

Promoting and Preserving 'The Waste Land': The Environmental Discourse of the UK Government

Abstract: The notion of language as a form of action which is socially shaped and socially constitutive allows us to think of any text as constitutive of social identity, social relations and systems of knowledge and beliefs (Fairclough 1992). Starting from this assumption, the study was aimed at investigating the UK government's 'beliefs' and viewpoint concerning environmental issues. In particular, the UK Department of Energy and Climate change and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' actions have been taken into account focussing on political speeches concerning environment, including sustainability, water and land pollution, food safety, energy efficiency, agricultural emissions, climate change. According to Fairclough (1989, 1995), ideologies are socially and discursively formed, reproduced and changed in a variety of ways which include institutional forms of discourse among their most prestigious varieties. In the study attention has been paid to the way the institutional Departments of the UK government build-up their own 'discourse' while promoting their own action on protecting and preserving the environment. In short, the final goal has been to focus on UK Government's ideological attitude towards the preservation of 'the waste' world environment.

Keywords: *evaluation, environment, CDA, food, commitment, politics*

Corpus, aims, methodology

The study is aimed at investigating the UK government's action and viewpoint concerning environmental issues. In particular, the UK Department of Energy and Climate change and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' actions will be taken into account focussing on some crucial topics, such as environment, sustainability, water and land pollution, food safety, energy efficiency, agricultural emissions, climate change.¹ The assumption is based on the theoretical notion of language intended as a form of action which is socially shaped and socially constitutive and which allows us to think of any text as constitutive of social identity, social relations and systems of knowledge and beliefs.²

Furthermore, the concept of ideologies intended as socially and discursively formed will be considered. In particular, ideologies are reproduced and changed in a variety of ways which include institutional forms of discourse among their most prestigious varieties.³ More specifically, in the study, the relationship between Evaluation and ideologies will be investigated.⁴ The corpus is comprised of 30 speeches by politicians working for two British Departments. The final aim will be to focus on the corpus on evaluative adjectives co-

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>; <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-of-energy-climate-change>, accessed 14 May 2015.

² Norman Fairclough, *Discourse and Social Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992).

³ Fairclough, *Language and Power* (London: Longman, 1989); Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁴ Teun A. van Dijk, *Discourse and Power* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

occurring with some main key-words in order to analyse the institutional 'viewpoint' concerning some crucial environmental issues.

In short, attention will be paid to the way the institutional Departments of the UK government devoted to these issues build up their own 'discourse' while promoting their own action on protecting and preserving the environment.⁵

In the study, Antconc 3.2.4 W 2011 has been employed to provide quantitative data to be analysed from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. In particular, Antconc tools such as word frequency and clusters have been adopted in order to investigate the key-words in their immediate co-text.

⁵ Susan Hunston, *Corpus Approaches to Evaluation: Phraseology and Evaluative Language* (London: Routledge, 2011); Hunston et al., *Pattern Grammar: A Corpus-driven Approach to the Lexical Grammar of English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1999); John Sinclair, *Corpus, Concordance, Collocation* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 1991).

Evaluation and CDA

The main concept in the current study is evaluation which is strongly related to a value-system where some ideological implications are found. This means that evaluative choices reveal the ideology implicit in the writer or the institution that has produced them. In particular, evaluation can be considered both subjectively and within a societal-system as it can convey the writer's viewpoint, but, at the same time, it may represent some principles and values belonging to some institutions and ideologies.⁶

In the study, particular attention will be paid to the evaluative adjectival dimension. The final aim will be to focus on the way the government controls people's opinions concerning political actions in favour of environment, climate, energy sources and food protection.

Powerful groups are usually assumed able to take and maintain control over public discourse, to build-up both content and 'structures' of texts and talks. In particular, controlling discourse basically means controlling people's minds. Thus, the focus is here on discourse structures which influence mental representation. This concept is based on the assumption that language is a part of society, as it can be considered a socially conditioned process, conditioned that is by other (non-linguistic) parts of society. This perspective is also shared by Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak who assert that defining discourse as social practice implies the existence of a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the institutions and social structures which frame it.⁷

In the study, the discursive event is represented by political speeches where the interaction 'engaging in politics' is most directly visible and experienced. Moreover, during the discursive event, political actions are also defined in terms of intentions, purposes, goals and functions within the more complex political process.⁸ While focussing on aims and intentions, politicians make a large use of evaluative choice. Thus, the relationship between power and discourse structure is investigated here with particular attention to evaluative lexis in order to analyse the UK 'viewpoint' concerning some environmental issues and

⁷ Gilbert Weiss et al., eds., *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

⁸ Van Dijk, "What Is Political Discourse Analysis?", *Political Linguistics*, 11 (1997), 11-52.

the way the UK government represents its personal commitment to face them. In short, through the investigation of some evaluative choice, the ideological viewpoint of the two UK Departments concerning the environmental issue will be analysed.

Evaluation through adjectives

Evaluation means using that language which indexes the act of evaluation or the act of stance-taking⁹ strongly related to ideological assumption. This relationship is multifaceted.

“On the one hand, implicit evaluation works in a text because writer and reader share assumptions. On the other hand, the ideological position that lies behind a text can be inferred by the analyst by examining the evaluation in it”.¹⁰ In the study, great attention will be paid to possible evaluative choices inside the text. In particular, the adjectival dimension related to evaluation will be taken into account. According to Francis et al.,¹¹ it is possible to distinguish among different types of evaluative adjectives, such as, for example, adjectives indicating emotion (e.g. *Ann’s friends were less **enthusiastic** about her plans, I’ve always felt **very affectionate** towards Kare, Canada is **seriously worried** over the level of spending*), adjectives indicating human qualities (e.g. *Her mother was **clever** at many things, We left for New York feeling ... **inadequate** as parents*), adjectives indicating qualities of things (e.g. *blues and greens are **easy** on the eye, insects which are **beneficial** to birds*), adjectives indicating attitudes (e.g. *It is **understandable** why they hate the sight of him, it is quite **possible** to alter or extend a house*). In the study, more attention will be paid to the adjectives used to convey qualities of things. To be more precise, the adjectives co-occurring with some key-words will be investigated. A crucial distinction concerning evaluative adjectives has been also provided by Martin and White.¹² In particular, they distinguish between patterns which appear to express ‘what someone thinks about something’ ‘how good or bad an entity is’ or ‘how good or bad what someone does is’. The first is also defined as ‘affect’, whereas the second one as ‘appreciation’, the third as ‘judgement’. The authors also provide some grammatical structures which could make the reader understand more easily the deep meaning of the three patterns. More specifically, they assert that affect occurs in the frame ‘*I feel (very) x, as I feel very happy/sad*’; judgment occurs canonically in the frame ‘*it was x of him/her to do that, as in It was kind or cruel of him to do that*’; finally, appreciation occurs in the frame ‘*I consider it x, as in I consider it innovative/unimaginative*’.¹³ In the study, appreciation is the most significant category, as it implies a personal viewpoint about something rather than judgment or personal affect towards something. In a previous study on

⁹ John W. Du Bois, “The Stance Triangle”, in Robert Englebretson, ed., *Stancetaking in Discourse: Subjectivity, Evaluation, Interaction* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 139-182.

¹⁰ Hunston, *Corpus Approaches to Evaluation* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 13.

¹¹ Gill Francis et al., *Collins Cobuild Grammar Patterns 2: Nouns and Adjectives* (London: HarperCollins, 1998).

¹² James Martin et al., *The Language of Evaluation: Appraisal in English* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

¹³ Martin, “Introduction”, *Text* 23, special issue on Appraisal (2003), 173.

evaluative devices in political discourse, the results showed that politicians both used them as a strategy to win electoral votes while deprecating the opposing party and, therefore, minimising their opponents' chances of winning the elections.¹⁴ In the study, appreciation could be considered as a political strategy aimed at convincing the audience of good political actions concerning environmental issues.

¹⁴ Ana B. Cabrejas-Peñuelas et al., "Positive Self-evaluation Versus Negative Other-evaluation in the Political Genre of Pre-election Debates", *Discourse & Society*, 25.2 (2014), 159-185.

Evaluation in the 'About us' sections

In this section, evaluation will be investigated through the analysis of the adjectival dimension. In particular, the *about us* section of the two Departments has been analysed in order to focus on the strategies employed by the UK government to promote its own actions concerning energy supplies, climate change, environment and food:

1) About us section (UK Department of Energy and Climate change)

What we do

The Department of Energy & Climate Change (DECC) works to make sure the UK has **secure, clean, affordable** energy supplies and promote international action to mitigate climate change (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments/departments-of-energy-climate-change>, About us section)

Responsibilities

We are responsible for:

energy security – making sure UK businesses and households have **secure** supplies of energy for light and power, heat and transport

action on climate change – leading government efforts to mitigate climate change, both through international action and cutting UK greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 (including by sourcing at least 15% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020) renewable energy – sourcing at least 15% of our energy from renewable sources by 2020

affordability – delivering **secure**, low-carbon energy at the least cost to consumers, taxpayers and the economy

fairness – making sure the costs and benefits of our policies are distributed fairly so that we protect **the most vulnerable** and fuel poor households and address competitiveness problems faced by energy intensive industries

supporting growth – delivering our policies in a way that maximises the benefits to the economy in terms of jobs, growth and investment, including by making the most of our existing oil and gas reserves and seizing the opportunities presented by the rise of the global green economy managing the UK's energy legacy safely, securely and cost effectively.¹⁵

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments/departments-of-energy-climate-change>.

As can be observed in the text above, *secure* is the most frequent adjective, co-occurring with one of the most relevant key-words in the text. In particular, it co-occurs as a premodifier of the phrase *supplies of energy*, but also as a premodifier along with the adjectives *clean*, *affordable* or the phrase *secure, low carb on energy*.

According to the theoretical categorization proposed by Francis et al.,¹⁶ all the adjectives can be included in the category of adjectives qualifying things. Moreover, they could be considered as expression of ‘appreciation’ according to the theoretical framework offered by Martin.¹⁷ In particular, the UK Department wants to show ‘how good’ the supplies of energy will be in terms of security, cleanliness and affordability, as it commits itself to guarantee UK businesses and households protection and safety.

¹⁶ Francis et al., *Collins Cobuild Grammar Patterns*.

¹⁷ Martin, “Introduction”, 173.

A similar perspective can be seen in the About us section of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs:

2) About us section (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)

What we do

We are the UK government department responsible for safeguarding our natural environment, supporting our world-leading food and farming industry, and sustaining a *thriving* rural economy. Our broad remit means we play a major role in people's day-to-day life, from the food we eat, and the air we breathe, to the water we drink.

Purpose

Unleashing the potential of food and farming, nature and the countryside, championing the environment and protecting us all from natural threats and hazards.

Objectives

- a cleaner, healthier* environment which benefits people and the economy
- a world-leading* food and farming industry
- a thriving* rural economy, contributing to national prosperity and wellbeing
- a nation protected against natural threats and hazards, with *strong* response and recovery capabilities
- excellent* delivery, on time and to budget and with outstanding value for money
- an organisation continually striving to be the best, focused on outcomes and constantly challenging itself

Themes

- boosting UK productivity
- data availability and utilisation
- better* domestic regulation

delivering our priorities internationally (including EU reform, US and China)

...

Responsibilities include: ...

food and farming
animal health and welfare
marine and fisheries
science and innovation
better regulation

continuing to be successful, strong, healthy, etc.¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs>, accessed 14 December 2015.

As can be observed in the example above, adjectives with a very positive connotation have been employed. In particular, **clean, healthy, thriving and excellent** deal with the semantic fields of strength, healthiness, efficiency. More specifically, healthiness is associated with environment, whereas, strength and efficiency mainly refer to the UK economy and political actions (e.g. a *thriving rural economy, excellent delivery, on time*).

¹⁹ Hunston et al., "A Local Grammar of Evaluation", in Susan Hunston et al., eds., *Evaluation in Text: Authorial Stance and the Construction of Discourse* (Oxford: Oxford U. P., 2000).

²⁰ Ibid., 13.

A very interesting point concerns comparatives and superlatives which have been employed in the example above. According to Huston and Sinclair,¹⁹ gradedness indicates comparison, and comparison with a norm or scale is often a matter of subjectivity. The latter is one of the contributors to evaluative meaning. According to Thompson/Hunston,²⁰ "Identifying evaluation ... is a question of identifying signals of comparison, subjectivity, and social value". In the instance above, subjectivity and evaluation are conveyed through the graded forms of the adjectives **clean, healthy, good**. Through subjective gradedness of these adjectives, the UK government seems to convey awareness of the need of a more efficient policy concerning environment than in the past. As a matter of fact, the adjectives are mentioned among its main objectives.

Evaluative adjectives with key words

Evaluating *energy* and *climate change* in the whole corpus

A further step in the study has been to focus on possible evaluative adjectives co-occurring with the two main words and phrases in the corpus - *energy* and *climate change*.

As far as the word *energy* is concerned, further investigation of its immediate co-text has been carried out:

Total No. of Collocate Types: 278					
Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 1137					
1	305	0	0	-1	energy
2	80	0	80	8.41631	efficiency

3	74	0	0	-1	Energy
4	38	37	1	3.33913	the
5	24	4	20	3.40750	and
6	21	21	0	3.58775	of
7	15	0	15	7.65578	security
8	15	15	0	4.79595	our
9	15	11	4	3.42482	in
10	14	0	14	8.06320	saving
11	12	12	0	4.64579	on
12	12	12	0	7.62930	clean
13	11	11	0	7.50377	renewable
14	11	2	9	7.20832	efficient
15	11	11	0	6.23528	an
16	10	10	0	5.45066	their
17	10	6	4	3.70158	for
18	9	2	7	7.35177	secure

Table 1: Collocations of *energy*.

In the table above, collocations (sorted by right and left) of the word *energy* reveal the most frequent phrases or words co-occurring with this first key-word. If attention is paid to the most frequent adjectives, it is possible to observe ***clean, renewable, efficient and secure*** as the most relevant ones. In the following examples, the co-text of the pattern *evaluative adjective+energy* has been further explored:

3) Our reform of the electricity market will rebuild our energy economy, securing the next generation of ***clean*** energy infrastructure. The renewable heat incentive and carbon capture and storage projects are breaking new ground.

4) It is clearer than ever that energy efficiency is one of the most cost effective ways of meeting our objectives for ***clean, affordable, secure*** energy.

As can be noticed in 3), *clean* is employed to qualify the type of energy the UK government wants to provide in order to rebuild the UK energy economy.

In 4) *energy* co-occurs with the three evaluative adjectives *clean, affordable, secure*. In particular, the phrase *clean, affordable, secure energy* is explicitly presented as one of the objectives of the UK government.

As far as adjectives co-occurring with *climate change* is concerned, it is possible to notice two possible structures where *climate change* co-occurs with

some adjectives-phrase including *climate change+be+adjective* or *adjective (premodifier)+ climate change*:

5) *Action on climate change is integral* to a robust and resilient economy (Secretary of State's speech at the launch of the Risk Assessment, June 2012)

6) As Norman Lamb noted, *some level of UK climate change is unavoidable* and the Climate Change Risk Assessment, set out the range of risks and opportunities that the UK faces. (Greg Barker keynote speech at the launch of the new Met Office Hadley Centre Climate Programme, June 2012)

In the examples above, two different uses of evaluative adjectives emerge. In 5), the adjective *integral* actually refers to political actions to be taken by the Department regarding climate change. In 6), instead, *unavoidable* is used to qualify *climate change*. While the latter seems to confirm an actual condition concerning the issue of climate change, the former seems to be more interesting, as it conveys a full commitment by the UK government to tackle this issue. The adjective *integral* has been defined as 'essential to completeness' (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integral>), thus, the political action on climate change is fundamental in order to offer a strong and successful economy.

Evaluating *environment* and *food* in the whole corpus

In this section, *environment* and *food* will be investigated. They can be considered as the main key-words in the corpus of speeches delivered by politicians belonging to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs'. As far as *environment* is concerned, a list of collocates has been provided in order to investigate the most frequent evaluative adjectives co-occurring with this word:

Total No. of Collocate Types: 66					
Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 317					
1	86	0	0	-1	environment
2	43	43	0	3.32663	the
3	22	22	0	7.98429	natural
4	20	0	0	-1	Environment
5	18	3	15	2.62989	and
6	14	0	14	8.50214	Agency
7	7	7	0	3.37802	our

8	6	0	6	3.35493	We
9	6	2	4	2.60379	for
10	6	6	0	7.95782	agri
11	5	1	4	3.73131	The
12	5	0	5	7.01671	schemes
13	5	0	5	1.69028	in
14	5	0	5	4.57377	but
15	4	4	0	5.14019	right
16	3	0	3	3.51156	It
17	2	0	2	6.69478	White
18	2	0	2	3.91342	where
19	2	2	0	2.86189	their
20	2	0	2	0.75520	that
21	2	2	0	4.93990	quality
22	2	2	0	5.88743	Natural
23	2	0	2	0.73768	is
24	2	0	2	1.09859	I
25	2	0	2	4.88743	Food
26	2	1	1	4.33723	better

Table 2: Collocates of *environment*.

In the table above it is possible to observe *natural* as the most frequent adjective mainly co-occurring on the left of *environment*. The high frequency of *natural* is due to its main function in the corpus as a topical adjective rather than an evaluative one. In particular, topical adjectives give the subject area or specific type of a noun.²¹ More specifically, it specifies the ‘type’ of environment the UK government wants to focus on.

²¹ Douglas Biber et al., *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (London: Pearson Education, 1999).

In the following examples, instead, the evaluative adjective *right* has been investigated, co-occurring with *environment*:

7) The Rural Economy

But at Defra, as well as responding to emergencies, we also need to focus on creating the ***right environment*** for businesses to grow, and that requires a long-term economic plan. The rural economy is worth £211 billion a year. Rural areas are home to one fifth of the English population, yet they support nearly a third of England’s businesses.

For years, the rural economy and farms were ignored but today, the Government is doing everything it can to support them. And that means more jobs, more opportunities and more financial security for hard working people.

(George Eustice speech to the National Farmers Union Conference: 'Backing the business of British Farming', January 2014)

8) Exports

So, cutting red tape, encouraging innovation, and safeguarding plant and animal health all set the **right environment** for farm businesses to grow. And I want to conclude by talking about some of the opportunities.

Yesterday I was in Dubai for the Gulfood exhibition, where over 100 British companies were present promoting British food and food catering equipment manufacturers.

Our exports to Dubai increased by 14 percent last year and there is growing demand for British dairy products and British lamb. (George Eustice's speech to the National Farmers Union Conference: 'Backing the business of British Farming', January 2014)

9) And we'll also start work on a comprehensive evaluation of doing the same for other materials, such as textiles, metals and all biodegradable waste. All of this is about creating the **right environment** for the resource management industry to thrive (Secretary of State's waste review speech, June 2011).

In 7), 8) and 9), *right environment* refers to the good environment conditions to improve farm business and resource management industry. More specifically, the focus is here on a better economy or policy concerning farm businesses, as the final aim is to make them flourish and improve. In these instances *right* implies 'judgement' by the UK government as the latter commits itself to take decisions concerning some good and correct environment conditions in order to guarantee a good and efficient rural policy.

If the immediate co-text of *environment* is further analysed it is possible to understand that some other evaluative adjectives have been employed:

1 areas are often also those with the worst quality environment and access to the natural environment . Research s
2 rst quality environment and access to the natural environment. Research shows that people in the most disadvant sp
3 ace - giving people and businesses a high quality environment , supporting biodiversity, managing drainage and t
4 an, and do, go hand in hand because a flourishing environment is essential to our future survival and prosperit
5 and markets which value and protect the natural environment . And follow-up work is now underway for example l spee

6 our understanding of how the state of the **natural environment** affects the performance of the economy and indivi

Fig. 1: Concordance lines for *environment*

Apart from the topical adjective *natural*, it is possible to observe the noun *quality* employed in an adjectival position with an attributive function. One of the aims of the UK government is to provide people and business with a ‘high quality’ environment and avoid ‘bad quality’ environment thanks to a series of initiatives, such as managing drainage, supporting biodiversity, and so on. In these instances, it is possible to observe the employment of further specification of the word ‘quality’ referred to environment through some more specific extent descriptors (e.g. *high*).

The last word investigated in its immediate co-text is *food*. In the following table, it is possible to observe a high frequency of a nationality adjective (e.g. *British*) rather than evaluative adjectives:

Total No. of Collocate Types: 154					
Total No. of Collocate Tokens: 573					
1	163	0	0	-1	food
2	57	9	48	3.37039	and
3	28	0	0	-1	Food
4	22	21	1	1.43734	the
5	21	19	2	2.38000	of
6	21	21	0	6.46420	British
7	16	14	2	3.09636	for
8	13	13	0	3.34864	our
9	10	0	10	7.09425	security
10	9	1	8	1.98514	is
11	8	5	3	1.44589	in
12	5	4	1	2.22388	with
13	4	3	1	-0.63919	to
14	4	0	4	4.68486	sector
15	4	0	4	7.18736	safety
16	4	0	4	5.60239	production
17	4	0	4	7.18736	producers
18	4	4	0	5.60239	global
19	4	0	4	5.60239	exports
20	3	3	0	2.83372	UK

21	3	2	1	1.09989	on
22	3	3	0	2.03535	more

Table 3: Collocates of *food*

Notwithstanding, some evaluative adjectives are sometimes found co-occurring with this word:

1	redients and raw materials, coupled with rigorous	food
2	a resource-efficient, climate-smart, sustainable	food
3	alone. Only together will we develop a global	food
4	paper work, and promoting the best of British	food
5	smart and water-smart; to both grow more	food ;
6	is a significant contribution to tackling global	food
7	entrepreneurs who want to help solve the global	food
8	how vital they are in building a sustainable	food
9	in this country and Britain brings more new	food
10	Great British brand. We will promote our superb	food
11	have some of the world's greatest	food
12	of a massive campaign to celebrate great British	food .
13	linator Strategy, but it also shows how important	food
14	to triple the number of apprentices in British	food
15	big event next year looking at how British	food

16 places like Italy and France that had great	food
and that here in Britain it wasn't	

Fig. 2: Concordance lines for *food*.

In the table above, apart from *British* and *global* as some of the most frequent adjectives, it is also possible to focus on some evaluative adjectives such as *superb*, *important*, *rigorous*, all referred to noun phrases where food is a premodifier of some several noun heads (e.g. *problem*, *system*, *sector*, *production*). The main concern by the UK government is represented by promoting national good food on one hand, but improve the national policy on food on the other. The focus on food promotion and political involvement in improving the global food problem clearly emerges from the observation of verbs preceding the phrases where the word food is found (e.g. *promote*, *tackle*, *solve*, *develop*).

Concluding remarks

Through evaluative adjectives characterised by a very positive connotation, the UK government seems to provide citizens with a reliable policy concerning some main environmental issues. In particular, through these adjectives, reference is usually made to political actions to be taken by the two Departments. Reliability is further emphasised by the high frequency of action verbs co-occurring with the most important key-words in the corpus (e.g. *develop* a global food system, *promote* our superb food, *create* the right environment). Furthermore, through the use of gradedness of the adjectives (e.g. comparatives), the UK government seems to convey awareness of the need of a more efficient policy concerning environment than in the past. This is particularly true with adjectives co-occurring with the key-word *environment*. In short, the UK government seems to build-up a discourse aimed at providing citizens with security, efficiency and protection while increasing its commitment to tackle the main environmental problems.