

Voice of the Voiceless: Mainstream Media Representation of The Climate and Nature's Biodiversity as Victims of Ecological Disasters

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Abstract: Media reports of ecological disasters reflect how disasters mutually affect humans and nature's biodiversity. While most studies have focused on the consequences on humans, this paper examined discourse patterns and strategies that underscore climate and nature's biodiversity as co-sufferers of ecological disasters, using news reports of mainstream news media. Images and texts from four news outlets, namely, Cable News Network, Columbia Broadcasting System, Television Continental and Channels Television. 20 news reports were purposively selected, 5 from each medium, considering the impact of disasters and frequency of reportage between 2019 and 2021, the period covered in the study. The news reports were downloaded from YouTube channels of the selected media because of accessibility and popularity. Transcripts and images from the videos were analysed, qualitatively, using van Leeuwen's Social Semiotics and Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistics as framework. Three discourse strategies were used by media to represent climate and nature's biodiversity vulnerability. First, media represents biodiversity losses, portraying nature itself as the victim in disaster situations. The second is signifying eco-adaptation, underscoring the need for humans to mutually coexist with nature, and engaging in anti-climate endangerment campaigns. Third, the media validates climate change, justifying disaster as an inevitable occurrence due to consistent endangerment by human beings. These findings underscore that media reports act as the mediated – semiotic voices of nature, projecting activities relating climate and nature's biodiversity, eco-adaptation and preservation.

Keywords: Climate change, Biodiversity, Media discourse, Ecocriticism, Social semiotics.

INTRODUCTION

News reports of ecological disasters often reflect imaginations of people (victims) and the perspective of the media, reporters and presenters both overtly and implicitly. The imaginations of disasters are categorised under feelings, thoughts, and perspectives (Eisenstein, 2011). These thoughts are about nature, which is characteristically voiceless; hence, relies on the expressions and significations of news media as mediated voices to present its plight. The media reports that are of interest to people. It is therefore significant that one of the things that interests people is news on disaster. The imagined signification of nature, as projected by the media, can have creative and symbolic powers. This in turn can co-ordinate human activities and regulate their belief systems about the climate and nature's biodiversity. Significations interface conception/appearance, reality, thought and action. What is of interest to this study is how the media use significations (narratives) to represent the state of the climate and nature's biodiversity. Questions that should be asked here are how is the climate and nature's biodiversity represented by the media? What are the discourse features/issues that the significations underscore?

News reporters and presenters are opinion-sharpeners. They have the power to influence people's feelings through their reports. In other

words, human perspectives about climate change and the ecosystem can be cultivated from news reports from mainstream or other media sources. Hypothetically, the way media reports ecological disasters may affect how people feel about the climate, nature and its biodiversity. However, this hypothesis needs consistent (re)evaluation at a time when media seems to have been polarised. Dimaggio (2008:7) opines that inability to demonstrate, in clear terms, the connection between disaster representation and the bidirectional response from audience or the opinion they shape has continued to pose a great challenge to scholars. The implication here is that there is a continuous need task to study the social effects of news significations or narratives of mainstream news. Also, there is constant demand to study public perception and responses to these narratives.

One of the biggest challenges, though, is the question of trust in media narratives, which has continued to dominate academic debates. For instance, it is possible for media to get involved in propaganda or engage in self or other-self validation or praise-singing narratives. In other words, in a highly censored situation, they can become less objective with the truth, acting as voice to justify government (in)actions. In the perspective of Stibbe (2015), ecological reporting

from the economic angle is unpalatable. Thus, it may be censored, warranting narratives that may tilt towards climate, nature or ecological adaptation from the economic angle. The media also has a choice to become the voice of the climate and nature or be concerned about biodiversity. The questions here are how does the media act as the voice of climate and nature's biodiversity? How does the media represent, in stylistic or semiotic manner, climate adaptation and nature's biodiversity using news reports of ecological disasters?

It has been established by Dimaggio (2008:7) that 'public trust in media is relatively weak'. But this is dominant in political situations or narratives. Hypothetically, most media outlets have become highly politicised and engage in propaganda reporting. This is no thanks to the political class, which gradually but consistently captures and regulates media narratives. This may account for the density of political praise-singing and propaganda in political reporting. The only problem this constitutes is the limited attention paid to the reporting of climate, nature and ecological conditions, especially disaster. Stibbe (2015) submits that climate change, ecology and nature's biodiversity discourses may be dwindling in mainstream media spaces due to political actors and their economic or industrial interests. However, the fact remains that there are some instances where the attention of mainstream media is channeled towards ecological issues. This is done especially during disasters. What makes up the significations of nature and biodiversity in the eventual reporting of ecological disasters in mainstream media has attracted interest in this study, which is designed to underscore the discourse and stylistic features of such reports. Thus, this study seeks to determine if the media promotes climate change and nature's biodiversity discourses and if these discourses promote the newsworthiness of climate, nature's biodiversity and ecological adaptation, in the local and global contexts. This is against the backdrop of Galtung & Ruge's (1965) position that narratives about ecological disasters undergo the most scrutiny in the processes of selection, distortion, and replication (circulation).

Linguistic and literary studies on disasters have closely and conveniently addressed climatic issues, adopting the prefix 'eco' to underscore nature, climate change and its relationship with disasters. Coinages that have emanated from the adaptation include 'ecocriticism', 'ecopoetics' or ethnography

(Lidström & Garrard, 2014, Inas Samy Abolfotoh, 2015, Estok 2009, Evans, 2015 and Rahman, Islam & Hussain, 2018). These works romanticise nature, following the footsteps of canonical poets such as Osundare (1988, 1984, 2011) and Bassey (2002) who advocate or promote adaptation, restoration and valorisation of the climate and nature's biodiversity. Scholars such as Kijiner's (2011) critique capitalists, industrialists and developed nations who create and test atomic bombs, causing the climate to degrade against the pursuit of their nuclear agenda and war mongering. These studies do not focus on mainstream media as implicit climate and nature's biodiversity activist. Also, the above studies have not amplified how the media acts as the voice of nature and represents climate and nature's biodiversity to campaign for human adaptation with and preservation of the ecosystem that he is a part of. This present study is focused on analysing the semiotic, stylistic and discourse features used in propagating the above intentions.

Literature Review: The Ecosystem, Nature and Change

Ecosystem discourse has been a subject that has continued to generate research interest in the last two decades or more. Simpson (2011:3) opines that the ecosystem and its associated challenges has been of imaginative concern to policy or 'decision-makers' globally. The ecosystem is a network of systems and organisms coexisting in the same space in the planet. The prefix 'eco', which originates from the Greek etymology, *oikos*, means house or 'habitat' (Stibbe, 2015: 2) of all biodiversity. This contains or is made up of living organisms and non-living matters. Other features of the ecosystem can be classified into biotic and abiotic components or systems. While the biotic is comprised of the flora and fauna elements, the abiotic contains soil, water, and air, among other terrestrial factors. In other words, the ecosystem encompasses human beings and their coexistence with water, temperature, plants, animals, air, light and soil. Rahman (2015:214) categorises the ecosystem into inter alia, that is, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic factors in the ecosystems, and ecological complexes of which they are part'. The same description applies to biodiversity, which involves 'races and species of all microbes, plants, and animals that live on earth' (Rahman, 2005:214). Everything in the world, including the ones evolving, is a part of nature's biodiversity. These elements in biodiversity are all connected in a semiotic network. They all work together and

depend on one other for their survival. In other words, any action against one affects the other in a consequential manner. For example, a situation of draught, which is, lack of light and water, imperils the soil, which in turn hinder the growth of crops planted in the soil. In the same vein, this will affect plants and animal nutrients, which may inadvertently cause hunger and starvation. In other words, if plants die, animals that depend on them may die consequently, and if these cause hunger and starvation, men may be affected in the process.

Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (2010) posits that there is a tight relationship between and among ‘the diversity of life on this planet’. This stipulates the conditions that guide or inspire people to engage in activities aimed at the sustenance of life. Sustainability of life is critical to the very survival of biodiversity and the economy. Human beings are a part of nature’s biodiversity. However, they are saddled with the highest responsibility to maintain the ecosystem. They are the greatest beneficiary of all elements of biodiversity. Human beings are consistently required to interact with the ecosystem on a variety of geographical and (or) temporal scales. This avails them opportunity to access vital information concerning their own survival in the ecosystem they inhabit. In another view, nature and biodiversity are considered as the most indispensable contributors to all life forms, despite being the most vulnerable.

Ostberg *et al.* (2013) establish the bidirectional connection between temperature, which is symptomatic of the climate and the ecosystem. The global rise in climate temperature negatively affects the ecosystem, which also has an impact on the proper ‘functioning of the earth as a system of planetary chemical cycles’ (Ostberg, *et. al.*, 2013: 347). In another pedestal, the negative impact of the climate on the ecosystem bidirectionally affects the social, cultural, and economic life of society. Hence, there is no denying the fact that climate change causes transformation of the ecosystem. This poses grave and dangerous consequences to nature’s biodiversity. Verwijmeren (2016:9) argues that the activities of human beings that affect the climate and degrades the ecosystem or nature’s biodiversity have continued to aggravate grossly due to industrialisation and other activities. These account for bifurcated changes in the ecosystem and the terrible consequences that have continued to occur in form of ecological disasters like hurricanes and flooding. Every change in climate

or the ecosystem turns back to affect human beings living in the face of the earth. The increasing actions of impairment or change in climate result in hampering of ‘vegetation growth’, and other biotic and abiotic factors (Grime 1977). These actions immensely contribute to human life and survival. Changes in the ecosystem or biodiversity may be gradual or rapid, that is nonlinear, as expected after a certain threshold of strain on the climate (Verwijmeren, 2016). Changes can be critical and interconnected, that is, covering a ‘wide variety of ecosystems’ (Scheffer *et al.* 2001, Kéfi *et al.* 2016). The notion of critical changes in the ecosystem is explained by Scheffer *et al.* (2009) to affect ‘organisms (including man) and the physical environment’ where human beings and other organisms co-exist.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework selected for this study is a blend of two theories, social semiotics by Theo van Leeuwen and Critical Stylistics by Lesley Jeffries. The principles of the theories are put together in a model tagged as critical semiotics. Social semiotics (SS) deals with dual phenomena; first, the meaning makers and meaning making systems. It focuses on the modes of communication whereby people understand and, at the same time, represent their experience or understanding of the world. The theory interfaces how communication shapes power. Bezemer & Jewitt (2009:2) submit that SS borders on qualitative analysis, dealing with artifacts of texts, and all the resources that enhance meaning making. It examines the cognition, production and dissemination of information across sociological and cultural spaces in different contexts. In other words, meaning systems are largely constitutive of contextual factors (John, 2020a, 2020b). The semiotic ways of making meaning are mediated by signs, which are the conceptualised elements in which meaning can be mediated (John, 2021; 2024; 2025). The conception of sign in Ferdinand de Saussure rudimentary framework is the connection between the signified, which the meaning model, and the signifier, which is the meaning-maker and mechanism. The argument is that social semiotics brings together factors that enhance meaning-making and the mechanism that generate the meaning. According to Kress (1993, 2010), sign interphases form and meaning. Meaning is not imagined but totally mediated by signs, while signs are consistently made and remade from social factors. These signs are situated within sociocultural milieus.

van Leeuwen (2005:4) opines that communication is a network of processes, existing as a chain. This begins from the process of making a sign to the process of using such signs to signify something (meaning). Signs are products of 'a social process' (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009:3; van Leeuwen, 2005). The sign maker, a social individual, selects from a pool of semiotic resources. These resources are from cognitive systems which can be put together in a way that makes it possible for the signifier to pass specific meaning. van Leeuwen (2005) and Bezemer & Jewitt (2009:3) agree that people express thoughts or meanings, using selected semiotic resources that 'are available to them'. The selection of semiotic resources can be regulated by certain social factors, ranging from 'what resources are made available' for meaning and the discourse strategies that shape how the signs are eventually used and meaning is eventually made (Bezemer & Jewitt, 2009:4). In another perspective, van Leeuwen (2005) posits that there are normative principles that determine how people select and subsequently use signs available to them in contexts. These principles are sometimes more or less binding on rules and norms, which define use in sociological milieu.

The most recurring term in social semiotics, which is also the most significant in terms of analysing every social communication process is 'sign.' As established in this study, these signs could be direct or mediated signs. There are two notable approaches that have onerous one-to-one effects on and relationship to the analysis of texts in the Critical Semiotics framework proposed and deployed to the analysis of the data in this study. The first is co-opted from Peirce's typology of signs, which are icon, index and symbol. These are the foundational basis for the development of social semiotics (van Leeuwen, 2005). The second is co-opted from the principles of critical stylistics. The theory deals with modelling and texturing of signs into processes to organise and represent social events in the real world (Jeffries, 2007, John, 2018; 2020). Sebeok (2001:50) considers icon to be 'a topological similarity' between the signifier and its denotata, that is, what the sign signifies. What this means is that an icon is used as a substitution or representation sign. Sebeok's (2001:110) argument is that there are virtually 'no pure iconic signs,' or simply put, 'no actual sign is an icon'.

An indexical sign is a pointing sign, according to Danesi, 2004. Dirven & Verspoor (2004) posit that an indexical sign is used to point to something

concrete in the immediate environment (John, 2021). Danesi (2004) argues that indexicality reflects all forms of representational behaviours, which are used by humans 'instinctively to point out and locate things, people and events in the world.' Indexical signs also point to proximal locations such as here, there, up, down, among other spatial settings (John, 2021, John & Ajayi, 2024). Danesi (2004) and Cap (2013) theorise indexical signs in three subgroups, which are spatial, temporal, and (axiological) personal indexical. Symbol is from the Greek etymology *symbolon*, which means 'a token of recognition' (Dirven & Verspoor, 2004:6). Symbolic signs may look vague or ambiguous because they may have no natural or direct link to what they signify. This is also because they are socially, religiously, and culturally grounded (John, 2024a; 2024b).

Critical stylistics (CS) combines three broad approaches, namely, linguistic stylistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Jeffries claims to have been informed by Fowler et. al (1979), Simpson (1993), Fairclough (1989), Fowler (1991) and Halliday (1985). CS specifically annexes and accounts for 'how texts may influence the ideological outlook of their recipients' (Jeffries, 2010:6). The orientation is that issues of ideology, whether subtle, manipulative or radical, are projected using linguistic and non-linguistic resources and structures. CS offers analytical tools that could be used to uncover ideology in texts. The theory also stipulates that there are established links between and among words, phrases, clauses and how they function in texturing the world (John, 2018). Wodak's (2002:3) notion links CS to CDA in three (3) conceptual dimensions. These are the concept of power, history and ideology. CS provides a list of conceptual-textual functions or rhetorical strategies that are recurrent in texts in all communicative encounters. Also, these strategies are referred to as the main functions that texts have in representing events in the real world.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs the descriptive design. Purposive sampling was used to select images and texts from news reports from four mainstream news outlets that have visibility on cable network and YouTube, which the secondary source of the data. These stations are Cable News Network (CNN), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), Television Continental (TVC) and Channels Television (CHNLSTV). CNN and CBS are

international outlets, while CHNLSTV and TVC are local outlets. However, these news platforms have global coverage, viewership and accessibility. The purpose of choosing international and local outlets is to juxtapose climate narratives in the global and local scenes. Twenty news reports, five from each outlet, were purposively selected, considering the significations in them and relevance to the thematic concerns of this study. The videos were downloaded from the official YouTube channels of the news media. This medium is fast evolving into the most channel means of accessing news reports. For instance, in order of popularity on YouTube, CNN has 19.5 million subscribers; CBS has 7 million subscribers, CHNLSTV has 3.7 million subscribers, while TVC has 1.5 million subscribers, justifying their choice of selection from their jurisdiction. The data were transcribed to textual form. Images were also generated using Gom Player version 2.3, a multimedia playback and photo-exporting application. These were subjected to qualitative textual and multimodal (semiotic) analysis, using van Leeuwen's Social Semiotics (2005) and Lesley Jeffries' Critical Stylistics (2010).

DATA AND DISCUSSION

Disasters cause ecological problems, which are a cause of concern for indigenous communities and nations at large. Disasters also affect nature's biodiversity. Significations in news serve as nature's outcry for survival and adaptation in the face of consistent degradation. This is because human life depends on nature's biodiversity for survival, both economically and biologically. The impact of disasters on communities and on nature itself is encompassing. According to representations in news report, disasters affect nature's biodiversity in terms of losses, expressing the need for eco-adaptation.

Signifying Biodiversity Losses

News reports about disasters underscore the symbiotic relationship among all elements of nature's biodiversity, which include human beings and other animals. What this reveals is that any disaster that affects human beings mutually affects other aspects of nature's biodiversity such as trees, farmlands and animals.

Excerpts

- (i) In Jigawa State, hundreds of farmlands have been swept by flood waters and residents displaced... (REP-FLD/CHNLSTV)

- (ii) I've not heard about any casualty or any injuries yet. The casualties are more on the animal side, livestock, but human casualties, no... (REP-FLD/TVC)
- (iii) the figures are amazing, and very sad, five hundred houses destroyed and there are reports of hundreds of domestic animals lost at that particular flood... (REP-FLD/TVC)

In excerpts (i) and (ii), the conceptual function of enumerating is used to list 'figures' that make up nature's casualty list. Hyperbole is adopted as a technique when listing the consequences of disasters. These are done to make the audience sympathetic to the plight of local communities and nature. The excerpts further signify the causes of disasters, and the community's means of survival. One of these is 'farmlands', which is facing destruction. Farmland is one of nature's biodiversity. The fact that it has 'been destroyed should arouse pity about the condition of nature itself in the occasion of disaster. There is the conceptual functions (spatial indexical) of representing place, 'in Jigawa State.' Which is the mood adjunct in excerpt (i). This proves profiling, that is, the fact that disasters occur in communities. It also decries that the destruction of the community means that nature's course has been altered. The destruction of 'farmland' is tied to the displacement of victims, who are joint sufferers of disaster consequences. In excerpt (ii), the signification plays down on the consequence of flooding as a disaster affecting human life, giving primacy to its effect on biodiversity. Using the conceptual function of prioritising, the presenter draws attention to this, in this case, deploying synonyms, 'casualty' 'injuries', to further foreground the consequence of disasters on animals. For instance, the synonym 'livestock' is a conceptual-textual function of equating. It is a synonym used to refer to domestic animals. In the context of use, it is a 'domestic animals' like cattle, ram, among others, which are directly mentioned in excerpt (iii), using the conceptual function of naming. However, this does not happen to domestic animals alone; it also affects all biodiversity. But in this context, animal biodiversity is profiled as the core occupation of the people of Northern Nigeria, which implicitly fits the conceptual function of describing. The presenter in the excerpt represents the pitiable condition of nature and humans, signifying them as co-inhabitants of the environment and related in terms of biodiversity. The constraint is that

people’s livelihood, including the animals, has been ‘washed away’ by the flood. Using relevance, reinforced by the conceptual function of implying, the speaker posits that elements in the biodiversity, that is ‘farmland’ and ‘domestic animals’ (livestock) are connected to the *flora* and *fauna* nomenclatures that define the bidirectional relationship among elements in biodiversity.

Pictorial and multimodal representations are very important in telling the plights of nature and biodiversity. The camera shot and angle tell stories, sometimes, better than texts, providing evidence and explicit iconic and indexical references to the affected elements in biodiversity. Signs are veritable resources for meaning (Behera, 2024), especially in news reports of disasters.

Excerpt



Plate 1. Representing plights of livestock biodiversity (Source: CHNLSTV)

The plight of animal (livestock) biodiversity, in news, is better told from the semiotic angle. For instance, in Plate 1, using close shot, the indexical sheep, is an important livestock and part of the biodiversity. This implicitly marks the context of the report with respect to the region, northern Nigeria. Their occupation is mainly animal husbandry, which emphasises a mutual co-existent relationship between human and animal biodiversity. The iconicity of death, also symbolising loss of biodiversity, is portrayed by

the lifeless body of the sheep. This multimodal representation confirms the portrayal of the sheep to elicit sympathy for the owner, who has lost a valuable resource, and for biodiversity which is the primary casualty. It can be inferred that the sheep has been denied its role in the ecosystem, which will now continue to exist without it. There is an inference represented in the plate that the sheep’s death is caused by the flood. The headline or caption under the image is used to convey this plight

Excerpt



Plate 2. Rescuing livestock biodiversity (Source: CHNLSTV)

The importance of biodiversity is indicated using iconicity and symbolicity, which is signified by the rescue effort of the people. Plate 2 contrasts the representation in Plate 1, where the animal is left or abandoned to die. Here, there is an effort to rescue the animals, implying attempts to preserve the biodiversity. The significance is that the animal (livestock), which is an icon of biodiversity, and has an immediate economic importance to the owners. It is also important to the ecosystem's preservation. The camera shot used as an icon tells the story of humans collaborating with other living biodiversity, in this case, animals, to ensure survival, since the (the animals) are helpless; hence, cannot rescue themselves. The image of the men trying to protect their livestock acts as an icon signifying preservation of life of biodiversity and

the ecosystem to ensure they continue to exist to serve their purpose. The signification shows that there is mutual dependence between humans and animals. Humans depend on animals for economic survival, while animals depend on humans to protect it from disaster for their own benefit. In the generic sense, both humans and animals are mutual occupants in the ecosystem, though one (humans) is labelled as strong, while the other (animals) is tagged as weak. Symbolically, their role in the ecosystem is that the strong should protect the weak. In other words, the humans must protect the vulnerable animals and ensure their continuity in the ecosystem. Flood in the plate serves as index, signifying threat to the biodiversity. The depth of the flood is iconised by the car which is halfway submerged in the water.

Excerpt



Plate 3. Felling trees - nature biodiversity (Source: CBS)

In Plate 4.16, extended-close shot is used to profile the entire area, which is surrounded by trees as its biodiversity. Trees perform a very significant function in the ecosystem. They act as a shield for the house, which implicitly belongs to a human being, which is at the background. According to metrologists and hurricane experts, trees are indispensable in preserving against disaster consequences during hurricane storms. As part of biodiversity, they serve as windbreaks or gatekeepers against heavy winds and storms. This is implicitly signified in the plate. The icon, the house, is still standing, while the trees shielding it are being felled due to the intensity of the storm. In plate 3, the felled trees are symbolic of defeat; the trees, which are iconic of biodiversity, are being destroyed. Another explicit inference is that the house will be defenseless without the trees; the gradual extinction of the trees poses a threat to the house and its dwellers. There is need for

cooperation between human and the tree biodiversity. To shield themselves from ecological disasters, they must plant and nurture more trees as the old ones are being felled. There is indexical irony in plate 3, where elements in the house are observed to be made of wood. Basically, this symbolises deforestation. It also explicates that it is not only hurricanes that bring down trees; humans consciously cut down trees to build shelters. The broader implication is that they are contributing to the destruction of the eco system (Stibbe, 2015). This is ironic because they are destroying the very aspect of biodiversity that shields them from disasterous storms. The felled trees iconise the intensity of the hurricane, which is a form of disaster. It is only a terrible storm that can bring down not just one but so many trees. The headline deploys the conceptual function of prioritising, to intensify the signification in verb 'slam', and the conceptual function of

enumerating, '150 MPH WIND', to quantify or measure the impact of the hurricane and its consequences.

Signifying eco-adaptation as plighting condition

Disasters throw people into different kinds of difficult, unhealthy, and condescending positions. In most cases, the victims, who are indigenous people, may not have alternatives or better conditions of life. Thus, they try to survive and cope with nature, even if it entails living dangerously or at the brink of imminent disasters, threats or consequences.

Excerpt

- (iv) erupting since the beginning of 2017... since the year 1580, we've had 79 eruptions, the worst was in 1974... Fuego is here, notice the old scar marks the old pyroclastic scar marks
- (v) ... the volcano has been active and also working with this kind of material, which is extremely hot, that makes the work of rescuers even more difficult, because we are talking about temperatures of about 30°C... (REP-VOL/CBS)

Clear instances of eco-adaptation are represented in excerpts (iv) and (v). For instance, in excerpt (iv), there is the conceptual function of representing time. This is done at three structural levels to signify mutual adaptation between indigenous people and nature, even in the face of danger. The first level is the representation of time relatively present, the second is time past, while the third is historical time. Index to the past is signified in '1580'. The conceptual function of enumerating is used to paint the picture of an area that has been unsafe from historical periods. For instance, it has, in past time, witnessed 'seventy-nine eruptions.' With such number of disasters, the place should have been abandoned. But the indigenous people have continued to find a way to live there dangerously. The semiotic meaning of this is that mutual co-existence with biodiversity has ancestral implications. People are resilient, and have continue to live in their ancestral home, despite threats, for centuries. Excerpt (iv) represents the opinion that these indigenous people have lived in that geographical space for generations. Reference is made to another historical time, stating disaster antecedence, tracing it to '1974'. The conceptual function of prioritising is used to signify and index this period as the landmark experience of volcanic eruption that has caused massive consequences in the

community. The adjective, 'worst', which is the conceptual functions of prioritising and describing, is used to measure the impact of disasters, portraying as inevitable consequences in every volcanic eruption. Index to revolving disasters, as a result of volcanic eruption, is done using the conceptual function of representing time and opinion. The excerpt represents the fact that it is a reoccurring disaster with reference to the present generation, who are said to have encountered a similar magnitude of volcanic eruption. But they continue to live there co-existing with the possibility that it is a volcanic eruption sight, and eruption can occur at any time.

In relation to present time, index is made to 'the beginning of 2017', the reporter draws attention to warning signs of an imminent disaster. The inference is that the indigenous people still have time and opportunity to vacate the area before the volcano erupts and become disastrous. The prospect of disaster occurring is represented at the latter part of the excerpt. The conceptual function of naming, 'Fuego', is used to profile the location – disaster site. The conceptual-textual function of describing is used to relate the imminent threat of disaster to past time, 1974, when it is said to have had the greatest sociological impact. Signs of the same impact are represented by the conceptual function of describing; this is in the nominal 'the old (pyroclastic) scar marks', which is repeated for emphasis. The addition of a register, 'pyroclastic', in parenthesis intensifies the threat and points to warning sign of a volcanic eruption. Unfortunately, warnings are not heeded because the indigenous people claim to be resilient and unwilling to abandon their ancestral land. In that spirit, they move from victimhood to survival with the determination to co-exist with potential threat of volcanic eruption. Although this makes their condition pitiable, it is also expressive of the fact that ecological disasters will not just go away. Due to climate degradation, disasters will continue to occur and human beings must continue to live with and adapt to this reality. It is also evident in (v) excerpt that each time there is volcanic eruption with a great impact, the consequences are always severe. Thus, the indigenes put up forms of eco-adaptation strategies, including risk-taking. They risk their life to save others'. The conceptual-textual functions of describing and prioritising are employed to show the rigour that is required to rescue victims in the event of eruption. Relevance is used to appropriately contextualise volcanic eruption, using descriptions like 'intense heat', and

'extremely hot', 'temperature', and enumeration '30°.'

Excerpt

- (vi) And look at the environment which we find ourselves, it is not conducive for living, we are actually suffering... (REP-FLD/CHNLSTV)
- (vii) ...so that the climate is changing because of global warming. And because of that, we need to position ourselves where we need to begin to adapt to these changes... (REP-FLD/TVC)

Some local communities are part of biodiversity that media represent as recipes for catastrophe, even before real disasters occur. The living conditions of these habitats are presented as pitiful and characteristically dangerous. In excerpt (vi), there is the conceptual function of representing opinion. The local community represented is a disaster site, even without natural disasters. The indigenous people have learnt to adapt to such 'environments,' which is the deictic centre. The plights of people living there is represented, using the conceptual function of describing. The descriptive adjectives 'not conducive', and 'suffering' show the pitiable condition they are living with. The relative, 'which we find ourselves', signifies condescension. This implies that they have no other alternative. The environment is profiled as a disaster-prone region,

Excerpt



Plate 4. Representing eco-adaptation landslide (Source: CHNLSTV)

Plate 4 shows a house on the brink of disaster – collapse, facing a significant threat to be washed away by landslide. The house which is on the bank of the sea is an iconic, showing human beings

but is presented as their heritage. Though they need a better place to live in, they still choose to remain there, and adapt to the condition imposed by the biodiversity. They have the option of vacating their land, but they choose to adapt to the consequences. Excerpt (vii) has the conceptual function of representing opinion. This is premised on the inference that humanity is living dangerously, due to threats of disasters. The conceptual function of representing opinion is also projected in the nominal 'global warming'. The reporter's aim is to portray the plight of humanity, while signifying the inevitability of climate change which is the cause of disasters. The reporter gives the inference that disasters do not occur in isolation; naming 'global warming' as the cause. This posits the generic knowledge that as much as there is global warming (climate change), disasters will continue to happen in the world. The conceptual function of equating is entailed in the use of global warming, equating it with changing climate. The reporter uses inclusive imperative clause, which reflects the conceptual function of emphasising, stating the obvious, which is the fact that global warming will continue, hence the advice to 'adapt'. The conceptual function of naming is entailed in the pronoun 'we', which refers to human beings, implying humanity, who must live to accept to live with (adapt to) the reality of global warming.

adapting to daily threat of imminent disasters. It is explicitly evinced that the people staying in the house risk their life every day, adapting to the daily encroachment of the landslide, which

signifies a disaster waiting to happen. The extended shot indexes a man in the backgrounded, foregrounding the fact that people really live there. The man is placed at an iconic distance, symbolising that his fate is dependent on biodiversity. The man is surveying the dredged area, possibly imagining and evaluating the devastations it is causing. The wood-rafters extended represents the opinion – the inference that the house is gradually being consumed. The signification shows that the house is above the sea level, implying that this may have been caused by excavation. The house is vulnerable, as signified by its wooden structure. This is an icon, signifying a disaster waiting to happen; a wooden house on a coastal area may collapse at any time. The house has continued to stand and the people living there have continued to ignore the threats of encroachment and disaster.

Signifying Climate Validation

The facts that the climate is vastly changing, and there is global warming is incontestable. There are enough reasons to believe that it will continue to have disastrous consequences on the ecosystem. News reporters push the narrative that ecological disasters are as a result of climate change, and the fact that disaster will continue to aggravate. This is a form of validation.

Excerpt

- (viii) ... a few years back, some decades back, the floods will come, the farmers will still be able to do whatever they want to do. But a lot of issues, climate change, human activities, anthropogenic activities, and even physical developments, and all that, they are all adding to the intensity and eh... it's becoming more serious and more serious (REP-FLD/TVC)
- (ix) This is nature. This is nature in process, nature in process. What is happening in the US is nature in process.
- (x) Nature in process. is it that man has gotten in the way of nature, and nature really must take its course? Bringing it back, quickly, to the issue of climate change... (REP-FLD/TVC)

In excerpt (viii), the reporter justifies climate changing, validating its inevitability, blaming it on human activities. The conceptual function of representing time is used to portray two periodic dispositions. Each conceptual time is further marked by the conceptual function of representing actions focusing on 'climate change' as the main

subject. There is time past, which the reporter marks, using the conceptual function of emphasizing, foregrounding the time. Using rephrasing and conversational repair as techniques in the nominal, 'some decades back,' coindexed with another nominal 'a few years back,' the speaker corrects the notion that climate change is only a recent phenomenon. The inference is that 'climate change' has been happening for a long time. The behavioural process reflecting time-past has two deictic connections which are placed in hypotaxis relations, 'the flood' and 'the farmers.' However, there is the conceptual textual function of contrasting, in the condescension to the fact that climate change is worsening. This is rhetorically represented to put in context, the fact that 'flood,' in the past, was not as critical or consequential as it is in the present. The impact of disaster is foregrounded as mild in the past but increasing consequential in the present. The second behavioural process focusing on the present is indirectly used to validate 'climate change.' The speaker, in excerpt (viii), further uses the conceptual function of describing, concentrates on validating climate change consequence as it continues to linger, reinforcing that it will continue to impact human life. The speaker also uses repetition as reference to signify the 'intensity' of consequences arising from disasters, using the adjective 'serious.'

In excerpt (ix), the reporter employs blaming technique to validate climate change and its consequences on the ecosystem. The narrative is that human beings are the architects of their own fate; this is because of the actions against the climate. The conceptual function of implying is used to validate that every act against the 'climate' leads to disaster being experienced in contemporary times. Human beings are not only degrading the climate, but also, technically, causing disasters which are rampant and is affecting them. Synonymy and repetition, that is the conceptual functions of equating and emphasizing, are used to balance the narrative, and lay emphasis on the mutual effect of climate change; Nature is a synonym for 'climate change.' This is repeated in excerpts (ix) and (x) for emphasis. Repetitive devices used include anaphora, repetition at the beginning of a sequence and epiphora, repetition at the end of structures, in excerpt (x), and epizeuxis, repetition at the beginning and end of successive structures. The conceptual function of emphasizing is used to connect 'climate change', which is implied in the

nominal 'issue' to disaster This signifies validation of climate change, using the evidence that human should be held responsible for their actions against the climate. The conceptual function of emphasising placed on 'nature' is also metapragmatic. First, it signifies hydronic disaster as a resultant consequence of climate change itself, and second, it validates the assertion that disasters are mutually caused by humans and nature, which is represented by the adjective 'natural'. The speaker in excerpt (x) opines that disasters have direct and indirect causes; nature, that is climate as the direct, and human actions as the indirect causes, respectively.

Excerpt

(xi) ... what you must acknowledge is that the environment and the climate is changing. That is fundamental. It's so easy to depict that, in the sense, you know, this year, the sun was a lot hotter than last year. You know that the intensity of the rainfall is a lot more than it was last year or the presiding year... (REP-FLD/TVC)

The intention of the reporter in excerpt (xi) is to explicitly attribute the blame of the terrible human conditions to 'environmental' changes. The conceptual functions of naming and equating (synonym) are used in the nominal 'environment', which is synonymous to 'climate'. This points to the fact that changes in the climate are caused by environmental actions, that is, human activities. This means that disasters are bidirectionally linked to human actions against the climate. The conceptual functions of describing and emphasising are used to validate the assertion that disasters will continue to happen as long as there are human activities that continue to endanger the climate. The adjective 'fundamental', implying the root cause, means that human beings are entirely blamed on human activities. It also establishes the connection between cause and effect in the climate change and disaster discourse. An analogical sequence of environmental change is provided, recounting experiences that are faced by human beings. The excerpt validates the claim that if the climate continues to degenerate, the impact of disaster will continue to be felt by human beings. Through this, the reporter establishes the indexical relevance that there is consequence for every human action against the climate. In other words, the lingering cases of disasters every year is justified as signified by the conceptual function representing time, that is, 'last year', 'presiding year,' and 'this year'. The degradation of the

climate is represented using the conceptual functions of prioritising and intensifying, which are marked by comparative adjectives, 'hotter', and 'more than' to qualify the extent of disaster consequences. The former condition (hooter) defines the temperature as a kind of disaster, while the latter (more than) symbolises the measurable impact felt. The broader inference or argument in excerpt (xi) is that as climate change continues to happen, ecological disasters will continue to increase, and human beings and biodiversity will continue to feel the impact of disasters that will also continue to happen.

CONCLUSION

This research has examined mainstream media as the voices of climate, nature and biodiversity. It investigated the semiotic and stylistic patterns that reporters of ecological disasters deployed in voicing issues relating to climate change disasters and how they affect biodiversity. It first established the fact that some elements of biodiversity have no voice of their own but suffer from climate actions, mostly blamed on human activities (Stibbe, 2015). The findings in this study have implications for framing strategies, and critical semiotics The media employed images and texts to voice out climate conditions and biodiversity concerns. These texts, as used by CNN, CBS, CHNLSTV and TVC, frame the plights of nature and biodiversity Findings revealed that the occurrence of disaster provides an opportunity to interrogate the conditions of the climate and bidirectionally, the ecosystem or biodiversity. A part of this negates the view of Stibbe's (2015) that issues of the climate and nature become newsworthy for economic interest, due to political actors controlling the narratives (John & Adebayo, 2024; and John 2025). In most cases, the media report disasters for the purpose of canvassing the fate of the climate and all living beings in the biodiversity. The other part which is that news agencies campaign against the destruction of the climate, which has consequences on the ecosystem

Three dominant discourse strategies were employed by news reporters in CNN, CBS, CHNLSTV and TVC to project climate change and disasters affecting biodiversity. First, they created narratives that front biodiversity losses, second, they signified the need for eco-adaptation or eco-adaptability and third, they engaged in validating climate change consequences, acknowledging that disasters are inevitable. The

first finding aligns with Ostberg, et. al. (2013) and Scheffer *et al.* (2009), who argue that climate change is caused by human actions against the climate. Disasters will continue to happen, if the factors that trigger or enhance climate change continue to persist. Instead, the consequences may continue to degenerate. The media also represents the opinion that the factors responsible for degenerating the climate have continued to thrive or even multiply; hence, it is inevitable that ecological disasters will continue to happen. The argument is that human beings should begin to adjust to condescend to the reality of climatic disasters (Verwijmeren, 2016). Findings in this study showed that the media project such narratives using texts and images. The use of 'natural' to modify 'disaster', imply that gradually, disasters are becoming a part of everyday life, if not a feature of the biodiversity of life. From the perspective presented by the media in this study, nature is synonymous with 'climate' and 'ecosystem'; it is not just the root word of natural, but it provides the basis for the description of disasters that is inevitable. Mostly, the media represents the notion that disasters are retaliatory climatic actions or environmental reactions. The fact that disaster is caused by people's actions have been projected in several literatures including Stibbe (2015), Verwijmeren (2016), and ecocritical works such as Osundare (1984) and Jetnil-Kijiner (2011). According to this study, the media portray that disasters are predictable anytime that climate or environmental changes are reported. Therefore, to reduce ecological disasters, human beings must control environmental and climate changes (Stibbe, 2015). These are gaps in the literature that should be studied further from the angle of media reports.

The study found that the media reports of CNN, CBS, CHNLSTV and TVC front biodiversity losses as inevitable circumstances. Studies such as Dimaggio (2008) and Rahman (2015) report this finding, although with certain limitations. For instance, both Dimaggio's and Rahman's findings show that biodiversity losses cause disasters, but they did not account for the effects of disasters on other biodiversity apart from human life. The media represent human beings and nature as mutual victims of disasters. Disasters affect biodiversity, by causing significant losses. The findings of this study and media reports agree with Simpson's (2011) proposition that disasters have critical consequences at a global scale. Biodiversity losses are evidently reported in

mainstream media, showing disasters in many parts of the world. The media deploy significations to voice out eco-adaptation strategies. Findings reveal terms like 'eco-adaptiveness,' 'eco-adapting' and 'co-existence' as part of the lexicon of eco-adaptation. Findings in this study suggest the need for human beings, who are a part of the biodiversity, to devise strategies for mutual coexistence with other biodiversity, and also learn to adapt with the persistent consequences of disaster. News agencies justify this by reporting the frequencies of disasters tied to climate change. The fact that disasters are consistent occurrences in the world today means that human being should continue to condescend and adapt. This is against the call for control of climate action in Stibbe (2015). Circumstances continue to show that human beings cannot mortgage economic gains for ecological or climate protection.

The study has showed that Critical Stylistics (CS) and semiotics offer a critical and all-encompass lens in assessing mutual victimisation of nature – biodiversity and human beings by ecological disasters. The representative tools: naming, describing, prioritising, representing action, enumerating and representing time demonstrate how media perceive climate, the roles and actions of human beings in the ecosystem, and disasters that often occur as a result of these actions. Jeffries (2010) groups the conceptual functions, pairing them according to lexical functions. But these operational markers are unbundled in John (2018, 2020) in the same way they are operationalised in this study. Findings characteristically showed that mainstream media deploy conceptual-textual functions to represent the connection between human activities and disaster occurrences. The features of CS are interlocking with semiotics. A good example is the representation of time in, 'last year,' 'a few years back,' among others, which are symbolic positions that are interfacing with indexical. Any news about disaster has indexical relations to time past (before disaster), and time present (during disaster) to conceptual time, which are often used to report the implications of climatic action. The conceptual-textual functions of naming and describing are unbundled in connection to symbols in the semiotic framework. Actions and events named in disaster situations such as personnel and disasters are symbolic representations. For instance, the choice of naming 'livestock' is symbolic of domestic animals, while the choice of 'animals' is generalised, symbolically to all living things coexisting in

biodiversity. The conceptual-textual functions of describing and prioritising mutually beneficial when referring to biodiversity, agents or climate.

It can be concluded that human beings, the climate and nature are all victims of ecological disasters. In other words, the consequences of disaster are felt generally by all the elements in the ecosystem. In fact, according to the reports in mainstream media, nature is represented as being more vulnerable than human beings. But their vulnerability is often undermined by human beings, since they do not have voices of their own to speak of their plight. The media, thus, create narratives that portray nature's conscious voice advocating for ecological adaptation and preservation.

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