

Evaluating Climate Commitment and Environmental Sustainability in Corporate Environmental Discourse

An Appraisal Analysis of Affect

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Abstract

Climate commitment and environmental sustainability have emerged as critical issues for corporations, leading to increased corporate communication showcasing efforts and strategies to achieve environmental goals. In this context, emotions are vital for fostering pro-environmental behaviours (Brosch 2021).

Corporations have been described as *emotional arenas* in which emotions are “deeply woven into the way power is exercised, trust is held, commitment formed, and decisions made” (Fineman 2000, 2). However, the role of emotions is often underestimated in corporate discourse (Wright and Nyberg 2015).

The present article investigates the use of evaluative language in climate-related corporate discourse, with a particular focus on the role of emotions in evaluative climate commitment and environmental sustainability. To this end, the study analyses a small specialised corpus (85,475 words) of corporate texts, which was manually annotated using the UAM Corpus Tool. The study employs the appraisal framework to scrutinise the use of attitudinal resources in the CRCLim annotated corpus, by looking at the affect sub-system (Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo Tenorio 2019; Martin and White 2005).

Findings shed light on the evaluative patterns corporations employ to articulate their commitment to climate change and environmental sustainability in response to the phenomenon's impact on corporate productivity. Therefore, the exploration of the emotional dimension within corporate discourse seeks to shed new light on the persuasive mechanisms of corporate communication regarding climate commitment and environmental sustainability.

*Emotions have no place in business,
unless you do business with them*

(Friedrich Dürrenmatt)

1. Introduction

The impacts of climate change on humans and more-than-humans have been well documented, with irreversible effects on Earth that threaten the future of life on this planet. This existential

threat to the future evokes complex emotional responses. On this line, Pihkala (2022, 1) argues that “the various phenomena related to the [climate] crisis cause various emotions in people and many contextual factors have an effect on them.” Thus, the emotional dimension of climate change discourse has become increasingly prominent, with fear, hope, and optimism emerging as core elements influencing behavioural responses, psychological well-being and health, moral issues, and decision-making.

In recent decades, climate change and environmental sustainability have emerged as core issues for the industrial sector. In particular, corporations face social and political pressure to align their practices with climate-related and environmental sustainability goals (Breeze 2013; Weingart et al. 2000). Corporate communication regarding climate change and environmental sustainability has become a strategic instrument for preserving a favourable public image in an environmentally conscious society. In this context, discourse is crucial in influencing audience perceptions and shaping social understandings of corporate responsibility and environmental leadership. In doing so, companies largely employ emotional language in environmental discourse to convey deeper engagement and understanding, while producing more impactful narratives surrounding environmental issues (Lee 2021; Thill and Bovée 2017). Despite extensive investigation of emotions across diverse disciplines and perspectives, the role of emotions in discourse remains complex.

In light of the above, the present article investigates the role of emotions in corporate environmental discourse. Drawing on the appraisal framework (Martin and White 2005) as a theoretical and methodological approach, and specifically on the AFFECT taxonomy developed by Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo Tenorio (2019), the study examines how food and beverage corporations employ attitudinal language to evaluate climate change and environmental sustainability.

The food and beverage industry has been recognised as a major contributor to environmental degradation, including water depletion, deforestation, biodiversity loss, and greenhouse gas emissions (Poore and Nemecek 2018). The discrepancy between this reality and the use of attitudinal language in their environmental disclosures constitutes a critical gap that this study aims to foreground. Hence, the analysis of attitudinal language contributes to the understanding of how the logics of globalised capitalism are reproduced through the affective dimension of corporate environmental discourse. Adopting ecolinguistics as a critical lens, the study questions whether emotions function to perpetuate growth-oriented corporate ideology, reconcile ecological responsibility with profitability, and obscure corporate implications in environmental degradation. More specifically, the work addresses the following main research questions:

1. How are climate change and environmental sustainability evaluated in corporate environmental discourse?
2. What kind of inscribed and invoked AFFECT strategies are employed in the corpus?
3. How does the use of emotions contribute to the alignment with, or challenge, the principles of ecological responsibility?

This article conceptualises emotions as core elements of the evaluative and interpersonal meanings negotiated in texts. The adopted taxonomy divides emotions into *goal-seeking* emotions, *goal-achievement* emotions and *goal-relation* emotions and is particularly well suited to corporate discourse, where goals are always embedded in invoked and inscribed emotional language. Using this framework, the study presents and discusses the findings of manual annotation of a small corpus of corporate texts addressing commitments to climate change and environmental sustainability (hereafter, CRCLim annotated corpus). In particular, it explores how emotions such as INCLINATION, CONFIDENCE or HAPPINESS are distributed across the corpus and how they contribute to narratives of corporate commitment to environmental sustainability and climate change. This study, as part of a larger work on climate change evaluation in corporate discourse, extends the qualitative analysis of appraisal also from an ecolinguistics perspective on climate commitment and environmental sustainability.

The article is organised as follows: Section 2 describes the theoretical and methodological framework employed in this study. In particular, it focuses on the relationship between emotions and discourse in corporate communication, the appraisal framework and ecolinguistics. Section 3 provides a detailed description of the annotation protocol and the sample selected for the manual annotation of appraisal. Section 4 presents and discusses the findings regarding the linguistic realisation of affect in the CRCLim annotated corpus. Concluding remarks, limitations and avenues for future research are outlined in Section 5.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

2.1 Emotions in corporate environmental discourse

Emotions are deeply embedded in human language practices. Any act of meaning-making is oriented towards particular goals and is therefore underpinned by affective motivations. Emotions are not only at the core of explicit emotional utterances but are also encoded with varying degrees of implicitness. As Alba-Juez and Haugh (2025) argue, language is one of the main semiotic resources through which emotions are conceptualised and expressed. Yet emotionality is closely interwoven with reasoning, often providing the basis for decisions that appear purely rational (Moisander, et al. 2016).

In corporate settings, the role of emotion has long been marginalised. Business organisations have typically been regarded as rational, objective and impartial. However, more recent work in organisational and business communication has challenged this assumption, showing that corporations are anything but emotion-free environments (Wright and Nyberg 2015). This led to a shift in the *emotional turn* in corporate discourse studies. Within this shift, scholars have begun examining how language and emotion interact to shape corporate practices and discourses, highlighting the centrality of emotion in the strategic, profit-oriented ways corporations operate and communicate (Orts Llopis 2022).

Despite the breadth of work on emotion in psychology, sociology and philosophy, emotions in discourse remain a complex object of study, partly because they can take multiple forms and functions (Thompson and Alba-Juez 2014). Emotions may be realised phonologically, morphologically, syntactically, lexically, semantically and pragmatically, and thus permeate the different strata of linguistic encoding (Alba-Juez and Mackenzie 2019).

Within the corporate sphere, emotions are as constitutive as in any other social domain (Wright and Nyberg 2015). From a systemic-functional perspective, emotional positioning is typically associated with the interpersonal metafunction of language (Halliday 1994), through which speakers negotiate relationships, express attitudes and align (or disalign) with others. Yet, emotional language is also closely linked to leadership communication, in which emotions are employed to convey enthusiasm, authenticity, loyalty, and engagement (Lee 2021). In this regard, emotions can be seen as central to how corporations formulate goals, make decisions and pursue achievements (Orts Llopis 2022). Corporate actors, therefore, mobilise emotions to advance strategic objectives, reinforcing organisational priorities (Lee 2021; Fineman 2000). As Moisander et al. (2016) note, emotions are intrinsic to cognitions, beliefs, and moral judgements, underscoring the importance of emotional resonance in the construction of corporate norms and in securing stakeholder compliance.

In the context of climate change and environmental sustainability, emotions are also leveraged to address public concerns and align environmental protection with profitability. However, this alignment is purely symbolic. The use of emotional language in corporate environmental commitment functions to reconcile corporate identity with public environmental expectations without necessarily implying transformative change. Wright and Nyberg (2015; 2012) draw on the notion of *emotionology* to capture the emotional standards that regulate how actors are expected to feel and to express emotion about issues such as climate change. Corporations mainly promote an emotionology of optimism in environmental discourse. This optimism, however, often aligns more closely with reputational and market interests. It enables a form of emotional management in which climate change and environmental sustainability are evaluated as opportunities for innovation and new markets, reinforcing the business-as-usual

approach. By emphasising hope and satisfaction rather than urgency, loss or complicity in environmental harm, companies build eco-brands around sustainability (Wright and Nyberg 2015). This emphasis on hope supports the belief that market-based solutions will be sufficient to address the climate crisis (Pihkala 2022), while more critical aspects – such as corporate contributions to environmental degradation – are backgrounded (Brosch 2021; Wright and Nyberg 2015; 2012; Fineman 2000; 1996). In this way, corporate discourse on environmental sustainability and climate change aligns perfectly with the broader functions of corporate discourse, understood as the means by which interpersonal and organisational goals are advanced and realised (Jaworska 2020; Breeze 2013). Hence, corporations often use performance disclosures to showcase their efforts to reduce environmental harm, blending factual reporting with promotional elements to inform the audience and manage their corporate image. Through the deliberate use of inscribed and invoked emotional language, corporations seek to engage stakeholders and enhance their reputational standing in the context of environmental accountability. In this sense, corporate environmental discourse has been described as linguistically performative and as playing a vital role in shaping ecological realities within business and in its relationships with the environment (Incelli 2025; Jaworska 2018; Alexander 2009).

The use of emotion in climate-related corporate discourse may be understood in relation to the relationship between language and the environment. In this regard, Stibbe (2021, 2) argues that “the link between ecology and language is that how humans treat each other and the natural world is influenced by our thoughts, concepts, ideas, ideologies and worldviews, and these in turn are shaped through language.” In the context of climate-related corporate discourse, the connection refers to how language is used to shape environmental understanding and influence action through emotions. Specifically, the relationship between language, emotions and the environment operates at the economic level, as language serves to legitimise existing systems of growth. Additionally, it plays a role in identity construction, as consumer identities are formed and lifestyles are directed towards accumulation through the use of emotions in language.

Importantly, the communication of climate and environmental sustainability commitment through emotional language often reflects “enlightened self-interest” (Fineman 1996, 485) rather than deep concern for the destructive effects of climate change. Emotions are used to reconcile environmental discourse with economic imperatives and to present climate commitment and environmental sustainability as both morally desirable and commercially sensible. This makes it essential to examine emotional language in climate-related corporate discourse in more detail. Such analysis can shed light on how emotions are used to engage audiences, reinforce claims of commitment to climate action, and construct collective eco-

identities for corporations and their stakeholders.

2.2 An ecolinguistic approach to the appraisal framework

The present work employs an ecolinguistic approach to investigate emotions in climate-related corporate discourse. Ecolinguistics explores

patterns of language that influence how people both think about, and treat, the world [...] There are certain key stories about economic growth, about technological progress, about nature as an object to be used or conquered, about profit and success, that have profound implications for how we treat the systems that life depends on. (Stibbe 2021, 1)

From an ecolinguistic perspective, corporations employ evaluative language to construct stories that shape the relationship between human activity and the natural world. Specifically, emotions are commonly used in corporate environmental discourse to construct stories in which corporations are benevolent environmental actors pursuing growth in harmony with nature, erasing the material conditions of ecological destruction. From this perspective, this study therefore employs ecolinguistics to unravel how the use of emotional language contributes to ecological destruction. It primarily adheres to the appraisal framework and the principles of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) as articulated by Martin and White (2005). As already stated, the interpersonal metafunction concerns the way in which language constructs and negotiates social relationships within SFL (Halliday 1994). The appraisal framework operationalises the interpersonal metafunction at the level of discourse semantics by identifying the evaluative linguistic patterns through which speakers or writers position themselves in relation to events, entities, and interlocutors (Martin and White 2005).

The appraisal framework has become one of the most valuable models for the analysis of attitudinal language (Hidalgo Tenorio and Benítez-Castro 2020). It constitutes a system of interpersonal meanings within discourse semantics that examines the attitudinal dimension of discourse (Martin and White 2005). As Martin (2014, 9) notes, discourse semantics cannot be regarded as “a list of cohesive ties relating to one grammatical unit to another, but as a further level of structure in its own right.” Furthermore, discourse semantics enables researchers to “reinterpret from an interpersonal perspective resources that are experientially constituted in lexicogrammar (i.e., mental processes and states of affection)” (Martin 2014, 19). For this reason, the appraisal framework operates at a more abstract level, allowing meanings to spread across discourse semantics and a variety of lexicogrammatical systems. Appraisal offers a generalisation of lexicogrammatical systems that bring feelings into relation with one another, enabling the delineation of evaluative prosodies. Therefore, appraisal relies on evaluation with regard to “the kinds of attitudes that are negotiated in a text, the strength of the feelings

involved and the ways in which values are sourced and reader aligned” (Martin and White 2005, 22).

The appraisal framework comprises three interrelated systems: ATTITUDE, ENGAGEMENT and GRADUATION. ATTITUDE is the general system responsible for expressing emotions, social judgments and aesthetic evaluations. Accordingly, it is divided into three subsystems: AFFECT, JUDGEMENT, and APPRECIATION. AFFECT is concerned with the feelings or the emotional reactions of the appraiser, whereas JUDGEMENT and APPRECIATION are regarded as the institutionalisation of AFFECT. In this context, JUDGEMENT focuses on the evaluation of people’s behaviours, and APPRECIATION is concerned with the evaluation of things in the environment with which the appraiser interacts (Hart 2014; Martin and White 2005).

Broadly speaking, AFFECT, as part of the ATTITUDE system, has been the subject of considerable scholarly attention. Martin and White (2005) concluded that AFFECT is crucial in understanding how evaluations are driven by feelings generated in discursive practices. As for AFFECT, this article draws on the refined taxonomy taken from Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo Tenorio (2019). This taxonomy is the result of a psychologically inspired approach to the linguistic expression of emotion. The revised framework emphasises the adaptive function of emotions and places the notion of *goal* at its core, which is considered the foundation of all types of emotions. In this regard, emotions arise from the perception of events as either beneficial or harmful to one’s goals. Consequently, the authors argue that emotion classification should be goal-oriented and divide emotions into three emotion types. The category of *goal-seeking* EMOTION encompasses emotional states that motivate an individual to pursue or avoid a particular goal. This category includes emotional states regarding INTEREST, INCLINATION, and SURPRISE. The second group, *goal-achievement* EMOTION, comprises emotions associated with the attainment or failure to attain goals, needs, and values. This category includes DIS/SATISFACTION, IN/SECURITY and UN/HAPPINESS. In *goal-achievement* EMOTION, HAPPINESS and SATISFACTION are treated as more inclusive categories. Moreover, they distinguish between hedonic HAPPINESS (related to sensory pleasures) and eudaimonic HAPPINESS (related to the fulfilment of social needs). Finally, the category of *goal-relation* EMOTION pertains to instinctive attitudes, “permeating our interaction with certain entities, often going beyond specific events and situations where those entities were involved” (Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo Tenorio 2019, 329).

Given the salient importance of the notion of *goal* in understanding the nature of emotions and in corporate discourse, this taxonomy is deemed applicable to analysing affect in corporate discourse on environmental sustainability and commitment to climate change. Finally, while the appraisal framework primarily provides analytical categories, this study also adopts a critical discourse perspective in interpreting the findings. In this sense, the use of emotions and

attitudinal language is examined not only as interpersonal resources but also as linguistic patterns that perpetuate consumerist corporate ideologies. The study concentrates on how inscribed and invoked emotions contribute to the legitimisation of corporate environmental identities, the naturalisation of growth-oriented sustainability narratives, and the backgrounding of corporate responsibility for ecological harm.

3. Data and methods

The year 2022 has been defined by *Copernicus* (the Earth Observation Component of the European Union's Space programme) as *the year of extremes*, which saw record droughts, temperatures, wildfires, and floods worldwide. Such contextual relevance had implications for corporate communication on climate commitment and environmental sustainability, providing fertile ground for applying the appraisal framework to examine how food and beverage corporations evaluate their commitment to climate change and environmental sustainability through affect analysis. This resulted in the compilation of the CRCLim annotated corpus, comprising 21 corporate texts, totalling 85,475 words (see Table 1). The CRCLim annotated corpus is compiled from randomly selected texts drawn from a larger corpus (CRCLim corpus, 7,272,328 words) comprising CSR reports, CEO letters, and web pages on environmental sustainability published by food and beverage corporations operating in the Global North and the Global South between 2015 and 2022. Given the considerable size of the corpus, it was not feasible to manually annotate the entire dataset for appraisal analysis. The CRCLim annotated corpus was therefore selected for manual annotation to enable in-depth analysis while preserving the representativeness of the CRCLim corpus.

Place	CEO letters	CSR reports	Web pages
USA	984	13,088	401
UK	359	7636	326
Canada	770	4102	539
Italy	1102	6690	466
Australia	932	21,466	1921
South Africa	2029	13,749	678
India	914	5882	1441
Total	7090	72,613	5772

Tab. 1: An overview of the CRCLim annotated corpus

The identification of evaluative expressions across texts is often considered subjective. The genre and the communicative contexts in which texts are produced significantly impact the interpretation of the meanings expressed and, consequently, the annotation process. In this context, manual annotation of corpora for analysing appraisal is considered a valid method for reducing accuracy bias associated with the automatic identification of predefined lists of

evaluative expressions. This approach enables a comprehensive, detailed analysis of evaluative language that would not be feasible with purely automatic methods (Fuoli 2018a).

The manual annotation of the corpus was carried out through the software UAM Corpus Tool (O'Donnell 2008). The annotation process relied on the annotation protocol developed by Fuoli (2018a) in order to preserve the principles of reliability, replicability and transparency of findings. The reliability of the annotation protocol and the findings was assessed through an intra-coder agreement. Following Fuoli and Hommerberg (2015) and Spooren and Degand (2010), in the one-coder manual annotation of corpora, the entire corpus is annotated by a single annotator. Although the annotator may employ subjective annotation strategies, it is reasonable to assume these strategies are systematic. Therefore, this does not hinder the ability to address research questions.

In particular, the annotation process involved several steps, including the sample selection and preparation of the corpus in UAM Corpus Tool, the development of the annotation manual and the assessment of the scheme and the annotation protocol, the revision of the annotation manual, the annotation of the corpus and the intra-coder reliability test and the analysis of the results (Fuoli 2018a).

Given the context-dependent nature of evaluative discursive patterns in the expression of emotions, particular attention was paid to internal consistency to ensure the replicability and reliability of the findings. In doing so, the coding scheme was systematically applied to the annotated corpus, and annotations were compared within and across texts to ensure coherence over two time intervals.

4. Findings and discussion

This section discusses the findings from manual annotation of the CRCLim annotated corpus. This article is part of a broader study which investigates the evaluation of climate change in corporate discourse. For this reason, the quantitative results presented here are sourced from the doctoral dissertation that serves as the foundation for this work.

Quantitative analysis of the CRCLim annotated corpus indicates a bias towards positive emotional language, accounting for over 80% of annotated instances, as may be seen in Figure 1. In line with previous studies, this suggests a strong tendency among corporations to cultivate environmental optimism and trust.

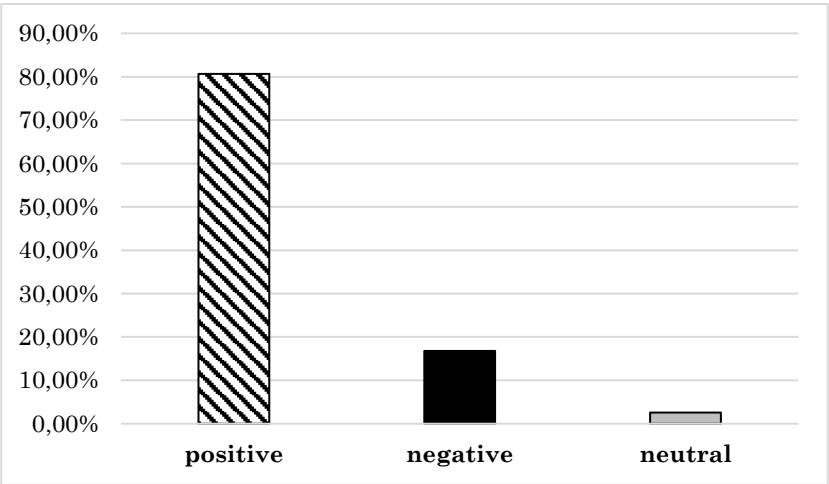


Fig. 1: Positivity in the CRClm annotated corpus

The examination of the annotated data indicates that corporate discourse concerning environmental issues predominantly embodies *goal-achievement* and *goal-seeking* emotional dimensions, particularly those associated with SATISFACTION (SECURITY and HAPPINESS) and INCLINATION. Such categories reflect “instances of volition to engage with a stimulus” as well as “affective states pertaining to our ecosocial wellbeing” (Benítez-Castro and Hidalgo Tenorio 2019, 312):

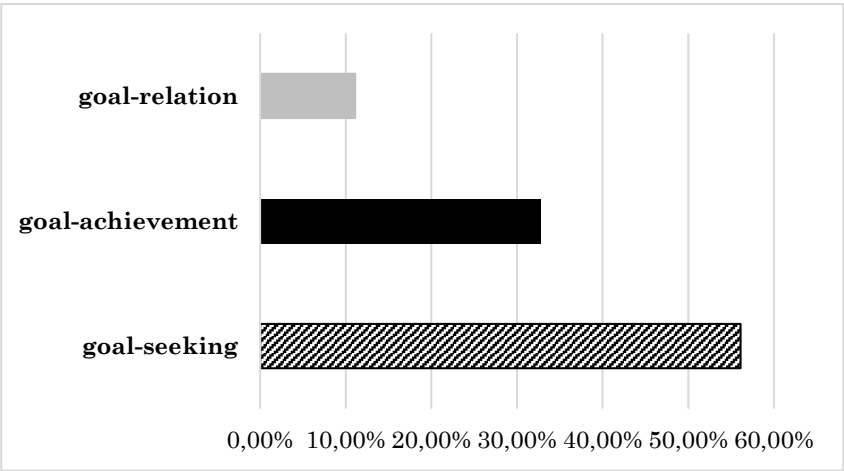


Fig. 2: EMOTION-type in the CRClm annotated corpus

As the graph shows, the use of *goal-seeking* emotions is salient in the CRClm annotated corpus, accounting for 56.1%. Goal-seeking emotional realisations are encoded in the category of INCLINATION, thereby signalling intentionality in corporate discourse on climate action and environmental sustainability. This dynamic effectively cultivates a goal-oriented narrative that is characterised by aspirational language. The strategic use of evaluative patterns under INCLINATION not only aligns corporate communication with overarching strategic environmental objectives but also reinforces the commitment to climate action and fosters a

sense of corporate responsibility. On the other side, *goal-achievement* emotions are commonly employed to convey success, stability and reassurance.

Interestingly, the CRCLim annotated corpus highlights a noteworthy alternation between inscribed and invoked emotions. In particular, inscribed emotions are explicitly encoded through evaluative patterns that unambiguously express emotional states (e.g., *proud*, *happy*, *concerned*). Invoked emotions, by contrast, are triggered implicitly through lexico-grammatical patterns and contextual evaluation, inviting the audience to infer determination, reassurance, or urgency without overtly naming an emotion. This distinction is crucial to the analysis, as it highlights where corporations explicitly present themselves as emotionally invested in environmental sustainability, but also how seemingly neutral formulations can carry evaluative force and contribute to the legitimisation of corporate environmental identities.

The salient presence of *goal-seeking* INCLINATION indicates corporate motivation to obtain a positive goal:

- (1) **Protecting** the environment: As the effects of climate change become more frequent, more severe and more challenging for communities and businesses, CORP is **committed** to helping the world mitigate the most severe effects by managing our greenhouse gas emissions (CN_rp)
- (2) To foster a Healthy Environment, we are **committed** to doing our part to meet the challenge of climate change. New to our strategy is a science-based target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions [...]. Meeting this target will require changes in our operations and throughout our value chain (US_ceo)
- (3) CORP recognises climate change as the single most significant sustainability challenge facing our world and impacting business and society. To support the shift to a low carbon economy we have **committed** to reaching Net Zero carbon emissions by 2040. In this way we support the outcomes of the Paris Agreement and the objective to limit global warming to well below 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C (UK_rp)
- (4) We are **focused on growth**: our **goal** is to become the leader in branded and value-added seafood in North America and to **help feed the world** through sustainable and responsible sourcing. Our value chain spans the globe, impacting communities, partners and environments worldwide. Our longstanding **commitments** to sourcing seafood responsibly and upholding high environmental and ethical standards were strengthened in 2022 through new initiatives and goals (CN_rp)

- (5) At CORP it's our aim to procure the raw materials we use in a way that is as environmentally sound as possible, considering for impacts on land, water and biodiversity. Environmental sustainability in food production is critical not just for the planet, but also for improving the resilience of our supply chain. **Combatting** deforestation [...] is a key issue for the whole food industry. We **commit** to working towards zero net deforestation and conversion-free sourcing by 2025 for the high-risk raw materials that we use (UK_rp)
- (6) Mitigating climate change associated risk and implementing an energy resilience plan is core to CORP's sustainability strategy. In **committing** to reduce our environmental footprint, we **strive** to reach our target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. We **continue to focus** on improving our energy efficiency and seek to reduce our consumption of non-renewable energy (SAF_wp)

As examples 1-6 show, INCLINATION primarily concerns corporate commitment to climate action to achieve environmental sustainability. Hence, references to pursuing quantified goals (e.g., zero net deforestation, shift to a low-carbon economy, management of GHG emissions, and carbon neutrality) are often implicitly emotionally charged through the use of verbs such as *commit*, *protect*, *strive* and *combat*. In doing so, corporations position themselves as proactive participants in mitigating climate change. In particular, the prominent use of *commit* signals a strong willingness to achieve environmental sustainability through collective, temporally displaced goals. The verb *strive* (example 6) suggests corporate dedication and effort. However, by using *strive* corporations foreground the importance of efforts over the accomplishment of goals, as these statements may be regarded as not “sufficient to reassure shareholders and investors that the company will live up to their expectations and turn their investments into profit” (Fuoli 2018b, 18). Interestingly, through the use of *protect* in a nominalised form (example 1), corporations in the CRClim annotated corpus attempt to appraise environmental protection as a genuine goal, rather than a response to the company’s contribution to environmental harm. Similarly, *help* (example 4) is used as a strategic pattern to convey INCLINATION, while downgrading corporate responsibility in environmental degradation. In this way, corporations position themselves as good global citizens. However, this may suggest that while appearing committed to climate action and environmental sustainability for benevolence towards the environment and societies, these statements reveal the selfish nature of corporations, where commitment is not genuine but profit-oriented. This perfectly aligns with the notion of greenwashing, which aims to construct a favourable corporate image (Vollero 2022). The use of emotional language thus functions as a reputational instrument that positions

corporations as responsible ecological actors while leaving the underlying business-as-usual approach intact. Moreover, the employment of *combat* (see example 5) engenders an aggressive mode of conveying INCLINATION, whereby climate-related issues are externalised and evaluated as matters to be combated in order to secure corporate profits (Del Gaudio 2024). Thus, securitisation of profits in climate-related corporate discourse indicates the alignment with a business-as-usual approach to environmental sustainability.

INCLINATION is often linked to negative evaluations of climate change or environmental harm. Corporations increasingly conceptualise climate change as a multifaceted issue, emphasising the urgency of climate action to mitigate its detrimental impacts. By invoking feelings of insecurity, companies seek to portray their commitment to climate action as firmly rooted in the prevailing crisis context, often by conveying destructive scenarios that underscore the severity of the challenge. The use of such negative evaluations of climate change functions as a background for showcasing corporate motivation and inclination towards business growth.

Similarly, the use of *pursue* and *objective* conveys *goal-seeking* INCLINATION as they overtly signal the corporate aspirational intent and forward-looking goals:

- (7) In line with the UNFCCC Paris Agreement's commitments and our sustainability strategy, we are **pursuing** targets of 50% absolute reduction in GHG emissions by 2030 (on a 2019 baseline), independence from third-party non-renewable electricity supply by 2040, and carbon neutrality (Net Zero) across our operations by 2050 (AF_rp)
- (8) At CORP, sustainability is integral to our core business. As we **pursue** increasingly **ambitious objectives** such as adopting a GHG management program and forming a growing number of sustainability-oriented partnerships and collaborations, our purpose of Reimagining Seafood to Nourish Life continues to sharpen our vision and fuel our progress (CN_rp)
- (9) The priorities within these pillars align with many of the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), which are designed to serve as a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all by 2030. This holistic approach was co-created with colleagues across the company which will enable us to better integrate sustainability throughout our business so that longer term **ambitions** can be achieved with measurable and targeted goals (US_rp)

- (10) We set **aspirations**, **objectives** and targets that drive environmental performance and continue to work towards these (AUNZ_rp2022)

In *goal-seeking* EMOTION, patterns annotated under the category of INCLINATION are accompanied by *ambitious*, *ambition* and *aspirations*, which are characteristic elements of corporate aspirational discourse. In particular, ambition is typically described as the hopeful desire to achieve something, usually accompanied by determination and hard work. It involves setting goals, pursuing them, and deriving satisfaction from their accomplishment. Hence, these patterns serve to establish competitive positioning and desire for expansion. In examples 8-10, then, *ambitious*, *ambitions* and *aspirations* are employed to not leave space for uncertainty, conflict or failure. The language of ambition thus becomes a key resource for legitimization, allowing corporations to position themselves as forward-looking and ethical, while overlooking the contradiction between ecological repair and continued growth. Although ambition does not explicitly evoke an emotional reaction to specific events, achieving ambitious goals is associated with feelings of excitement, joy, and SATISFACTION.

As can be seen from Figure 2, *goal-achievement* emotions in the CRCLim annotated corpus primarily find realisation in the category of SATISFACTION. *Goal-achievement* emotions are often realised through inscribed attitude markers. Inscribed SECURITY realisations are specifically employed to articulate perceptions of protection, certainty, and safety concerning the leadership environmental roles of corporations. This approach emphasises the significance of corporate responsibility in fostering a secure and sustainable environment:

- (11) Healthy freshwater, soil and ecosystems are essential to the long-term success of our business, farmers' businesses, and to communities. We **believe** protecting and restoring the environment is critical to safeguard opportunities for future generations. To achieve this, we're working to develop the skills, knowledge and systems to regenerate the environment throughout our global supply chain (AUNZ_wp)
- (12) Throughout our long existence, we, at CORP, **have believed** that sustainability across our business ecosystem is the key to ensuring a safe environment while giving the highest regard to human rights. Our sustainability strategy which embodies the vision of being a Responsible Global Total Foods Company is in the hearts of all our stakeholders and we pursue this by setting benchmarks in all areas of our operations (INSL_ceo)

The verb *believe* conveys a sense of corporate integrity and highlights the organisation's commitment to environmental issues (Fuoli 2018b). Within the CRCLim annotated corpus, it is employed to strengthen the company's image and demonstrate confidence in its capacity to restore the environment by enhancing skills and knowledge. This application underscores a self-promotional trust in the corporation's competence and its capability to tackle environmental challenges. In the examples above, *believe* encodes a sense of assurance, quiet confidence that the corporate view of sustainability and the environment is correct and stable. The frequent use of *we believe* suggests that corporations in the CRCLim annotated corpus are emotionally at ease with their role in proposing environmental sustainability solutions. Yet, the use of the present perfect in example 12 (*we, at CORP, have believed*) embeds this emotional stance in historical continuity in order to further enhance corporate confidence. The realisation of SECURITY emotions through the use of the verb *believe* suggests a corporate attitude towards erasing insecurity and conflict. Hence, the linguistic and emotional construction of corporate confidence in the communication of climate commitment and environmental sustainability lies in the systematic erasure of doubt and conflict, thereby constructing a protective and responsible corporate self that is difficult to challenge.

SECURITY is also realised explicitly through the use of the adjective *confident* in the corpus:

- (13) While we are **confident** in our capabilities and our position for growth, we know that the quality of our partnerships and the work we do together is the best way to ensure a sustainable future for all (CN_rp)
- (14) Looking ahead, it looks like it's going to be another challenging year. However, I remain **confident** that our ESG agenda strengthens and complements CORP's business strategy and helps the company to fulfil its purpose and grow in a positive and sustainable way (UK_ceo)
- (15) I'm proud to share our 14th Sustainability Report. I am **confident** it demonstrates the maturity of our sustainability journey and shows the sustainable and solid way we conduct our business, everywhere we operate (IT_ceo)

In examples 13-15, the communication of corporate SECURITY lies in the reassurance to stakeholders through the affective certainty in corporate competencies. In particular, in examples 14 and 15, the use of CEOs personal voice intensifies the rhetorical load of corporate confidence. In example 14, the use of the verb *remain* before *confident* and the acknowledgement of climate-related challenges for corporations further enhances confidence as enduring and

resilient in the face of difficulty. Accordingly, corporate confidence is grouped with *maturity* and *solid* in example 15, which retrospectively validates the company's own emotional construction of strength and security.

The adjective *confident* reflects a sense of emotional strength, assurance, and lack of anxiety and doubts. It is often used to describe corporate feelings related to the corporate ability to perform or succeed. Therefore, it signals a strong sense of certainty and SATISFACTION in the corporate ability to achieve climate-related goals, reflecting the invoked affective dimension of corporate discourse. In these examples, SECURITY encompasses not only confidence in achieving goals but also the corporate belief in the robustness and reliability of the approach to climate change. Hence, SECURITY indicates that food and beverage corporations usually have confidence in their methods and outcomes, leading to a positive self-evaluation of sustainability efforts. In example 15, SECURITY is also coupled with the category of HAPPINESS, as the use of the adjective *proud* suggests.

Proud signals positive SATISFACTION, typically associated with achievement, success, or a sense of value:

- (16) Despite significant challenges in the global supply chain, we **were able to secure** a steady seafood supply through the strength of our diversified global supply chain and our strong supplier relationships. 98% of the seafood we sourced was from audited suppliers, demonstrating our commitment to responsible sourcing practices that ensure we can feed a growing world population with healthy protein, now and into the future. Managing our emissions. We are **proud** of our long legacy of sustainable business practices but understand the urgency with which the world needs to address climate change (CN_ceo)
- (17) CORP has been committed to making food that people love while having a positive impact on the communities we call home and the planet we share. It's in our DNA and has always been fundamental to who we are as a company. We are **proud** of the impact we have made throughout our history. Today, as the world demands more—and as macro-economic, social and environmental changes accelerate—we will demand more of ourselves (US_ceo)

The use of *proud* not only expresses happiness but legitimises a corporation's environmental records. Through the use of *pride* as a realisation of HAPPINESS, corporations turn environmental sustainability into an object of deserved satisfaction. Yet, *pride* is embedded in corporate identity and history. Hence, the use of the evaluative adjective *proud* next to *our long*

legacy of sustainable business practices (example 15), *our DNA* and *the impact we have made throughout our history* (example 17) serves to influence public perception of corporations as always-responsible and always-ethical. In this context, the emotion of *pride* is not about a single achievement but about an entire historical trajectory. The historical perspective is strategically employed by corporations in order to be perceived as unassailable. Therefore, *pride* is regarded as a self-praising and motivating emotion through which food and beverage corporations transform environmental sustainability into an object of satisfaction. For this reason, it plays a crucial role as it contributes to enhancing corporate stance and self-esteem. Through the emotion of *pride*, corporate actors position themselves as leaders in climate action and environmental sustainability, aiming to elicit a positive emotional response from the audience.

Corporations express SATISFACTION in relation to their involvement in climate-related initiatives:

- (18) For our farmers to meet expectations for methane reduction by 2030 and 2050, significant investment was made by both Government and industry in research and development to create practical steps that farmers can take. [...] we are **pleased** to be one of the partners in the new Centre for Climate Action on Agricultural Emissions (AUNZ_rp2022)

The use of *pleased* indicates the realisation of inscribed emotion to express gratitude. In example 18, SATISFACTION is tied to corporate involvement in proactive and impactful climate action. *Pleased* refers to a feeling of mild joy, often in response to something agreeable or satisfying. Therefore, it presents a more modest realisation of SATISFACTION, centred on enjoyment or comfort derived from a sense of collaboration, whereas *pride* centres on a stronger sense of fulfilment tied to happiness.

Lastly, SATISFACTION is also implicitly conveyed as embedded in corporate ability and the possibility to achieve goals:

- (19) Our efforts to create a sustainable working environment have allowed us to **achieve** many of our environmental targets while further promoting diversity and well-being within our organisation. Our sustainability strategy, which we unveiled last year, has 4 core pillars, supported by 8 levers and further split into 26 programs. These programs have been assigned annual targets and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to evaluate our progress as we put the strategy into action (INSL_ceo)

- (20) Despite a challenging economic and geopolitical environment for all businesses, the Group was **able to grow** and to **increase investments** in its brands, R&D and production capacity. These investments represent our continuous approach to improving the quality, freshness and safety of our products, while reducing our environmental impact (IT_ceo)

As these examples show, SATISFACTION: HAPPINESS is not only about the self-praise narrative regarding the achievement of goals, but it also indicates the way in which corporations appraise the financial results emerging from environmental sustainability and their position in relation to it. In examples 19-20, HAPPINESS is anchored to the notions of investments and growth. In this sense, business expansion is prioritised, with environmental benefits presented as a rhetorical surface. Therefore, SATISFACTION is strongly self-referential. Companies in the CRCLim annotated corpus evaluate their own performance and structures as successful and adequate. Instances annotated under the categories of INCLINATION, SECURITY and HAPPINESS, do more than simply register commitment, confidence and success. The use of inscribed and invoked emotional language is employed strategically to evaluate climate commitment and environmental sustainability positively and construct a narrative in which corporations are already on the right path, already achieving, already investing, such that deeper questions about ambition, sufficiency, and structural change risk being neutralised by the sheer density of self-congratulatory achievement language.

A further dimension that characterises all the analytical categories is temporality. *Goal-seeking* EMOTION is strongly future-oriented, whereas *goal-achievement* EMOTION is mainly retrospective and anchored in past achievements and long-term responsibility. Therefore, the temporal dimension is crucial as it allows corporations to combine future-oriented optimism and retrospective self-validation.

5. Concluding remarks

This article provided an examination of the emotional language in corporate environmental discourse with special attention to the evaluation of the commitment to climate change and environmental sustainability. By focusing on *goal-seeking* and *goal-achievement* emotions, the study appears to show that the use of inscribed and invoked emotions is central in corporate discourse, where evaluative discursive patterns are used strategically to evaluate commitment to environmental issues, position corporations as responsible actors, and manage relationships with stakeholders.

Results suggest a corporate bias towards the use of positive emotional language. Within this

context, goal-seeking emotions are especially salient and encoded under the category of INCLINATION. Through INCLINATION, corporations position themselves as proactive and forward-looking actors, showcasing strong motivation and foregrounding the importance of efforts over the importance of environmental sustainability. At the same time, *goal-achievement* emotions are strategically employed to signal success, reassurance and stability.

These findings have several implications for the study of climate-related corporate discourse. This study indicates that emotions in corporate texts are highly patterned and strongly aligned with organisational interests. Hence, AFFECT is used to stabilise a narrative of proactive, confident and self-regulating corporate actors, rather than to foreground vulnerability, conflict or responsibility for environmental harm. Yet, the bias towards the use of positive emotions suggests an anthropocentric, utilitarian and cynical evaluation of corporate commitment to climate change and environmental sustainability, which are considered resources for business growth and investment. Despite the use of emotions to produce proactive and protective narratives, corporate discourse on environmental sustainability and climate commitment is deeply rooted in consumerist ideologies, perpetuating business-as-usual approaches that fail to address the systemic changes needed to tackle environmental degradation (Burnett 2026).

This article contributes to the ongoing debate on environmental issues in ecolinguistics and critical discourse studies by demonstrating that corporate environmental discourse is structured by a distinctive emotional pattern that privileges optimism, ambition, satisfaction and security. By bringing emotional language to the centre of analysis, the study aimed to demonstrate how food and beverage corporations selected for this study use AFFECT to legitimise their environmental strategies, to reconcile climate action with business-as-usual growth-oriented ideologies, and to construct eco-identities that are difficult to challenge. From an ecolinguistic perspective, this results in the production of the stories *we die by* (Nerlich and Jaspal 2012; Goatly 2001). Corporate environmental optimism aligns with stakeholder expectations and enhances a broader societal understanding that associates progress with technological innovation and economic growth. Consequently, the evaluation of corporate commitments to climate change and environmental sustainability reveals the self-serving nature of corporate discourse, as authentic concern for the environment and the pursuit of sustainable living practices are frequently marginalised or overlooked.

The study also has limitations, which suggest directions for future research. It only took into account a single year (2022) and a single industrial sector (food and beverage). Future work could extend the analysis to other sectors and time periods. Yet, comparative studies of corporate genres could further elucidate how different genres employ emotional language to serve distinct communication purposes.

Bionote

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