



The use of reported speech in the climate change blogosphere

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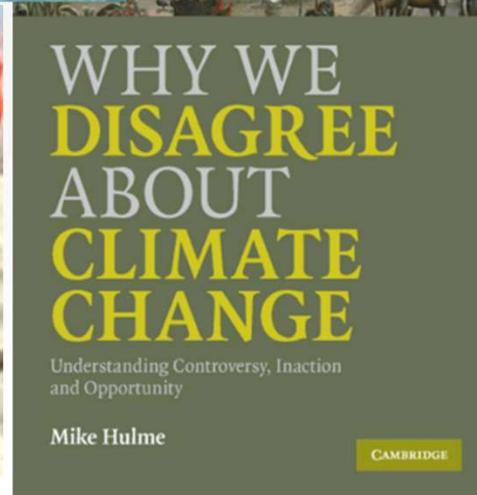


1 Introduction

- Point of departure: broad interest for quotations/reported speech in discourse related to environmental and climatic societal challenges (cross-disciplinary LINGCLIM research group)
- Here: blogs related to climate change (CC)
- Two issues:
 - 1) Content analysis of 390 blogs ->
 - 2) Investigation into how bloggers construct their arguments: how they integrate other voices, both within 'sceptic' blogs and 'acceptor' blogs
- Results: new insight into the way knowledge, opinions and attitudes are selected and presented by the two camps to further their arguments in the climate debate



Multitude of stories, interests, values, opinions, attitudes





- Various online discourse types in the climate debate
- Lack of knowledge on how blogposts are rhetorically constructed; how voices interact with each other
- Attention on unveiling similarities and differences between acceptor and sceptic bloggers
- Theoretical framework – linguistic polyphony in a broad enunciative perspective
- Focus on direct quotations:
 - John Smith says: “Sea level threatens small island states.”



2 Quantitative analysis for the big picture

Data and techniques

- NTAP Corpus (<http://clarino.uib.no/korpuskel>):
Blogposts from 390 blogs: 248 “acceptor” and 142 “sceptic” blogs
- Searches for instances of text spans enclosed by quotation marks
-> approx. 1,600,000 quotes
- Word frequency lists, ngrams and keyness
- Speech verbs in the top 500 words: *add, ask, believe, call, claim, declare, describe, explain, know, note, point, refer, report, say, show, state, support, talk, tell think, write*
- SAY – approx. 40 % of all instances in both camps



Topical content of quotations

- Limitation: the corpora were filtered through connection to the verb *say* in paragraphs including a CC term
- A list of 100 CC terms was generated from inspection in the entire NTAP corpus
- Results: similarities wrt what topics are the most frequent in the two 'camps'
- Do they really follow the same agenda?
- More explorative and qualitative analyses needed



3 Explorative analysis of quoting in a selection of blogposts

- Selection of quotations introduced by *say*, located in a paragraph containing the term *sea ice*; a total of 167 quotations (70 acc + 97 scept)
- Quoted sources : well-established climate researchers who represent or agree with the IPCC consensus
- Value-laden words: not modifying *SAY* but included IN the quotations (*tremendous, severe, dramatic, threatened*)
- Polyphonic markers (*not, but, however*) within the quotations



Examples

"We have long known that the Earth's oceans are able to absorb huge amounts of CO₂. *But* we also thought that this did *not* apply to ocean areas covered by ice, because the ice was considered impenetrable. *However*, this is *not* true: New research shows that sea ice in the Arctic draws large amounts of CO₂ from the atmosphere into the ocean", [says Dorte Haubjerg Søgaard](#). (Acceptor 2014, 8)

"The planet as a whole is doing what was expected in terms of warming. Sea ice as a whole is decreasing as expected, *but* just like with global warming, *not* every location with sea ice will have a downward trend in ice extent," [Parkinson said](#). (Sceptic 2014, 17)



Blogpost titles

- *A "death spiral" for warmists*
- *Sea ice escape route*
- *Sept. 2014 all time record Antarctic Sea Ice, Alarmist Trip Over Themselves!!!*
- *Southern Hemisphere Sea Ice Measurements Can't Be True!!!!*
- *Wind contributing to Arctic sea ice loss, study finds*
- *Melting sea ice forces walruses ashore in Alaska*
- *Arctic sea ice helps remove CO2 from the atmosphere*
- *How global warming is causing more weather extremes*



4 Qualitative analysis of blogposts

- *Sea ice loss driving Arctic warming cycle, scientists confirm*
2010, acceptor blog, “C-QUESTOR”
<http://cquestor.blogspot.no/2010/04/sea-ice-loss-driving-arctic-warming.html>
- *Baby steps to Mea Culpa? Scientists examine causes for dull warming*
2010, sceptic blog, “The Hockey Schtick”
<http://hockeyschtick.blogspot.no/2010/02/baby-steps-to-mea-culpa.html>



From the acceptor blogpost

1. *The Arctic is locked into a destructive cycle [...], scientists have confirmed.*
2. *Scientists have long suspected [...].*
3. *Screen and his colleague Ian Simmons say they used new data [...].*
4. *“The albedo effect is very important here, but there are other factors related to the loss of sea ice that likely play a role.”*
5. *“The concept of Arctic sea ice having a tipping point is still hotly debated. Our results cannot prove whether we have passed a tipping point or not. ”*



From the sceptic blogpost

1. *Climate scientists must do more to work out how exceptionally cold winters or a dip in world temperatures fit their theories of global warming, if they are to persuade an increasingly sceptical public.*
2. *“There is a lack of consensus. [...]. **I think we need better analysis of what's going on on a routine basis** so that everyone, politicians and the general public, are informed about our current understanding of what is happening, more statements in a much quicker fashion instead of waiting for another six years for the next IPCC report.” (blogger's emphasis)*
3. ***“Solar might be one part of it,”** said the Hadley's Jeff Knight, [...]. **“We've not put our finger precisely on what has changed,”** Knight said. (blogger's emphasis)*
4. *The underlying reason for cold winter not known.*



5 Summary - discussion

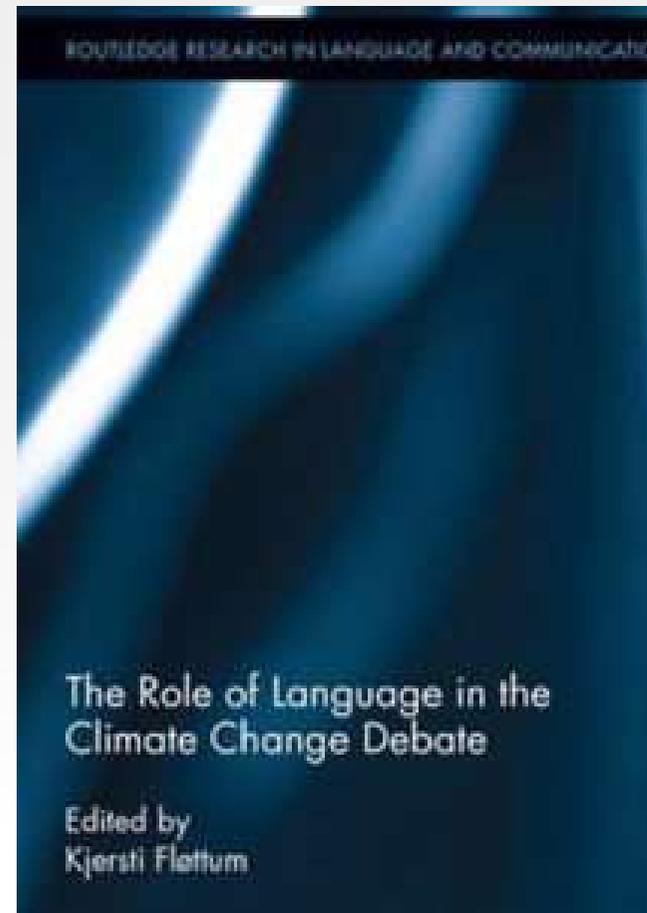
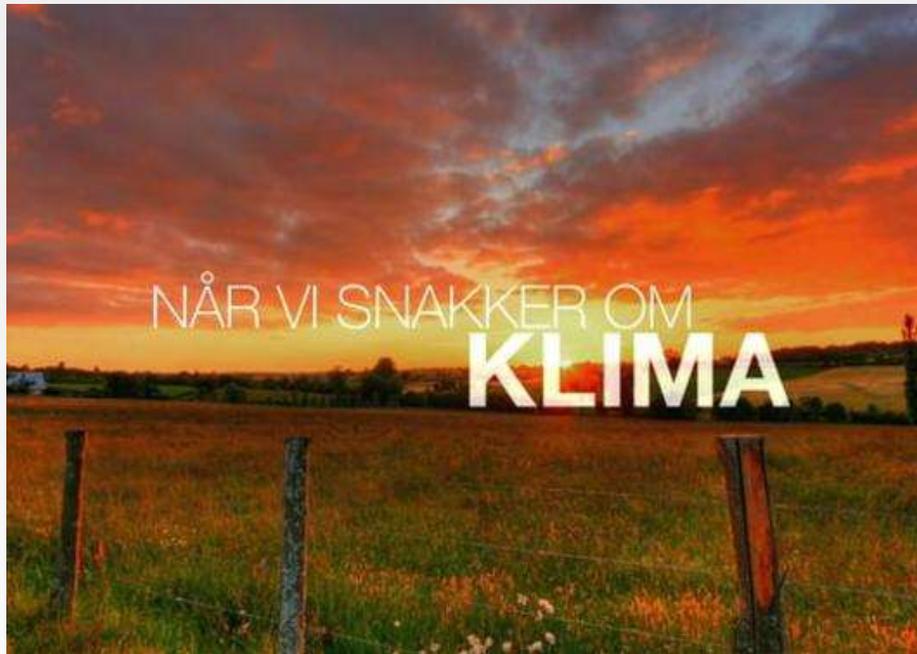
- High level of polyphony is confirmed by the large number of quotations both in acceptor and sceptic blogs
- No notable differences between the two camps wrt:
 - topics and agenda
 - use of speech verbs
 - both acceptors and sceptics quote acceptors (!)
- Differences apparent in qualitative analysis of entire blogposts:
 - the sceptic blogposts manifested critical assessments of “mainstream” climate science
 - they used evaluative expressions, both in blogpost titles and text, ridiculing the opinions of the external voices
- The impact of such critical and ridiculing orientation may be difficult to assess, but it does not contribute to a knowledge-based debate of well-founded arguments on the issue of climate change.

More from LINGCLIM



Documentary film:
«Talking about climate»

Fløttum, K. (Ed.) 2017.
*The role of language
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Some references



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Merci !



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