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RESEARCH PAPER

Echoes of a Warming World: An Ecolinguistics Lens on Salience and Conviction in Global Climate Change Discourse at COP28

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ABSTRACT

The current research study delineates the concepts of Conviction and Salience with reference to CoP28, through the selected speeches. In the present era, one of the pressing global issues is climate change, which calls for world leaders to act immediately. So, developing the understanding of the power of language is inevitable in this regard. Therefore, this research study employs a qualitative methodology to unearth these concepts and achieve their objectives. The study examines how speakers emphasize important climate issues, arouse moral and emotional responsibility, and use persuasive language features like modal auxiliaries, personal pronouns, and hopeful framing to encourage international collaboration. The findings show that while emphasis on climate finance, the transition from fossil fuels, and sustainability promotes salience, emotional and moral appeals, inclusive language, and urgency signals strengthen conviction. Hence, to encourage climate action through emotionally and morally compelling messaging, policymakers should take advantage of language's persuasive power.

Introduction

Climate change is one of the burning topics nowadays. Almost every country in the world is fighting the threats posed by the climate predicament. There are multiple causes of this, including the enormous exposure of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, burning of fossils fuels, emission of carbon dioxide, chloroflouro carbons and carbon monoxide. With every passing day, the need for tackling this grave menace is arising (Nadeem, et. al., 2023). There is a need to look at the ways the world is striving to tackle this issue. If it is not handled seriously, it will turn out to be a nightmare not only for the Global South, but also for the Global North. Moreover, it is a need of time to delve deeply to unmask and analyse the discourses pertaining to climate change at a global level. This study aims to explore the ways in which Salience and Conviction play a role in the global climate change discourse and evoke certain actions towards sustainability.

In addition, climate change has become a significant issue in the present. The world is taking serious steps to curtail this issue. In line with the objective to curtail this issue, in the 2023, COP28 was held in the United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.). Many world leaders participated in the conference, to express their views regarding this global threat and to present certain valid actions to curtail this menace. The world leaders talked about their agendas and emphasized sustainability actions to save the future of the planet earth, amid the growing concerns of climate change. It is mandatory to shed light on the fact that COP28 reached certain agreements to ensure zero carbon and harmony with nature, in addition to

avoiding the usage of the elements, which are proving to be dangerous for the planet earth. This commitment was in line with the agreements made at COP21 in Paris, also known as the *Paris agreement.* The conference also highlighted the role of the media in propagating discourses related to global climate change.

Literature Review

There are much research works available in which the researchers have talked about global climate change discourse, COP28 and utilized the theoretical framework being used in this study. To begin with, (Fottum & Gjerstad, 2017), carried out a research study which was based on the analysis of narratives in the climate change discourse. The research said that the texts of linguistic perspectives can frame narratives and contribute to the narrative policy framework. Moreover, this study analyzed the use of multiple approaches as analytical tools, to see the ways conflicting narratives can affect people's attitudes and behaviors toward the climate change issue. The research study concluded that when people are exposed to conflicting stories in different narrative structures, they get a vast picture of this issue and may sometimes get puzzled in giving actual reaction to this very issue.

In addition, (Knight & Greenberg, 2011), carried out research on adversarial framing and climate change discourse. The research is a comparative study of two Canadian groups holding different opinions regarding the climate change. The researchers found out that the Natural Resource Stewardship Project (NRSP), says that the climate change issue is not actually caused by humans. While the opposite group DeSmogblog(DSB), believe it to be the result of human actions and negligence. The research study focused on the ways the structure of adversarial framing differs from and is mirrored by the framing of the opposition. The researchers also carried out an analysis of the website of both the organizations and found that both the groups are highlighting the weak points of each other and ways of working. The research study demonstrated that both these groups developed different stories or discourses about each other, which involved all the five components of attack, i.e. Practices. Moral characters, Qualification and competence, real versus apparent motivation and social association. The factor of motivation, as per the researchers, played an important cognitive role in the attack against each other.

Additionally, the role of metaphors in the climate change discourse was unearthed by (Skinnemoen, 2009), in their research thesis. The researcher gathered data from two environmental organizations websites and two different newspapers websites. The sample of the research study comprised 100,00 words taken from the sources. The study was based on cognitive metaphor theories, to see the ways metaphors shape political and political realities and the underlying role of the use of metaphors in the global climate change discourse. The study concluded that the use of metaphors in the discourse of climate change shapes and influences public opinions and behaviors toward this global menace.

Many researchers have utilized the theoretical framework taken for this study in different ways to unearth different things. An important ecolinguistics study was conducted by (Nabila, 2023), to see the effects of gold mining project on the Sangihe Island. The researcher utilized the three components salience and conviction, in addition to erasure, for this study. The main aim of this study was to consider the said stories given by Stibbe (2015), to see the influence of these stories amid the gold mining project on the well-being of ecology in the Sangihe Island. The researcher analyzed the gathered data from the lens of ecosophy and eco-critical discourse analysis. Moreover, the researcher tried to highlight the issues going on in the Island in view of the growing concerns of climate change. It was found that one company was propagating a beneficial story for the well-being of ecology by presenting the salient image of the elements of ecology in the Sangih

Island. While the second company propagated the destructive story for the well-being of the elements of ecology in the Island by undermining the description and erasing the salient image of the ecological elements.

In a nutshell, from the above given studies cited in the literature review, it can be inferred that there is still a gap to address the global climate change discourse in the more comprehensive manner, particularly at the level of COP, as it has not been properly analyzed. So, the current study aims to fill up the gap by analyzing the speeches given at COP28 to see the discourses at global level surrounding climate change through the elements of Conviction and Salience.

Material and Methods

Research Design

In the words of (Trochim, 2006), the design of research totally depends on the methods and strategies that have been combined by the researcher in a celebrated and coherent way, to achieve the desired outcomes in a more comprehensive and logical manner. Basically, employing a research design that is highly relevant to the research questions and objectives helps the researcher attain research objectives, analyse and interpret the data taken for the study in a coherent and acclaimed fashion. Therefore, in line with the above guidelines, the current study has employed qualitative research design to achieve its objectives. The research study is also exploratory in nature. This has made it easier to analyse and interpret the data to achieve the goals of the research.

Data Collection

Sample

The researcher has gathered the sample through purposive sampling technique. Basically, it is a sampling technique in which the researchers themselves select the data based on their judgement that is highly relevant to their research and helps them achieve the research objectives. The four speeches of different world leaders from the Conference of the Parties (COP28), held in 2023, served as the main data source for this current research study.

Tools and Techniques for Data Collection

The researcher has employed secondary data collection technique for data collection, as all the data taken for this research has been gathered through UNFCCC's website and other online archives. Besides, the four selected speeches from COP28 served as the main source of data for the researcher.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of ecolinguistics, Arran Stibbe (2015), introduces eight stories in his book, *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by,* which can be used to analyse a text or advertisement related to the environment. Those stories include Salience, Conviction, Erasure, Metaphors, Framing, Ideologies, Evaluation and Identities. However, the current study utilized the stories of Conviction and Salience, to analyse the speeches taken for this study.

To start off, conviction refers to the stories in people's minds about whether a particular description is true, certain, uncertain or false. In the context of ecolinguistics,

conviction urges people to act towards the sustainability of the environment by drawing an analogy between environmental issues with personal experiences. Moreover, conviction patterns include linguistic devices that are used in a particular text or advertisement to show people's beliefs and commitments towards environmental issues. On the other hand, salience refers to the story in people's mind that an area of life is important or worthy of attention. The salience patterns include linguistic or visual representation to portray an area of life as important. It can be of high salience and low salience type in a written text or visual.

Thus, the research study aims to trace out the ways in which language has been used by the speakers in the speeches to get insights into the discourses pertaining to climate change on a global scale, with the help of the current theoretical framework.

Results and Discussion

Qualitative content analysis is employed as the method of data analysis by the researcher to analyze the data gathered for this study. Basically, it is a method of data analysis that is used to analyze qualitative data. According to (Zhand & Wildemuth, 2009), qualitative content analysis is a method of analysis that helps researchers in properly understanding the social reality in a scientific manner. This method of data analysis can be used in different fields including psychology, education and social sciences. It is a flexible research method of data analysis with no rigid rules of application. Ecolinguistics deals with the relationship between ecology and language. By incorporating an ecolinguistics approach by considering the techniques of conviction and salience, the current research study has deeply delved into the selected speeches collected as data for the study, to unearth different strategies incorporated by the world leaders to bring forth the challenges posed by climate change, and to motivate group efforts towards sustainability.

Salience in the Speeches Given at COP28

Salience is one of the important concepts in ecolinguistics. Basically, it is a story in people's mind that an area of life is worthy of attention. The same thing was observed at the occasion of COP28, last year. The world leaders encouraged people and other leaders towards sustainability actions to restore the world to its initial phase. For example, speaker A, in his speech uses framing technique through which he framed environmental issues and then declared COP 28, as one of the crucial points towards the revolutionary actions. This can be seen when he says,

Eight years ago, I was most touched to be asked to speak at the opening of COP21 in Paris, which of course culminated in the Paris Agreement; a landmark moment of hope and optimism, when nations put differences to one side for the common good. I pray with all my heart that COP28 will be another critical turning point towards genuine transformational action. (Speaker A, COP28, 2023).

Moreover, speaker A, uses certain words and phrases like *"a starker and darker one"*, (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), to put forth the gravity of the situation and demonstrate his haste and concerns regarding this issue. He also uses linguistic expressions to manifest the importance of taking sustainability actions towards climate change. He says, *"how dangerous are we actually prepared to make our world"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), and *"real action is required."* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023). This clearly shows his concerns towards the threats posed by climate change.

Additionally, the speech by speaker A drew a solid connection between personal experiences and environmental concerns. In this way, he highlighted the salience of the issue. He says that the world has to adopt Sheikh Zayed's idea of supporting renewable energy. The speaker also talked about the effects of climate change on vulnerable people. Thus, by linking environmental issues with personal narratives, speaker A made this very compelling and relatable. This can be observed when he says, *"Sheikh Mohamed 's dear father, Sheikh Zayed, was advocating for clean energy at a time even before the United Arab Emirates, as such, came into being."* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023).

On the other hand, speaker B also emphasized the salience of climate change discourse at the global level. From the very start, he made a statement that, *"I would like to thank the United Arab Emirates for hosting this crucial event."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023). Here, he used the word "Crucial event", which clearly puts forth the salience of the global climate change issue. Speaker B, in his speech says that the global leaders must work together now, in a bid to overcome the challenges posed by this menace, and to ensure food and energy security in the world. This becomes clear when he says, *"We need multilateralism now more than ever to take effective action against climate change and to ensure food and energy security."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023). By saying so, the urgency and need for global cooperation have been highlighted in this regard. He also incorporated facts and figures in the speech to talk about the challenges and the current situation because of climate change. Speaker B says that the world is not able to restrict global temperature to 1.5, as it has already reached the level of 1.2. Global warming has wreaked havoc in all continents of the world. In line with this, it can be inferred that by employing scientific facts and figures, the speaker in his speech portrayed the salience of climate change issue and underscored the seriousness of this global menace. This claim can be validated through the statement articulated by the speaker B, in his speech. For instance, when he says, *"The science is clear: we are not on track to limit climate change to 1.5 degrees. Global warming has already reached 1.2 degrees, causing widespread damage on all continents."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023).

Furthermore, speaker B also highlighted the importance of shifting from fossil fuels to clean energy sources and demonstrated the importance of global agreements to achieve the targets for renewable and energy efficiency. In this way, actionable measures and goals have been foregrounded with clean energy as the central solution to this problem of climate change. He also asserts the importance of carbon free technologies to overcome the challenges posed by this global issue. This can be seen in the speech,

The most crucial thing is a rapid clean energy transition away from fossil fuels. A just transition can help create new businesses and jobs, and better opportunities for people everywhere. To enable the transition, we should agree on global targets for renewable and energy efficiency. These targets need to be accompanied by concrete steps towards phasing out fossil fuels and subsidies that support their use and recognizing the role of other carbon-free technologies. (Speaker B, COP28, 2023).

In addition, Speaker C also demonstrated the salience of climate change discourse. The speaker C, in her speech, emphasized the urgency of climate action. She says that the clock is ticking, and time is running out. She also gives reference to the IPCC report that those steps which are necessary and effective to tackle the menace of climate change today will become less output oriented and become outdated as time passes, and global warming increases. This statement from her and the direct references to the IPCC report demonstrate the salience of climate challenges. This can be validated when she says, *"The clock is ticking. This year's IPCC Report cautioned that "adaptation options that are feasible and effective today will become constrained and less effective with increasing global warming."* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023).

Moreover, she also highlights the consequences of unfulfilled commitments to the developing countries in the context of global climate change discourse, and the erosion of trust and solidarity in this regard. She mentioned that her country is losing 2 and 3 percent of its GDP due to climate change. By doing so, Speaker C demonstrated the salience of this very issue in the eyes of the world leaders and people. This can be traced out in her statement, *"It must be said, unfulfilled commitments erode solidarity and trust and have detrimental and costly consequences for developing countries. My own country is losing 2 to 3 percent of its GDP due to climate change."* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023). Additionally, speaker C also highlighted the importance of clean energy in the context of global climate change and mentioned her country's role in further minimizing emissions. She says,

Despite its minimal emissions contribution, Tanzania is doing its part. At this COP, we seek to mobilize support for increased use of clean and affordable cooking fuels and technologies across Africa, especially for women. Our call is for all of us to play our part. (Speaker C, COP28, 2023).

Moving on, speaker D also demonstrated the salience of global climate change issue in her address on the eve of COP28. She mentioned the support of the United States of America for the marginalized communities which are fighting with the adverse effects of climate change. She emphasized the equity of the US in this work by saying, *"We have also placed equity at the center of all of our work, investing in marginalized communities, which are often hardest hit by extreme weather and bear a disproportionate burden from fossil fuel pollution."* (Speaker D, COP28, 2023). Besides, speaker D, also announced the pledge of 3 billion dollars by the United States of America for the green climate fund. She says that this grant will help underdeveloped countries to invest in clean energy, and nature-based solutions. By talking about this very grant and the utilization of the grant in nature friendly projects, the speaker D puts forth the salience of the global climate change challenges. This can be seen when she says, *"Today, I am also proud to announce a new $3 billion pledge to the Green Climate Fund, which helps developing countries invest in resilience, clean energy, and nature-based solutions."* (Speaker D, COP28, 2023).

To be very conclusive, by highlighting the importance of collaborative work, climate friendly initiatives, zero carbon world, climate funding and urgent actions, the speakers on the eve of COP28 demonstrated the salience of global climate change discourse, as also analyzed in the above given analysis.

Conviction in the Speeches Given at COP28

The speeches given on the eve of COP28 are not merely the reflection of the salience of climate change crisis, but they also portray the conviction of the speakers to eradicate climate crisis. This can be seen through multiple statements, words choices and phrases incorporated by the speakers in their speeches. To start with, speaker A utilizes certain words and phrases during his speech, which clearly demonstrates his conviction to eradicate the climate change crisis and the urgency to address these crises. For instance, his use of words and statements like *"dangers are no longer distant risks"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), *"existential threats"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), *"I pray with all my heart"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), and *"it worries me greatly"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), manifest the sense of urgency to take actions, in order to tackle this menace and completely thwart the delaying tactics in this regard. Besides, speaker A further highlights the graveness and intensity of the situation and says that devastating effects would be seen as the tipping points have been reached. So, there is a need for taking mutual actions, in a bid to overcome the effects of climate change on the world. He further emphasizes the severity of the situation caused due to the global climate change issue to urge immediate actions. This can be seen when

speaker A says, **"***we are seeing alarming tipping points being reached,"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023).

Moving on, the speech of speaker A comprehensively demonstrated the lethal effects of the world's inactivity towards this issue on the people who are vulnerable to it. The speaker comprehensively talked about the suffering of people and town due to *"laid waste"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023) and talked about the cost that humans are paying due to this global menace. He also humanizes the problem by taking about the *"repeated shocks"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), that are affecting the human population across the world. The speaker talked about the repeated cyclones and unprecedented floods that are hitting the vulnerable countries and islands like Vanuatu, Dominica, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Moreover, he highlighted the issue of decade long droughts in East Africa and the wildfires in Europe and America that are causing a lot of damage to wildlife and properties. In this way, he also aroused the compassion of the audience towards elimination of this issue. As mentioned previously, speaker A shows his conviction and steadfastness towards this issue by keep on highlighting the importance of collaboration and group work in this regard. It is visible from the statements he articulated during his speech that, "*real action is required*" (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), "*Change will come through working together*" (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), and "*dealing with this is a job for us all*" (Speaker A, COP28, 2023). All these statements clearly show that he is very convicted towards this global issue and is vigilant and determined to find the solution to this menace. Moreover, the speaker in his speech not only specified and outlined the issue, but he also urged the world community to act together, to find the answer and solution to this climate change issue.

In addition, the king alluded to a moral duty in his speech which clearly manifests his conviction. He talked about "*indigenous world view*" (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), which emphasizes *"harmony with Nature"* (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), is also foregrounded by speaker A in his speech. In simple, he is trying to persuade the audience to be eco-friendly and show harmony towards the nature. This urges the need not cause any damage to nature by making use of things that are harmful to it. Moreover, the speaker A use of the statement, "*The earth does not belong to us, we belong to the earth*" (Speaker A, COP28, 2023), also demonstrates his conviction and harmony with nature. This is because he indirectly mentions that the earth is the homeland, and we people must take care of this planet, to keep it liable for living and human existence.

On the other hand, speaker B also demonstrates conviction in his speech given at the forum of COP28. This can be seen at several points in his speech where he highlights the dire consequences of not taking action to curb this issue, and the urgency of taking mutual actions to thwart the challenge of global climate change. For instance, he says, *"COP28 marks the culmination of the first-ever Global Stocktake. It is up to us now to act with urgency and determination and make clear political commitments to put us on track."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023). In this statement, he gave the reference of global stocktake report to evoke the sense of urgency and collective actions to put the world on right track again by curtailing the effects of climate change. Moreover, he also talked about the ongoing wars and violence in the world and said that all these human actions are further intensifying the issue rather than overcoming it. So, these human actions need to be stopped to reach the objectives of the climate change discussions. It can be observed from the statement, *"ongoing wars and violence in different parts of the world are only aggravating the impacts."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023).

Furthermore, the speaker B's conviction in this regard can be further seen when he talks about his country's commitment towards the global climate change fund for the countries facing the effects of climate change. He also announced a 3 million euros grant

for the countries vulnerable to climate change. This also shows his conviction in this regard. It becomes obvious when speaker B says, *"It is crucial to expand the donor base for climate funding, to include more countries on a voluntary basis. Finland stands ready to support the new fund with 3 million euros."* (Speaker B, COP28, 2023). All in all, the highlighted excerpts from the speaker B speech clearly demonstrated his conviction and determination to address the menace of climate change. So, it can be inferred from his speech that the well-being of the planet earth and climate is dependent on the measures and actions taken today.

Adding to the same perspective, conviction is also obvious in the speech of speaker C, given on the eve of COP28. She talked about the urgency of taking strong actions to thwart this global climate change menace and emphasizes the seriousness of the issue. She uses phrases like *"the clock is ticking,"* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023), *"unfulfilled commitments erode solidarity and trust,"* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023), and *"the decision is therefore ours: adhere to science or face the consequences."* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023). Through these statements, speaker C talked about the intensity of the situation and said that the time is running out. She also mentions that as per the IPCC report, the actions that are supposed to be taken today and are deemed effective will be useless tomorrow. So, the world should come forward and take comprehensive collaborative actions in this manner.

Moreover, Speaker C also highlighted her country's commitment to keeping the missions as low as possible, even though it is not contributing to climate change. She emphasizes the need to increase support for clean and affordable cooking fuels and technologies across Africa. It can be seen when she says, *"Despite its minimal emissions contribution, Tanzania is doing its part. At this COP, we seek to mobilize support for increased use of clean and affordable cooking fuels and technologies across Africa."* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023). Besides, she articulated the statement, *"our call is for all of us to play our part."* (Speaker C, COP28, 2023). In this statement, the use of the pronoun "our" clearly showcases the fact that it is not an issue that can be resolved by a single person or a country, but it demands collective actions and group efforts. All the world countries must play their part, in a bid to thwart the menace of climate change. By emphasizing the collective actions and showcasing personal commitments in this regard, the conviction of speaker C in this discourse can be clearly seen.

Additionally, from the analysis of the speech of speaker D, it aroused that ecolinguistics concept conviction was also present there. Speaker D also portrayed her conviction towards eradication of this global climate change issue. She says that the United States of America will be the leader of the world in the fight against the global climate change crisis. She showcases her country's ambition towards this very issue and says that they are now working to turn their ambition into action. This can be observed when she says, *"Two years ago, President Joe Biden stood on stage at COP26 and made a declaration of ambition: The United States of America will once again be a global leader in the fight against the climate crisis."* (Speaker D, COP28, 2023).

Last but not the least, speaker D also emphasized the need for group actions and collaborative efforts towards climate change issues. She says that the world actions if taken or not taken will impact billions of people in the nook and corner of the world. So, it is the real time to embark on this expedition of taking actions to secure the future of the world in the coming decades. She also says that the nature of the work which has been done in this regard is not enough, and continuous actions are further warranted to ensure progress in terms of curbing the threats posed by climate change across the globe. This also demonstrates her conviction and determination towards resolving the issues posed by climate change. In her own words, *"This is a pivotal moment. Our action collectively or, worse, our inaction will impact billions of people for decades to come." (Speaker D, COP28, 2023) and "For*

as much as we have accomplished, there is still so much more work to do. And continued progress will not be possible without a fight." (Speaker D, COP28, 2023).

Conclusion

To be very conclusive, from the analysis of the selected speeches from COP28, it has become obvious that the speakers have tried their best to highlight the urgency of actions to be taken, to curtail the impacts created by climate change across the globe. Moreover, by emphasizing the moral aspect, their personal actions towards curbing this issue, shifting from fossil fuels to clean energy, grants for the climate fund, other sustainability components, by drawing on the optimistic tone and evoking the compassion of the audience towards the sustainability actions, the speakers foregrounded the intensity of this issue. In addition, the use of modal auxiliaries and personal pronouns in speeches also helped speakers to evoke the sense of collaborating actions in the audience and the world leaders. In this manner, the salience and conviction of the climate change issues have been created by the speakers in their speeches on the eve of COP28, which was held in the United Arab Emirates

Recommendations

In the light of the above given results and discussion, the research study recommends that policymakers and environmental activists should make use of the persuasive power of language to highlight the threats posed by climate change. By using such a strategy, the conviction and salience of people towards climate change can be aroused, which will ultimately help in inclining them towards finding possible solutions to this environmental menace. Additionally, policymakers should also work to arrange relevant training programs to emphasis the urge of addressing these challenges at the global level, and to enhance the understanding of the people regarding the persuasive power of language, in the global climate change discourse. On the contrary, future researchers can explore the same speeches in terms of framing and reframing, metaphors, erasure, positive and destructive discourses, to see the power ideologies and hidden power of words in the speeches, which will help in orchestrating more inclusive strategies in the global climate change discourse.

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