

## BLAME ATTRIBUTION IN ECOLOGICAL MEDIA DISCOURSE: MANIPULATIVE REPRESENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

### АТРИБУЦІЯ ПРОВИНИ В ЕКОЛОГІЧНОМУ МЕДІАДИСКУРСІ: МАНІПУЛЯТИВНА РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЯ ЕКОЛОГІЧНИХ ПРОБЛЕМ

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The research paper investigates agency representation in ecological media discourse. The lexico-semantic and pragmalinguistic analyses of blame-bearers for environmental problems demonstrate that the way the agent is represented within ecological media discourse can shape public perception and influence the awareness of ecological problems. The study contributes to our understanding of agency representation as a crucial component in news articles and a powerful tool that influences the human sense of responsibility for ecological welfare. The article examines the peculiarities and forms in which misinformation is expressed in ecological media discourse through agency representation, including the lexical and semantic types of blame-bearers. The study involves a corpus-based analysis to examine the linguistic means, the ways they are employed in the rhetoric of news media to downplay ecological problems, doubt their existing evidence and mitigate human impact on the environment.

In this paper, we endeavor to capture a representative – though not all-encompassing – lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearers in ecological media discourse. The human-, society-, technology-, nature-, and problem-related lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearers for environmental problems were identified and analyzed. The UAM software tool was used to manually annotate corpora (*The Guardian's* news reporting articles addressing the issues of environmental problems) and calculate statistical data to understand the current patterns of representing agents accountable for environmental problems and the causes triggering and contributing to their emergence. It made it possible for us to notice the manipulative potential of the agency category in mitigating, obscuring, or obfuscating anthropogenic impact on environmental change.

**Key words:** ecological media discourse, environmental problems, blame attribution, agency, lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearers, UAM, responsibility, manipulation.

У науковій статті досліджується репрезентація агентивності в екологічному медіадискурсі. Лексико-семантичний та прагмалінгвістичний аналіз носіїв провини за екологічні проблеми демонструють, що спосіб репрезентації агенса в екологічному медіадискурсі може формувати суспільну думку та впливати на усвідомлення екологічних проблем. Дослідження поглиблює розуміння репрезентації агентивності як важливого компонента новинних статей та потужного інструменту, що впливає на почуття відповідальності людини за екологічне благополуччя. У статті розглядаються особливості та форми, в яких місінформація подається в екологічному медіадискурсі через репрезентацію агентивності, зокрема лексичні та семантичні групи носіїв провини. Дослідження залучає корпусний аналіз для аналізу мовних засобів і способів їх використання для применшення екологічних проблем, піддавання сумніву наявних доказів і применшення впливу людини на довкілля в риторичі новинних ЗМІ. У цій статті ми намагаємося виокремити репрезентативні, хоча й не всеосяжні, лексико-семантичні групи носіїв провини в екологічному медіадискурсі. У статті виокремлено та проаналізовано лексико-семантичні групи носіїв провини за екологічні проблеми, пов'язані з людиною, суспільством, технологіями, природою та власне проблемами. Для аотації корпусу (новинних статей видання *The Guardian*, присвячених питанням екологічних проблем) та підрахунку статистичних даних було використано програмний інструмент UAM, що допоміг визначити сучасні моделі репрезентації агенсів, відповідальних за екологічні проблеми, а також причини, що зумовлюють та сприяють їхній появі. Це дало нам змогу зауважити маніпулятивний потенціал категорії агентивності у применшенні, приховуванні впливу людини на зміну середовища існування.

**Ключові слова:** екологічний медіадискурс, екологічні проблеми, атрибуція провини, агенс, лексико-семантичні групи носіїв провини, UAM, відповідальність, маніпуляція.

**Problem statement.** Ecological problems facing humanity nowadays, including climate change, are not an exception and are widely discussed within this scope. The relevance of the study is motivated by public attention to environmental issues, the investigation of their causes, as well as the growing interest among linguists towards the research of environmental discourse overall, including the need to investigate the way ecological problems' causes are verbalized

and framed within environmental discourse, to identify linguistic means and patterns that reflect the relationship between humankind and nature. **The study aims** to examine the peculiarities and forms in which the causes of ecological problems are manifested in ecological news media discourse, to analyze the agency in ecological media discourse, to investigate how agency serve as a tool for manipulation in news reporting. In addition to methods of analysis and syn-

thesis, lexico-semantic and pragmalinguistic analyses, and the method of interpretative textual analysis, the research employed a corpus-based approach to manually annotate the empirical material and obtain quantitative results. The study material is represented by 13 news articles published in *The Guardian* from 2019 to 2025. The corpora were analyzed and manually annotated with the help of UAM multilayered corpus tool developed by Mick O'Donnell [15].

**Analysis of recent scientific papers.** The study of ecological discourse, as well as the issues of blame attribution and accountability for environmental problems, is a focal point of scientific discussions and debates among scholars due to the growing public concerns and awareness of environmental changes we face nowadays. The scientific base of the study is represented by the following research publications of the scholars who have investigated: the issues of blame and accountability for climate change, the role of anthropogenic agency in it through the philosophical perspective (C. Rehmann-Sutter [12]), the discursive strategies used to redirect responsibility within the climate delay discourses (W. F. Lamb et al [8]), agency of language and agency in language (A. Duranti [2]), the role of pragmatic inferencing in analyzing semantic meaning (J. Peregrin [10; 11]), the role of nominalizations in environmental problems representation (A. Goatly [4]), participant categories for semantic coding (L. Kawaletz, I. Plag [7]), semantics of nominalizations (L. Kawaletz [6]), etc. The research conducted by A. Duranti has greatly advanced our understanding of agency, particularly in the way the researcher brings the understanding of agency forward, taking into account social implications and thinking beyond the generative paradigm of Chomsky. A. Duranti investigates the agency in language and agency of language [2, p. 451]. Understanding language as an agent involves determining its role in ensuring communication, shaping, and representing realities. The scientist keeps studying the issue of agency in language within the traditions of linguistic anthropology. A. Duranti assumes that a language is an action, and its use and the resulting product of language also imply a sense of responsibility on the part of those who use it [2, p. 459]. M. Formanowicz, J. Roessel, C. Suitner and A. Maass [3] investigate how social meaning is manifested by grammatical constructions, in particular the role of the verb in agency perception. Agency is a category whose dynamism depends not only on the semantic meaning reflected in verbs, which are “linguistic markers of agency”, but also on syntactic organization. Meanwhile, the understanding of agency implies a focus on verbs, which are gram-

matical entities conveying social meaning; however, the inferences about meaning are not only about the semantic content conveyed by words, but also about the grammatical categories they represent within syntactic constructions [3, pp. 567-568]. A. Goatly [4, p. 219] observes that nominalization, like middle ergative constructions, is a way to avoid specifying an agent or external cause and creates the image of environmental changes that occur by themselves, as well as to avoid responsibility, to obscure the anthropogenic contribution to environmental problems' causes.

**Discussion and results.** A shift in the rhetoric of media coverage of climate change is currently underway: an outright climate denial is no longer as convincing to the media's audience, and therefore, rhetorical tactics are being used that do not directly deny climate change, but rather downplay it, use and doubt existing evidence, and mitigate the human impact on the environment. Denying the anthropogenic factor in the driving mechanisms of environmental problems puts the mass media's target audience in a mental state that impairs the public's ability to realize the falsity of their beliefs and behavior, the exploitative way people live, and the aggressive attitude towards living beings on Earth, which are taken for granted, as well as resources such as water, land, and air, which are treated not as finite, life-giving resources, but as unlimited ones. Framing environmental problems as something that arises on their own, rather than as something that is human-driven, takes away precious time from all of humankind to solve the problem promptly. After all, realizing the real cause requires both time and effort to take measures to at least slow down the adverse impact on the environment, and, ideally, to take active steps to find the best solution. Efforts are impossible without people realizing their contribution to their habitat. One of the reasons people fall victim to manipulation in the field of climate change and crisis is their vulnerability, their inability to resist something they cannot control, such as natural disasters. The United Nations Development Programme [17] and the explainer issued by The Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment [13] single out climate denial, climate delay, greenwashing, climate conspiracy narratives as forms of climate dis- and misinformation. The common features and strategies behind the 12 types of discourses identified in the study [8] are grouped into four categories, namely “redirect responsibility”, “push non-transformative solutions”, “emphasize the downsides” of climate policy, or “surrender”, used in media to discourage public climate action. It is worth noting that examining the issue of responsibil-

ity for climate change decision-making, according to the ‘redirect responsibility’ discourse type [8, p. 3], requires a primary understanding of the underlying causes of climate change, the roots of environmental problems, and the awareness of the role of human beings in shaping the environment. Hence, the first step is to understand the cause-and-effect relationships underlying any environmental problem, including climate change. Furthermore, the way a particular problem is highlighted and framed in the media, namely the agent responsible for an environmental problem, suggests identifying someone accountable for solving the problem. When determining those ones responsible for climate change, the philosopher C. Rehmann-Sutter [12] firmly attributes blame to humankind, but only when it comes to selecting between two opposing dichotomous agents: humankind and nature. In his view, the collective blame for climate change often aims to conceal the real causes and perpetrators. The modern understanding of blame implies that a subject can be accused only if their actions were conscious and purposeful. The same is true in the context of climate change: the collective entity is not responsible for its actions or inactions, as it has no will, and for C. Rehmann-Sutter [12], the concept of “collective” is identical to the concept of “nobody”: narratives whose main message imposes blame on the collective, on a set of subjects, or even the phrase like “All are guilty!” are only a ploy to absolve or obscure individual contributions in order to diffuse personal accountability. At the same time, the scientist, following the perspective of Emmanuel Levinas and his foundations of the ethical framework, insists on the need for the wrongdoer to accept the culpability, since the individual’s cognitive awareness is not only an indicator of blame acceptance, awareness of own ‘burden’, but also helps to recognize the damage, harm, and suffering caused to others.

T. A. van Dijk defines the main difference between persuasion and manipulation in terms of whether the addressee of the information has freedom of choice. In the case of persuasion, recipients of information are free to choose whether to accept the arguments presented by the addressee [16, p. 361]. At the same time, manipulative techniques make the target audience a passive consumer of information. The victims of manipulation cannot understand the real intentions and further consequences of the information, beliefs, or actions received from the manipulative addressee. For example, T. A. van Dijk describes the negative consequences for public perception when, following media coverage of immigration, recipients of information began to blame the poor state of the

economy, unemployment, or migrants for economic problems, rather than the government and its directives [16, p. 362]. One of the triggers to manipulate is the desire to achieve authority, establish a dominant position, and thus impose one’s visions and beliefs on others, indirectly influencing public behavior. Establishing a dominant position is the goal of the manipulator, which Teun A. van Dijk defines as “power abuse,” [16, p. 372] with the media acting as a means of achieving control, exercising its influence in verbalized forms of public discourse (e.g., news articles, political debates, scientific publications, etc.), as well as a means of “social reproduction” of this power [16, p. 362]. Linguistic manipulations in news reporting via lexico-semantic means, syntactic organization of the information, positively or negatively marked vocabulary, stylistic devices influence the objectivity of news reporting [9, p. 32].

Scholars have been interested in the semantic aspect in the study of agency since the mid-1960s, but A. Duranti in his works attempts to explore semantic (thematic) roles of agency beyond the generative paradigm of Chomsky and brings the understanding of agency forward, taking into account social implications. From his perspective, the ontological status of the semantic (thematic) role of agent and intentionality challenge the process of agency definition [2, pp. 452–453]. A. Duranti defines agents as “entities whose actions have consequences for themselves or others” and whose interaction results in cause-effect relationships between them [2, p. 454]. At the same time, the function agency plays in a language is determined by the type of referent and the grammatical form it takes [2, p. 463].

To understand who or what is a blame-bearer for the consequences of environmental problems, it is important to consider not only the semantic content and syntactic structure of the sentence, but also pragmatic inferences, which literally stands for trying to “read between the lines.” Pragmatic inferencing is a mental process in which, based on background knowledge, prior known facts, and evidence, a person uses logical thinking to draw conclusions that go beyond what is explicitly communicated. The semantic content provides the basis, which, being processed through cooperative social reasoning, allows us to determine the inferred meaning and marks the pragmatic Gricean interpretation of the expression [5, p. 117]. A. Duranti does not support the perspective that the subject necessarily means that it acts as an agent in the sentence, arguing that in English, especially in spoken English, most sentences are intransitive. In addition, being a nominal-accusative language, English grammatically allows

the role of agents to be performed by not only non-human entities, animate and inanimate referents, and abstract objects, but also processes, thereby granting those entities a quasi-agentive status [2, p. 464]. L. Kawaletz examines participant categories, their hyperonyms of and differentiates between such categories as actor, agent, and causer. An actor appears to be a causer of an event, regardless of whether they are animate or inanimate, whether their actions are conscious or not [6, p. 39]. J. Peregrin highlights that the semantic meaning of words should be taken into account in combination with inferences in empirical research in linguistics, arguing that “there is no meaning without inference...and without representation” [10, p. 1216] and, accordingly, semantics should not be paradigmatically separated from pragmatics [11]. Blamee’s identification involves primarily clarifying the causes. According to the psychology of blame, locus of causality in the context of human agency singles out two categories of causes, namely internal (in cases where the situation arose due to the direct actions of a person) and external (in cases where the situation is perceived as the outcome of the actions of a person who was under the influence of external factors, the environment) [14, p. 138]. We hold the view that when people explain environmental problems as being caused by internal factors in environmental discourse, it implies the awareness of their role in shaping the Anthropocene. Meanwhile, when people focus on external causes as blame-bearers for the genesis and spread of environmental problems, it instead indicates conscious blame-shifting or immaturity in how humankind perceives and responds to its impact on the environment and the way we cope with climate change. The longer humanity realizes its role, at least through the use of language, the more it is likely to slow down humanity’s response to piled-up ecological problems.

In this paper, we endeavor to capture a representative – though not all-encompassing – lexical and semantic categories of blame-bearers in ecological discourse. Qualitative and quantitative analysis helps to grasp better the current patterns of representing agents accountable for environmental problems and the causes triggering and contributing to their emergence in news reporting. It made it possible for us to notice a tendency to mitigate, obscure, or obfuscate agency in reporting news concerning ecological problems. Therefore, we aim to analyze agents and entities holding quasi-agentive status for causing ecological problems, that is, blame-bearers, organize them accordingly into lexico-semantic groups acknowledging the lexical and semantic meaning they hold not only explicit but also the one that could

be inferred pragmatically, as well as taking into account the syntactic patterns they are shaped in.

**The human-related lexico-semantic group of blame-bearers** encompasses entities, i.e., concrete individuals or groups of people, as well as human-driven activities (everyday activities, professional activities, their behavior and lifestyles, etc.), which explicitly or implicitly function as instigators of environmental problems. The following example illustrates the world as the blame bearer for the lack of resources, implying a collective human-related lexico-semantic type.

*“Each year, the world consumes more than 92b tonnes of materials – biomass (mostly food), metals, fossil fuels and minerals – and this figure is growing at the rate of 3.2% per year.”* (“The Guardian”, 2019, March 12).

A closer examination of the human-related lexico-semantic group revealed the opportunity to distinguish **the society-related lexico-semantic group** further to denote the blame-bearers of environmental problems. Within this group, the human being is logically considered as a social being. This group can be further unpacked into layers denoting global society, civil society, the government sector, the economic sector, and so on. Each of these layers is parsed into components representing human beings as representatives of a particular sector, human-driven activities, and their products within this sector. For example, categories such as economic entities, representatives of economic entities, activities of economic entities, artifacts and products of economic activity, and the global economy as an entity can be further layered within the economic sector subgroup.

Let us consider the following example: *“Land use change – mostly for agriculture – accounts for over 80% of biodiversity loss and 85% of water stress as forests and swamps are cleared for cropland that needs irrigation”* (“The Guardian”, 2019, March 12). In the excerpt from an article in *The Guardian*, the removal of the human factor from environmental impact is achieved through the use of nominalized phrases, such as *land use change* and *biodiversity loss*, which serve as euphemisms that obscure the exploitative nature of human interaction with the natural environment. Moreover, the phrase *clear forest* has a positive connotation, which completely hinders the recipient’s ability to grasp the problem of deforestation and treat it seriously.

In the headline of *The Guardian*’s article *“Resource extraction responsible for half of the world’s carbon emissions”* (“The Guardian”, 2019, March 12), we notice two agents responsible for the problem of carbon emissions. Firstly, the agent is referred to



grammatically as anthropogenic activity placed as a subject, pertaining to activities within the economic sector of society (resource extraction). Secondly, we notice an appeal to impose blame on the world, not in the form of mere possession, but through the use of nominalization with an agent in the postposition. Thirdly, shifting blame semantically from possible entities (e.g., industries) to human activity within the economic sector makes agency a more generalized and abstract concept. L. Kawaletz and I. Plag investigate the semantics of nominalizations, in particular the semantics of participants and the way it is introduced into causal relationships based on the semantics of psych verbs. An activity means that the participant category of actor is involved. An activity does not presuppose intention as a component of the actor's participant role. The actor is semantically broader category than agent; those actions (not activity) are deliberate and conscious [7, p. 308]. The sentence is a clear example of agency mitigation. However, the semantic meaning implies that industry-related and society-related human activities within the primary economic sector are inferred.

*"A fifth of world's ocean surface particularly vulnerable to threats driven by burning fossil fuel and deforestation, new research finds"* ("The Guardian", 2024, June 04). In this instance, the target metonymically represented by the by-phrase is not the entire ocean, but only a part of it. The agent referred to by the by-phrase is not human beings, but their activity, a process expressed by the nominalized form of the gerund, i.e., burning fossil fuels and deforestation. Nominalization in the role of an agent that affects ecosystems deprives the target audience of empathy and compassion, creating the impression that the cause arises on its own and has no instigator standing behind it.

F. Cominetti [1] focuses on the role of nominalization as a semantic and syntactic tool of implicit linguistic strategies (presupposition, topicalization, vagueness, implicature) used to conceal responsibility, or more precisely, agents, as well as to conceal content. The manipulative potential of nominalization involves the strategy of vagueness, where nominalization is used to omit those involved in the action, the agents. A nominalized subject allows the instigator, the responsible agent that causes the environmental problem, to be omitted or concealed, making it difficult for the recipients to detect. Nominalization is a powerful grammatical strategy for enhancing linguistic implicitness. Moreover, the use of transformations at morphological and syntactic levels to create nominal forms makes it possible to shift the focus to a more generic action in terms of the semantics

of the underlying verbal expression [1, pp. 75-76]. Nevertheless, while preserving the semantic meaning in the root of the verb, nominalization as a process leading to the formation of event nouns compresses or completely diminishes the thematic roles of the general action expressed by the verb under transformations [1, p. 78].

**The nature-related lexico-semantic group of blame-bearers** is involved in cases where blame for environmental problems is shifted to natural phenomena and processes (such as weather and temperature), living beings (excluding humans), their activities, abiotic substances, nature as a divine being or creature, and ecosystems, etc. *"In essence, there are no more safe spaces on Earth. We are already out of our safe operating space and if these trends continue, things will get worse. Extreme weather events will simply become much more frequent and that will have ever more serious financial and human costs"* ("The Guardian", 2024, January 31). The excerpt is an example of attributing responsibility to the weather, specifically to weather events that result from nature's response to anthropogenic activity. However, the human-driven trigger is not explicitly mentioned.

The following example in *The Guardian's* article titled *"World's feral pigs produce as much CO2 as 1.1m cars each year, study finds"* ("The Guardian", 2021, July 19) represents not only the shift of the responsibility for greenhouse gases to pigs, which became feral due to human negligence, but also implicitly appeases the conscience for using vehicles. Moreover, the article's author does not clearly distinguish between the terms *wild* and *feral*; the blame-bearer for greenhouse emissions – *pigs* – are portrayed negatively through the negatively labelled lexeme "invasive." In addition, the allocation of blame to the whole world in this sentence is achieved through the use of the possessive form (*world's*), which not only shows that feral pigs belong to the whole world, but also pragmatically might suggest the global scope of the problem, thus indicating that problem-solving requires collective efforts and actions.

*"Feral hogs uproot soil while searching for food, in a process O'Bryan likens to 'mini tractors that are ploughing soil'. Doing so exposes microbes in the soil to oxygen. The microbes 'reproduce at a rapid rate and then that can produce carbon emissions [in the form of] CO2.'"* ("The Guardian", 2021, July 19). In this example, we observe a case of blame allocation between multiple agents, where living beings fall into a nature-based lexical and semantic category. The blame is shifted, firstly, to representatives of the fauna (*pigs*) and secondly to representatives of

the microbiological world (*microbes*). Furthermore, there is a metaphorical comparison between animals' biological need for food to survive and the artifacts of technological advances within the agricultural sector, such as *tractors*. This artifact metaphor has an exaggerated effect in representing the consequences of the natural activity of the representatives of fauna.

*"But on top of the heat, which forces fish and other species to move, if they are able, to more suitable climes, the oceans are also paying another heavy price for soaking up huge volumes of heat and carbon dioxide from fossil fuel emissions that would otherwise further warm the atmosphere for people on land. The extra CO<sub>2</sub> is making seawater more acidic, dissolving the shells of marine creatures, as well as starving the ocean of oxygen"* ("The Guardian", 2024, June 04). The agent blamed for the forced relocation of habitats of oceanic ecosystems (*sharks*) is a by-product of the natural transformation of energy during thermodynamic processes (*heat*). The other nature-related blame-bearer is CO<sub>2</sub>, a natural gas that causes suffering to its victim (*the ocean*) by starving them to death and depriving them of vital oxygen. Though the reader is likely to feel a sense of empathy in this sample because of the metaphorical personification of the ocean, the doer is not a human being, but CO<sub>2</sub>, as the subject modified by the adjective *extra*, which expresses semantically something beyond the normal state or quantity.

**The problem-related lexico-semantic groups of the blame-bearer** are illustrated in cases where blame is attributed to environmental problems themselves. *"Sharks are deserting their coral reef homes as the climate crisis continues to heat up the oceans, scientists have discovered"* ("The Guardian", 2024, September 09). In the excerpt, the agent responsible for the ocean heating and the relocation of its inhabitants to more favorable areas of the ocean for further residence are explicitly the environmental problem itself – the *climate crisis*. When the problem itself serves as an actor that shapes the consequences, changing the biological habitat of the planet Earth, the role of humankind in altering the habitat and contributing to climate change is completely overlooked. The very notion of a climate crisis creates a somewhat distant sense of the readers' perception of the challenges, where readers may question climate change, yet take it for granted, despite the fear-mongering connotations of the lexeme *crisis*. However, the element of urgency, an implicit call for decisive, immediate action, is created by the fear-mongering effect. In this example, it is worth noting the metaphorical use of a military-related target domain, which can shape the image of sharks not as victims

who suffer and are forced to resettle, but rather as deserters from their duty. Such a stylistic device puts humans and representatives of the animal world in unequal positions, with humans taking the dominant position. However, it is worth noting that although human beings put themselves in a superior position to other beings, this logically increases their moral responsibility towards others.

**The technology-related lexico-semantic group of blame-bearers** is observed in cases where blame is assigned for environmental problems to human-made objects and entities that affect the natural environment due to technological advances, such as technological artifacts, processes, and entities (e.g., industries, companies, etc.). In the following example, it is the artifact (*electric vehicles*) that is explicitly responsible for the issue of raw materials extraction and use. *"Electric vehicles, for example, use almost 10 times more 'critical raw materials' than conventional cars < ... >"* ("The Guardian", 2024, January 31).

*"Light pollution now affects 23% of Earth's surface and is rapidly growing in extent and intensity, data suggests. There is already evidence for detrimental effects on human health and concerns that many species are affected, with negative consequences including die-offs of insects and the disruption of migration patterns in bats and sea turtles"* ("The Guardian", 2025, August 21). This example is particularly noteworthy because it simultaneously reflects the implicit instigator in the role of humankind, or rather, their activities, as a source of environmental problems due to technological advancements. In addition, we notice that when describing the negative impact of light pollution, living beings (*insects, bats, sea turtles*) are saliently mentioned. However, again, the consequences are expressed through nominals (*die-offs, disruption*).

The study compares annotated datasets to identify distributional tendencies within and across a global corpus of texts – 13 news reporting articles addressing environmental problems. The feature-pattern analysis illustrated that it was possible to detect the blame-bearer in 59.3% (195) of annotated segments under investigation. Considering all 195 as the complete set (100%) of annotated segments, the UAM corpus tool revealed the following patterns, presented below.

Among the lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearers analyzed, the society-related lexico-semantic group of blame-bearers for environmental problems demonstrates the highest frequency, with 39.5% of examples. The second place is occupied by the human-related lexico-semantic group (25.6%), followed by the problem-related lexico-semantic

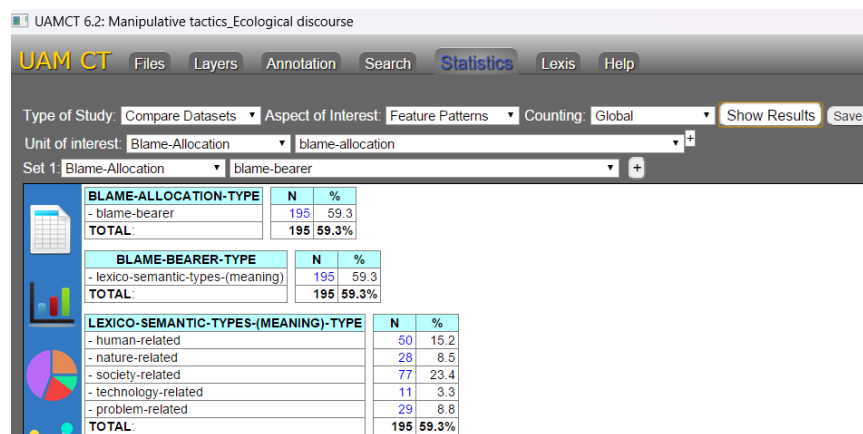


Fig. 1. The feature-pattern analysis of lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearers for environmental problems

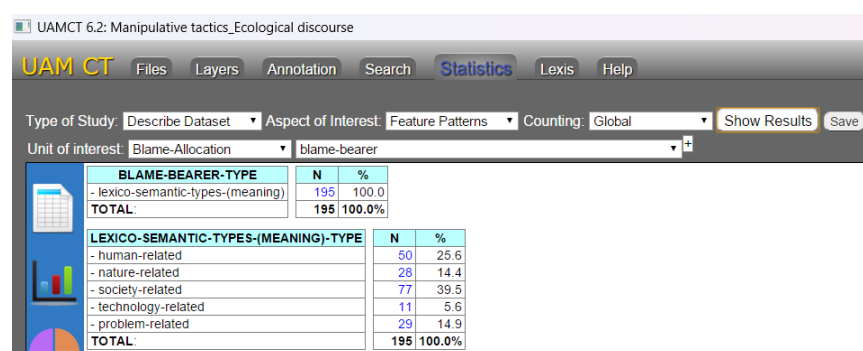


Fig. 2. The table demonstrates the frequency of occurrences of each lexico-semantic group in *The Guardian* news articles concerning environmental issues

group, which accounts for 14.9% of instances. The least common lexico-semantic groups of blame-bearer in the analyzed articles are revealed to be the nature-related group (14.4%) and the technology-related group (5.6%). These groups, despite their low frequency, demonstrate instances of shirking environmental responsibility and erasing the anthropogenic factor from the emergence of environmental problems. However, it is worth noting that the pronounced occurrence of nominalizations is particularly noticeable in groups exhibiting the highest frequency counts. Nominalizations serve as a linguistic tool at both the semantic and syntactic levels to create a somewhat distant sense of the readers' perception of the challenges, which in turn might result in questioning the existence or even taking environmental problems for granted.

**Conclusions and perspectives for further investigations.** Language serves simultaneously as a tool used by humans and as a resource that allows them to shape and represent reality: humans are primarily responsible for how they use language, and they are the ones who define the way they frame the cause and effect of an environmental problems, which facet and agent to make salient, which

agent to mitigate, obfuscate or completely erase. Taking everything into account, recognizing one's responsibility makes sense from a moral perspective. Accurate media coverage is essential for ensuring that the public receives reliable information, because it allows one to fix one's mistakes whenever possible, or, in the context of global changes in the habitat and environmental problems, at least to change the prevailing mindset to improve the prospects for the future, i.e. to develop a forward-thinking orientation and elaborate a plan of possible actions to preserve nature. An analysis of news articles on environmental problems revealed the prevalent use of nominalizations to describe the causes, blame-bearers and consequences of environmental and climate change we face nowadays. Nominalizations serve as a linguistic tool at both the semantic and syntactic levels to create a somewhat distant sense of the readers' perception of the challenges, which in turn might result in questioning the existence or even taking environmental problems for granted. The society-related lexico-semantic group of blame-bearers for environmental problems demonstrates the highest frequency, with 39.5% of examples. Yet we noticed that when the problem (14.9%) or

nature-related phenomena, processes, entities, etc. (14.4%) themselves serve as blame-bearers, it is a kind of strategy to shift the blame from humankind to mitigate the anthropogenic factor for transforming the biological habitat of the planet Earth, climate change, and environmental degradation. The use of negatively evaluative vocabulary when denoting semantically a nature-related blame-bearer, the use of nominalized subject denoting activities or processes as agents and emphasis on collective entities as causers of environmental problems allow the instigators, the responsible agents that causes the environmental problem, to be omitted or concealed, making it difficult for the readers of news articles to

perceive the real causes and consequences as well slow down the actions towards the eco-conscious life and welfare. The study also proved the importance of pragmatic inferencing in analyzing lexico-semantic types of blame-bearers for environmental problems in news reporting articles. The findings may be useful for further investigations into patterns of agency representations in media, as well as the manipulative strategies and tactics employed in the representation of agents accountable for environmental problems, a critical analysis of the role of agency in narratives centered on environmental issues within ecological, media, economic and political discourses.

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