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Positive discourse analysis of Aotearoa New Zealand Foreign Minister's speeches: an ecolinguistic perspective

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Abstract: As opposed to Western ideologies that promote unrestrained consumption of environmental resources, Indigenous or Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) encourages a more beneficial relationship with nature. In order to address underrepresented subjects and contexts, this article investigates the integration of TEK within political discourse by examining a corpus of speeches given by Aotearoa New Zealand former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nanaia Mahuta, between 2020 and 2022. The study refers to the frameworks of ecolinguistics and Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) to understand how Māori culture shapes Mahuta's linguistic choices. Particularly, it focusses the attention on lexical and figurative items, drawing on the concepts of metaphor, framing, and intertextuality. Results show a considerable concern over the state of the environment in Mahuta's speeches. Furthermore, they reveal the presence of an adaptation framing inspired by Indigenous thinking that acknowledges nature's agency and complexity. The latter is used to conceptualise current environmental challenges and international cooperation directed at tackling them. Mahuta's language ultimately supports the idea of interconnectedness within nature and offers as an instance of positive discourse in institutional settings.

Keywords: Aotearoa New Zealand; ecolinguistics; framing; political discourse; positive discourse analysis

1 Introduction

Environmental communication intended as the production and dissemination of knowledge about the environment is central to shaping people's attitude and behaviour towards nature. While it has inevitably come to be a part of different types of discourses, its incursion into the language of politics rises interest – if not

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concern – as to the kind of representations put forward by political leaders. Indeed, it is in their power to carry out actions that can either mitigate or aggravate environmental degradation. Because the current ecological crisis has its roots in the uncontrolled exploitation of the earth that is inherent in capitalist thinking, political debate especially in the West tends to reiterate unsustainable narratives that run counter to the supposed aims of environmental action. As an alternative to this, ecological values endemic to Indigenous¹ knowledge systems can inspire renewed efforts towards the protection of the natural world (Berkes 2008; MacGregor 2018).

The present article is aimed at understanding whether instances of political discourse from geo-cultural contexts that are informed by Indigenous knowledge can in fact offer sustainable representations of nature and humans' relationship with it. For this purpose, it analyses a corpus of public speeches delivered between 2020 and 2022 by Nanaia Mahuta, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of Aotearoa New Zealand from 2020 to 2023, and the first Māori woman to hold the portfolio.

The analysis collocates itself within the theoretical frameworks of ecolinguistics (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001; Fill and Penz 2018; Penz and Fill 2022; Stibbe 2021) and Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA) (Bartlett 2012; Martin 2004; Stibbe 2018), and combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to linguistic data. Quantitative results demonstrate that the Minister's speeches are consistently preoccupied with environmental issues. Furthermore, the qualitative examination – which focusses on lexical items, framings, metaphors, and intertextuality – reveals the presence of a broad adaptation framing. This conceptualises both response to environmental challenges and human disposition towards nature in terms of recognition and adaptation to nature's own pace. Overall, it is suggested that Mahuta's beneficial representation of the natural world specifically derives from the Māori worldview as integrated in her addresses.

2 Literature review

Despite the role played by politicians in influencing public opinion on matters of global interest, the intersection between political discourse and environmental communication has not received sustained attention from linguistic analysis. Authors such as Kuha (2018) have widened the scope of the language of politics to encompass the language of *policy*, and accordingly collect examples from environmental policy communication, as well, but these more properly belong to news discourse. Moreover, with the exception of Mansyur et al.'s (2021) investigation of

¹ For the sake of acknowledging the importance of Indigenous thought, I chose to capitalise all instances of the adjective throughout the article, as it is standard practice with nationality adjectives.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo's statement at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (also known as COP 21), previous studies are limited to the Western context (Willis 2017), especially North-America (Bevitori 2015; Bonnefille 2008; Peterson 2004).

While Peterson (2004) inaugurated research on American presidential "green talk", Bonnefille (2008) and Bevitori (2015) complemented such efforts with the tools provided by cognitive and corpus linguistics, respectively. Bonnefille examined the environmental rhetoric of George W. Bush's State of the Union Addresses (SOUAs) between 2001 and 2008, with specific reference to his conceptualisation of climate change. She found that the President consistently tackled the issue by using both a dependence and security frame that stressed America's need to produce safe and clean energy domestically, instead of relying on the Middle East. Together, these framings contributed to the development of a narrative that presented the former country as a dependent character, and the latter as a villain. Ultimately, Bonnefille interpreted Bush's rhetoric as an instance of greenwashing, given that the President's insistence on the topic did not stem from genuine concerns over the state of the environment, but rather from fear of the economic recession that the country was facing during those years.

Epidectic or ceremonial discourse is at the core of Bevitori's (2015) research, too. She expanded on previous work by carrying out a diachronic analysis of SOUAs, inaugural, and acceptance speeches across ten American presidencies (Johnson-Obama). Through corpus-assisted methods, she identified Nixon, Carter, and Clinton as those most frequently addressing environmental topics. In the case of the former two, this corresponded to the 1970s oil crisis, which equally marked a shift in the meaning attributed to environmental protection. Indeed, the early conservationist approach towards the preservation of America's natural beauty, for example during Johnson's administration, was at that time supplanted by issues related to technology and economy. Confirming Bonnefille's results, Bevitori observed that from the 70s onward, Presidents would discuss the environment by mentioning the national and independent production of safe and clean energy.

Willis's (2017) examination accounts for the representation of climate change in the British political setting. Specifically, she referred to a corpus of speeches by Members of Parliament (MPs) about the Climate Change Bill (2008). Through keyword and collocation analysis, and semantic tagging, Willis found out that the language used by politicians to discuss climate breakdown was essentially scientific and economic. Reference to *science* and *scientists* was aimed at justifying climate action by highlighting factual evidence, whereas the relevance of the economic framing proved that most of the measures suggested were concerned with leveraging the economic impacts of climate change. Conversely, potentially catastrophic events were not discussed, nor were implications for both people and non-

human beings taken into account. Willis understood this as a general tendency to “taming the climate” (Willis 2017: 225), i.e. presenting climate change as a highly technical matter in order to downplay or conceal its most worrying effects.

Mansyur et al. (2021) explicitly adopted an ecolinguistic perspective in their analysis. As opposed to earlier studies, they considered a single speech, which is ultimately evaluated as a positive example of environmental communication within politics. They especially focussed on instances of transitivity patterns according to Halliday’s functional grammar, and found that material clauses were the most consistent in Joko Widodo’s statement. Material clauses are realised by verbs that express processes of doing and happening (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014), hence identifying an actor or doer who performs the action described. In Widodo’s speech, the syntactic position of material actors was more frequently taken up by the subjects *developed countries* and *Indonesia*. However, while the former were described as the doer of actions resulting in climate change, therefore being assigned responsibility towards it, *Indonesia* was represented as involved in carrying out actions that try to mitigate the impact of environmental issues.

In light of the existing research, this study strives to provide new perspectives on the relationship between political discourse and environmental communication by accounting for underrepresented subjects and contexts. For this reason, it directs its attention to Aotearoa New Zealand and Nanaia Mahuta’s speeches.

3 Theoretical foundation

The present article wishes to contribute to research within that strand of ecolinguistics that has been named “critical ecolinguistics” (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001; Zhou 2021). In particular, it offers an instance of ecolinguistic PDA (Martin 2004; Stibbe 2018).

Ecolinguistics as a whole originally developed from the introduction of the ecological metaphor into linguistic studies (Haugen 2001 [1972]; Sapir 2001 [1912]). This prompted insights into the behaviour of languages within their ecosystems, i.e. how languages interact within the same environment. Following such initial endeavour – which however continues to spark interest (Bastardas-Boada 2018; Romaine 2018; Skutnabb-Kangas and Harmon 2018) – attention began to shift towards the relationship between language and the *natural* environment. Building from the tradition of discourse studies that recognises a link between language and ideologies (Fairclough 1996; van Dijk 2000), it was understood that particular linguistic uses can favour representations of nature that affect the way speakers think of and relate to it. As a result, ecolinguistics collected scholarly efforts aimed at the identification of the former.

The first significant contributions to critical ecolinguistics had the language system as their object of study. For instance, Halliday (2001 [1990]) saw in the English distinction between countable and uncountable nouns a tendency to represent natural elements as though they were unbounded and potentially inexhaustible resources – e.g. “a *reservoir* of water” (Halliday 2001 [1990]: 194). Similarly, and as a further application of his functional grammar, he noted that material and mental processes very rarely do take non-human beings as subjects, so that these are usually treated as passive or inanimate objects. Goatly (2001) recognised a similar disposition towards the portrayal of nature’s assumed fixity in English syntax, especially in the case of transitivity. At the same time, he offered instances of a “green grammar” that could overturn anthropocentric representations of nature, for example by means of grammatical metaphors and ergative verbs.

Parallel to this, ecolinguistics developed an interest in the study of language in use. As such, it took the form of a “text-critical” (Fill and Mühlhäusler 2001) or “discourse-focused” (Poole 2022) ecolinguistics. This consists in applying a various range of discourse analytical tools to authentic texts in order to assess the type of ideologies they promote, with respect to their implications on the treatment of the natural world. Stibbe’s (2021) most comprehensive and practical approach to the discipline defines it as “the study of the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment” (Stibbe 2021: 223). He distinguishes among “destructive”, “ambivalent”, and “beneficial” (Stibbe 2021: 22–30) discourses, based on whether they encourage destruction or support of natural ecosystems; accordingly, he understands ecolinguistic analysis as directed at contributing to this categorisation. Like most discourse analysis, ecolinguistic examination can be conducted at different linguistic levels. However, it is most often aimed at addressing framings, metaphors, appraisal, facticity, erasure, and salience patterns (Stibbe 2021). These indeed focus on language uses which contribute to the formation of “stories we live by” (Stibbe 2021: 6) that influence the way people think, talk, and act about and towards the environment.

Therefore, most of ecolinguistic research can be understood as an ecologically-informed type of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Bloor and Bloor 2007; Fairclough 2003) – or Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA) (Cheng 2022; Poole 2016) – since it is often directed at identifying destructive discourses. Nevertheless, the need to expand the scope to virtuous examples has been acknowledged in recent years (Stibbe 2018). In this sense, ecolinguistics provides a useful theoretical framework for the performance of PDA. PDA was first devised by Martin (2004) in the attempt to complement CDA with a tool that would drive social change not only by exposing and criticising reproachable discourses, but more effectively by supplying alternatives to the former. Indeed, PDA seeks to single out and investigate “heartening accounts” of “social processes that make the world a better place” (Martin 2004: 184). When

applied to the specific aims of ecolinguistics, PDA delineates a form of linguistic analysis that addresses “discourses which can inspire people to find well-being in ways that do not require over-consumption and treat the natural world with respect and care” (Stibbe 2018: 176).

One of the first – and unaware – instances of ecolinguistic PDA is Alexander’s (2009) analysis of Vandana Shiva’s lecture for the BBC Reith Lectures series. Alexander underlines Shiva’s “re-evaluation” of globalisation, which she frames as a war against nature, and observes how she develops a unique notion of sustainability that exceeds the idea of development to include such values as compassion, justice, and dignity. Goatly’s (2017) investigation of Wordsworth’s, Thomas’s, and Oswald’s poems similarly identifies a praiseworthy representation of nature, which emphasises nature’s role “as sayer and experienter” (Goatly 2017: 48). Ponton’s (2022) recent example of ecolinguistic PDA focusses on environmental issues related to agriculture by analysing British naturalist Chris Skinner’s texts from the BBC radio programme *The countryside hour*. Specifically, he conducts an inferential analysis of extracts from two episodes where Skinner answers to a caller’s question concerning foxes and birds in Norwich. Results highlight both Skinner and his listeners’ positive ecological ideologies, including interest in and detailed knowledge of the habits of animals, who are talked about as intelligent beings.

Since its beginning, however, PDA has been concerned with discourses belonging to marginalized groups, particularly Indigenous communities. Martin himself understood it as a way to comprehend, among the others, “how Indigenous people overcome their colonial heritage” (Martin 2004: 184), and exemplified his aims by investigating discourses from Australia. Bartlett (2012) resorted to PDA for a similar purpose, although he accounted for the context of Guyana. With regard to ecolinguistics, Indigenous knowledge is indeed pinpointed by Stibbe (2018) as one of the targets of PDA, being “a useful potential source of beneficial discourses” (Stibbe 2018: 172). Whereas not all Indigenous groups necessarily live in harmony with nature, they have often been found to show a profound ecological understanding and to learn from ecological mistakes (Berkes and Turner 2006), especially in recognising the irreducible complexity of the ecosystems they live in (Berkes and Berkes 2009). As opposed to the Western positivist-reductionist paradigm tending towards simplification and ultimate separation, their worldviews acknowledge the interrelatedness of humans and non-humans, who are both seen as equal and active subjects within a relationship of mutual dependence (MacGregor 2018). Berkes (2008) labels Indigenous knowledge informed with ecological concerns as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), defining it as “a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission about the relationships between living beings (including humans) with one another and their environment” (Berkes 2008: 7).

With this in mind, the present research conducted an ecolinguistic PDA of Minister of Foreign Affairs Nanaia Mahuta's speeches. Given the peculiar context of Aotearoa New Zealand, it proposed to exemplify how the integration of Māori values into institutional addresses results in discursive realisations that can inspire new and more positive ways of framing the current debate about nature.

4 Research methodology

The analysis was built on a corpus containing all the public speeches given by Nanaia Mahuta between 2020 – the year marking her appointment as Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Labour Government led by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern – and 2022. This corresponds to a collection of 28 addresses in total. The linguistic examination was conducted on the official transcriptions provided on the website of the Aotearoa New Zealand Government.²

The first part of the analysis was mainly quantitative and aimed at assessing the statistical relevance of environmental matters within the Minister's speeches. Accordingly, all texts were first carefully and manually read in order to count how many of them contained at least one reference to issues concerning the state of the natural world. Secondly, the speeches thus identified were scanned further in order to gauge the space devoted to such matters with reference to the whole length of the address. In order to do so, the example set by Bonnefille (2008) was followed, and the texts were divided into segments with the purpose of distinguishing between “green segments” (Bonnefille 2008: 33) – i.e. those informed with issues related to nature and its wellbeing – and segments covering other topics. Segmentation was performed according to the paragraphs already laid out by the transcripts. These indeed provided with a sound thematic unit, as the speeches display a fairly predictable structure that facilitates the identification of their main points. Therefore, each segment generally corresponds to a paragraph, and consists of at least one or more sentences. Words from the green segments were also singled out to offer a picture of the type of environmental topics or natural elements considered in each speech (see Table 1).

In addition, as a tool for obtaining useful statistical information, an electronic version of the corpus was compiled and searched through the online software SketchEngine.³ The former was employed to check frequency and retrieve a keyword

2 <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/minister/hon-nanaia-mahuta> (accessed 25 May 2023).

3 <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>.

Table 1: List of speeches and main environmental topics addressed.

Date of speech	Reference to the environment/ environmental issue?	Topics addressed
1 December 2020	Yes	Sustainability, environmental realities, climate change, green economic recovery
4 February 2021	Yes	Sustainability, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), climate change, low-carbon economy, fossil fuel Environment
29 March 21	Yes	Environment
19 April 21	Yes	Sustainability, climate change, nature, land, environment, ecosystem
14 May 2021	Yes	Water, climate change, sustainability, environment
23 June 2021	Yes	Planet, climate change, environment, sustainability
2 July 2021	Yes	Climate change, environment, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> ('environmental stewardship'), climate emergency, planet, biodiversity, pollution, sustainability, fossil fuel
7 July 2021	Yes	Sustainability, climate change
2 September 2021	Yes	SDGs, climate, climate change, environment, sustainability, freshwater, oceans, forests, <i>kaitiakitanga</i>
15 September 2021	Yes	Sustainability
27 October 2021	Yes	Climate change, climate crisis, climate adaptation, climate migration, climate finance, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , environment, SDGs, food and water security, ecosystems, carbon emissions, carbon reduction, renewable energy, storms, crops, droughts, pests, floods, sea level rise, disaster resilience, water quality, oceans, forests, planet
28 October 2021	Yes	<i>Kaitiakitanga</i> , natural environment, climate change, climate crisis, climate policy, oceans, marine protected areas, carbon emissions, greenhouse gases, sustainability, sustainable development
3 November 21	Yes	<i>Moana</i> ('ocean'), marine environment, ocean, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , environment, sustainability, SDGs, weather events, sea level, temperatures, climate change, climate finance, climate related impacts, emissions, planet, conservation, fisheries, fishing, sustainable development, maritime zones, climate-change-related sea-level rise
16 November 21	Yes	Environment, climate change, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , planet, environmental stewardship, climate resilience, sustainability, (low-)emissions, global warming, paperless documentation, animal health, renewable energy
17 November 21	Yes	Renewable energy, sustainability, environment
1 March 22	Yes	Climate crisis

Table 1: (continued)

Date of speech	Reference to the environment/ environmental issue?	Topics addressed
1 July 2022	Yes	Climate change, environment, birds, ocean, tidal, winds, currents, flotsam, land, planting, harvest, hunting, fishing, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , climate, earth, biodiversity, water, sustainability, Whanganui River/Te Awa Tupua, threatened species
4 July 2022	Yes	Climate change, global warming, low carbon economy, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , ocean, SDGs, sustainability, environment, seismic activity, sea-level rise, fishing, COP26, emissions, temperature rise, climate finance, natural disasters, mining
27 July 2022	No	
19 August 2022	Yes	Climate change, climate finance, climate resilience, climate priorities, climate impact, climate projects, climate change mitigation, climate technologies, climate, weather, sustainability, land, soil, eruption, tsunami, planet, extreme weather, floods, droughts, soaring temperatures, fires, tidal surges, biodiversity, oceans, ecosystems, natural systems, environment, pre-industrial temperatures, water security, low emissions, coastal protection, fossil fuels, sustainable agriculture, biodiversity, <i>kaitiakitanga</i> , solar nation
11 October 2022	Yes	Climate change, 1992 Māori Fisheries Settlement
17 October 2022	Yes	Water, wastewater, storm water, water services, water system, water entities, water infrastructure, climate change, natural, environment, emissions, carbon-neutrality
19 October 2022	Yes	Water, water reform, water system, water infrastructure, water service, water workforce, water sector, climate change, natural disaster
8 November 22	No	
22 November 22	Yes	Climate change
23 November 22	Yes	Water, water service, water system, water entities, water infrastructure, water network, water workforce, water industry, water sector, climate crisis, sustainable
28 November 22	Yes	Planet, godwits, birds, coastal wetlands, Arctic, environment, climate change, migratory shorebirds, emissions, <i>kaitiakitanga</i>
7 December 2022	Yes	Climate change, sustainable, climate finance, natural resources, climate forecasts, climate solutions, flooding, drought, environment

list (see Table 3).⁴ Because all of Mahuta’s speeches contain opening and closing greetings in Māori, these were omitted from the texts included in the electronic corpus to avoid interference. However, all other Māori words and expressions occurring in the main body of the addresses were retained, as they are either translated or glossed by Mahuta herself. Results are summarised in Tables 1 and 2 and will be discussed in Section 5.

The second part of the investigation adopted a qualitative approach. This consisted in the recognition of language uses that testify to the Minister’s incorporation of Māori values and principles in her public addresses. The analysis focussed on lexical and figurative items, and all types of segments were taken into consideration. Particularly, it looked at framing patterns and metaphorical representations inspired by intertextual references to Māori traditions. Finally, these patterns were judged so as to assess if and how they can favour a positive representation of nature and humans’ relationship with it.

According to the guidelines of ecolinguistic PDA, the definition of an “ecosophy” (Naess 1973; Stibbe 2021) – the ecological philosophy that condenses the analyst’s ethical framework – is required. An ecosophy is both descriptive and prescriptive, as it includes both assumptions about the state of the world, drawn from available evidence, and value statements based on the analyst’s own principles (Stibbe 2021). First, my personal ecosophy recognises the irreversibility of the current ecological crisis, with particular reference to climate disruption and its global consequences (IPCC 2022). As such, it assumes the inherent fallacy of actions seeking a final solution to it instead of adaptive responses. Second, its norms are inspired by one of the core tenets of Deep Ecology (Naess 1973, 1995 [1986]; Sessions 1995), which states that “the well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves” (Naess 1995 [1986]: 68). Therefore, my ecosophy rejects any hierarchy that justifies human’s exploitation of ecosystems, since “these values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes” (Naess 1995 [1986]: 68). Nature’s bounty ought to be treated as gifts rather than just resources. The relationship between humans and non-humans is in fact understood in terms of interconnectedness and kinship. Because all beings and ecosystems have intrinsic value, humans need to relate to and respect them as kins. Finally, and building from Stibbe (2021), the temporal scope of my ecosophy can be summarised as *Before, now and the future*. The phrase suggests that not only does the ecosophy apply to present and future generations, but it also look backwards. It is intergenerational in that it values the integration and transmission of traditional knowledge from past

⁴ The integration between corpus linguistics analytical tools and ecolinguistic research has produced a growing number of studies within corpus-assisted ecolinguistics. These include Alexander (2018), Bevitori (2015), Bevitori and Johnson (2022), and Poole (2016, 2022).

communities showing deeper ecological awareness than many current societies. The results of the linguistic analysis were thus judged according to the ecosophy just outlined.

5 Analysis and discussion

5.1 Quantitative analysis

The statistical analysis confirms Mahuta's general preoccupation with the environment, since only two out of the 28 speeches considered do not include any reference to it. This is most probably justified by the type of addresses and the function they perform. One is indeed a Ministerial Statement to the Parliament (27 July 2022) condemning the execution of four people in Myanmar, which took place on 25 July 2022 following the previous year's military coup; the other is a talk given at the Financial Intelligence Unit Conference (8 November 2022) aimed at reiterating disapproval of Russia's military invasion and summarising sanctions imposed to the country by Aotearoa New Zealand.

Although in varying degrees, all remaining speeches mention at least one aspect related to environmental degradation and/or preservation (see Table 1). As shown by Table 2, up to nine addresses contain 30 % or more of green segments. Certainly, their depth of commitment is linked with the context of the speeches themselves, namely, their purposes and target audience. For instance, the "greenest" talk (77 % of green segments) is the one given at the New Zealand Storm Water Conference on 14 May 2021. The topic of water management is dealt with across multiple speeches, as the country has undertaken a programme of reform named Three Waters (New Zealand Government 2021). The latter is directed at centralising the control of drinking water, storm water, and waste water by shifting their management from 67 local councils to four publicly-owned regional entities, and was launched by Mahuta in 2020 during her earlier term as Minister of Local Government. Equally productive in terms of environmental engagement is the speech given at the Aotearoa New Zealand Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit 2021 (2 September 2021). Second on the list (67 %) is the address delivered in Tonga on 19 August 2022, when the Minister launched the country's International Finance Climate Strategy, outlining the national plan to take financial actions towards mitigating the effects of climate breakdown. Surprisingly, one of the addresses that most consistently refers to the natural world and its health (30 %) is the keynote speech at the fifty-sixth Otago Foreign Policy School (1 July 2022), whose theme for that year was outer space. Discursive implications of this will be addressed in Section 5.2.2.

Table 2: Percentage of green segments per speech.

Date of speech	Green segments/total	Percentage
1 December 2020	1/27	4 %
4 February 2021	18/96	19 %
29 March 21	1/19	5 %
19 April 21	9/68	13 %
14 May 2021	27/35	77 %
23 June 2021	6/62	10 %
2 July 2021	11/59	19 %
7 July 2021	2/25	8 %
2 September 2021	20/26	77 %
15 September 2021	2/11	18 %
27 October 2021	20/41	49 %
28 October 2021	7/36	19 %
3 November 21	15/47	32 %
16 November 21	9/42	21 %
17 November 21	6/37	16 %
1 March 22	1/31	3 %
1 July 2022	21/69	30 %
4 July 2022	15/62	24 %
19 August 2022	73/109	67 %
11 October 2022	1/51	2 %
17 October 2022	22/60	37 %
19 October 2022	33/57	58 %
22 November 22	1/43	2 %
23 November 22	24/57	42 %
28 November 22	13/61	21 %
7 December 2022	10/71	14 %

Conversely, results show that green segments decrease in speeches with a highly specific focus, like Mahuta’s Statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council (3 %) on 1 March 2022, following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. However, and perhaps most significantly, the number of direct references to the environment plummet in economy-oriented addresses. These include, for example, the Opening Speech (4 %) for the 21st meeting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Commission (APEC) (1 December 2020), which was hosted by Aotearoa New Zealand in 2021; or the Te Taumata National Trade Hui (11 October 2022), the national conference on Māori trade and businesses, which comes last on the list with only 2 % of green segments. Here, the linguistic construction of natural elements actually aligns with a resource-oriented view of the environment, as it will be seen below.

As for the type of environmental aspect concerned, Table 1 highlights *climate* as the most pervasive – if not ubiquitous – element addressed. Not only does it occur 144

Table 3: List of keywords.

Number	Keyword	Number of occurrences
1	Aotearoa	157
2	Māori	132
3	APEC	48
4	<i>kaitiakitanga</i>	24
5	Indo-Pacific	34
6	<i>whanaungatanga</i>	22
7	<i>taniwha</i>	19
8	<i>kotahitanga</i>	18
9	Locally-led	15
10	Tiriti	15

times across the corpus, but it is mentioned in as many as 23 texts. Other recurrent themes are sustainability, water, and the environment in general. An interesting result is pointed out by the keyword list obtained through SketchEngine (see Table 3).⁵ While most of the keywords predictably refer to the geo-political context under examination (*Aotearoa*, *Indo-Pacific*, *Māori*, *APEC*), the Māori word *kaitiakitanga* (‘environmental stewardship’) takes up position number four. Since it describes a Māori principle conveying a specific understanding of the natural world, it will be thoroughly addressed in the next sub-section.

Taking into account its quantitative relevance, the framing of climate change will be used as a starting point for the following qualitative analysis. In general, this will delve into lexical uses with the aim of reflecting on the type of figurative conceptualisations they afford. Because PDA is interested in language as discourse, the examination will not be limited to the green segments but will extend to the speeches in their entirety.

5.2 Qualitative analysis

5.2.1 Climate change

As attested to by quantitative results, climate breakdown proves to be the environmental concern most consistently referred to in Mahuta’s speeches. One logical

⁵ Keywords are obtained by comparing the frequency of words in the target corpus, i.e. the corpus being examined, with those in a reference corpus, i.e. a corpus that represents a certain language “standard”. In the present study, the keyword list was retrieved using the English Web corpus 2020 (EnTenTen20) as a reference corpus.

reason for this might be that it encompasses a broad range of related issues – carbon emissions, fossil fuels dependence, sea level rise, and extreme weather events – that either contribute to or are a consequence of the former. Previous research into environmental discourse has widely illustrated the attention devoted to climate change (Angwah 2019; Bevitori and Johnson 2022; Boykoff 2008; Grundmann and Krishnamurthy 2010; Liu and Huang 2022; Nerlich and Koteyko 2009), especially as a result of the increasing media coverage of international gatherings such as COPs (Kuha 2018).

Nonetheless, what remains controversial is the type of framing used to describe the phenomenon. Framings are understood as cognitive schemes, or “mental structures that shape the way we see the world” (Lakoff 2014: xi). They consist in the conceptualisation of an area of life or knowledge in terms of another one. Linguistically, this translates into the use of lexical items belonging to one area of life – the “source frame” – to describe the other – the “target domain” of the framing (Stibbe 2021). For instance, climate change is often framed, and therefore spoken of, as a problem (Cachelin et al. 2010; Hulme 2009; Stibbe 2021). The most significant effect of framing is its entailments; since it is usually selective, “it emphasises some aspects while downplaying others” (Stibbe 2021: 45). With regard to “environmental frames”, that is to say, frames “that people have in their brain to understand environmental issues”, entailments could mislead the audience “to ignore the relevant facts” (Lakoff 2010: 74). Indeed, the problem framing of climate change, so pervasive as to have turned into a story we live by (Stibbe 2021), mistakenly entails the existence of a solution that could make climate breakdown disappear.

Recurrent framings of climate change further include certainty/uncertainty, risks, business and economics, climate security, and mitigation (Penz 2018). The very label of *climate change* might be problematic, too. As opposed to *global warming*, the former sounds more abstract, therefore less threatening and concealing human involvement. Nevertheless, *global warming* is equally fallacious, given that it restricts the effects of carbon emissions solely to the rise in global temperatures, overlooking further repercussions (Penz 2018).

In Mahuta’s speeches, *global warming* occurs only three times, while *climate change* totals 63 instances. Collocation analysis shows a tendency towards the combination of multiple framings. For instance, climate change is often described as a *threat* (8),⁶ triggering the security framing:

- (1) climate change remains the single greatest **threat** to Pacific lives and livelihoods (27 October 2021).

⁶ Numbers given in parentheses with no further indication refer to the total amount of occurrences of the item addressed within the target corpus.

(2) climate change is the existential **threat** of our generation (4 July 2022).

One instance explicitly identifies climate disruption with international security:

(3) There is nothing more challenging to our region's security than climate change (19 August 2022).

Furthermore, in the Minister's speech to the UN Human Rights Council, the "climate crisis" is pinpointed as "exacerbating inequalities and undermining the basic human rights", potentially leading to conflict.

Alternatively, climate change is addressed as a *challenge* (9):

(4) Aotearoa New Zealand is alert to the **challenges** of our environment and climate change. (4 July 2022)

The problem framing is also present. *Climate change* indeed collocates with *issue* six times; one occurrence includes it in a list of *problems*:

(5) there is no denying the **problems** are serious: the ongoing pandemic and its related economic crisis, global insecurity, climate change to name a few. (23 June 2021)

And, finally, *climate solutions* are mentioned in two different contexts.

Nevertheless, the most interesting framing to consider is that of adaptation/mitigation. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognises and defines climate mitigation and adaptation as two distinct concepts. The former refers to "efforts to reduce emissions and enhance sinks" (UNFCCC 2023b), wherein *sink* stands for *carbon sink*, namely, anything that absorbs more carbon than it emits. The latter addresses, more broadly, "adjustments in ecological, social or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects" (UNFCCC 2023a). However, because they both involve an active response to the climate crisis, they can be interpreted as complementary and contributing to a common framing. The phrase *climate adaptation* figures only once in the corpus, although all other instances of the noun *adaptation* (13) refer to climate change, as is the case with two occurrences of the verb *adapt*. Similarly, along one instance of *climate change mitigation*, *mitigation* (3) as a noun and *mitigate* as verb (4) all address the matter of climate disruption or carbon emissions. Adding to the adaptation/mitigation framing is the notion of *climate resilience*, as well. This occurs 5 times within the corpus, together with two instances of the modifier *climate-resilient*. Although they are not limited to it, it must be noted that most of these uses pertain to the Tonga speech, or the launch of Aotearoa New Zealand's Climate Finance programme.

The framing of the response to climate change as adaptation or mitigation is valuable because it participates in the rejection of the problem framing. Something requiring adaptation entails that the current state of things cannot be changed and that no reset is possible, so that there exists no actual solution but adjusting to the crisis itself. In this sense, and as opposed to the tendency for “taming” its most abrupt consequences (Willis 2017), Mahuta’s discourses participate in acknowledging the irreversibility of climate breakdown. Not only, in her Tonga speech she goes as far as admitting that in some cases even adaptation is no longer a viable option:

- (6) Aotearoa New Zealand also recognises the limits of adaptation may have been reached in some places, and that some Pacific partners are experiencing loss and damage on a daily basis. (19 August 2022)

Additionally, such a recognition does not give in to inaction or paralysis against the complexity of climate breakdown. In fact,

- (7) we [Aotearoa New Zealand] want to explore ways we can support Pacific countries to avert, minimise and then address the losses and damages they are experiencing. (19 August 2022)

Although it is not the only one to be retrieved in the corpus, the adaptation/mitigation framing gains prominence in Mahuta’s speeches because it is not limited to climate change as a target domain. Actually, it frames a general disposition towards the natural world and its phenomena. As such, the comprehensive label of *adaptation framing* may at this point be conveniently used to account for such broader scope. The former instantiates itself in different discursive realisations, and is supported by a web of intertextual references to Māori and Pacific culture, as it will be shown below.

5.2.2 Adaptation

The notions of resilience and adaptation are touched upon by Mahuta in different speeches, and they participate in the definition of a large intertextual web. This is the case with the address commemorating 50 years of diplomatic relationship with China (28 November 2022). In her talk, the Minister describes the two countries’ partnership by likening China and Aotearoa to a pair of emblematic creatures belonging to the Chinese and Māori cultures respectively – the Dragon and the Taniwha.⁷ As to the latter, she says that

7 The Te Aka Māori Dictionary defines *taniwha* as “water spirit, monster, dangerous water creature, powerful creature, chief, powerful leader, something or someone awesome – *taniwha* take many forms from logs to reptiles and whales and often live in lakes, rivers or the sea” (Te Aka Māori 2023).

- (8) The Taniwha, like the Dragon, has the ability to understand the essence of its environment and changing conditions – as well as the ability to adapt and survive. After all, as custodians and *kaitiaki*, Taniwha are intrinsically linked to the wellbeing and resilience of people, the environment and the prosperity from which all things flourish. (28 November 2022)

This quotation exemplifies an intertextual node, since the metaphor of the Dragon and the Taniwha had already been used in an earlier address to the New Zealand China Council (19 April 2021). Mahuta herself reminds it to her audience, in a sort of “self-quote” that introduces the comparison:

- (9) Eighteen months ago I spoke publicly of the metaphor of the Dragon and the Taniwha. (19 April 2021)

Intertextuality is defined by Fairclough (2003) as the process by which “texts draw upon, incorporate, recontextualize and dialogue with other texts” (Fairclough 2003: 17), and, in its simplest form, consists of direct quotations from alternative sources. Surely, the Minister often refers to her own previous addresses, with the result that some linguistic uses recur across multiple discourses (and thus may more properly be considered *intratextual*). In some cases, including the one just mentioned, these are explicit and their sources are easily identifiable.

Other times, references are more subtle. For example, the word *resilience* (114) found in the Taniwha metaphor is one of the most frequent in the corpus, and is therefore hooked to the meanings associated with it across the whole corpus. One of the speeches that contain the most occurrences is the one given to the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs (3 November 2021). Here, the Minister outlines her view towards the management of international relations within the Pacific region, which she wishes to be built upon a “resilience focus”. Resilience is actually described as a quality peculiar to Pasifika people:

- (10) COVID-19 has highlighted the resourcefulness, innovation, and depth of **resilience** that has existed for centuries in Pacific countries. (3 November 2021)

Particularly, resilience characterises Pacific people’s ways of sustaining themselves through traditional practises that respect nature. In order to exemplify this, the Minister resorts to the metaphor of “net-making”:

- (11) First let me take a moment to share a *whakatauākī*, that is a metaphor well understood across the Pacific. ‘*Ka pū te rūhā, ka hāo te rangatahi*,’ ‘As the old net is cast aside a new net goes fishing.’ When we consider the importance of the moana [sea] and the resources of the marine environment, fishing is a vital activity to ensure the survival of people and communities. The net is an enduring symbolism of the **resilience** of people to sustain themselves. The imagery of the old and new net convey intergenerational knowledge passing on. Consider elders, kaumatua and kuia [elder men and women], reinforcing connection, identity and knowledge through the active practices of traditions such as fishing, weaving, sustainable harvesting, understanding the natural environment and caring for the whānau [family], then we begin to gain an appreciation for the endurance and **resilience** of Pacific people and their culture (3 November 2021).

“Understanding the natural environment” is paramount to being resilient. Later on in the speech, the very ability to learn from nature’s behaviour is described as driving action to face extreme weather events:

- (12) every year we prepare for the cyclone season, because we understand how catastrophic these significant weather events can be on the livelihoods of whānau and communities across the Pacific. (3 November 2021)

As shown by these examples, the adaptation framing is recurrent, and encompasses the representation of climate change – without being circumscribed to it. Instead, it frames the general disposition of Pacific people to “remain agile and attuned to the natural world”. Because frames act as both structures and containers, metaphorical instances like the “net-making” are included within the adaptation framing. Combining framing theory with Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) (Deignan 2005; Kövecses 2020; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Semino 2008), metaphors can actually be understood to realise a deeper, and more specific, level of framing. In fact, “metaphors are a type of framing – one where the source frame is from a specific, concrete, and imaginable area of life” (Stibbe 2021: 60). Here, the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the other is compared to the replacement of the old net with the new one.⁸ In other words, while the fishers, tools, and techniques might change, the practice of fishing through which communities sustain themselves does not. It is resilient, it evolves – rather, it *adapts* to changing conditions – and preserves itself in the process:

⁸ To give but one example, adopting the conventional schematisation of CMT, this metaphor would be mapped as KNOWLEDGE IS A NET.

- (13) The tradition of net-making has some consistent principles in their design. However, through the generations the way a ‘net’ is set or cast can differ according to the location, tide, whether it is being set from land or sea, and of course determined by what you are setting out to catch. (3 November 2021)

In terms of linguistic realisation, Mahuta’s metaphor displays a considerable number of “signalling” (Goatly 1997) or “hinges” (Vandaele 2021). These are items that highlight the metaphoricity of the expressions being used, such as, in this case, *metaphor*, *symbolism*, *imagery*, and *convey*. This practice seems to be customary in Mahuta’s speeches, who often draws her figurative devices from Māori proverbs. Again, this testifies to the marked intertextuality of the Minister’s discourses. First, as the same proverb is quoted again in a later speech. Second, because it establishes a link with the body of Māori oral literature. In this sense, hinges may be justified by Mahuta’s efforts to contextualise her language, given that, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, the majority of her speeches are addressed to audiences from other countries and cultures. As a result, her talks may be seen to fulfil the dialogical potential of intertextuality, which is ultimately an instance of polyphony, or co-occurrence of “voices”, intended as “ways of being or identities” (Fairclough 2003: 41).

Traditional knowledge offers Mahuta a rich repository of source items that allow her to frame foreign cooperation according to the ecological consciousness inherent in the Indigenous system of thought. Several metaphorical constructions use traditional practises based on direct contact with nature as a source frame. For example, efforts towards Indigenous recognition in international cooperation are compared to tending to a plant:

- (14) ‘*Poipoia te kakano, kia tipu*’ – ‘nurture the seed and it will grow.’ Our efforts to see Indigenous issues included on the APEC agenda can be likened to planting a seed. (7 July 2021)

On a similar note, the metaphor of the canoe conceptualises countries’ need to be aligned on matters of global interest to allow for successful relationships:

- (15) There is a Māori proverb [that] comes to mind: ‘*Kaua e rangiruatia te hāpai o te hoe; e kore tō tātou waka e ū ki uta*’. Which translates to: ‘Do not lift the paddle out of unison or our canoe will never reach the shore’. With India and New Zealand paddling in unison, we can much more effectively tackle some of these challenges. (23 June 2021)

Furthermore, in discussing the common Pacific objective of responding to climate change, Mahuta implicitly represents the Pacific Ocean as a neighbourhood:

- (16) And as we meet these challenges, we must not be diverted from the ever-present challenge of climate change and threats to the ocean environment on which we, and our Pacific neighbours, rely. (2 July 2021)

In a different speech, the ecological metaphor instead presents Aotearoa New Zealand as one of the organisms within the “Pacific ecosystem”:

- (17) Resilience takes a Pacific-centric view of our collective interests in the region, shifting us to a strength-based approach that acknowledges building long-term resilience requires an ecosystem-wide response. Aotearoa New Zealand sits within that ecosystem. (3 November 2021)

Such metaphors reflect Mahuta’s desire to “call on the bi-cultural values that have characterised who we are” and that “are unique to us in Aotearoa New Zealand”. As she acknowledges the “recent history [that] also connects” the country “to the United Kingdom, the early establishment of Government in New Zealand and the Treaty of Waitangi/Te Tiriti o Waitangi as our founding document”, Mahuta seeks to mediate Western and Māori TEK. Indeed, she repeatedly enumerates the Māori values that inspire her work as Foreign Minister. Among these is the principle of *kaitiakitanga*, a reference to which is contained in the previous Taniwha quotation, wherein Mahuta speaks of the creatures in terms of “custodians and *kaitiaki*”. As noted earlier, *kaitiakitanga* is the fourth keyword of the corpus. It occurs 20 times across all texts, along with seven instances of the noun *kaitiaki* from which it is derived. The Minister’s first mention of the word is in the Inaugural Foreign Policy Speech to Diplomatic Corps at the beginning of her term (4 February 2021). On this occasion, *kaitiakitanga* is simply glossed as “stewardship and care”, whereas *kaitiaki* is translated as “protectors and stewards of our intergenerational wellbeing”. However, Mahuta soon expands on the definition to include the specific target of care, i.e. the natural world. The first direct association between the principle and the environment occurs in the Minister’s speech to the Otago Foreign Policy School on 2 July 2021, as she claims that

- (18) we share *kaitiakitanga* responsibilities for the environment, especially in relation to the Blue Ocean Continent. (2 July 2021)

From this speech on, all following occurrences of the word address nature as the object of stewardship and guardianship.⁹

⁹ This environmental connotation is also noted by the Cambridge Dictionary, which includes the word *kaitiaki* as belonging to New Zealand English and defines it as “a person who has been given a responsibility to protect something, especially nature or the environment” (Cambridge Dictionary 2023).

Kaitiakitanga offers a further example of how reference to Māori culture or TEK allows Mahuta to use peculiar phrasings. Hybrid compounding is indeed characteristic of New Zealand English, and highlights the vitality of Māori concepts within the culture of Aotearoa New Zealand (Degani and Onysko 2010). Through *ad hoc* noun-noun creative compounds (Benczes 2006), Mahuta addresses humans' relationship with the natural environment as an act of care; the noun *kaitiakitanga* is used as a modifier for the words *responsibilities* and *aspirations*, and as a synonym for *sustainable*:

- (19) We share ***kaitiakitanga*** responsibilities for the environment, especially in relation to the Blue Ocean Continent. (2 July 2021)
- (20) we assert a common set of *tikanga* or norms that should prevail in the region. These *tikanga* underpin the peace, security and prosperity we seek, alongside our ***kaitiakitanga*** aspirations for New Zealand and the Pacific. (2 September 2021)
- (21) when it comes to our planet, strong regional cooperation is essential for continued ***kaitiakitanga***/sustainable conservation. (3 November 2021)

Accordingly, humans are talked about as *kaitiaki* or custodians:

- (22) This framework for a new way of working gives me hope that the next generation will benefit from the actions we take together, as ***kaitiaki*** of Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa [the Blue Ocean Continent]. (27 October 2021)

The notion of *kaitiakitanga* is built upon Māori's vitalist ontology, which recognises selfhood and dignity of agency to all the things of the natural world, regardless of their being human or non-human (Henare 2001). Therefore, natural "resources" are not to be exploited without restraint, but rather treated as a gift. This understanding, which Mahuta reiterates across several speeches, is evident in the Foreign Minister's conceptualisation of water as a *taonga* in her addresses concerning the national water system reform. The word *taonga* describes a "treasure" (Te Aka Māori 2023) or "anything highly prized" (Collins Dictionary 2023). Mahuta claims that the new system proposed is aimed at

- (23) building awareness around the role every New Zealander has in the water system to value our ***taonga*** – our precious water resource. (19 October 2022)

In two further instances she stresses that

- (24) Our water is a precious ***taonga***. (14 May 2021)
and reminds the audience of
- (25) the value of this precious ***taonga*** – our *wai* [water]. (23 November 2022)

These lexical uses may be taken as an instance of "linguaging", the "behaviour" by which "language users employ whatever language features are at their disposal with

the intention of achieving their communicative aims” (Jørgensen 2008: 169), which is especially peculiar to multilingual contexts such as Aotearoa New Zealand. The term *linguaging* is meant to shift the attention from the supposed existence of languages as fixed and coherent entities, to the practice of using linguistic features “in interaction to grasp, influence, and shape the world” (Karrebæk et al. 2015: 10).¹⁰ In this case, it is interesting insofar as it partly offers an alternative to – perhaps a “re-framing”¹¹ of (Stibbe 2021) – the framing of nature as a resource, which is indeed one of the stories we live by and entails that natural elements can be disposed of as consumer goods. Albeit being very limited, this re-framing aligns with the *kaitiakitanga* framework informing Mahuta’s policies.¹²

Actually, the noun *taonga* is used again to talk about outer space in the Minister’s second keynote to the annual Otago Foreign Policy School (1 July 2022). As she addresses the increasing global interest for the development of space, and outlines Aotearoa New Zealand’s potential contribution to it, the Foreign Minister calls into question “its sustainable wellbeing”. Space presents itself as an opportunity for the “ongoing survival” of humankind, but Mahuta acknowledges that it is ultimately finite. In accordance with this, she seeks to translate *kaitiakitanga* from the earthly to the cosmic environment:

- (26) We are not owners of space, but stewards for its future, for the benefit of future generations. With use comes deep responsibilities. The space environment, particularly the low earth orbit, is a finite resource that must be protected for the future. These values all require that a long-term intergenerational view drives today’s decisions. Space is a *taonga*; it is precious. *Kaitiakitanga* seeks to allow use while safeguarding this environment from degradation. Much like other shared resources, the sooner we can put in place regimes to manage its sustainability, the better. (1 July 2022)

As a means to meet such responsibility, the Foreign Minister proposes the definition of a legal framework to regulate activity in space that mirrors the one adopted with the Whanganui River. Mahuta is referring to the Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River

¹⁰ For an insight into the notion of *linguaging* from the perspective of ecolinguistic research concerned with language interactions (see Section 3) see Steffensen (2011).

¹¹ A reframing is “the act of framing a concept in a way that is different from its typical framing in a culture” (Stibbe 2021: 40).

¹² As an evidence for the ubiquity of the resource framing, Mahuta herself activates it on the occasion of the Te Taumata National Trade Hui (11 October 2022), the national meeting of Māori businesses. In this speech, which is also the one containing the lowest number of green segments, the only mention of natural elements is the volume of exports for “horticulture, honey, wine, seafood, beef and dairy”. Although this is the only instance, language complies with the resource framing that is typical of economic discourse and equates natural materials and non-human beings with commodities.

Claims Settlement) Act 2017 (New Zealand Government 2022) – the law that granted legal recognition to Aotearoa New Zealand’s Whanganui River and its region. The act, preceded by a deed of settlement signed between the Māori communities of the Whanganui and the Crown (New Zealand Government 2020), was actually the first to formally attribute a natural element the status of living and legal entity, charged with both rights and liabilities. The Minister thus cites the document:

- (27) Drawing on indigenous concepts and the evolution of legal frameworks to truly capture the essence of stewardship or *kaitiakitanga* of space, Aotearoa New Zealand could introduce a similar concept to space as we have done for example for the absolute protection of the Whanganui River and recognising space as a ‘living entity’. Treating space like an ancestor with rules and norms to guide decision-making and behaviours would certainly invoke a different mentality for nation states around the world. (1 July 2022)

On the one hand, Mahuta’s intertextual reference to the Whanganui River Claims fulfils a rhetorical aim. It legitimises the country’s ambition to engage in the future of space, notwithstanding they “are a relatively new entrant into the space matters”. As proved with Te Awa Tupua, the negotiation between Western and Māori values provided with an effective framework to locate responsibilities for potential harm of the environment, and other countries could benefit from this solution. On the other hand, Mahuta’s words focus the attention on issues of paramount importance. While global activity in space remains at present mostly unregulated, careful management of its resources is required, lest it faces the same destiny as earth.

In addressing space activity within the specific geo-cultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Mahuta compares the importance that space has been assuming for the country’s foreign affairs to the role astronomy played in regulating the life of Polynesian ancestors:

- (28) when the great migration of my *tupuna* [ancestors] arrived to [sic] these shores, they already had an advanced knowledge base of the universe, the natural environment, navigation and survival. Much of that understanding was forged through decades of observation of star patterns, the flight path and migration of birds, ocean currents and tidal sequences, of winds, currents and flotsam. But critical to that navigation were the stars and where and when they appear on the horizon. With neither modern instruments nor printed maps, Polynesian navigators could memorize and chart accurate journeys of thousands of miles to reach tiny island destinations. They assessed the existence of these distant and larger southerly islands and navigated the stars and signs to find them. When here, akin to many peoples who live close to nature, they depended for survival on the cycles and patterns of the seasons. (1 July 2022)

The “advanced knowledge” these people possessed is the result of “decades of observation” of the natural world, whose complexity Mahuta addresses by enumerating its manifold manifestations: birds, waves, winds, currents, flotsam. This may be taken as an example of salience pattern, understood as “a linguistic or visual representation of life as worthy of attention through concrete, specific and vivid depictions” (Stibbe 2021: 160). More specifically, the Foreign Minister increases the salience of nature by resisting the conventional level of abstraction associated with it. Instead of referring to a vague environment, she names (some of) the specific elements that constitute it.

Overall, the passage again activates an adaptation framing. Her lexical choices underline the effort Polynesian forebears made to survive. With “neither modern nor printed maps”, they “could *memorize* and *chart*” and “*assess*” [emphasis mine]: these verbs suggest reiterated and careful study. These people did not impose their needs on the ways of nature, but rather got accustomed to their pace, as “they *depended* for survival *on the cycles and patterns* of the seasons” [emphasis mine]. Therefore, and as suggested above, the adaptation framing in Mahuta’s speeches displays a larger target domain than climate change. In identifying it within the corpus, adaptation is understood as the general necessity and ability to adjust to nature’s own agency.

6 Conclusions

The analysis of Nanaia Mahuta’s speeches reveals the discursive potential of culturally hybrid contexts like Aotearoa New Zealand. For one thing, this is shown, with the support of quantitative evidence, by the space that environmental matters take up in her public addresses. In spite of her portfolio not being directly linked with these, the Minister almost always refers to them, and she recognises that concerns like climate disruption are indeed of global interest. Moreover, questions linked with the natural world and its wellbeing are addressed by mediating Western and Māori Indigenous knowledge or TEK. The integration of both is a clearly-stated objective of the Minister’s, who openly lists the Māori values that inspire her agenda and calls for the increasing involvement of Māori into national politics. However, the result of a negotiation is, by definition, a compromise, and data confirm that Mahuta sometimes align with persistent ways of talking about the natural environment. For instance, speeches covering economic development register a drop in the number of green segments. Furthermore, as observed in the analysis, framings of climate change also include those that are fallacious in addressing adequate response to it, especially the problem framing. This may testify to the actual status of the latter as stories we live by, informing every type of discourse.

Nevertheless, Mahuta's speeches display linguistic devices that resist or re-frame such conventional – or ideological – conceptualisations. As pointed out by the qualitative examination of the texts, the former result from the Minister's incorporation of and intertextual references to Māori language and culture. This is mainly achieved by means of figuration, which Mahuta sources from traditional proverbs or metaphors. These compare foreign relations to traditional Māori practises that are performed in accordance with natural time (e.g. net-making). In addition, the use of Māori words – which Mahuta always glosses or contextualises – allows for the presence of lexical elements that support an alternative and more beneficial way of talking about the environment. This is the case of *kaitiakitanga*, leading to the representation of humans as guardians or stewards of nature.

To sum up, the analysis has tried to demonstrate how all these features converge in an adaptation framing that informs all of Mahuta's addresses. Not only does the former describe response to climate breakdown in a way that most environmental communication does not; but it more broadly puts forward a favourable representation of how to relate to nature in order to sustain its health. To conclude, because the results of the present analysis can be seen to conform with my ecosophy, Mahuta's addresses actually instantiate a positive discourse around nature. Moreover, in the hope of identifying further examples of beneficial ecological narratives within institutions responsible for environmental policies, the present investigation confirms the need to extend (eco)linguistic analysis to less uncharted political contexts and figures.

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