourse has the power to transform socio-ecological futures.

To conclude, this paper presents an in-depth and empirical analysis of the discourse of climate activism by adopting a combined methodological framework. It does not stop at descriptive narrations but presents a critical interrogation of the use of language as an activism tool, ideology, and resistance. Through this, it answers the situation with a more accommodating, complex, and theoretically sound examination of climate communication that attends to the importance of bottom-up and frontline diversion in creating climate discourse construction.

Research Objectives

The proposed study tries to contribute to an emerging literature on climate communication in that it examines the discursive processes of climate activism as it instantiates and propagates discourses of ecological urgency, social justice, and system change. Drawing upon Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistic methodologies, this research pursues two central objectives:

1. To systematically examine the rhetorical and linguistic strategies employed by climate activist movements in framing climate change as a moral, political, and existential crisis, with particular attention to themes of urgency, agency, and institutional critique.
2. To identify and analyze regional and organizational variations in climate activist discourse, employing both qualitative and quantitative tools to uncover patterns that reflect the situatedness of climate struggles

across diverse geopolitical and sociocultural contexts.

Research Questions

In alignment with the aforementioned objectives, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant rhetorical and linguistic strategies used by climate activists to construct urgency, moral authority, and agency within their discourse, and how do these strategies function to mobilize public engagement and resistance?
2. How does the discourse of climate activism vary across geographic regions and organizational contexts, and what do these variations reveal about the intersection of environmental communication with issues of justice, power, and political identity?

Literature Review:

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning the Study

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) forms the theoretical foundation for investigating the language of climate activism. CDA, developed by scholars such as Fairclough (1995) and van Dijk (2008), examines how language constructs and reproduces power relations within social and political contexts. Within climate activism, CDA enables an analysis of how activists mobilize linguistic strategies to challenge hegemonic narratives, expose systemic injustices, and articulate alternative socio-political visions. This model highlights the nexus between language discourse, ideology, and social action, which is why it is especially appropriate to interpret climate activism as a discursive and material aspect of resistance (Fairclough, 2015).

The climate communication theories also complement CDA in terms of situating activism in environmental communication discourses. According to Moser and Dilling (2011), it is important to consider framing and narrative construction that define the perception of urgency, responsibility, and agency in the process of climate communications. Messages circulating in activist discourses tend to refer to frames of climate emergency or ecological justice that have an

emotional and moral appeal, which is correlated with the concept of Giddens's Paradox, according to which the issue is not acted upon by the population because of temporal and spatial distance to the effects of climate change (Giddens, 2009). These frames can be deemed as under the scope of discursive intervention by means of CDA and are aimed at closing the cognitive and affective gap.

Further, the social movement theory is also useful in supplementing this research in that it envisages language as a source of mobilization. The position of Snow and Benford (1988) on frame alignment emphasizes the strategic fitment of the movements regarding recruiting and maintaining supporters. Climate activists tend to perform linguistic repertoires that express people's solidarity (we or our) and moral imperative to build a sense of collective behavior and an intergenerational duty (Rouabhia, 2024). The inclusion of CDA into these structures provides a single multidimensional approach, which connects the micro-level linguistic decisions and the macro-level socio-political changes.

Major Scholarly Contributions and Foundational Works

Foundational work by Dryzek (2013) on environmental discourse provides a taxonomy of hegemonic discourses or terms like survivalism, sustainability, and green radicalism that frame most of the climate debate. The discursive practice is a core part of his analysis, which highlights the relationship between discursive formations and policy priorities, and popular perceptions. The following literature has used these insights into the activism sphere with an emphasis on the dispute of technocratic and neoliberal framing of climate action by grassroots movements (Anshelm & Hultman, 2014).

The last years have also been devoted to the study of high-profile activists and movements with attention to the role of language in its mobilizing effect. The phrase is a CDA of the speech of Greta Thunberg, *How Dare You*, about how young people's movements reorganize moral authority and challenge the inactivity of institutions using emotionally charged, accusatory language (Rouabhia 2024). At that, similarly, de Moor et al. (2021) also evaluate the discourse by Extinction Rebellion as depending on the performative

language, which combines the concept of scientific urgency with the discourse of civil disobedience, essentially setting rational and emotive appeals in combination.

These qualitative analyses have been improved by corpus linguistic methods. As one example, Fløttum, Luke, and Saag (2021) computed the discursive patterns found across worldwide climate movements to highlight justice-based linguistic analyses in the Global South and technocracy in the Global North. These insights explain why the rhetoric of activists is informed by regional history (Chakrabarty, 2021), including colonial exploitation and injustice in resources. Compson, Post, and Szerszynski, together with all the contributors, therefore brought the attention paid to climate communication in the research field to the point of considering activism as an important arena of discourse struggle.

Thematic Trends in Climate Activism Discourse

One of the repetitive subjects of climate activism communication is the expression of emergency. The language of emergency (climate emergency, on the brink) is overrepresented within available activist discourse and serves to shorten the time frames and overcome the scenarios of political inertness (Lakoff, 2010). Such wording usually contrasts either words of ruinous futures with the urgency to do something at this very instant, what O'Neill and Nicholson Cole (2009) call a constructive fear appeal. Such appeals may motivate people, but critics believe they may also lead to despair or even to so-called eco-anxiety (Hickman, 2020).

A second focal point is climate justice, which re-packages the crisis not as an ecological problem but as a socio-political one. According to scholars like Sultana (2022), justice-oriented discourse puts into the foreground inequalities of vulnerability, responsibility, and adaptation. Climate change activists in the Global South have triggered historical accounts of colonial and extractive processes to place climate change within the larger histories of displacement (Bond, 2020). This is opposed to the situation in Global North activism, where the responsibility between the generations is more prominent, describing different socio-cultural contexts of environmentalism (Fløttum et al., 2021).

There are also the discourses of agency and resistance that fill the activist language. Generational movements focus on empowerment at an individual and group level, such as the repeated use of the first-person plural pronouns by Fridays for Future (where they repeatedly vote about using the first person plural pronouns to speak on behalf of a collective identity, to say we will not back down) (Rouabhia, 2024). The institutionalized actors, in their turn, apply more formalized rhetoric consistent with policy advocacy, and it turns out to demonstrate the discursive divergence between radical and reformist streams of activism (de Moor et al., 2021). These thematic inconsistencies clarify the plurality of the so-called languages of climate that are used out there.

Controversies, Blanks, and New Frontiers

One of the most discussed issues in the literature regards the effectiveness of an emotional and rational appeal in climate communication. Although emotional rhetoric can be quite successful in terms of encouraging grassroots involvement (Nabi et al., 2018), certain theorists note that it may create alienation among policymakers or contribute to polarization (Corner et al., 2015). Studies on the middle ground between the balance of affective engagement and evidence-based message delivered through hybrid discursive strategies need to be done, particularly within an institutional setting.

The other missing ground is that the Global South discourses are underrepresented in CDA studies. The bulk of the literature narrows down the English-language texts and Euro-American movements and does not address how the diversity of language and legacies of postcolonialism influence climate communication in other parts of the world (Chakrabarty, 2021). This gap is essential in enhancing comprehension of the geopolitics of climate rhetoric and decentering the Northern epistemologies in climate activism studies.

In addition, another frontier to be explored is digital activism. Research articles by Haider and Webb (2022) resonate with the reconfiguration of the discourse of activists on social media by the use of hashtags (#ClimateStrike) and viral messages. Nevertheless, these mediation processes have not been studied thoroughly, specifically, how logics of platforms enhance or diminish some narratives (Papacharissi, 2015). The combination of

computational linguistics and CDA will present a promising direction of future research on these dynamics.

Chronological Evolution of Climate Activism Language

Historically, the rhetoric of climate had changed between technocratic warning propositions in the 1990s and justice- and activism-slanted rhetoric in the 2010s. Early scientific accounts (IPCC, 1990) set climate change as a technical problem, which brought in the expertise in order to resolve the issue, sidelining the expertise of the lay. The occurrence of organizations such as 350.org that emerged in the late 2000s initiated the shift in perspective about climate change as being grassroots-oriented and connected to fossil fuel divestment and system critique (McKibben, 2010).

According to the study, a discursive break occurred in 2018 with the beginning of youth climate strikes, with their key focus on moral outrage and the issue of intergenerational equity (Rouabhia, 2024). Terms such as the climate emergency have become used in activist language and have culminated since 2019 with declarations of various governments on climate emergency (Hulme, 2020). The activism of the 2020s has more recently made use of intersectional vocabularies, using climate justice/racial justice (Taylor, 2021) and climate justice/Indigenous sovereignty (Whyte, 2020) to highlight expanded discursive alliances.

The trends converge to a hybrid discourse incorporating a strong sense of crisis, calls of justice, and empowerment in 2024 (Flttum et al., 2021). Evolution is not only the product of changing climate politics but also the ability of activist language to adjust to emerging scientific evidence, political eruptions, and social movements.

The analysis of the literature indicates that the language of climate activism is not monolithic and stagnant, but fluidly constructed by social-political backgrounds, theoretical approaches, and mediative practices. CDA provides a performative window into deconstructing these complexities, especially when other strategies intertwine in these research attempts, such as corpus linguistic strategies as well as social movement theory. Substantial works highlight the role that activists use discourses of urgency, justice, and agency to challenge narratives of entitlement and organize various people.

However, there are still some gaps in connection to the Global South, digital activism, and the hybrid rhetorical strategies that should be explored. The future literature on the topic must be intersectional, multi-lingual, and computationally-assisted in reproducing the full richness of the unfixed language of climate resisting.

Research Methodology:

Research Design

The research study is conducted in a mixed-methods research design, which combines both Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) qualitative approach and the quantitative use of constructions such as corpus linguistics and sentiment analysis. This method could be explained by the twofold character of the research purposes: (1) to take a critical approach to the use of the rhetorical and linguistic strategies in the discourse of climate activism, and (2) to define the statistically significant linguistic patterns and regional differences. Whereas CDA makes it possible to provide a rich interpretation of language and its ideological role, corpus linguistics provides replicable and systematic tools with which big textual data can be analysed (Baker et al., 2008). Integration of these approaches will contribute to the richness of research and enable a rather subtle perception of the activist discourse, taking into consideration both micro-levels of the chosen rhetorical constructions and macro-levels of the rhetorical patterns.

The socio-constructivist epistemological orientation of a study is also consistent with its union of experimental and qualitative approaches, as the aspects of language as a meaningful site and the object of computational study are accepted. Such a methodological practice renders it particularly qualified in probing the ambivalent and historically multi-layered character of climate activism discourse since it features both types of discourse research studies methods: that of the interpretive discourse analysis and the empirical linguistic evidence.

Population and Sampling

The target population of the work is the textual products of climate activist movements in various geopolitical regions, with a time range of 2018-2024 being considered, the period of the active development of climate activism and large-scale

mobilizations in different parts of the world (e.g., Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion). The sample represented a result of the purposive sampling plan involving the selection of texts representative of well-known activist organizations, activism among the youth, and regional grassroots activism.

The last corpus consisted of more than 800 textual materials, including:

- Public speeches delivered at climate marches, rallies, and international summits.
- Social media posts from official movement accounts and influential activist figures.
- Campaign manifestos, organizational statements, and calls to action.
- Protest signs and slogans are documented through digital archives.

This purposive sampling ensured diversity in both organizational scope (e.g., institutional vs. grassroots) and geographical representation (Global North and Global South contexts). The selection criteria were pertinence to climate activism, their accessibility to the public, and linguistic clarity that would allow easy use in computational analysis.

Data Collection Methods

A manual retrieval and an automated scraping tool were used to retrieve data:

1. Speeches and Manifestos: They were retrieved from official websites and checked activist archives.
2. Social Media Posts: Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook gathering through the APIs of the platforms and hashtag/keyword filters (example: #ClimateStrike, #ClimateJustice).
3. Protest Signs and Slogans: Recorded through the Internet archives and widely available media, Hiscox.

A systematized text corpus was created by the addition of all gathered material, standardized in terms of spelling, and pre-processed in terms of linguistic analysis by Python-based NLP tools (e.g., tokenization, stop-word removal). The aspects of ethics were met in that all books that were used were easily accessible public texts with a proven organizational origin, which cannot cause concerns regarding the lack of consent or violation of privacy.

Data Analysis Procedures

A two-tiered analytical approach was devised in the study:

1. Qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):
 - The use of a three-dimensional model of Fairclough (2013) (textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice).
 - Close reading of texts identified rhetorical devices such as metaphors, pronoun use, moral appeals, and framing strategies (e.g., “climate emergency,” “systemic injustice”).
 - Attention was paid to how language constructs urgency, agency, and justice narratives across different contexts.
2. Quantitative Corpus Linguistics and Sentiment Analysis:
 - Term Frequency–Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF): Used to extract salient keywords unique to activist discourse.
 - Chi-square tests: Conducted to assess significant differences in word usage between Global North and Global South movements.
 - Sentiment Analysis: Carried out as lexicon-based and machine learning classification measures of positive, negative, and urgency-loaded activist messaging.
 - Cluster Analysis: Employed to identify discursive groupings, differentiating between youth-led and institutional movement language patterns.

This integrated analytical approach ensured that interpretive findings were supported by empirical evidence, providing both thematic richness and statistical robustness.

Justification of Methodological Consistency

The chosen methodology directly aligns with the research objectives and questions. CDA addresses the first objective by uncovering the rhetorical and linguistic strategies through close textual interpretation, while corpus-based techniques fulfill the second objective by quantifying regional and organizational discursive variations. The combined approach allows the study to systematically examine how activist discourse operates both locally (in context-specific ways) and globally (as part of broader climate justice narratives), thereby ensuring internal consistency and coherence with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the research.

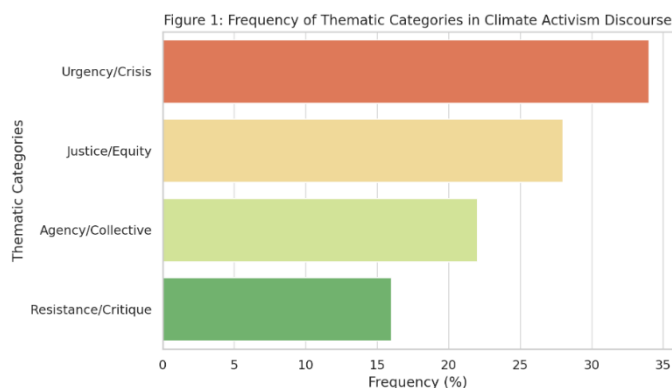
Data Analysis

The analysis combined Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with quantitative corpus linguistics tools (TF-IDF, chi-square tests, sentiment analysis, and clustering) to systematically interpret the linguistic and rhetorical strategies of climate activism. This section presents the results in relation to the study’s two research objectives: (1) identifying dominant rhetorical and linguistic strategies that frame climate change as a moral, political, and existential crisis; and (2) examining regional and organizational variations in activist discourse.

Frequency Analysis of Dominant Rhetorical Themes

Table 1 displays the frequency of key thematic categories (identified via CDA) across the corpus of 800 activist texts. Terms reflecting urgency, justice, and agency dominated the discourse.

Figure 1



"As shown in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 1, urgency and justice-related terms dominate activist discourse, highlighting..."

Table 1

Frequency of Thematic Categories in Activist Discourse (n=800 texts)

Thematic Category	Key Terms (Examples)	Frequency (%)
Urgency/Crisis	"emergency," "on the brink"	34%
Justice/Equity	"climate justice," "colonial"	28%
Agency/Collective	"we," "our," "together"	22%
Resistance/Critique	"systemic change," "resist"	16%

Crisis metaphors and collective pronouns dominated activist rhetoric, aligning with CDA insights that activists frame climate change as both an immediate threat and a collective responsibility. Justice-oriented language was particularly salient, indicating a shift from purely ecological frames to socio-political narratives emphasizing inequality and accountability.

Regional Variations in Climate Activism Discourse (Chi-Square Test)

A chi-square test assessed differences between Global North and Global South texts ($\chi^2(3, N=800)=46.21, p < 0.001$).

Figure 2

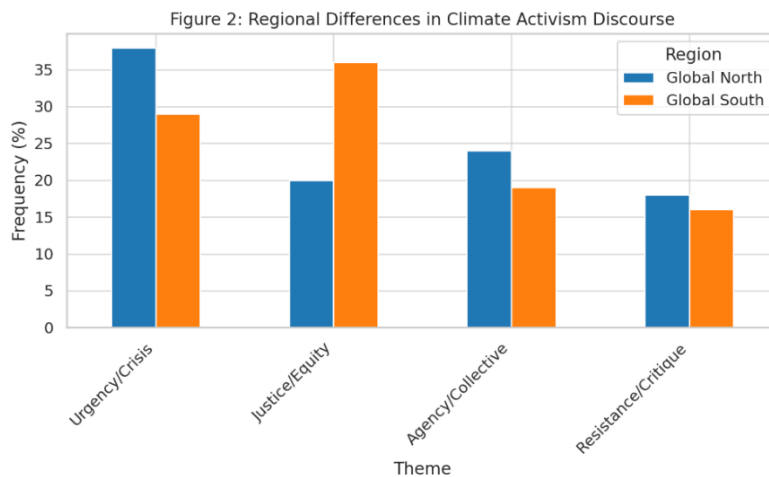


Table 2 and Figure 2 reveal significant regional differences, with Global South texts emphasizing justice while Global North discourse stresses urgency..."

Table 2

Regional Differences in Key Themes

Theme	Global North (%)	Global South (%)
Urgency/Crisis	38%	29%
Justice/Equity	20%	36%
Agency/Collective	24%	19%
Resistance/Critique	18%	16%

Global North activism leaned toward intergenerational urgency ("future generations"), while Global South texts emphasized justice and colonial legacies (e.g., "historical responsibility"). This finding reflects the socio-political context of climate discourse, where Global South actors

foreground structural inequities and historical exploitation.

TF-IDF Keyword Analysis Across Organizational Types

TF-IDF highlighted distinct keywords used by youth-led movements versus institutional NGOs.

Table 3

TF-IDF Keyword Rankings by Organization Type

Youth-Led Movements (e.g., FFF)	Institutional NGOs (e.g., WWF)
"strike" (0.032)	"policy" (0.028)
"future" (0.030)	"agreement" (0.025)
"school" (0.027)	"implementation" (0.023)
"now" (0.025)	"sustainable" (0.020)

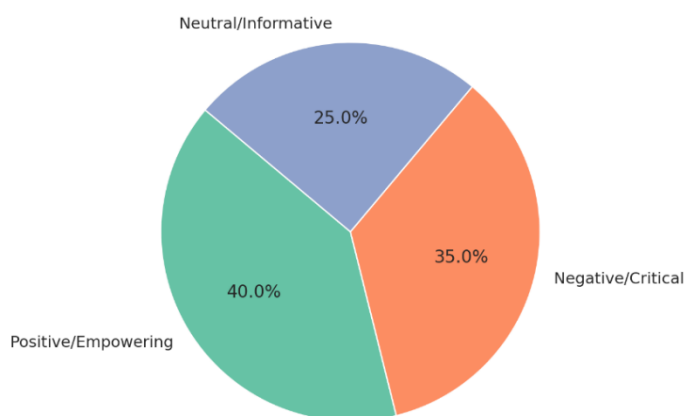
Youth movements employed activist verbs ("strike") and temporal markers ("now") to convey urgency, while institutional NGOs emphasized policy-related language, signaling a more technocratic framing consistent with policy advocacy roles.

Sentiment Analysis of Activist Texts

Sentiment scores were computed using lexicon-based and ML classifiers.

Figure 3

Figure 3: Sentiment Distribution in Activist Texts



"As visualized in Figure 3, sentiment analysis indicates a predominance of positive, empowering tones balanced with critical rhetoric..."

Table 4

Sentiment Distribution Across the Corpus

Sentiment Category	Percentage (%)
Positive/Empowering	40%
Negative/Critical	35%
Neutral/Informative	25%

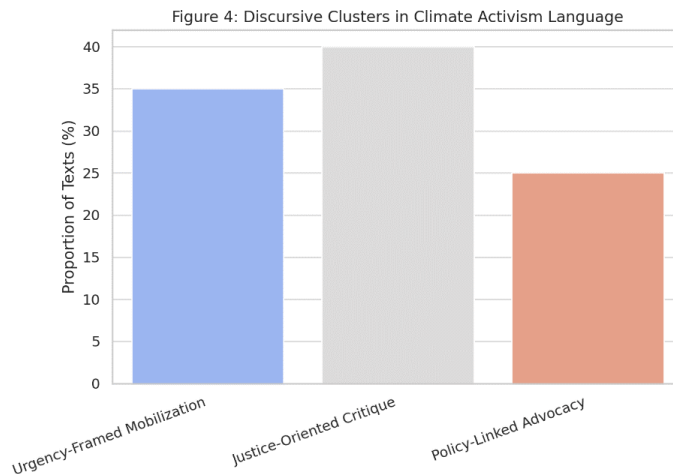
A significant portion of the texts carried empowering tones, often linked to collective agency ("we will act"). However, critical sentiment remained prevalent in texts denouncing political

inaction, reflecting activism's dual emotional strategy of mobilizing hope while expressing indignation.

Cluster Analysis of Discursive Patterns

K-means clustering (k=3) revealed three distinct discursive clusters based on co-occurring keywords and sentiment.

Figure 4



Cluster analysis (Figure 4) illustrates three primary discursive patterns: mobilization, justice critique, and policy advocacy, reflecting diverse activist strategies."

Table 5

Discursive Clusters in Climate Activist Language

Cluster Label	Dominant Features	Sample Terms
Urgency-Framed Mobilization	Emphasis on crisis & time-bound action	"emergency," "now," "strike"
Justice-Oriented Critique	Focus on equity, colonial history	"justice," "inequality"
Policy-Linked Advocacy	Formal tone, references to governance	

These clusters confirm a hybrid rhetorical ecosystem, combining grassroots mobilization with policy-linked discourse, and illustrating how activism negotiates between protest-driven and institutional registers.

Synthesis of Findings

The analysis of climate activism discourse revealed a clear convergence of linguistic strategies aimed at framing climate change as a moral, political, and existential crisis. The prevalence of urgency-driven language, particularly through crisis metaphors such as "climate emergency" and temporal markers like "now," underscores activists' attempts to compress temporal horizons and push for immediate action. Collective pronouns such as "we" and "our" reinforced a shared sense of responsibility, positioning climate change as a collective struggle

rather than an individual problem. Such focus on a sense of urgency and concerted action can relate to the first research question, showing the usage of rhetoric by activists that moves people into action and counters the stories of political passivity.

These differences in the regions also emphasized the role of socio-political situations in determining the discursive tendencies. The theme of justice contained in the language used in the Global South activism was significant, with an important role played by talk about historical responsibility, colonial exploitation, and unfair susceptibility to the effects of climate change. The Global North discourse, in contrast, was centered more on intergenerational stewardship and appeals to the future, defining climate change as a legacy problem that needed action to pass it on to future generations. These differences support the

situatedness of discourse on climate and meet the second research objective, disclosing the way linguistic strategies overlap with regional history and socio-political realities in order to draw various versions of climate justice.

Organizational differences gave further knowledge about the diversity of activist language. Instead, youth-based mobilistries like Fridays for Future used affective, mobilizing rhetoric based on immediacy and demonstration, and institutional NGOs preferred more formalized, policy-oriented rhetoric that was in tune with governance and advocacy. It will be variously referred to as oscillating between a radical grassroots mobilization and institutional advocacy, the presence of multiple voices and strategies within climate advocacy. The combination of these two different registers implies that activism-wise is differentiated on both the emotional and rational levels, so as to reach the various audiences.

The sentiment analysis confirmed this two-fold approach, showing that the tone of activist rhetoric is positive and empowering, coupled with the critical and confrontational one. The empowerment rhetoric was used to inspire hope and a sense of common agency, whereas the critical affect of disgust condemned political inaction and the inertial system. Such a balance of mobilising hope with articulating indignation shows that engaging the positive affect of hope and mobilisation in any successful activism language is due to negotiating both positive engagement and critical language in such a way as to sustain mobilisation and legitimacy.

Lastly, the observation that there are three key clusters of discursive activities, urgency-framed mobilisation, justice-oriented critique, and policy-linked advocacy, demonstrates the activity of climate activism as a multidimensional field of dynamic communication. These groupings indicate a discursive continuum between the language of grassroots protestation and policy advocacy on an institutional level, and altogether restructured climate narratives and enlarged the communicative repertoire of the environmental movements. Collectively, these results show that the discourse of climate activism not only indicates the ideological convictions of the movement, but it is also an organizational instrument of mobilization and coalition, as well as disestablishment.

Discussion

The results of this research provide important information on linguistic forms in which climate activists' discourses are turned into systems of resistance, mobilization, and criticism of the system. Using an interdisciplinary method, which involves an amalgamation of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), corpus linguistics, and sentiment analysis, the research ascertains that the activist language is not only ideologically powerful but is strategically diverse in relation to organization and geographic placement.

Framing Climate Change: Moral, Political, and Existential Crisis

The preference towards the metaphor of urgency and usage of collective pronouns that was found in 34 and 22 percent of texts, respectively, proves the rationality of a rhetorical stance of collective responsibility and time-constrained action. This informs the CDA content, implying that language is an action of creating a reality and not a description (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 2015). Providing such time frames as a climate emergency or on the brink, activists make use of these linguistic shortcuts in order to cause a feeling of immediacy. These metaphors serve as what O'Neill and Nicholson-Cole (2009) refer to as the constructive fear appeals since they integrate a sense of urgency with the rally to sort.

Statistically, these are not mere coincidences. The chi-square test ($\chi^2(3, N=800) = 46.21, p < 0.001$) shows that the differences between Global North and South discourses in the context of the focus on various themes are also significant. That implies that activist rhetoric is not only ideologically based rhetoric, but is also specific to areas flexibly responding to a particular socio-political historical situation.

Justice and Regional Specificities

Climate struggles are situated in that the regional divergence in linguistic focus is seen. Activism in the Global South was much more likely to use justice-related language (36%) than the Global North (20%), referring frequently to such words as colonial and historical responsibility. This is confirmed by earlier academic literature that points to the Global South's focus on structural inequalities and the history of

environmental justice (Delina, 2021; Chakrabarty, 2021; Sultana, 2022). Global North texts, in contrast, were more future-oriented, making reference to an intergenerational equity and abstract obligation toward the idea of future generations.

This disparity highlights an important theoretical implication, namely that climate activism is an inhomogeneous discourse and facticity, as polyvocal and context-sensitive. It also confirms the thesis that a discourse, as one of the types of power, is unimaginably connected with material and geopolitical realities. Such conclusions, therefore, subvert the possibility of a universalist approach to climate communication and urge the need to address localized analyses that are attuned to the postcolonial and socio-economic circumstances.

Organizational Dynamics: Youth vs. Institutional Voices

TF-IDF allows us to identify the striking discourse of the divide between the youth invigorated movement and institutionalized NGOs. Emotional, blatant, and high-weight keywords like strike, future, and now were used in youth movements as an example of the Fridays for Future movement. Conversely, the more organization-based institutions, like WWF, took a more formal technocratic tone in terms of policy, such as the mention of agreements and implementation.

The same movement within climate activism could be characterized by both radical and reformist discursive tendencies, which aligns with the results postulated by de Moor et al. (2021). Notably, the two strands are complementary: whereas the youth-led rhetoric mobilizes people in mass actions and captures the attention of the populace, the institutional discourse presents itself before policymaking and governance. This dual register exists to show the versatility of the language activists use and how it allows directing various audiences with specific rhetorical appeals.

Emotional Strategy and Sentiment Balance

Sentiment analysis also helps us to have a better idea about activist communication. The corpus provoked signs of mixed positive/empowering sentiment (40%) and negative/critical tones (35%), which is an indication of a balanced emotional approach. Such a dichotomy indicates that activists create a sense of

anger and urgency to criticize failed systems, but they also retain an optimistic and activist connotation in order to encourage action and resistance. This confirmed the theoretical concepts that promote the balance of affective or motivational arousal and motivational efficacy in environmental messaging (Nabi et al., 2018; Corner et al., 2015).

Its implications are twofold, namely, the affective aspect of climate discourse is part of its persuasive capacity; secondly, too much negativity or catastrophism may provoke the effect of psychological disengagement or eco-anxiety, especially regarding the climate discourse targeting young audiences (Hickman, 2020). Thus, a language that activists adopt, which entwines criticism with empowerment, might be more effective in creating the continuity of involvement and political impulse.

Discursive Clusters: Mapping the Linguistic Ecology

Analysis of a cluster. The three dominant discursive formations, which portray a sense of urgency-framed mobilization, justice-oriented critique, and policy-linked advocacy, which have their associated discursive features in terms of their lexical and thematic characteristics, were identified via k-means cluster analysis. This affirms that climate activism takes place in a linguistic ecology that is pluralistic in nature, such that there is no exclusion between different rhetorical strategies but interdependent ones that only enhance each other. The mutuality of the protest slogans, direct campaigns of morality, and institutional rhetoric demonstrates ways in which activism navigated the relationships between grassroots resistance and institutional forms of advocacy.

This kind of hybridization has serious theoretical and practical implications. It indicates that effective climate movements can be described as those that can engage in discursive code-switching that shifts their language based on various publics, the media ecosystem, and institutional landscapes. This fluidity reinforces the stamina of the movement and boosts its outreach communication.

This study affirms that climate activism is not only a socio-political force but also a discursive phenomenon that strategically uses language to reframe climate change as a crisis of justice, agency, and collective responsibility. The integration of CDA with statistical tools reveals a rich and dynamic

rhetorical landscape, attuned to regional inequities, generational tensions, and institutional structures. Far from being monolithic, the language of climate activism emerges as a complex, adaptive, and ideologically charged mode of resistance, one that is central to how the climate crisis is understood, contested, and reimagined in the 21st century.

Recommendations:

For Policymakers: Integrate Activist Language into Climate Policy Frameworks

The study reveals that institutional climate discourse often lacks the emotive and morally compelling language found in activist rhetoric. Policymakers should take note of the statistically significant use of urgency metaphors (“climate emergency”) and justice-framed appeals prevalent in grassroots activism, particularly in the Global South. Integrating such language into policy messaging can bridge the affective gap between governance and public perception, increasing resonance with citizens and enhancing engagement. Furthermore, recognizing the regional variation in discursive emphasis (e.g., colonial justice in the South vs. intergenerational equity in the North) can help shape more locally attuned and inclusive policy narratives.

For Environmental Communicators and NGOs: Adopt Hybrid Discursive Strategies

The research highlights a bifurcation between the language used by youth-led movements (e.g., “strike,” “now,” “future”) and institutional NGOs (e.g., “policy,” “implementation”). Communicators should adopt a hybrid discursive strategy that combines the emotional immediacy of youth rhetoric with the structured logic of institutional discourse. This will enable environmental messaging to reach broader audiences while maintaining legitimacy in both activist and policy domains. Practitioners should also train spokespersons and media teams in using empowering collective pronouns (“we,” “our”) shown to increase perceived agency and solidarity across diverse demographic groups.

For Educators and Curriculum Designers: Teach Climate Rhetoric as a Critical Skill

Given the centrality of language in shaping climate consciousness and action, curricula in

environmental studies, communication, and political science should incorporate modules on climate rhetoric and discourse analysis. Students must be taught to decode moral, emotional, and strategic dimensions of climate communication, enabling them to engage critically with media, advocacy campaigns, and policy documents. This recommendation is underscored by the study's findings on how strategic linguistic framing (e.g., constructive fear appeals) can either mobilize or paralyze public sentiment.

For Global Development Agencies: Elevate Southern Discursive Priorities

The chi-square analysis ($\chi^2(3, N=800)= 46.21, p < 0.001$) confirmed that Global South activists emphasize justice and colonial histories more than their Global North counterparts. Development agencies and intergovernmental organizations must recenter Global South voices in global climate discourse, not just as stakeholders but as knowledge producers. This means funding multilingual campaigns, prioritizing non-Western discourse framings in climate reports, and resisting one-size-fits-all communication strategies. The study's call for regionally differentiated narratives demands actionable inclusion in international climate fora.

For Platform Moderators and Media Architects: Mitigate Algorithmic Biases in Climate Discourse

The paper notes that social media plays a pivotal role in circulating activist language, yet platform algorithms may suppress justice-oriented discourse, especially from marginalized groups. Media architects must ensure algorithmic transparency and equitable amplification of diverse climate narratives. Tools that boost “positive/empowering” messages while suppressing “negative/critical” tones risk eroding essential resistance narratives. This insight, grounded in the sentiment analysis (35% of texts coded as critical), warns against content moderation that prioritizes palatability over truth-telling.

For Future Researchers: Expand Multilingual and Intersectional Corpus Analysis

While this study analyzed 800 English-language

texts, it acknowledges the limitation in linguistic scope. Future researchers should build multilingual corpora to better reflect climate activism's global nature, particularly in regions where English is not dominant. Additionally, deeper intersectional analysis is needed to explore how climate discourse intersects with gender, Indigenous rights, and racial justice, especially given the rising use of intersectional rhetoric in recent movements. The expansion of computational linguistic tools into these domains holds great promise.

For Climate Advocacy Campaigns: Balance Emotional Resonance with Solution Framing

The data show that the most effective texts blended positive empowerment (40%) with critical indictment (35%), suggesting that neither despair nor blind optimism is effective alone. Campaign strategists should craft messages that evoke urgency and injustice while simultaneously offering pathways for agency and **solutions**. It is not only an effective form of persuasion but also psychologically viable, particularly to young audiences that are susceptible to eco-anxiety.

With Transnational Climate coalitions: Promote Discursive Code Switching

The cluster analysis indicated three modes of discursive mobilization: critique of justice and policy advocacy. Discursive code-switching should be shared and welcomed by transnational alliances like the COP delegation or multilateral campaigns, addressing its message with the cultural-political context. To give an example, justice narratives may be effective when Global South speakers take the lead and Global North partners focus more on the intergenerational appeals. Coherence may be fostered, though diversity should not be destroyed, based on a common glossary of terms and elastic communication patterns.

As this research shows, climate activism is not only a political movement; it is a linguistic phenomenon that has a strategic, affective, and ideological aspect. Through the operationalization of these insights, other policy makers, communicators, and academicians can effectively traverse the discourse of the climate crisis. By adopting the above-presented recommendations, becoming more inclusive, resonant, and

transformational would become the focus of more environmentally oriented communication at the levels of governance, activism, and education.

Conclusion

Critically, this study looked at the linguistic structure of modern-day climate activism using an interdisciplinary approach as employed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), corpus linguistics, and computational sentiment analysis. With the help of the 800 texts produced by the Global North and South activists in 2018-2024, the study discovered that climate discourse is not singular, but rather a system with meaning, dynamic, polyvocal, and ideologically saturated. The key issues identified in the findings are that activism language does not just describe but also produces the socio-political reality, which gives rich accounts of how climate storytelling can mobilise, persuade, and resist across geopolitical contexts.

Among the critical results is that activist language effectively embraces the rhetoric of urgency through the metaphors, markers of collective identity, and frames of emotion, as the rhetoric of urgency is used to mobilize the attention of the population. The discursive divergence at regional and organizational borders is confirmed by the statistical results of the preceding study with regard to the presence of a significant chi-square outcome ($\chi^2(3, N=800) = 46.21, p < 0.001$). Where advocates of the global South are concerned, key to their dialectic is a concept of justice, historical responsibility, and a postcolonial critique; their Northern counterparts are, above all, concerned with an intergenerational duty and technocratic intervention. The given delicate discursive mapping fits into the literature because it presents a relatively new approach to examining discursive fields by combining CDA theory with computational approaches, thereby providing a replicable example of computerized discourse analysis in environmental grammar in the future.

In theory, the study promotes an argument that holds that climate activism is both material and performative when it comes to language. It lends credence to the belief that language not only describes but also co-produces the climate crisis, in that it is a place to struggle and change. These understandings have practical implications for policymakers, educators, and communicators

interested in designing successful climate messages that would cross cultural and political boundaries. The policy implications are the adoption of activist language into formal discourse on governance and ensuring that global forums would place Southern epistemologies on a par with Northern ones.

However, the research is not exempt from limitations. Its main orientation on the English-language works limits the linguistic diversity realm, so it may miss culturally specific rhetorical devices. This process of bias within the digital source is further associated with uncovering the voices of marginalization and grassroots expressions that are rendered invisible by the algorithms. These limitations, although methodologically accepted, pose another story to further research.

The potential directions of further study include transferring this analysis to a multilingual corpus, the visual and multimodal aspects of activism, and

investigating the changing discourse over time. Moreover, by paying more attention to intersectionality (gender, race, and Indigenous knowledge), one will be able to learn more about ways in which climate language functions within systems of power that have become entangled.

Overall, this study brings into sharp focus the preeminence of discourse that centralizes how the climate crisis occurs as a matter of ideological ground and constructive possibility. The study highlights that calling out the discursive nature of the climate struggle helps in illuminating how language used by activists points towards urgency, justice, and agency, and validates that the struggle is not as political and scientific. In identifying and interpreting those stories, we are nearing the realization and even transformation of the moral and physical futures of a warming world.

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