

GREEN ECONOMY / GREEN REVOLUTION: AN ECOLINGUISTIC CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICAL PARTIES' PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

A minor dissertation submitted to the University of Cape Town's Linguistic
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Degree: Master of Arts



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ABSTRACT

The intertwined planetary crises of anthropogenic climate change and ecological degradation have already begun, and the effects are being felt around the world (IPCC, 2022, World Meteorological Organisation, 2021). However, it is still not being treated as a crisis by global policymakers or the media. Although Africa contributes only 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, the continent is the most vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis. At the same time, South Africa is an outlier to the rest of Africa, being the 12th highest greenhouse gas emitter worldwide (Global Carbon Atlas, 2020). This is due in large part to South Africa's reliance on coal, both as the centre of the country's export economy and as a source of energy at home. However, South African policymakers have yet to take any significant climate change mitigation actions. This is the central social and ecological problem that serves as impetus for this study.

This study investigates the climate change-related communications of South Africa's three major political parties, namely the ANC, the DA, and the EFF, from a critical perspective. It explores a wide variety of public political discourse genres in which the topic of climate change is mentioned. Utilising an ecolinguistic and critical discourse analytic framework, this study aims to uncover the "stories" (Stibbe, 2015:6) South African political parties are telling about climate change. Drawing on Fairclough's (1989) three stage approach to analysis, as well as tools from corpus linguistics and the emerging field of ecolinguistics (Stibbe, 2015), it examines both broad quantitative patterns across the data and specific instances of discourse in detail. In particular, the discursive strategies of naturalization, framing, and erasure and salience patterns are investigated. As a CDA study, the focus is on making visible the messages that are implicit in discourse, particularly those in service of power. As an ecolinguistic study, the focus is on the potential ecologically damaging impacts of these messages.

Using the above analytical tools, this study shows the political parties' climate change communications to be sites of discursive conflict. It illustrates the ways all three parties, but particularly the ANC and DA, continuously undermine their ostensible commitment to combating the climate crisis with discourses that "tame" it and evade responsibility for addressing it. This is done through framing climate change as an economic issue and as an opportunity for technological innovation and entrepreneurship, through telling the story that individual actions are key to solving climate change, through naturalizing current levels of carbon emissions, and through presenting

climate change as “manageable”. In addition, all three parties construct the natural world as existing for the benefit of humans. While the EFF does not exhibit the above taming discourses to the same extent, their dominant climate change story is one of erasure through the absence of discussion. Thus, all three parties naturalize the continued destruction of the planet’s life support systems and obscure the central causes of this destruction.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ACCESS: Applied Centre for Climate and Earth Systems Science

ANC: African National Congress

AU: African Union

BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

COP21: 21st Conference of Parties

DA: Democratic Alliance

EFF: Economic Freedom Fighters

IBEX 35: Iberian Index

IEC: Independent Electoral Commission

IPBES: Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services

IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

MR: Member Resources

NDC: Nationally Determined Contribution

NDP: National Development Plan

NEPAD: New Partnership for Africa's Development

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NOAA: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

SAASTA: South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement

SADC: Southern African Development Community

SONA: State of the Nation Address

SOPA: State of the Capital Address

UN: United Nations

UNFCCC: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

USAS: UCREL Semantic Analysis System

WMO: World Meteorological Organisation

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview

This dissertation investigates the discourse of South African politicians' communications to the public about climate change, and the implicit ideologies conveyed through it. It explores the climate change “stories” (Stibbe, 2015:6) told by South Africa's three major political parties, namely the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). This study utilises a critical discourse analytic (CDA) and ecolinguistic approach to the analysis of data. CDA is an inherently interdisciplinary, problem-oriented approach that aims to demystify ideologies and power through in-depth analysis (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Ecolinguistics is an emergent branch of CDA that focuses on discourses related to ecologically destructive systems and practices (Stibbe, 2015). In addition, the research is triangulated with a quantitative component that comprises a corpus analysis, and a qualitative component that involves close reading of key texts.

Section 1.2. begins by providing a brief rationale for the study. Section 1.3. contextualises the research by laying out the state of the climate, the South African political landscape, and South Africa's response to the climate crisis. Sections 1.4-6 continue by identifying a research problem, explaining the research aims and questions, and discussing the potential impact of the study. Finally, section 1.7. provides an overview of the dissertation structure.

1.2 Rationale

The problem that serves as the impetus for this study is that anthropogenic climate change is occurring yet is not being treated as a crisis. There is a high degree of consensus among climate modelers regarding the basic processes of climate change and what must be done to mitigate it (IPCC, 2022; WMO, 2021). In South Africa, we have already begun to feel the effects in the form of years-long droughts, increased wildfires, and extreme weather. Nevertheless, the government is instituting plans to excavate more fossil fuels, and coal remains a central part of the country's economy (Carnie, 2021; Adebayo et.al., 2021). There is thus a mismatch between the seriousness of this problem and what is being done to address it. We need a roadmap for how to hold politicians

accountable, not only for their actions or lack thereof, but also for the narratives they put forward to the public. This study aims to contribute towards building such a roadmap, through illustrating discursive strategies politicians utilise to legitimise ecologically destructive practices.

1.3 Situational context

1.3.1 The climate crisis

As noted above, there is a high level of consensus regarding the direct cause of climate change, namely greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC, 2022). There is also a high level of consensus that the climate crisis will be disastrous for human and nonhuman life. As of 2021, average temperatures on earth had increased by 0.84°C (NOAA, 2022). At this level of warming, we have already seen a global increase in natural disasters such as droughts, floods, hurricanes, and extreme temperatures by a factor of 5. This in turn has led to millions of deaths, predominantly in the global South (WMO, 2021). Despite the commitment of world leaders to limit warming to 1.5°C (Paris Agreement, 2015), the latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that warming of between 3.3°C and 5.7°C is likely to occur by the end of the century (IPCC, 2022). Noting the effects that are already occurring at a 0.84°C rise, an increase in the above range will be nothing short of catastrophic. Extreme weather events will become commonplace, sea levels will rise by approximately 1.8 meters, and shifts in regional climate will pose a serious risk to global food security (IPCC, 2022). Added to these risks are the related but distinct crises of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation (IPBES, 2019).

While the direct causes of climate change are well understood, its underlying social factors are less so. The UN-led climate negotiations have led to a “common sense” discourse on climate change, which places the blame for the crisis on humanity in general. This is exemplified by the notion of the Anthropocene era, a proposed geological epoch that represents humanity’s impact on the earth’s geology (Laurance, 2019). However, this flattening of causal factors fails to account for the role of capitalism and the philosophy of perpetual growth. According to a wide range of scholars (Victor, 2012; Satgar, 2018; Guerrero, 2018; Brand, Boos & Brad, 2017), an economic system premised on continuous growth cannot be ecologically sustainable and is in fact one of the root causes of the climate crisis. However, the failure to reckon with this has led to the increasing popularity of market-based ‘solutions’ such as carbon trading, carbon offsets, and the

commodification of biophysical resources (Satgar, 2018:59). Not only have such solutions not led to any significant action to curb climate change, but the refusal to discuss the role of the growth economy has stymied the development of genuine alternatives. Indeed, the obvious solution of shutting down fossil fuel extraction is rarely considered at global climate negotiations (Satgar, 2018).

1.3.2 The South African political landscape

The South African political landscape is dominated by three political parties, namely the ANC, the DA, and the EFF. The ANC is a party borne out of the largest liberation movement that fought against the apartheid regime (Koekemoer, 2017). Ever since winning the first democratic elections in 1994, it has been the country's ruling party. However, its support base has been waning steadily, and in the 2019 national election it received only 57.5% of votes (IEC, 2022). Its declining popularity can be partly attributed to its failure to change the socio-economic reality of the majority of South Africans, inability to fulfil election promises, and widespread corruption (Koekemoer, 2017). Furthermore, much of the waning confidence in the ANC may be attributed to its shifting economic policies. As a liberation movement, the ANC was firmly on the side of socio-economic transformation and policies informed by socialist principles. However, since it has been in power, the ANC has continued down a path of free-market driven macro-economic policies, which is often blamed for its inability to shrink the socio-economic gap (Segatti & Pons-Vignon, 2013:546).

The DA began as the Progressive Reform Party, a breakaway from the apartheid National Party who sought to address apartheid through constitutional reform (Koekemoer, 2017:39). The DA has always styled itself as the party of liberal democracy, supporting limited state intervention and the creation of an "opportunity society" (Koekemoer, 2017:40). As such, job creation through private sector growth is seen as the top priority. In contrast to the ANC and the EFF, the DA's policies do not recognise race as a consideration in addressing inequality. Among other reasons, this has led to the accusation that their policies sustain institutional racism (Maphaka, 2022:52). Part of the DA's growth in popularity can be attributed to rising anti-ANC sentiment, from which the DA emerged as a viable alternative (Koekemoer, 2017:41). Since 2009, they have held a consistent majority in the Western Cape and have been gaining control of more municipalities each election cycle.

In contrast to the ANC and the DA, the EFF is a very young political party, formed in 2013. However, it has enjoyed a remarkably rapid rise in popularity. It was formed when its leader Julius Malema was expelled from the ANC Youth League and brought some of his allies with him (Majavu, 2021:155). The EFF see themselves as continuing the struggle against imperialism, capitalism, and racism. They style themselves as the bringers of economic freedom that the ANC has not been able to provide (Koekemoer, 2017:42). This will be done through the expropriation of land for equal distribution, and the nationalization of mines and financial institutions (Koekemoer, 2017:66). The EFF's purported ideology is one of Marxist-Leninism, combined with a Fanonist black nationalism. However, as Majavu (2021:19) argues, beyond radical-sounding slogans, the EFF's key policies lack coherency, and on closer inspection are not very different from the ANC's.

1.3.3 South Africa's responses to the climate crisis

The African continent has contributed least to the climate crisis, and still contributes only 4% of global carbon emissions (Cock, 2018). At the same time, it is the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change (WMO, 2020). However, South Africa is the highest greenhouse gas emitter in Africa, and the 12th highest worldwide (Global Carbon Atlas, 2020). Since the discovery of coal in 1878, mining and coal energy have become the central features of the minerals energy complex (MEC) that defines the South African Economy (Williams, 2018:240). As a result, South Africa is the biggest producer and exporter of coal in the Sub-Saharan region, and the 5th largest consumer of it in the world (Adebayo et.al., 2021).

In addition to abundant coal, South Africa also has an abundance of potential renewable energy sources (Williams, 2018:244). The One Million Climate Jobs Campaign argues that the government can create one million climate jobs by transitioning to an economy that cuts CO2 emissions by 75% (Ashley, 2018:272). Nevertheless, the National Development Plan still envisions coal making up 65% of the power supply by 2030 and promotes coal and platinum exports as a crucial growth sector. This locks the country into a carbon intensive future, thus contributing to further heating of the planet (Ashley, 2018:289). Other policies, such as those of Operation Phakisa, promote further fossil fuel extraction and threaten the destruction of ocean ecosystems (Masie & Bond, 2018). In addition, millions of South Africans continue to live in

environments where they are exposed to high levels of toxic pollution (Okereafor et. al., 2020). Despite optimism regarding South Africa's growing environmental movement in the 1990s (McDonald, 1998), there are few results to show for it.

1.4 Research problem

CDA scholars have been instrumental in illuminating the ways in which systems of power and oppression are enacted through language (Fairclough, 1989, Van Dijk, 1998, Jorgensen & Philips, 2011). However, until recently, the focus has been limited to the social world. And yet, the unfolding climate crisis demands a rethinking of the relationship between the social and natural worlds, and a recognition of the potential extra-social impacts of discourse. The emerging field of ecolinguistics brings the critical perspective of CDA to an examination of the ways that language can have ecologically destructive effects (Stibbe, 2015). However, ecolinguistic research has so far been piecemeal, investigating specific instances of discourse across heterogeneous genres (Fernandez-Vasquez, 2021; Jismulatif, Dahnilsyah, & Sinaga, 2020; Norton & Hulme, 2019; Poole & Spangler, 2020). Few ecolinguistic studies have looked at political discourse, and few have utilised corpus analysis tools to investigate large quantities of data. Lastly, there are few studies of climate change discourse from the global South.

As such, this dissertation aims to address several gaps in the research. It utilises methodological and theoretical approaches that have been established through ecolinguistic research and applies them to South African politicians' climate change discourse broadly. It also incorporates corpus analytic tools to the ecolinguistic approach, thus allowing an investigation of larger quantities of data and enabling findings that are not possible using purely qualitative means. Lastly, it provides a much-needed window onto the climate change discourse of politicians in a Southern context.

1.5 Research aims and questions

The primary aim of this research study is to investigate the public discourse of South African politicians on climate change with a view to uncover the implicit "stories" that are communicated through it. "Story" as it is used here is a technical term, referring to the myths, ideologies, frames, and metaphors that exist in the minds of individuals and influence how they perceive the world (Stibbe, 2015:6). When stories become widely communicated in public discourse, they have the

potential to become “stories-we-live-by” (Stibbe, 2015:6), or entrenched mental models shared by multiple individuals within a society. Throughout this dissertation, the word “stories” will be used to refer to the climate change ideologies exhibited in the discourse of the political parties.

In addition, the study also aims to evaluate whether the stories communicated through the political texts are ecologically destructive, ambivalent, or beneficial. This is a subjective, normative evaluation based on my ecosophy or “ecological philosophy”, described in section 2.3.5. However, as argued by Fairclough (2018), CDA as a form of critical social analysis is about illuminating the damaging aspects of social life. Therefore, while not discounting the possibility of ecologically beneficial discourses, analysis errs on the side of uncovering where they are destructive.

The research questions were developed in accordance with the above aims. There is one primary research question, and five subordinate questions that provide more detailed foci to guide analysis. The primary research question is:

What are the climate change stories of South Africa’s three main political parties as reflected by their official communications to the public?

The five subordinate research questions are:

- 1) *Are the climate change stories told by South African politicians ecologically destructive, ambivalent, or beneficial?*
- 2) *What discourses are drawn upon in shaping these stories, and how do the discursive elements blend and interact with one another?*
- 3) *How do the different political parties construct the challenges facing the nation and the responsibilities of government, and how do they negotiate climate change within that?*
- 4) *How are climate change and environmental issues framed and what is the potential impact of this framing?*
- 5) *How do political actors and parties construct themselves in relation to South African citizens and other national / international political actors?*

1.6 Impact of the study

By applying methods developed by ecolinguistic researchers to a broad range of text genres from South African politicians, this study contributes to the emerging field of ecolinguistics. In focusing on the discourse of politicians, it also illustrates how the “stories-we live-by” may be constructed and reinforced by those with the responsibility to craft policies and guide the country through challenges. Equipping people with the tools to uncover such stories for themselves is an important step in enabling resistance to them. While this study cannot aspire to such lofty aims, it can begin to lay the groundwork for a roadmap that may be used to hold political actors accountable.

1.7 Chapter overview

The rest of this dissertation is organised as follows:

Chapter two provides an overview of relevant literature, including CDA and ecolinguistic studies. It also details the theoretical grounding of this study.

Chapter three describes the methodological approach of this study and the methods used to collect, select and process the data. It also includes a discussion of ethics and my positionality.

Chapter four describes the analytical framework utilised in this study, and the tools I draw upon in performing data analysis.

Chapter five is the first data analysis chapter and comprises of a corpus analysis of all three political parties, including word frequency and concordance analyses.

Chapter six is the second data analysis chapter, which provides an in-depth, qualitative critical discourse analysis of textual data from all three parties.

Chapter seven summarises the findings and discusses their significance in light of the social and ecological context. It also evaluates the climate change stories according to my “ecosophy”.

Finally, **chapter eight** revisits the research questions provided above. It concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the state of the research on climate change discourse as well as the theoretical grounding of this dissertation. Section 2.2 examines the state of the research, looking first at media discourse, then corporate discourse, then scientific discourse, and finally political discourse. Section 2.3 lays out the theoretical grounding of this study. It touches on theoretical perspectives on discourse, power, and social and ecological context from CDA and ecolinguistics scholars, and explicates the “ecosophy” (Stibbe, 2015:6), or ecological philosophy, of this dissertation. Finally, section 2.3. outlines the analytical framework of this study and the tools used in analysing data.

2.2 Research on climate change discourse

2.2.1 Media discourse

It is only recently that discourse on climate change has become a topic of analysis for CDA researchers (see Broadbent et. al., 2016; Flottum et. al., 2014; Jaworska, 2018; Asayama, 2021). So far, much of the focus has been on media discourse. For example, Grundmann and Krishnamurthy (2010) utilised Goffman’s frame analysis to investigate how climate change was framed by the media in different countries, and whether this corresponded to different policies. They found that while France and Germany utilised a political and moral frame, the US and UK media reported with more of a scientific frame. In addition, while the UK emphasised the international dimensions of the issue, the US media focused much more on its own people and politics (Grundmann & Krishnamurthy, 2010:135). However, the study did not find a straightforward correspondence between frames and climate policy. In my view, the heightened focus on differences between framings moves attention away from the ways in which the countries are similar. As noted by Poole (2022:160), much corpus based CDA work focuses on comparison, often overlooking similarities between texts. Most countries have not implemented adequate policies to combat climate change (IPCC, 2014). Therefore, correlating discursive frames with minor policy differences does not illustrate the ways in which entrenched ideologies prevent meaningful action.

Dayrell's (2019) analysis of Brazilian newspapers also falls short in an attempt to find answers to the climate crisis in dominant discourses. According to Dayrell (2019:164), the "analysis demonstrated how the press engendered Brazilians' striking level of climate concern" (2019:164). However, although Brazil's fossil fuel emissions are low by international standards, this is impaired by rampant deforestation (Climate Action Tracker) and the fact that climate change mitigation measures are not effectively interconnected (Dayrell, 2019). Nevertheless, Dayrell's starting assumption is that Brazilian media discourse on climate change is ecologically beneficial. As such, the analysis does not look past superficial markers of concern for the climate, such as mentions of key phrases like "renewable energy" (Dayrell, 2019). As many authors have noted, it is necessary to uncover ecologically destructive discourses even when they initially appear to be beneficial (Bernard, 2015; Farrelly, 2020; Kukkonen & Yla-Antilla, 2020).

Norton and Hulme (2019) analysed UK newspaper editorials from an ecolinguistic perspective to assess their climate change stories. Following Stibbe, they identified four potential "stories", namely the Lukewarmer, the Ecoactivist, the Smart Growth Reformer, and the Ecomodernist story. The Lukewarmer story, which suggests that climate models are unreliable and exaggerated, has decreased significantly over time (Norton & Hulme, 2019:118). The Ecoactivist story, which sees climate change as an imminent crisis that spells impending doom unless radical action is taken, was present in a small number of newspapers. The Smart Growth Reformer story, which views the use of market mechanisms as the most effective way to fight climate change, was predominant across national media (Norton & Hulme, 2019:119). The Ecomodernist story, which argues for technological fixes and the decoupling of human activities from nature to avoid economic and ecological collapse, was increasingly common (Norton & Hulme, 2019:124). Although some newspapers leaned more towards particular stories, it was more useful to trace each story across time through different newspapers (Norton & Hulme, 2019). This is illuminating as it shows that ecologically destructive stories are often prevalent in contexts that are assumed to support environmental action.

2.2.2 Corporate discourse

Other studies have brought their attention to corporate discourses on climate change (Bernard, 2015; Fernandez-Vasquez & Sancho-Rodriguez, 2020; Jaworska, 2018). In a PhD dissertation,

Bernard (2015) performed a critical discourse analysis of the corporate social responsibility reports of high-emitting South African corporations. Bernard highlights several discourses that appear to promote eco-friendly practices, but mask environmentally destructive practices. For example, the phrase “cleaner industry” often simply means that the impact has been redistributed elsewhere (Bernard, 2015:26). Many words and phrases have become commonplace in the last few decades that represent a growing concern for the environment. However, this “eco-speak” (Harre et. al., 1999 in Bernard, 2015) has been adopted by marketing campaigns to sell products to eco-conscious consumers. This commodification of the language of environmentalism can lead people to erroneously believe they are doing something good for the environment by buying particular products (Bernard, 2015:37). This is a harmful belief, because as Satgar (2018) and Stibbe (2015) argue, capitalism and consumerism are themselves key causes of ecological destruction.

Fernandez-Vasquez and Sancho-Rodriguez (2020) performed a critical discourse analysis on the websites of IBEX 35¹ companies, comparing their discursive construction of climate change with those of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Using an ecolinguistic framework, they attempted to uncover which of the four aforementioned climate stories the websites are telling. They found that the companies constructed people as passive consumers or instruments of technology, and nature as subservient to economic activities. This is in keeping with an Ecomodernist and Smart Growth Reformer stories, which suggest that technological innovations and capitalist markets can sufficiently combat climate change. In contrast, the NGOs constructed people as agents with the power to both destroy the natural world and act against climate change, in keeping with the “Ecoactivist” story (Fernandez-Vasquez & Sancho-Rodrigues, 2020).

2.2.3 Scientific and political discourse

A significant amount of discourse analytic work has examined the scientific public discourse of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports (Flottum, 2010; Lejano, Tavares-Reager, and Berkes, 2013; Asayama, 2021). For example, Flottum (2010) compared an IPCC report summary report with a position statement by the South African Applied Centre for Climate and Earth Systems Science (ACCESS). This provides an interesting look at the link between scientific and political discourse on climate change. The IPCC report aims to be “policy relevant

¹ Spain’s principal stock exchange

and yet policy neutral” (IPCC, 2014). According to Flottum (2010), it presents information in a distanced, scientific voice, with an absence of personal pronouns and frequent uses of hedging strategies. In contrast, the ACCESS report is more explicitly political, with more occurrences of the pronoun “we” and a more refutative stance (Flottum, 2010:13). The paper also found that while the IPCC report was dominated by a narrative of complication, the ACCESS report was clearer and included elements relating to direct action (Flottum, 2010:15).

According to Lejano, Tavares-Reager, and Berkes (2013), the scientific discourse of the IPCC is not conducive to narration by people outside the organization. They argue that in order to lead to meaningful action, climate change must move out of the realm of purely scientific discourse, and “into the everyday narratives that people tell about themselves and their world” (Lejano, Tavares-Reager, & Berkes, 2013:61). In my view, part of the reason this has not occurred is due to the conceptual divide between culture/society on the one hand and nature/science on the other hand (see Willis, 2017; Flottum, 2010; Stibbe, 2015). Across public discourse, not only is culture seen as separate to nature, but nature is understood only scientifically and not connected to social systems (Ghosh, 2016). This inhibits people from understanding themselves to be part of the planet’s ecology, and thus affected by changes to the climate (Stibbe, 2015:3). It also inhibits a political, social, and cultural understanding of climate change. As I will explore in section 2.3., I view this conceptual divide to be a key issue in the construction of ecologically destructive ideologies (Fox & Alldred, 2018; Umbrello, 2019).

2.2.4 Political discourse

There are a surprisingly small number of studies examining the climate change discourse of politicians directly. One example is Calliari (2018) who investigated the discourse of climate change negotiations between world leaders at the 21st Conference of Parties (COP21). She found that leaders of developing countries focused much more on the cost of adaptation to climate change risk and the question of compensation, while developed countries focused more on non-economic issues such as health and ecosystems (Calliari, 2018). However, compensation was not straightforwardly requested, but was rather strategically brought up as a “bogeyman to increasingly get concessions on loss and damage from the developed countries” (Calliari, 2018:740).

In a PhD dissertation, Govender (2015) investigated then-president Jacob Zuma's rhetoric on climate change. Although this dissertation comes from a political science rather than linguistics perspective, it provides relevant insights on politicians' talk on climate change in a South African context. Like Calliari (2018), Govender found that President Zuma constructed finance as a key climate issue. She noted that Zuma often emphasised South Africa as part of Africa rather than its membership in BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) which served to construct it as more vulnerable and less able to contribute to mitigation efforts (Govender, 2015). She also found that Zuma made frequent use of a "balance" framing, emphasizing the need to balance economic growth with climate change mitigation (Govender, 2015:78). While Zuma placed little emphasis on climate science, he paid significant attention to the creation of "green jobs" (Govender, 2015:86). However, he provided no precise definition of green jobs and no detailed policy framework for creating them (Govender, 2015).

An important study is that of Willis (2017) who performed a corpus based CDA of British political speeches about a proposed climate change bill. Willis found that British politicians overwhelmingly used scientific and economic framings of climate change, and avoided discussions of people and social factors, as well as the environment and nonhuman species. There was also a complete absence of discussion on society's dependence on fossil fuels. This focus on what was not discussed is an important reminder to consider absences in discourse. Willis (2017:224) concludes that there is a tendency on the part of politicians to "tame" climate change. Instead of reckoning with the embedded, socially bound nature of climate change and acknowledging its serious, irreversible impacts, politicians discursively constructed it as a technical issue amenable to straightforward policy action. Willis posits that politicians are constrained by the bounds of the political sphere in their discussion of the issue, suggesting that even those who want to make change are forced into "un-politics" (Willis, 2017:226). To make any action seem possible, they must make climate change appear solvable within the existing system.

Climate change is discursively constructed very differently within the media, political texts, scientific documents, and by various social groups (Fleming et. al., 2014). However, a few common themes emerge across the literature. One of these is the naturalisation of the conceptual divide between nature/environment and humans/society (Ghosh, 2016). Another is the idea of

Ecomodernism, which suggests that technological innovations can solve our climate problems (Fernandez-Vasquez & Sancho-Rodriguez, 2020). Ecomodernism, along with the Lukewarmer story, the Ecoactivist story, and the Smart Growth Reformer story, are key ideological narratives discussed by several ecolinguistics scholars. Political discourse does not operate in a vacuum and is influenced by discourses from elsewhere. Therefore, part of the analysis will involve looking for examples of interdiscursivity that echo corporate, scientific, and media discourse.

2.2.5 Gaps in the research

This dissertation will work towards filling a few key gaps in research on climate change discourse. One of these is simply providing a perspective from the global South. There is a significant imbalance in the output of research between the global North and the global South (Demeter, 2020), and this is reflected in investigations of climate change discourse. This is significant, as the relationship of countries in the global North and the global South to climate change is very different. There is considerable difference both in CO₂ emissions and the impacts of climate change (Ritchie & Poser, 2020), and no doubt in political priorities too. Therefore, there is a significant gap in understanding of climate change discourse from perspectives of the South.

This research project also fills a gap in combining corpus analysis and qualitative critical discourse analysis within an ecolinguistics framework. Most ecolinguistic work has focused on qualitative analyses of a small number of texts (Stibbe, 2015; Pool & Spangler, 2020; Zahoor & Janjua, 2020; Fernandez-Vasquez, 2021). One notable exception is Poole (2022), whose book *Corpus-assisted ecolinguistics* provides an overview of the existing research and four of his own papers that utilise corpus methods. What I aim to do in this study is incorporate both corpus methods and an in-depth, qualitative component that goes beyond simply interpreting the corpus analysis findings. This will provide insights about the normative ways political parties use language in relation to climate change (Poole, 2022:17), as well as illustrate instances of the discursive formation of climate change stories.

Lastly, this dissertation fills a gap in applying an ecolinguistic approach to political discourse. The existing studies on political discourse on climate change have focused primarily on global climate negotiations. Very few have looked at the public discourse of politicians over a broad range of text genres. Bringing an ecolinguistic perspective to political discourse also fills an important gap.

Political discourse has long been a key subject for CDA (Van Dijk, 1998, Wodak & Meyer, 2016). It is vital to investigate this not only in clear cases of political oppression, but also with regards to murkier issues in which political actors are implicated. Bringing an ecolinguistic approach to political discourse is an important step in merging methods and concepts from CDA and the recent ecological turn in the humanities (Kinefuchi, 2018). These theoretical perspectives and others that underpin this dissertation are discussed in the following section.

2.3 Theoretical grounding

2.3.1 Language, discourse, and stories

One of the most important concepts to define in any linguistics research project is the researcher's approach to "language". As this study utilises a CDA approach it is heavily informed by concepts developed in critical discourse studies. I take the view of Fairclough (1989:16), that language is a social, as well as communicative, practice. The ways in which people speak, write, and interpret others is both socially determined and has social effects. Language shapes our perceptions and actions and can thus be used to shift dominant perceptions and behaviour patterns (Fleming et. al., 2014). However, language is also influenced by its social context. Thus, any one communicative event may reproduce or challenge dominant ideologies (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011:9). Considering language in this way implies a "dialectical relationship" between a particular communicative event and the institutions, situations, and social structures that it emerges from (Wodak & Meyer, 2016:5).

We may consider "discourse" as simply referring to "language" to the extent that it has social effects and is determined by social structures (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). However, it is worth digging a little deeper, as the term has been used in various ways. Van Leeuwen (2008:3) embeds intertextuality into his understanding of discourse, defining it as "recontextualised social practice". Fleming (2014) also considers discourse as a practice, defining it as the active construction of thoughts, identities, and actions through language. Stibbe (2015:22) defines discourse as "standardised ways that particular groups in society use language, images and other forms of representation," refocusing attention on linguistic forms. Farrelly's (2020:359) definition of "conventional or habitual language patterns associated with social practices" encompasses both the linguistic and normative elements of discourse. However, it obscures the multiplicity of ways

in which linguistic forms can naturalise ideologies and behaviour patterns. For this dissertation, I will attempt a definition that incorporates this as well as the most important aspects of the above definitions. Thus, discourses are:

Normative representations of entities in the world and the relationships between them constructed through language patterns, both influenced by and influencing social contexts and practices.

As an ecolinguistic study, this dissertation also concerns itself with “stories”. Although this term may sometimes overlap with “discourse”, it is distinct. It refers to the cognitive structures and ways of thinking that underly discourses, mediating the relationship between discourse and social phenomena. The term is similar to Fairclough’s (1989) notion of ideologies, incorporating mental models like frames and metaphors, though it is not inherently tied to power in the same way. Nevertheless, stories communicated in the discourse of powerful actors are more likely to become stories-we-live-by, which are ways of thinking that have become entrenched across a society (Stibbe, 2015). As such, I define discourses as:

Cognitive structures or ways of thinking that are exhibited in discourse and constituted via discourse.

This dissertation concerns itself with political discourse, insofar as this refers to the public discourse of politicians (Van Dijk, 1998:12). For Fairclough and Fairclough (2012:13), as politics is a process of making decisions in a context of conflict, uncertainty, scarcity, and risk, political discourse is always a form of argumentation. While I believe political discourse to have broader aims than this, the emphasis on material outcomes is an important reminder to ground discourse analysis in the social processes surrounding it. Van Dijk (1998) also grounds political discourse in action, viewing it as a form of political action. He also makes a few noteworthy observations about common features of political discourse. For example, it frequently involves the construction of in-groups and out-groups, and it tends to refer to the future more positively than the present (Van Dijk, 1998:29). It will be pertinent to examine this in the light of the looming climate crisis, which suggests that the future will be, at least in some respects, worse than the present.

2.3.2 Power

We have established that language has social effects. However, the extent to which a communicative event may contribute to social change is mediated by power relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011:13). Since its inception, CDA has focused on power relationships and the discursive aspects of inequality and oppression (Fairclough, 2010; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). This is not merely a methodological trend, but it is grounded in a theoretical definition of ideology as “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1984 in Fairclough, 2010:8). This is linked to the inherently political nature of CDA as a research field that aims not only to interpret but also change the world (Fairclough, 2010:9). CDA’s theoretical roots are in critical theory, and as such it aims to unveil the causes and scaffolds of social inequality so that they can be better challenged (Rush, 2004:10).

However, there is no singular CDA definition of power, and different scholars draw on a variety of perspectives to form their own definitions (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2011:14). Most CDA scholars utilise a concept of power that is strongly linked to language and the idea that social relations are shaped through discourse. As such, those who have the most control over influential discourses tend to have the most power over the actions and ideologies of others (Van Dijk, 2001:355). In this dissertation, I follow many CDA practitioners and take on Gramsci’s notion of power as hegemony or rule by consent (Gramsci, 1971). Hegemony refers to the fact that state power comes not only from physical force, but is also enacted discursively. Powerful actors have control over public discourse, and thus to a certain extent over the minds of the public. Through the enactment of this discursive power, the people come to think that the status quo is beneficial, or else forget that there are alternatives (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

As always, there are complications to this story. Discourse in the real world does not illustrate a set of neat and consistent ideologies, and political texts are often not the work of one person (Wodak & Meyer, 2016:8). Therefore, texts frequently exist as sites of struggle where different discourses and ideologies compete for dominance (Wodak & Meyer, 2016:10). This dissertation thus assumes that power and ideologies are not clearly defined in any given text. Rather, a text may evidence a mix of stories and discourses that compete against each other or combine to form something new. Moreover, despite the importance of the concept of power, the emphasis on human

social relations to the exclusion of the nonhuman world is inadequate for understanding climate change discourse. Therefore, this study requires a conceptualization of power, context, and the relationship between entities in the world that goes beyond those developed in CDA.

2.3.3 Ecolinguistics

Critiques of the modernist conceptual divide between “nature” and “culture” are not new. For posthumanists such as Harraway (1992 in Fox & Alldred, 2019), this divide is not simply a separation, but a hierarchical one. The nonhuman environment is seen as conceptually subordinate to society, which limits our ability to understand the interrelationships between the two. Climate change is a crisis that illustrates the inadequacy of the divide between society and nature (Lejano, Tavares-Reager, & Berkes, 2013). To seriously investigate climate change discourse, we must take up the posthumanist challenge to acknowledge that humans are part of a natural world, not just a social one. Ecolinguistics is an emerging discipline that takes up this challenge through examining discourse from an ecological perspective. Although the “eco” prefix has been interpreted variously to refer to natural, symbolic, sociocultural or cognitive ecology (Li, Steffenson, & Huang, 2020:1), the movement to foreground natural ecology has been gaining strength (Stibbe, 2015; Norton & Hulme, 2019; Pool & Spangler, 2020; Zahoor & Janjua, 2020; Fernandez-Vasquez, 2021). This does not discount the social, but rather sees humans and their discursive practices as situated in an ecological, as well as social context. For example, a piece of environmental legislation is a product of discursive practice, but it has very real effects on natural ecology (Stibbe, 2015:8).

Ecolinguistics draws on a wide variety of linguistic theories and analytic methods, though it is generally considered a specialised approach to critical discourse analysis. Rather than focusing only on social problems, the concern of ecolinguistics is the interrelationship of human society with the natural world. Human culture is not seen as separate from the physical world, as it both affects it and is affected by it (Norton & Hulme, 2019:115). As Stibbe sees it, ecolinguistics analysts must develop their own “ecosophy” (ecological philosophy) by which they evaluate the “stories” they analyse (Stibbe, 2015:11). Each analyst’s ecosophy will reflect their own positions but will have in common a consideration of the interrelationships of people with other organisms and the physical environment.

2.3.4 The ecosophy of this dissertation

As I am approaching this research project from an ecolinguistic perspective, it is important to articulate my ecosophy as researcher (Stibbe, 2015). Broadly, my ecosophy places value on protecting the “systems that humans and other forms of life depend on for their wellbeing and survival” (Stibbe, 2015:9). Everything else encompassed within my ecosophy is in service of this primary tenet. Thus, my ecosophy places importance on long-term resilience over short-term gains, on the wellbeing of the majority over the wealth accumulation of the few, and on active care over a laissez-faire approach. As such, I would support discourses that advocate for significantly scaling back on practices that harm ecological systems over those that prioritise short-term economic growth.

Another element of my ecosophy is a view on humans and nature that is interconnected and non-hierarchical. Thus, discourses that position humans as having dominion over the land will be evaluated negatively, as will discourses that view systems of life as resources that exist for human extraction. However, my ecosophy would support uses of land and relationships with other life forms that are not destructive to wider ecological systems. Lastly, social justice and equity is an important element of my ecosophy. The climate crisis has been caused by humanity, but not all humanity equally. Rather, it is a result of economic and social systems that prioritise everlasting accumulation and exploitation of resources and other humans (Satgar, 2018; Davis et. al., 2019). My ecosophy thus values wellbeing over accumulation and harmony with nature over exploitation. This ecosophy is key to my data analysis in this study, as it forms the set of values against which I evaluate the discourse of South African politicians and the ecological stories they tell. The following section will explicate the analytical framework of this dissertation in more detail.

2.4 Analytical Framework

2.4.1. CDA and ecolinguistics

As a CDA study, this dissertation aims to bridge the gap between the micro-structures of text and discourse and the macro-structures of society via critical analysis (Van Dijk, 2006:304). I start from an assumption that the macro is enacted through the micro, and that the micro is influenced by the macro. However, the understanding of what constitutes the “macro” is broadened by an ecolinguistics perspective. It is not only social structures that are in question, but also humans’ role

in the ecological systems that support life (Stibbe, 2015). The broad analytical approach of this dissertation is thus one that incorporates insights from both CDA and ecolinguistics.

However, as Wodak and Meyer (2016) argue, CDA is not in itself a method of analysis, but rather a set of common principles. Under the broad umbrella of CDA, research has examined diverse topics such as the marketization of the public discourse of universities (Fairclough, 1993), the construction of in-groups and out-groups in political party manifestos (Edwards, 2012), interactions between store owners and assistants in Chinese shops in Cape Town (Thompson, 2018), and many more. These studies have utilised a range of analytical frameworks, including Fairclough's (1989) three-stage model, Reisigl & Wodak's (2016) Discourse Historical Approach, and multimodal approaches (Ledin & Machin, 2018), among others. In recent years, CDA studies also increasingly make use of corpus-based or corpus-assisted methods (see for example Moor, 2002; Gu & Tipton, 2020; Edwards, 2012; Ho, 2018). Ecolinguistics can be seen as a specialised branch of CDA (Poole & Spangler, 2020:345), concerned with critiquing language forms that contribute to ecological destruction (Stibbe, 2015:1). Once again, it is this common goal that unites researchers rather than any specific method of analysis. It is therefore necessary to be explicit about the analytical framework one is using in any CDA or ecolinguistic study.

2.5 Stages of analysis

Notwithstanding the analytical diversity of CDA, there are common themes in the techniques researchers use to analyse their data. As noted by Reisigl and Wodak (2016), most CDA practitioners utilise an abductive approach to the analysis of texts. This involves the gradual construction of explanatory hypotheses by observing data, relating them tentatively to theoretical models, and continuing to move back and forth between the two. However, this is a very broad characterization, and within it different CDA practitioners employ a wide range of analytical methods. This dissertation follows Fairclough's three-stage model (Fairclough, 1989), modified by Stibbe's approach to ecolinguistics. The three stages of analysis are as follows:

- 1) **Description:** analysis of textual features
- 2) **Interpretation:** analysis of text interpretation via ideologies/stories

3) **Explanation:** analysis of the social and ecological influences and effects

In the following subsections I will explain each stage and the specific techniques and theories drawn upon within them in this dissertation.

2.5.1 STAGE 1: DESCRIPTION

As this dissertation is a two-pronged study, involving both corpus analysis and qualitative analysis components, the description stage has two parts. The first part involves data processing using AntConc, while the second involves close readings of select texts, and observation of their formal properties.

i. Corpus analysis

Corpus analysis makes it possible to investigate a much larger quantity of data (Subtirelu & Baker, 2018). It can also provide insights that may not have been noticed if the analyst was relying solely on their own observations. The description phase as it pertains to corpus analysis consists of quantitative analysis of lexical features. In this dissertation, this included a word frequency analysis and a concordance analysis. The corpus analysis software AntConc was used to determine which words were most frequent for each party and to investigate the collocations of important words. Corpus analysis can provide information about grammatical features too. For example, it may indicate a high frequency of nominalizations and passive verb forms. These are common mechanisms for removing the human agency behind an action and making it seem like a natural process (Fairclough, 1989; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Van Dijk, 2006).

ii. Qualitative analysis

I also employed a qualitative analysis as part of the description phase, which involved performing a close reading of selected texts, while noting down textual features. While corpus analysis can determine a word's frequency, a close reading provides context and thus more clues about its discursive significance. For example, corpus analysis may reveal a high frequency of certain pronouns such as "we" or "you". However, a close reading will provide much more information about the way these are used. As noted by Filardo-Llamas and Boyd (2018:320), "we" can have a shifting indexical scope in political speech, allowing the speaker to create a bond with an increasingly wider audience. In addition, a close reading may reveal stylistic strategies such as

degrees of formality or specificity, and grammatical features not evident from the corpus analysis (Fairclough, 1989:111).

2.5.2 STAGE 2: INTERPRETATION

The *interpretation* stage involves a consideration of the cognitive processes employed in an audience's interpretation of the text. Of course, the analyst does not have access to the processes of interpretation in people's heads. They can only observe their own interpretations, and assess these according to relevant linguistic, social, and cognitive theories (Fairclough, 1989:167). In interpreting a text, a listener/reader relies on their *member resources* (MR), which consist of all their prior knowledge, cognitive associations, and assumptions. This includes knowledge of vocabulary, but also of prior texts and discourses, pragmatic conventions, as well as frames and ideologies (Fairclough, 1989:149). While everyone's MR is unique to them, many elements are shared within a society. These shared MR are precisely what interest CDA practitioners, as they are the underlying cognitive models that collectively shape our view of the world (Stibbe, 2018:502). Stage two is thus concerned with exposing the underlying stories reproduced via the features discovered in stage one. This study focuses on the stories constructed through naturalisation, framing, and salience/erasure patterns.

i. Naturalised ideologies / stories

One of the foremost ways that ideologies are entrenched is via naturalisation, the discursive process by which social objects and processes are constructed as common sense or natural (Gavriely-Nuri, 2018:125). Arran Stibbe (2015:6) refers to such naturalised ideologies as “stories-we-live-by”, that are so entrenched that we do not see them as stories but merely perceive them as the world. These are often revealed in texts as *presuppositions* - what the author assumes to be common ground for all members of the audience (Fairclough, 1989:152). However, presuppositions do not only *follow* what is given, but can make certain statements *appear* as given and thus lead them to be interpreted as such (Fairclough, 1989:153). The work of critical discourse analysis is to “denaturalise” what has been naturalised in discourse (Fairclough, 1995:27). A key aim of this study is thus to denaturalise common-sense assumptions about climate change and the natural world.

ii. Framing

According to Tannen (1993:16), we organise information about the world on the basis of pre-existing experiences and knowledge. These unconscious cognitive organizational structures are *frames*. An entire frame becomes activated when we hear a lexical item associated with that frame. For example, hearing the word “parliament” is likely to activate the “politics” frame in our minds. Frames become ideological when one concept or area of life is discussed with reference to another frame (Fairclough, 1989:159). For example, climate change can be discussed within a frame of economics, science, or human rights, among others. Whichever frame is activated will imply different ways of thinking about the issue and different courses of action. According to Lakoff (2010) one of the reasons most people do not have a strong understanding of the climate crisis is because we lack the frames to adequately capture the situation.

iii. Erasure / salience

According to Stibbe (2014:17), erasure is a “story that an area of life is unimportant”, while salience is the degree of importance ascribed to an area of life. When a topic is emphasised or repeated, it is constructed as having high salience. Salience can also be built by foregrounding participants in active clauses and by applying greater levels of specificity and concreteness. In contrast, when something is backgrounded, de-emphasised, or not mentioned, it is subject to erasure (Van Dijk, 1998:29). Although it is impossible to mention every erasure in a text, an erasure would be considered relevant if the analyst views it as important based on their ecosophy (Stibbe, 2015:146).

2.5.3 STAGE 3: EXPLANATION

The aim of the *explanation* stage is to explain the findings of the textual and interpretive analyses by connecting them to the social processes of which they are a part. This stage attempts to illustrate how the discourse is determined by social structures, and what cumulative effects it can have on them (Fairclough, 1989:163). However, as an ecolinguistic study, this dissertation primarily considers ecological rather than purely social effects (Stibbe, 2015). As this study investigates the discourse of politicians, the explanation stage also requires consideration of the political nature of the discourse. Fairclough and Fairclough (2012:22) argue that unlike everyday talk, political discourse is almost always informed by strategic planning aimed towards achieving a particular

goal. As argued by Van Dijk (2006:356) a major source of power for political actors is the extent of their control of public discourse. I agree with Van Dijk (2006:360) that politicians frequently abuse this power through deliberately manipulating people via discourse. During the explanation stage, it is useful to keep in mind the strategic, goal-oriented nature of political discourse.

In practice, I did not perform these stages as discrete phases, but moved back and forth between them during the process of analysis. This aligns with the abductive approach proposed by Reisigl and Wodak (2016). Drawing on the textual evidence and considerations of processes of interpretation, I gradually worked at linking the discursive features of the text to the social and ecological world. My analysis was always oriented towards the central objective of uncovering politicians' climate change stories. In the *description* stage I collected evidence for the stories being told, in the *interpretation* stage I attempted to explain how these stories influence the way we perceive the world, and in the *explanation* stage I explored their social and ecological effects.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the state of the research on climate change discourse, and how this dissertation sits in dialogue with existing scholarship. While climate change discourse has begun to receive attention, there are scant studies that examine political discourse on climate change in the global South, and none that utilise an ecolinguistic approach. This section has also laid out the theoretical cornerstones of this study as well as the analytical framework I use in approaching my data. The following methodology chapter will describe how the data were collected and processed.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Overview

This chapter discusses the methodological approach and methods that were used to collect and analyse data for this dissertation. The methods were chosen to address the primary research aim, which is to investigate South African politicians' discourse on climate change and uncover the "stories" implicit in it. The focus is on comparing the public discourse of South Africa's three largest political parties, namely the ANC, the DA, and the EFF. As such, the data were made up of communications on the topic of climate change from each party, whose primary recipients are the general public. After a discussion of methodological approach, this chapter will describe how data were selected, processed, and analysed. Lastly, ethical considerations and positionality will be explored.

3.1.2 Methodological approach

This study employed a triangulated methodological approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2016), utilizing both quantitative (corpus analysis) and qualitative (CDA) approaches. The approach is comparable to that employed by Bernard (2015), who investigated corporate responsibility reports of high emitting companies, and Willis (2017) who investigated British politicians' speeches about the 2008 Climate Change Bill. Like in these studies, the corpus analysis is not seen as separate from the critical discourse analysis but is used to support the qualitative methods of CDA (Bernard, 2015:103). For example, once frequent words were identified by the corpus analysis, cases of these were examined in their wider textual contexts. Findings from the corpus analysis also influenced decisions about which texts to perform qualitative analyses on.

Including a corpus analysis component strengthens validity of the study in several ways. Firstly, it contributes to triangulation of methods (Reisigl and Wodak, 2016). Secondly, it makes it possible to investigate a much larger quantity of data than would be feasible using only qualitative techniques. Thirdly, it provides further perspectives on the data, such as frequencies and collocational environments. Fourthly, it makes it possible to generate findings beyond what is

immediately visible or that the analyst is looking for (Subtirelu & Baker, 2018). However, despite the usefulness of corpus methods, they cannot replace in-depth critical analysis in a CDA study. As Mautner (2016) acknowledges, corpus analysis has a strong bias towards individual lexical units, rather than other features like grammatical forms, longer phrases, style, and intertextuality. In addition, corpus analysis inevitably decontextualises data. Therefore, this research study also included a qualitative component which consisted of a close reading and critical analysis of selected texts.

3.2 Data selection

3.2.1 Quantitative data collection

The data for this dissertation consists of “communications to the public” from the ANC, the DA, and the EFF that discuss climate change. These communications consist of a wide range of text genres, including blogs, speeches, media statements, informational pamphlets, and policy statements (for a full inventory, see Table 3.2). To collect this data, I conducted online searches using the search term “climate change” for the period April 2018 – April 2021. This period begins when Cyril Ramaphosa took over from Jacob Zuma as president, and ends soon after the Virtual Leaders’ Summit on Climate Change that president Ramaphosa took part in. April 2021 was also close to the time that I began data collection.

Due to the different roles of the three political parties, data collection for each party required different approaches. For the ANC, I searched the South African government website and the dedicated website for the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries, which yielded many results. I also searched on the ANC’s official website but did not find anything more. For the DA, I searched their official party website, and the Western Cape provincial government website, which yielded several results. For the EFF, I searched their official party website, but did not find any texts on climate change. I then searched on general search engines with the terms “EFF + climate change”, and continuously did so over a few months. I finally found an election manifesto with a section on climate change, but no other texts.

Table 3.1. Included and excluded political fields and corresponding political subgenres

	Political field	Political subgenres
Included	<i>Formation of public attitudes, opinion and will</i>	Media statements, speeches by politicians, State of the Nation/Province Address, contributions to conferences, blogs, opinion statements
	<i>Organization of international/interstate relations</i>	Speeches at meetings/summits of supranational organizations, speeches at state visits
	<i>Political advertising</i>	Election speeches, election manifestos, speeches by politicians, State of the Nation/Province address
Excluded	<i>Law-making procedure</i>	Laws, bills, parliamentary speeches, regulations
	<i>Party-internal formation of attitudes, opinions and will</i>	Speeches at party conventions/meetings, party programmes
	<i>Inter-party formation of attitudes, opinions and will,</i>	Speeches at inter-party government meetings, coalition negotiations

3.2.2 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As the search results for the ANC and the DA were numerous and varied, it was necessary to decide which to include or exclude. Therefore, I clicked on each result and decided to include it if:

- a) Climate change was mentioned in the text.
- b) The text did indeed come from the political party in question.
- c) The text's primary recipients were the general public.

The first criterion was easily determined by performing a search on each web page using Control + F. With regards to criterion b), some of the texts on the SA government website came from members of parliament who belong to the DA and were therefore classified as DA texts. Criterion c) was a little harder to ascertain. In one sense, all the texts on the websites could be seen to be aimed towards the public, as they were all published on public websites. However, in some cases the public were secondary recipients, while politicians or policymakers were primary recipients. In assessing whether a text had the general public as its primary recipients, I utilised Reisigl and Wodak's (2016:29) "fields of political action". These fields are defined by different functions of discursive practices in the political sphere. For example, the field of *public advertising* includes political text subgenres such as election speeches and manifestos. For this study, I included texts that belonged to more 'public-oriented' political fields, including *formation of public attitudes, opinion and will; organization of international/interstate relations*, and *political advertising*. I excluded texts that belonged to fields more oriented towards those involved in state apparatus, such as *law-making procedure; inter-party formation of attitudes, opinions and will*, and *party-internal formation of attitudes, opinions and will*. Table 3.1. provides a more detailed description.

After this selection process, the final corpora consisted of 199 texts for the ANC, 90 for the DA, and 1 for the EFF. In corpus linguistics, "token" refers to individual occurrences of linguistic units, and "type" to the category of such units. For example, the word *climate* is one word type, but it could have any number of tokens. The ANC corpus was made up of 228,386 tokens, the DA corpus of 135,810 tokens, and the EFF corpus of 25,425 tokens. Table 3.2 provides a comprehensive list of the text categories included for each party. Note that the text categories are not the same as the

“political subgenres” illustrated in Table 3.1. The political subgenres are organised according to political function, while the categories below are self-assigned by the political parties (with slight variations in phrasing).

Table 3.2. Overview of all texts and text categories that make up the data

Text categories	ANC	DA	EFF
Blogs	5	49	0
International speeches	26	0	0
Local speeches	51	8	0
Media advisories	21	0	0
Media statements	89	11	0
Statements by politicians	3	11	0
Informational pamphlets	3	10	0
Policy statements	0	1	1

3.2.3 Qualitative data selection

The data selected for qualitative analysis came from the same corpora that were used for the corpus analysis. From these, texts were chosen for close reading partly based on the extent to which they exhibited typical or interesting discourses features, partly on the findings from the corpus analysis, and partly on their perceived importance. The discourse features were picked up on an initial reading of the entire data set, leading to the selection of texts for in-depth analysis. Though “importance” is difficult to quantify, it was assessed based on a few different features, namely:

- a) The number of people who could be expected to have consumed the text. For example, the State of the Nation Address is broadcast on SABC and YouTube and can be assumed to have a wide viewership.

- b) The focus given to the phenomenon a text addresses. For example, the Good Green Deeds campaign was promoted across many texts, prompting me to analyse its campaign launch speech.
- c) The extent to which I as the analyst considered the topic of a text important. For example, my ecosophy values decisive action on climate, prompting me to examine texts on South Africa's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC).

3.2.4 Data storage

The corpus data was initially stored by saving each text as a word document or PDF, and then uploading the texts to Dropbox. The texts were organised in files according to the categories described in Table 3.2. Prior to corpus analysis, each text was converted to a txt. file, and extraneous text such as dates and web links were deleted. The original word documents and PDFs were saved for qualitative and analysis.

3.3 Data processing

3.3.1 Quantitative data processing

The corpus-based component was performed using AntConc Version 3.5.8, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit developed by Lawrence Anthony. I made use of two tools on AntConc, namely the Word List and Concordance tools. The Word List tool ranks all the words in the corpus according to frequency, which allowed me to compare word frequencies for each party. The Concordance tool allows for any word to be searched and for all instances of that word to be displayed in a list format, organised alphabetically according to three levels. For example, level one could be set as one word to the right of the search word (1R), level two as two words to the right (2R), and level three as three words to the right (3R). The analyst could also choose to search according to words to the left or a combination of the two. It is also possible to include more than one word in the search at a time, thus allowing one to search using multiple derivations of a word.

For this study, the words *climate*, *economy*, and *environment* were chosen for concordance analysis. The plurals and derivations *economies*, *economic*, and *environmental* were also included. These words were chosen based on the primary research aim of investigating discourse on climate change,

as well as observations from the word frequency analysis. Each word was searched using the levels 1R, 2R and 3R or 1L, 2L and 3L depending on the part of speech and what was being investigated. For example, as *economy* is a noun, it was analysed for its preceding adjectives, and thus searched with the levels 1L, 2L and 3L. This allowed an investigation into which adjectives occurred up to 3 words to the left of *economy*, showing phrases such as “green economy” and “our economy”.

3.3.2 Qualitative data processing

All the written data for this study was initially saved in the form of Word documents and PDFs. The selected texts were then subjected to a close reading and a textual, discursive, and contextual analysis according to Fairclough’s (1989) three-stage approach. This, as well as further techniques drawn upon in analysis are discussed in the following chapter.

3.4 Ethics and positionality

In this dissertation, there was not much to overcome in terms of ethics. The data came from texts that were publicly available on government and political party websites. They are produced by political actors in their capacity as political actors, and often addressed to the public. They are thus available for analysis, particularly if the goal of the analysis is holding politicians accountable.

A more pressing issue to address here is positionality. CDA has been criticised for positing that a systematic analysis by a single researcher can demystify social events. We aim to uncover what is hidden, but we ourselves are driven by economic, social, and political motives (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Therefore, we cannot say that as researchers we have a superior ability to see the truth in discourse. CDA researchers do not aim to provide an objective analysis of discourse, but rather to make their subjectivities transparent. In addition, CDA researchers tend to take an explicitly political stance. This is not seen as a hindrance, but as an important function of CDA to challenge ideologies in service of power (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Although CDA aims to make visible what is implicit in discourse, what an individual researcher decides to make visible and the way they do so is also discourse and thus available for critique.

My social identities are likely to have influenced my analyses (Ratele, 2019). I am a white, upper-middle-class woman. This will impact my views on political issues and what I prioritise as

important. For example, I have the mental space to prioritise climate change as a political issue because I do not struggle to meet my basic needs, nor do I experience much discrimination based on my identity. Although climate change is an issue that will affect marginalised communities the most, it is not yet experienced directly in a way comparable to unemployment, poverty, or lack of necessary services. As well as these aspects of my identity, I have certain political views that certainly impacted my interpretation of data and my choice of what to subject to detailed analysis. These are that:

- a) I am sceptical that climate change can be tackled in an economy premised on continuous growth.
- b) I believe governments have the responsibility to prioritise tackling climate change; and
- c) I believe the government has so far not prioritised climate change to a sufficient degree.

These views form part of my ecosophy, which was discussed in section 2.3.5.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodological approach of this study and shown why it is suitable to address the research aims. It has laid out the methods for data selection, storage, and processing. It has also explored the ethics of the study and my positionality in relation to it. The following two chapters outline the findings that emerged from the analysis of the data described in this chapter, chapter 4 from the corpus analysis and chapter 5 from the in-depth qualitative analysis.

Chapter 4: Corpus Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will describe the findings that emerged from the corpus analysis. I analysed two features within the datasets of each party, namely word frequency and concordance. In corpus linguistics it is necessary to have a large corpus of texts, or superficial variation may obscure underlying regularities (Poole, 2022:12; Mautner, 2016:163). The ANC corpus consisted of 228,386 tokens over 199 texts. The DA corpus was approximately half the size of the ANC corpus, consisting of 135,810 tokens over 90 texts. Unfortunately, as I could only find one text from the EFF that mentioned climate change, its corpus comprised only one text of 25,425 tokens. Moreover, this was an election manifesto with only one section addressing climate change. The corpus was thus too short for meaningful analysis. I applied the same analyses to the EFF corpus to make exploratory observations and comparisons, but the reader should be aware that these are very preliminary findings.

4.2 Word frequency

4.2.1 Highest frequency overall

Word frequency was compared using the Word List tool on AntConc. Table 4.1 shows the 20 most frequent words in each corpus, listed in terms of number of occurrences per 1000 words. At first glance, the most striking observation is how similar the ANC and DA corpora are. After removing grammatical and function words, they share 12 of their 20 most frequent words, with several occurring in the same order of frequency. For example, *climate* and *change* are ranked third and sixth in the ANC corpus, and eighth and ninth in the DA corpus. This is unsurprising given that the texts were all chosen because they mentioned climate change. The words are not as frequent in the EFF corpus as this consists of only an election manifesto, which touches on many other issues.

Notable commonalities in the top 20 words for the ANC and DA include *development*, *energy* and *water*. However, *energy* is more frequent than *water* in the ANC corpus, but vice versa in the DA corpus. This could point to the recent droughts in the Western Cape, which brought the issue of

water scarcity to the forefront for the DA-led province (Otto et. al., 2018). Energy may also be seen as more of a national issue than a provincial one, particularly because it is primarily provided by the state-owned enterprise Eskom, which is at the centre of numerous crises (Bowman, 2020). Another notable difference is the presence of *economic* and *economy* in the top 20 words of the ANC and EFF corpora, but not the DA corpus. This implies that economic issues are more central for the ANC and EFF than they are for the DA. However, we will see later that other findings complicate this.

Table 4.1. Top 20 content words in each corpus

	ANC		DA		EFF	
Rank	Word type	No. of tokens per 1000	Word type	No. of tokens per 1000	Word type	No. of tokens per 1000
1	we	7.94	we	14.49	EFF	32.53
2	our	7.8	our	6.91	government	31.43
3	climate	5.64	Cape	9.01	South	6.8
4	South	5.43	Western	4.93	state	5.78
5	Africa	4.89	water	4.59	Africa	4.8
6	change	4.29	city	3.72	people	4.09
7	energy	3.92	government	3.25	owned	4.01
8	environment	3.63	climate	3.03	ensure	3.78
9	development	3.5	change	2.69	development	3.58
10	water	3.46	South	2.58	build	3.3
11	department	3.26	province	2.46	women	3.19
12	national	2.99	their	2.35	African	2.95
13	economic	2.55	year	2.33	establish	2.91
14	country	2.25	department	2.16	jobs	2.64
15	economy	2.17	Africa	2.1	land	2.56
16	government	2.09	you	1.87	companies	2.48
17	environmental	2.08	development	1.86	economic	2.48
18	minister	2.07	energy	1.84	public	2.24
19	their	2.06	people	1.77	services	2.24
20	African	2.03	town	1.75	health	2.2

Although there are some frequent words that the EFF has in common with the ANC or the DA, there are many that are not highly ranked for the other two corpora. One striking pattern is that four of the top 20 words for the EFF are verbs (*owned, ensure, build, establish*) while there are no verbs in the top 20 words for the DA or ANC (*change* is primarily used as a noun in *climate change*). This suggests that the EFF discusses actions much more frequently than the ANC and DA, which could imply that they are more committed to implementing change. Another notable observation is the high ranking of words relating to geographical place, including *South* and *Africa* for the ANC, *Cape, Western, and city* for the DA, and *South, state, and Africa* for the EFF. This suggests that all three parties frequently frame their discussion of climate change with regard to specific locations or geographical relations, but there are differences in which places are referenced. This and other differences will be discussed below.

4.2.2 Semantic grouping

To make more sense of the word frequencies, I grouped the most frequent words according to semantic similarity. I first collated all words that occurred more than once per 1000 words in all three corpora, then created the semantic groupings inductively from the resulting words. I chose this approach rather than using an existing semantic tagging system due to the specificity of the discourse genre and topic (Poole, 2022:13). I had initially tried to use the USAS tagging tool, but this applied meanings that were too general. For example, within USAS, *change* is classified as “affect: modify, change.” However, in the context of my corpora, *change* is predominantly used to refer to climate change. Thus, not taking the context into account results in important information being lost.

The categories that resulted from this approach included the following: 1) “Governance”, 2) “Climate change”, 3) “Economic”, 4) “Place”, 5) “People”, and 6) “Verbs”. There was an additional grouping in the DA corpus that I did not find in the ANC or EFF corpora which I termed 7) “New beginnings”. There were also two groupings in the EFF corpus I did not find in the other two corpora, namely 8) “Natural resources” and 9) “Education”. There were some words in the other ANC and DA corpora that could have been included under “Natural resources”, but these were few and were thus subsumed into the “Climate change” grouping. However, very little can be concluded from the presence of 8) and 9) in the EFF corpus as it is a single text. A few of the

words applied to more than one of the groupings, so there is some overlap. For example, *jobs* was included both under the *economic* grouping and the *people* grouping as it relates to economic concerns of people’s lives. Tables 4.2., 4.3. and 4.4. illustrate the semantic groupings for each party.

Table 4.2. Semantic groupings for frequent words in the ANC corpus

Governance	Climate change	Economy	Place	People	Verbs
<i>department, government, minister, sector, forestry, programme, fisheries, management, areas, year, public, infrastructure, plan, implementation</i>	<i>climate, change, energy, environment, water, environmental, sustainable, waste, biodiversity, gas, carbon, green, renewable, adaptation, land</i>	<i>development, economic, economy, work, growth</i>	<i>South, Africa, national, country, African, global, international, world, countries</i>	<i>we, our, their, us, you, people, communities</i>	<i>support, ensure, need, work</i>

4.2.3 Governance

Most of the words under the “governance” grouping are unsurprising, given that the corpora are made up of political discourse. *Forestry* and *fisheries* are frequent in the ANC corpus but not the other two due to references to the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment. However, unlike the DA and ANC, the EFF has few words relating to the machinery of governance itself, such as *department*, *minister*, and *speaker*. Most of its “governance” words refer to more general political systems, such as *institutions*, *infrastructure*, *system*, and *political*. This may suggest a more abstract approach compared with the other two parties, but may also stem from the genre of the text as an election manifesto. The frequency of words like *programme*, *management*, *plan*, and *implementation* in the ANC and DA texts suggests a bureaucratic orientation towards climate change among both parties. It presents the climate crisis as something that can be “managed” through programmes and initiatives:

- 1) “The City is committed to improving the **management** of energy use in all municipal operations, to improve resource efficiency, reduce its carbon footprint and save money.” (DA –blog post)

- 2) “Furthermore, we have developed the National Framework on Climate Services to enable better **management** of the risks of climate variability and change at all levels, through development and incorporation of science-based climate information and prediction services into planning, policy and practice.” (ANC – speech by Minister Edna Molewa)
- 3) “Improve **management** and maintenance of the ecological and agricultural resource-base.” (DA – 2018 medium term budget policy statement)

These sentences utilise a bureaucratic framing to address climate and environmental issues. They suggest that not only can energy use be managed, but so can migratory birds and even the risks of climate change. This implies that as long as we have coordinated systems of information and planning, we can keep the climate crisis under control (Willis, 2017). The word *management* also denotes a useful lack of specificity (Van Dijk, 1998). Unlike words like *limitation*, *reduction*, or *protection*, it does not contain any information about what this management will involve. For example, although “management and maintenance of ecological and agricultural resource-base”, seems to imply protection, it does not preclude the possibility that it would also involve destruction.

Table 4.3. Semantic groupings of frequent words in the DA corpus

Governance	Climate change	Economy	Place	People	Verbs	New beginnings
government, year, department, sector, DA, speaker, public, management, minister, infrastructure, programme, services, years, project, projects	water, climate, change, energy, agriculture, environmental, green, carbon, land, sustainable,	development, economic, economy, jobs, growth, work	Cape, Western, city, South, province, Africa, town, provincial, local	we, our, their, you, us, people, communities, jobs,	ensure, use, need, work, support, do, make	first, new, opportunities, now,

4.2.4 Climate Change

The existence of the *climate change* grouping is not surprising given that the texts were chosen because they mention climate change. However, there are a few notable differences between the ANC and DA corpora. For example, the words *waste*, *biodiversity*, *gas*, and *renewable* all occurred

much more frequently in the ANC corpus than the DA corpus. This suggests that waste, biodiversity, and energy are seen as key climate issues for the ANC but not so much for the DA. *Energy* is frequent across both corpora, but the paucity of more specific words in the DA corpus suggests that the DA does not address it in as much detail as the ANC. Conversely, *agriculture* occurs much more frequently in the DA corpus than the ANC corpus, suggesting that it may be a significant climate change topic for the DA but not for the ANC.

Table 4.4. Semantic groupings of frequent words in the EFF corpus

Governance	Natural resources	Economy	Place	People	Verbs	Education
<i>EFF, government, public, services, institutions, infrastructure, system, facilities, legislation, political, management, years, new</i>	<i>land, water, mining, energy, resources</i>	<i>development, jobs, companies, economic, mining, economy, produce, company, industrial, financial, ownership, production, work, products, resources</i>	<i>South, Africa, state, African, region, local, Cape, country, ward, areas, national</i>	<i>people, women, jobs, black, public, health, youth, schools, school, social, community, hospital, work, them</i>	<i>owned, ensure, build, establish, provide, increase, support, care, require, research, creating</i>	<i>schools, school, learning, higher, education, research</i>

4.2.5 Place

Words relating to place featured highly in the most frequent words for all three political parties (see table 4.3). Overall, the ANC's references to place were mostly national and to a slightly lesser extent international, while the DA's were regional and provincial. The EFF's were primarily national but also regional. These differences can be explained by the differing governing responsibilities of the parties. As the party of national governance, the ANC speaks to the country as a whole, but also to international political actors. Similarly, words like *provincial*, *local*, and *city* reflect the DA's position as the provincial government of the Western Cape. In contrast, the EFF holds no governing power beyond the ward level. The EFF text is an election manifesto, and therefore much of it is about stating plans should the EFF come into power. One intriguing finding

is the relative frequency of *state* over *country*, as they essentially mean the same thing. However, *state* holds connotations of nationalisation that *country* does not.

In general, the ANC corpus contains more words relating to specific climate issues than the DA corpus. A possible explanation is that the ANC is more involved in creating climate policies, being the party of national governance. Another explanation is that the ANC is more dedicated to solving specific climate issues, while the DA relies on virtue signalling of ‘greenness’. However, focusing on these differences belies the similarity between the two corpora. Although the ANC addresses a few key issues, both corpora display a remarkable scarcity of words relating to specific climate commitments. As argued by Stibbe (2015:188), what is absent in a text is as important as what is present. Words that suggest clear targets, such as *target/s*, *goal/s*, and *aim/s* are not frequent in either corpus. Words that refer to international guidelines and scientific consensus on climate change, such as *IPCC* and *UNFCCC* as well as *warming*, *temperature*, and *degree/s* are also rare. Thus, both corpora display a lack of specificity regarding what the climate crisis will involve, and what will be done about it.

The “climate change” grouping was not present in the EFF corpus. As mentioned before, the EFF corpus is a single text, with only one section on environment and climate. However, the brevity of this section is notable. The word *climate* only occurred 6 times in the text including headings, and *environment* only 7 times. This suggests that the EFF does not take climate change seriously. Moreover, the fact that it is mentioned only in its own section also suggests that the EFF does not consider climate issues to be linked to other systems, such as agriculture, mining, and the economy. Discussing the above issues without mentioning climate, and discussing climate change without mentioning its entanglements in our social and economic systems, creates an extremely limited picture of both (Stibbe, 2015).

4.2.6 Economy

All three corpora have a markedly high frequency of economic words, suggesting that they frame climate change largely through an economic lens. As noted by Stibbe (2015), a feature of much discourse on climate change is its tendency to view it as an environmental issue only. As humans and culture are viewed as separate from the environment and nature, climate change is not seen as an issue that directly affects people (Ghosh, 2016). Therefore, the acknowledgement that climate

change will affect social structures such as economies is necessary. However, if climate change is viewed as a problem only to the extent that it affects economies, it is easy to disregard processes that will have disastrous effects on human and animal life further down the line. Furthermore, the economy is not only mentioned when speaking about the effects of climate change. As we will see in the concordance analysis, it is predominantly spoken about in relation to economic growth, reflecting a strongly neoliberal mindset.

Although *economy* and *economic* occur frequently in both the ANC and DA corpora, they are more prevalent in the ANC corpus. However, we have already noted that *jobs* is comparatively more prevalent in the DA corpus. Relating climate change to jobs is still utilising an economic frame, albeit one focused on individuals' direct economic concerns. Interestingly, *technology* and *opportunity/ies* are also more frequent in the DA corpus. This suggests that while both the ANC and the DA present the economy as a central concern, the ANC does so primarily through referring to economic systems, while the DA does so more through matters relating to individuals' aspirations.

The frequency words relating to the economy in the EFF corpus is striking. *Company/ies*, *mining*, *produce*, *industrial*, *financial*, *ownership*, *production*, *products*, and *resources* are all proportionally more frequent in the EFF corpus. Perhaps this is not surprising, given the EFF's name and emphasis on economic freedom. In addition, words like *ownership*, *mining* and *resources* point to the EFF's goal of nationalizing the country's key assets. However, the frequency of words like *mining*, *industrial* and *production* suggest an expansionist view of the economy. Despite being explicitly anti-capitalist, it appears that the EFF still supports economic expansion, thus not moving away from an ecologically destructive economic system. We can see this in the following examples:

- 4) "The EFF government will specifically discontinue private ownership of Sasol and Mittal Steel and provide them with concrete developmental mandates to contribute to the rapid sustainable **industrial** development of South Africa." (EFF²)
- 5) "The EFF government will encourage and incentivise the application of research and development findings to the various **production** processes of SOEs and private companies." (EFF)

² Note that the only document analysed from the EFF was the 2019 election manifesto, so every extract labeled "EFF" comes from that text.

4.2.7 People

There are few words relating to people in the ANC or the DA corpus. Most are pronouns, and the others are very general, such as *people* and *communities*. Words relating to specific identities, such as *children*, *parents*, *youth*, and *workers* are rare, as are words relating to people's daily lives. This suggests that neither party frames the climate crisis as something directly affecting human lives and wellbeing (Stibbe, 2015:108). Interestingly, the EFF corpus has a high frequency of words relating to specific identities and issues that people face, such as *women*, *black*, *youth*, *health*, and *school*. Although these are not primarily used in relation to climate change, it suggests a greater focus on people's everyday lives.

Another similarity between the ANC and DA corpora is the overwhelming frequency of the pronouns *we* and *our*. In both corpora, these were used to refer variously to the political party, the government, the specific department, South Africans, or humanity in general. Very frequently it appears as a generic *we*, where the referent is unclear. For example, it is not clear in text 6 whether *we* refers to all South Africans, policymakers, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, or a more amorphous collection of stakeholders. Either way, the text does not specify who should be responsible for creating a nature-based economy. As noted by Poole (2022), such patternings of *we* can obfuscate causality and responsibility, diffusing the need for action without ensnaring anyone specifically. The referent is also unclear in text 7. Presumably, conserving resources is the responsibility of everyone, while ensuring that access to them is shared fairly is the responsibility of government. However, collapsing these into a single *we* erases this distinction, thus diluting any claims of responsibility.

- 6) “**We** would do well to work together to address all the challenges that face us as **we** adapt to, and mitigate, climate change as we create a nature-based economy from which all **our** people can benefit, without harming the environment.” (ANC - 2021/22 Forestry, Fisheries and Environment dept budget vote)
- 7) “**We** must better conserve resources, use them wisely and ensure that access to these resources is shared fairly across all communities.” (DA – blog post)

Interestingly, the pronoun *them* was much more frequent than *we* and *our* in the EFF manifesto. This may reflect the fact that the EFF text was an election manifesto, and as such lays out their commitments should they come to power. Much of the EFF text is written in the format of promises

with the modal verb “will”, as in extracts 8 and 9. However, it is notable that the EFF makes little attempt to establish a collective identification with citizens through pronouns. Even when speaking about the party itself, the manifesto tends to use “the EFF” rather than “we”. While the ANC and DA attempt to build rapport and a sense of collective responsibility, the EFF aims for a more detached voice, which contributes to a sense of authority.

- 8) “The EFF government will make it illegal for residents to be evicted from private properties unless a suitable alternative is found for **them**.” (EFF)
- 9) “The EFF government will ensure that young and emerging black farmers in all these agricultural development nodes are prioritised and receive technical and financial support, and that a minimum of 50% of **them** are women.” (EFF)

4.2.8 New Beginnings

A notable difference between the ANC and DA corpora is the presence of the semantic grouping “new beginnings” in the DA corpus but not in the ANC corpus. This consists of the words *first*, *new*, *opportunities*, and *now*. Of these, the biggest difference is displayed by *now*, with the DA corpus having 11.1 tokens per 10,000 words and the ANC only 5.7. These differences point to a greater tendency on the DA’s part to speak about the future optimistically in terms of positive developments. *First* and *now* are not inherently optimistic, but are mostly used to refer to commendable actions the DA is taking or plans to take:

- 10) “The Western Cape will be the **first** province to beat load shedding.” (DA – 2021 State of the Province Address)
- 11) “The series was the **first** ever programme on climate change.” (DA – media statement)
- 12) “The Western Cape has **now** appointed a Climate Change and Risk Assessment Scientist.” (DA – 2021 State of the Province Address)
- 13) “We have also **now** procured technical expertise that will help our municipalities become energy resilient.” (DA – 2021 State of the Province Address)

As the largest party after the ANC, the DA is eager to emphasise its successes in the regions it governs, thus suggesting that the country would be better off under its leadership.

4.2.9 Verbs

The *verbs* category for the ANC and DA corpora is strikingly small, especially when compared with the EFF. In the ANC corpus, only the verbs *support*, *ensure*, *need* and *work* occurred more than once per 1000 words. Moreover, *support* and *work* are often used as nouns. However, *work* is also frequently used as a verb with the collocate “together”, as in text 14. It is also used to refer to actions the ANC promises to take as shown in text 15. In the DA corpus, *work* also occurs frequently with *together*, but it does not mention problems to the same degree as the ANC. Rather, it usually refers to actions the DA claims to be taking, as in text 16. This supports the observation that the DA represents climate change predominantly in terms of the positive actions taken in response to it.

- 14) “It is therefore essential that all South Africans **work** together to address this challenge”. (ANC – Speech by Edna Molewa)
- 15) “We commit to **work** with the youth and other partners on the whole society approach to heighten nature’s solutions to the many challenges that humanity faces”. (ANC – media statement)
- 16) “We will continue to **work** hard, every day, to deliver this vision” (DA – 2021 State of the Province Address)

Of the three parties, the EFF corpus has by far the highest proportion of active verbs, with the words *ensure*, *build*, *establish*, *provide*, *increase*, *support*, *care* and *require* all occurring very frequently. However, on closer inspection, *care* is primarily used as a noun in the sense of *health care*. Of these, *build*, *provide* and *support* are particularly interesting as they suggest active commitments on the part of the EFF in the form of promises to do things for South Africans. Much of the EFF manifesto reads like a list of promises. Some of them are fairly detailed, while others appear highly ambitious without any information about how to fulfil them.

- 17) “The EFF government will maximally **build** and **support** the cultivation and agro-processing of citrus products in the Mopani region; the cultivation and agro-processing of tomatoes in Mopani and the cultivation and agro-processing of avocados, bananas and other products in the Vhembe region of Limpopo Province.” (EFF)
- 18) “The EFF government will **provide** each South African with in-house hot running water by 2024.” (EFF)

4.3 Concordance Analysis

For concordance analysis, key words were chosen based on the above findings and the aims of this dissertation. These words were 1) *climate*, 2) *economy* (and its derivatives *economic* and *economies*), and 3) *environment* (and its derivative *environmental*). *Climate* and *environment* were chosen due to their relevance to climate change. *Economy* was chosen due to the frequency of words relating to the economy across both corpora.

4.3.1 Climate

By far the most common concordance for *climate* across the corpora was *change*, which is not surprising as the documents were chosen because they mention climate change. However, the lack of other ways to refer to the same phenomenon is striking. This observation led to the decision to approach the concordance analysis through two questions:

- a) How does each corpus usually refer to the phenomenon climate change?
- b) How does each corpus usually refer to action taken in response to climate change?

These questions allowed for a more targeted analysis to make relevant comparisons between the corpora.

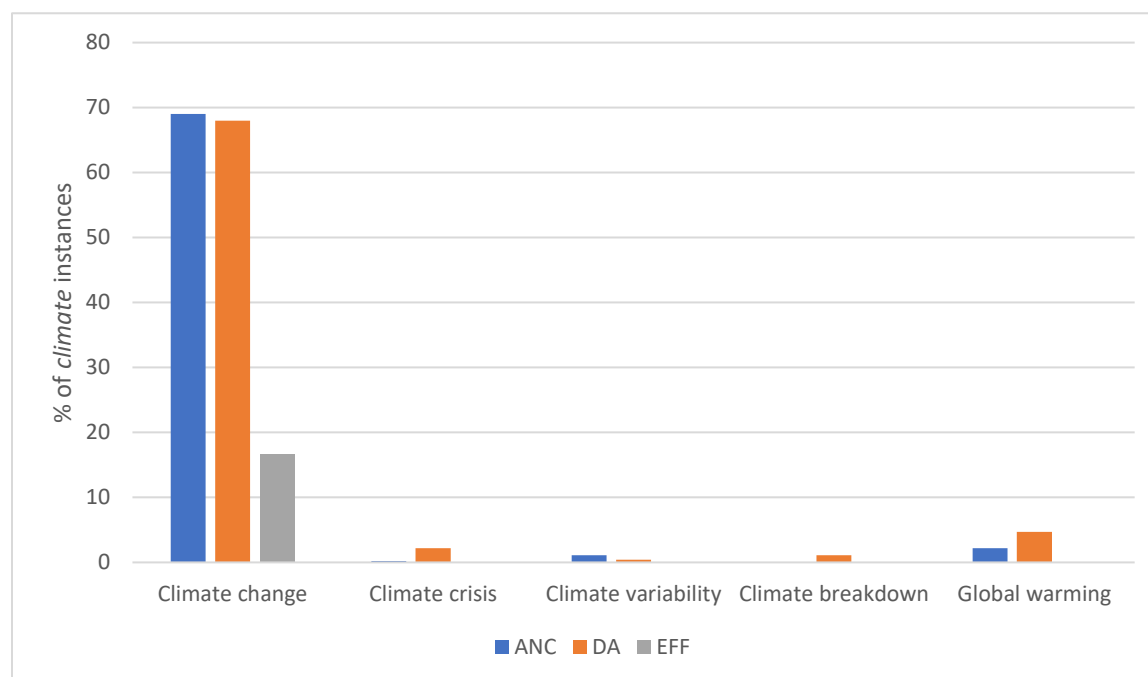
4.1.1.1. The phenomenon of climate change

In the ANC corpus, *climate change* occurs 894 times, representing 69% of all instances of the word *climate* as shown in Figure 4.1. In the DA corpus, the proportion is remarkably similar, with the phrase representing 68% of all instances of *climate*. In the EFF corpus, *climate* only occurred 6 times, three of them in the heading *Environment and Climate*. *Climate change* only occurred once. In the ANC and DA corpora, the scarcity of alternative ways to refer to the climate crisis is notable. *Climate crisis*, *climate emergency/ies*, *climate issues*, *climate variability*, *climate warming*, *climate catastrophe* twice, and *climate breakdown* all occur in one or both corpora, but none occur more than 10 times in a corpus.

Climate change has become the ubiquitous way to refer to global heating and escalating climate disasters (Grundmann & Krishnamurthy, 2010). However, some publications and institutions have

deliberately switched their language to phrases that more accurately depict the seriousness of the situation, such as *climate crisis* or *climate emergency*. Indeed, the term *climate change* was popularised in the USA because *global warming* was seen as overly dramatizing, while *climate change* was milder and implied potentially natural causes (Poole, 2022:31). *Global warming* occurs only 20 times in the ANC corpus and 13 times in the DA corpus.

Figure 4.1. Ways to refer to the climate crisis



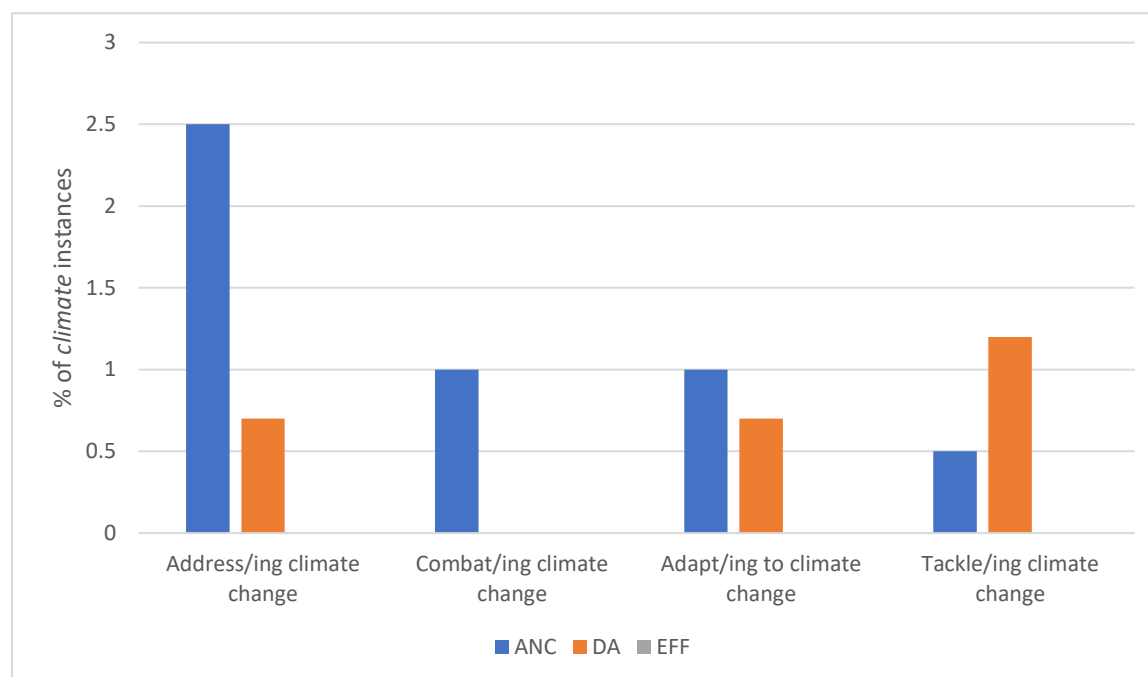
4.1.1.2. Climate action

To investigate how each party presents actions taken in response to climate change, I analysed the corpora for collocations of verbs to the left of *climate change*, shown in Figure 4.2. Interestingly, none of the corpora had many instances of such verbs. For those that did occur, the most frequent in the ANC corpus was *address/ing climate change*, followed by *combat/ing* and *adapt/ing to climate change*. The DA had proportionally even fewer verbs before *climate change* than the ANC. The most frequent was *tackle/ing climate change*, followed by *address/ing*, *adapt/ing to* and *respond/ing to*. The EFF corpus had no instances of verbs preceding *climate change*.

While *combat/ing* evokes a war metaphor (Stibbe, 2015), both *tackle/ing* and *address/ing* have more semantically neutral connotations. *Address/ing* in particular implies no sense of urgency.

Rather, it has connotations of bureaucratic procedure, as one “addresses” concerns via an established protocol, or items on a meeting agenda. One does not “address” emergencies or imminent threats. It is also interesting to note the prevalence of *adapting to climate change*, while *mitigate/ing* is less frequent. This illustrates a minimizing of focus on mitigation actions, as well as an implication that it is possible to simply adapt to a changing climate (Stibbe, 2015).

Figure 4.2. Preceding verb concordances for *climate change*



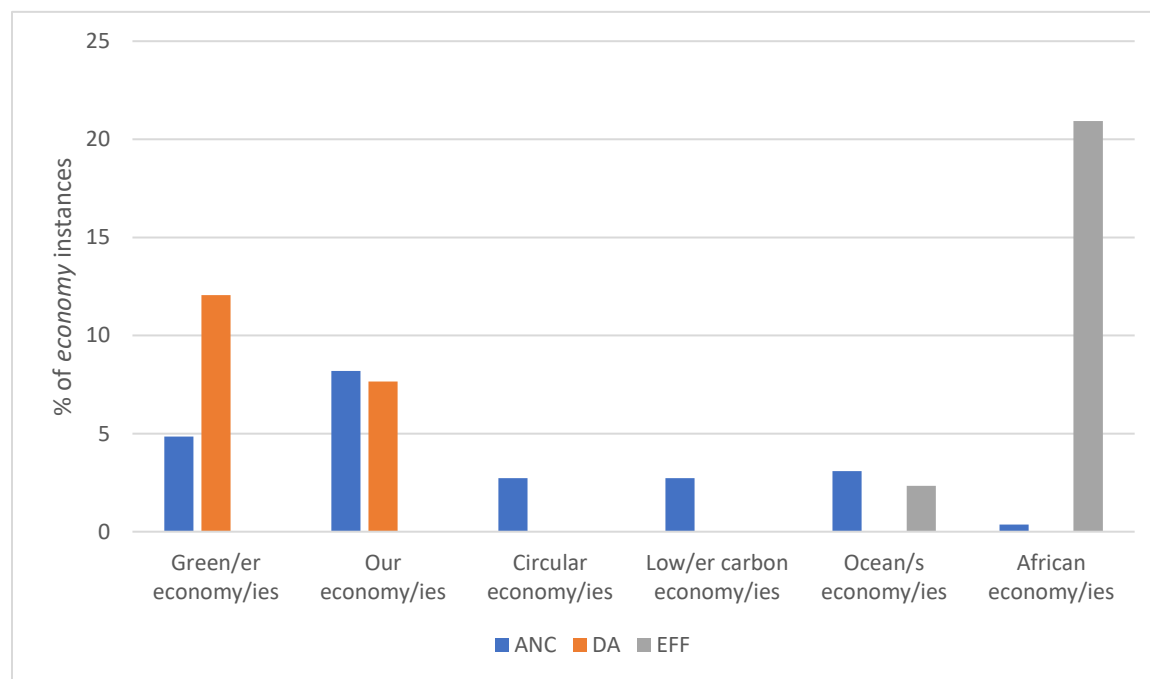
4.3.2 Economy

In the concordance analysis of *economy* and its derivatives, I investigated the adjectives that precede *economy/ies*, and the nouns that follow *economic* due to the words’ different grammatical roles. As Figure 4.3 shows, there is a wider variety of adjectival collocations with *economy* in the ANC corpus than in the DA corpus. The only prominent collocations in the DA corpus were *green/er economy/ies* and *our economies*, which are also the most frequent in the ANC corpus. *Circular economy/ies* and *low/er carbon economy/ies* may be understood to fall under the notion of a “green economy.” However, while the DA speaks only generally of “green economies”, the ANC includes more specific categories. At the same time, the strong link made by the ANC between economic and climate related issues is once again evident (Poole, 2022). Readers and

listeners are frequently asked to view solutions to the climate crisis as primarily economic processes.

In contrast, when the EFF mentioned the economy, it was usually not in relation to the climate. The most frequent economy concordance for the EFF was *African economy/ies*. Interestingly, *African economy* on its own was more frequent in the EFF manifesto than *South African economy*, which was much more frequent in the ANC and DA corpora. This speaks to a pan-Africanist ideology and an emphasis on economic relations between African countries (Majavu, 2021). This supports the observation that the EFF's geopolitical orientation is towards the continent.

Figure 4.3. Preceding adjective concordances for *economy*

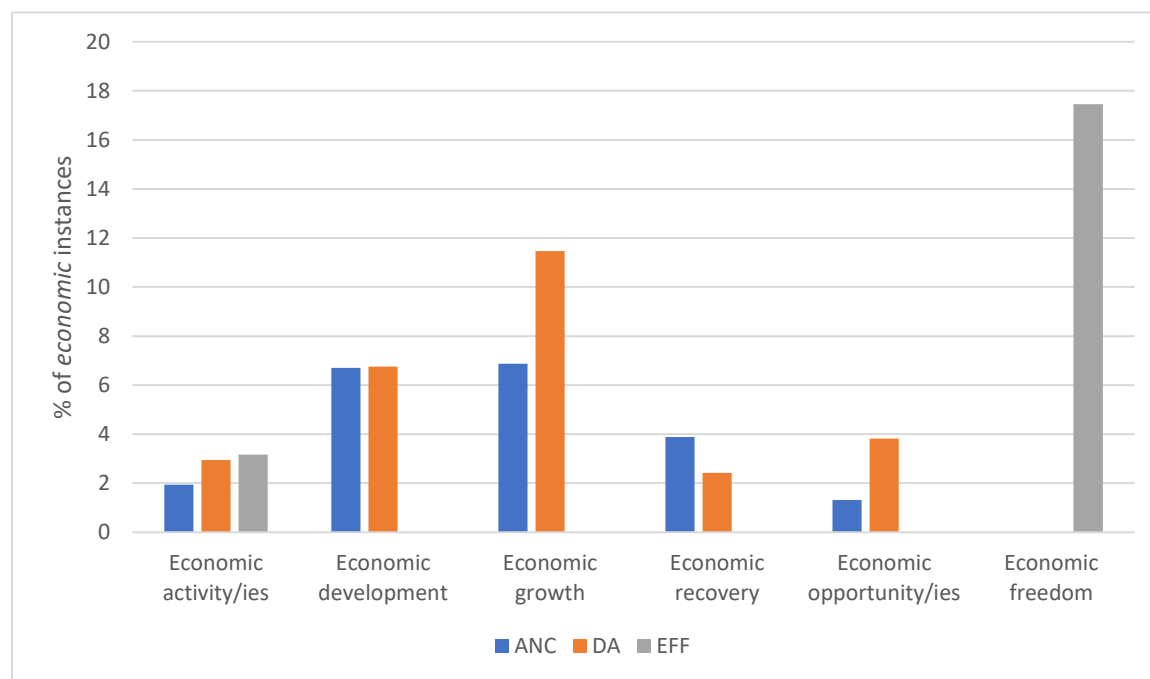


An analysis of the noun collocations with *economic* reveals that *economic development* and *economic growth* were the most frequent across the ANC and DA corpora, shown in Figure 4.4. This illustrates a neoliberal ideology in which economic growth is viewed as the key goal for policymakers (Stibbe, 2015). Although not as frequent as *development* and *growth*, it is interesting to note the relative frequency of *economic opportunities* in the DA corpus. This supports the previously mentioned hypothesis that while both parties emphasise economic matters, the DA does so with an individualised orientation, while the ANC speaks in more systemic and broader terms.

Economic recovery is slightly more frequent in the ANC corpus than the DA corpus, referring to recovery from the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic.

In contrast to the ANC and DA, the EFF corpus had no instances of *economic growth* or *economic development*. By far the most frequent concordance was *economic freedom*, which reflects the name and mandate of the party. Other *economic* concordances had similar meanings, such as *economic emancipation* and *economic empowerment*. While this implies that the party's main economic objective is justice and equality rather than growth, this may be misleading. Closer inspection shows that while *economic growth* does not occur anywhere in the manifesto, *growth* on its own occurs a few times, as does *industrial growth* and *economic expansion*. Thus, while the EFF avoids neoliberal buzzwords, it still advocates for expansion of the country's economy and industrial projects.

Figure 4.4. Proceeding noun concordances for *economic*



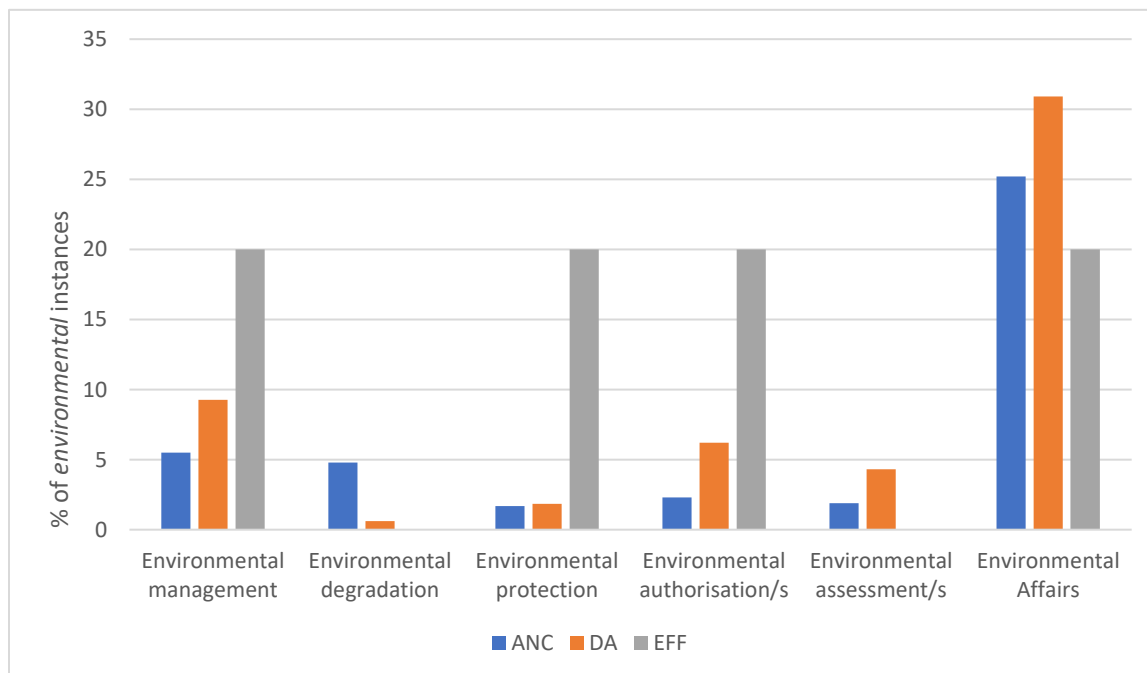
4.3.3 Environment

Like *economy* and *economic*, I analysed *environment* and *environmental* separately, looking at noun collocates of *environmental* (Figure 4.5.) and adjectival collocates of *environment* (Figure 4.6). For both the ANC and DA corpora, by far the most frequent noun collocation of

environmental was *Environmental Affairs*, referring to titles of departments and ministers. Following this in the ANC corpus was *environmental management*, then *environmental degradation*, *environmental programmes*, and *environmental sector*. Apart from *environmental degradation*, these all suggest a bureaucratic view of the environment. The environment is again constructed as something to be managed, regulated, and brought under the control of the government (Stibbe, 2015; Willis, 2017).

The DA's characterization of the environment is similar. The most frequent collocation after *Environmental Affairs* is also *environmental management*, followed by *environmental authorization/s*, and *environmental assessment/s*. As mentioned in section 4.2.2.1., another feature of words like *management* and *authorization* is that they hold minimal semantic specificity. In contrast to other possible collocations like *environmental protection* or *conservation*, they allow for a much wider grey area as to how much supportive action will be taken and how much destructive action will be allowed.

Figure 4.5. Proceeding noun concordances of *environmental*

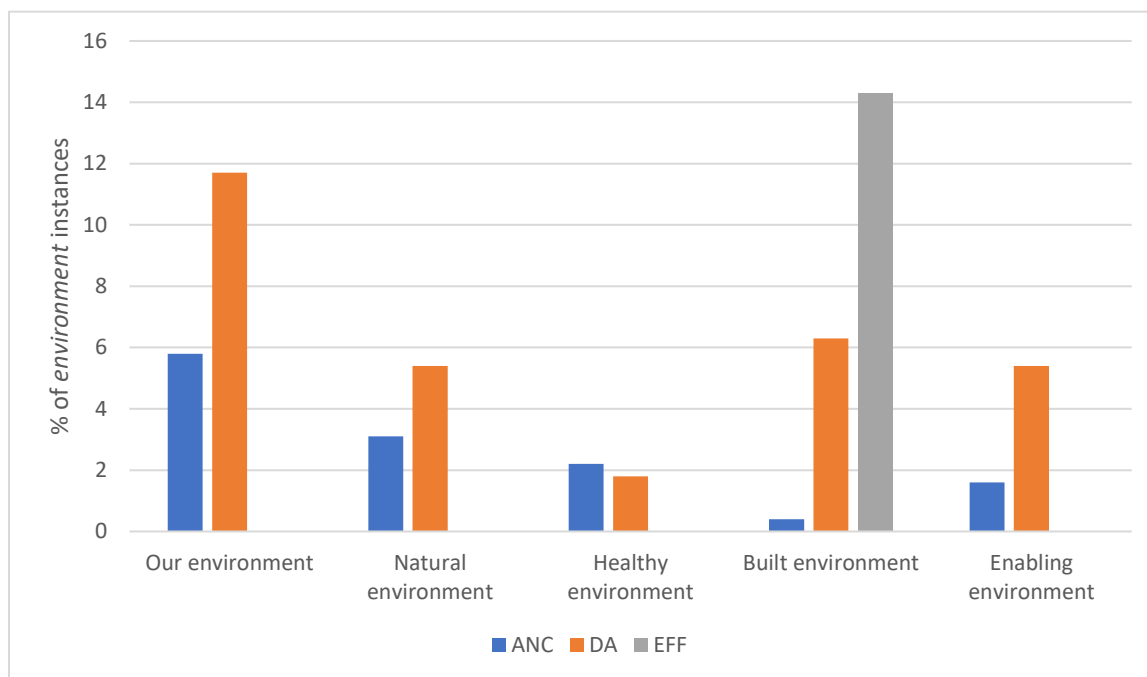


The collocations for *environmental* provide one example where the results for the EFF are similar to the ANC and DA. However, the word *environmental* only occurs 5 times in the text, so any

instance of it represents 20% of its occurrences. The only concordance in the EFF corpus not shown in the graph is *environmental scientists*, which did not occur in the other two corpora. Apart from this, the EFF's framing appears similarly bureaucratic, given the phrases *environmental management*, *environmental authorization*, and *environmental affairs*.

Examining the adjectival collocations for *environment*, by far the most frequent in the ANC and DA corpora is *our environment*, reflecting a view of the environment as belonging to humans. Following this in the ANC corpus was *natural environment*, then *healthy environment* and *global environment*. In the DA corpus it was followed by *built environment*, and then *enabling environment*, *regulatory environment*, and *natural environment*. It is striking that of these, only *natural environment* refers to the living environment, while the others refer to human-made or political environments. There is thus a pattern of erasure of the natural environment and nonhuman world.

Figure 4.6. Preceding adjective concordances for *environment*



In the EFF corpus, *environment* is hardly ever used to refer to the natural environment, with the only phrase suggesting it being one instance of *safe and clean environment*. Again, *environment*

itself only occurred 7 times, and 3 of these were in the heading *Environment and Climate*. As such, the dominant impression is one of erasure and lack of concern for the issue.

4.4 Conclusion

The above analysis provides some indications about the way each party frames the environment and the stories they tell about climate change. For example, both the ANC and DA utilise a broadly economic and bureaucratic framing of climate change and the environment. Both frequently display language that diffuses responsibility and accountability. In addition, both parties seem to present the natural world as existing for human exploitation. While the EFF speaks little of climate change, it also presents the natural world as existing for the benefit of humans. In the following chapter, I will draw on the findings from the corpus analysis to perform an in-depth, qualitative critical discourse analysis of key texts from each party. This will allow for more detailed and contextualised observations.

Chapter 5: Qualitative Analysis

5.1 Introduction

Following the corpus analysis, in this chapter I will dive deeper into the data and perform an in-depth, qualitative critical discourse analysis. This chapter comprises the first two stages of analysis described in section 2.5, namely *description* and *interpretation* (Fairclough, 1989). It involves both a description of textual features and an analysis of the stories these lead us to interpret. In my textual analysis I focus on lexical choices and grammatical formulations. In terms of interpretation, I focus on naturalised stories/ideologies, framing, and erasure/salience. As noted in chapter 3, the qualitative analysis was performed on a subset of the corpora. This included blog posts, media statements, speeches, policy statements, and the EFF's election manifesto. In the following sections, I will discuss the main discourses and stories that were found.

5.2 Economic frame and “growth is good” story

5.2.1 Economic growth is good

The corpus analysis revealed that across all parties, there was a high frequency of words related to the economy, suggesting that they tend to utilise an economic framing when discussing climate change. Upon qualitative analysis, I observed that this frame was frequently tied to the story that *economic growth is good* (Stibbe, 2015:83), which often took the form of presuppositions. For example, in text 19, the “economic growth path” is presupposed, and it is only what this path looks like (“equitable, inclusive, sustainable and environmentally sound”) that is argued for and thus potentially up for discussion. In text 20, the DA argues that the mining sector requires “policy certainty” because it “can be a key driver of economic growth”. The DA thus presupposes that economic growth is desirable and uses that as a basis to argue for a “predictable regulatory environment”. Both texts take the desirability of growth as an assumption upon which to base further arguments.

- 19) “From an environmental perspective, it is our mandate to facilitate an economic growth path that is equitable, inclusive, sustainable and environmentally sound.” (ANC - budget vote for the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries)

- 20) “Recognising that mining can be a key driver of economic growth and that its contribution to the economy is dependent on investment, the DA believes that this sector requires policy certainty and an efficient, predictable regulatory environment.” (DA – policy document)

The following subsections will explore the ways the *growth is good* story is naturalised and discursively linked to other stories about climate change.

5.2.2 Climate change is an economic threat

One way that the primacy of the economy is naturalised is that when climate change is discussed, it is often in relation to economic resilience. The examples below refer to the importance of a “resilient” or “climate-resilient” economy. Text 21 speaks of the importance of an economy that can “withstand the effects of climate change”, and text 22 argues that we must “prepare” for the “consequences of climate change”. These arguments are framed in the language of threat, with words like “protect”, “devastating”, and “increasingly erratic”.

- 21) “An important aspect of this new economy is that it must be able to withstand the effects of climate change. A climate-resilient economy is necessary to protect jobs, ensure the sustainability of our industries, preserve our natural resources and ensure food security.” (ANC – blog post from Cyril Ramaphosa)
- 22) “Our devastating drought has taught us that we also need to prepare for the increasingly erratic consequences of climate change. This not only ensures a more resilient economy but can also help create many job opportunities in the new, green economy.” (DA - 2021 State of the Province Address)
- 23) This Commission decided to advise government on how to develop a clear plan to take us from an aspirational commitment to a low carbon, climate resilient economy and society to the reality of new technology, new investment, and above all new jobs. (ANC – speech by Minister Barbara Creecy)

However, the extracts also suggest that the threat of climate change is essentially an economic one. Climate change threatens jobs, industry, natural resources, and food security, but these are all presented as mediated through the economy. The primary focus is the “climate-resilient economy” which is key to the functioning of all other systems. In this way, both the ANC and DA construct a world which is run by and essentially *is* the economy. Furthermore, text 23 discursively links economic resilience with “new technology, new investment, and... new jobs”. Thus, economic resilience is not just about protecting jobs and ensuring food security, but also creating an economy that attracts investment and leads to the development of technology, further reinforcing the *growth*

is good story. Interestingly, while Stibbe (2015:48) discusses the *growth is good* story at length, the story that *climate change is an economic threat* is not widely discussed in the literature.

5.2.3 Climate change is an economic opportunity

Another aspect of the economic framing is the story that *climate change is an economic opportunity*, which has also not yet received much focus in ecolinguistics research to my knowledge. However, this story clearly further entrenches the central importance of economic growth. We can see this in texts 22 and 23, where the notion of an economy that must be resilient to climate change becomes an opportunity for a “green economy” which will create “job opportunities”, “new investment”, and “new technology”. Sometimes, a text shifts within one sentence from a story of risk and danger to one of hope and opportunity, evoking the idea of light emerging in the darkness. For example, in text 24, Minister Barbara Creecy first uses the words “fraught”, “risk”, and “difficulty”, and then immediately shifts to describing the same thing as a “great opportunity”. Similarly, in text 25, the DA shifts from “bleak” to “hope” in one short sentence. The sentence that follows again characterises climate change as “an opportunity”.

24) “Our President noted that while this process is fraught with risk, and difficulty, it is also a time of great opportunity in new areas such as the green and digital economy if we invest in our human capital to lay the foundations for the future.” (ANC – speech by Barbara Creecy)

25) “As bleak as it may seem, there is hope. Climate change gives us an opportunity to innovate and create a more sustainable environment. All we have to do is play our part, and change our ways.” (DA – blog post)

The notion of climate change as opportunity links with Ecomodernism, which is the story that technological innovation can solve climate change (Norton & Hulme, 2019:124). Both the ANC and DA (though not the EFF) frequently created a discursive link between sustainability and technological and economic opportunity. The “opportunity” in text 26 is one that combines technological innovation, economic growth, and sustainability, exemplified by the phrases “green growth” and “low-carbon industrialisation”. In text 27, the DA positions itself as a pioneer of “green technology”, implicitly distancing itself from the rest of the (ANC-led) country. In addition, phrases like “pioneering new technologies,” “quantum leaps towards the economy of the future”, and “leader in green technology,” call to mind discourses of techno-utopianism (Jochum, 2020). They evoke an idealistic imaginary of futuristic science and technology and discursively link this

with sustainability and entrepreneurship. Moreover, the fact that both extracts come from televised parliamentary addresses suggests both parties want to publicise this discourse widely.

26) “We have the opportunity to be at the forefront of green growth, of low-carbon industrialisation, of pioneering new technologies and of taking quantum leaps towards the economy of the future. We must increase the contribution of renewable and clean energy to our national energy mix and explore the potential of the hydrogen economy.” (ANC - 2021 State of the Nation Address)

27) “Tshwane is the first city in sub-Saharan Africa to run full CNG-propelled buses. We seek to reaffirm our position as a leader in green technology and other green interventions.” (DA - 2018 State of the Capital Address)

Interestingly, the techno-utopian story is not present in the EFF discourse. Although the EFF mentions technology as a tool to fight climate change, this is not done through a discourse of exciting opportunity, but rather as a practical solution to a problem. While the ANC and DA texts emphasise opportunities for entrepreneurs and scientists to grasp, the EFF manifesto suggests that the EFF government will provide solutions to a passive public. As seen in texts 28 and 29, it is the EFF that will “establish a research and development centre focused on nuclear technology and the disposal of nuclear waste” and adopt the “one million climate jobs” initiative.

28) “The EFF government will establish a research and development centre focused on nuclear technology and the disposal of nuclear waste by 2023, creating 2 500 new jobs, 1 200 of which will be reserved for women and the youth.” (EFF)

29) “The EFF government will officially adopt the civil society-driven ‘one million climate jobs’ initiative as a government programme. Through this initiative, the EFF government will create one million jobs aimed at transitioning South Africa from coal-based energy sources to renewable energy.” (EFF)

In addition, the EFF does not emphasise the “green economy”, a phrase that was frequent in the ANC and DA corpora (see section 4.3.2.). An explicit thread running through the EFF text is one of anti-capitalism, as seen in text 31 in the phrase “close the wage gap between the rich and the poor”. This is made explicit in text 32, where “a few capitalists” are presented as those who would dispossess indigenous people of their land. However, this does not translate to an anti-growth ideology. On the contrary, an emphasis on economic expansion is prevalent, exemplified by phrases like “expand the productive economy”, “inclusive development” in text 30, and “massive protected industrial development” in text 31. The EFF generally avoids the term “growth”, perhaps

because of its neoliberal connotations. However, it is still advocating for large-scale economic expansion.

- 30) “As a movement, we carry collective and individual capacity that will fundamentally change South Africa’s economy in a manner that will allow us to reclaim economic ownership, expand the productive economy, give black people real ownership, create jobs and drive inclusive development.” (EFF)
- 31) “Massive protected industrial development to create millions of sustainable jobs, including the introduction of minimum wage(s) in order to close the wage gap between the rich and the poor, close the apartheid wage gap and promote rapid career paths for Africans in the workplace.” (EFF)
- 32) “The EFF government will once and for all guarantee that the right to land of people living in communal areas, such as the people of Xolobeni, is an absolute right, and that no one has authority to dispossess indigenous people of their right to land for the benefit of a few capitalists.” (EFF)

Although the economy and the climate are linked in various ways across the parties’ texts, the overall economic framing is clear. Moreover, all the different perspectives exhibit the evaluation that *economic growth is good*. The ANC and DA construct a “resilient” economy as one that is “sustaining economic growth” and the opportunities that climate change presents as opportunities for “green growth”. As argued by Stibbe (2015:89) this is a deeply ingrained story that pervades multiple areas of life and discourse genres. Even the EFF, though explicitly anti-capitalist, is pro-growth, though it generally avoids this phrasing in favour of others like “industrial development”.

5.3 “Nature belongs to us” story

5.3.1 Commodification of nature

Another illustration of the way an economic framing is ubiquitous for all three parties is in the way nature and natural resources are discussed. Frequently, when the natural world and issues of biodiversity are mentioned, it is with reference to their economic value:

- 33) “We recognise biodiversity as a basis for transformation and sustainable development. The department has commenced with plans to transform two sub-sectors of the biodiversity economy, that is, the wildlife and bio-prospecting sectors within the ambit of the national biodiversity economy strategy (NBES) and implementation plan. (ANC - 2018/19 Environmental Affairs dept budget vote)

Text 33 makes use of the phrase “biodiversity economy”. As explored in the corpus analysis, this formulation of “economy” with an adjective or adjectival noun preceding it is very common. Biodiversity is not simply biodiversity, but a “biodiversity economy”, and therefore any use of biodiversity in service of the economy is appropriate. In text 33 this includes both wildlife and “bio-prospecting”. “Bioprospecting” refers to a systematic search for products derived from bioresources such as plants, animals, and microorganisms that may be commercially useful or beneficial to society. (SAASTA, 2009). Thus, biodiversity is constructed as existing for the benefit of humans.

- 34) “Our environment has intrinsic value that requires protection. Its numerous ecosystems provide human society with valuable and free essential services, including the limited amelioration of our pollution and various products that can be used in innovation and wealth creation.” (DA – policy document)

Text 34 exhibits an interesting interdiscursive conflict. It starts by arguing that the environment has “intrinsic value” and therefore must be protected. However, it then goes on to describe the value that the environment has for humans, including the “amelioration of our pollution” and “various products that can be used in innovation and wealth creation.” Despite its “intrinsic value”, the environment is constructed as having value because it benefits humans. Moreover, the formulation “valuable and free essential services” constructs the benefits we derive from the environment as “services”. These services are both “valuable”, in that we can extract value from them, and “free”, so we do not have to pay for them. Although this extract highlights the importance of protecting the environment, it also constructs an environment that abundantly supplies services and does not require anything in return. Thus, even as the environment is positioned as requiring protection, its exploitation and destruction is naturalised.

- 35) “The EFF government’s approach to the fishing industry will be guided by the principle that marine resources are public resources and the exploitation of these resources should benefit the public as a whole.” (EFF)

The EFF is not exempt from a construction of the natural world as existing for human benefit. In text 35, the organisms that live in the sea are reduced to “marine resources” that exist for the “benefit” of “the public”. While this evokes the notion of justice and equality, justice is not extended beyond human lives. Instead, nonhuman life is construed as nothing more than resources for humans to exploit. Thus, all three political parties construct nature as subservient to humans

and economic activities. This subordination of nature to economics echoes the findings of Fernandez-Vasquez and Sancho-Rodrigues (2020) in their analysis of corporate websites. It also reflects Stibbe's (2015:53) discussion of the positioning of nature as an object of human ownership.

5.3.2 Romantic constructions of nature

When the EFF speaks of natural resources, it is in a direct tone, presenting them as purely economic resources that should be used to benefit the people, as in text 35. In contrast, in ANC and DA texts, this is often combined with an exaltation in the beauty of the country's rich biodiversity that calls to mind romantic constructions of nature (Takach, 2012). Nevertheless, this is still done in a way that constructs nature as existing for human benefit and enjoyment.

36) "This is the first World Wildlife Day to focus on life below water. It is a great opportunity to raise awareness about the breath-taking diversity of marine life, the crucial importance of marine species to human development, and how we can make sure it will continue to provide these services for future generations." (ANC – media statement)

37) "South Africa is blessed with rich resources and unique biodiversity. Our environment is however under significant pressure from a growing economy and a rapidly increasing population, as well as climate change and water scarcity" (DA – policy document)

Text 36 creates a sense of wonder with the description of "breath-taking diversity of marine life", and then immediately rates its value because of "the crucial importance of marine species to human development". It again uses the word "services" to describe human extraction of resources from the ocean. In text 37 the DA uses the phrasing "rich resources" that we are "blessed" with when describing South Africa's biodiversity. Even as this calls to mind wonder in nature, the words "blessed" and "resources" construct biodiversity as something belonging to humans. Moreover, in emphasising South Africa's "unique biodiversity", nature is construed as a symbol of national pride rather than holding its own value. However, the next sentence is interesting, as it suggests that among other things, a "growing economy" threatens biodiversity. This contradicts the story that *climate change is an opportunity*, which suggests that economic growth and climate action can go hand in hand.

5.4 “Ecoactivist” story

5.4.1 Apocalypse frame

Despite the prevalent techno-utopian story, a discourse of risk and danger is also present across the ANC and DA texts, though not in the EFF manifesto. In many ANC and DA texts, there is an acknowledgement of the seriousness of climate change and the extent of its effects, which could even be seen by some as alarmist or apocalyptic. This is evident in the phrases “cascading effect”, “ecological collapse” and “survivalist move” in the texts below, which imply the necessity of fast and wide-reaching action. It is interesting that all these examples come from blog posts, suggesting that this story is more prevalent in blogs than in speeches or media statements. However, this is not conclusive as not every text was subjected to close reading.

- 38) “Understanding this cascading effect is vital. Climate change doesn’t just affect weather patterns. It affects nearly every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat, to the water we drink, to where we live. It affects human health, economic activity, human settlement and migration.” (ANC – blog post from Cyril Ramaphosa)
- 39) “Preventing ecological collapse cannot be something we think about annually on Earth Day or leave to those most passionate about the natural world. It is a survivalist move for humanity and must be front and centre of how we live.” (DA – blog post)
- 40) “Climate change is an economic and a social challenge and will undermine our development gains if we are not prepared. In future, climate change will impact food, water and energy security, our health and wellbeing, our living conditions, and the infrastructure and transport networks that our economic activities depend upon.” (DA – blog post).

Texts 38 and 39 both exhibit negation as presupposition. The formulation “climate change doesn’t just affect weather patterns” implies that people think it does. Similarly, “ecological collapse cannot be something we think about annually on Earth Day” implies that we currently only think about it then. Text 38 is a rare example of the tipping point metaphor described here as “cascading effects”. It emphasises the totality and irreversibility of the effects of climate change. Although the phrases “development gains” and “economic activities” in text 40 bring forward an economic framing again, the rest of the aspects listed relate to immediate needs. The above examples thus point to an Ecoactivist story (Norton & Hulme, 2019), suggesting that the ANC and the DA take climate change seriously. Scholars such as Foust and Murphy (2009:151) have discussed apocalyptic framings of climate change and the danger that they may encourage a sense of

inevitable tragedy and thus make action appear pointless. However, as I will show in chapter 6, the greater danger in South African politicians' use of this frame is that it creates the impression of concern about the climate crisis when both their actions and more prevalent stories imply the opposite.

5.4.2 Climate justice

Another discursive thread that suggests the ANC and DA are taking climate change seriously is in the references both parties make to climate activists and climate justice, an intertextual move I have not seen discussed in the literature to date. In text 41 the ANC refers to climate strikes, acknowledging the “adult inaction” to address climate change. However, when speaking about the activists' demands, Minister Creecy focuses primarily on a semantic issue, namely using the phrase “climate emergency” rather than “climate change”. While this may be one of the activists' arguments, mentioning it alone avoids discussion of their more significant demands, thus minimising their voices and obscuring more challenging arguments (Foran, Gray, & Grosse, 2017). Moreover, as we saw in the corpus analysis, this advice is not followed by the ANC, as they overwhelmingly use the phrase “climate change”.

41) “Our debate takes place today, in a context which in recent times has seen school children across the world, including in our own country, organising strikes to demonstrate against adult inaction to address the irreversible risks and dangerous climate change pose to their futures. These young people insist that we talk about a climate emergency and not about climate change.” (ANC - 2019/20 Environment, Forestry and Fisheries dept budget vote)

42) “Inspired by the Climate Justice Movement and a desire to make a difference in their community, brothers Geronimo and Valentino de Klerk began the garden in a dumping space previously utilised as an escape route by local criminals. The open space has been transformed into a community garden supporting several local feeding projects in the area.” (DA – blog post)

Text 42 is from a DA blog post about two brothers who set up a food garden in their community. The DA frames this act as extremely admirable, and the phrases “inspired” and “desire to make a difference” evoke discourses of hope and upliftment. This is reinforced by a narrative of a barren dumping ground that had been an escape route for “local criminals” and is now the opposite, a “community garden supporting several local feeding projects”. The brothers are thus characterised as model citizens and caring for the climate is discursively tied to notions of a clean and safe community. However, it is individual members of the community who are saving it from crime,

hunger, and filth, rather than local government. Rather than being seen as a failure of governance, this is positioned as an example of commendable civic responsibility.

Text 42 displays an interesting example of intertextuality when it refers to the brothers' own words, saying that they were "inspired by the Climate Justice Movement". However, there are no direct quotations, so we cannot know the context of this statement or whether it is accurate. Either way, it is interesting that the Climate Justice Movement is referenced when speaking of a community initiative to support local feeding projects. While this movement is not necessarily at odds with a community garden, its focus has been activism that puts pressure on government to make systemic changes to protect the planet (Foran, Gray, & Grosse, 2017). However, the DA rejects this characterization, robbing the Climate Justice Movement of its political significance. In addition, climate justice is characterised in opposition to criminality and on the side of the DA. Rather than being subversive, climate justice is thus construed as in line with political and legal authorities. It is also discursively tied to individual acts of civic responsibility, rather than organised activism and collective justice. Like the apocalyptic framing, mentions of climate justice and activism create the impression of taking the climate crisis seriously even as the same texts undermine the issue.

5.5 "Individual responsibility" story

As the ANC and the DA both acknowledge the seriousness of climate change, it may be expected that they advocate for significant action to be taken against it. However, across both ANC and DA texts, the primary focus is on small choices that individuals can make, such as avoiding littering (text 43), buying climate-friendly appliances, travelling "more responsibly", recycling, using solar panels, and planting water-wise trees (text 45). Furthermore, even in these examples, there are caveats like "where possible". A clear thread is the notion of small actions having large impacts. Text 43 utilises a landslide metaphor to suggest that individual "simple actions" will build up to an "unstoppable movement for change". Text 44 reassures the reader/listener that their actions "no matter how small [they] think they are", are significant. Text 45 explicitly argues that "small actions are going to be key" in tackling the climate crisis. At the same time, the texts also suggest that it is not top-down, systemic changes that are necessary, but rather bottom-up "contributions" from citizens. The focus on "small actions" by ordinary people draws attention away from the "big actions" that are required of government if it is to take the climate crisis seriously.

- 43) “Keep a bag in your car so that you are not tempted to litter as you drive. Instead of dumping your waste as you walk, carry it with you until you find a bin. It is these sorts of simple actions that will cascade into an unstoppable movement for change.” (ANC – blog post)
- 44) “Your contributions, no matter how small you think they are, are in reality making a huge contribution to our country’s commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, mitigate and adapt to climate change and to sustainable development.” (ANC – speech by Deputy Minister Barbara Thompson)
- 45) “You and I can make a difference in our communities, neighbourhoods, schools, churches, sports and social clubs and workplaces. Small actions are going to be key. We all have a role to play, big or small but we do not have the luxury of doing nothing. Change comes when we make smarter choices. Be it choosing more climate-friendly appliances, travelling more responsibly, getting into the habit of recycling, using solar panels where possible, planting water-wise trees and speaking out as a consumer if you are unhappy about the resource efficiency of products and companies.” (DA – blog post)

The use of pronouns in the above texts is also worth examining. All three are structured as advice or instructions given to the public through using second person pronouns. Text 43 seems to aim to imbue the reader/listener with the sense that they are more powerful than they had thought, making a “huge contribution”, even if you thought your actions were “small”. However, the power is a diffuse and apolitical one of individual contributions to a predetermined public good. In text 45, the “you” becomes “you and I”, thus characterising the speaker as a member of the public. In the following sentence, this becomes “we”, and in the final sentence shifts back to “you”. The author thus identifies with the public, while simultaneously presenting themselves in a position of expertise. This is particularly interesting given that this example comes from a blog post with no stated author. It also serves to place the responsibility of the public and that of government on the same plane. The key responsibility is not one of policy decisions, but a consumer and civic responsibility that all individuals hold.

Text 46 reiterates the discourse of personal responsibility, applying it to the proper disposal of waste. The vehemence of this example, with its exclamation marks, could come off in a very didactic way, but because the pronoun “we” is used, it appears less so. However, the referent of “we” is not consistent, but rather shifts throughout the text, similarly to Filardo-Llamas and Boyd’s (2018:320) findings on speeches by Barack Obama. The first phrase “we must change citizen behaviour” appears to identify with those who have power to influence citizens. However, over the following sentences, the referent shifts to the citizens themselves. The speaker (Minister

Creecy) thus starts by constructing herself as part of the group of influential actors, then shifts to identifying with the citizens. In this way, she can address both her fellow politicians and South Africans from an in-group perspective. Furthermore, as in text 45, she can construct herself as a knowledgeable actor who can tell citizens what they must do without appearing overly didactic.

46) “First and foremost we must change citizen behaviour and encourage everyone to dispose of waste in a responsible manner! We must stop dumping household waste and fast-food packaging in the environment! We must refuse single use plastics buying our favourite take away!” (ANC – 2020/21 Environment, Forestry, and Fisheries dept budget speech)

47) “Importantly, the global plastic waste crisis challenges the take-make-use-dispose approach to production and consumption. There is no waste in a circular economy – when we have finished with something it becomes the raw material for something else.” (ANC - 2019/20 Environment, Forestry and Fisheries dept budget vote)

In text 47, Minister Creecy suggests that the solution to the issue of waste is the “circular economy”, essentially meaning recycling. The idea of consuming less plastic is occasionally mentioned, but usually only with reference to “single use” plastic that cannot be recycled. This implies that if plastic can be recycled, we can consume as much of it as we want. In addition, the phrase “take-make-use-dispose approach” suggests that the fundamental issue is the *disposal* of plastic rather than its existence in the first place. Thus, the notion that we could reduce plastic *production* is not on the table. The solution is for individuals to make better choices, not for government to implement any policy or for corporations to stop producing plastic.

Unlike the ANC and DA, the EFF does not exhibit a discourse of individual responsibility. However, the story that small actions are significant for the climate is present. For example, text 48 suggests that recycling is an important action, and text 49 focuses on the use of plastic bags, both minor actions relating to minimizing waste. However, unlike in the ANC and DA texts, responsibility is not placed with citizens. Like the examples discussed in section 5.2.2., it is “the EFF government” who will solve things directly by building recycling plants and phasing out plastic bags. In addition, recycling is not linked to economic growth as it is by the ANC. Instead, it is presented simply as something the government should implement for the good of the environment.

48) “The EFF government will build a new recycling plant in each municipality by 2023.” (EFF)

- 49) “The EFF government will phase out the use of plastic bags, so that by 2024 they are no longer being distributed.” (EFF)

5.6 The framing of climate policy

Although it is more common for the parties to focus on minor actions by individuals, there are cases where they outline their own climate policies. Text 50 is one of the most comprehensive examples of this. We are given a year when the country’s emissions will “begin to decline”, and a goal for the expansion of renewable energy. The phrase “target ranges” implies a specific goal, and the phrase “plan to build” suggests the existence of action plans. Moreover, the use of present and continuous tense suggests that these plans are underway. The use of active verbs is particularly notable as these were very rare across the corpora (see section 4.2.1). Texts 51 and 52 also both utilise an active voice, and text 51 explicitly identifies Eskom as a body that is “committed” to net zero emissions by a certain date. Text 52 mentions a “Carbon Neutral 2050 brief”, implying that the DA also has plans to decarbonise. These examples thus suggest that the ANC and DA are acting decisively on climate.

- 50) “We are currently in the process of updating South Africa's Nationally Determined Contribution... The new target ranges we are proposing are much more ambitious in two respects. First, the top of the 2030 range has been reduced by 28%, or 174 million metric tons, a very significant reduction. Second, according to our previous Nationally Determined Contribution, South Africa's emissions would peak and plateau in 2025, and decline only from 2035. South Africa's emissions will begin to decline from 2025, effectively shifting our emissions decline 10 years earlier. With regard to our energy resources, we plan to build capacity to generate over 17 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030.” (ANC – international speech by Cyril Ramaphosa)
- 51) “Eskom, our largest greenhouse gas emitter, has committed in principle to net zero emission by 2050 and to increase its renewable capacity.” (ANC - 2021 State of the Nation Address)
- 52) “Achieving this carbon neutral goal requires that all residents, businesses, organisations and government play their part. Our Carbon Neutral 2050 brief is a first step in explaining how we can all collaborate to achieve this.” (DA – blog post)

However, the above examples also exhibit several discursive strategies that exaggerate the significance of the climate policies. For example, words like “ambitious” and “significant” construct the policies as impressive and beyond what is required. Text 50 mentions a “previous Nationally Determined Contribution” only to emphasize how much more ambitious the updated

one is. Another common tactic is the strategic use of numbers and percentages. In general, when speaking about climate actions, both parties use numbers rather than percentages, which serves to make the actions appear more significant. Although text 50 provides a percentage, this is only when describing the reduction of the planned emissions range by 2030, a concept that is not explained further. Even then, the number is also given in “metric tons”. When speaking about plans to generate renewable energy, the target is given in gigawatts, and we are not told what the proportion of renewable to non-renewable energy will be. This description of the ANC’s climate policies is thus much less clear than it first appears.

A similar strategy is a discourse of savings, shown in texts 53 and 54. Climate actions are presented in terms of how much CO₂ was *not* emitted, how much coal was *not* burned, and how much coal ash waste was *not* generated. This naturalises the emission of CO₂ by constructing higher emissions as normal and any reduction as laudable. In text 53, this is equated with saving water and money, which constructs fossil fuel and CO₂ emissions as valuable and desirable rather than very harmful phenomena. In text 54, the savings discourse is invoked to discuss the carbon credits system, which allows a high emitting company to buy ‘credits’ from projects that mitigate emissions, however indirectly. However, as argued by Solon (2018:125), the preservation of one aspect of the environment cannot compensate for the destruction of another. Both extracts legitimise the destruction of nature by normalising current emission levels and suggesting that these can be compensated through abstracted financial systems.

53) “By displacing conventional, largely fossil-fuelled electricity, the Department has –

- Avoided the use of over 3.4 million litres of precious water;
- Avoided the atmospheric emission of over 2.6 million kg of Carbon dioxide (CO₂), the principle greenhouse gas, and thousands of kilograms of particulate matter, South Africa’s most problematic air pollutant, and oxides of sulphur and nitrogen;
- Avoided the burning of over 1.3 million kgs of coal;
- Avoided the generation of almost a half a million kg of coal ash waste; and
- Saved over R 3.7 million on electricity purchases.” (ANC - speech by Deputy Minister Makhotso Sotyu)

54) “This means the City, through this project, has reduced 126 274 ton of carbon emissions since July 2018 when the accumulation of credits began. This is equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from approximately 24 762 passenger vehicles driven for one year, or carbon captured and stored from the atmosphere (i.e. sequestration) by planting 2 million trees’ seedlings grown for over 10 years.” (DA – blog post)

Two phrases that come up when the parties speak about emissions reduction are “carbon neutral” (text 52) and “net zero” (text 51). In principle these refer to the same concepts, namely the combined use of emissions reduction and carbon capture technologies so that the “net” emissions of a country average to zero (Wu, Tian & Guo, 2021). However, this commitment tends to be equivocal, as shown by text 51 which states that Eskom has committed to net zero emissions by 2050 “in principle”. Text 52 also calls on a discourse of collective responsibility to suggest that achieving carbon neutrality is not purely a responsibility of policymakers but “residents” too, with phrases like “we can all collaborate”. Listing “residents, businesses, organisations and government” places all these stakeholders on an equal plane, diffusing responsibility and shifting it away from policymakers specifically.

5.7 Geopolitical alignment

The corpus analysis (section 4.2.1.) found that words relating to geographical place were among the most frequent for all three parties. In some cases, these words point to a party’s geopolitical alignment. The following subsections will discuss such alignments and how this relates to their climate stories.

5.7.1 ANC: Shifting alignment

Many ANC texts exhibit a strategic alignment of South Africa with the rest of Africa and/or developing countries in general. Most frequently this forms part of an argument that developed nations need to provide more funding for mitigation and adaptation efforts. We can see this in text 55, with the strong advocacy for “adaptation and implementation support”. In an analysis of negotiations at COP21, Calliari (2018:740) found that leaders of developing countries did not straightforwardly request compensation, but strategically brought it up as a “bogeyman to increasingly get concessions on loss and damage from the developed countries.” However, my data suggests a more direct request for financial support. This could be the result of a shift in strategy or could indicate differences between communications to the public and negotiations between world leaders.

55) Our ambition must not be limited to mitigation, but must necessarily include adaptation and implementation support. This balance is vitally important for Africa, which is disproportionately

affected by the impact of climate change and yet is the lowest emitter.” (ANC – international speech by Cyril Ramaphosa).

- 56) “Minister Creecy said it was the ultimate injustice that developing nations, such as South Africa, have historically contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions, but today are the most affected. South Africa’s vulnerability to climate change is exacerbated by its economic inequality, poverty and dependency on coal-fired power generation.” (ANC – media statement).

In most cases, the geopolitical alignment is implicit, with texts speaking of “Africa” and “developing nations” without explicitly mentioning South Africa. However, in text 56 it is made explicit with the phrase “developing nations, such as South Africa”. Text 56 also emphasises “South Africa’s vulnerability to climate change” and argues that the fact that “developing nations” have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions but are most affected by climate change is “the ultimate injustice”. And yet, the same example goes on to refer to South Africa’s “dependency on coal-fired power generation”. These statements are contradictory, as South Africa’s dependency on coal makes it a high greenhouse gas emitter. Despite being an African country and developing nation, it does not necessarily fit the category of having “contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions”.

- 57) “In continuation of the BRICS tradition of Outreach first initiated by South Africa during its first tenure as BRICS Chair in 2013, the BRICS Leaders met with African Leaders, including the Chairpersons of the African Union (AU), of the NEPAD Head of States and Government of the recognised regional economic communities (RECs) and of the AU Commission, as well as with the SADC Leaders.” (ANC – media statement)

Govender (2015:22) found that Jacob Zuma emphasised South Africa as part of Africa rather than its membership in BRICS in order to construct it as more vulnerable. While in my data the ANC predominantly aligns with Africa, it also occasionally aligns with BRICS or the “international community”. For example, in 62 above, Cyril Ramaphosa aligns South Africa with BRICS through emphasising its role as BRICS chair, rather than its membership in the AU (African Union), and SADC (Southern African Development Community). In this formulation, Ramaphosa is a “BRICS Leader” before he is an “African Leader”. In contrast with the characterization of South Africa as a poor, developing country, it is here placed above other African countries through highlighting its membership in BRICS.

58) There was a common appreciation that, as the international community, we need to dramatically scale-up our efforts, raise our level of ambition, and support developing countries with the means to implement climate actions. (ANC – blog post by Cyril Ramaphosa)

59) “The third part is financing – mobilising resources to support the efforts of developing countries in particular to adapt to climate change and move towards cleaner forms of energy. This is important because developing countries are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change, despite historically being the lowest emitters of greenhouse gases. (ANC – blog post by Cyril Ramaphosa)

60) “As a developing country, our economy is still heavily dependent on fossil fuels. That is why we continue to push on the world stage for the space to develop our economy and improve the lives of our people.” (ANC – blog post by Cyril Ramaphosa)

Texts 58-60 are from the same blog post by president Ramaphosa about an international summit he attended with 39 other world leaders, which reveals a gradual shift in alignment. In 58, he initially speaks as if South Africa is part of the “international community” characterised as powerful nations that need to “support developing countries”. However, he then shifts to describing the ways South Africa has been affected by climate change, and describes the three pillars of global action required, namely mitigation, adaptation, and support. This is where we find text 59, which speaks of the need for financing “to support the efforts of developing countries”. He then discusses South Africa’s NDCs and how these will be financed. This is where we find text 60, which finally aligns South Africa with developing countries with the phrase “as a developing country”. This shifting identification illustrates how the ANC attempts to align with both developed and developing countries. The identification with developing countries allows it to argue for financial support, while the occasional identification with more powerful nations allows it to simultaneously appear as a powerful global player.

5.7.2 EFF: Anti-western Pan-Africanism

Like the ANC, the EFF strongly aligns with other African countries, but much more explicitly. However, this alignment is not used to request funding, but rather to argue for a self-sufficiency between African countries and an economic and cultural Pan-Africanism. In text 61, the EFF aligns South Africa with “African states” and “African economies”, arguing for “political, social and economic solidarity”. It explicitly distances South Africa from the West, constructing relations with the West as “domination”.

- 61) “The EFF government will lead a progressive programme to build international political, social and economic solidarity among African states. The EFF government will lead a progressive programme to reject foreign and in particular Western domination of African economies.” (EFF)
- 62) “The EFF government will build sustainable and balanced relations with all progressive forces in the world and will relate with growing economies, particularly China, Russia, Brazil and India, in a mutually beneficial way.” (EFF)
- 63) “The EFF government will radically pursue regional economic integration with the view to easing economic trade within the African continent. This will include the radical transformation of the African Union and the revision of its Project 2063 into a more comprehensive Project 2038, by which year the African economy must resemble the best practices found in, for example, the modern Chinese economy while guaranteeing basic democratic freedom.” (EFF)

However, as texts 62 and 63 show, the EFF supports relations with BRICS countries, constructing these as “mutually beneficial” rather than examples of domination. In text 62, South Africa is characterised as a “growing economy” which distances it from developed countries but also from poor countries. Text 63 is interesting as it illustrates the strong alignment with “the African continent”, and constructs China as an economic role model. China is presented as an example of a perfectly running economy, though the phrase “while guaranteeing basic democratic freedom” hints that it is not entirely democratic. All these examples emphasise the alignment with BRICS as economic, while with Africa the alignment is also “political and social”.

5.7.3 DA: “Megacities” and the global North

Unlike the ANC and the EFF, the DA identifies little with Africa. Instead, it aligns much more closely with developed countries such as those in the EU and USA. This is usually to compare cities the DA governs with cities in the global North, rather than South Africa as a whole.

- 64) “This step alone puts us on par with global C40 cities such as New York, London and Copenhagen, and is the impetus for a wide-ranging set of measures to support the global effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in a bid to stem global warming and the havoc it is wreaking – floods, droughts, unbearable temperature increases and the concomitant health impacts.” (DA - 2018 State of the Capital Address)
- 65) “Cape Town has set the goal of attaining urban forest status and has employed satellite technology to map the tree canopy over the entire metro. It is a member of C40 Cities, one of 97 leading megacities around the world taking climate action, and it will release its updated Climate Action Strategy Document this year.” (DA – blog post)

Texts 64 and 65 describe Cape Town as a “leading megacity”, “on par” with cities like New York, London, and Copenhagen. The construction of New York and London as cities to emulate when it comes to climate action is interesting, as these are large cities with high levels of greenhouse gas emissions (Wei, Wu & Chen, 2021). However, it is consistent with an Ecomodernist story that emphasises the role of technology in climate action (Norton & Hulme, 2019:124). An Ecomodernist framing precludes a construction of less developed countries as “green” as it is only advanced economies and technologies that can be “green”. South Africa’s DA-run regions are associated with the global North and simultaneously constructed as modern, technologically advanced, and environmentally progressive. This implicitly contrasts them with the rest of the country, which is presumably backwards in all these areas.

5.8 Green revolution

Across much of this chapter, the EFF has been shown to exhibit stories that are notably different to those of the other two parties. There is one framing in particular that is prevalent in the EFF manifesto but not present in the ANC or DA texts, namely one of revolution. This is evident across the manifesto, through direct references to revolution and an implication that everything the EFF does is radically transformative. This can be seen in texts 66 and 67, which present the EFF’s primary aim as “revolutionary transformation of society for the better”, and the EFF as a “revolutionary socialist economic emancipation movement”.

66) “The EFF’s manifesto commitments for the 2019 general elections are inspired by as well as based on our movement’s seven cardinal pillars, which constitute the core of our approach to genuine revolutionary transformation of society for the better.” (EFF)

67) The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is a revolutionary socialist economic emancipation movement founded in 2013, in South Africa to fight for economic freedom in our lifetime. (EFF)

68) “The EFF government will collaborate with African governments to drive the Green Revolution across the continent, underpinned by agriculture, good production and environmental protection.” (EFF)

In text 68, the revolutionary framing is extended to climate and environmental policies, referred to as the “Green Revolution”. This is a stark contrast from the neoliberal framings of the ANC and the DA, with their “green economy” and emphasis on entrepreneurship. However, when we look at what the Green Revolution means, it includes “agriculture, good production and environmental

protection”. In practice, then, the Green Revolution is not too different from the green economy, which also ostensibly involves environmental protection and a productive economy. It appears that the phrase “green revolution” has been chosen more for branding than because it describes the substance of the EFF’s policies. This supports Majavu’s (2015) argument that beyond radical-sounding slogans, the EFF’s policies lack substance and are not markedly different from the ANC’s. As the parties construct themselves very differently in the political space, the way they speak about climate change and the environment are very different. However, when examining their proposed actions, they turn out to be remarkably similar.

5.9 Conclusion

This section has provided a detailed linguistic and interpretive analysis of key examples from the three parties’ datasets. It has analysed vocabulary and grammatical constructions and shown how these serve to construct particular stories. As such, it is the result of the first two stages of analysis. The following chapter will explain the findings with reference to the social and ecological context. As such, it is the result of the third “explanation” stage.

Chapter 6: Results and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter consolidates the findings from the corpus analysis and the qualitative critical discourse analysis chapters and discusses their significance in light of the social and ecological context. It also draws on the ecosophy of this dissertation described in section 2.3.5 to evaluate whether the climate change stories of the political parties are ecologically beneficial, ambivalent, or destructive from a discourse analytical perspective. This chapter is organised as follows. Firstly, section 6.2 discusses the ways in which all three parties work to discursively “tame” the climate crisis (Willis, 2017:224) and undermine their stated commitment to addressing it. Section 6.3. explores the ways the parties construct the nonhuman world and naturalise continued ecological destruction. Lastly, section 6.4. assesses the commonalities and divergences of the parties’ climate change stories.

6.2 Taming the apocalypse

Both the corpus analysis and qualitative analysis suggested that the texts on climate change from all three political parties are a site of discursive struggle in which conflicting discourses and ideologies are present (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In particular, all three parties exhibited similar discursive conflicts between stories that acknowledged the seriousness of climate change on the one hand, and stories that worked to undermine its seriousness on the other. This was particularly true for the ANC and the DA, while the EFF’s primary discursive pattern with regard to climate change was one of erasure. These patterns will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

6.2.1 Creating an impression of commitment

All three parties acknowledged the seriousness of climate change to a certain extent. For the ANC and DA, this frequently took the form of an apocalyptic framing when describing the effects of the climate crisis, as discussed in section 5.3. Climate change was described as “ecological collapse” and preventing it as a “survivalist move”. This discourse is very similar to the Ecoactivist story, which sees climate change as an imminent crisis that spells impending doom unless radical action is taken (Norton & Hulme, 2019:119). In a few instances, the ANC and DA even emphasised the

far-reaching and systemic nature of the climate catastrophe, stressing that it will have significant impacts on “nearly every aspect of our lives”. While the EFF did not exhibit this apocalyptic discourse, it did acknowledge climate change and South Africa’s dependence on “polluting energy sources” as a key problem.

Discourses that highlight the seriousness of the climate crisis are in line with the ecosophy of this dissertation, as this is required to allow for swift and substantial action. Mentioning the effects that communities are experiencing is also positive, as it brings the issue of climate change into the realm of human experience (Lejano, Tavares-Reager & Berkes, 2013). Much discourse on climate change has been critiqued for applying a purely scientific framing that distances the issue from people’s everyday experiences (Flottum, 2010). However, the apocalyptic framing of the ANC and DA tends to be quite general rather than focused on localised communities’ experiences.

The ANC and DA also create an impression of taking climate change seriously through their references to climate justice and activists. The ANC refers to youth climate activists a few times to avow that they have “heard the voices” of these activists. However, this is usually undermined in the following sentences through shifting the focus to issues of semantics or separate topics such as development, as in the extract below.

69) “We have heard the voices of the young people who marched to the Union Buildings last week, urging us to take action to protect our planet. It was to address these fundamental challenges that we adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) in 2012 to guide our national effort to defeat poverty, unemployment and inequality.” (ANC)

The DA also refers to “climate justice” and “environmental justice”, but the meaning ascribed to these phrases is highly divergent from how it is used by activists. For example, by evoking the Climate Justice Movement in their discussion of a community food garden, they discursively link it to notions of personal civic responsibility, as seen in text 70. According to a paper co-authored by academics and environmental justice activists in the global South (Rodríguez-Labajos, Yáñez, Bond, Greyl, Munguti, Ojo, & Overbeek), environmental justice is a social movement that seeks to resist mechanisms of domination and dispossession related to ecology and the climate (Rodríguez-Labajos et. al., 2019:175). Environmental justice activists aim to confront the industries, policymakers and powerful actors that operate such mechanisms. However, the DA’s use of the term evokes none of this political framing and is instead bound up in the framing of

personal responsibility. It thus ostensibly highlights the issue, while simultaneously undermining its political force.

- 70) “Inspired by the Climate Justice Movement and a desire to make a difference in their community, brothers Geronimo and Valentino de Klerk began the garden in a dumping space previously utilised as an escape route by local criminals. The open space has been transformed into a community garden supporting several local feeding projects in the area.” (DA)

The undermining process described above occurs at a large scale throughout the discourse of all three political parties, but particularly in ANC and DA texts. Ecoactivist stories of apocalypse and climate justice are far outweighed by stories that “tame” and minimise climate change, which frequently immediately follow them. As discussed in section 2.5.3, political discourse tends to be much more strategic than most orders of discourse. Thus, this structure is likely to be intentional (Van Dijk, 2006). While the initial apocalyptic framing serves to reassure us that the party is taking climate change seriously, this is undermined by the stories that follow. This discursive conflict is an important finding, as it suggests that discursive actors may use one story as a discursive “shield” to draw attention away from more ecologically destructive stories. This strategy and the mechanisms by which it is applied is worth further investigation.

6.2.2 Economy frame

The ANC and DA consistently frame climate change as an issue that will primarily impact the economy, emphasizing the importance of “economic resilience” and “sustaining economic growth”. This serves to naturalise the *economic growth is good* appraisal pattern (Stibbe, 2015:83), and minimise the direct human and ecological impacts of the climate crisis. The *growth is good* evaluation pattern is exhibited throughout all three datasets, as economic growth is consistently presented as the key objective, like in the examples below. Even the EFF, that explicitly rejects capitalism, also supports “massive protected industrial development”. Alternatives such as degrowth and post-extractivism (Brand, Boos & Brad, 2017) are never mentioned, and are thus not presented as within the realm of possibility.

- 71) “From an environmental perspective, it is our mandate to facilitate an economic growth path that is equitable, inclusive, sustainable and environmentally sound.” (ANC)

- 72) “Faster economic growth also requires accelerated land reform in rural and urban areas and a clear property rights regime.” (DA)

- 73) “Under the EFF government, the economy will grow at 6% in the first two years and 10% in the remaining three years.” (EFF)

However, as discussed in section 1.3.1., an economic system characterised by perpetual growth is not ecologically sustainable (Satgar, 2018). In many ways, this economic system is what led to the climate catastrophe in the first place, and halting climate change is not possible within it (Brand, Boos & Brad, 2017). Therefore, the *growth is good* story is an ecologically destructive one. Moreover, the emphasis on growth as a benchmark for a country’s wellbeing prioritises a growing economy over social development, the health of ecosystems, and human and nonhuman wellbeing (Stibbe, 2015). As most economic activities are destructive to the environment, prioritizing them above all else is not conducive to creating a sustainable world.

Overall, far from being considered a factor in ecological destruction, economic growth is presented as going hand in hand with climate action. Both the ANC and DA frequently create a discursive connection between climate action, “green growth”, and technological process, as seen in the extracts below. This represents an amalgamation of both the Ecomodernist and Smart Growth Reformer stories, which were both also found to be prevalent in UK newspaper editorials (Norton & Hulme, 2019) and the websites of major Spanish corporations (Fernandez-Vasquez & Sancho-Rodrigues, 2020). The Smart Growth Reformer story suggests that market mechanisms will engender sustainable systems, while the Ecomodernist story argues for technological fixes to the climate crisis. However, what is intriguing in my data is the interdiscursive mingling of these stories within the same text. The stories were not merely both present but construed as inherently interconnected.

- 74) “We have the opportunity to be at the forefront of green growth, of low-carbon industrialisation, of pioneering new technologies and of taking quantum leaps towards the economy of the future. We must increase the contribution of renewable and clean energy to our national energy mix and explore the potential of the hydrogen economy.” (ANC)

- 75) “Tshwane is the first city in sub-Saharan Africa to run full CNG-propelled buses. We seek to reaffirm our position as a leader in green technology and other green interventions.” (DA)

These extracts exemplify Jochum’s (2020:8) argument that digital innovation is increasingly becoming linked with sustainability in “socio-eco-technical imaginaries”. The notion of a utopian future has always been common in political discourse, as political actors construct themselves as bringers of better worlds (Van Dijk, 1998). Here, dual visions of techno-futures and eco-futures

(Jochum, 2020:8) become an inseparable part of the utopia evoked by the texts. As noted in section 2.4.2.3. Van Dijk (1998:29) argues that a key feature of political discourse is its optimistic construction of the future, which political actors implicitly associate themselves with. While the ANC and DA sometimes acknowledge the seriousness of the climate crisis, they undermine this elsewhere by creating an imagined future of an ecologically sustainable, technologically advanced, and prosperous country. I should note that the EFF's association of themselves with positive futures is more direct, as they construct themselves as the bringers of solutions to a passive public as in text 76. This extract also associates technology with jobs and climate action, but it is not bound up in an imagined future of economic opportunity and technological innovation as it is for the other two parties.

76) “The EFF government will establish a research and development centre focused on nuclear technology and the disposal of nuclear waste by 2023, creating 2 500 new jobs, 1 200 of which will be reserved for women and the youth.” (EFF)

The Ecomodernist story runs counter to the ecosophy of this dissertation, as it suggests that all we need to prosper and live in ecological harmony is the continuation of technological progress. This story is highly misleading, as the technology we currently have access to is not at all sufficient to avert climate catastrophe (Cock, 2018). Even if we were able to develop technologies to remove enough carbon from the atmosphere and not emit any more, we do not have the time to do so. The world already has a significant degree of warming locked in, and without dramatic cuts in emissions in the next few years, this will increase to catastrophic levels (IPCC, 2022). Moreover, the linkage of technological innovation with economic growth reveals a one-dimensional approach of development as technology for accumulation and consumption (Acosta & Abarca, 2018). This approach is not consistent with the protection of earth's finite resources and the planetary systems that support life.

6.2.3 Individual responsibility frame

On the rare occasions that the parties address consumption as a climate issue, the way they do so minimises it with the story that *small actions will save the planet*, discussed in section 4.4. In some instances, the focus is not on consuming less, but simply different things, such as “more climate-friendly appliances” as in text 77. In other instances, the parties encourage us to consume less only when it is convenient, such as “unplug[ging] unused electronic devices”, and “us[ing] public

transport if you can”. The implication is that we can continue living our lives as we do now, with very minor adjustments (Stibbe, 2015:46). As in text 77, this is frequently made explicit through claims that “small actions are going to be key” to addressing climate change.

77) “You and I can make a difference in our communities, neighbourhoods, schools, churches, sports and social clubs and workplaces. Small actions are going to be key. We all have a role to play, big or small but we do not have the luxury of doing nothing. Change comes when we make smarter choices. Be it choosing more climate-friendly appliances, travelling more responsibly, getting into the habit of recycling, using solar panels where possible, planting water-wise trees and speaking out as a consumer if you are unhappy about the resource efficiency of products and companies.” (DA)

The story that *small actions will save the planet* is discursively connected with a story that *climate change is an individual responsibility*. In this construction, addressing the climate crisis is not primarily the responsibility of political actors, but of all citizens. Furthermore, the focus on individual actions suggests that this responsibility is a purely personal one. The solution is not to be found in civil society collectives, but each individual making “responsibl[e]” choices in their own life. This echoes the eco-speak that Bernard (2015) found in her analysis of corporate social responsibility reports. Often, when ANC and DA politicians discussed these topics, they positioned themselves as both members of the public and as holding positions of expertise through the strategic use of pronouns (see section 5.5). They thus shifted focus from the responsibility they hold as political leaders, while maintaining the construction of themselves as authorities.

Both stories described above are highly ecologically destructive. The explicit nature of *the small actions will save the planet* story makes it less of an implicit ideology and more of a wholesale deception. Not only does it suggest that we can make a significant impact with a few simple adjustments, but it also shifts the responsibility of addressing the climate crisis from the government onto individual citizens (Barr, Gilg & Shaw, 2011). Furthermore, it shifts focus away from the source of each issue. By focusing on buying single use plastic, attention is shifted away from plastic production. By focusing on electricity usage in the home, attention is shifted away from the reliance on fossil fuels for energy. By focusing on individual actions of citizens, attention is shifted away from the responsibilities of government. Political actors thus simultaneously present climate change as solvable and avoid the responsibility of solving it. This discourse can be

said to be manipulative, as it benefits the government and powerful corporations by obscuring the root causes of the issues (Van Dijk, 2006).

In this way, the ANC and the DA evaded responsibility for addressing the climate crisis. This was further reinforced by their frequent use of nominalisations revealed by the corpus analysis. Nominalisations are very common in political discourse and have been shown to shift responsibility away from the speaker or writer (Poole, 2022: 42). Interestingly, active verbs were much more common in the EFF manifesto than in the ANC and DA datasets. The EFF also had a much greater tendency to assign responsibility to the state rather than to individual citizens, promising to build recycling plants and change laws. However, it also avoided responsibility for the climate crisis by focusing on minor actions and through a simple dearth of discussion on the topic.

6.2.4 Exaggeration and obfuscation of climate actions

When discussing actions taken on climate change, the DA and ANC frequently used discursive strategies to exaggerate their significance. For example, the use of numbers instead of percentages and a discourse of savings served to make the parties' climate actions appear more significant than they are. We can see both strategies in text 78, which talks about how many kg of CO₂ emissions have been "avoided". This exaggerates the environmental benefit of what has been done, while minimizing the ecologically destructive activities that continue on a large scale. This clearly runs counter to the ecosophy of this dissertation, as it allows ecologically destructive activities to continue without scrutiny.

78) "This means the City, through this project, has reduced 126 274 ton of carbon emissions since July 2018 when the accumulation of credits began. This is equivalent to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from approximately 24 762 passenger vehicles driven for one year, or carbon captured and stored from the atmosphere (i.e. sequestration) by planting 2 million trees' seedlings grown for over 10 years." (DA)

Although the ANC and DA mostly focus on individual responsibility, there are times when they explicitly mention their climate policies. When they do so, their mention of specific targets and use of active voice creates the impression that they are taking significant action. For example, in text 79 below, the phrases "target ranges" and "significant reduction", and "plan to build" suggest clear, comprehensive, and ongoing plans. However, on closer inspection, the text is full of

unexplained concepts and obfuscation of the full picture (see section 5.6.). The ANC thus provides little specificity regarding their climate actions despite ostensibly having “ambitious” and decisive plans.

- 79) “We are currently in the process of updating South Africa's Nationally Determined Contribution... The new target ranges we are proposing are much more ambitious in two respects. First, the top of the 2030 range has been reduced by 28%, or 174 million metric tons, a very significant reduction. Second, according to our previous Nationally Determined Contribution, South Africa's emissions would peak and plateau in 2025, and decline only from 2035. South Africa's emissions will begin to decline from 2025, effectively shifting our emissions decline 10 years earlier. With regard to our energy resources, we plan to build capacity to generate over 17 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2030.” (ANC)

As the corpus analysis revealed, avoidance of specificity was a key feature of the ANC and DA climate change discourse. This was evidenced by the high frequency of semantically neutral words like “manage” and “address”. As seen in text 80 below, not only does this imply that “climate variability and change” is something that can be brought under control through scientific and bureaucratic mechanisms, but it holds very little information about what such management involves. “Address” is similarly nonspecific and holds little sense of urgency. Along with other key phrases (see sections 4.3.1. and 4.3.3.), these words minimize the climate crisis by turning it into a bureaucratic issue to be solved through following correct procedures. This minimization is reinforced by the near universal use of the phrase “climate change” as opposed to more urgent sounding alternatives. Furthermore, semantic non-specificity allows politicians to appear committed to an issue while keeping their commitments relatively vague.

- 80) “Furthermore, we have developed the National Framework on Climate Services to enable better **management** of the risks of climate variability and change at all levels, through development and incorporation of science-based climate information and prediction services into planning, policy and practice.” (ANC)

All these strategies of exaggerating climate actions and obfuscating climate destruction form part of the wider strategy of drawing attention away from ecologically destructive actions and stories towards ostensibly beneficial ones. The strategies discussed in this section, especially the strategic use of numbers and percentages and semantically non-specific words and phrases, are particularly notable as they have not yet been a strong focus in ecolinguistic research.

6.3 Construction of the nonhuman world

In my view, the way political actors construct the nonhuman world and the human relationship to it is a key indicator of their approach to protecting the systems that support life on earth. Both the corpus analysis and qualitative analysis (sections 4.3.3. and 5.2) suggested that all three parties naturalised the view that nature exists for human benefit (Stibbe, 2015:72). This was exemplified by the frequency of the phrase “our environment” as well as the existence of phrases like “ecosystem goods and services” and “ecological infrastructure”. These abstract phrases erase the “profound reality” of plants, animals, and ecosystems by not providing the vivid representation that concrete phrases like “silver tree” and “vlei” do (Stibbe, 2015: 150). When we describe a riverine estuary as “ecological infrastructure”, we lose any perceptual image of what this is, and we also constitute its existence as already in the service of humans.

This is made explicit in some texts, such as the DA’s text 81. Here, the “services” of nature are characterised as both “valuable” and “free” as well as “essential”, suggesting that nature can benefit us and that there is no cost to this. The benefit is not only in lessening our own detrimental effects on the environment, but also in “innovation and wealth creation”. This is particularly striking in a text that initially claims that the environment has “intrinsic value that requires protection”. The following sentences make clear that the value is not intrinsic, but is related to what nature can do for us. The text naturalises the exploitation of nature for the economic benefit of humans, even as it argues for its protection.

81) “Our environment has intrinsic value that requires protection. Its numerous ecosystems provide human society with valuable and free essential services, including the limited amelioration of our pollution and various products that can be used in innovation and wealth creation.” (DA)

In the EFF manifesto, nature was constructed as existing for exploitation by humans through very direct language. As seen in text 82, justice and equality are strongly emphasised, but never applied to the nonhuman world. Plants and animals are constituted as inanimate objects equivalent to mineral resources. Unlike the ANC and the DA, the EFF does not create the impression that these resources have value outside of their benefit to humans. This contributes to the EFF’s erasure of the climate and ecological crises, as exploitation of natural resources is discussed without any mention of its impacts on ecology or relation to the climate.

- 82) “The EFF government’s approach to the fishing industry will be guided by the principle that marine resources are public resources and the exploitation of these resources should benefit the public as a whole.” (EFF)

In contrast to the EFF, the ANC and the DA frequently speak about the beauty of nature highly romantic connotations (Takach, 2012), through phrases like “breath-taking diversity of marine life” and “blessed with rich resources and unique biodiversity”. While this suggests an appreciation of nature’s inherent value, it is always accompanied by the implication that this beauty exists for human consumption (see section 5.3.2.). Presenting the natural world as existing for human benefit reinforces the conceptual divide between the natural and human worlds (Fox & Alldred, 2018). Humans are placed in a position of supremacy, which does not allow for a view of the natural and social worlds as interconnected (Pennycook, 2018). Moreover, nonhuman animals and plants are not given intrinsic value and can thus be exploited as long as humans benefit from this exploitation. This also contributes to their erasure, as they are not given perceptual salience or imbued with their own life force. This makes it much harder for us to care about them being destroyed.

6.4 Comparing the three parties

In this section, I will assess the similarities and differences between the climate change stories of the ANC, DA, and EFF. When comparing the three parties, I found a surprising number of similarities. While the EFF did not exhibit the apocalyptic discourse of the ANC and the DA, all three parties acknowledged the seriousness of climate change to a certain extent. At the same time, all three parties constructed economic growth as the primary objective. All parties also “tamed” climate change in a number of ways:

- a) Through framing climate change as an economic issue (ANC and DA)
- b) Through framing climate change as an opportunity for innovation and entrepreneurship (ANC and DA)
- c) Through suggesting climate change can be “managed” via bureaucratic mechanisms (ANC and DA)
- d) Through emphasizing minor actions over systemic change (ANC, DA and EFF)

- e) Through a lack of discussion of climate change (EFF)

Furthermore, all three parties constructed the natural world as existing for the benefit of humans and presented humanity as separate from nature. Despite these similarities, there were several key differences that will be discussed below.

6.4.1 EFF vs. ANC and DA

There were several ways in which the EFF discourse diverged from that of the ANC and the DA. First, it did not engage in apocalyptic discourse when describing the effects of climate change. It also did not exhibit the romantic discourse of the other two parties when speaking about biodiversity. For the DA and ANC, this served to romanticise the natural world at the same time as placing humans in a position of supremacy over it. In contrast, the EFF manifesto almost entirely erased the natural world, referring to it only as “resources” and “protected areas”. Ultimately, both strategies lead to erasure and the positioning of humans as separate from the nonhuman world. However, the ANC and the DA still created an image of appreciating biodiversity, despite constructing its value only to the extent that it benefits humans.

The EFF also did not exhibit the linkage of economic growth, techno-utopianism, and sustainability evident in ANC and DA discourse (Jochum, 2020). Although there was an appraisal of technology as key to improving people’s lives, this was not discursively linked to visions of private enterprise and ecological harmony the way it was by the other two parties. This linking of technological innovation with private enterprise alludes to some of the fundamental differences between the ANC and DA on one hand, and the EFF on the other. While the ANC and DA both present the private sector as playing a key role in improving the economy and the lives of South Africans, the EFF sees both as primarily the role of the state. This is not surprising, given the explicitly communist underpinnings of the EFF and the neoliberal leanings of the DA and to a lesser extent the ANC (Koekemoer, 2017).

In contrast to the overwhelming economic framing of climate change exhibited by ANC and DA, the EFF’s framing was one of revolution. Even the transition to renewable energy was described as the “green revolution”. This points to another fundamental difference between the EFF and the ANC and DA. Overall, the changes proposed by the ANC and the DA suggest a gradual shift,

while the EFF seeks to implement large-scale changes to the country's economic and political system (Majavu, 2021). Nevertheless, when it comes to the issue of climate change, the changes the EFF proposes are not significantly different to those of the ANC and the DA. All parties emphasise minor actions in combatting climate change as opposed to limiting economic expansion and rejecting fossil fuels.

Arguably, as the EFF dataset consisted of only one text, it cannot be said to be representative of the party's climate change discourse. The fact that the text is an election manifesto is likely to have impacted its tone, the topics it addressed, and its framings and interdiscursivities. However, it is worth noting that this was the only text I was able to find from the EFF that mentioned climate change. Thus, the EFF's dominant story of the climate crisis is a non-existent one, and their primary discursive strategy when it comes to climate change is erasure.

6.4.2 ANC vs. DA

When comparing the climate change stories of the DA and ANC, I found even fewer differences. As described above, the two parties had many stories in common and drew on similar discursive influences. In general, the main differences were in the extent to which a discourse was emphasised rather than its presence or absence. For example, the ANC displayed more specificity in the ways they related climate change and the economy, as seen in the frequent reference to various "economies". However, the DA displayed a greater frequency of words that suggested optimism about the future, such as "new" and "opportunities". The DA also placed greater emphasis on the role of individuals in their communities, while the ANC exhibited a more country-wide orientation. However, this may simply stem from the differing roles the two parties hold in government.

One of the biggest differences between the ANC and the DA was in geopolitical alignment. The ANC frequently emphasised South Africa's connection to the rest of Africa, and to developing countries in general. This was usually done to argue for increased climate funding from developed countries. However, the ANC did occasionally align with BRICS or the "international community". The ANC thus strategically aligned with different geopolitical groupings at different times, constructing South Africa as both a vulnerable country in need of support and as an influential global actor. This diverges slightly with Govender's (2015) findings that Jacob Zuma did not align South Africa with BRICS countries but only with African and developing countries.

In contrast, the DA did not align with Africa and developing countries to a significant extent. As the DA is not the party of national government, it is perhaps not surprising that it would not highlight the need for funding from developed countries as much as the ANC. However, it is notable that when the DA did make connections with other parts in the world, it did not align with Africa, but rather with “megacities” in the global North. This serves to discursively distance the cities that the DA governs from the rest of South Africa. It constructs DA-led cities as “on par” with developed cities in the global North, implicitly constructing the rest of the country as backwards. This is key to the political competition between the ANC and the DA, as the DA positions itself as a more competent alternative to the failing ANC (Koekemoer, 2017:41). On the other hand, the DA is often accused of being a party that serves predominantly white interests (Maphaka, 2022:53).

Like the ANC, the EFF aligned South Africa with the rest of Africa. It also aligned the country with other BRICS countries to a greater extent than the ANC. However, it did not do so to argue for financial support from developed countries. Rather, it pointed to an economic as well as social and cultural alliance with the rest of Africa. Developed countries were not constructed as providers of funding, but rather as perpetrators of western domination. In contrast, BRICS countries were presented as models to emulate in terms of economic policies.

6.5 Conclusion

Overall, the stories presented in all three parties’ communications on climate change are ecologically destructive and in opposition to the ecosophy of this dissertation. In some ways, the EFF’s discourse could be seen to be the most ecologically destructive, as it exhibited the strongest pattern of erasure of the natural world. In addition, I could find only one text from the EFF that addressed climate change at all. However, the ANC and DA’s appropriation of ecoactivist discourse may be more insidious, as it implies that the ANC and DA take climate change seriously. However, this is continuously undermined with stories that minimise the climate emergency, avoid responsibility for it, and construct the natural world as existing for human benefit.

The “revolutionary” framing of the EFF is also misleading, as it suggests that the EFF would support much more drastic and immediate action than the DA and ANC. The EFF’s anti-capitalist stance could be seen as amenable to post-extractivist philosophies and alternatives to a growth

economy. However, on closer inspection, the EFF's construction of the natural world and its proposed climate actions are very similar to those of the DA and ANC. Ultimately, all three parties are guilty of "taming" climate change even as they profess their commitment to addressing it.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as conclusion to this dissertation, following the findings that emerged from the analyses. The ensuing section revisits the research questions, and provides responses based on findings from the corpus and critical discourse analyses. Section 7.3. discusses the limitations of this study, and section 7.4. concludes the dissertation with suggestions for future research and action.

7.2 Revisiting the research questions

The following subsections will revisit the primary research question as well as the five subordinate questions to illustrate the extent to which the analyses succeeded in addressing them.

7.2.1 Primary research question: *What are the climate change stories of South Africa's three main political parties as reflected by their official communications to the public?*

The climate change stories exhibited by the ANC and the DA were very similar. Of the four stories identified by Norton and Hulme (2019), namely the Lukewarmer, Ecomodernist, Smart Growth Reformer, and Ecoactivist stories, three were present to varying degrees. The Ecoactivist story was occasionally displayed in an apocalyptic framing of climate change, but the Ecomodernist and Smart Growth Reformer stories were more prevalent. In addition, several other stories were evident in the ANC and DA discourse. One of these was the *economic growth is good* story, which has become a story-we-live-by in the globalised world (Stibbe, 2015: 88). Another story was that *climate change is manageable*, evidenced by the frequency of semantically neutral words like *manage* and bureaucratic framings of the environment. Also very prevalent were the stories that *small actions will save the planet* and *climate change is an individual responsibility*. The story that *current emission rates are normal* was displayed in a discourse of savings to describe climate action. Lastly, two interconnected stories were that *the natural world exists for human benefit* and *the natural world is not important*. The latter was revealed through a pattern of erasure in discussing it using highly abstracted terms.

The EFF displayed much fewer climate change stories, as the only data I had for it was an election manifesto with a short section on climate change. However, it also displayed the *growth is good* story and the *small actions will save the planet* story, though to a lesser extent than the other two parties. In addition, the stories *that the natural world exists for human benefit* and *the natural world is not important* were evident in several parts of the manifesto. The EFF's erasure of the natural world and the issue of climate change itself was even more extensive than that of the ANC and the DA. These stories, as well as those of the ANC and DA discussed above, work together to tell an overarching story that *climate change is not serious*.

7.2.2 Subordinate question 1: *Are the climate change stories told by South African politicians ecologically destructive, ambivalent, or beneficial?*

Overall, the climate change stories told by the three political stories are highly ecologically destructive. The apocalyptic framing exhibited by the ANC and DA could be seen as ecologically beneficial, as could stories of environmental justice and the EFF's revolutionary framing. However, for all three parties, any seemingly beneficial stories are undermined by the much more prevalent stories that serve to tame climate change, divert attention from it and evade responsibility for it. These include stories that position the environment as subservient to the economy, that present trivial actions and technological innovation as the keys to solving climate change, and that suggest that climate change can be "managed". The ecologically ambivalent stories influenced by Ecoactivist discourse can be considered highly insidious given the ecologically destructive nature of the more prevalent climate change stories. This is because the parties *appear* to take the climate crisis seriously. As an audience, we may be reassured by this and thus less likely to cognitively register the destructive nature of subsequent stories.

7.2.3 Subordinate question 2: *What discourses are drawn upon in shaping these stories, and how do the discursive elements blend and interact with one another?*

As is evident from the above, there are a wide variety of stories in the parties' communications to the public, which are often in discursive conflict. Many of the texts emphasise the existential and systemic nature of the climate emergency in one breath, then prioritise trivial actions in the next. Some texts evoke discourses of climate justice, and then go on to frame climate change as an opportunity for private sector growth. Nature is frequently constructed as important but is

simultaneously presented as a resource pot for humans to exploit. Thus, interdiscursive conflict is a significant element of all three datasets (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Jorgensen & Philips, 2011).

The parties' climate change discourse also reveals intertextual links to existing prominent discourses. For example, the DA and ANC evoke techno-utopianism and discursively link Ecomodernist and Smart Growth Reformer stories in their imaginings of technological innovation leading to both economic growth and ecological harmony (Jochum, 2020). In addition, the "eco-speak" of the DA and the ANC, which emphasises trivial actions and consumer choices individuals could take to minimise climate change, evokes a dominant neoliberal refrain (Barr, Gilg & Shaw, 2010). In the EFF data, interdiscursivity was not as visible, though there was some evidence of eco-speak. Nevertheless, the primary discourse evoked was one of nationalist revolution, albeit one that will be imposed from above (Majavu, 2021). Overall, the main takeaway when it comes to the EFF's climate change discourse is a pattern of erasure.

7.2.4 Subordinate question 3: *How do the different political parties construct the challenges facing the nation and the responsibilities of government, and how do they negotiate climate change within that?*

The ways the ANC and DA construe the challenges facing the nation are very similar. They both present unemployment, poverty, and lack of development as key challenges, and suggest economic growth as the solution. The role of the state is seen as the facilitation of opportunities for private enterprise. Climate change is presented as a separate problem, but the solution is always tied to and secondary to the solution to economic troubles. However, both parties also consistently shift responsibility for addressing the climate crisis away from government and onto citizens. For the EFF, the primary challenge facing South Africa is inequality and the oppression of poor and black people through economic means. The solution is seen as a restructuring of the economy including nationalization of key assets, as well as an expansion of the productive economy. In contrast to the DA and the ANC, the EFF confers primary responsibility for the country's challenges onto the state, constituting itself as potential saviour of the South African people. Climate change is addressed by the EFF, but as separate and subordinate to the key challenges of the country.

7.2.5 Subordinate question 4: *How are climate change and environmental issues framed and what is the potential impact of this framing?*

Climate change and environmental issues are framed in a variety of different ways by the political parties. The most prominent framing for the ANC and DA is an economic one, with almost every topic framed through a lens of economic growth. Another prevalent framing is one of individual responsibility. Political actors thus shift responsibility away from government and simultaneously minimise climate change. In contrast, the EFF utilises a revolutionary framing of climate action. However, this appears to be only surface level, as the policies it proposes represent a continuation of the fossil fuel-based growth economy. A final framing exhibited by the ANC and DA is one of bureaucracy, which diminishes climate change to something that can be “managed”.

When it comes to the environment, the ANC and DA frequently utilise a romantic framing that constructs South Africa’s biodiversity as a source of pride. However, both parties simultaneously imply that animals, plants, and ecosystems exist purely for the enjoyment and material benefit of humans. Not only are humans separate from the natural world but are in a position of supremacy over it. While the EFF does not exhibit the same romantic construction, it frames the nonhuman world in a utilitarian way as a means for expanding the economy and achieving equality. All parties thus position humans as the owners of the natural world, which is essentially a pot of resources for us to benefit from.

7.2.6 Subordinate question 5: *How do political actors and parties construct themselves in relation to South African citizens and other national / international political actors?*

When it comes to the way the parties construct themselves in relation to South African citizens, the ANC and DA exhibit vague and fluctuating relational attitudes. This can be seen in the frequent usage of “we”, where the referent is not clear. Politicians use this shifting referent to construct themselves as one of the people, and in a position of authority over them. As a purportedly socialist party, one may expect that members of the EFF present themselves as members of the public. However, the message from the election manifesto is one of the EFF as a saviour of vulnerable South Africans, who are not constituted as having agency for themselves.

As many of the texts in the ANC database are government texts, there was little evidence of the way it constructs other political parties. However, when it comes to international relations, there is a clear discursive strategy. The ANC consistently aligns with other African countries and with developing countries in general to request climate finance from countries in the global North.

However, the ANC also occasionally aligns the country with BRICS and the international community in general. In this way, it strategically aligns in different geopolitical directions to construct the country as vulnerable and in need of assistance, but also as an important global player. In contrast, the DA aligns the cities it governs with “megacities” in Europe and the USA, distancing them from the rest of the ANC-governed country. Like the ANC, the EFF aligns with the rest of Africa and BRICS, but explicitly not with the West. However, they do so not to request climate finance, but in a way that suggests a cultural and economic Pan-Africanism and anti-Western sentiment.

7.3 Limitations of the study

This study aimed to uncover the climate change stories of the ANC, the DA, and the EFF, through a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis. As such, the primary limitation was the lack of data from the EFF, as one text does not constitute a corpus. Although this lack of data is illuminating, it did limit the findings that emerged from the EFF dataset. Two more limitations of this study are its lack of interdisciplinarity and space constraints that limited the depth and extent of the analysis. While CDA and ecolinguistics are inherently interdisciplinary due to their focus on the social and ecological effects of language, I was limited in my ability to address these. This was due to both space constraints and my own lack of training in political and ecological fields. Wherever possible, ecolinguistic research would benefit from collaborations with scholars in social and ecological fields.

7.4 Recommendations for future research and action

This study was an exploratory one, and thus approached the parties’ climate change discourse from an open-ended perspective. Future research could address more specific issues or genres. It may also be useful to pick up key phrases that emerged and investigate them further, such as the “ecosystem services” or the “green economy”. Assessing how these relate discursively to climate change and the parties’ policies more generally could illuminate the extent to which climate change stories connect to the other stories told by the parties. In addition, one of the limitations of research on climate change discourse is that it tends to be limited to discourse that explicitly addresses climate change. Nevertheless, there is an abundance of political discourse on topics that impact

the climate, such as tourism, economic growth, energy shortages, mining, and technology. Investigating these from an ecolinguistic perspective could shed light on how ecological ideologies pervade political discourse in general, even if the “ecological” aspect of these exists in its absences.

I will end this dissertation with a final call, all too common in CDA research and with all too little uptake. For ecolinguistics research to have any significant impact, it must extend beyond the walls of academic institutions. Stibbe (2015) calls on an alliance with activists and others working in the climate sphere to uncover beneficial climate stories and disseminate these. However, in my view, avenues of “positive discourse analysis” (Bartlett, 2018) are fraught with the risk of these positive discourses being appropriated by powerful forces and used in hegemonic ways (Fairclough, 1995:232). Thus, I would argue that the most useful contribution of CDA is in providing the tools for people to look for the implicit messages in the language of powerful actors and to see the hegemonic presuppositions that exist in habitual ways of speaking. I therefore suggest that the most fruitful avenue for collaboration between ecolinguists and activists is in the creation of resources and educational programs to help people critically analyse the ecological messaging around them.

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