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RESPONSIBILITY IN UK ECO-AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS: AN ECOCRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

ABSTRACT

Litter and plastic pollution adversely affect animals, humans, nature, and the environment. This study applies the frameworks of Van Dijk and Stibbe to critically analyse a data set of eco-awareness posters on littering. It emphasises the advantages of integrating critical discourse analysis with ecolinguistics to uncover fresh narratives that safeguard the environment and promote physical and mental health and well-being.

KEYWORDS: ecolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, pollution

STRESZCZENIE

W niniejszym badaniu zastosowano ramy Van Dijka i Stibbego do krytycznej analizy zestawu danych dotyczących plakatów ekologicznych na temat zaśmiecania. Artykuł podkreśla zalety integracji krytycznej analizy dyskursu z ekolingwistyką w celu odkrycia nowych narracji, które chronią środowisko i promują zdrowie fizyczne i psychiczne oraz dobre samopoczucie.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: ekolingwistyka, krytyczna analiza dyskursu, zanieczyszczenie

INTRODUCTION

Eriksen *et al.* (2014) contend that the ocean contains at least 5 trillion pieces of plastic, weighing approximately 250,000 tons. Forecasts by various scientists indicate that given the current rate of production, plastic waste in water will increase to at least 1.3 billion tons by 2040 (Velis, Cook 2020). Litter and plastic pollution pose significant threats to wildlife. For example, 85.2% of crows' nests in Sacramento Valley, California, contain plastic-like materials, and 5.6% of nestlings become



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trapped in these materials (Townsend, Barker 2014). A study found that ants and other insects are chronically exposed to plastic pollutants, including plastic particles in the atmosphere and lipophilic substances (Cuvillier-Hot *et al.* 2014).

Considering the significant impact of pollution on human health and the environment, this study examines how environmental advocacy posters depict accountability for litter and plastic pollution. It focuses on the environmental responsibility discourse and the portrayal of these narratives in posters for the Keep Britain Tidy campaign during 1971–1981 and 2011–2021. By considering “stories-we-live-by”, this study refers to narratives that exist within the collective consciousness of a culture and significantly impact individuals’ thoughts and actions in the society (Stibbe 2020).

Stories can promote ecologically conscious behaviours and practices, highlighting environmental justice and responsible management, thus making them beneficial. Conversely, stories can be harmful because they perpetuate behaviours, practices, and identities that harm the environment. Stibbe’s (2020) ecolinguistics framework identifies nine ways in which linguistic analysis can uncover stories of human interactions with the world, highlighting ideologies, framings, metaphors, evaluations, convictions, identities, and salience.

However, research on the influence of grammatical, lexical, and semantic aspects on environmental campaign discourses (ECDs) is scarce (Poole 2016). The significance of semiotic modes of communication in ECDs has also received little attention (Gulliver *et al.* 2020), which is unexpected given that many semiotic features are universally recognisable; that is, they can attract the attention of text-receivers in ways that grammatical, lexical, and semantic features cannot.

This study thus investigates the social construction of responsibility discourses in eco-awareness campaign posters on litter and plastic pollution. The following research questions are designed to fulfil the objectives of this study:

1. How are discourses of responsibility constructed socially in environmental campaign posters concerning litter and plastic pollution?
2. How have discourses on accountability for litter and plastic pollution evolved over time?

EVOLUTION OF DISCOURSES OF RESPONSIBILITY

The literature on ECDs covers various environmental issues. It raises the possibility that advocacy efforts on the television and Internet can be more successful than more conventional forms such as public rallies and marches (Katz-Kimchi, Manosevitch 2015; Latinopoulos *et al.* 2018). Furthermore, non-local actors, including non-governmental organisations and celebrities, can be instrumental in increasing the salience of local campaigns (Rootes 2013).

Many disciplines in the substantial literature that is currently available use interdisciplinary approaches such as content and discourse analyses (e.g., Packwood Freeman 2010; Katz-Kimchi, Manosevitch 2015). This suggests that more linguistic research on ECDs is necessary. However, most current literature focuses on the elimination and exclusion of the nature and environment (e.g., Goatly 2002; Alexander 2013; Stibbe 2019), despite exceptions, such as Ballantyne *et al.* (2021).¹

The existing literature also points out barriers to the acceptance of responsibility. For instance, Halliday (1990) and Chawla (1991) clarify that several indigenous languages have more precise and thorough grammatical features than English does. Therefore, many people assume that their efforts insignificantly impact the environment. Individuals take little or no responsibility for their actions because they ignore their effects on destroying the environment.

The materials and procedures used to gather and process the data are described in the section that follows. It also describes the data collected, rationale for the analytical framework used to examine the data, and the central discourse surrounding the topic under investigation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

TIME PERIOD AND MATERIALS

Overall, the data sets comprised 225 environmental campaign posters about plastic pollution and litter produced during 1971–2021. This period was chosen because a study of online databases from 1970 to 2018 revealed a significant rise in queries about “plastic pollution” between 1970 and 2018 (Chillcott 2020). Subsequently, progress in addressing this issue was abruptly halted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The surge in demand for disposable personal protective equipment (PPE), including plastic aprons, gloves, and surgical face masks, significantly impacted the industry. In addition, the government’s closure of non-essential businesses significantly increased online shopping and takeaway delivery services. To facilitate ease of reference, posters from the period spanning 1 January 1971 to 31 December 1981 are henceforth denoted as Data Set A. Data Set B refers to posters between 1 January 2011 and 31 December 2021.

¹ Three discourses of responsibility (consumer, political, and industry) were found in several Danish media writings about the pollution caused by microplastics. The political responsibility discourse held politicians accountable for microplastic pollution because they have the authority to introduce legislation that forbids or restricts the production and/or sale of goods containing microplastics. Conversely, the consumer responsibility discourse held consumers accountable for microplastic pollution because of their purchasing decisions, which initially created the demand for microplastics. Even though politicians and industries have more resources, expertise, and capacity to address this issue, the study discovered that discourses of consumer (i.e., individual / personal) accountability were more prevalent than discourses of political/industrial responsibility.

These posters were produced by Keep Britain Tidy and could be easily sourced from the Internet. Independent environmental charity Keep Britain Tidy, based in the UK, was founded by a convention of 26 organisations at the beginning of 1955. It runs programs to eliminate waste, enhance neighbourhood spaces, and lessen trash and is regarded as one of Great Britain's most effective anti-littering campaigns.² In addition, the charity works with non-governmental organisations, companies, and educational institutions regularly to raise public awareness of trash and plastic pollution while promoting eco-friendly behaviours and activities.

Keep Britain Tidy posters rather than other forms of campaign communication were analysed because posters can effectively (in a concise manner) highlight and discourage environmentally harmful behaviours, such as littering, illegal dumping, and overuse of non-recyclable materials and single-use plastic (Hansmann, Steimer 2015). Television campaigns were intentionally avoided owing to the belief that this medium would not create a suitable "emotional climate" for environmental messaging. Television programmes such as games promote environmentally harmful behaviours such as excessive consumerism and overspending (Wolburg 2001). Advertisements on television that discourage consumption are inappropriate as people typically watch television for pleasure, escapism, or relaxation, often followed by pro-consumption advertisements (*ibidem*).

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This study utilises Van Dijk's (2015) critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to identify the mental processes required for creating and comprehending texts (Fairclough 2015). Van Dijk's approach examines the ways in which text producers abuse their access to a vast array of knowledge, studies, and discourses that the general public may not have to sway the opinions and actions of text recipients. In addition, CDA explores the social construction of dominance and inequality in texts. It was important to analyse how dominance and inequality are portrayed in these posters because litter and plastic pollution ultimately involve power dynamics. This is especially relevant to this study, which examines how the society creates notions of responsibility for litter and plastic pollution in eco-awareness campaign posters.

Moreover, Stibbe's (2020) approach, which examines how language affects cognition and behaviour as well as human responses – or lack thereof – to environmental information, provides the justification for combining it with Van Dijk's method. While Stibbe acknowledges in an oblique manner that his framework was affected by Van Dijk's framework, he clarifies that his focus is on the basic socio-cognitive processes involved in the creation and interpretation of texts from an ecological perspective. Stibbe (2020) considers stories to be cognitive frameworks that shape people's ideas, words, and actions. The purpose of Stibbe's framework is

² <https://www.keepbritaintidy.org/> (Retrieved on 28/06/2024).

to analyse discourse related to the environment and ecology. Van Dijk (1993) emphasises the significance of discourse analysts adopting a socio-political position in their research to convey their perspectives on the text and society. However, Perrins (2019: 21–22) rightly observes that, despite being well-established, integrating ecolinguistics with CDA in CDA is challenging.

Accordingly, this study focuses on four aspects of Stibbe's framework for story revelation: frames and framings, identities, metaphors, and evaluations. According to Stibbe (2020), stories might be exposed in nine ways; however, this study only considers the four factors mentioned above. As ecolinguistics is transdisciplinary (Stibbe 2020), perspectives vary about the kinds of tales that are relevant to analyse, and thus, we focus on these four ways. They also disagree on what kinds of discourse structures – that is, how a tale is revealed – are interesting to study. This study investigates how frames and framing strategies are used to minimise or conceal a person's or company's responsibility for litter and plastic pollution as a type of erasing. Ideologies can also be exposed through framing (Lawson 2001), thereby avoiding the need for separate ideological analysis. Furthermore, Stibbe's focus on salience and Van Dijk's focus on mind-control are similar in that salience is used to draw attention to a specific subject for text-receivers (Stibbe 2020: 160), whereas mind-control is the process by which a text-producer indicates particular facts and information as though they are important to text-receivers (Van Dijk 2015). The examination of assessments and appraisal patterns was deemed highly significant because assessments advised the recipient of the text on the merits of a certain topic (Stibbe 2020: 79) and could influence public opinion, and eventually, behaviour. In addition, they disclose the text's producer's and society's ideological viewpoints (*ibidem* 2020), providing the study with the socio-political perspective that Van Dijk considers to be a crucial component of CDA, thereby exposing the ideological standpoints of both the author of the text and the society (*ibidem*).

RESULTS

This section examines the posters based on the analytical and theoretical frameworks outlined. It assesses the commonalities and distinctions within and among the data sets, concentrating on the four methods of uncovering stories through framing techniques, metaphors, assessments, and self-perceptions.

FRAMES AND FRAMING

Data Set A used second-person pronouns such as “you”, “your”, and “you are” to emphasise personal responsibility: Trash pollution is solely the responsibility and fault of the text recipient. In essence, these words advocate personal accountability

for litter and plastic pollution instead of blaming companies that produce non-recyclable materials or the government that controls their production and distribution. Personal pronouns address the recipient of the text as the subject of the conversation about personal responsibility to make them solely responsible and accountable. This act of modification might be considered a form of erasing, namely in the shape of a mask, as it promotes the story that “litter pollution is a serious environmental problem” in an uncommon manner. Moreover, verbs in the present tense in Data Set A imply the frame that “litter pollution is a contemporary issue”.

Data Set B used first-person pronouns (my), inclusive pronouns (we’re), and second-person pronouns (you and your) to demonstrate a language of collective accountability. This discourse blames both the text producer and recipient for plastic waste and littering, because everyone has the responsibility to combat litter pollution, this discourse encourages those who receive the message to participate in collective action projects such as collecting garbage, recycling, and reducing the use of single-use plastics. According to Gulliver *et al.* (2020), environmentalist imagery encourages group reaction to environmental issues. However, personal pronouns may have a comparable impact on collective action responses in Data Set B because personal pronouns reinforce the frame that “everyone must cooperate to combat plastic pollution and litter” by casting the writer and reader as co-offenders of litter and plastic pollution. This assumption is more likely to make people follow rules pertaining to plastic pollution and littering.

By contrast, Data Set A communicates the frame that “litter pollution is a significant environmental problem that requires immediate attention” by using verbs in the present tense. In other words, it reframes recycling and other eco-friendly behaviours and practices as social and cultural norms. These practices serve as new narratives that motivate individuals to protect their environment and raises the awareness of litter pollution as a significant environmental problem.

Similarly, present-tense verbs in Data Set B also activate the frame that “litter and plastic pollution is a serious environmental problem that requires immediate attention”. For example, words such as “charge”, “gets”, “aid”, “increase”, “discard”, and “save” emphasise the need for immediate action and encourage the reader to adopt environmentally conscious behaviours and practices such as recycling and avoiding single-use plastics. Verbs in the present tense tell a positive story and show how the society is moving toward a more eco-conscious mindset and an understanding the importance of environmental issues such as trash and plastic waste. The significance of protecting the environment for present and future generations is emphasised in this story. In addition, since littering takes time and money to address, present-tense verbs (e.g., “costs” money and it “takes” time) also communicate to the recipient the negative consequences of waste and plastic pollution on the environment and economy.

METAPHORS

Figure 1 demonstrates that the metaphor “The pollution problem is in our hands” triggers the story that “the consequences of waste pollution are reversible as long as text-receiver behaviour is ecologically responsible”. The target frame is tackling litter pollution, and the source frame is that this is a manageable task. The metaphor is in the present tense which informs the text receiver that they must act immediately to resolve this issue.

Furthermore, the phrase “in our hands” suggests that trash pollution is not a significant issue to address. If something is within our control, it cannot be too overpowering, implying that litter pollution can be managed and restricted, and indicates that it is preventable. This may diminish the seriousness of the situation and belittle the issue of litter pollution. However, the metaphor inspires the audience to act by framing the problem of litter pollution as something that is easier to handle. It encourages the text receiver to think that their individual and group efforts are more important and valuable than they may first realise.

The claim in Figure 1 was uttered by Marc Bolan. Bolan was a musician who, with his band T. Rex, was instrumental in launching glam rock in the 1970s (Peraino 2006: 229). By enlisting the support of prominent and popular public personalities, Keep Britain Tidy could effectively disseminate crucial messages addressing trash pollution to a broader audience. This includes those who may not have previously expressed worry about litter pollution, such as fans of T. Rex and glam rock. Moreover, this strategy capitalises on the fervour towards T. Rex and the glam rock movement, urging the fans to band together and make a difference.

By contrast, Data Set B uses fewer metaphors. The metaphor “Flicking blue murder” compares individuals who litter with dangerous criminals, as they are harm-



Figure 1. Marc Bolan's poster, 1972.

<https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CtCxTShXgAAgI35.jpg> (last access: 29.6.25).

ing marine ecosystems by permitting plastic and trash to get into the water and be consumed by marine creatures. Because blue is the colour of the sea, which is home to aquatic life, the term “blue murder” is employed. Moreover, the word “murder” is associated with the concepts of murdering, death, and evil, thereby intensifying the gravity of trash and plastic pollution. Thus, it draws a parallel between the act of littering and taking human life.



Figure 2. #BinTheButt poster, 2019.

<https://liverpoolexpress.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BTB-370x247.png> (last access: 29.6.25).

Furthermore, the term “murder”, which explicitly refers to the intentional killing of a person, as opposed to death that occurs by accident or natural causes, appraises the text recipients that they can prevent such results by being cautious and considering the repercussions of their actions. A seal swimming through used cigarette filters strengthens the metaphor and informs the reader about the lifespan of litter, specifically cigarette butts, as well as the detrimental effects they have on marine ecosystems. This is because once litter enters the ocean, it remains there indefinitely. Studies reveal that in 79% of the 7,200 sites surveyed in 2014–2015, cigarette butts were the most frequently thrown item (Keep Britain Tidy 2018). Consequently, this disproves the notion that cigarette butts are too small to contribute to litter and plastic pollution and supports the notion that “anything can be classified as litter regardless of size” as long as someone in a public area has discarded it.

ASSESSMENTS

Data Set A consistently indicates that the belief that “littering is not acceptable” is conveyed through a pattern of negative evaluations. This narrative reinforces the notion that littering is morally incorrect and unacceptable in the society. Consequently, it motivates the message recipient to adopt environmentally responsible actions and habits such as picking up litter and recycling. Analysis identified the following themes in Data set A: Not much fun, Offensive, Dirty, Issue, Dirtying, Pollutant, Toxin, Get rid, Unwanted, Isn’t much fun, Problem, Offensive, Offence.

The message contained in the posters in Data Set A emphasises the importance of environmental consciousness and responsible behaviours, challenging the notion that littering is less significant than other environmental issues. The terms “offensive” and “not much fun” underscore the unpleasant nature of littering while reminding us that littering is not a source of amusement. This is because littering has detrimental effects on the environment and necessitates the use of individuals to clean up the mess. For instance, “offensive” implies that littering is irresponsible because it upsets, angers, and hurts somebody or something, which may make the text receiver feel guilty about their littering habits.

The phrase “not much fun” may appeal to a younger audience, particularly teens and young adults, who may value going out and having fun more than saving the environment because they are less conscious of how their actions affect the environment. Manika *et al.* (2019) find that environmental issues are often not known by university students. In addition, students believe that they could use as much electricity as they want in their dorm rooms as there would be either none or very little financial repercussions. Hence, the interpellation specifically targets the youth demographic and educates them that although litter-picking may not be enjoyable, the repercussions of environmental damage caused by litter pollution are far more undesirable. Thus, Data Set A shows how a negative assessment pattern can effectively encourage people to engage in eco-friendly behaviours and procedures, such as recycling and picking up rubbish, by fostering the idea that littering is harmful and needs to be eliminated.

In Data Set B, the assessment that “there is a pressing environmental problem that must be dealt with: litter and plastic pollution” is conveyed through a negative appraisal pattern. Analysis identified the following themes in Data set B: Cash, Careless, Issue, Bugs, Stretched beyond measure, Substances, Spread, Time, Money, Poison, Chemicals, Limit, Dumped, and Thoughtless. In Data Set B, the story, “litter and plastic waste constitute a global health disaster that need immediate attention”, is activated by the vocabulary associated with illness (e.g., “bugs” and “substances”), which relates plastic pollution and trash to very contagious illness or infection. Recently, the society has prioritised virus control through vaccine production, self-isolation, and adherence to social-distancing norms. Many people will go to any lengths to minimise the virus’s spread (Stibbe 2020). Consequently, text producers use illness-related vocabulary to encourage text receivers to treat litter and plastic pollution with the same seriousness as COVID-19.

Conversely, the terms “cash”, “money”, “stretched beyond measure”, “careless”, and “thrower” alert the posters’ message recipients to the fact that leaving litter behind is rude and expensive because a cleaner must be hired. These sentences imply that picking up litter is a tiresome and time-consuming task and requests the text recipient to stop the spread of litter and plastic pollution. They create a negative social identity for the litterers, portraying them as selfish and disrespectful people who believe that others are responsible for cleaning after them.

INDIVIDUALS

To challenge the assumption that people need to possess a specific degree of scientific and ecological knowledge to protect the environment and make knowledgeable judgments on environmental matters, the Swedish popular music group ABBA was used as a model in one poster (Figure 3; Moser, Dilling 2011: 164). This poster also challenges any underlying presumption that celebrity culture can harm the environment, since famous people use private jets to tour the world, purchase expensive clothing, make expensive purchases, because they are depicted as picking litter at a train station.

Such posters validate these habits and practices of celebrities and trigger the notion that “irrespective of interests, wealth, occupation, or environmental knowledge, every individual is obligated to tackle litter pollution”. ABBA’s mission, Keep Britain Tidy, is driven by the collective welfare of the society rather than their own interests. Within discourse analysis, the phenomenon described here is legitimisation through benevolence (Reyes 2011). In Figure 3, the objective of ABBA is justified by the campaign name, Keep Britain Tidy displayed on their t-shirt. Using the term “Britain” as a collective noun reframes the act of picking up litter and addresses litter pollution as a national duty that all residents of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must collectively undertake.

As per Tajfel’s (1978) social identity theory, which Stibbe (2020) draws some inspiration from, the term “Britain” creates a distinction between the text sender and recipient, inviting the latter to interact in eco-friendly activities such as litter-picking, as portrayed in the ABBA poster. Consequently, those who properly dispose of their trash and take part in litter-picking activities like ABBA preserve their good social identity and fit in, whereas people who show disregard for the environment are members of the outgroup and have a bad social identity (Tajfel 1978).



Figure 3. ABBA poster, 1976.

https://coimages.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/710/286/medium_1981_7368.jpg (last access: 29.6.25).

Figure 4 illustrates a waste collector donning brown PPE and holding black garbage bags that likely contain trash. The refuse collector encourages environmentally conscious behaviour, such as recycling and reducing single-use plastics, assisting those who participate in these activities in developing a healthy social identity. In addition, it raises awareness about the significant environmental issue of “fly-tipping” that requires immediate attention.

The term “key workers” is used to designate refuse collectors, highlighting their essential role in the country’s functioning and serving as a reminder that refuse collectors, health and social care workers, and supermarket staff are crucial and deserve recognition, as they have received considerable praise and media attention during the pandemic. This inspires the recipient of the message to cultivate a newfound admiration for waste collectors and adopt actions such as recycling, taking personal litter home, and encouraging others to refrain from littering to alleviate the collector’s burden during these extraordinary circumstances. This may lead to a fresh narrative that regards workers previously perceived as having low or unskilled occupations with greater esteem and as essential contributors to the nation’s labour force. The garbage collector encourages actions and behaviours that are beneficial to the environment, such as recycling and avoiding single-use plastics. This promotes a positive social identity for those who engage in these behaviours.

The goal is to decrease the burden on essential workers during these difficult times by making the recipients feel guilty and encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their actions. Waste collectors face unprecedented demands when the public persists in littering, disregarding the efforts of these essential workers and



Figure 4. Support our key workers poster issued in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. https://www.carboncreative.net/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/FlyTipping_Ad_Facebook_1200x630px.jpg (last access: 29.6.25).

treating them as invisible or tireless machines that do not require rest or time off. PPE worn by refuse collectors effectively obscures their identities, including their face and hair. Moreover, its use highlights the high risk that waste collectors face during an epidemic. They require further protection beyond basic facial coverage to ensure their safety.

The man in the poster is turned away, which may be interpreted as a sign of the extreme stress faced by the nation's "key workers", primarily refuse collectors. In addition to being physically worn out, they are afraid about getting COVID-19 and infecting their families. Unfortunately, they are unable to escape their workload and stay at home – like the rest of the country – because individuals continue to drop litter when they are out shopping for essential items or exercising.

The refuse collector keeps their eyes downwards rather than making direct eye contact with the camera. An actor's gaze direction functions as a visual representation (Machin, Mayr 2012: 70) of how the text recipient should interpret the actor and react to the circumstances. The garbage collector may move away from the scene to confirm their completion of tasks such as cleaning after everyone and providing instructions to the recipient. Nevertheless, responsibility has been transferred to the recipient of the message, implying that they must now assume control over the issue.

Under these COVID-19-related posters, the story is conveyed that COVID and the climate crisis are two sides of the same coin (see Figure 5), since PPE can transmit COVID-19. Much research has since been published explaining that, contrary to what scientists initially thought, COVID-19 is not actually spread by



Figure 5. PPE and Covid-19 correlation poster, 2020.

https://www.carboncreative.net/wpcontent/uploads/2020/07/PPE_Ad_Facebook_1200x630px.jpg
(last access: 29.6.25).

touch or surfaces (see e.g., Goldman 2020). This implies that a more modern audience may view the poster and be less concerned about the possibility of PPE spreading the virus to others while drawing attention to the fact that the pandemic is making plastic waste worse. Thus, the wordplay conveys the message that it is crucial to discard old gloves and face masks to protect the environment and stop trash and plastic pollution from starting a new pandemic.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated how individual, group, and corporate discourses about responsibility are shaped by the society in relation to eco-awareness posters that highlight waste and litter. Combining the frameworks of Van Dijk and Stibbe, this study effectively demonstrated that eco-awareness posters combating the pollution caused by plastic waste and litter tend to emphasise discourses of individual and collective responsibility rather than those of corporate responsibility. The literature, as mentioned earlier (Alexander 2013; Ballantyne *et al.* 2021), supports the notion that corporations often conceal or obscure the environmental harm caused by their products and services while attributing responsibility to the people. However, the lack of corporate accountability is alarming, because firms, politicians, and journalists possess the authority, financial resources, and specialised expertise necessary to address this significant environmental problem.

Regarding Research Question 1, this study emphasises that social constructs, including frames, framings and erasing shape discussions about litter and plastic pollution responsibility. Personal pronouns were used to reframe litter and plastic pollution as an individual responsibility or a target of particular social groups (e.g., British citizens). Furthermore, the frame “pollution from plastic and litter is a serious problem that requires immediate attention” was communicated with present-tense verbs. Metaphors that attempted to refute the text recipient’s perception impacted the conversation on responsibility. These metaphors prompted people to reconsider the environmental harm caused by pollution from plastic and trash.

Data Sets A and B differed in their portrayals of litter pollution. In Data Set A, litter pollution was depicted as unnecessary and mildly inconvenient, using a negative appraisal pattern. Data Set B, however, compared the severity of COVID-19 to an international crisis by presenting trash and plastic pollution. Research Question 2, which examined the evolution of discourses on accountability for litter and plastic pollution over time, indicated that the issue of litter and plastic pollution has gained prominence in public discussions in the previous decade. By examining linguistic assessments and appraisal patterns in CDA, researchers can take an analytical perspective, which is crucial for guiding their viewpoint. Hence, integrating the frameworks of Van Dijk and Stibbe proved to be effective, especially when examining assessment and appraisal patterns.

Social constructions influenced by ecological identities have shaped discussions on responsibility for litter and plastic pollution. These constructions portray efforts to address litter, plastic pollution, and other environmental challenges as relatively easy and time efficient. The integration of these two frameworks in the study effectively led to the analysis of semiotic forms of communication. This is because Van Dijk's method does not traditionally emphasise the visual or multimodal components of texts.

One additional distinction between the two data sets is that Data Set A predominantly used language to construct national identities which helped those who recycled and picked up garbage and develop positive social identities. The text tone also urged the receivers to act against plastic pollution and littering to save the environment and show pride in their nation.

Using celebrities and non-celebrities as actors was one important way in which Data Sets A and B differed. However, the effect of these actors remains unknown. Compared with Data Set B, Data Set A had a larger number of famous actors. These players encouraged environmentally conscious behaviours and practices that are socially built, such as recycling, litter picking, and avoiding single-use plastics. They did it in a way that was both enjoyable and clear. In addition, they challenged the belief that individuals needed scientific or environmental knowledge to address environmental issues (Moser, Dilling 2011: 164). Furthermore, as the campaign recipient started to associate particular celebrities – like ABBA – with the Keep Britain Tidy campaign through reinforcement, the campaign's salience increased while raising awareness.

In contrast with Data Set A, non-celebrity actors – like the garbage collector in Figure 4 – appeared more frequently in Data Set B. In addition, these actors demonstrated behaviours and practices that are socially formed and eco-conscious. This may be because, as in the case of a famous actor, the audience was urged to respect and take the advice of these performers when they were introduced with honorifics such as “key workers”. A significant number of the samples included in Data Set B were created after the pandemic, as people began to recognise essential workers. This could be the reason behind the rise in popularity of non-celebrity actors during the campaign. This suggests that, in general, Rootes's (2013) findings about the influence of well-known actors on the prominence of environmental initiatives are validated. However, they only hold true in specific circumstances. For instance, a campaign receives the same amount of attention and significance when an actor who is not well-known is presented as a significant role model, such as a “key worker”. However, in relation to Research Question 1, incorporating both well-known and lesser-known performers fosters the idea that combating trash and plastic pollution is a joint responsibility. This demonstrates how people within a society can mould their ideas of accountability.

Undoubtedly, the primary distinction between Data Sets A and B was that, while Data Set A contained no mention of single-use plastic or plastic pollution at all, Data Set B depicted plastic pollution as a prominent issue. Scientists first became aware of

the issues with plastic in the 1960s, and mass production of plastic was a novel idea in the 1970s (Schlanger 2019). Nevertheless, the public awareness of the dangers of plastic increased only recently, and greater attention has been paid to combating plastic pollution (e.g., Hunt 2017; Chillcott 2020). In response to Research Question 2, it is evident that discussions surrounding accountability have changed from the 1970s to the present, encompassing the issues of plastic and litter pollution. This expansion is considered a means of satisfying the obligation of responsibility.

According to Stibbe (2020), people have an opportunity to evaluate and contemplate their everyday habits considering the pandemic, thus allowing them to learn from previous errors. Despite significant changes in everyday life over the past two years, such as an increase in remote work, leading to reduced traffic, the issues of litter and plastic pollution are part of a bigger picture. These changes are expected to have positive environmental impacts in future; however, pollution problems persist. Therefore, the fact that plastic pollution is more prominent in Data Set B shows that the society still has considerable responsibility to reduce trash and plastic pollution, and that these assertions do not adequately address all environmental challenges.

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