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LINGUISTIC OPPOSITIONS IN ENVIRONMENTALIST AND ANTI-ENVIRONMENTALIST MEDIA DISCOURSE: A TRIGGER-BASED COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Abstract. Situated within ecolinguistic and discourse-analytic perspectives, this study investigates linguistic oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist media discourse, focusing specifically on trigger-based syntactic frames that construct contrast. Drawing on the work of Jeffries (2010) and Davies (2012b), linguistic oppositions are defined here not as general thematic conflicts, but as context-dependent semantic contrasts generated by specific syntactic triggers, such as negation (*not X but Y*), comparison (*more X than Y*), or transitional frames (*from X to Y*), which function here as a distinct analytical framework applied within ecolinguistic and discourse-analytic perspectives. The study addresses the research question of how oppositional strategies differ between these two discourses and what linguistic patterns characterise their use of opposition. Using an adapted opposition-trigger model (Davies, 2012b) as the primary analytical framework, the study analyses a manually compiled corpus of 60 online media articles, evenly split between environmentalist sources published in mainstream media and anti-environmentalist responses published on *ClimateRealism.com*. Within this study, the model serves as the primary analytical procedure situated within broader ecolinguistic and discourse-analytic perspectives. The corpus focuses on cases where anti-environmentalist texts explicitly react to environmentalist claims, allowing for the examination of oppositional structures within a shared topical and temporal context. A combination of qualitative classification and

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quantitative frequency analysis identified 165 instances of linguistic opposition. The findings show that anti-environmentalist texts employ oppositions more frequently and favour less conventional and multi-trigger patterns, whereas environmentalist texts rely more on implicit or concessive forms. While the study does not assess the persuasive effectiveness of the oppositions, it identifies recurring discursive tendencies and constraints, contributing to a clearer understanding of oppositional framing in environmental communication.

Keywords: oppositional framing; linguistic oppositions; environmentalist discourse; syntactic triggers; ecolinguistics; media discourse

1. Introduction

Linguistic oppositions are a pervasive feature of text, shaping readers' perceptions and disseminating ideologies. Given their naturalness in structuring the text, their exploration is essential. To date, relevant research has been limited to literary and news texts, unveiling the potential of oppositions for leveraging opposing views, frequently in unexpected ways (e.g., Davies, 2012a, 2012b; Jeffries, 2010), and no insights into oppositions as used in the environmentalist discourse have been provided. In contemporary environmental communication, the media play a significant role in shaping public perceptions (Happer & Philo, 2013). Media's influence on framing environmental issues, including visions of a sustainable future, is central to ecolinguistics (Penz & Fill, 2022), a field with a 50-year history that examines how language shapes understandings of the environment.

For this reason, the present study examines linguistic oppositions — understood here as syntactically constructed contrasts rather than ideological disagreement — in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist media discourse. The analysis focuses on identifying specific trigger-based categories of opposition used in the linguistic framing of environmental issues. The following research questions are thus raised:

RQ1: What specific opposition strategies are used in the environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse?

RQ2: What do the observed oppositional patterns suggest about discursive tendencies in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse?

Following this introductory section, the study is structured as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 lays out the methodology and data collection procedure. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses the possible implications of the findings. Section 6 concludes the study.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. Critical discourse analysis

Adopting ecolinguistic and discourse-analytic perspectives, the present study treats linguistic opposition, which here is operationalised through trigger-based syntactic frames, as the primary analytical framework. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is discussed below as a strand of discourse-analytic research relevant to the interpretation of opposing perspectives, in particular, environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been specifically conceived as a methodology for addressing issues of power and inequality embedded in language use (Fairclough 1989, 2013; van Dijk, 2001). The relationship between power and discourse is explored by asking two fundamental questions:

1. "How do (more) powerful groups control public discourse?
2. How does such discourse control the mind and action of (less) powerful groups, and what are the social consequences of such control, such as social inequality?" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 355).

Drawing on social constructivist work, which views language as constitutive in the social construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), discourse is conceptualised as a form of social practice embedded in wider social contexts: "discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 285). Within this tradition, Fairclough (1989) distinguishes between power *in* discourse and power *behind* discourse, highlighting how linguistic choices may reflect

broader ideological structures. Later discourse-analytic and ecolinguistic approaches have further emphasised the dynamic interplay between language, ideology, and context (e.g., Cheng, 2022; Stibbe, 2014).

Viewed as a system of fundamental "common-sense" beliefs and assumptions, ideology forms the basis of the social representations of a group (Fairclough, 1989, p. 2; van Dijk, 2012). As it is learned from parents, peers, and the media, ideology forms an integral part of most discourse (van Dijk, 2012). Environmental discourse is also ideological: at its core is the concern over human activities endangering the environment.

While acknowledging the distinction between the notions *environmentalist* and *ecological discourse* – the former encoding endangerment of nature and humanity globally and the latter reflecting the general relationship between language and the environment (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014; Cheng, 2022; Mühlhäusler & Peace, 2006) — we use the term *environmentalist discourse* throughout the study to refer to texts advocating environmental preservation, in contrast to sceptical perspectives. The social constructivist role of language is encoded in the ecolinguistics concern with "the linguistic mechanisms by which worldviews are constructed, reproduced, spread and resisted", and their implications for sustaining conditions that support life (Stibbe, 2014, para. 3).

Ecolinguistics encompasses two main strands of research. The first, ecology of language, initially introduced by Haugen (1972), views language metaphorically as an ecosystem and addresses questions of language development, contact, continuity, extinction, and revitalisation (Penz & Fill, 2022). The second strand, *ecological discourse analysis* (EDA), investigates language use within an ecological framework, that is, in relation to human interaction with the environment (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014). As an interdisciplinary enterprise, EDA includes a linguistics-focused dimension concerned with lexical choices and transitivity constructions (Alexander, 2018; Goatly, 2000, 2002), as well as research into climate change communication and its behavioural implications (Penz, 2022).

As the present study focuses on syntactically constructed oppositions in media discourse, the discussion is limited to the textual and linguistic dimension of ecological discourse analysis.

2.2. Anti-environmentalism

The celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970 marked a pivotal moment in the development of modern environmentalism (Stoddart et al., 2022). It spurred the creation of prominent environmentalist organizations such as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. *Environmentalism* emerged as a movement committed to fostering a more sustainable future and addressing pressing environmental concerns. Since "any socially significant movement is bound to encounter opposition" (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996, p. 1630), environmentalism was soon confronted with a countermovement known as *anti-environmentalism*. Anti-environmentalism is associated primarily with destructive industries, corporations, and think tanks promoting skepticism towards environmental issues and evolves in two directions, "classic" and "critical" (Stoddart et al., 2022, p. 7). While classic anti-environmentalism evolves as a counter-movement to environmentalism, critical anti-environmentalism aims to provide productive insights into issues created by environmentalism. Often stimulated by unintended consequences of environmentalist activities, critical anti-environmentalists align with environmentalists in their pursuit to improve rather than boycott the movement.

The emergence of anti-environmentalism as a countermovement to environmentalism signifies a complex development, marked by the strategic use of linguistic tactics by anti-environmentalists — primarily at the conceptual and lexical levels — aimed to discredit the pro-environmentalist agenda.

Exploring anti-environmentalist rhetoric, — understood here as discursive strategies that question, minimise, or reframe environmental concerns — Tambeau (2010) distinguishes five frames (patterns of interpretation). These frames, with the potential to exaggerate specific aspects of reality, portraying the environmentalist movement in a negative light (Scheufele, 2006), may combine in between and are the following: a) expressly negatively-coloured lexis, e.g., "*scam*," "*blatantly false claims*," "*lies*"; b) hyperboles to accuse the environmental movement of fear-mongering, which resonates with c) their critique of environmentalists as resorting to intimidation to suppress opposition; d) exposure of environmentalism's frequent connection with faith, which portrays the

movement as cultish and radical; and e) portrayal of environmentalism as a movement vying for greater control over citizens' lives and freedoms (Tambeau, 2010, p. 12). Jointly, these frames are used to linguistically construct environmentalism as a deceitful, untrustworthy movement based on fallacies and employing questionable tactics to promote its agenda.

Given the limited research on linguistic tools in anti-environmentalism and environmentalism discourse, the study addresses this gap by exploring linguistic oppositions used in these two types of discourses and their contribution to shaping the agenda.

2.3. Linguistic oppositions

2.3.1. Conventional oppositions

Opposition, traditionally regarded as the oppositeness of meaning between lexemes, e.g., *rich* and *poor*, centres on the dichotomy between two distinct values, events, or phenomena, reflects a natural thinking process and thus makes an integral part of discourse (Jones, 2002, p. 10; Lyons, 1977; Virdis, 2022). Compositionally, oppositions step beyond the word level and include both phrasal and clausal forms (Davies, 2012a, 2012b) and are of two types: conventional and unconventional oppositions. At the core of both is the formative component, the *syntactic frame*, which is a certain syntactic environment in which a given opposition is constructed. Syntactic frames contain an element which highlights, or *triggers*, contrasts between words, phrases, and clauses (Davies, 2012b), such as "or" in the opposition frame "X or Y". The example below is for a conventional opposition formed by means of the trigger *or* and recognizable even when used in isolation:

1) He showed no disloyalty, **publicly or privately** (Jones, 2002, p. 66).

In contrast, the interpretation of unconventional oppositions relies heavily on the context. In the following example, the opposition spans two clauses and is constructed contextually:

2) Labour says he's **black**. Tories say he's **British** (Jeffries, 2010, p. 2).

The critical role of context in constructing non-conventional oppositional relationships is reflected in the variety of terms used to describe them, including *non-canonical oppositions, constructed oppositions, created oppositions, context-bound oppositions,* and *unconventional oppositions* (Jeffries, 2010).

To date, three major classifications have been proposed by Jones (2002), Jeffries (2010), and Davies (2012a, 2012b). Jones (2002) categorises oppositions into eight types, each associated with specific syntactic frames: ancillary (e.g., *love to cook, but hate doing the dishes*), coordinated (X and Y), comparative (e.g., *more X than Y*), distinguished (e.g., *the difference between X and Y*), transitional (e.g., *from X to Y*), negated (X not Y), extreme (e.g., *too X or Y*), and idiomatic (e.g., *the long and short of it*). Most of these types involve conventional oppositions, with the exception of ancillary antonymy, which may generate additional oppositional pairs.

Focusing on syntactic frames for conventional oppositions rather than their meanings or functions, Jones nevertheless acknowledges the existence of unconventional antonyms, such as *gay* and *straight*. Jeffries (2010) further highlights the limited scope for unconventional oppositions and, emphasising the role of opposition in ideological construction, distinguishes between lexical and structural triggers. Lexical triggers encode explicit oppositional relationships, while structural triggers include negation, parallel structure (where repetition creates semantic contrast), coordination, and comparative structure.

Examining oppositional triggers in media discourse, particularly political discourse, Davies (2012b) refines the earlier typologies proposed by Jones (2002) and Jeffries (2010). He introduces additional categories, including replacive opposition (*X instead of Y*), concessive opposition (e.g., *but*), and binarised options (e.g., *whether X or Y*). These frames capture the complexity of unconventional oppositions and form the analytical basis for the present study.

2.3.2. Oppositions in environmentalist discourse

To date, analysis of unconventional oppositions has primarily been applied

to relatively long literary texts and news discourse, with a notable exception of a study by Virdis (2022), exploring unconventional oppositions in environmentalist discourse. Specifically, applying Jeffries' (2010) model of opposition triggers, Virdis analyses *speakGreen Facebook* page and finds that unconventional oppositions are generally more effective than conventional oppositions, as unexpected comparisons can positively surprise the readers and leave a lasting impression. In her data, *negation* and *parallel structure* emerge as the most prominent structural triggers.

To conclude, while research into environmentalist discourse *per se* is extensive, studies focusing on oppositions, particularly in comparison with anti-environmentalist perspectives, remain limited. The discovery of unconventional oppositions and their ideological encoding necessitate a comparative analysis of oppositional framing in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourses.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Selectional criteria and methods

This study analyses the use of oppositions in primary online environmentalist and anti-environmentalist articles. The selection process was based on *ClimateRealism.com*, a site positioning itself as pro-ClimateRealism (anti-environmentalist) and responding to environmentalist outlets. Accordingly, environmentalist outlets are defined here as those whose claims are explicitly targeted and criticised by *ClimateRealism.com*, and we examine both the environmentalist articles criticised by *ClimateRealism.com* and its anti-environmentalist responses. This approach offers two advantages: it facilitates the study of direct dialogue between the two perspectives, and it ensures the articles share similarities in publication time, topic, and length. Individual media articles are treated as primary data and are cited as in-text examples; the corpora as a whole are referenced in the bibliography.

As outlined above, while the broader theoretical discussion draws on ecolinguistic and discourse-analytic perspectives, the analytical procedure applied in this study focuses specifically on the identification and classification of trigger-based syntactic oppositions.

ClimateRealism.com is part of the Heartland Institute — an American think tank that is well known for climate change denial. The website has been known to partner and receive funding from sources tied to the fossil fuel industry (Goldenberg, 2012). In general, *ClimateRealism.com* focuses on correcting environmentalist media claims about the so-called "moderate warming" of the Earth. This website is a part of an eponymous movement that positions itself as 'climate realist' and opposes positions it characterises as climate alarmism (Levantesi & Corsi, 2020). As cited on the website, *ClimateRealism.com* "provides daily rebuttals to the alarmists' Climate Delusion, giving the media and interested persons access to the facts, data, and perspectives that put the daily media scares in proper perspective" [*ClimateRealism.com* "About" section] (n.d.).

In total, 30 *ClimateRealism.com* articles were collected for the analysis, from which 30 corresponding articles in environmentalist outlets were traced. Individual media articles constitute the primary analytical units of the study and are cited selectively as in-text examples, while the corpora as a whole are referenced in the bibliography. Taking *ClimateRealism.com* publications as a starting point, and because the response articles published on this webpage are traceable to their original environmentalist sources, 16 distinct environmental discourse news outlets were identified and analysed. These are as follows: *the Hill, CNN, The Washington Post, Forbes, New York Times, the Conversation, Nature World News, Eco-business, ABC News, BBC, USA today, Associated Press, US news, the Guardian, LA Times,* and *Wired*.

The collected articles, including their headlines, were compiled into a 45216-word corpus. *ClimateRealism.com* articles accounted for 22036 words, while environmentalist articles consisted of 23970 words.

Using Voyant Tools (Sinclair & Rockwell, 2016), trigger-based linguistic oppositions (hereinafter, *linguistic oppositions*) were identified by searching for lexical triggers such as "not", "instead", or "more" that typically occur in opposition frames. Once the frames were identified, each instance was analysed to determine if it generated a linguistic opposition.

To classify the identified linguistic oppositions, an adapted categorisation by Davies (2012b) was employed, acknowledging the significant influence of Jones (2002) and Jeffries (2010) in shaping the proposed classification. Two further modifications were introduced.

First, the parallelism category was omitted from the original classification by Davies (2012b) due to the lack of any specific frames within the corpus,

given that parallelism concerns the repetition of structures overall. While occasionally parallelism did emerge as an auxiliary trigger, it did not form a distinct category. Including it would require a more in-depth analytical approach and a larger corpus.

Secondly, we added a multiple-trigger category. While Davies (2012b) notes the possibility that oppositions may be generated by more than one trigger, no such category is included in his classification. The multiple-trigger category captures oppositions produced through the combination of two or more elements rather than a single trigger. For example, negated and concessive triggers such as *not* and *but* may jointly generate an opposition. This category is therefore defined not by a specific frame but by the *co-occurrence* of multiple frames. As identifying all possible trigger combinations lies beyond the scope of this study, Table 1 acknowledges the category without listing specific frame types. The inclusion of this category is motivated by the observed prevalence of such oppositions in the corpus and reflects an effort to account for this pattern rather than to assign oppositions to a single trigger function.

The proposed categorisation is thus shown below:

Table 1

Opposition Categorisation Based on Davies (2012b) Used in the Study

	Category	**Frame/trigger**
1.	Negated oppositions	X *not* Y; *not* X, Y.
2.	Transitional opposition	X *supplants* Y; *spurns* X *for* Y; X *becomes* Y; X *turns into* Y; X *falls into* Y; *slips from* X to Y.
3.	Comparative opposition	*more* X *than* Y; X *is more* A *than* Y.
4.	Replacive opposition	X *instead of* Y; X *rather than* Y; X *in place of* Y.
5.	Concessive opposition	*but; while; although; despite; yet.*
6.	Explicit opposition	X *contrasts with* Y; X *opposes* Y.
7.	Binarised option	*whether/either* X *or* Y.
8.	Multiple triggers	…

The qualitative and analytical methods were used to analyse the collected oppositions. The oppositions were classified as conventional or unconventional, and the role that different triggers played in generating them was examined. An opposition was classified as conventional if it retained its contrastive function even in a context-free environment. If the contrastive meaning only revealed itself in a given context, the opposition was classified as unconventional. For instance, *heat* and *cold* are oppositions in any context, while *heat* and *rain* do not have an antonymic sense in zero context but might develop it in a specific situation.

The quantitative method was applied to calculate the prevalence of oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse and to discern the popularity of different trigger categories. Textual opposition density was calculated by dividing the number of textual opposition occurrences by the total number of words in the corpus, and then multiplying by 1,000 to express the result as oppositions per thousand words (Littlemore et al., 2013). The comparative method was employed to achieve the objective of comparing oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist articles. Specifically, opposition density and trigger category prevalence were measured and compared against each other.

3.2. Limitations of the study

Although the environmentalist / anti-environmentalist distinction is central to this study, it should be understood as a relative and discursively constructed categorisation rather than an objective one. Self-identification varies across individuals and publications, and the label *anti-environmentalist* in particular is often avoided due to its negative connotations. For example, *ClimateRealism.com* does not describe itself as anti-environmentalist but instead positions its stance as *climate realist*. Nevertheless, despite differences in self-labelling, the sources analysed consistently articulate positions aligned with environmentalist or anti-environmentalist perspectives. For analytical purposes, they are therefore categorised accordingly in this study.

Due to space constraints, we do not aim at a comparison of prevalence of conventional and unconventional oppositions; rather, we focus on the identification and comparison of the prevailing trigger categories used to generate oppositions.

4. Findings and results

4.1. General overview of the findings

This section introduces the overall distribution of identified textual oppositions in terms of their conventionality and trigger types. Across the dataset of 30 environmentalist and 30 anti-environmentalist articles, a total of 165 oppositions were identified (see Table 2). Of these, 32% (53) were conventional, and 68% (112) were unconventional. Anti-environmentalist articles accounted for 67% (110) of oppositions, compared to 33% (55) in environmentalist articles. Overall textual opposition density across the corpus was 0.364 oppositions per 1,000 words, with densities of 0.229 in the environmentalist corpus and 0.499 in the anti-environmentalist corpus.

Table 2

Total Number of the Oppositions Identified

	Environmentalist	**Anti-environ-mentalist**	**Total**
Conventional	12	41	53
Unconventional	43	69	112
Total	55	110	**165**

4.2. Conventional oppositions in environmentalist discourse

Analysis of 30 environmentalist articles revealed 55 oppositions in total; 12 (22%) conventional and 43 (78%) unconventional. The oppositions were analysed using syntactic frame categories (Table 1). Figure 1 illustrates the breakdown of identified trigger categories.

Transitional triggers play a significant role, with 42% of all conventional oppositions being transitional. These oppositions involve a shift from one state to another, resulting in contrast. Frequent frames include *turn from X to Y* and *X becomes Y*.

In example (3), taken from the headline of Jacobo and Peck (2023), the transitional frame *from X to Y* constructs a conventional opposition between *weak* and *major* intensity, referring to the strengthening of hurricane intensity levels:

3) "Climate change making Atlantic hurricanes twice as likely to strengthen **from weak to major** intensity in 24 hours" (Jacobo & Peck, 2023). (our highlight)

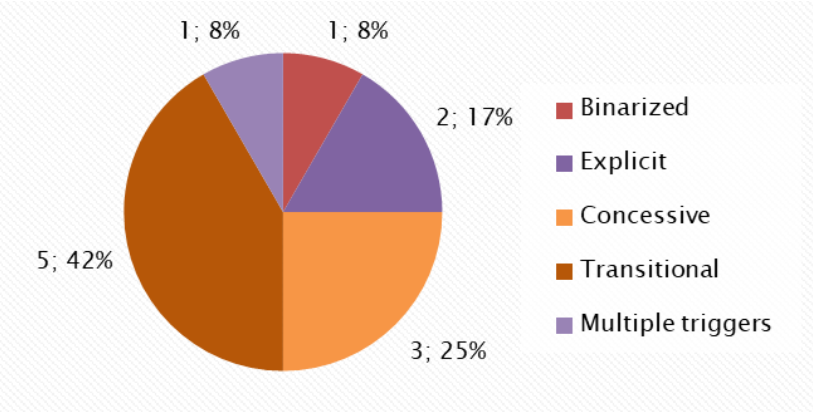

Figure 1. Prevalence of Conventional Opposition Triggers in the Environmentalist Discourse (N; %)

It is easy to recognise this as a conventional opposition as the words *weak* and *major* inherently have contrasting meanings, independent of context.

Other transitional oppositions, all from the same article, also employ the conventional contrast of *weakness/strength*, thus building emphasis. Whether transitional triggers are a frequent category overall is a question for future research with a larger dataset.

Concessive triggers accounted for 25% (3 out of 12 oppositions). Generally, concessive triggers such as *but*, *despite*, and *while* indicate a surprising quality exhibited by one member of the oppositional pair (Davies, 2012b). In the following example, *despite* evokes a conventional opposition between *decline* and *surge*, emphasising that a price increase in Asian markets despite a decline in other markets is unexpected:

4) "**Despite declining** values in other grain markets, rice prices **surged** to their highest levels in 15 years in 2023, experiencing increases of 40%-45% in quotations at various Asian export hubs" (Ewing-Chow, 2023, para. 13). (our highlight)

Next, we found two examples of explicit opposition triggers. Explicit triggers tend to overtly point to the contrasting nature of oppositions through words like "contrast," "opposing," or "difference" (Davies, 2012b). In the context of the environmentalist discourse, explicit triggers were found to be useful when discussing the extreme difference between moisture or floods and megadroughts.

Notably, the trigger categories comparative, replacive and negated are absent among the conventional oppositions in the environmentalist discourse. Interestingly, the negated opposition frame of *X, not Y*, described by Davies (2012b) as an archetypical frame of any type of antonymy, is not found in the dataset. As follows Davies (ibid.), replacive and negated categories express a preference for one member of the oppositional pair; their absence suggests that participants of environmentalist discourse tend to refrain from expressing preference.

4.3. Unconventional oppositions in environmentalist discourse

Unconventional oppositions constitute 78% (43 of 55 oppositions), with concessive triggers – a large category containing triggers like *but*, *while* – being the most prevalent, followed by comparative and multiple triggers. Negated, replacive, and explicit triggers are all equally underused (Figure 2).

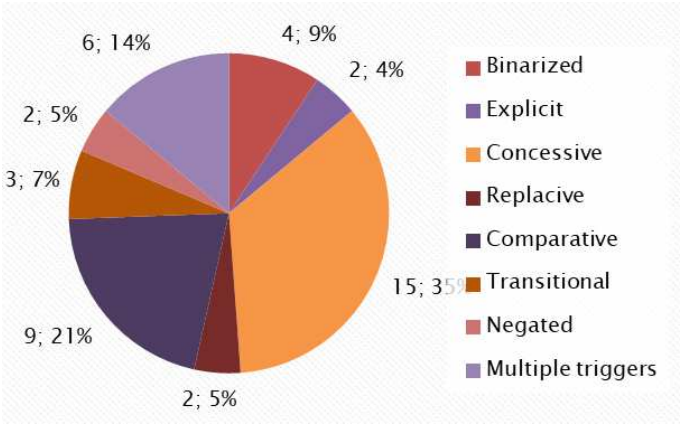

Figure 2. Prevalence of Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Environmentalist Discourse (N; %)

Concessive oppositions highlight unexpectedness expressed in one of the clauses (Davies, 2012b). In the example below, despite the importance of the Rhine River to commerce, it is surprisingly difficult to navigate:

5) "It's a **crucial** channel for European shipping, **but** right now, it's a **nightmare** to navigate" (Crocker et al., 2022, para 8). (our highlight)

The opposition *crucial vs nightmare* is analysed as unconventional due to the absence of the inherent semantic contrast, the opposition created through the use of the concessive trigger *but.* In another interesting case, the same concessive trigger (in tandem with a parallel syntactic structure) generates two unconventional oppositions:

6) "Modern climate change is driven by CO2 emissions, not changes in the sun" (Petersen, 2024, para. 8).

Firstly, *sun* is opposed by *CO2*, while c*limate* contrasts with *global warming*. Both of these oppositional pairs are unconventional, as the opposition is contextual. Additionally, one overarching conceptual (and conventional) opposite emerges: *natural/unnatural*. The *sun* and *climate* are both naturally occurring phenomena, while *CO2* and *global warming* result from human activity. This is an interesting case, as a conceptual conventional opposition is expressed through an unconventional one. While a conceptual analysis is beyond the scope of this study, it is worth mentioning that this specific dichotomy between *natural* and *man-made* is prominent in both the environmentalist, and especially, the anti-environmentalist, discourses. This opposition furthers a binary view, strictly presenting the natural as good (or neutral) and the unnatural as bad.

Nine (21%) unconventional oppositions were generated by comparative triggers, making the comparative opposition the second most popular category among context bound oppositions in the environmentalist discourse. This category contrasts oppositions by measuring them against each other. One example measures rights and commodities against a scale of necessity:

7) "Conceptualising food ***more*** as a human **right *than*** a **commodity** might initiate such a shift" (Bardsley, 2023, para. 12). (our highlight)

In this example, the contrasted lexemes are *right* and *commodity*, the criterion being a certain level of necessity that each is associated with. A *right* is inherent and necessary for all, while a *commodity* is supplemental. Additionally, the contrast is drawn from the fact that rights are associated with the protection of authorities and the government, while commodities are linked with commerce and business. Therefore, in this specific example, the opposition *right* / *commodity* is urging to treat food as something indispensable and ensured for all, not as a superfluous accessory.

The comparative category displays an unusual tendency of using what one might call "generalised" oppositions. Tricky to classify as conventional or unconventional, these oppositional pairs have one specific member, like "the United States" and one ambiguous member, such as "any other country." They were classified as unconventional, because of the lack of conventional oppositions for proper nouns.

During the analysis, six (14%) instances of multiple triggers were found, forming what Davies (2012b, p. 66) refers to as "a web of triggers". In all these instances, two oppositional triggers were used, and one of them was always concessive. Customarily, all the triggers retain their separate functions, as evidenced by this example:

8) "The summit is covered in **white**, **but** the Nisqually Glacier ***becomes*** **sparse** as it extends down" (Sengupta, 2023). (our highlight)

The concessive *but* points to the unexpected development as the white snow vanishes, while the transitional trigger *becomes* emphasises the gradual transformation from a snow-covered summit to barren dirt. As the adjectives *white* and *sparse* are not semantically oppositional, this is an unconventional opposition.

Binarised oppositions point to a choice between two possible options. Amongst identified unconventional oppositions in the environmentalist discourse, four such cases were found. One unusual example opposes clauses with the active and passive forms of the verb *transform*, conceptually, perceivable along the lines of sovereignty/subservience:

9) "(...) it's now inevitable that societies will ***either*** **transform themselves *or* be transformed**" (Gilmore & Lempert, 2022, para. 1). (our highlight)

This specific example is notable for having a grammatical category responsible for the creation of opposition.

Figure 3 below summarises a comparison of trigger categories used to produce conventional and unconventional oppositions in the environmentalist discourse.

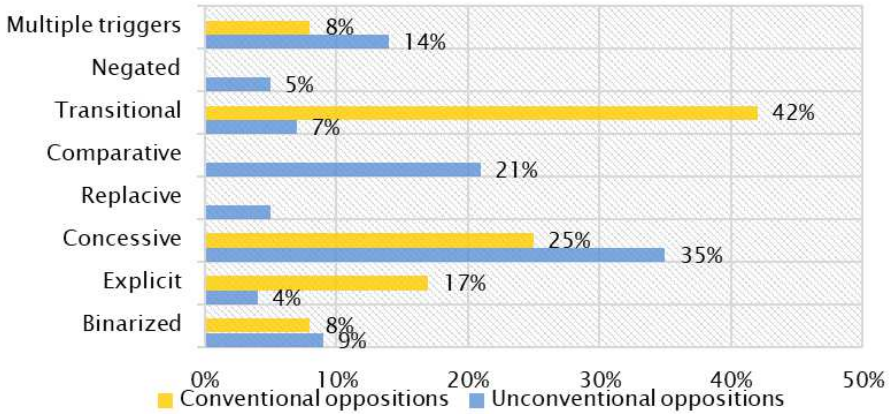

Figure 3. Percentage of Conventional and Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Environmentalist Discourse

While transitional opposition dominates when it comes to producing conventional oppositions, it is not so significant in generating unconventional oppositions. This could be attributed to the fact that transitional frames are common in collocations that use conventional oppositions, like *from* ***on*** **to** ***off***. Comparative oppositions account for 21% (9) of unconventional oppositions and are not present in conventional oppositions. It is surprising that explicit oppositions are more prominent in conventional oppositions, as one would expect explicit references to be made to unconventional contrasts that are innovative or less easily recognizable, rather than to conventional oppositions.

Ultimately, the environmentalist discourse is shown to prefer concessive oppositions most of all. Canonical and non-canonical oppositions diverge

in that transitional triggers are more productive in triggering canonical oppositions, while comparative triggers generate more non-canonical oppositions. Negated, explicit and replacive categories are the least prominent among both canonical and non-canonical oppositions.

4.4. Conventional oppositions in anti-environmentalist discourse

Analysis of 30 articles selected from *ClimateRealism.com* revealed 110 oppositions in total: 41 (37%) conventional, and 69 (63%) unconventional. Among conventional oppositions comparative, concessive and negated trigger categories are overwhelmingly the most popular categories, while transitional triggers are underrepresented. Typical oppositions amongst those identified are the traditional dichotomy of *heat/cold*, followed by *increase/decrease*, primarily prompted by comparative and multiple trigger categories.

Overall, the trigger categories found to generate conventional oppositions in the anti-environmentalist discourse are presented in Figure 4:

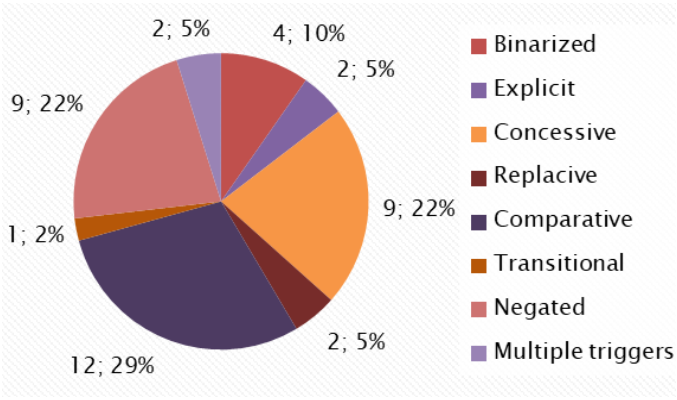

Figure 4. Prevalence of Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Anti-Environmentalist Discourse (N; %)

Prior to approaching articles in *ClimateRealism.com*, the assumption was made that comparative oppositions would prevail, given that the website often addresses and juxtaposes two opposing points of view. Indeed, comparative oppositions were found to be the most prevailing

oppositions among conventional oppositions, with the overwhelming majority (with the exception of two oppositions) based on the contrast *heat/cold*. Specifically, *ClimateRealism.com* employs this opposite to bring attention to the fact that cold might be deadlier than heat:

10) "(...) more people die in the United States from **cold temperatures *than* hot temperatures**" (Taylor, 2020, para. 11). (our highlight)
11) "The Lancet came to two irrefutable data-based conclusions: **cold temperatures** contribute to far **more** deaths each year ***than*** **warmer temperatures**" (Watts, 2022b, para. 2). (our highlight)

By consistently employing this specific opposition, *ClimateRealism.com* seeks to downplay the effects of global warming, noting that it is cold one should be worried about, rather than rising temperatures. This tactic contributes to diminishing environmentalist claims, but also portrays them as unreliable and erroneously focusing on the wrong issues.

The contrast between heat and cold is present among negated oppositions as well, which were the second-most popular opposition trigger category. Negated oppositions emphasise the inherent contrast of the oppositional pair, while sometimes expressing a preference for one member. *ClimateRealism.com* employs this frame mostly to emphasise the difference between something negative or positive, opposing words like *blessing/curse* or *setting records/declining*. In particular, this seems to be a common practice employed in headlines, such as:

12) "Sorry, U.S. News & World Report, Plant Growth Is **Good**, **Not** a Climate **Harm**" (Sterling Burnett, 2022c).
13) "L.A. Times Should Publish **Facts**, ***Not*** **Misinformed Opinions** About Purported Climate Catastrophe" (Sterling Burnett, 2023c, headline). (our highlight)

Example (13) illustrates yet another characteristic opposition often employed by *ClimateRealism.com*, that of *facts/lies*. This dichotomy is found among both canonical and non-canonical oppositions and portrays the environmentalist media as not factually based, but relying on dubious claims with the goal of fearmongering or pushing an alarmist narrative.

4.5. Unconventional oppositions in anti-environmentalist discourse

Out of 110 oppositions identified in the anti-environmentalist discourse, 69 (63%) are unconventional. The distribution of trigger categories used to generate unconventional oppositions in the anti-environmentalist discourse is presented in Figure 5:

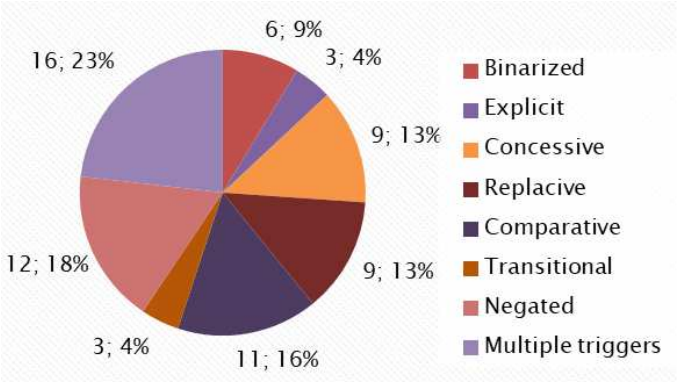

Figure 5. Prevalence of Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Anti-Environmentalist Discourse (N; %)

Most unconventional oppositions found in anti-environmental discourse were generated using multiple triggers, with concessive triggers prevailing. In addition, a trend to combine the concessive trigger *but* with the negated *not* emerged. Seven of the identified 16 oppositions were generated by both of these triggers, appearing, in particular, in the frames *not X, but Y* and *X but not Y*. Regardless of whether they act alone or together, their function remains the same: *not* asserts the mutual exclusivity of the oppositional pair, while *but* encodes the surprising nature of the contrast. Example (14) presents an unexpected contrast in opposing the clause "polar bear biologist" against "active climate scientist":

> 14) "It's no wonder the BBC promotion piece for PBI includes so many statements from Lehner, who is **not** a **polar bear biologist but** an **activist climate scientist**" ("Wrong BBC," 2022, para. 14). (our highlight)

The purpose of this opposition is to diminish the credibility of the environmentalist article, by pointing to the fact that someone who is presented as an expert in the topic of the article (polar bears) is not an expert, but an activist climate scientist. Additionally, some of the oppositions of this category reflect a common contrast used by *ClimateRealism.com* to undermine the claims of environmentalists. The conceptual opposition of *facts*/*alarm*, often used at the end of articles, enhances a negative view of the addressed content and demonstrates the rhetorical tactics, like hyperbole, used by anti-environmentalists in order to diminish environmentalist claims (Tambeau, 2010), e.g.:

15) "Of course, the media completely **missed the facts** about the timing in the distant future and water volume used to goose the model, that completely negate the study and render it moot, ***but instead*** **blasted_out scary headlines** as if doom were imminent" (Watts, 2024, para. 20). (our highlight)

The second most favoured trigger category amongst unconventional oppositions was negated opposition. While the oppositions generally expressed through this trigger vary in topicality, in the context of anti-environmentalism, this category often lends itself to express one specific contrast: the incongruity between climate and weather. In scientific terms, weather refers to short-term weather conditions, while climate describes weather pattern trends in a specific region that take place over a long period of time. While climate and weather do contrast each other in some elements (short-term vs long-term), they are not technically oppositional. In fact, Thesaurus.com (n.d.), lists weather and climate as near synonyms. In the context of the anti-environmentalist discourse, however, climate and weather are presented as fundamentally contradictory and a key argumentative point. To anti-environmentalists, this distinction is crucial in downplaying the change climate is going through. *ClimateRealism.com* often emphasises that harmful environmental events, such as droughts or floods, are not necessarily indicative of climate change, but can be attributed to regular weather patterns:

16) "The Guardian Should Know That **One Mild Winter** Is ***Not*** **Climate Change**, Nor Is It Alarming" (Lueken, 2024b, headline). (our highlight)
17) "Regional differences of snowfall between states in a single season is **weather**, ***not*** **climate**" (Watts, 2022a, para. 6). (our highlight)

One problematic opposition to categorise contrasts *words* vs. *actions*. In a zero-context environment, this gives the impression of an unconventional opposition. A possible opposite of words is silence, while action is opposed by inaction. And yet it can still be recognised as a conventional opposition, due to idiomatic phrases such as *actions speak louder than words*. Idiomatic antonymy, as presented by Jones (2002), may be relevant here. This is a category of conventional opposition frames, which considers all antonyms appearing in idiomatic environments, as in *the* ***short*** *and* ***long*** *of it*. This category is notable for its requirement of holistic analysis of whole phrases, rather than just opposition frames. However, such a category concerning idiomatic phrases is not present in any unconventional opposition trigger categorisation. Ultimately, this opposition was categorised as unconventional:

18) "It is true that governments are **talking the talk**, ***but not*** **walking the walk** about the draconian policies they claim are necessary to meet the goals of the Paris climate agreement" (Sterling Burnett, 2023c, para. 1). (our highlight)

This exemplifies the problems of conventionality. As discussed by Davies (2012b), opposition convention is a spectrum, therefore attributing one opposite as strictly conventional or unconventional is tricky. To simplify and remedy this issue, this research views oppositions as either more conventional or unconventional, but not necessarily belonging strictly to one category or the other.

Despite these obstacles, analysis of non-canonical oppositions in the anti-environmentalist articles found that the category of multiple triggers generated the most oppositions, followed by negated and comparative triggers, while transitional and explicit categories were the least productive. Results show that oppositions can act a part in the rhetorical tactics employed by anti-environmentalists to diminish environmentalist claims.

4.6. Oppositions in the anti-environmentalist discourse

A comparison of conventional and unconventional oppositions in the anti-environmentalist discourse revealed that the distribution of the respective trigger categories is rather similar, with only substantial discrepancies lying in the popularity of replacive triggers, (13% in unconventional oppositions) as well as oppositions generated by multiple triggers (Figure 6):

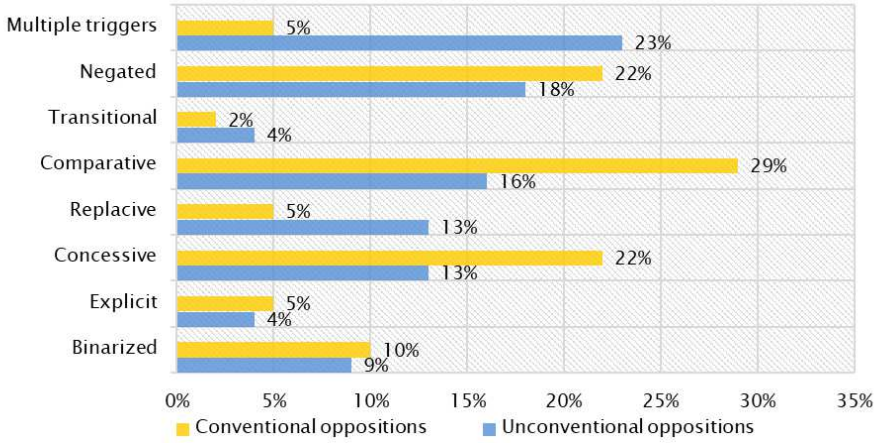

Figure 6. Percentage of Conventional and Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Anti-Environmentalist Discourse

While multiple triggers (23%) are characteristic of unconventional oppositions, they account for only 5% of conventional oppositions, possibly due to difficulties in identifying them, given their frequently idiosyncratic lexical patterns.

Both conventional and unconventional oppositions underuse explicit and transitional categories. Meanwhile replacive triggers are less common in conventional oppositions but more popular in unconventional ones. Comparative, negated, and concessive triggers are the most common, with transitional and explicit triggers being used the least. The multiple trigger category is notably more effective in producing unconventional oppositions.

4.7. Conventional oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse

In total, 53 conventional oppositions were discovered. Out of these oppositions, 77% (41) were found in the anti-environmentalist discourse articles, and 23% (12) appeared in environmentalist media (Figure 7):

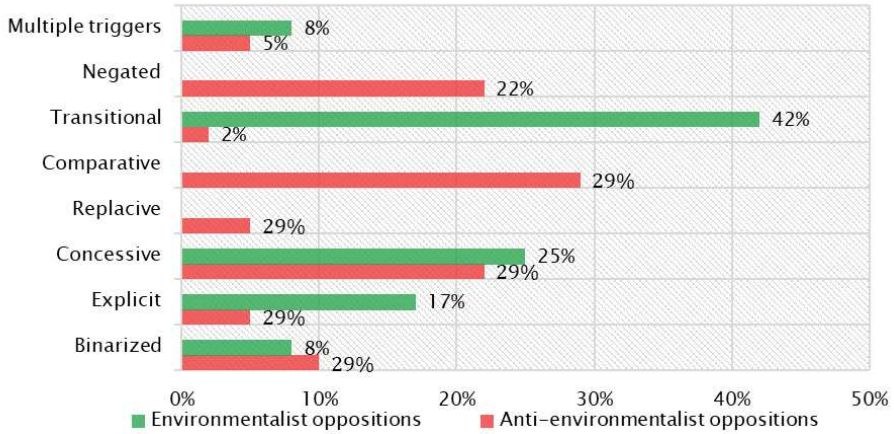

Figure 7. Percentage of Conventional Opposition Triggers in the Environmentalist and the Anti-Environmentalist Discourses

As can be seen, the distribution of conventional opposition trigger categories in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse is quite different. Environmentalist oppositions are dominated by transitional and concessive triggers, while in the anti-environmentalist discourse, conventional oppositions are a lot more varied. The only points of agreement are the popularities of the concessive, binarized, and multiple trigger categories.

Comparative and negated triggers generate 51% of conventional oppositions in anti-environmentalist discourse, but are absent in environmentalist texts, possibly reflecting an avoidance of preference. Meanwhile, environmentalists' reliance on transitional oppositions may stem from common collocations or the need for emphasis. Explicit triggers, comprising 17% of environmentalist oppositions but only 5% of anti-environmentalist ones, consistently use the syntactic frame *X contrasts Y*:

19) "The recent **moisture** in the West is in stark ***contrast*** to the ***megadrought*** (Wholf, 2023)". (our highlight)

Although these results seem particularly dissonant, it is important to remember that only a small number of conventional environmentalist oppositions were found, making it easy for a single article (or trigger category) to be overrepresented.

4.8. Unconventional oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse

The primary differences between unconventional oppositions identified in the environmentalist and the anti-environmentalist articles concern negated, replacive, and concessive categories. Figure 8 shows the breakdown among all categories identified:

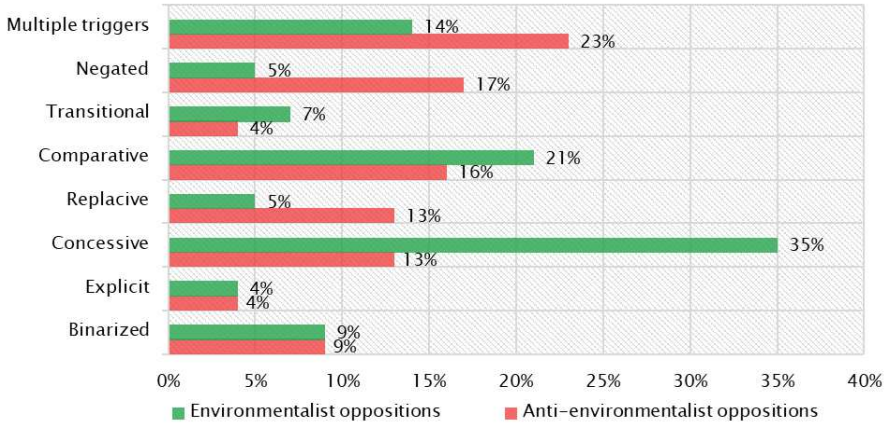

Figure 8. Percentage of Unconventional Opposition Triggers in the Environmentalist and the Anti-Environmentalist Discourses

The lack of unconventional concessive oppositions in anti-environmentalist articles is explained by the fact that concessive triggers also appear in the multiple trigger category, which is more prevalent in the anti-environmentalist discourse. The majority of the oppositions generated using multiple triggers use a concessive trigger in conjunction with a different

category, such as the following example taken from a *ClimateRealism.com* article, which combines negated, concessive and replacive triggers:

> 20) "(...) it is due **not to climate change *but rather*** to **localised temporary weather conditions and ongoing subsurface volcanic activity** below the ice sheet" (Lueken, 2023c, para. 1). (our highlight)

Consistently, whether conventional or unconventional, environmentalist or anti-environmentalist, binarised and explicit trigger categories remain the least popular. While both camps use similar categories for unconventional oppositions, environmentalists favour comparative and concessive triggers, while anti-environmentalists frequently employ multiple and negated triggers.

4.9. Conventional vs. unconventional oppositions

The distribution of conventional and unconventional trigger categories across both discourses is presented in Figure 9 below:

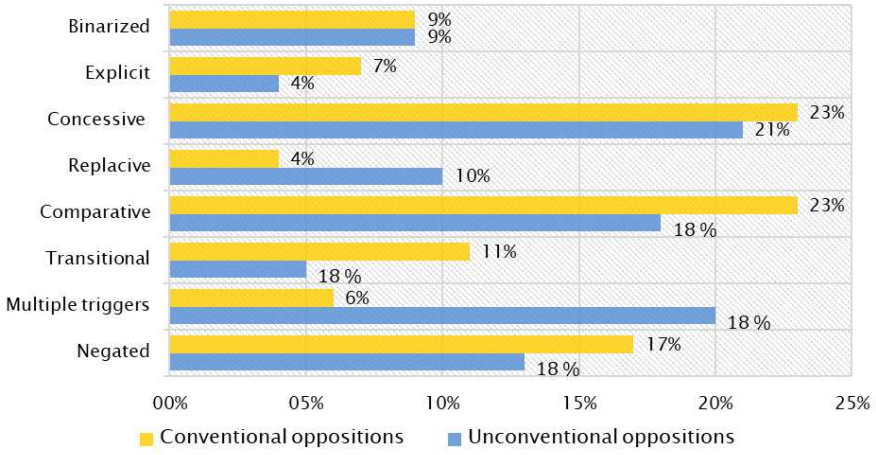

Figure 9. Percentage of all Conventional and Unconventional Opposition Triggers

The popularity of different categories is consistent with expectations. Thus, concessive, comparative and negated categories are the most productive, while binarised and explicit categories are both used the least. Though

conventional oppositions employ transitional triggers quite often and shun replacives, the opposite is true for unconventional ones.

One notable discrepancy is the prevalence of multiple trigger oppositions when generating unconventional oppositions. This may be because multiple triggers help make an unconventional opposition more identifiable, whereas conventional oppositions are easily recognised due to their inherent semantic contrast. The following example illustrates an unconventional opposition that was difficult to identify, as it relies on multiple triggers:

21) "Of course, the media completely **missed the facts** about the timing in the distant future and water volume used to goose the model, that completely negate the study and render it moot, *but instead* **blasted out scary headlines** as if doom were imminent" (Watts, 2024, para. 20). (our highlight)

To compare, a conventional opposition, such as in (22) below does not necessarily need a trigger to be recognised as an opposition. If the trigger *while* was to be taken away, the contrast between *natural* and *industrial* would remain easily identifiable:

22) "*While* there are **natural** sources of this air pollution, much of it in the early to mid-20th century came from sources like **industrial** smokestacks and car exhaust" (Ramirez, 2022, para. 10). (our highlight)

5. Discussion

This section synthesises the findings presented in Sections 4.2–4.9, bringing together results from both environmentalist and anti-environmentalist datasets in order to interpret broader discursive tendencies. The present study does not evaluate the persuasive success of these strategies; rather, it identifies recurring discursive tendencies and constraints observable in the data. The analysis shows that environmentalist and anti-environmentalist approaches differ in their use of oppositions. Most strikingly, while negated

and multiple-trigger categories are underused in environmentalist texts, they are highly prevalent in anti-environmentalist discourse. These categories account for 35% of all anti-environmentalist oppositions, but only 10% of environmentalist oppositions. As the majority of the triggers in the multiple trigger category also appear to be negated, this implies a strong affinity towards negation for *ClimateRealism.* The negated trigger *not*, as discussed by Jeffries (2010) and Davies (2012b), can express a preference for one member of an oppositional pair. This can be seen in many unconventional oppositions used by *ClimateRealism*:

23) "The NOAA article doesn't mention 'climate change' a single time, clearly demonstrating it wasn't a factor. Again, it was a **weather event**, *not* a '**climate disaster**'" (Watts, 2023, para 15). (our highlight)
24) "**Balanced, honest reporting**, *not* **one sided alarm**, should be the goal when presenting the big picture facts on climate change for any credible news outlet" (Sterling Burnet, 2022c, para. 15). (our highlight)

Environmentalist media, on the other hand, uses negated oppositions in a more objective way:

25) "Modern climate change is driven by **CO2 emissions**, *not* **changes in the sun**" (Petersen, 2024, para. 8). (our highlight)

Although popular with both environmentalist and anti-environmentalist oppositions, concessive triggers are about twice as prevalent in environmentalist media. Meanwhile, explicit and binarised categories remain the least popular amongst both domains.

Notably, the number of oppositions found in both domains diverged drastically. This discrepancy may be attributed to the fact that anti-environmentalism in general, and the entire rationale of *ClimateRealism.com* articles in particular are inherently oppositional. Thus, it is not unexpected that their critical stance translates to the rhetorical and lexical devices used in their communications. It seems that at least in this dataset, opposition tends to breed oppositions.

Another reason why anti-environmentalists are fond of oppositions was already discussed by Virdis (2022). Virdis argues that anti-environmentalists favour oppositions, particularly unconventional ones, as they leave a lasting impression and aid ideological dissemination. This need for memorable tactics also explains the frequent use of concessive triggers, which introduce surprising ideas. However, the question remains why environmentalists do not adopt this strategy. Additionally, the abundance of oppositions in anti-environmentalist discourse is linked to the personal approach of sites like *ClimateRealism.com*, where oppositions often appear in headlines or key article sections to critique environmentalist authors, e.g.:

26) "L.A. Times Should Publish **Facts**, *Not* **Misinformed Opinions** About Purported Climate Catastrophe" (Sterling Burnett, 2023c, headline). (our highlight)

Overall, the lack of a personal dialogue in the environmentalist articles may influence the production of oppositions. Unlike anti-environmentalist articles, which frequently point to and contradict specific claims, the environmentalist articles analysed here were not framed as direct responses, making oppositional structures less readily available. Taken together, these patterns suggest differing discursive affordances and constraints across the two discourses, rather than differences in communicative effectiveness.

Ultimately, as an oppositional movement, anti-environmentalist discourse represented here by *ClimateRealism.com* employs more oppositions than environmentalists. This may be due to the adopted approach, focusing on responding to articles advocating for environmental changes, and thus naturally evoking oppositional structures. Another reason for the higher use of opposition may be the website's need to stand out and create a lasting impression on the reader.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of trigger-based textual oppositions in environmentalist and anti-environmentalist discourse revealed significant findings regarding

their prevalence and function. A review of CDA concepts, such as power and ideology, provided a broader interpretive context for the analysis and highlighted a gap in the analysis of oppositions within environmentalist texts. By foregrounding trigger-based syntactic frames as the primary analytical framework, the study sought to highlight the role that syntactic framing plays in the creation of oppositional meanings within ideological discourse. Across a dataset of 60 articles (30 per discourse), 165 oppositions were identified, of which 33% occurred in environmentalist discourse and 67% in anti-environmentalist discourse. Environmentalist texts predominantly used concessive triggers (e.g., *but*, *while*), while transitional triggers (*become*, *turn*) generated conventional oppositions. For instance, concessive frames such as *but* and *despite* frequently introduced unexpected contrasts, whereas anti-environmentalist articles often combined *not* and *but* in multiple-trigger constructions. In contrast, anti-environmentalist texts favoured comparative, negated, and multiple triggers, with the latter accounting for 35% of oppositions compared to only 10% in environmentalist discourse. These findings suggest that anti-environmentalism appears to strategically utilise oppositions, particularly unconventional ones, in ways that may reinforce ideological positioning and express critique of opposing perspectives. Future research could focus on the semantic dimensions of oppositions in anti-environmentalist rhetoric and extend comparative analyses across various ideological movements to uncover broader patterns in opposition use.

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Appendix

Full Research Corpus (60 items)

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