

Framing Ecological Crisis: A Multimodal Semiotic Analysis of Contemporary Environmental Posters

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Abstract—The study examines the semiology of language used in contemporary environmental posters and its role in creating persuasive meaning within the context of the Anthropocene. This study argues that language in environmental posters is not merely an explanatory aid, but a key semiotic instrument that interacts with images, compositions, colours and typography to shape perceptions of ecological catastrophe. This qualitative, multimodal study draws on semiotics, the pragmatic philosophy of language, text-image relations and social semiotics. The corpus consists of four modern posters: STOP Plastic Pollution, Women & Climate Change, The War for Water and Global Warming (Warning!). These posters illustrate four dominant linguistic strategies in environmental graphic discourse: commands, naming, conceptual reframing and wordplay or lexical deformation. Environmental messages that use a slogan function based on speech acts such as force, implicature, anchorage, and multimodal reinforcement are examined. The study concludes that the persuasive force of environmental posters emerges from the integrated interaction of verbal and visual signs, and that language is indispensable to understanding how ecological crisis is publicly framed in the Anthropocene.

Index Terms—Anthropocene, environmental posters, linguistic semiotics, multimodality, visual communication

I. INTRODUCTION

The Anthropocene is now frequently reconceptualised as both a geological label and a historical and epistemic condition in which human activity has emerged as a factor influencing Earth systems and the form and nature of social life. In this respect, the environmental crisis cannot be considered merely a matter of science or policy any longer. It is part of a larger social conversation and remains a topic to be contested in terms of legitimacy, responsibility, justice, and moral obligation (von Braun, 2025). Consequently, environmental communication goes beyond the dissemination of information. During its campaigning, via digital media and in printed visual forms, it hopes to convey, mobilise, and influence the public's view of ecological problems and their personal relationship with them (Doerr, 2024; Dancygier, 2023).

Viewed through this communicative lens, the environmental poster fulfils a significant role. It is designed to be instantaneous, accessible, and impactful as a condensed visual-verbal form. In this way, its communicative power appears

to be manifested based on the interaction among different semiotic resources—image, colour, composition, symbol, typography, title, and slogan. The resources do more than function in isolation; they structure themselves to guide reading paths, organise salience, and establish ethical and political orientations for the spectator (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; Bateman et al., 2017). Consequently, the environmental poster is transformed from a decorative or informative construct into a multimodal site of meaning-making in public discourse.

Although prior research has generally assessed what it means to have environmental posters in relation to their linguistic components, relatively little attention has been paid to this issue, even though the language dimension alone is a valuable sign system. Language on environmental posters may also serve more than the purpose of emphasising what is already clearly visible. Titles and slogans can be used to name a public issue, create urgency, declare responsibility, and place ecological processes within the context of significant social issues. In persuasive rhetoric, however, one phrase can shift an image from neutral representation to moral accusation, from description to obligation, and from natural surroundings to civic concern.

In this understanding, language is the key instrument for the production of Anthropocene meaning. Speech act theory can inform this role. Slogans are not neutral descriptions; they are actions, performative utterances. They warn, command, accuse, urge, and mobilise. Austin's differentiation between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary force, as well as Searle's account of directive speech acts, enables us to imagine poster language as an action-focused discourse that creates social effects in the addressee (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Green, 2024). This is further explained by Barthes's concept of anchorage, which shows how verbal language orients interpretation by reducing the polysemy of the image to stabilise it in perspective (Barthes, 1977).

At a pragmatic level, a short poster text also generates thick implicatures about harm, accountability, scarcity, urgency, and potential futures that render little verbal material semantically and politically potent and impactful (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). These matters are of particular importance at the Anthropocene level, where naming and framing are not ideologically neutral within an Anthropocene setting. To call something pollution, crisis, war, warning, or justice is to already situate it within a normative horizon. Figurative and rhetorical practices condition how audiences conceptualise ecological risk, agency, and response, as metaphors recast environmental processes as conflict, threat, or emergency (Johnstone & Stickles, 2024; Dancygier, 2023).

It is, therefore, necessary to consider how linguistic meaning in environmental posters is constructed through relations with visual hierarchy, contrast, composition, and typography. The study investigates the semiology of language across four current environmental posters adapted from Poster for Tomorrow's 2018 A Planet for Tomorrow project: STOP Plastic Pollution by Ramin Ara, Women & Climate Change by Élodie Imbert, The War for Water by Camille Anne Ferreol, and Global Warming (Warning)! by Mengxi Cui. These selected works have two functions: visually documenting and foregrounding a particular type of linguistic strategy of environmental persuasion, command, and moral urgency, naming and constituting public problems, conceptual reframing through conflict metaphor, and wordplay or lexical deformation. Together, they provide a coherent corpus to consider how language acts as more than a secondary attribute but rather as a key semiotic resource that grounds images, activates implicatures, shapes moral evaluation, and aligns design choices to produce an appealing meaning in Anthropocene discourse.

II. LINGUISTIC SEMIOTICS AND MULTIMODAL MEANING-MAKING IN ANTHROPOCENE ENVIRONMENTAL POSTERS

This research is based on a semiotic and philosophical assumption: the language used in the environmental poster is not an additional supplementary explanatory layer attached to the image at that time but a constitutive semiotic resource in the production, control, and circulation of meaning in a multimodal text. As a contemporary style of graphic discourse, the environmental poster operates through the interplay of at least two complementary signifying systems: the visual system (image, colour, composition, symbol, typographic organisation) and the linguistic system (title, slogan, lexical selection, and directive phrasing). Hence, the meaning is not confined to either one or the other of these systems, but rather to the whole relational system integrated into such a structured communicative event. For learners of Saussurean languages, the meaning of a slogan lies not only in what a given slogan is ascribed to in any one dictionary; it also resides in its place in a relational system (not just the environment) in the semantic domains of urgency, duty, justice, harm, and public accountability. They are strong in building cognition and normative frames through lexical choice, compression, and opposition. Thus, in this view, environmental slogans in societies like ours function as socio-historically (or rather politico-culturally) charged signifiers whose worth is based on whatever relations they instantiate within the broader social and discursive relations (Saussure, 2011).

Peirce's triadic model also assists in understanding the verbal and visual signs in poster communication. By definition, linguistic features are highly symbolic and rely on conventional meaning; visual features play an iconic or indexical role, especially since visual elements often rely upon historical markers of trouble, pollution, deprivation, and disaster. These interactions are essential for environmental posters, as vague ecological issues need visual and symbolic mediation to be interpretable to the public. A phrase such as "The War for Water" doesn't just emerge on the receiving end of its lexical metaphor; for example, it also binds symbolic language to something visual as a metaphor for conflict, poverty, and danger. Eco's stance also supports this semiotic point by showing that signs work within culturally scripted systems instead of as open-ended conveyors of information. Therefore, environmental slogans serve as much to explain as to describe, as they

are to call into play interpretive codes, assumptions within the belief system, and collective cultural memories that we can use in making sense of environmental crises during public communication (Peirce, 1931–1958; Eco, 1976).

The second strand in the philosophical line discusses the relationship between text and image. Language does not merely accompany the visual field in environmental posters but modulates its interpretation. In our analysis of the site, Barthes's theory of anchorage is key to informing us of how printed text works to isolate the image's polysemy and attract a favourable evaluative reading of events. In persuasive design, the role is even greater: the point is semiotic orientation, not open-ended contemplation. Titles and slogans can help answer non-literal questions such as, "What is the problem? Who is affected? What is being demanded? What value position does this create? As a consequence, text has an interpretive function, anchoring its visual significance alongside drawing tension, irony, or even critical reframing.

Thus, the slogan is not only a physical object, or set of decorations, but also one of the meanings the design is supposed to achieve according to Barthes (1977). This is particularly important for the current sample. The imperative sentence "STOP Plastic Pollution" places the image in a moral and interventionist moment. In "Women & Climate Change", for instance, the language transfers interpretation from an ecological to an interpretive one that is permeated with vulnerability, justice, and social inequality. Water in "The War for Water," on the other hand, is turned into some kind of battleground, rather than a neutral natural resource. In "Global Warming (Warning)!", the linguistic form serves as a site for semiotic encounter and semiotic play, with lexical slip highlighting the affective and rhetorical stakes in the environmental argument. Furthermore, in each of these venues, text functions as identity in speech — text is not simply a way to express one's sense of identity but also a carrier of framing and ideological argumentation.

A third component of the model arises from pragmatism in the philosophy of language. Language in environmental posters is often too compressible, but it is because of this that environmental poster language is not semantic equivalence. Slogans tend to be performative and situational. Austin's theorisation around speech acts explains how utterances are not merely words that describe situations; they are deeds: cautioning, urging, charging up, commanding. Searle's description of illocutionary force is particularly helpful for poster analysis because it enables us to think of slogans as directive, assertive, or expressive acts, which aim to orient the viewer toward them in response. Environmental slogans, therefore, can become public action: they require visibility and reaction (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

Pragmatics also can take into account how messages written on short poster texts have meanings above what they would otherwise mean. With implicature, truncated speech can summon networks of tacit presumptions about harm to the environment, institutional guilt, distributive injustice, group frailty, and risk in our future decades. When you look at words like "STOP Plastic Pollution", it is obvious that pollution is a serious problem – it's ongoing, it's harmful, and we have the resources to prevent it, but we cannot wait. On the other hand, "The War for Water" emphasizes the scarcity of water and how people are competing for it, which can lead to a crisis, and not everyone will have equal access to water. There's "Women & Climate Change," which explains how environmental issues affect different people, depending on who you are. And when we are greeted by "Global Warming (Warning)!" it is using a play on words to really drive home the urgency of the situation. These phrases can be super powerful and can carry the message. It's a matter of convincing people that it's time to get them to act. This is why Gricean pragmatics (along with more recent work on speech acts and communicative meaning) offers a necessary account of how less is more in public communication—that is, how the small expression of words can have dense ideological or affective implications (Grice, 1989; Green, 2024; Korta & Perry, 2024).

A fourth methodological strand is social semiotics and multimodality. As environmental posters are naturally multimodal artefacts, the analysis should consider the dynamic relationship between linguistic meaning and visual and typographic resources. The work of Kress and van Leeuwen provides an original model to be employed in explaining how composition, salience, framing, gaze, contrast, and hierarchy organise visual meaning. This approach is particularly useful because it regards verbal language itself as a semiotic resource of the overall design, as opposed to merely an external one. Bateman et al. (2017) also stress that multimodal analysis must explore how various semiotic modes work together to structure discourse. Thus, in such a view, typography, scale, placement, colour, and lexicon are not merely stylistic appendages; they are crucial to the making of the poster itself, a response, an appeal to attention, and an object positioned to the environmental assertion (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

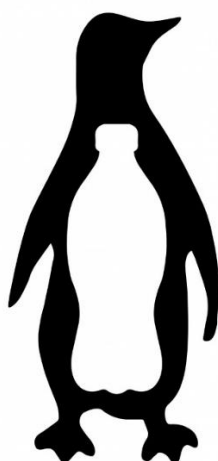
It is this multimodal method that is of specific importance in Anthropocene discourse (which, to speak in a certain way, is a term of art), when environmental messages move beyond mere reporting on environmental conditions towards a discourse on responsibility, justice, risk, and the collective future. The political philosophy of language also validly reinforces this view, illustrating how language is a potential way for people to recode public sense, split up responsibility, and establish normative boundaries. For the Anthropocene, this role is especially important in environmental communication, where the ecological event itself is transformed into public assertions that must be 'known' in order to be accounted for and addressed. In practice, the environmental poster emerges as a site of convergence of semiotic, pragmatic, and political processes: it names crises, frames responsibility, structures attention, and attempts to transform its audience from recognition towards ethical or civic action.

Collectively, these theoretical threads create a holistic matrix that allows us to see the four curated posters less as visual artefacts than as multimodal acts of environmental meaning-making. It enables us to investigate modern environmental posters as they enact the use of language through four intertwined operations: calling for moral urgency; naming the public matters that concern the people; reframing ecological resources as metaphors; and activating rhetorical potency through lexical distortion or wordplay. More broadly, this enables the study to investigate the interaction of verbal and

visual signs to develop persuasive Anthropocene discourses that do not just represent environmental crises (here, they are represented) but socially and morally shape them.

III. INTEGRATED ANALYSIS OF FOUR LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES IN CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTAL POSTERS

This section provides a combined multimodal examination of four modern environmental posters. In the four samples, language is not considered an accompanying caption on the image but a semiotic resource that is engaged in framing, directing, and amplifying meaning. The logic of analysis is consistent: each poster is assessed on the basis of speech act force, pragmatic implicature, anchorage, as well as multimodal reinforcement through composition, colour, typography, and visual hierarchy. This is how every poster becomes a coordinated semiotic event, where linguistic and visual signs work together to construct persuasive Anthropocene meaning (Austin, 1962; Barthes, 1977; Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).



STOP Plastic Pollution

Figure 1. *STOP Plastic Pollution*. Poster by Ramin Ara, From *A Planet for Tomorrow* (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018a). From <https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/51151>

The first specimen, *STOP Plastic Pollution* (featured in Figure 1), is arresting; like language, it commands and imposes moral imperatives. The slogan is immediately clear and direct: *STOP Plastic Pollution*. This framing, rather than simply framing plastic pollution as an act of ecology, takes its cue from an act of command and situates the viewer in a morally implicated addressee who needs intervention. This type of utterance is illocutionary and therefore not descriptive, according to speech act theory, and its effect therefore is not content-linguistic and speaking, but is, indeed, linguistically meaningful. It also positions the audience as an agent, a participant in the process, not just an individual or a spectator, who therefore has a responsibility to respond rather than standing back and remaining passive. The flow of the conversation is from acceptance to response (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Green, 2024).

More importantly, it uses short-structure language to make a slogan work even more effectively. It does whatever it takes to get its short words across: they condense a message into shorter, easier-to-digest statements. The phrase engages a thick, thick vein of pragmatic implicatures: plastic pollution is present and dangerous, damaging and destructive, preventable and already urgent enough that we must respond together now. So none of those assumptions is obviously stated here, but it's based on the assumption of what those things include about where and how that waste that is left behind contributes to the problem but as well, about the ecosystem impact of plastic that can be reclaimed and so on and so forth in terms of environmental degradation. Using Gricean terms, the slogan is very rarely stated, actually, more so, due to context and a perceived social assumption to persuade (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024).

Semiotically, however, the slogan operates not as a referential field but as a normative field. The verb "stop" is not merely an interruption, it arranges the world, clarifies what is permissible and what should be stopped. Plastic pollution, likewise, is a semantically charged construct—not a neutral technical description. It also recontextualizes plastic, for the average consumer, as an emblem of pollution and public damage. This lexicon is not to say name it — all of it entails — and it opens the phenomenon itself up to the evaluative horizon of rejection. So, in another sense, the slogan provides a discourse of guidance and functions as a form of summarizing indicator of moral interpretation (Eco, 1976; Saussure, 2011).

As the graphic's visual backbone, the economical yet powerful design of the poster provides visual props for this force. The graphic in its foreground displays the shape of a black penguin body, with the inner white space becoming a plastic bottle mold. This is not just a visual pun. The bottle is not that of an animal, or, in other words, outside a particular animal's environment a kind of contaminant at all; rather it is within, inside the body of that animal. The final result is an

incredibly image-oriented claim: plastic pollution has enclosed nature but also cut through and transformed it from within. The poster, composing in this fashion, proclaims that its effect on life's exterior is a disfigurement of its interior. The penguin represents sensitive wildlife, and the bottle represents the consumer universe with the symbol of everyday consumer material. The combined effect yields a striking visual inference that consumer waste has become “embedded” in the material becoming of life at this point (Eco, 1976; Peirce, 1931–1958).

In this respect, Barthes's notion of anchorage is particularly relevant. Even without the slogan, it could still be possible to understand it as a formal contrast between animal and object, or as an ecological metaphor, but STOP Plastic Pollution is the verbal phrase that both defines the interpretive horizon and prescribes a path for the viewer to chart. The text doesn't only describe the image; it configures its ideological position. This does not allow the image to be read as a kind of unmediated visual puzzle but instead accuses and demands intervention with it. Anchorage, therefore, is not a subsidiary and secondary component of the image but the very substance of its rhetorical potency (Barthes, 1977). The poster is also shown to possess a very effective and clever distribution of semiotic labour in terms of multimodal presentation. More of a visual style, but one that stands out because the slogan appears in small type on the bottom edge of the image, making it a focal point. This hierarchy is meaningful. The visual shock comes to the viewer first, then the verbal directive. The image calls to mind cognitive arrest; the text makes the arrest an ethical orientation. This sense of sequencing is tied closely to social-semiotic accounts of multimodal composition in which salience, placement, and path through the text inform semiotic resources for meaning (or not). This indicates that image and text are not redundant but complementary, build on one another's work. The image triggers the shock that comes with pollution; the language invokes a cry for response (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023).

Collectively, Figure 1 shows that command is more than a grammatical group. It assumes the shape of a multimodal ethical framework. The bottle becomes an object of personal accusation and the penguin a living being observing environmental violence, and the imperative, as a simple verbal act, becomes a form of public intervention. Such a poster is an example of how linguistic semiology and visual semiology join forces to produce an environmental message that is not simply informative but morally performative.

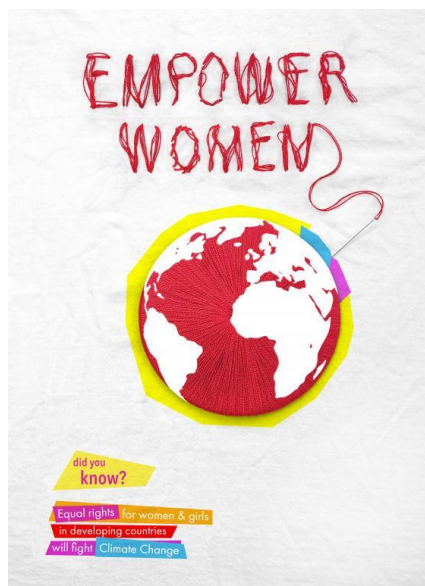


Figure 2. Elodie Imbert's *Women & Climate Change*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018b). From <https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/52562>

The second example, *Women & Climate Change* (Figure 2), shows naming as a public problem-constitutive linguistic strategy. In contrast to the imperative structure of the first poster, the force of this slogan is its ability to forge a conceptual relation between two domains: gender and climate, within one discursive unit. The title of the ad isn't just some coincidence of “women” and “climate change”; it frames the two semantically to allow us to reframe climate change as a concern that, as a socially experienced condition, needs to be experienced as a question of vulnerability, social inequality, forms of social care and collective responsibility, resilience, and justice. In that sense, the title is not descriptive but has a constitutive function. It provides a space of crisis and puts it in public view (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). On the language level (semiotics), then, naming is, in this case, an act of framing. *Women & Climate Change* frames environmental discourse and discourse around different human exposures and not universal planetary processes. It shifts the interpretive axis from climate as an objective scientific occurrence to climate as a socially uneven crisis. It also involves some epistemic work; the headline specifies what is and isn't an issue—what the public should do about it. Naming here is not only referential but ideological and distributive in the sense that it decides what becomes a subject of public concern under which kinds of semantic terms (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1976).

The title does, in principle, evoke a smattering of small but potent implicatures. It means that climate change is not a neutral force; women are disproportionately among those who bear the brunt of ecological disruption, and women should be presented less as passive victims and more as vital players of community resilience and a state of recovery. Those implications don't need to be articulated in the name of the title itself; the title paves the way for an area in the public sphere where issues of gender inequality, environmental justice, employment, and care will begin to grapple. Meaning thus arises within that platform and under the constraint of semantic compression and contextual expansion: if one of its titles is very little, then its reference site appears to be a large social field of relevance (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024).

The poster additionally reinforces (the naming strategy) visually via material design. The piece is stitched with lettering on white cloth, with continents cut from felt laid out on a handmade thread spool. This isn't some neutral material choice. Here, there are strong associations with labor, care, repair, embodiment, and interdependence throughout all threads, cloth, and stitching—felt, too. The earth is no loose cartography here at all, for here it's made, embroidered, and sustained by human hands. Visual semiotics are essential here, for the materiality of the image also enters the debate. The world is posed not as an abstract globe “out there,” but as a frail and amendable fabric whose existence relies upon social labour and modes of embodied care.

Once again, Barthes's notion of anchorage helps us understand the interplay between text and image. Without the title, the stitching and craftsmanship can be read as aesthetics based on craft, as icons of domesticity, the visual language of human interconnection. The term *Women & Climate Change* serves to situate and anchor these possibilities; it pushes the viewer toward a particularly gendered reading of climate justice. Language fixes the political significance of the material form. The stitched surface is less a decorative device than semiotically connected to the argument that climate change is entwined with social reproduction, inequitable burdens, and the labour-based reconstruction of shared worlds (Barthes, 1977).

Figure 2 shows how a multimodal approach to a resource can work — not just the image and text, but texture and material processes as powerful means for meaning. The poster does not enact climate justice in words alone. It performs it through a visual language of stitching, bond, and handwork. This is wholly aligned with social-semiotic theories that make meaning spread across various resources such as typography, image, composition, and materiality. The issue is discursively constituted by the title, whereas the visual form provides that issue with embodied and affective logic. The product is a poster in which naming is indistinguishable from material meaning (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). Figure 2 also illustrates that naming for the purposes of environmental discourse is never neutral labelling. It is a mode of discursive construction that transforms visibility, highlights who is in crisis, and reorganises the moral stakes of climate communication. By combining lexical framing with tactile visual materiality, the poster makes climate change a socially differentiated and ethically consequential issue for society to take notice of.



Figure 3. Camille Anne Ferreol's *The War for Water*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018c). From <https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/49857>

The third sample (Figure 3) is “The War for Water”, which reframes the concept using a conflict metaphor. Its efficacy as a language is due to its power: it reimagines water—not as a neutral natural or universal resource, nor in any sense a life-nature and life state but as a condition of scarcity, struggle, control, and geopolitical pressure. This one does more than merely lift the atmosphere of environmental conversation; it rewrites the ontology of the resource. Water, in a sense, is presented not as a given but as something to be contested, threatened, and made inextricably linked to future instability and power relations that provide the fabric of society (Eco, 1976; Dancygier, 2023). Based on speech act theory, the slogan is not perceived as a single command but nevertheless offers a major public act. It necessitates reconceptualising

thought. The viewer is invited to reinterpret water in terms of how war frames the frame of reference. A different kind of discursive act is obtained when we investigate the context under which it may be comprehended. While its title isn't a call for rapid response—at least not in the sense of being in an imperative mode—but a kind of reordering of the status of an environmental reality—as the act of rebranding the public mind before a call to action occurs—this form of declaration employs power by reconfiguring public thinking (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

At the level of pragmatic implicature, the phrase “The War for Water” implicates an elaborate entextualisation of implicit premises—scarcity, uneven access, instability, competition, territorial contestation, and ecological disaster as a driver of political and social violence. Such implications are not specified explicitly in the title but are triggered by the metaphor. “War” doesn't so much infuse this emotional tone as lay claim to an interpretive frame in which some kind of inference seems all but inevitable. To do so serves as an example of a means by which brief language can allow for broader ideological and affective definitions within a short span of time, in a single textual instance (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). In linguistic terms, the reason a word means so much is due to its reframing. Reframing is not just an insult on a wound; it's a semiotic ruse, one domain readable through the lens of another or as a semiotic practice, one domain acquiring the language and values of the other. Military conflict language is reframed as the language of access to resources in this instance. It causes a shift in vocabulary from ecology to politics, from necessity to struggle, from natural sustenance to social injustice.

The result is a profound moral-political change: water can now be understood in terms of an index of inequality, a space in which civic danger lurks, not merely an outcrop of nature. With respect to anchorage, the title ensures that the image is not read in an objective ecological register. While the poster has no formal visual features, “The War for Water” makes readers see this landscape through an antagonistic lens. Water cannot be conceived of as simply a picture of tranquillity, purity, and the essence of life without, all too often, bringing conflict, pressure, and competition into the picture as well. Otherwise, the text takes away the semantic freedom in this part of the visual field—it makes it politically loaded, an interpretation. In Barthesian terminology, anchorage in this sense serves not merely to explain but to increase and politicise the image (Barthes, 1977). At the level of visual semiology, the multimodal logic of the poster is used to add a sensory, as well as a compositional dimension to this repositioning. A title such as “The War for Water”, for instance, pushes the visual field to understand scarcity only as tension and vulnerability only as a force.

From a social-semiotic perspective, these visual resources—contrast, spatial pressure, fragmentation, directional force, or imbalance—aren't just things we add onto the image or “ornaments” but are frameworks of actuality that materialise the metaphor and bring the abstraction of water conflict into focus so that it is immediately visible to the eye of the beholder. That's the image because the metaphor gets a body and perception on it there. The title names the crisis conflict; in design, it becomes visible (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). Figure 3 is important in this sense in illustrating how environmental discourse changes in a single reframing step, from descriptive to political theatre. Water is no longer something that is “passively” “about” life; it is a resource shaped by power, access, and future confrontation. The poster confirms that metaphor in environmental communication isn't decorative language so much as the semiotics of the kind necessary for rearranging urgency, for renegotiating what the public stakes are worth.

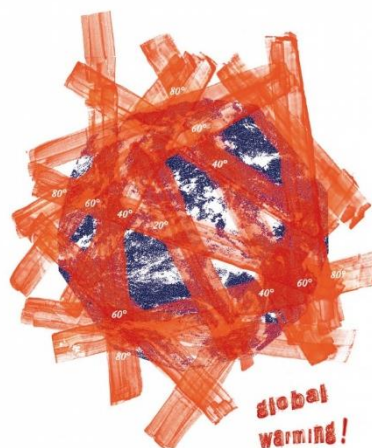


Figure 4. Mengxi Cui's *Global Warming (Warning)!*, Selected From the *A Planet for Tomorrow* Environmental Poster Project (Poster for Tomorrow, 2018d). From <https://www.posterfortomorrow.org/en/gallery/52033>

In the fourth example — Global Warming (Warning)! (see Fig. 4) — wordplay and lexical deformation have been the corpus's most self-reflexive linguistic strategy. The message is both language and meaning. Its power arises from a deliberate slide from ‘warming’ to ‘warning’, which makes a term about global warming (in our case climate) a wake-up call. Such declarations are not decorative but rather a semiotic labour by which disordered destabilising forces become weapons of persuasion (Saussure, 2011; Eco, 1976).

It can be seen from a semiotic perspective, where the influence is a reaction to difference and deviation. It sounds familiar to viewers who are greeted with the expectant word “global warming” — but who are also sucked into its close variant as “global warning.” Its significance depends on a shift from anticipation to fact. But precisely on that account the story works: It shows us that climate change is no longer an objective, descriptive category, but an emergency to be faced with seriousness. As pragmatic and rhetorical terms speak, the formal lexical change is, nevertheless, marginal but maximally meaningful. The latter term has a complex communicative impact in speech act form. It does not state an imperative like Figure 1, nor makes a problem space out of a name as Figure 2 does, or re-organise a metaphor as Figure 3 does. It doesn’t say so; it warns, and it does it through language disruption. It’s telling this tale with such force because it warns the viewer to render the language unstable. The utterance sounds an alarm, but it sounds oblique, as one has to participate in the recognition itself. However, for the warning function to fully emerge, the viewer must feel the deviation. Significance is thus co-produced through reading; for this reason, the poster has a much more potent cognitive and rhetorical impact (Austin, 1962; Green, 2024).

Pragmatically, the phrase engages several implicatures at once: that climate change can no longer be a distant descriptive matter; that the level of difference between climate conditions and a warning condition has essentially collapsed; and that the global scale of the threat cannot be separated from the urgency of response. None of these meanings is actually articulated, but their full recovery is through the lexicon of slippery semantics and a reader’s awareness of the phrase itself. This is a classic case of inferential force produced with only marginal textual variation (Grice, 1989; Korta & Perry, 2024). The visual design heightens this effect through colour and placement. Red lettering wrapping the image of the Earth provides a planetary size to the warning and embodies a visual logic, reminding us of the warning’s planetary scale. Here, red serves, however, as a culturally stabilised sign of peril, alarm, and emergency.

The circular structure of the text throughout the world does not merely add a touch to the composition; it creates a feeling of both encirclement and pressure. It seems that the Earth itself is not merely depicted but is also enveloped in its own warning. That is, visual semiology heightens the lexical deformation: the signifier is disrupted at the verbal level while the globe is visually enclosed at the graphic level. The result is a multimodal correspondence between linguistic instability and planetary precarity (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). As for anchorage, the phrase also serves a double function. In effect, it keeps our view of the Earth in an environment of danger, lest it appear to be neutral as an image of globality; and in so doing, its own witticisms are reinforced: the shift from warming to warning is not handled as a teasingly ambiguous formulation but a thunderous warning to the planet and its surroundings.

Here, language knows itself: it does not just identify the crisis, but shapes the crisis. As a result, this poster, particularly semiotically, is complex: the deformation of the signifier reflects the instability of the world it sees (Barthes, 1977). As a result, as Figure 4 suggests, wordplay in environmental communication can become a medium at which not only humour is served but also ethical and cognitive pressure. The poster does not simply document climate peril but performs it with disruptive language. Verbal diverging, chromatic alarm and planetary enclosure coalesce into a message, not only in the form of having the crisis depicted but made visible itself by how its name appears on the sign. Altogether, the four samples indicate that modern environmental posters do not depend on image alone or text alone but on the harmonious combination of linguistic and visual semiotics. In Figure 1, the imperative becomes a multimodal structure of ethical intervention. With the lens of climate change as a socially differentiated issue of justice and resilience, naming is considered in Figure 2 as climate change. But in reframing, as shown in Figure 3, water morphs from a vital resource into an arena of conflict, scarcity, and political struggle. Lexical deformation turns climate discourse itself into an act of warning (Figure 4). In all four cases, the persuasive force is achieved at the intersection of speech act force, implicature, anchorage, and multimodal composition. Typography, materiality, colour, placement, and image—they do not simply support the verbal message; they join in making it. The environmental poster thus becomes a site where language turns into action, and design turns into argument, whereas the ecological crisis is developed not only as a question of representation but as a field of ethical and civic address (Austin, 1962; Barthes, 1977; Bateman et al., 2017; Eco, 1976; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has made the case that contemporary environmental posters in an Anthropocene world should not be thought of simply as visual artefacts embedded in shallow verbal overlays, but rather as multimodal discursive formations in which language emerges as the preeminent semiotic resource for the performing of persuasive meaning. The analysis has found that the environmental poster is not so much a representation of ecological crisis as the framing, organisation, and moral intensification of the crisis that go hand in hand with verbal, visual, and typographic signs. In other words, the paper suggests that language does not take a back seat to the image in environmental poster discourse, nor does it lend itself to an explanatory caption. Instead, it is a constitutive process in which crisis is named, urgency is declared, responsibility is allocated, and social response is mobilised (Barthes, 1977; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). Theoretically, the paper has demonstrated the theoretical model that runs throughout the study itself (semiotics, text-image relations, pragmatic philosophy of language, and social semiotics). This semiotic analysis of the text demonstrates that the salience of slogans does not derive from dictionary value alone, but rather from their presence in broader systems of difference, association, and cultural coding (Saussure, 2011; Eco, 1976).

On a practical level, it has shown that environmental poster language is performative and inferential: slogans do not just narrate the ecosystem but warn, instruct, reconfigure, mobilise, and build dense knotted webs of implicature between harm, obligation, scarcity, injustice, and possible futures (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Grice, 1989; Green, 2024; Korta & Perry, 2024). From the perspective of a multimodal analysis, the study has also shown that meaning is generated not in solitary signs, but rather through the patterned interaction between lexical choice, composition, salience, colour, spatial organisation, and typography that strengthens the persuasive power of the poster as a public communicative act (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021). The data presented here bolster the principal theorisation of the project: that the semiology of language in environmental posters is most evident when viewed through the recurring and coordinated rhetorical acts that shape public reception of environmental crisis. Language works through four strategies (among the four posters), embedded within the four selected posters. In *STOP Plastic Pollution*, the imperative form converts environmental discourse into a moral imperative, transitioning the viewer from recognition to ethical resistance.

In *Women & Climate Change*, naming constitutes a constitutive act by which climate change is discursively connected to the notion of gender-based vulnerability, resilience, and social justice. In *The War for Water*, the analysis has shown that metaphorical reframing moves the framing of water from a neutral natural resource to a contestable topic of conflict, scarcity, and political struggle. In *Global Warming (Warning)!*, lexical deformation, as well as wordplay, transforms language itself into a material sign of alarm, laying bare how the formal instability of the signifier works to intensify environmental urgency. But at bottom, the above examples illustrate that the linguistic dimensions of environmental posters are not merely the material end product of visual design: they are an ineluctably crucial terrain through which we make and disrupt public meaning. It also demonstrates that environmental posters take advantage of the persuasive impact of linguistic economy. Even the smallest slogans themselves can carry more semantic and political weight than their size indicates. For, in this moment we see not in this shortness impotence, but a rhetorical point of strength and it allows for reference to wide distances of interpretation with implication, compression, and communal cultural understanding. In this sense, our results illustrate that framing is part and parcel of the practice of language for environmental discourse. A single word can transform what appears to be a neutral landscape into a civic indictment, from a descriptive rendition to a moral duty, from a visual depiction to a call to intervene. This framing effect is especially relevant in the Anthropocene, wherein naming is never ideologically neutral, how environmental discourse represents ecological conditions affects how these conditions are socially constructed, politically interpreted, and ethically evaluated (Dancygier, 2023; Johnstone & Stickles, 2024).

At the same time, the study demonstrates that the persuasive force of this environmental poster cannot be attributed to language alone. Throughout the corpus, visual and typographic organisation was crucial as argumentative means. Hierarchy controlled attention; composition established relationships of tension, depletion, and conflict; colour established tone of feeling and semantic mood; and typography was not only a transmission of words but also a physical mode of meaning in its own right. These findings indicate that texts, images, and typography should not be viewed as parts to be combined late in the project, but as a single signifying system one would expect. The poster does best within this convergence—language shapes meaning, the image becomes sensory and symbolic proof, and typography informs rhythm, provides emphasis, and articulates the mood of the work. This meaning, therefore, is not presented as inherent to the posters from outside but rather emerges when it works together and is constructed by means of the relationships between semiotic resources that intersect in the communicative space (Bateman et al., 2017; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021; van Leeuwen, 2023). There are two main theoretical and practical contributions of this study. In theory, it extends a line of reading in Anthropocene communication research to shift focus from visual aesthetic interpretations of environmental posters primarily to a multimodal interpretation of language as a productive sign system in ecological public conversation. It thus reinforces arguments to incorporate the use of speech act theory, anchorage, implicature, and multimodal analysis of design for environmental media.

Practically speaking, the study lends a framework for poster designers, campaign planners, and environmental communicators to be more effective at message construction. It is suggested that successful environmental posters closely coordinate slogans, visual architecture, and typographic choices to guarantee that the word-for-word message is not only readable but also ethically forceful, emotionally resonant, and visually effective. This has direct consequences for developing climate and environmental campaigns intended to alleviate uncertainty, increase public adoption, and enhance the civic benefit of graphic-based advocacy (Doerr, 2024; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

While having made valuable contributions, this study is limited by the size and range of the corpus it examines. This study focused on four purposively selected posters, chosen based on their clarity of linguistic strategy and their potential for multimodal interpretation. Although this created analytical depth, the results cannot be mechanically generalised to environmental poster discourse, as it is a complex structure that necessitates diverse epistemic approaches. A similar analysis could take place in subsequent research via a larger sample, campaign, or other regional/linguistic environments in order to illustrate how identical rhetorical strategies translate across cultures, publics, and media ecologies. Experimentally interrogating audience reception in the context of command, naming, metaphor, and lexical deformation within the frames of prior beliefs, environmental literacy, and political context would be similarly worthwhile.

These extensions would expand our understanding of how multimodal ecological discourse circulates and how persuasive meaning is stabilised, resisted, or transformed in the real world. In summary, this study has shown that the environmental poster emerges in the Anthropocene as a location where language becomes action, image becomes

argument, and design becomes an instrument of ethical address. The semiotic character of language on these posters is not only that of words; it is not only how they are used to represent crisis, the distribution of responsibility, the organisation of interpretation, and how they relate to the visual form to achieve public meaning. Environmental posters do not just record ecologies — they actively build them out of urgency, justice, and civic action. By demonstrating the symbiotic relationship between verbal and visual signs in this production process, the study adds to a more accurate portrait of environmental communication as a mode of engagement, an orientation, an operation of persuasion, and moral world-making for a time of planetary crisis.

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