

Keeping young people informed and engaged

A linguistic analysis of climate change communication targeting young audiences in Flemish news

Wout Van Praet, Anouk Bries & Liv Huygens

Introduction



Introduction

- Reality of climate change, probable consequences, and potential roadmaps toward mitigating climate change generally (well-)known
 - In Belgium, general public agreement on necessity of climate action (e.g., 80% of Belgian citizens are concerned about climate change, see Pepermans & Maesele 2017)
 - Since peak public interest in climate change in 2019 (Fridays For Future, school strikes), reduced attention to climate change, both in media and in political communication (cf. 'climate pause')
 - Increasingly more attention to feelings of 'eco-anxiety' among general public, but young people in particular (e.g. Léger-Goodes et al. 2022)
- Challenge is to keep children / young people engaged and informed without feeding into feelings of despair

Introduction

- This study examines coverage of climate change through a **linguistic analysis** of the Flemish children's news programme *Karrewiet*
- With children and teenagers as its primary audience, *Karrewiet* plays a pivotal role in shaping the perspectives and **attitudes** of future generations towards **climate action**
- Does coverage of climate change in *Karrewiet* help to keep children and teenagers informed and engaged in the climate debate? (cf. constructive journalism)

Background



Background

Constructive journalism (McIntyre & Gyldensted 2017b, 2018; de Smaele et al. 2019)

= approach to journalistic practice inspired by positive psychology (e.g. Seligman 2011)

- focused on solutions, recovery / progress and the future (cf. *solutions journalism*)
- fostering positive attitudes (e.g. reporting on positive stories or looking for solutions and/or silver linings in negative stories) (McIntyre 2015; Kleemans, Schlindwein & Dohmen 2017; Kleemans, De Leeuw, Gerritsen & Buijzen 2017) (cf. *positive journalism*)
- engage and accurately inform the public, without compromising core journalistic values (e.g. critical questioning, impartiality)

Research question

How 'constructive' is coverage of climate change in children's news programme *Karrewiet*?

- To what extent does it foster **positive attitudes**?
- Is it focused not just on identifying problems but does it also offer **solutions** and highlight **progress/recovery**?
- Does it engage and accurately inform children?

Materials and methods



Data collection

- Clips from *Karrewiet* Youtube channel about climate change (search term 'klimaat') from 2019 to 2023
- 27 clips, each approximately 2 minutes
- Automatic orthographic transcriptions using speech-to-text transcription software

Data analysis

Appraisal analysis (Martin & White 2005)

- Model for analysis of ‘evaluations’
 - Distinction between three systems: attitude, engagement, graduation → focus on attitude
 - Attitude (‘opinion’)
 - **Emotions** (e.g. (un)happiness, (in)security)
 - **Judgements** (of people) (e.g. capacity, tenacity/resolve, moral behaviour)
 - **Appreciation** (of ‘things’, including physical object, natural phenomena, but also propositions and proposals) > reaction, composition, and value
- Each can have ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ value

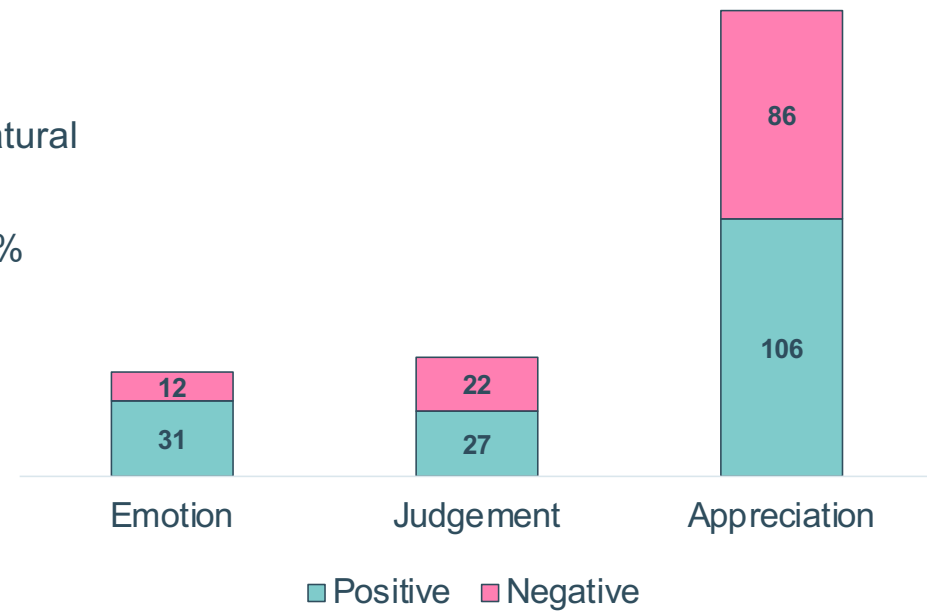
Results



Results

Attitude

- Comparatively few expressions of ‘emotion’ and ‘judgement’
- Instead, focus on ‘appreciation’ of things (e.g. natural phenomena, actions, proposals, propositions)
- Positive expressions prevail (in total 58% vs. 42% negative comments)



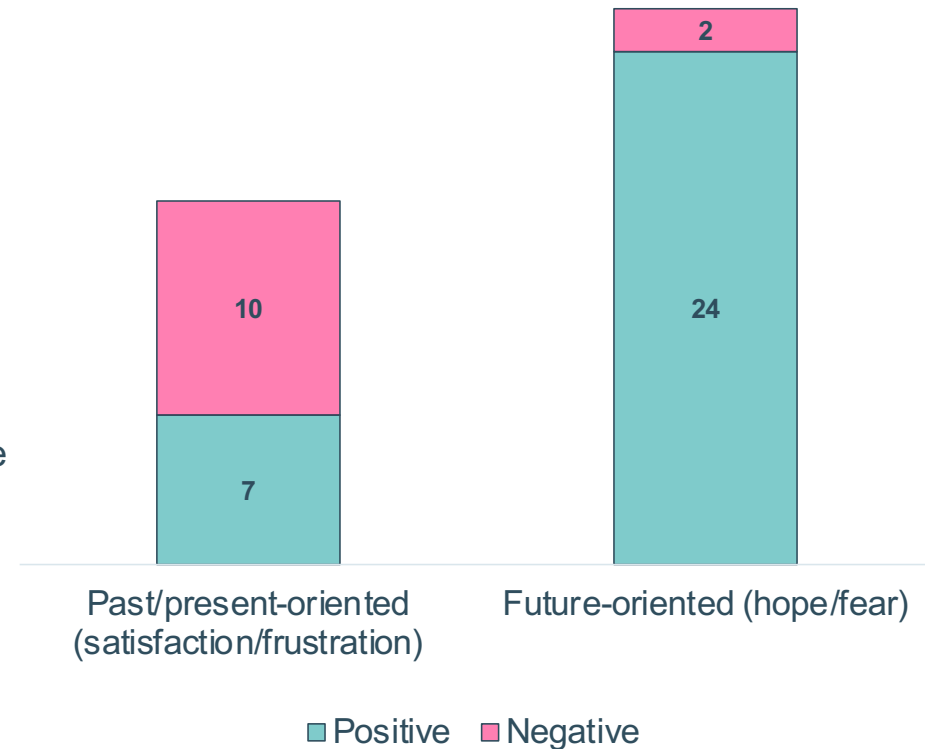
Results

Attitude: emotion

- Overall few expressions of emotion
- More expressions of hope (future-oriented) than satisfaction / frustration (present- and past-oriented)
- Among present/past-oriented emotions, negative ones (frustration) more frequent

e.g. ***I hope** that many of these good ideas make their way to the climate summit.*

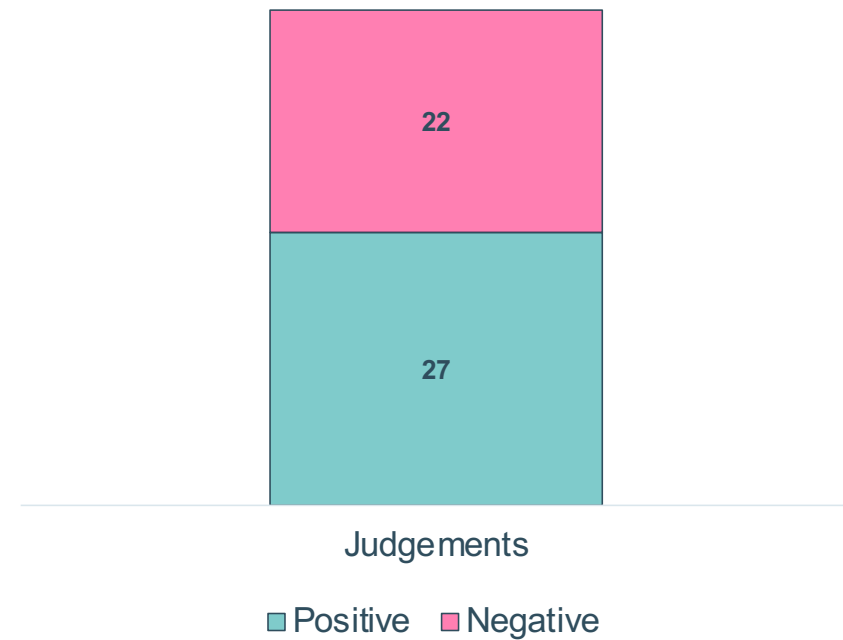
e.g. *Because of global warming there is **unfortunately** less and less of this coral.*



Results

Attitude: judgements (of people)

- Overall few judgements
- Slightly more positive (55%) vs. negative (45%)
 - e.g. *Alright, you [Unicef] are doing great! High five!*
 - e.g. *They [young protesters] think politicians do too little against global warming.*



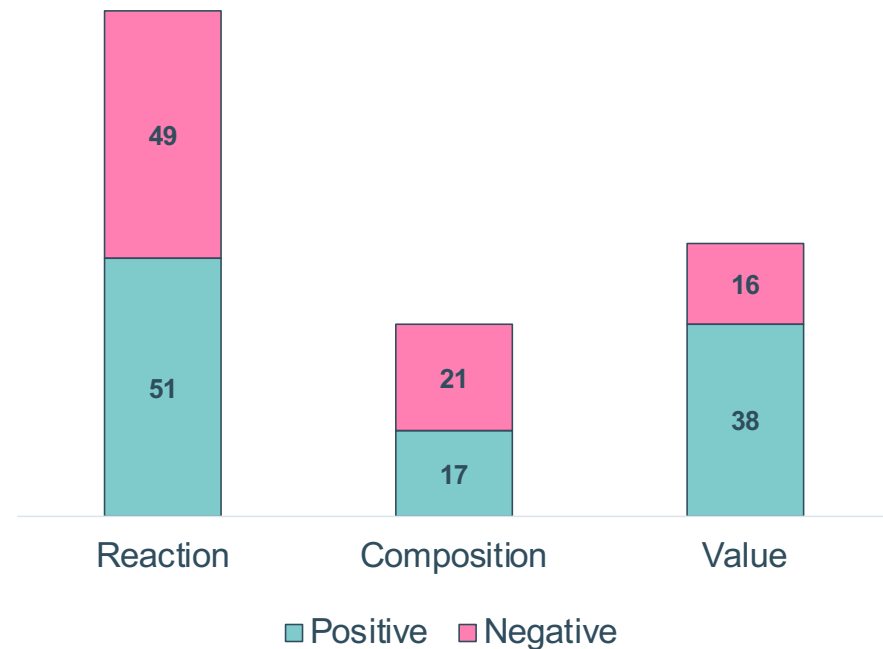
Results

Attitude: appreciation (of 'things')

- Most frequent
- Overall, slightly more positive (55%)
- Focus on 'reaction' (cf. *Do I like it?*): almost equal frequency of positive vs. negative

e.g. *I think it's **great**.* [children's panel on climate change]

e.g. *That will lead to prolonged heatwaves and hence long droughts. That's **a problem** for our food supply.*

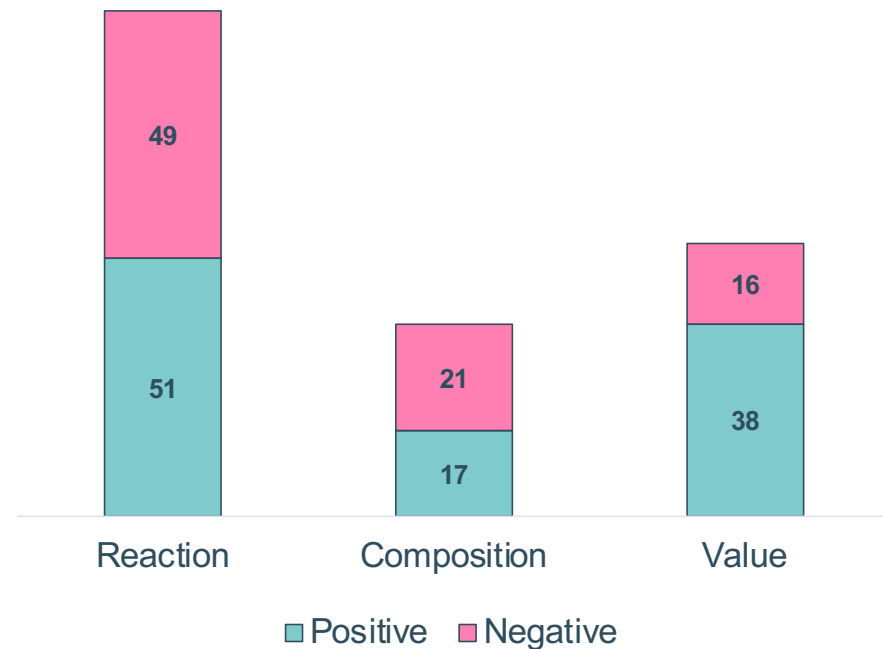


Results

Attitude: appreciation (of 'things')

- Fewer comments on 'composition' (i.e. complexity and balance)
- Composition more likely to be negatively evaluated (55%)

e.g. *[If average temperatures rise more] then the weather will become **more extreme** than today.*

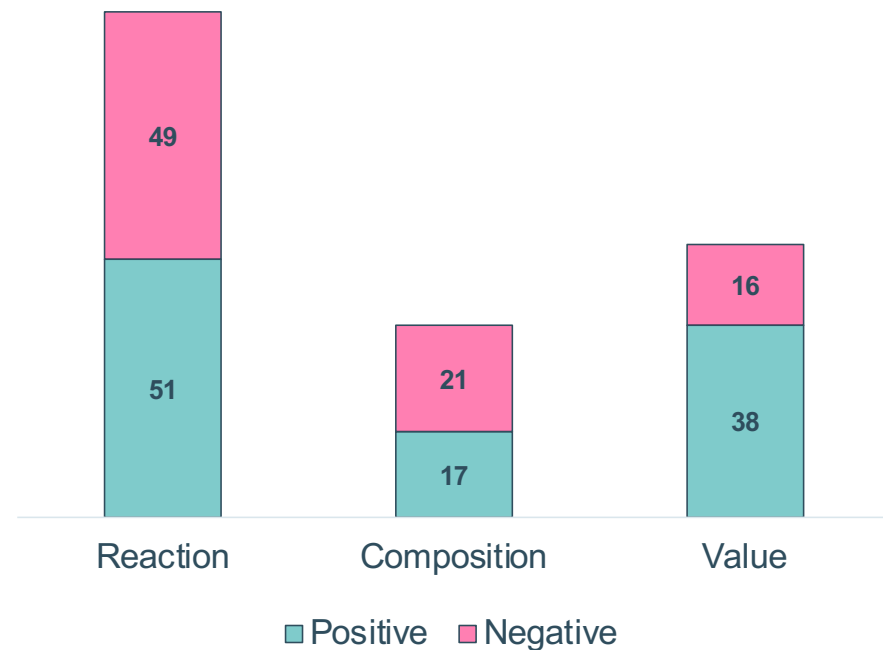


Results

Attitude: appreciation (of 'things')

- 'Value' (worth) relatively frequent
- Evaluated mostly positively (70%)

e.g. *Millions of people get their food from the coral reefs. **It's important**, therefore, to take action now.*



Discussion



Discussion

Constructive journalism in *Karrewiet*?

- i. Fostering positive attitudes
- ii. Engagement and accurate information
- iii. Future-oriented: focus on solutions, recovery and/or progress

Discussion

i. Fostering positive attitudes

- In its evaluations, *Karrewiet* is overall more **positive** than negative, especially in expressions of emotion
- Expressions of emotion mostly **future-oriented** and positive ('hope')
↔ Emotion about past/present ('dissatisfaction') more negative
- Appreciations in terms of **value** largely positive; **reactions** (*Do I like it?*) equally negative and positive

Discussion

ii. Engagement and accurate information

- Quite a bit of engagement with alternative viewpoints in *Karrewiet* (especially information from experts and experiences from other young people)
- Besides many ‘**human interest**’ stories (e.g. impact of forest fires, floods, etc. on lives of children elsewhere in the world), also focus on **explaining key topics** in climate debate (e.g. *Climate or environment?* ; *What is the climate?* ; *What is the Green Deal?*)
 - In ‘scientific’ reports (*What is the climate?*) relatively few appraisals (compared, for instance, with more ‘policy-oriented’ reports)

Discussion

iii. Future-oriented: focus on solutions, recovery and/or progress

- Most reports mention at least some (possible) solutions and/or offer ‘silver lining’ to negative news

Discussion

iii. Future-oriented: focus on solutions, recovery and/or progress

e.g. [On possible extinction of polar bears]

Luckily, polar bear experts say it's not too late. What can we do? We could, for instance, take the bike or the train instead of the car or a plane. This shows in fact that if we do something, then polar bears actually can survive.

e.g. [Climate-related natural disasters in the Amazon region]

First, there was the hurricane that swept the roofs away. And then there were the floods and they had to climb in trees. Now, they are safe, here in the camps, and they are getting help.

Discussion

iii. Future-oriented: focus on solutions, recovery and/or progress

- Yet, most solutions focus on **individual action** ↔ policy-related solutions mostly appraised as ‘necessary’ and ‘possible’, but **little attention** on **actual accomplishments**
- Despite consistent emphasis on ‘possibilities’ and ‘roads to recovery’, sometimes very **abstract**

Discussion

iii. Future-oriented: focus on solutions, recovery and/or progress

e.g. [Great Barrier Reef is dying.]

... But it's not too late. We can still do something. [end]

e.g. [Randy's village is slowly disappearing into the sea.]

... There's no money for levees. Moving is also not an option. Luckily, not every square [in Randy's village] is flooded, and Randy can still play football. [end]

Conclusion



Conclusion

- Climate-related news reports in *Karrewiet* generally show many signs of constructive journalism
- Focus on positive attitudes (mostly ‘hope’ for future, and ‘value’ (worth) of things)
- Climate coverage aimed at informing children (e.g. explanation of key topics; interviews with experts) and keep them engaged (e.g. human interest stories)
- Solutions feature prominently, though often concentrating on individual action, while actual political accomplishments are largely absent → focus more on ‘potential for progress’

References

- Dagan Wood, S. (2014). The positive future of journalism. Tedx Talks, 15 september. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPy0xnymGR0>
- Kleemans, M., Schlindwein, L.F., & Dohmen, R. (2017). Preadolescents' emotional and prosocial responses to negative tv news: Investigating the beneficial effects of constructive reporting and peer discussion. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 46, 2060-2072.
- Kleemans, M., de Leeuw, R.N.H., Gerritsen, J., & Buijzen, M. (2017). Children's responses to negative news: The effects of constructive reporting in newspaper stories for children. *Journal of Communication*, 67, 781-802.
- McIntyre, K. (2015). Constructive journalism: the effects of positive emotions and solution information in news stories (dissertation). University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
- McIntyre, K. (2017). Solutions journalism. *Journalism Practice*. doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1409647
- McIntyre, K., & Gyldensted, C. (2017). Constructive journalism: Applying positive psychology techniques to news production. *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 4(2), 20-34.
- McIntyre, K., & Gyldensted, C. (2018). Positive psychology as a theoretical foundation for constructive journalism. *Journalism Practice*. doi:10.1080/17512786.2018.1472527
- Pepermans, Y., & Maeseel, P. (2017). Climate Change Communication in Belgium. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.013.456>
- Pollet, D.; de Thier, V. Génération What? Pourquoi, Quoi? Available online: <https://www.fapeo.be/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/ge%CC%81ne%CC%81ration-quoi-version-finale1.pdf> GÉNÉRATION (accessed on 19 September 2023).
- Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish: A visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being*. New York: Atria.
- Van der Molen, W.J.H. & Van der Voort, T.H.A. (2000). Children's and adults' recall of television and print news in children's and adult news formats. *Communication Research*, 27, 132-160.
- Van der Molen, W.J. H., & De Vries, M. (2003). Violence and consolation: September 11th 2001 covered by the Dutch children's news. *Journal of Educational Media*, 28(1), 5-19