

An analysis of climate change discourses in the UK parliament (2006 - 2018)

12th April 2021

ICE-5 conference, online



Introduction

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Thesis working title: 100 years of continuity and change in spoken British English.

Researching grammatical variation in English dialects, based on the sound archives of the British Library.



London Interdisciplinary
Social Science
Doctoral Training Partnership



Queen Mary
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Climate change discourse in the UK parliament, 2006–2016

Based on data from MA dissertation

University of Brighton, 2017

Supervisor: Prof. Raphael Salkie



University of Brighton

- Combining corpus linguistics and discourse analysis, using data from Hansard.
- Three narrative discourses:
 - catastrophism
 - gradualism
 - scepticism



A post-political topic?

2006: Stern Report

2008: Climate Change Bill

2015: Paris Agreement

2019: UK Climate Emergency declared

Willis (2017):

- a dominance of “scientific and economic framing”
- an absence of discussion on social and human impact; non-human species; and the possibility of irreversible change.



Corpus collection

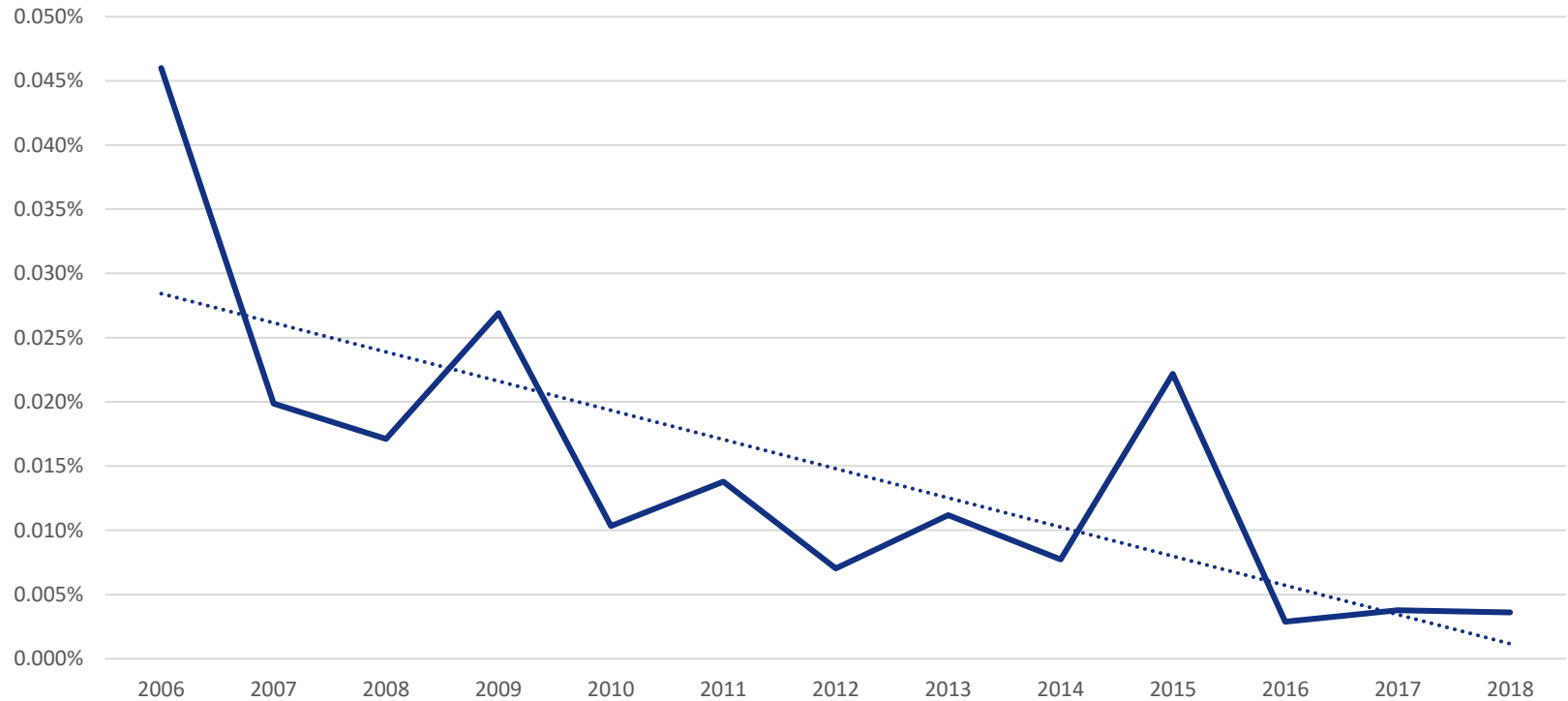
Time periods: one week before, two weeks during, and one week after the UN climate change conferences

Source: Hansard, Commons Chamber debates

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Total word count	847945	1012193	952880	1100212	1152230	1153834	1138028	1099243	1099343	1239276	1074635	1115942	1197470	14,183,231
Tokens of 'climate change'	390	201	163	296	119	159	80	123	85	275	31	42	43	2,007



Overall tokens of 'climate change' by year

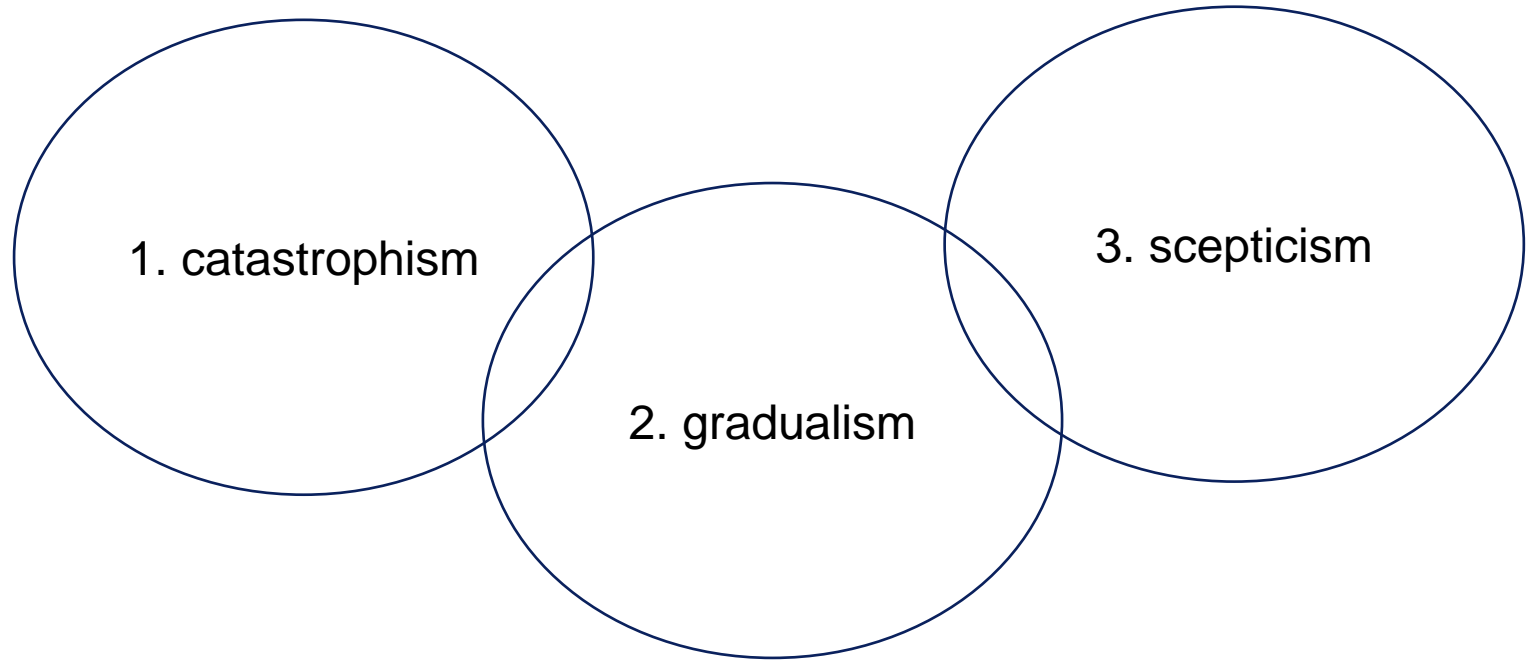


Data analysis

Corpus Linguistics	Discourse Analysis
All tokens included 😊	Shorter texts
Automatic keywords search 😊	'Cherry picked' examples
Abstracted collocations	Contextualisation 😊
Omissions not clear	Framework of reference 😊



Climate change discourses (Urry, 2015)



Elements of a discourse using a narrative approach: setting, characters, plot and moral

(Nisbet, 2009)



Collocations

Collocate	Freq	Stat
tackle	61	7.70206
dangerous	20	7.32829
challenge	19	5.91212
challenges	18	6.26623
threat	17	5.86111
risk	15	4.59449
address	11	4.70386
combat	8	6.77076
fight	7	5.95956
avoid	7	5.6958
opportunity	7	2.83051

Collocate	Freq	Stat
deniers	4	10.99958
tackle	61	7.70206
dangerous	20	7.32829
scientists	4	7.00862
combat	8	6.77076
challenges	18	6.26623
dangers	3	6.04228
battle	6	5.96983
fight	7	5.95956
challenge	19	5.91212
threat	17	5.86111



Key areas for analysis

Collocations related to:

- Challenges and opportunities
 - Dangers and threats
 - Science and experts
 - Denial and sceptics
- setting, characters, plot and moral



Challenges and opportunities

Challenge

- part of a list of international concerns
- used with action and awareness verbs

Opportunity

- create jobs
- develop industries
- show global leadership

Economic choice between different options?

“There is an increasing polarisation between engaging the community, maintaining sustainable communities and tackling major challenges such as climate change on the one hand, and the promotion of enterprise, employment and wealth on the other.” 2007-12-10



Dangers and threats

Used with:

- “avoid” (dangerous)
- “tackle” (threat)

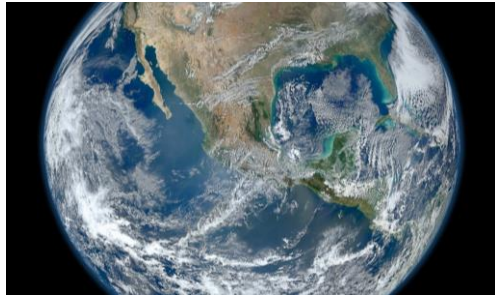
- UK or global victims
- European or global actors and actions

- UK as influencer and economic model for success

on with the job in hand preventing dangerous climate change, adapting to the change to help us tackle the increasing threat of dangerous climate change. The sea provides us with the pathway envisaged in the UK's Climate Change Bill, dangerous climate change would not collective agreement to protect the world from dangerous climate change since the Kyoto protocol would still be left with the threat of dangerous climate change because of the rising emissions and 18 Dec 2007 : Column 730 see the impact that dangerous climate change will have on our country time, to make a contribution to ensuring that dangerous climate change does not in the end overtake and energy package. If we are to avoid dangerous climate change, it is vital that the European Union to play in limiting the damaging effects of dangerous climate change and in leading global action to clean energy for the future and to tackle dangerous climate change. Our vision is of a thriving the action we need to take to prevent dangerous climate change. The gap is too large and means that we are on course for exceeding dangerous climate change, so what will he do to to within 2°, beneath the level that would create dangerous climate change. I have had discussions on change (Gregory Barker) The best strategy to avoid dangerous climate change must be agreeing a new global world will indeed “lock in” the risk of dangerous climate change. More positively, they will

Science and denial

Science should drive policy. But scientific expertise is



- unpalatable / too rigid?

“Stern does not say “I am a scientist: I know the answers”. He says, “I have looked at all the evidence that is available, and have reached the following conclusion”. 2006-11-20

- pitted against economic expertise?

“for those of us who are passionately committed to the green agenda, there are two great threats in these difficult economic times. First, and obviously, there are the climate change deniers, but secondly, and I think even more dangerously at the moment, there are the deficit deniers. There is no greater bunch of deficit-denying opportunists than Opposition Front Benchers, who seem to think that the green economy lives in a vacuum, immune to the economic realities confronting every other sector of the British economy and to the impact that that has on consumer bills.” 2011-11-23



What's missing?

Environmentalism and campaigners
protest, revolution, emergency

Humans
people, humanity, society, community, family

Non-human species
biodiversity, plants, animals, nature



The UK parliament narrative

Low number of 'climate change' tokens, declining trend

Setting

= economic and technical issue (gradualism) with some sense of urgency (catastrophism), but largely happening elsewhere and the responsibility of international actors (scepticism).

Main character

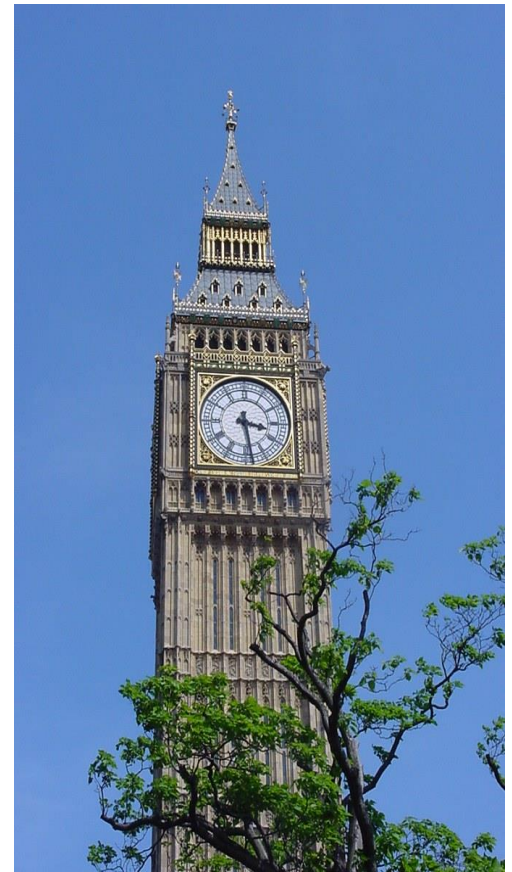
= economic interests (absence of humans/non-humans).

Plot

= abstract challenge / threat (absence of social impacts, ambivalence to science), pitted against 'real' economic concerns.

Moral

= parliament's role is to encourage technical solutions for and by distant others, to display altruism and leadership (only in economic good times?)



Future research areas?

Expansion:

- time-scale
- committee meetings
- devolved parliaments

Focus on word forms:

- verbs
- adjectives
- metaphorical language



Which debates / topics include and exclude climate change?

References

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Thank you



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Tokens of climate change in Hansard 2006-2019 (full year)

From: <https://hansard.hud.ac.uk>

