

Somme Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis of the Article “Kyoto Protocol is not Enough to Tackle Climate Change”

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Abstract: From a critical discourse analysis perspective, this research analyses a newspaper article entitled “Kyoto Protocol is not enough to tackle climate change” in *The Independent*. In light of Norman Fairclough’s Dialectical Relational Approach and Theo van Leeuwen’s Linguistically-Oriented Conceptual Framework, such lexico-syntactic categories as passivation, nominalization, and metaphors have been unveiled, which convey the attitudes of nations, organizations, individuals toward this event. Most strikingly presented is the UK’s positive attitude in support of the efforts against climate change. In addition, person deixis and implicit positive vocabulary help depict the journalist’s position, that is, to persuade the U.S. to jointly promote globally concerted efforts in addressing the challenge of climate change. The paper concludes with some recommendations on the application of critical discourse analysis in language studies at higher education, and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Kyoto Protocol is not enough to tackle climate change, lexico-syntactic categories, implicit evaluation, climate change.

1. Introduction

Emerging in the 1980s, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has not merely been interested in the analysis of purely linguistic features but also in the dialectic relationship between language and society. With its multidisciplinary approach focusing on the analysis of ideology and power relations, CDA has strongly penetrated into humanities and socio-political sciences all over the world. Nonetheless, by far,

it remains a fairly infant research approach in Vietnam.

Climate change is a complex issue, exerting impacts on almost every aspect of social life. It has become a major concern of nations, organizations, individuals and has been studied from various perspectives worldwide. In linguistics, there is a body of research on this issue, such as a discourse study on a corporate public discourse on climate change [1], a study of the cultural politics of climate change discourse in the UK tabloids [2], a frame analysis of climate change discourse in the US

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newspapers [3], etc. However, these previous studies have not analysed the prominent linguistic features as embedded in the social context so as to unravel the social actors' roles in and attitudes toward important events in the climate change history.

Therefore, this study adapts Norman Fairclough's Dialectical-Relational Approach to CDA ([4], [5]) and Theo van Leeuwen's Linguistically-Oriented Conceptual Framework [6] in the analysis of an article in the UK's *The Independent* newspaper which covers the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. Firstly, the concepts and tools in the analytical framework are presented. Next, the representations of nations, organizations, individuals' attitudes toward the Kyoto event and climate change are interpreted and explained. Finally, suggestions for the application of CDA in language studies are made.

2. Theoretical background and analytical framework

2.1. Theoretical background

There is a vast diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches in CDA (see [7]). These approaches all aim at uncovering how "language and discourse are used to achieve social goals and [effect] social maintenance and change" [8, p.2].

Inspired by Michel Foucault's [9] works in discourse analysis, CDA scholars regard discourse as social practice imbued with political overtones and power nexus. "Critical" "gives discourse attitude. By nature, "critical" means unraveling the ideological nature or the unequal social relationships represented in

discourse" [10, p.14]. Also, CDA maintains that the role, relationship, and identity of participants in a discourse community are created and arranged by textual features embedded in the social, economic, cultural, political context. Hence, to various extents, critical discourse analysts focus on the analysis of the dialectic relationship between language and society.

One of the prominent founders and most influential scholars of CDA is Norman Fairclough [4]. He analyses the dialectic relationship between language and society at three levels:

(i) micro-level analysis of the textual features,

(ii) meso-level analysis of the context of producing, distributing, consuming texts, and

(iii) macro-level analysis of the broader socio-economic context.

The Faircloughian method allows for the investigation of textual meaning and the interpretation of language in use based on the analysis of discourse practice and sociocultural practice, in order to make better sense of the attitudes and ideologies represented in discourse [11]. As such, Fairclough's method is employed in this research in order to describe the textual properties which unveil nations, organizations, individuals' attitudes toward the Kyoto event and climate change, as well as interpret and explain why such textual properties are used in its discursive and social context.

However, the Faircloughian approach does not provide an inventory of lexico-semantic categories for depicting the representation of social actors in discourse. As this research studies how different social actors are

represented, it is important to supplement Fairclough’s method with such an inventory. Theo van Leeuwen’s [6] Linguistically-Oriented Conceptual Framework with a range of morpho-syntactic categories suffices this need. Additionally, by far, van Leeuwen’s framework has been considered the most comprehensive for the interpretation of social actor representation from the social angle, as “different ways of representing social action encode different interpretations of, and attitudes to, the social actions represented” [6, p.81]. For the purpose of this study, part of van Leeuwen’s framework is utilized.

2.2. Analytical framework

In order to analyze and interpret the dialectic relation between textual properties and society, this study investigates the sample data at three levels, as follows:

2.2.1 Micro-level analysis

Our study focuses on the description and analysis of the linguistic features used in the text to “unravel the ideological nature or the unequal social relationships represented in discourse” [10, p.14]. Figure 1 introduces the categories of impersonalization and evaluation in our analytical framework’s micro-level, as adapted from [12, p.10].

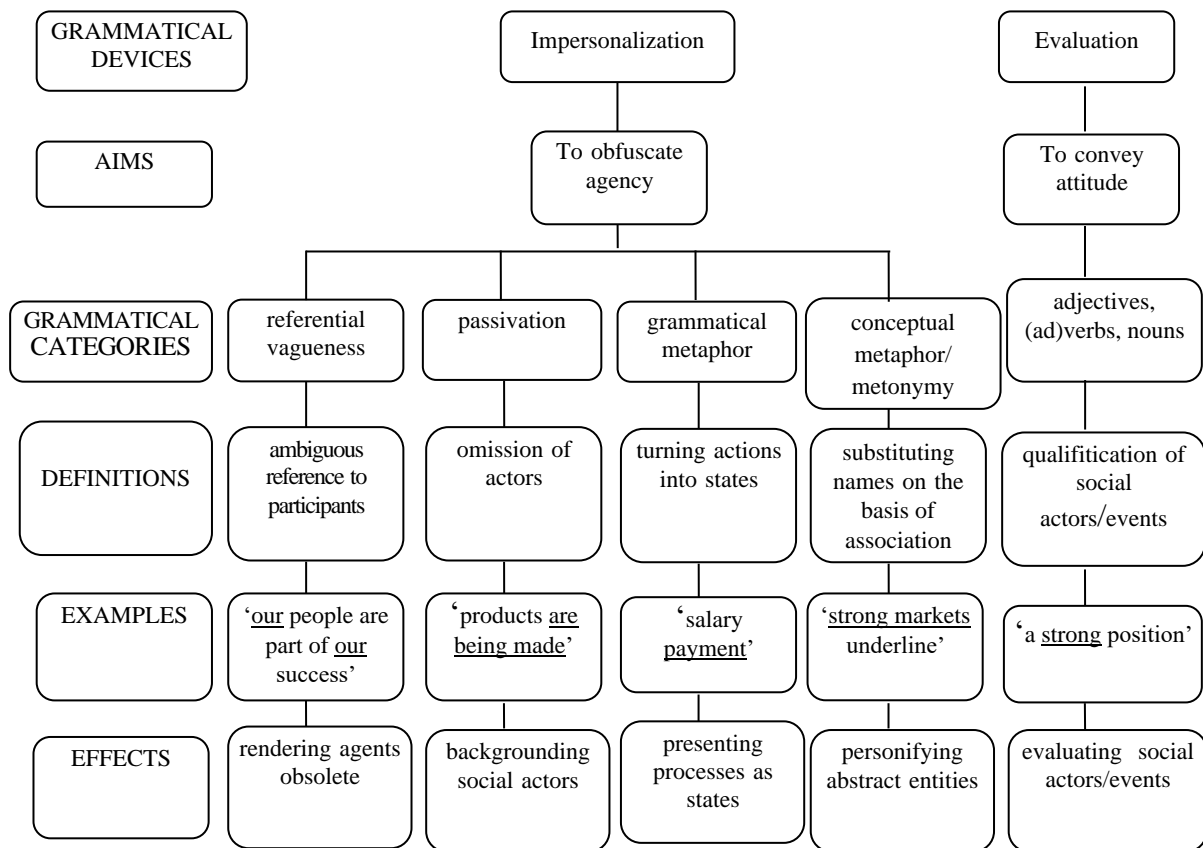


Figure 1. Micro-level analytical framework: Impersonalization and evaluation categories (Adapted from Merkl-Davies, D. & Koller, V. 2012).

As illustrated in Figure 1, impersonalization represents processes in an abstract manner through such grammatical devices as referential vagueness, activation/passivation, grammatical metaphor, conceptual metaphor and metonymy. Evaluation identifies “specific values regarding desirability, importance, or usefulness of social actors and events” [5, p.172]. It is realized in the form of attributive adjectives, adverbs, verbs and nouns with particular denotative and connotative meanings in a particular context. Evaluation may be positive or negative, explicit or implicit.

2.2.2. Meso-level analysis describes the context of discourse practice, including the production, distribution, reception of the text in order to explain the reasons why the linguistic strategies are used the way they are in the text.

2.2.3. Macro-level analysis examines the socio-economic context that embeds the text in order to explain why social actors are represented in the specific way in the micro-level analysis. The context is analysed along two axes: synchronic (with simultaneous depictions of the event in different newspapers) and diachronic (with a general review of the social changes relating to the event).

With the aforementioned theoretical background and analytical framework, we analyzed the article entitled “Kyoto is not enough to tackle climate change” by Stephen Byers, in *The Independent* on the 16th February 2005. The reason for this choice is that the article was published in a newspaper which has a large readership, and “The paper has also taken strong positions on environmental issues” [see 13]. Also, with 875 words divided into 63 lines (see Appendix), the sample data is appropriate for the aims and analytical approach of this study.

3. The critical analysis of the article “Kyoto is not enough to tackle climate change”

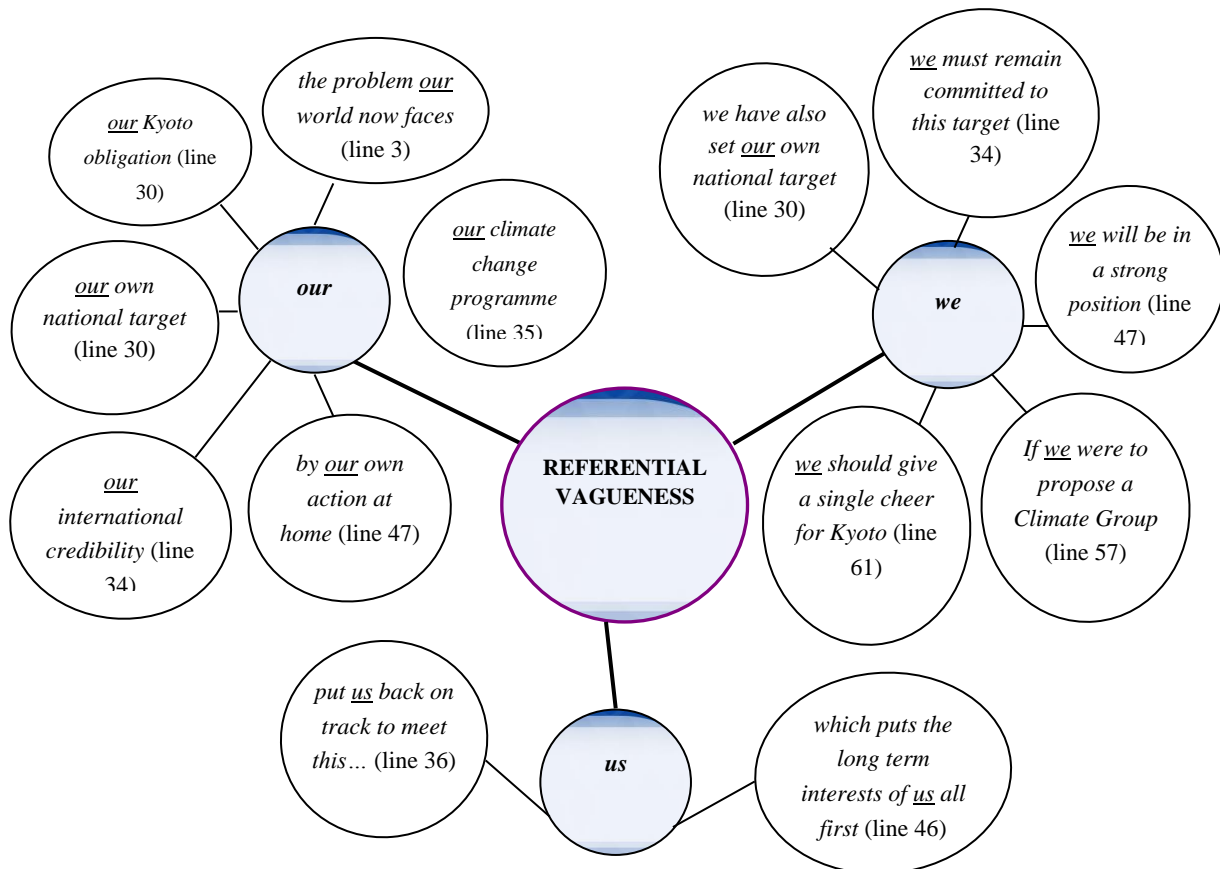
3.1. Micro-level analysis of the text

3.1.1. Referential vagueness

In the article, referential vagueness is effected through the use of the first person plural (i.e. *we*, *our*, *us*), as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2 indicates that the author of the article has given priority to the use of the first person plurals *we*, *our* and *us* in the text. Except for the case of *our* used to refer to *the world* in line 3, almost all of the first plural deixis in the article are employed to refer to the United Kingdom. The U.K. with ‘our Kyoto obligation’, ‘our national target’, ‘our climate change programme’, ‘our own action at home’ ‘have set our own national target’ and ‘must remain committed to this target’; in the mean time ‘should give a single cheer for Kyoto’ ‘which puts the long term interests of us all first’. The generous use of the first person plural has signified the consensus of the U.K. as a whole in support of the Protocol. However, it remains unclear whether the word *us* in line 46 refers to the U.K. or to the European Union, or both. This vagueness leads to a question, “Who will be responsible for finding a way forward that puts the long term interests of us all first?”

Appearing 6 times (*we*), 6 times (*our*) and 2 times (*us*), the first person plural deixis plays a significant role in building a spirit of harmony between the author and the reader. The author of the article does not detach the government of the Prime Minister Tony Blair from the U.K. people; in contrast, whatever claimed by the government is related to *us* – the U.K. people. The words *we*, *our* and *us* are used as an inclusion throughout the text in order to share the government’s responsibility with the people. Therefore, the reader seems to become a co-author of the article as well as agree with the controlling ideology in the article.



Beside the use of the first person plural, the third person singular *he* is used to denote the U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair, while confirming his ‘right’ viewpoint of the importance of climate change to the world. Nevertheless, there is no trace of the third person singular *he* to refer to President Bush anywhere in the text. Here, the author uses naming and referencing strategies in news discourse [8: 49] to create a difference between the two big nation’s leaders. Is the formal addressing ‘President Bush’ used for psychological, social or political reasons to position the U.S. president in a key role in the negotiations regarding the Kyoto Protocol in particular and climate change in general (?).

Finally, the use of the third person plural *their* (line 6) and the demonstrative *those* (line 58) to refer to the rapidly developing countries

such as China and India seems to distance the rapidly developing countries from the leadership of the climate change task force.

In a nutshell, the referential vagueness in the article shapes the U.K. as the leader of the European Union in response to climate change. Also, the article places the USA in a formal position, perhaps in the hope that the USA would ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Moreover, it puts forth the argument that climate change can only be solved by international agreements.

3.1.2. Activation/passivation

The presence of more active sentences than passive ones in the article represents the U.K. as an active leader of the world, or at least of the

European Union, in the engagement in the Kyoto Protocol and climate change.

The passive voice helps the author shift whatever considered important to the subject position in a sentence, in place of the agent. The

following table analyzes two passive sentence structures found in the article, namely (1) passive voice with grammatical agents, and (2) agentless passive voice.

Passivation	Line	Extracts	Effects
(1) passive voice with grammatical agents	16	...the single most important issue <i>faced</i> by the world.	To orient the reader's attention to the theme, and background the agent in the rheme of the sentence. The collective nouns 'the world', 'the G8', and the grammatical agents 'the Protocol', 'our Kyoto obligation' have obfuscated who is responsible for the actions stated in the sentences.
	7	...the cuts <i>required</i> by the Protocol...	
	29-30	...gas emissions <i>required</i> under our Kyoto obligation.	
(2) agentless passive voice	58	...a Climate Group <i>made up of</i> the G8 plus...	The omission of the social agents have obscured the names of the countries, organizations, or individuals accountable for requiring to make cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, for taking decisions, and for doing more...
	5-6	...China and India, are <i>not required</i> to make cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions.	
	20-21	... political decisions need <i>to be taken</i> now...	
	33	...much more will need <i>to be done</i> if this goal is <i>to be achieved</i> .	

The omission of the agents in the sentences in lines 5-6, 20-21, 33 seems to render the discourse more dialogical, and obscures the names of the countries, organizations, or individuals accountable for requiring to make cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, for taking decisions, etc. The shift from the use of a human subject (Tony Blair) to a non-human subject tactfully transfers the accountability of the U.K. to an unidentified agent. Thus, impersonalization through the omission of agents brings about a consensus among social actors toward the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol.

In short, the active voice foregrounds the powerful nations' responsibilities for important tasks, and the passive voice backgrounds unimportant information, avoiding the statement of whose responsibilities these are.

This finding confirms Richardson's claim [14: 56] that "there is often social or ideological significance between these choices [the choices to represent the same events in different ways]", and Fairclough's idea (cited by Richardson in [14: 56]) that "transforming an active process into a relation or 'state of affairs' can remove important (perhaps uncomfortable) political implications."

3.1.3. Metaphor and metonymy

The use of the grammatical metaphor in the form of nominalization 'the international discussions about the next step to build on the Kyoto' as the subject of the verb 'have not gained' in line 10 obscures the agent(s) of the 'discussions'. Other examples of grammatical metaphors that can be found in the article are 'Kyoto provides a solution to the scale of the

problem’ (line 3), ‘the political challenges facing Tony Blair’ (line 27), ‘trading scheme has huge potential’ (line 38) and ‘trading scheme could provide a model’ (line 44). In addition, there are conceptual metaphors such as ‘fresh injection of political will’ (line 62). The metaphors in the article help the author cut down on the number of words in the sentences, render the discourse picturesque and enrich it.

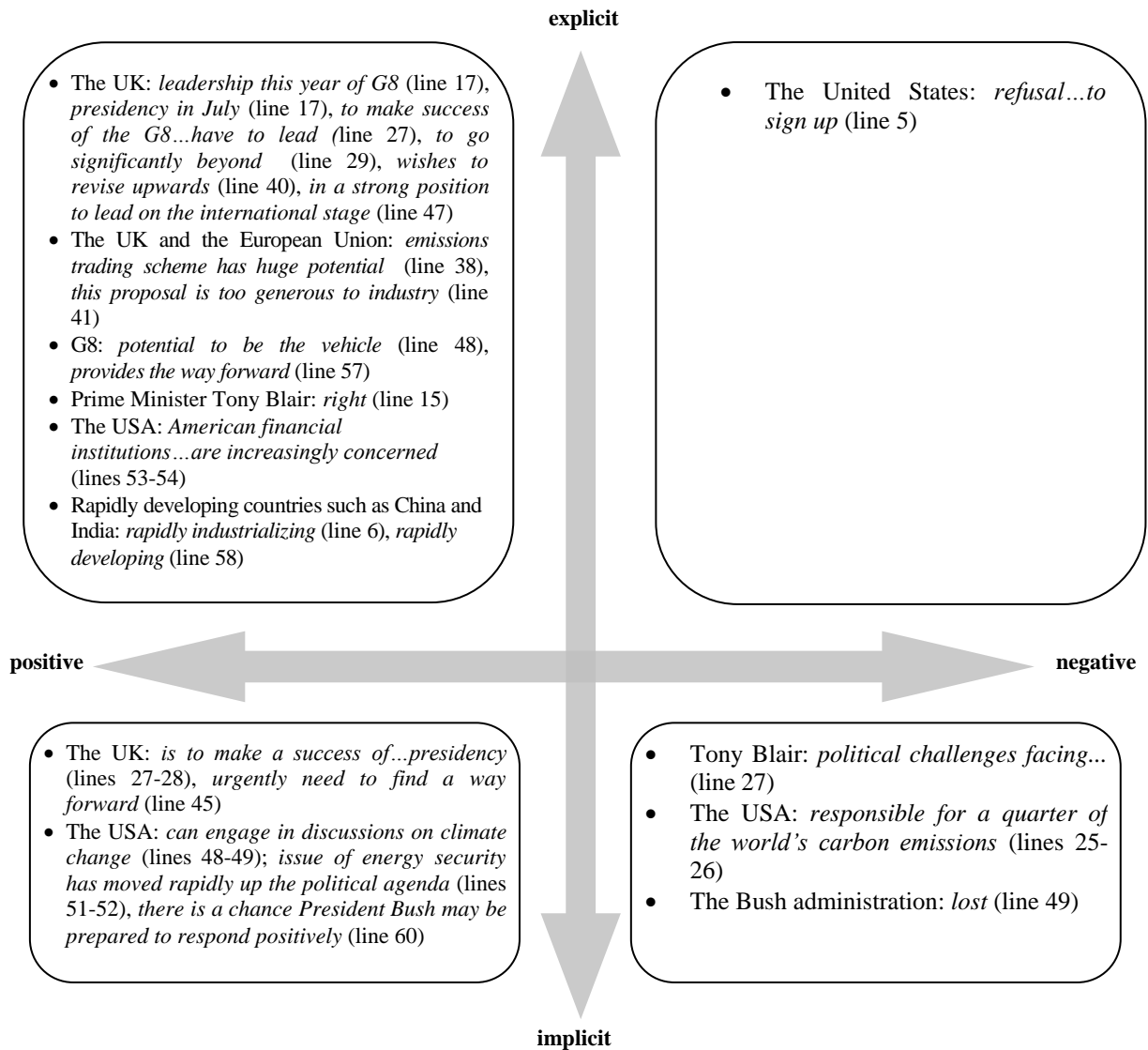
The most prevalent type of metonym in the article is part-for-whole, for instance, the use of ‘the Bush administration’ (line 49), ‘American financial institutions’ (line 53), ‘Florida’ (line

56) and ‘President Bush’ (line 60) to represent the USA. Then, the type of date-for-event is exemplified by ‘the 11 September’ (line 51) to refer to the USA. Such metonyms give the author more plausible reasons to support the argument put forth in lines 23-26, that ‘the United States...must be engaged’ in solving problems caused by the global climate change.

3.1.4. Evaluation

Figure 3 below categorises the vocabulary items utilized to evaluate the social actors in the article.

Figure 3. Evaluation of social actors



Most of the instances of evaluation in the text are explicitly or implicitly positive. It is noteworthy that the positive evaluation of the U.K. appears in almost all positions in the text, while the positive evaluation of the USA occurs only near the end of the text. It is obvious that the article gives explicit positive evaluation of the U.K. and the European Union right at the beginning. Specifically, the verbs and nouns 'lead,' 'make success,' 'presidency,' and the citation of Tony Blair's 'right' statement on the importance of climate change have affirmed the position of the U.K. on the international climate change arena. For the USA, evaluations move from a virtually zero ('refusal of the US to sign up' in the second paragraph) through a series of losses in Florida, the event of the 11th September, etc. in later paragraphs to a position of 'may be prepared to respond positively' in the next to last paragraph. Hence, the USA is represented as changing from an entirely negative attitude to an implicitly positive one toward the Kyoto Protocol in particular and climate change in general.

3.2. Meso-level analysis

The article appeared in the online *The Independent* on the 16th February 2005, only one day after the Kyoto Protocol officially came into force. It was in the *Voices* section, which is not the most striking section, but of interest to a lot of readers. The author of the article is Stephen Byers, the co-chairman of the International Climate Change Task Force.

The article consists of 875 words, which is above the average level of length, reflecting the newspaper's evaluation of the event reported. The title and the first paragraph of the article front the event of the Kyoto Protocol officially coming into force and the role of the U.K. By

creating an image of the U.K. in the leadership of the ratification of the Protocol, the article represents the country in its world's leading role.

The most prominent spirit in the article is of the International Climate Change Task Force and Prime Minister Tony Blair. Employing the linguistic features as described in the micro-level analysis, the author shows the U.K. as a country positively supporting the Protocol. This is in good harmony with Prime Minister Blair's ideology as cited in the article, as well as the ideology of the former prime ministers, especially Margaret Thatcher, who considers climate change a global issue requiring concerted efforts of the international community, in which each country has its own role, and the USA should be engaged as the most powerful nation on Earth.

3.3. Macro-level analysis

3.3.1. Synchronic analysis

On the day Stephen Byers' article appeared in *The Independent*, another article also in *The Independent* addressed the Kyoto Protocol under the title 'Can Kyoto really save the world?' in the Environment section. *The Guardian* published the article entitled 'The Kyoto Protocol' by Alison Purdy explaining the Protocol and some reasons why several countries decided not to join it. *The New York Times* issued an article expressing the US people's feelings toward the Protocol as the title suggests 'Mixed feelings as Treaty on greenhouse gases takes effect' by Mark Landler. These articles represented different ideas and attitudes towards the Protocol. However, within this writing, we cannot analyze these representations in detail.

3.3.2. Diachronic analysis

Although it was first discussed at the World's Climate Conference in 1979, the first event to note in the history of climate change was the Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, which approved a series of international agreements on the globe's environmental issues, including the United Nation's Framework of Climate Change, with a view to preventing humans' dangerous interventions into climate. In 1995, countries began negotiating in order to urge the whole world to respond to climate change. In 1997, the Kyoto Protocol was approved, and it was not until 2005 that the Protocol came into effect, officially requiring developed countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions by a certain percentage. However, the most powerful nations in the world (for instance, the U.K., the USA) and the rapidly developing nations (such as China and India) have their own agendas to climate change. The U.K. has already ratified the Protocol, Australia has also signed in despite several years of rejection, but the USA has yet to endorse it. Understanding this social context helps the critical discourse analyst to interpret and explain why the linguistic features are used the way they are in the discourse. For example, the evaluation strategy used to represent the USA shifting from a negative attitude to an implicitly positive attitude is to persuade the USA to engage in the Kyoto Protocol, to support the goal of greenhouse gases reduction and climate change mitigation efforts in the long run.

In order to understand the socio-economic context more deeply and explain the linguistic patterns used in the article in more detail, it is important to analyze the historical context of the Kyoto Protocol through some articles published before the date of the Kyoto Protocol ratification. By so doing, it is possible to pinpoint the prospects and expectations of the

event as well as to develop a better interpretation of the patterns in climate change discourse in each newspaper in comparison with other papers. We will continue the chronical analysis in our future studies.

4. Conclusion

The critical discourse analysis of a newspaper article about the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol has depicted the representations of different social actors' attitudes toward and ideologies of both the Kyoto event in particular and climate change in general. Referential vagueness helps develop a consensus and a sense of responsibility sharing, passivation removes unwanted political influences, metaphors and metonyms strategically persuade the USA to engage in the Protocol, evaluation describes the U.K. in its world's leading role and the USA shifting from a negative position to a position where the USA 'may be prepared to respond positively' to climate change.

With the results of the present study, we recommend that CDA be introduced as a research approach to post-graduate language students in Vietnam. Rather than merely analyzing the linguistic features in their own right, it is significant to employ CDA to interpret the linguistic features in the wider socio-economic context so as to unveil the hidden meanings of the text. Also, it is important for both language students and linguistic researchers to develop a critical stance in reading materials in order to understand more thoroughly the use of language in social context as well as to develop their critical thinking skills.

We have to admit that the data in this present study is too modest to conduct the macro-level analysis to its full sense. In our

future research, we will thus first of all aim to investigate the issue of climate change with more data, from both diachronical and synchronical perspectives. It will be really significant if future research can analyze agency, social actor representation, subtopics and change synchronically and diachronically.

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Phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán bài báo “Kyoto Protocol is not Enough to Tackle Climate Change”

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Tóm tắt: Từ góc độ phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, bài viết này phân tích bài báo “Công ước Kyoto chưa đủ để chống lại biến đổi khí hậu” (Kyoto Protocol is not enough to tackle climate change) trên tờ *Độc lập* (*The Independent*). Vận dụng phương pháp Phân tích quan hệ biện chứng của Norman Fairclough và Phân tích ý niệm theo Định hướng ngôn ngữ học của Theo van Leeuwen, chúng tôi chỉ ra những phạm trù cú pháp - từ vựng như thể bị động, danh hóa, ẩn dụ được sử dụng để biểu hiện thái độ của các quốc gia, tổ chức, cá nhân đối với sự kiện này. Bên cạnh đó, các từ chỉ xuất ngữ, các từ ngữ có tính chất đánh giá tích cực hàm ẩn cũng góp phần thể hiện quan điểm của tác giả bài báo. Bài viết kết thúc với gợi ý cho việc vận dụng phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán trong nghiên cứu và học tập ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: Phân tích diễn ngôn phê phán, phạm trù cú pháp - từ vựng, đánh giá ngầm ẩn, biến đổi khí hậu.

Appendix



<URL: <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/stephen-byers-kyoto-is-not-enough-to-tackle-climate-change-483551.html?origin=internalSearch>>

Wednesday 16 February 2005

Stephen Byers: Kyoto Protocol is not enough to tackle climate change

If the mood is changing in the US, then Britain's presidency of the G8 provides the way forward

1 Today, the Kyoto Protocol on climate change comes into effect. It is significant because it
 2 represents agreed international action to tackle global warming. But it would be a
 3 dangerous mistake to believe that Kyoto provides a solution to the scale of the problem our
 4 world now faces.

5 This is not due to the refusal of the US to sign up, or the fact that countries which are
 6 rapidly industrialising, such as China and India, are not required to make cuts in their
 7 greenhouse gas emissions. The reality is that the cuts required by the Protocol are
 8 inadequate in the rapidly worsening situation. In addition, the focus on Kyoto over recent
 9 years, and whether or not it will come into force, has become an excuse for inaction. As a
 10 result the international discussions about the next step to build on Kyoto have not gained
 11 momentum.

12 Yet the urgency of the issue is clear. Climate change is no longer an abstract concept.
 13 Polar ice caps are melting. Sea levels are rising. The earth's temperature is undoubtedly
 14 climbing. The five hottest years on record have occurred in the last seven years.

15 So, Tony Blair was right when he said last year that in the long term climate change was
 16 the single most important issue faced by the world. No country, however rich and
 17 Britain's leadership this year of the G8, and for the UK presidency of the European Union
 18 in July.

19 Such action is not without political risk. There are two main dangers. The first is that
 20 potentially unpopular political decisions need to be taken now with the benefit not being
 21 seen for 10 or 20 years. There is a mismatch in timing between the electoral disadvantage
 22 and environmental advantage.

23 Secondly, no nation acting alone can resolve climate change. There has to be concerted
 24 international action with all countries playing their part. In particular, this means that
 25 somehow the United States, which is responsible for a quarter of the world's carbon
 26 emissions, must be engaged.

27 These are the political challenges facing Tony Blair. If Britain is to make a success of the
 28 G8 and the EU presidency, then it is going to have to lead by example.

29 The UK is on track to go significantly beyond the cuts in greenhouse gas emissions
 30 required under our Kyoto obligations. However, we have also set our own national target
 31 relating specifically to carbon dioxide emissions - to reduce them by 20 per cent below
 32 1990 levels by 2010.

33 As things presently stand, much more will need to be done if this goal is to be achieved.
 34 For the sake of our international credibility we must remain committed to this target and
 35 use the present review of our climate change programme to come forward with a package
 36 of policies that will put us back on track to meet this ambitious carbon emissions
 37 reduction.

38 The European emissions trading scheme has huge potential to change the way thousands
 39 of businesses think about their energy use. Yet it has got off to a faltering start. The UK
 40 Government wishes to revise upwards the level of carbon allocations to business. The EU

41 believes this proposal is too generous to industry and that as a result those businesses that
42 cut emissions, and therefore have carbon allocations to sell, will find few takers, thus
43 undermining the whole scheme.
44 This stand-off is to no one's benefit. The trading scheme could provide a model for the
45 rest of the world to follow. The EU and the UK urgently need to find a way forward
46 which puts the long term interests of us all first.
47 By our own actions at home we will be in a strong position to lead on the international
48 stage. The G8 has the potential to be the vehicle by which the US can engage in
49 discussions on climate change. I know that many regard the Bush administration as a lost
50 cause. That the Texas oil lobby has a vice-like grip on energy policy. But there are signs
51 that things are beginning to change. Post 11 September the issue of energy security has
52 moved rapidly up the political agenda.
53 American financial institutions in general, and the insurance sector in particular, are
54 increasingly concerned about the costs of extreme weather conditions. The insurance
55 industry estimates the cost of claims from last summer's hurricanes in the Gulf of Mexico
56 will amount to more than \$22bn (£11.6bn) in the Florida alone.
57 If the mood is changing in the US then the G8 provides the way forward. If we were to
58 propose a Climate Group made up of the G8 plus those rapidly developing countries such
59 as China and India to look at the action necessary to cut greenhouse gas emissions there is
60 a chance President Bush may be prepared to respond positively.
61 Today, we should give a single cheer for Kyoto but recognise that there needs to be a
62 fresh injection of political will if we are to achieve a new global consensus that will
63 provide the world with the means to meet the challenge of climate change.

The writer is co-chair of the International Climate Change Task Force.