CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Intersecting Discourses of Death and the Climate Crisis

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INTRODUCTION

The notion of death is intrinsically embedded in discourses of the global climate crisis. Yet, how death is discursively constructed in texts addressing this crisis can vary. Human loss, the extinction of animal life and planetary death occupy discussions of both past losses at the hands of climate change and future threats that come with this exacerbating crisis (e.g., Zhang et al. 2021; Weatherill 2021). Research at the intersection of death and climate seeks to document this loss, but also to propose preventative measures to minimize climate crisis induced fatalities (e.g., Gosling et al. 2017), unpack state reach in the social construction of death as a form of Foucauldian biopower (e.g., Briggle and Briggle 2021) and inspire responses to the climate crisis by forecasting often extreme cases of death and loss. Discursively, metaphorical depictions and emphatic descriptions of death and the climate crisis attempt to render the potential impact of the crisis both accessible and unwelcome. Moreover, cross-culturally, understandings of this crisis further diversify, as how the climate crisis is discursively framed and questioned, for example, appears to vary across languages and contexts (Curry 2024; Dayrell 2019; Engels et al. 2013). Owing to this inherent complexity, multiculturalism and transdisciplinarity, it stands to reason that the way in which the notion of death intersects with the climate crisis is also discursively contingent on these same factors. This chapter endeavours to set this perspective in context, highlighting how discourses of death intersect with discourses of the climate crisis in socially contingent ways.

To do so, Section 2 presents a brief review of literature surrounding discourses of death and the climate crisis, focusing on the relationship between these two phenomena in terms of planetary, animal and human life. Following this broad contextualization, Section 2 also offers a brief review of literature on public-oriented research communication which constitutes the data studied herein. Section 3 presents a case study that operationalizes the notions discussed in Section 2, centring on the discursive construction of death in public-oriented research communication on the climate crisis in English. Finally, Section 4 concludes this chapter, reflecting on its main contributions and the intersecting discourses and ideologies that frame the concept of death in the climate crisis.

DEATH, THE CLIMATE CRISIS, AND PUBLIC-ORIENTED RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Discourses of death and climate crisis

Death is a well-established feature of climate change and the climate crisis. Reporting on the causes of death, for example, is central to wider studies on the climate crisis, with current bodies of knowledge addressing the myriad ways in which death – human, animal and planetary – occurs at the hands of climate change. Deaths owing to temperature change (e.g., heat-related death in heatwaves, Yang and Ha 2013), flooding (e.g., drowning, Zhang et al. 2021), disease (e.g., dengue fever, Naish et al. 2014) and malnutrition (e.g., drought, Lieber et al. 2022) typify the impact of the climate crisis on mortality. Unsurprisingly, much of the climate literature focuses on developing knowledge to inform responses to the climate crisis (e.g., climate adaptation, Gosling et al. 2017).

From a linguistic perspective, climate discourses have been interrogated from many different points of view and across many languages. Discourse studies have identified, for example, the use of metaphor to legitimate and support geoengineering (Nerlich and Jaspal 2012), the framing activity of corporate and government bodies in geoengineering advocacy (Sikka 2012), and the construction of deforestation discourses in Brazilian news media (Dayrell 2019). While, as this wider volume attests, discourses of death occupy a vast canon of research dedicated to understanding how society constructs and addresses notions surrounding death, there is only a limited collection of studies concerned with how death and climate discourses intersect. In fact, most research in this area engages only peripherally with the notion of death, representing an evident dearth in the literature and our collective understanding of death in the climate crisis.

In the literature on discourses of death and the climate crisis, death is often constructed as something abstract and conceptual. For example, the notion of death-worlds in Morris (2022) frames places such as Puerto Rico as being in danger of death and in need of saving, rendering saviour discourses central to their study of the climate crisis. Likewise, in Weatherill (2023), death discourses are constructed within extinction narratives in which both planetary and human life are framed as expendable and disposable. Their study exemplifies the prevalence of colonial power and its role in naturalizing climate-induced death. Elsewhere, discourse studies of media narratives position death conceptually as a cause of ecoanxiety (Benoit et al. 2022), where those suffering from ecoanxiety are predominantly concerned with an impending death associated with the climate crisis. Human death as a consequence of climate change is also constructed in military discourses, where the natural environment is attributed with the cause of death (Hall 2016), while elsewhere, discourses appear to frame human life as fragile, signalling death in the climate crisis primarily as a consequence of fragility (Allan 2017).

Animal and plant death have also featured in discourse studies of the climate crisis. For the former, animal welfare has been associated with *in vitro* meat consumption, with arguments signalling that the consumption of such meat protects animals' lives (Dilworth and McGregor 2015). News media discourses have been seen to argue that the advantages of *in vitro* meat consumption outweigh ethical concerns (Almiron and Zoppeddu 2015). Such views have led scholars to call for critical, nuanced interrogation of this practice of meat consumption (Dilworth and McGregor 2015). Conversely, the death of plant life as a consequence of climate change has emerged from discourse studies of educational materials wherein the occurrence of problems such as pond death are identified and delineated (Sharma and Buxton 2015).

While this cursory view of relevant literature serves to illustrate the current state of the art in discourse studies of death and the climate crisis, there remains much to study in order to gain a nuanced understanding of the construction of the complex discourses of death in the climate crisis. This chapter specifically focuses on the study of public-oriented research communication to access the culturally and socially situated construction of death in this crisis. This focus was chosen as such an analysis affords insight into how discourses of death form part of climate crisis knowledge construction, disseminated by academics and scientists to readers beyond the academy.

Public-oriented research communication and the climate crisis

In the context of knowledge production, there is a range of genres that academics produce to construct and communicate their research, on topics such as the climate crisis, to one another. These include research articles, conference presentations, books and book chapters. Notably, all of these genres have come to be understood within their disciplinary confines as forms of disciplinary genres, with established conventions and reader expectations (Bhatia 2015; Hyland 2015). In the production of digital genres, a more recent trend in academia has seen a growth in public-oriented research communication (e.g., Curry and Pérez-Paredes 2025; Luzón and Pérez-Llantada 2022), through which academics share their research with those beyond their disciplinary confines and with non-specialist audiences via the likes of academic news blog posts and podcasts.

As an emergent genre, academic news blog posts are noted for their hybridity, reflecting features of both academic and journalistic texts. While limited research exists on such texts, there is a growing interest in studying academic news blog posts, owing to the insight they afford into the socially and culturally situated construction of knowledge (Curry 2024; Curry and Pérez-Paredes 2021, 2025; Deaconu 2011; Luzón 2018). In their study of COVID-19 discourses in English and Spanish, for example, Curry and Pérez-Paredes (2021) argue that the academic news blog posts they analysed reflected culturally contingent ways of understanding the pandemic. This in turn offered insight into how different cultures and countries were experiencing and managing the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, in their study of journalistic texts and academic news blog posts on COVID-19 vaccinations, Zou and Hyland (2024) discuss the role of stance markers in framing knowledge of vaccinations and in persuading audiences to engage with and adopt authorial perspectives. The blog posts in this case reflected a socially constructed means to develop understandings of COVID-19 vaccinations and engage readers in that construction process.

In the context of the climate crisis, the climate blogosphere has received much attention (Sharman 2014), though this research largely centres on blog posts produced by climate activists, climate sceptics and organizations dedicated to addressing climate change, as opposed to independent academic researchers. Research, such as that of van Eck and Feindt (2022), has investigated culturally situated ontologies in blog posts produced by climate sceptics and climate activists in the UK. Their research shows how climate sceptics undermine scientific evidence as a means to support their views, while activists, for example, focus on future research as a means of offering potential solutions for the climate crisis. Elsewhere, Fløttum et al. (2014), using the NTAP blog corpus (Salway et al. 2013), found climate change to be viewed as a threat, not only in relation to nature and human life, but also to security, the economy and industry. Focusing on polarized perspectives, their research shows the affordances of blog posts for socially constructing collective

understandings of the climate crisis, which, they argue, can offer insight into future climate responses, policies and adaptation. Yet, despite the evident role that the academy plays in the global and social construction of climate knowledge, there is a surprising scarcity of work on academic and scientific climate-themed discourses. A recent contribution by Curry and Pérez-Paredes (2025) offers critical insight into the register of academic news blog posts about the climate crisis. However, while this is an important contribution in terms of the registral features of such forms of academic communication, our understanding of how academic knowledge of this global issue and crisis is *discursively* constructed remains unclear. Recognizing the dearth in research on the intersection of death and climate discourses, the limited work on public-oriented research communication of the climate crisis, and the affordances of public-oriented research communication for offering insight into the socially situated construction and dissemination of knowledge, this chapter aims to operationalize the discussion thus far through the analysis of the discursive construction of death in public-oriented research texts on the climate crisis in English.

CASE STUDY: DISCOURSES OF DEATH IN ENGLISH CLIMATE-THEMED PUBLIC-ORIENTED RESEARCH COMMUNICATION

Data: The Conversation Corpus of Climate Discourses in English

A corpus is a principled collection of texts deemed to be representative of the language used by specific populations, in specific contexts and for specific purposes. Generally, corpora are quite large in size. However, in many domains of research, including discourse analysis, translation studies, stylistics, languages for specific purposes and contrastive studies, small, specialized corpora are the norm, owing to their value for responding to very specific and deeply contextualized research questions. This chapter is based on the analysis of a small, specialized corpus called *The Conversation Corpus of Climate Discourses in English* (henceforth, CDE). CDE is composed of academic blogs from the English language versions of *The Conversation* website and includes all texts indexed in *The Conversation* with tags that relate to climate discourses, for example, climate change. The metadata scraped include author name(s), author affiliation(s), date and year of publication, region of publication, the thematic category under which the blog is published, the tags used to index the blogs and whether or not the text is translated. In terms of text, only titles and authorial texts were scraped from the website and advertisements and comments were excluded. Overall, it represents the entire catalogue of research published on the topic in *The Conversation* from the inception of the website in 2011 up until January 2024. Table 18.1 presents a summary of this corpus when analysed using Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al. 2014).

Analytical approach

This analysis of the discursive construction of death in climate crisis texts in CDE is based specifically on the use of the lemma DEATH. The lemma was chosen to allow for case insensitivity and the use of plural forms, and the decision was made to focus on DEATH as it offers a means to access discourses engaging directly with the theme of death. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive approach, as other terms, such as *deceased*, *kill*, *extinction*, *perish* and so on, could not only offer a deeper insight into discourses of death,

TABLE 18.1: The conversation corpus of climate discourses in English

Metadata	*CDE*
Tokens	6,953,600
Sentences	292,215
Blogs	6,572
Authors	6,122
Affiliations	696
Dates	2,782
Years	14
Regions	9
Themes	19
Topics	8,043
Translated Texts	392

TABLE 18.2: Death in the CDE

CDEFS Subcorpus	*Lemma*	*Raw Freq.*	*Relative Freq. per 1000 words*	*Range*
English	DEATH	1457	0.2	12%

but potentially a more nuanced one. Therefore, it is important to see this case study only as an illustration of the relationship between death and the climate crisis. Table 18.2 presents the frequency and range of distribution of DEATH in CDE.

In studying this lemma, I employed a collocation analysis. Collocation is the study of linguistic co-occurrence, typically measured in terms of frequency and varying degrees of exclusivity and directionality. From a discourse analytic perspective, collocation analysis reveals words that co-occur more frequently than one might expect, offering insight into the company words keep, the use of specific words in context, and words' situated meaning(s). Using Mutual Information (MI), collocates for DEATH were computed to identify those with a score of 3 or above within a range fives spaces to the right and left of the node. In order to further ensure generalizability in terms of the wider corpus data, minimum frequency counts were set to ensure that only those collocates that occur at least ten times in the corpus and three times within the range were retrieved. This use of MI and frequency cut-offs follows standard practices in corpus-based discourse studies (e.g., Baker et al. 2013; Brookes 2023) and, in this study, the process identified 531 collocates of DEATH.

All instances of these collocates with an MI score above 3 were analysed qualitatively to identify a thematic category to which they belong. Through bottom-up coding of sample concordance lines for each collocate, a total of twenty-three categories were identified, including the likes of 'Climate and Environmental Issues' (e.g., heat-related deaths), 'Health Impacts and Conditions' (e.g., deaths and injuries), and 'Numbers and Statistics' (e.g., thousands of deaths). In light of the theme of this handbook, the category of 'Mortality and Death' is noteworthy here – a category composed of collocates that relate semantically to the notion of death. As such, the remainder of this case study focuses solely on the collocates of DEATH that were categorized as such. Table 18.3 presents the frequency information for each collocate of DEATH identified within this category.

TABLE 18.3: Frequency information for collocates of DEATH in 'Mortality and Death' category in CDE

Word	*Category*	*Freq. as a collocate in CDE*	*Freq. in CDE*	*Freq. per 1000 words*	*MI*
drowning	Mortality and Death	10	72	0.01	9.4
deaths	Mortality and Death	15	704	0.1	6.7
died	Mortality and Death	6	286	0.04	6.7
dying	Mortality and Death	4	187	0.02	6.7
mortality	Mortality and Death	4	201	0.03	6.7
life	Mortality and Death	41	2616	0.38	6.2
deadly	Mortality and Death	3	225	0.03	6
killed	Mortality and Death	3	349	0.05	5.4
loss	Mortality and Death	5	2230	0.32	3.4

TABLE 18.4: Frequency information for the thematic grouping of collocates of DEATH in 'Mortality and Death' category in CDE

	Causes of Death	*The Human Experience and Death*	*Fixed Expressions using Death*	*Non-Human Death*	*Death as a Societal Issue*	*Positive and Unnecessary Death*	*Total*
Frequency	27	13	28	9	7	6	90
Percentage	30	14	31	10	8	7	100

Results and discussion

Each collocate presented in Table 18.3 was investigated in order to identify their role in the discursive construction of death in the climate crisis in CDE, with those that did not relate to death and the climate crisis being removed. Bottom-up coding resulted in the classification of ninety collocates into one of six groups: 1) Causes of Death; 2) The Human Experience and Death; 3) Fixed Expressions using Death; 4) Non-Human Death; 5) Death as a Societal Issue; and 6) Positive and Unnecessary Death. Table 18.4 presents the frequency and percentage of collocate per thematic grouping. In the interest of space, the discussion of each group focuses on the majority patterns that characterize the use of DEATH and its collocates therein.

Causes of death and death as a societal issue

For causes of death, the lemma DEATH collocates with *deadly*, *deaths* and *drowning*, serving to signal both the causes and types of death related to the climate crisis. Drowning features prominently as a cause of death, with authors signalling that death by drowning can be a result of both flooding and heat-related climatic disasters, as Examples 1 and 2 attest.

Example 1
Our excess mortality calculations identify heatwaves contributed to an additional 13 ***drowning deaths*** between 2010 and 2019.

Example 2
In 2021–22, 13% of ***drowning deaths*** in Australia were flood-related.

Notably, death by drowning owing to climate change was claimed to have impacted people in Mexico, the Mediterranean, the USA, the UK and New Zealand in several different blogs, demonstrating the global nature of the relationship between climate, drowning and death. This phenomenon is reported widely in the academic literature (e.g., Sindall et al. 2022; Zhang et al. 2021) and, arguably, is not so much a linguistic finding as an insight into reporting on death and climate, globally.

Yet, there remain linguistic findings of note embedded in these climate crisis discourses. Interestingly, there is a propensity in the CDE data to label and typify climate-induced deaths by creating categories or types of death. In Examples 1 and 2, the concept of *drowning deaths* constructs and conceptualizes a particular type of death. So too do Examples 3 and 4, wherein authors construct the notion of *heat-related*, *cold-related* and *temperature-related* deaths.

Example 3
However, they predict this pattern would reverse by mid-century under the business-as-usual emissions scenario, with increases in heat-related ***deaths*** outweighing decreases in cold-related ***deaths*** over the long term

Example 4
We use statistical techniques to distinguish temperature-related ***deaths*** from ***deaths*** due to unrelated causes.

This practice of pre-modification serves to normalize and categorize death in the climate crisis by its specific cause, rendering clear that such deaths are the result of climatic changes. Generally, the use of the abstract noun *deaths* as both node and collocate constructs death in the climate crisis as a concept, distinct from a form of material action or process. This focus on cause but not recipient could be seen as a means to dehumanize death in the climate crisis (Weatherill 2023), as death itself becomes something of a social actor (García Marrugo 2017).

As well as typifying and categorizing climate-related deaths, causal discourses of death in the climate crisis serve to imbue the environment with a natural and innate danger, through the use of *deadly*, as Example 5 attests.

Example 5
The border-crossing between the United States and Mexico is particularly ***deadly***, with 2,980 ***deaths*** recorded since 2014.

In this case, the border-crossing is signalled to be the cause of death and the text continues to explain that drowning and the harsh environmental conditions that migrants face when attempting to cross the border are largely responsible for these deaths. Thus, the environment becomes accountable and responsible for these deaths. However, one could argue that the true cause of such deaths is the infrastructure in place that limits migration and forces migrants to pursue dangerous paths to cross the border. In such cases, the environment, labelled as *deadly*, acts as a form of scapegoat (Hall 2016), being attributed as the cause of what is arguably an avoidable death (Munandar and Basuki 2021).

A similar story emerges in the analysis of the collocates *deaths* and *mortality* that co-occur with the lemma DEATH in CDE to construct death as a societal issue. The quantification of deaths is a key feature of death as a social issue, whereby, as a form of Foucauldian biopower, death is objectified and commodified as a countable yet abstract phenomenon that impacts specific states (Biermann and Anderson 2017). In Example 6, death rates in Bangladesh are discussed in this way.

Example 6
More recent strikes, such as Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Alia in 2009, had over 3,400 ***deaths*** and about 190 ***deaths*** respectively.

Rates of *mortality* are also quantified, as can be seen in Example 7, which is an extract from a discussion of climate-related death rates in Canada.

Example 7
This has reduced ***mortality*** by 2.52 *deaths* per day during hot days.

The human experience and death, non-human death and positive and unnecessary death

When constructing death in the climate crisis as part of the human experience, authors collocate DEATH with *died*, *dying* and *life*. In this group, the role of death in the climate crisis is constructed as an occurrence and a process (García Marrugo 2017), with people having died, as Example 8 demonstrates.

Example 8
Some 30,000 people were evacuated, 1,000 square kilometres of land was inundated, and 307 people in England and 19 people in Scotland ***died***. The ***death*** toll was particularly bad on Canvey Island in the Thames Estuary.

In this case, the abstract noun *death* is used in conjunction with the verb *died* to report on the people who died amid flooding. This usage reflects a marked difference from the focus on causes and societal issues, wherein the people who died as a result of the climate crisis were obscured by the focus on abstract deaths and their causes, and the quantification of death.

A further means through which humanity, the climate crisis and death are intertwined in CDE is the framing of death as a natural end of life (Carpentier and Van Brussel 2012; Gathigia et al. 2018). Example 9 demonstrates this connection through the juxtaposition of *life*, *death* and the natural world.

Example 9
This transformation represents the duality of nature as a bringer of ***life*** and ***death***, echoing how the natural world has the ability to both support and destroy humankind.

From a metaphorical perspective, DEATH appears to collocate with *dying* as part of a spiralling time metaphor (Jablonsky 2017), reflecting the natural cycle of dying and death, as Example 10 demonstrates. This construction of death as a natural and recursive phenomenon positions death as a composite part of life and the human experience.

Example 10
Mourning our losses, together, pushes us through numbness and anxiety, toward the reality of the natural cycles of ***dying*** and ***death***, and those that humans have accelerated.

These juxtapositions of death and life and the framing of death as part of a cycle naturalizes the relationship between life and death and, once again, appears to link nature with the cause of death in the climate crisis (Munandar and Basuki 2021). Death becomes unavoidable and a feature of the human condition. While this may be true and while nature may have the capacity to destroy human life, one must not omit the role that humans play in developing and exacerbating the climate crisis.

From a non-human perspective, death is both seen as a process and an abstract concept when addressing animal and plant life. As such, the collocates *died*, *dying*, *killed*, *loss* and

mortality serve to construct non-human death in a manner similar to the human experience, as well as causes of death and death as a societal issue. Animals and plants are attributed with the process of dying in Examples 11 and 12. In both cases, the verb from is used in combination with *death* to specify non-climatic causes of animal death or to humanize plant death while rendering human death abstract, as Examples 11 and 12 show.

Example 11
Some frogs may have frozen to ***death***, ***died*** from diseases or from old age.

Example 12
Recent record temperatures in India and Pakistan resulted in crops ***dying*** and increased ***death*** rates.

While this may be a stylistic choice to avoid the repetition of *death*, the construction of non-human death in the climate crisis in this way appears to present death as a natural process for animals, and a climate-induced process for crops.

At times, planetary life is presented as the victim of human activity (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006). In Example 13, the planet is personified and positioned as being *killed* by humans.

Example 13
To be more specific, the earth was being ***killed***. Done to ***death*** by its fond owners.

A more common trend, however, is the construction of the death of animal and plant life as an abstract concept. *Loss*, for example, is used in combination with *suffering* and *death* to discuss the loss of species, as Example 14 shows. Likewise, *mortality* rates are used to document the death of trees, as can be seen in Example 15.

Example 14
Many Australians feel a similar frustration – this time chronic – at the refusal of their government to 'turn around' to face what's clear to everyone else, a galloping climate emergency which portends ***death***, suffering and species ***loss*** on a planetary scale.

Example 15
Even old-growth tropical forests are highly dynamic systems, marked by cycles of tree ***death*** and regrowth. The ***mortality*** rates for trees larger than 10 centimeters in diameter have been estimated at one percent to two percent per year for forests in the Amazon and Central America.

In both of these examples, the death of animal and plant life is presented abstractly. Moreover, the notion of loss and the quantification of death can be seen as a form of objectification and commodification whereby non-human life is treated as something that is owned, from a biopolitical perspective (Bird and Lynch 2017) or countable and, therefore, disposable (Weatherill 2023).

In both human and non-human death, there is a propensity to construct death through DEATH's collocates *deaths* and *life* as something that is preventable or as something to which one can respond (Kübler-Ross 2012; Whitney and Smith 2010). For example, *life* collocates with *death* to signal how life can form from death, as Examples 16–18 show.

Example 16
But I see soil very differently: as a very thin, breathing skin of the planet, full of myriad different, beautiful forms of invisible life – an ecosystem that enables ***life*** to reform from ***death***.

Example 17
New research shows how carrion beetles turn ***death*** into ***life***.

Example 18
In the midst of ***death***, ***life*** persists.

In this way, life and death are juxtaposed in a more hopeful manner when compared to death as a natural part of life. In this case, death is not the end point, but part of the process for the production of new life. This perspective constructs death in a more positive manner (Kübler-Ross 2012), potentially minimizing the negative impacts of the climate crisis on life on earth.

Elsewhere, death is also presented as something unnecessary, often drawing on research as evidence to support the evaluation of death as early and premature. This construction of death signals the potentially avoidable causes of death in the climate crisis, framing death as a potentially unnatural consequence of the climate crisis (Whitney and Smith 2010), as Examples 19 and 20 attest.

Example 19
One study linked hospitalization from acute heat illness to an increased risk of early ***death*** later in ***life***.

Example 20
The MIT study draws upon pollutant emissions data, meteorological and air quality models and epidemiological evidence to quantify particulate matter and ozone-related premature ***deaths*** in 2005. These ***deaths*** were attributed to electric power generation, industry, commercial or residential activities, and road, marine and rail transport.

Fixed expressions using death

The final thematic grouping of DEATH and its collocates relates to the use of DEATH and *died*, *dying* and *life* as part of fixed expressions. Three primary expressions emerged, with the first being *to die a death*; the second, *death of life*; and the third, *life and death*. Arguably, these expressions could be divided into their roles in constructing discourses related to causes, social issues, human and non-human life, and positive and unnecessary deaths. However, I decided to address these expressions separately owing to both their frequency and flexibility in terms of their reference. From a formal perspective, fixed expressions can act as so-called routine formulae (Coulmas 1979) that have a form of linguistic currency that emerges from their recognizable, accessible and socially situated nature. Owing to their routine usage, the formal nature of fixed expressions can be an effective point from which to unpack their functional reflexivity and offer insight into the use of specific, frequent and recurring socially situated forms.

Expressions such as *die a death* appear in the CDE data. In such cases, as Example 21 shows, the use of both *die* and *death* could be seen as a process of overlexicalization (Erjavec 2004), whereby the two death-related terms serve to accentuate both the seriousness and finality of the issue.

Example 21
And thousands of coal miners have ***died*** horrible ***deaths*** from silicosis after inhaling tiny silicon particles in mines.

The expression *death of life* appears to be a similar case of overlexicalization, as, although all death pertains to the end of life, the use of both terms strengthens the reality and severity of the issue.

Example 22
This climate change in turn affects the composition of the oceans and quickly leads to the ***death*** of ***life*** on Earth.

Authors, therefore, appear to use these expressions to offer an emphatic construction of death. In so doing, they signal its ultimate nature and finality.

The most frequent expression in the CDE data involves the use of *life and death*. When referring to issues in the climate crisis as a matter of *life and death*, authors often signal those people and entities at risk in the climate crisis. In many cases, vulnerable social groups are evoked, as Examples 23–25 demonstrate.

Example 23
For older adults experiencing homelessness or housing issues, it could mean ***life*** or ***death***.

Example 24
It is, quite literally, a matter of **life** and ***death*** for both vulnerable human populations and for natural ecosystems.

Example 25
But for the one in ten households in the UK living in fuel poverty, who are unable to afford to properly heat their homes, it can mean the difference between ***life*** and ***death***.

This expression, therefore, is often used to signal death inequality in the climate crisis, as those most likely to be at risk belong to often impoverished or unsupported communities (Harlan et al. 2015). As such, this propensity to construct death using this fixed expression offers researchers ways of accessing discourses of climate injustice.

A further trend in the use of *life and death* pertains to the causes of life and death situations. In the case of this expression in the CDE corpus, much of the focus links to the dissemination and communication of climate crisis knowledge. Issues such as access to knowledge, the accuracy of knowledge and the sharing of information are all presented as potentially meaning the difference between life and death, as Examples 26–28 show.

Example 26
Even a 1-degree difference in a forecast's accuracy can be the difference between ***life*** and ***death***, our research shows.

Example 27
In matters of health and climate change, misinformation can be a matter of ***life*** and ***death***.

Example 28
The importance of clearly communicating science to the public should not be underestimated. Accurately understanding our natural environment and sharing that information can be a matter of ***life*** or ***death***.

In such cases, the authors construct death as something caused by a lack of access to high-quality and reliable information. This view reflects a perspective on death as unnecessary, in that it could be avoided by access to relevant information, and death in the climate crisis as a form of climate injustice, since, in their view, access to knowledge can save lives.

Discussion of findings

Through this brief investigation of the discursive construction of death in climate crisis public-oriented research communication, it emerges that discourses of death are embedded within fixed expressions, such as *life and death*, and that they thematically construct death

in the climate crisis as an issue defined by its cause, its humanity, it relationship with non-human entities, its construction as a social issue and its framing as positive and unnecessary, in order of descending frequency. The primary expression used to construct discourses of death involves DEATH's juxtaposition with *life*, where, interestingly, overlexicalization is used to underscore the seriousness of death while issues of life and death appear to be a means to access the root causes of climate-induced death and those at risk of it. This latter expression positions death in the climate crisis as a social justice issue, and further analysis of *life and death* in climate-themed texts would offer much-needed insight into the importance of this expression in the construction of death discourses in the climate crisis. It would be particularly interesting to note whether changes in authorship (e.g., journalists) or audience (e.g., government bodies) impact the operationalization of this expression.

From a causal perspective, discourses of death in the climate crisis gravitate around the notions of blame and accountability. Deaths are presented abstractly, with a focus on how people die as opposed to who it is that dies. Moreover, there is an ostensive obscuring of human agency as the cause of death in the climate crisis. The environment is naturalized as a malevolent force, causing death and creating danger. Through such discourses, death is not only abstracted, but, in an implicit manner, human impact is removed. The climate crisis as a result of human behaviour has advanced exponentially since the 1950s (Steffen et al. 2015). Capitalistic practices, increased productivity, waste mismanagement and non-adherence to climate change prevention measures have had an incalculable impact on the planet and all forms of planetary life, exacerbating climatic disasters. This exacerbation can ultimately result in human, animal and plant death (Wright and Nyberg 2015). Yet, as Hall (2016) found in a study of military discourses, in these causal discourses of climate knowledge production, death is caused by the climate, with humans nowhere to be found.

Humans are represented in discourses of death that frame it as an action and process. This lends a temporary, fragile nature to human life, which is framed as something that ultimately concludes in death (Weatherill 2023). In the wider literature on discourses of death, it can be seen as something to be challenged (e.g., Brault-Dreux 2021), with humans striving for mastery over death and focusing on its medicalization. Therefore, the construction of death as something natural, as is made evident in these data, could be seen to offer a valuable counter-perspective to the human preoccupation with fighting death (Carpentier and Van Brussel 2012; Gathigia et al. 2018). However, this naturalization of death in the climate crisis as being an environmental process, not one exacerbated by human action, poses risks of misinformation and disinformation. This is because death resulting from changes in nature perpetrated by human action could, and arguably should, be seen as something unnatural (Briggle and Briggle 2021). These same patterns are evident in the discourses of non-human death, in which animal and plant deaths are seen as a process and a natural part of life, akin to human death, or are framed abstractly and objectified (Bird and Lynch 2017). The predominantly abstract representation of animal and plant life in the CDE data echo wider cultural views of animals and plants as products or objects that can be consumed and discarded by humans (Bos et al. 2018). While the naturalizing of human death affords, at least, some opportunity for the Foucauldian notion of a 'good life' (Hancock 2018), animals and plants appear not to have acquired such affordances of self-governance. It should be noted that there is infrequent evidence of plant death being addressed more directly in CDE, a pattern also evidenced in Sharma and Buxton (2015). It is possible that, despite its often taboo nature (Sayer 2010), death, in relation to plants, may seem more directly accessible to the authors and their intended audiences by means of the humanization and anthropomorphization of nature (Tam et al. 2013).

Overall, the combined focus on abstract death and causes, the placing of responsibility and accountability for death on the environment, the framing of human death in the climate crisis as a natural part of life, and the abstraction and objectification of plant and animal life appear to be converging in a discourse that distances human action and responsibility from the deaths discussed in CDE. Instead, the discourses frame death in its wider social consciousness. This conceptualization of death signals the reach of governmental, state and institutional bodies in the construction of death in society. The prominence of death rates and the quantification of deaths in discourses of death in the climate crisis evidence the role of biopolitics in the framing of the concept of death. This discursive construction of death reflects facets of Foucauldian biopower, as these public-oriented research communications appear to naturalize the conceptualization of death, and by this proxy, life, as a product of the state (Briggle and Briggle 2021; Hancock 2018). The naturalization of such a view reflects, in effect, a legitimation of this stately power and raises questions for the academy as to the best means to avoid the reconstruction and dissemination of harmful discourses when discussing and framing death, more generally, and in the context of the climate crisis, specifically.

It should be noted that some counter-perspectives to these converging discourses emerge, through the focus on unnecessary deaths, for example. The presentation of death as something early and premature signals that such deaths should not be happening. This is likely owing to the view that the climate crisis and its effects are somewhat unnatural, exacerbated by human behaviour (Steffen et al. 2015). Such views offer valuable contextualization for climate-induced deaths and, though infrequent overall, signal the complexity of the climate crisis and the social construction of death therein.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this chapter has demonstrated both how death and the climate crisis are intrinsically linked and the value of unpacking the discursive construction of death in public-oriented climate crisis research communication. Through a corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the lemma DEATH and its collocates, this study has identified various ways in which death is discursively constructed in such texts, signalling that death in the climate crisis is, among other things, largely abstracted and naturalized. Yet, these processes of abstraction and naturalization are potentially harmful, risking the spread of misinformation and disinformation from trusted sources of knowledge production.

While death is a natural part of life, death in the climate crisis is considerably more nuanced. As a global phenomenon, the climate crisis operates in a complex ecosystem of intersecting crises. In this way, climate issues intersect with other global issues, including a wide array of health, economic, political and social challenges that may situate it as part of a so-called polycrisis. Death in this polycrisis, then, is linked not just to climate issues but, inter alia, to socioeconomic issues, climate justice, and the spreading of disease. Death is universal and one of the few certainties in life, but that is not to say it is understood in the same way across cultures. The data studied herein reflect Anglocentric perspectives on the intersection of discourses of death and climate in knowledge construction and dissemination. It is widely recognized that cultural and linguistic backgrounds shape epistemological and communicative practices in science and knowledge dissemination. Therefore, recognizing the potential challenges emerging from the discursive construction of death in the climate crisis in the CDE data, further insight into how languages other than English with diverse epistemological backgrounds engage with discourses of death in the climate crisis is warranted. Such insight

would not only prove beneficial for intercultural understandings of death, but also offer potential recourse for a nuanced and critical framing of death in the climate crisis.

Overall, as intersecting discourses, death and the climate crisis facilitate a critical perspective on how those responsible for developing knowledge engage with, understand and reconstruct the role of death in the climate crisis. While naturalizing death can be beneficial to help us, as humans, contend with our own mortality, it is important that we do not conflate natural death with that caused, at least in some way, by human behaviour. As scholars, it is imperative that we render clear the role of humans in the exacerbation of the climate crisis and the responsibility we bear for deaths therein.

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