

An Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis of Environmental Policies in Presidential Statements

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Abstract. *The field of ecolinguistics has developed into a flourishing field of linguistics that is nearer than ever to the persistent matters in this period. It is believed that ecology, language and policies are three separate concepts. Due to this, the paper attempts to fill the gap by investigating two presidential statements in order to reveal the fundamental ideologies that govern environmental policies hidden in the language used. The data are selected from the statements of two presidents; Joe Biden (President of United States) and Cyril Ramphosa (President of South Africa) that are delivered in the conference of parties (COP 27), held in Sharm Al-Sheikh, 2022, about adopting environmental policies to combat the impact of climate change. The study that is qualitative in nature adopts two levels of analysis depending on Stibbe's (2015) model of ecolinguistic analysis and van Dijk's (2006) model of critical discourse analysis. The findings present two types of information; the cognitive level sets forth the economic terms that are repeated through the presidents' statements to focus on the prominence of financial issues especially "private sector" and "investment" that are mentioned in various terms whereas, the ideological level reveals that one type of discourse is offered in those statements, which is ambivalent discourse. The study could be very useful to all scholars and others interested in environmental issues.*

Key words: *Ecolinguistics, Critical discourse analysis, Qualitative, Presidential statements, Environmental policies.*

1. Introduction

In the mid-19th century, German biologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term "ecology" to describe an organism's interactions with other organisms (Arndt & Janney, 1983, as cited in van Lier, 2004). Originally, ecology focused on studying and managing the environment (ecosphere or biosphere) or specialized ecosystems. In truth, ecological study tries to understand a complex world, and the quest for proof, causal links, and correlations is not always the best or surest approach of knowing (van Lier, 2004)

Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 5) described being critical as 'denaturalising the language to reveal the kinds of ideas, absences, and taken-for-granted assumptions in texts'. Sometimes the absences in a work are as significant as the real ideas and assumptions there. In the same context, Estok (2001) noted, ecocritics also place a strong emphasis on connectivity. At its best, ecocriticism seeks to understand how dynamics of oppression, persecution, and tyranny are mutually reinforcing, as well

as how racism, sexism, homophobia, speciesism, and other prejudices are, to use Ania Loomba's term, linking.

Stibbe (2014) continued to affirm that ecolinguistics utilises the same techniques of linguistic analysis as classic critical discourse studies, but its normative framework takes into account not only the connections between humans and other humans, but also the ecological systems upon which all life depends. Ecolinguistics examines discourses ranging from consumerism to nature poetry, condemning those that promote ecologically destructive behaviour and searching for those that promote connections based on respect and care for the natural world

Consequently, Ecocritical discourse analysis (EDA) is an intriguing technique that investigates how language and discourse impact our perceptions of environmental challenges. When applied to presidential utterances, EDA can indicate how presidents shape environmental policy, affect public image, and promote specific ecological ideologies (Fill, 2001)

In this study, analysing presidential statements can uncover the underlying ideologies that drive environmental policies. This involves investigating how presidents' environmental rhetoric aligns with broader political and economic objectives. In this context, two presidential statements were picked from the COP27 summit of parties held in Sharm-Al-Sheikh in November 2022; the statement of Joe Biden (President of United States) and Cyril Pamphosa (President of South Africa).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Eco-Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Dash (2019), ecolinguistics is an applied linguistics that investigates discourses that are either beneficial or detrimental to the Earth's survival. It condemns language practises that have detrimental consequences on the environment or habitat. Ecolinguistics creates theories that analyse the interaction between human language and ecology in order to examine the ecological function of languages. It involves the study of a variety of issues, including climate change, the conservation or destruction of ecosystems, new practises for preventing language extinction, cultural or environmental degradation, and the celebration of the symbiotic relationship between ecology and all stakeholders and factors positively influencing sustainability. Ecolinguistics provides the tools required to investigate the life-enhancing effect of language in ecological.

The 1980s saw the birth of environmental discourse and the collapse of a single modern linguistics paradigm. New linguistics researchers started to pose fresh inquiries and use fresh analytical techniques. Ecolinguistics' inception and, more recently, the investigation of the connections between language extinction and biocultural diversity, were probably inevitable (Mühlhäusler & Peace, 2006).

2.2 Environmental Policies

According to van Lier (2004, p. 181) stated that “Language policy, and some sorts of planning related to the formulation and administration of policy, is a common aspect of the government of most countries”.

An environmental policy can be defined as a government's chosen course of action or plan to address issues such as pollution, wildlife protection, land use, energy production and use, waste generation, and waste disposal. In reality, the way a particular government handles environmental problems is most often not a result of a conscious choice from a set of alternatives. More broadly, then, a government's environmental policy may be characterized by examining the overall orientation of its responses to environmental challenges as they occur, or by defining its policy as the sum of plans for, and reactions to, environmental issues made by any number of different arms of government (Freedman, et al. ,1992).

3. Methods and Materials

This study is qualitative in nature in which the researchers selected two levels of analysis, cognitive and ideological based on two theories of cognitive linguistics and ecocritical discourse analysis to cover the implicit ideologies to differentiate between two types of discourse; beneficial and ambivalent as illustrated below. The data were examined according to two levels; the first level was

cognitive that adopted of Stibbe's (2015) model of ecolinguistic and the second was ideological that adopted of van Dijk's (2006) ideological square of discourse analysis. The first level involved various items including framing, evaluations, identities, convictions, erasure and salience while the second level indicated two types of ideologies, negative-other -presentation and positive self-presentation. The selected data were two statements of two famous presidents; Joe Biden, the president of United States and Cyril Ramphosa, the president of South Africa in the conference of parties (COP 27) that was held in Sharm Al-Sheikh aiming to focus on the environmental policies these countries adopted to combat the current environmental crisis.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The statement of Joe Biden (President of America)

4.1.1 Cognitive Level

✓ Framing

The speaker tries to discuss many frames in his speech, such as telling the narratives of the devastating repercussions of climate change in many countries, such as:

- “Here in Africa — here in Africa, home to many nations considered most vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity [and] hunger follows four years of intense drought in the Horn of Africa” (Biden 2022).
- “Meanwhile, the Niger River in West Africa, swollen — swollen because of more intense rainfall, is wreaking havoc on fishing and farming communities” (Biden 2022).
- “In Nigeria, flooding has recently killed 600 people; 1.3 million more are displaced” (Biden 2022).
- Also, he focuses on the frame of hope once and raises urgency through several frames, as shown below:
- This is not to stand by and allow us to fail in their — in this responsibility. We can't. That's why, as I look out, of all the things that I've — we've accomplished, with so much more to do, I'm optimistic. (Biden 2022)
- “We're delivering on our promise of leadership, and more and more of the world is standing with us” (Biden 2022) .
- “That's why we're here. That is what we're working toward. And we can do it together. I am confident” (Biden 2022).
- This progress is being driven by young people all across America. Like young people around the world, they feel the urgency of climate, and they feel it deeply. They're committed to these issues. They know the stakes, and that's their world we're creating. (Biden 2022)

More than once, the speaker emphasizes, through key phrases, the economic cost that is necessary to reduce the global warming to the target level, such as:

- “As the world's largest customer, with more than \$650 billion [\$630 billion] in spending last year, the United States government is putting our money where our mouth is to strengthen accountability for climate risk and resilience” (Biden 2022).
- Today, as a down payment, we're announcing more than \$150 million in initiatives that specifically support PREPARE's adaptation efforts throughout Africa, including Adaptation in Africa effort that Egypt and the United States launched together in June. (Biden 2022)
- “We're investing more than \$20 billion in domestic methane mitigation to do things like cap orphan wells leaking methane, improving industrial equipment in the oil and gas sectors to reduce emissions” (Biden 2022).

With more focus on the role of US government and the president that works in harmony to reach the dream of reaching low-carbon future, the speaker mentions several narratives about this power, such as:

- “The United States is acting. Everyone has to act. That’s the duty and responsibility of global leadership” (Biden 2022).
- My friends, I came to the presidency determined to be tran- — make the transforma- — transformational changes that are needed — that America needs to make and we have to do for the rest of the world to overcome decades of opposition and obstacles of progress on this issue alone; to reestablish the United States as a trustworthy, committed, global leader on climate. (Biden 2022)
- “My administration has also made the United States the first-ever contributor to the Adaptation Fund last year, and this year we’re doubling our pledge to bringing our total commitment to \$100 million” (Biden 2022).

For encouraging unity and cooperative work among nations, the speaker remarks key phrases in the last section of his speech to stress this frame, such as:

- So let’s reach out and take the future in our hands and make the world we wish to see and that we know we need — a planet preserved for generations to come; an economy powered by clean, diversified, secure energy sources; opportunities unlocked through innovation and cooperation that deliver equitable, more prosperous, and more stable, and more just world for our children. (Biden 2022)

✓ **Evaluation**

Many expressions of judgment are included, such as “insecurity, hunger, intense, havoc, risk, crisis, urgency, hell, losses and damage” to express the behaviour of the speaker towards the environmental crisis, as shown underneath:

- “Here in Africa — here in Africa, home to many nations considered most vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity [and] hunger follows four years of intense drought in the Horn of Africa” (Biden 2022).
- “Meanwhile, the Niger River in West Africa, swollen — swollen because of more intense rainfall, is wreaking havoc on fishing and farming communities” (Biden 2022).
- “Seasonal livestock migration routes have been used for hundreds of years are being altered, increasing the risk of conflict between herders and local farming communities” (Biden 2022).
- “The climate crisis is about human security, economic security, environmental security, national security, and the very life of the planet” (Biden 2022) .
- “We are racing forward to do our part to avert the “climate hell” that the U.N. Secretary-General so passionately warned about earlier this week” (Biden 2022).
- “So today, I’d like to share with you how the United States is meeting the climate crisis with urgency and with determination to ensure a cleaner, safer, and healthier planet for all of us” (Biden 2022).

As noticed in the last example, expressions of affect, such as “cleaner, safer and healthier” are used to express positive emotions about the near future.

✓ **Identities**

Regarding key actors, the speaker implicitly portrays himself many times in this speech as the leader of this nation and the reformer of the environment, as revealed below:

- “And today, finally, thanks to the actions we’ve taken, I can stand here as President of the United States of America and say with confidence: The United States of America will meet our emissions targets by 2030” (Biden 2022).

From the other side, he victimizes the people of poorest regions, such as “African countries” who suffer from the devastating impact of climate change, such as:

- “Here in Africa — here in Africa, home to many nations considered most vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity [and] hunger follows four years of intense drought in the Horn of Africa” (Biden 2022).
- “It’s true so many disasters — the climate crisis is hitting hardest those countries and communities that have the fewest resources to respond and to recover” (Biden 2022).
- “Folks, we’re also supporting the Global Shield, a G7 initiative to better protect vulnerable countries everywhere from climate-related losses and quickly respond to climate-related damages” (Biden 2022).

For more emphasis on the negative roles of others, he criticizes the “brutal” Russian attack on Ukraine that has a very negative impact on the whole region; economically and environmentally as illustrated in the following example:

- “And the upheaval we’re seeing around the world, especially Russia’s brutal attack against Ukraine, is exacerbating food shortages and energy spikes in cost, increasing volatility in those energy markets, driving up global inflation” (Biden 2022).

As mentioned earlier, the pronouns “we and our” are used many times inclusively and exclusively. The pronoun “we” is mentioned to refer to US, and the government excluding the audience from one side. From the other side, the pronouns “we, our and us” are used inclusively when the speaker evokes the emotions of the mutual work with his audience to provide a better future.

✓ **Convictions**

The speaker employs true stories about the devastating impact of environmental crisis on countries including:

- “The United States — in the United States, we’re seeing historic drought and wildfires in the West, devastating hurricanes and storms in the East” (Biden 2022).
- “Here in Africa — here in Africa, home to many nations considered most vulnerable to climate change, food insecurity [and] hunger follows four years of intense drought in the Horn of Africa” (Biden 2022).
- It’s true so many disasters — the climate crisis is hitting hardest those countries and communities that have the fewest resources to respond and to recover. That’s why, last year, I committed to work with our Congress to quadruple U.S. support to climate finance and provide \$11 billion annually by 2024, including \$3 billion for adaption [adaptation]. (Biden 2022)

These examples denotes the fact that climate change is a serious problem that needs urgent solutions to protect people from devolution. Besides, focusing on the importance of people, communities, and economic costs reproduces the idea of anthropocentric convictions.

✓ **Erasure**

The speech highpoints the economic costs imposed by the US government to reach a low-carbon future. Terms, such as “biodiversity”, “sustainability” and “green planet” are missing which is an example of erasure.

✓ **Salience**

The speaker discusses what is urgent according to his government; economic security and his own commitments towards the global community. He prioritizes the power of the his government’s commitments and actions to reduce emissions, especially methane gas, by burdening high costs and makes it salient throughout his language. Terms like “climate hell”, “food insecurity”, “hunger”, and climate-related damages” highlight the prominent thinking of danger and the hopeless impact it leaves on people and lands.

4.1. 2 Ideological Level

By picking adjectives and noun phrases, the speaker reveals hopeless and miserable state of many countries including America as a result of the continuing the overwhelming impact of climate change. He mentions the pronouns “they and their” that belong to “developing countries” who are portrayed as victims to the implications of climate crisis. Inserting terms, such as “flooding, hunger, investments and food insecurity” indicates the negative image of climate change and its high cost to reduce emissions. This fundamental ideology prioritizes the US economic stability over environmental stability emphasizing financial costs to reduce emissions until reaching 50 to 52 % by 2030.

He mentions the US government and his administration positively since they all adapt real efforts to reach the target. As for rhetoric appeals, the speaker uses an evaluative and emotive language to help others; developing countries to prove that good climate policy equals good economic policy. As mentioned earlier, he uses the pronouns “we,” “our,” and “our” both exhaustively and inclusively several times.

Finally, he reveals two polarizing ideologies: The positive and negative in this discourse present a type of discourse called ambivalent discourse.

4.2 The Statement of Cyril Ramphosa (President of South Africa)

4.2.1 Cognitive Level

✓ Framing

The speaker attempts to discuss many frames, such as the frame of connection with others to address the implications of climate change, especially in the beginning of his statement, such as:

- “We are gathered here for COP 27 on an African continent that is experiencing the worsening effects of climate change” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “Like other vulnerable regions, Africa needs to build adaptive capacity, foster resilience and address loss and damage, as we all agreed at Paris COP 21” (Ramphosa, 2022).

More than once, the speaker through key phrases emphasizes the economic costs to reach net zero, such as:

- “This places a great responsibility on developed economies to honour their commitments to those countries with the greatest need and that confront the greatest environmental, social and economic effects of climate change” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “We need a clear roadmap to deliver on the Glasgow decision to double adaptation financing by 2025” (Ramphosa, 2022).

With more focus on the role of South Africa that works to provide a sustainable future for the planet, the speaker mentions several storylines about its commitments to achieve the global environmental goals, such as:

- “At a national level, South Africa is fully committed to achieving the most ambitious end of the mitigation range in our updated Nationally Determined Contribution” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “We are already scaling up investment in renewable energy, and are on course to retire several of our ageing coal-fired power plants by the end of 2030” (Ramphosa, 2022) .
- In the concluding part of his statement, the speaker highlights certain crucial terms that encourage international collaboration, like:
- “It is our hope that this partnership will offer a ground-breaking approach to funding by developed countries for the ambitious but necessary mitigation and adaptation goals of developing countries” (Ramphosa, 2022).

✓ Evaluation

Many expressions involved are those of judgment. These expressions, such as “worsening effects, loss, damage and onerous” convey negativity expressing the devastating impact of climate change on people and economy, such as:

- “We are gathered here for COP 27 on an African continent that is experiencing the worsening effects of climate change” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “Like other vulnerable regions, Africa needs to build adaptive capacity, foster resilience and address loss and damage, as we all agreed at Paris COP 21” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “At present, multilateral support is out of reach of the majority of the world’s population due to lending policies that are risk averse and carry onerous costs and conditionalities” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- Other expressions of judgment, such as “ambition and foster resilience” are involved to convey a positive meaning about addressing the impact of climate change, as illustrated below:
- “For the sake of our continent and the world, we need a dramatic increase in global mitigation ambition to keep the world on the 1.5-degree pathway” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “Like other vulnerable regions, Africa needs to build adaptive capacity, foster resilience and address loss and damage, as we all agreed at Paris COP 21” (Ramphosa, 2022).

✓ Identities

Concerning key actors, the speaker identifies several countries in this speech, as shown below:

- “At COP 26 in Glasgow last year, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, the United States and the European Union offered support in the form of a Just Energy Transition Partnership” (Ramphosa, 2022).

As mentioned previously, he mentions South Africa to be a crucial key actor as the supporter to the collective work to sustain the planet, From the other side, he victimizes the people of vulnerable regions to burden onerous costs to save the planet.

By analysing pronouns in this text, the pronouns “we and our” are used many times inclusively and exclusively. The pronouns “we and our” are mentioned to refer to South Africa alone, excluding the audience from one side, such as:

- “As a country, we are guided by a Just Transition Framework and an Investment Plan that outlines the enormous scale and nature of investments needed to achieve our decarbonisation goals over the next five years” (Ramphosa, 2022).

From the other side, the pronouns “we” and “our” are used inclusively when the speaker evokes the emotions of necessitating the cooperative work with his audience to provide a better future, such as:

- “For the sake of our continent and the world, we need a dramatic increase in global mitigation ambition to keep the world on the 1.5-degree pathway” (Ramphosa, 2022).

✓ Convictions

Many strong statements are mentioned about the need to urgent actions to solve the current environmental problems. The following examples denote the fact that climate change is a serious problem that needs doubling finances to protect people from devolution including:

- “To achieve this, our continent will need a predictable, appropriate and at-scale funding stream and technological support” (Ramphosa, 2022) .
- “The multilateral development banks need to be reformed to meet the needs of developing economies for sustainable development and climate resilience” (Ramphosa, 2022).
- “We need a clear roadmap to deliver on the Glasgow decision to double adaptation financing by 2025” (Ramphosa, 2022).

- “Our emphasis must be on the health, well-being and food and water security of the most vulnerable” (Ramphosa, 2022).

As well, focusing on funding, doubling financial costs and the insistence on the importance of health reproduces the idea of anthropocentric convictions.

- **Erasure**

The speech highpoints the economic costs that the South Africa double to save the planet. Terms, such as “biodiversity”, “nature” and “green planet” are missing and this is an example of erasure.

- **Salience**

The speaker discusses the needs of his country; doubling economic costs and working together as partners to save the planet. He prioritizes the supremacy of his country’s commitments and actions to fix climate change by doubling their financial costs and makes it salient throughout his speech. Terms like “global mitigation ambition” “address loss”, and “technological support” highlight the ambitious thinking of fighting climate change and this is prominent in this text.

4.2.2 Ideological Level

By selecting adjectives and noun phrases, the speaker reveals in many positions the existence of fear as a result of the continuing devastating impact of climate change. He mentions definite determiners “those and other” that refer to vulnerable countries that are portrayed as victims in need of assistance.

Inserting terms, such as “double adaptation financing”, “onerous costs”, and “worsening effects of climate change” indicate the fear of the damaging influence of climate change and its need to higher costs to address the situation. This underlying ideology prioritizes South Africa economic plans and actions over environmental stability emphasizing its crucial role to reduce emissions by working on energy transition. He mentions many nations positively since they all adapt real efforts to support other vulnerable countries. As for rhetoric appeals, the speaker uses an emotive language to represent others.

As mentioned previously, he uses the pronouns “we, our and us” exclusively and inclusively several times. Lastly, he mentions two polarizing ideologies; The positive and negative in this discourse presents a type of discourse called ambivalent.

5. Concluding Remarks

Based on the above mentioned findings, the researchers examine how certain ideologies, proposed by Stibbe (2015) construct ambivalent, beneficial and destructive discourses hidden in the words written. To be precise, ecocritical discourse analysis provides valuable insights into how presidential rhetoric shapes environmental policy and public perception. It also helps identify the broader socio-political implications of environmental discourse in shaping our collective response to ecological challenges.

Cognitively, it is concluded that both presidents through various key phrases emphasize the frame of raising urgency to deal with environmental problems and the impact of financial cost. Besides, the findings of the study show that two types of evaluations are introduced; positive and negative. It is revealed that one type of convictions is presented, which is anthropocentric. Both presidents employ it to focus on the burden of economic costs on their countries more than environmental costs.

Further, the findings strongly imply that the concept of erasure is represented in political discourse only since politicians employ economic terms instead of environmental terms, which are backgrounded in their speeches. The economic terms are recurred throughout their speeches to emphasize the importance of financial issues especially private sector that is mentioned in various terms nearly in every political speech.

Ideologically, one type of discourse is presented in those statements, which is ambivalent discourse. Mainly, it involves two polarizing ideologies; positive and negative in each selected discourse.

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