Tampere University

Riina Konola

# DEVELOPMENT PROJECT SUFFERING FROM THE WHITE SAVIOUR SYNDROME:

## Representations and Agency in the World Bank's Climate Change Action Report

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# ABSTRACT

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In this study a video report, "Climate Change Action Plan Delivers $83 Billion and Results" (2020), produced by the World Bank is analysed to convey if it reproduces colonial power relations. Colonial hierarchies present the Global North as a foundation and source of development and the Global South as the underdeveloped periphery. This work studies the dichotomy and the social injustices within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The framework is a transdisciplinary approach to analyse discourse and the means of reproducing power relations with discourse, and therefore, social critique is employed alongside with linguistic analysis.

The methods are applied on both verbal and visual data, making this a multimodal study. The research questions of the study are: 1. In the data, what types of groups are indexed with personal pronouns 'we' and 'they'? Who are we and who are they? 2. How are these groups and their agency represented in the data linguistically and visually? 3. How do these representations reflect the power relations between the Global North and the Global South? The first question was answered with a linguistic analysis, whereas the answers to second and the third question consisted of both verbal and visual analysis.

The data suggests that 'we' refers to the World Bank itself, and that the institution represents itself as an organisation with resources and knowledge. The analysis shows that the World bank assigns itself agency, especially in the form of helping, while simultaneously representing 'they', the Global South, in the position of needing the help with no agency or resources. These positions were interpreted to replicate and reinforce colonial power structures and therefore contribute to ongoing social injustice.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis, ecolinguistics, climate discourse, otherness, climate project, climate colonialism

# USE OF AI IN THESIS

I have used AI tools in my thesis:

- ☐ No
- ☒ Yes

The AI tools used in my thesis and the purpose of their use has been described below:

Names of the tools and versions:
ChatGPT, version 4.

Purpose of the use:
An attempt to establish the origins of the video data. This was done to collect more context information about the data because the World Bank reported that they used ”recycled” video material.

Parts in which AI was used:
Studying the context of the data, which is reported in the Methods section.

I am aware that I am totally responsible for the entire content of the thesis, including the parts generated by AI, and accept the responsibility for any violations of the ethical standards of publications.

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# 1 Introduction

Climate change is an inescapable topic that not only produces challenges in the material word but also causes social injustice. Sometimes these injustices are produced or amplified by those claiming to help the people suffering from the effects of climate change, especially in the Global South (Sultana 2022a, 2). The development projects and development discourse led by global institutions often have two polarised participants; the Global North, also referred to as the Western or developed countries, and the Global South, that is often called the developing countries (Ziai 2015,112; Stibbe 2021, 51). This study will employ the terms the Global North and Global South following Sultana's (2022b) definition of them as "analytical categories" and "geographical spaces" (26:29–26:35). These two spaces differ in their possession of power (ibid). The hierarchy between the two spaces along with the issue of climate colonialism was raised in Conference of the Parties in 2021 (from now on COP26), the annual climate summit held by the United Nations (Sultana 2022a, 1–2). Sultana (2022a) argues that those who have obtained the power in the Global South during the colonial era continue to define climate discourse and therefore the actions taken in the material world (pp. 7).

In linguistics, the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is applied to study how language is used in the production and justification of social injustice and abusive power relations (Van Dijk 2015, 467). CDA often perceives the effects of language use in the material world through the concept of social constructivism, according to which language as a mean of communication constructs its subject (Van Dijk 2015, 467, Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 21–22). Stibbe (2021) determines the critique of language that "contribute[s] to ecological destruction" and exploring language that promotes nature's protection as ecolinguistics (pp. 1). Ecolinguistics can comprehend social aspect as well, for example, Yasmin and Amin (2024) researched the language used and vulnerabilities reported in the tweets of UN Environment Programme, UN Women, and World Bank Climate (pp. 4,6). In addition, Ziai (2015) has studied the development of the discourse produced by the World Bank and its characteristics. He reports that despite the change in discourse

the power relations between the Global North and Global South remain as they were in the colonial era, and that the World Bank is one of the most dominant institutions producing discourses related to development project (Ziai 2015, 118). Simultaneously, the World Bank ignores the economic disturbances caused by colonial rule and the role of the Global North in causing the climate change (Ziai 2015, 129; Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 3, 5). Even some schoolbooks replicate the colonial power structures where organisations led by white people provide aid in the Global South creating an impression that improvement is impossible without that aid, as was discovered by Ideland and Malmberg (2014, 380–81).

The division of people and spaces into the coloniser and the colonised, the helper and the one in the need of help or developed and developing countries can be a form of othering. Otherness lays its basis on the construction of ‘us’ and ‘others’, or ‘not us’, and is used as a justification for power imbalance between the two groups and legitimise actions mitigate or to adjust to climate change (Andreucci and Zografos 2021, 2). In climate discourse, this is sometimes done in the light of agency where ‘us’ is represented as the capable and knowing agent and ‘the other’ as passive and vulnerable needing help from ‘us’ (Andreucci and Zografos 2021, 2; Ideland and Malmberg 2014, 381). This dichotomy, along with representing the Other as a generic mass, was utilized in World Bank’s book *Voices of the Poor* (2000) (Pithouse 2003, 123). The framing has been studied in verbal, mainly written, data, but rarely in multimodal data. Yasmin and Amin (2024) call for multimodal research “to provide a more complete understanding of the discourse” (pp. 7).

This study employs a video, ”Climate Change Action Plan Delivers $83 Billion and Results” (2020), produced by the World Bank, reporting results from their climate related project in the Global South. The study replies to the request made by Yasmin and Amin (2024) and allows the findings to be compared with Pithouse’s (2003) results. The framework applied in this study is critical discourse analysis. More precisely, the method is used to analyse verbal and visual representations and the power relations they create and maintain making it a critical study. According to Fairclough

(2010) the core of CDA is to focus on power and social injustices by identifying and interpreting them and their production while aiming to reduce the harm by adding awareness (pp. 21–22). The harm of some climate projects is that they replicate oppressive colonial power structures (Sultana 2022a, 2). Sultana (2022a) reminds that organisations and academics have stated in multiple occasions that current capitalist solutions do not change the existing oppressive structures, that often go unrecognised and therefore unaddressed (pp. 5). Therefore, recognising, analysing, and interpreting texts that may reproduce and even reinforce inequal structures is necessary and valuable.

This study focuses on representation and agency because they may reveal hierarchies and justifications for the power imbalance making them a fertile ground for analysing power relations. The research questions and the analysis will follow Anu Pynnönen's (2013) framework that consist of three parts; textual, interpretative, and critical analysis (*tekstuaalinen, tulkitseva ja kriittinen*) (pp. 32 - 33, Table 1, 38). The research questions are:

1. In the data, what types of groups are indexed with personal pronouns 'we' and 'they'? Who are we and who are they?
2. How are these groups and their agency represented in the data linguistically and visually?
3. How do these representations reflect the power relations between the Global North and the Global South?

## 2 Theoretical Background

Some of the most significant social problems are inequalities that are produced and justified by cultural and racial differences (Fairclough 2004, 1–2). This type of inequalities are currently being discussed in the domain of climate discourse. For example, the discussion over climate colonialism erupted at COP26, in 2021, as the decolonial and indigenous groups protested the inefficiency, insincerity, and inequality of the actions planned at the meeting (Sultana 2022a, 1–2). According to

Fairclough (2004), several researchers working in the field of social studies are acknowledging the central role of discourses as societal constituents (pp. 2). But what is a discourse? There is no simple or exhaustive definition for the word (Fairclough 2013, 3–4) and, therefore, in this study discourse is used in a broad sense, communication, but also as an extinctive category with specific features, such as, *climate discourse* or *neoliberal discourse*.

## 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis perceives language as a social construction and studies language as social action, where the meaning of language reaches beyond syntax or grammatical features (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 13–14). Fairclough's (2010) discourse analysis is constructed to analyse the language and how it operates in capitalist societies (pp. 14). His focus is determined by the impact capitalism has on other fields of society and how understanding these mechanisms might lead to a thriving, healthier society (Fairclough 2010, 14–15). Van Dijk (2015) states that critical discourse analysis studies the “discourse structures” that justify and reinforce or question abusive power relations (pp. 467). According to Fairclough (2010), the main feature of CDA is that "it is relational, it is dialectical, and it is transdisciplinary", and its foremost subject is *power relations* and their impact on social injustices (pp. 16, 21). Multifaceted relations are formed internally within discourse and externally in the actual society, these relations, such as power, is simultaneously 'dialectical' and 'physical' (Fairclough 2010, 16–17). Fairclough (2010) suggests that critical discourse analysis should be an "analysis of dialectical relations between discourse and other objects, elements or moments, as well as analysis of the ‘internal relations’ of discourse" and to achieve this, *transdisciplinary* methods are required (pp. 17). This is why this study is not purely linguistic but applies social and political studies as well.

Besides applying interdisciplinary theories, it is resourceful to analyse a broader spectrum than the text or data itself. Context, in other words who communicates, where, and how, is a crucial feature in discourse analysis (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 19). Context and its inseparable relationship with language is the core of discourse analysis according to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019, 15). They further explain the relation by noting that the subject is affected by the words used to discuss it, but simultaneously the speaker builds a relationship with the listener and is affected by the norms of the society, in other words which words the speaker can apply in the given context (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 15, 73).

Two aspects that are related to contexts are who is producing the speech and who is being spoken about. If the producer of discourse is an institution, it likely has more power than an individual speaker. Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) state that institutions formulate and reorganise discourses to define and restrict them (pp. 78). This setting holds a power structure that allows the speaker to choose whose version of the truth is presented, what is accepted as a fact, and what constituents form causalities (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 73–74). The use of power can manifest in data as the producer of the data creates representations of the subject and thus defines what type of knowledge is produced about the subject (ibid). The power of representations lies in the way they effect the items that are being described, since the representations reformulate the impression, the reader has of them (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 78–79). Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019) connect this relation between the subject and the object with social constructivism, a theory, in which the language constructs and shapes the physical and the social realities (pp. 15, 79). As mentioned before, social constructivism is the core of discourse analysis.

A relatively new objective in discourse analysis is dismantling binary classification (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 54). One way to unravel these binaries could be the study of otherness, the division of people into ’us’ and ’them’. However, the relation between two dialectically differentiated groups is not mutually exclusive (Fairclough 2010, 17). Yet, the representations may

deliberately emphasise those differences by constructing the Other while separating it from the Self. The process of division by defining and describing is often done within the concept of otherness. The otherness can appear in activities and projects and the roles created by them. An example of otherness in development projects is 'helping' that, according to Ideland and Malmberg (2014), has formed into an institutional concept where organisations from the Global North assign themselves the role of the helper leaving the role of being the target of that help to those seen as the other (pp. 381). In this example, the subject and the object form a binary where the subject implements its agency in the form of helping and the object is the target of that help. By analysing who is given the position of a subject and who has the position of an object, the roles and agency of groups or individuals can be distinguished, which according to Fairclough (2010) can lead to understanding the causes to inequality and at best advance equality (pp. 22).

Even though, discourse analysis has been developed to analyse verbal data its methods could be applicable to visual data. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) note that visual data is likely to have central role in critical analysis and have developed a technique to analyse modern visual text produced in the Global North (pp. 3, 14). They wish to elaborate the spectrum of the field beyond verbal analysis and ground their "the descriptive framework" on critical discourse analysis (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 14). The framework follows in the footsteps of 'a social semiotic theory of representation' and Halliday's 'systemic-functional linguistics' focusing on the process of coining a sign (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 6). According to their theory, signs are made, for example, in *classificational structures* and *transactional structures*, which are types of *narrative representations* (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 49–51).

*Classificational structures* are a type of visual representation (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 50). *Analytical processes* study a *Carrier* and its *Attributes*, for example, a person and their features of clothes (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 87). Though Kress and Leeuwen concentrate on taxonomies rather than symbolism of the Attributes they may convey more than their role as part of a whole.

Attributes could be read as signs that carry meaning beyond their appearance, which is called *indexicality* (Johnstone 2015, 633). Reading indexes involves interpretation and knowledge about the context, both of which are parts of CDA.

*Transactional structures* are visually presented transitive verbs that consist of an *Actor*, a *Goal*, and a *vector* (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 46, 59, 65). This study employs the terms subject and object instead of Actor and Goal to maintain a concise terminology with verbal analysis. According to Kress and Leeuwen (2006) vectors can be indexed by linear forms, such as, the direction of the depicted action, paths, or eyelines (pp. 46, 59, 67, 285). Transactions depicted in visual elements may be used to describe agency, an essential element when analysing power relations. Agency and effectiveness of actions can be visually represented also by the movement of the camera or other changes in the image. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) suggest that "camera-initiated" change allows the producer of the video to decide the viewpoint (pp. 262). The mood of the visual element can be determined by its brightness and colour as a hight saturation communicates joy of life and positivity, among other things, whereas they associated low saturation with dullness and gloominess (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 233, 236).

Representations can be a fertile target for analysis, because, according to Pietikäinen and Mäntynen (2019), in visual discourse they can represent the essence of an entire group of people (pp. 86–87). Representations or other signs are not arbitrary but are selected by the producer of the material and, therefore, reflect their values and intentions (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 8, 13). These selections, in both verbal and visual data, can impact the agency of those being represented, in other words, what type of actions are associated with different people or groups.

## 2.2 Climate Discourse – a critical view

Some financial institutions, such as the World Bank, may and are known to implement "neocolonial control" and should therefore be viewed with critique (Sultana 2022b, 38:39–39:10). According to Sultana (2022a) colonialism is founded on unequal power relations that are to some extent justified by racism (pp. 4). These mechanisms are present in the form of neocolonialism, in post-colonial world, and more precisely in development projects, where the same unequal power relations obtain (ibid). Due to colonial structures and worldwide capitalist trade leading in the wealthiness of the Global North extracted from the Global South, there remains an imbalance between the Global North and the Global South (Sultana 2022b, 25:30–27:00). The resources needed to build the wealth of the Global North were extracted from the Global South, resulting in poor capacity of the latter to encounter the climate crisis (Sultana 2022a, 5).

Since the Global North has more resources and therefore more power, it also possesses the authority to define both itself and the Global South, in other words the Self and the Other. Climate actions enforced in the Global South by organisations operating from the Global North are justified by climate discourse dominated by international development organisations. Andreucci and Zografos (2021) suggest that the World Bank, among other institutions, replicates colonial practices in their way of categorizing peoples and assets (pp. 3). By controlling and producing climate discourse, these international organisations can restrict what can be discussed, what type of knowledge is acceptable and what measures are feasible (Sultana 2022b, 30:53–31:20).

The control and the power imbalance can be noticed in othering language and practises. Both Sultana (2022a, 5) and Andreucci and Zografos (2021, 1) define otherness in the light of the work by Naomi Klein, who adopted the term from Edward Said. Andreucci and Zografos (2021) extend on Naomi Klein´s thoughts of otherness by arguing that current climate projects reproduce colonial power structures (pp. 8). More precisely, they connect Foucault's biopolitics and racism with othering and colonial rule (Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 2). The othering binary is particularly present in the naming of geographic areas. When the word 'developing country', referring to the countries

Global South, is applied in the meaning of ‘an undeveloped country’ it contains the idea of subordination (Stibbe 2021, 51). This entails that there are ‘developed countries’, the countries of the Global North, that have achieved an optimal state, against which the standards are established, which causes a complication because the consumption patterns of the Global North remain unquestioned while increase in the Global South is promoted (ibid.). It is worth noting that the consumption in the Global North is the reason for climate change, and therefore, this othering setting does not only create power relations but is also planetarily unsustainable.

The same binary power relation is present in the idea of the Global South as the other in demand for assistance from the Global North placing the other into a justified inferior position (Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 3), as discussed previously in this chapter. Actions and plans that are developed to address the climate issues often employ "narratives that stress vulnerability, underdevelopment, and victimhood" (ibid.). These positions seem to offer no or scarce agency. Yasmin and Amin’s (2024) ecolinguistic research examines intersectionality and vulnerability in tweets posted by the UN Environment Programme, World Bank Climate, and UN Women, more precisely, how these institutions write about the role and position of women in the context of climate change (pp. 4, 6). They discovered that the World Bank does recognise the inferior position of women and promotes “gender-inclusive policies” in their tweets (Yasmin & Amin 2024, 6). However, recognising vulnerabilities does not automatically lead to equality or justice. Vulnerability is often depicted as an independent constituent separate from the colonial history and extractivism capitalism that produced the state of scarce resources, while the origins of the climate crisis are omitted from the discourse (Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 5–6).

As the Global North names the Global South as the vulnerable other, it simultaneously portrays itself as a realistic and intelligent instance that relies on science (Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 5). This reproduces the colonial “white man’s burden” (ibid) or as Sultana (2022a, 6) calls it; “white saviourism”. Because the Global North has the responsibility to civilise, solutions and thoughts

ascending outside its region are neglected or silenced in climate action (Sultana 2022a, 3, 9). This is what Sultana (ibid) refers to as epistemic violence. She notes that the voices leading the climate discourse are "often [those of the] Global North, white, male experts" (Sultana 2022a, 8). Those who have obtained the power in the colonial era continue to define climate discourse and therefore the actions taken in the material world (Sultana 2022a, 7). By analysing pieces of the discourse produced by the powerful instances, possible elements of epistemic violence and coloniality could be revealed.

## 2.3 The World Bank

The World Bank was established in the United States after the Second World War to support rebuilding Europe, but in the mid-1950's its focus was redirected to reinforce the development of the countries in the Global South (Ziai 2015, 126). The financial institution defines itself as "one of the world's largest sources of funding and knowledge for developing countries" (the World Bank). Stibbe (2021) remarks that in the beginning of development projects they often caused more poverty by exploiting workforce and local resources, and once this was undeniable, the projects were gradually renamed and modified to "sustainable development" and even further to models that prioritise profits of the Global North over everything (Stibbe 2021, 52–54). Nowadays even sustainable development goals (SDGs) are primarily economic and only secondarily ecologic, which is exemplified in the text and symbol chosen to illustrate Goal 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth" (Stibbe 2021, 54–55). The symbol consists of a vector ascending gradually from left to right, most likely representing growth (see the United Nations).

Ziai (2015, 136) classifies the discourse produced by the World Bank as "neoliberal discourse of development" that includes key elements from development discourse and globalisation discourse. In the core of development discourse is the two binaries: developed and developing countries (Ziai 2015, 112), in other words the Global North and the Global South. Neoliberalism

establishes that it founds itself on knowledge, thus implying that it is founded on discourse as well (Fairclough 2010, 269). This makes discourse produced by the World Bank a justified subject of CDA, alongside with its significant global influence. Ziai (2015) notes that for the last three decades the Global North has dominated the financial support administered to development work, which has allowed it to affect local politics (pp. 101). Giving an example of neoliberal discourse, Fairclough (2010) remarks in his analysis on Tony Blair's White Paper (1998) that Blair highlighted global hierarchies by speaking of "our assets: knowledge, skills and creativity" (pp. 276–77). These *assets*, alongside with economic wealth, seem to equate with power in neoliberal discourse.

Richard Pithouse (2003) critiques the World Bank for the representation of its subjects in his analysis of the book *Voices of the Poor* (2000). He suggests that the institution filters the local voices even if it endeavours to create an accurate representation for the Westerners who might have a prejudiced perception of people living in the Global South (Pithouse 2003, 118–120). In the book the World Bank systematically omits the names of the interviewees representing 'the poor' portraying them as an anonymous entity (Pithouse 2003, 123). Pithouse (ibid.) supposes that the nameless poor is what the World Bank refers to as 'they' and defines 'us' as educated Westerners. Ziai (2015) explains that the actions of 'us' are often connected with the supported development and industrialisation of the Global South (pp 103–104), in other words helping the Global South to achieve similar unsustainable standards of living with the Global North.

This short study examines the possible inequalities present in the chosen data on linguistic, visual, and critical level. It could be used to evaluate if the relatively current, 2020, climate discourse produced by the World Bank reproduces the othering structures that have been distinguished by other scholars. Simultaneously, the findings can become a part of the broader discussion over climate discourse, specifically the neocolonial nature of climate actions raised in COP26 in 2021.

# 3 Materials and Methods

The following sections explain the origins and context of the data and how it was collected. It also briefly describes how the analysis was conducted. In this section as well as in the analysis, the words verbal, and text are used to describe written and spoken elements and the word visual to denote images and video clips. The words textual and data refers to the video in all its multimodality.

## 3.1 Materials

The data for this study was collected from the Word Bank's own website regarding their Climate Change Action Plan -project that was executed in 2016–2020. The World Bank was of the institutions that was repeatedly discussed by researchers contributing to climate discourse and climate colonialism, for example Farhana Sultana and Aram Ziai. Therefore, the institution was chosen as the producer of the data. Other criteria for the data collection was the multimodality to extend the scope of the analysis as requested by Yasmin and Amin (2024, 7). Therefore YouTube was selected as the platform for collecting data.

From a range of videos on YouTube "Climate Change Action Plan Delivers $83 Billion and Results" (2020) was chosen due to its climatic orientation. This multimodal data consisted of speech that was attached to the video in audio form and in subtitles, and of recycled video material compiled by the World Bank (3:20). The length of the video was 3 minutes 27 seconds and the subtitles consisted of 365 words. To maintain the focus on the discourse produced by the World Bank, verbal data that was considered as excerpts of interviews, was omitted and only the narrator's words were included in the analysis. This left 255 words in the transcription. The video was also traced to the World Bank's website .Verbal content on that website was utilized as background information and to place the video into a larger context.

The origins of the video clips were not indicated in the video and could not be traced by a search on Google Images or by employing Chat GPT. The tracing was done by providing screenshots to both platforms and searching for the source of the image. Despite the lack information about the original producer of the video clips, the producer of the video was the World Bank and the imagery chosen for the video supported the viewpoint and representations they wanted to deliver to the viewer. Chosen representations of "events, phenomena, or people" create 'a visual discourse' (Pietikäinen & Mäntynen 2019, 86–87, my translation). The matters and details represented on this video were the actions taken by the World Bank and the people towards whom the actions were directed. This is why the collected data was considered worth analysing with the means of CDA.

## 3.2 Methods

Fairclough (2010) suggests that 'methodology' would be the preferred term for this section due to inseparable nature of theory and methods in CDA, and the process of combining and choosing methods according to chosen to viewpoint of the research (pp. 213). Also, Van Dijk (2015) marks that critical discourse analysis has no specific way of analysing texts (pp. 469) This study employs a three-stage model that follows the steps defined in the three research questions. A framework from Anu Pynnönen (2013) was adopted and complemented with Kress and Leeuwen's (2006) theory for visual analysis.

Pynnönen (2013) provides a three-step model for critical discourse analysis (pp. 32–33). The 'textual' analysis operates on the micro level focusing on words and expressions on the level of linguistics leaving only a minor space for interpretation and maintaining objectivity (Pynnönen 2013, 32). The 'interpretative' analysis expands the research to "context" and "representations" and on the last level, 'critical' analysis, these findings are examined to reveal power relations and

ideologies embedded in the data (Pynnönen 2013, 32–33). This three-stage method was applied to visual data in compliance with the analysing of ‘classificational’ and ‘transactional’ introduced by Kress and Leeuwen (2006). The analysis conducted in this study could be classified as *negative critique* because it critiques the injustices produced by the World Bank (see Fairclough 2010, 21).

On the textual level of this study, the pronouns ’we’ and ’they’ including the objective and possessive forms, such as ’us’ and ’our’ were analysed. The core of the analysis was to research to whom these pronouns refer to. Other words that were in the centre of the analysis were the words that in the text described the pronouns and their references. First, all the pronouns 'we', 'us', 'our' and 'they', 'them', 'their' were highlighted from the text by using the search function on Microsoft Word individually for each form. In other words, they were retrieved manually. Second, the references of the pronouns were analysed to indicate which people, groups or institutions were referred to with the pronouns. For instance, the sentence: “*we* have been keeping pace with the fast changing climate, so *they* are not left behind” (00:18–00:24, my italics), was noticed. Third, the textual analysis was extended to study the surrounding constituents, including nouns in genitival nominal phrases, such as “our $415 million” (00:38–00:39), and verbs in predicates. For example, verbs that are assigned to these binaries could reveal how their agency is portrayed, and the nouns with possessive pronouns as premodifiers could enlighten the socio-economic status given to ‘us’ and ‘them’ by describing their assets. This was done to investigate what type of resources ’we’ and ’they’ were described to possess in the data, and to analyse the object-subject relation between ’we’ and ’they’. A more detailed analysis was performed with the verb ‘help’ due to its significance in development discourse. Lastly, verb phrases without explicit agents were recognised and the agent of the phrase was deciphered from the context.

The linguistic analysis was complemented by a brief overview of naming practices. First, it was examined if the people presumably from the Global South were named or if they remained anonymous as in a previous publication from the World Bank, *Voices of the Poor* (2000), as noted by

Pithouse (2003, 123). At the end of the textual analysis, the terms used for the geographical and social area the World Bank operates in were examined. This was done to study if the World Bank applied the hierarchical dichotomy to developed and developing countries as discussed by Ziai (2015, 112) and Stibbe (2021, 51), or if the World Bank had updated their terminology to match the current trend in social sciences, the Global South and the Global North (see Sultana 2022b, 26:29–26:35).

Visual and verbal are not opposing alternatives of expression, but often they overlap (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 76). Visual analysis was employed in the research because the data utilised visual representations complementing the verbal data. Three (3) images, or more precisely screenshots of short video clips, were chosen for closer analysis, two depicting 'we' (Image 1 and Image 2) and one representing 'they' (Image 3). Image 1 was chosen because it contains 'a classificational structure'. It was a representation of 'us' with significant indexicality. Images 2 and 3 were selected due their 'transactional structures' with distinct vectors depicting actions. Image 3, along with a vector, included a visual representation of 'they'.

The interpretative analysis extended beyond the textual analysis and focused on the representations that were employed both in the textual and visual material. The interpretative stage included notions of context and analysing the word choices as well as visual elements chosen to support the text (Pynnönen 2013, 33). For example, a person's 'Attributes' were analysed, and the indexes formed by these attributes were studied in the light of textual elements attached to the clip. Also, vectors were recognised and analysed in a similar manner. According to Pynnönen (2013) the critical stage also discusses what is omitted from the data (pp. 32–33). Contrary to Pynnönen's framework, notions concerning omission were included in the textual and interpretative analysis to avoid excess repetition in the discussion section. However, further discussion over the meaning of those exclusions remained in the section.

The chosen constituents were further reflected in the critical analysis in the discussion section to extend the analysis to subject positions, otherness and power relations that were present the

data. This was done by examining how the linguistic and visual representations, along with agency of 'we' and 'they', connected to a broader societal context. The power relations that were observed were further reflected from the viewpoint of colonialism and if the power structures replicated colonial hierarchies and mechanisms, such as othering. The findings were compared with the theoretical background with a transdisciplinary, but primarily linguistic, approach. The interpretative stage was merged with visual and critical analysis for conciseness and coherence.

# 4 Results

In this section research questions one (1) and two (2) are answered. Due to the nature of critical discourse analysis, interpretation is present in the analysis alongside with the textual and visual analysis. The critical phase of the analysis is placed in the discussion section.

## 4.1 Textual analysis

| Person (total) | Nominative | Accusative | Genitive | Elision |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| First (15) | 7 | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Third (7) | 3 | 4 | 0 | 0 |

Table 1. Taxonomy of pronouns.

In the entire text, there were twenty-two (22) pronouns. The first-person singular forms were excluded from this number because they appeared in translations of clips where locals were interviewed and spoke a language other than English. The interviewees were interpreted to present their personal views and experiences, and therefore these instances were omitted from the analysis that focused on representations of larger groups or entities. Fifteen (15) of the pronouns were first person plural

forms (*we, our, us*) and seven (7) were third person singular or plural forms (*they, them, he, him, her*). Third-person singular forms were included because the instances they appeared in were interpreted to represent 'they' instead of individuals. For example, 'he', despite picturing a single person, likely represented farmers in general rather than the particular farmer. From now on, to improve the readability of the analysis, the nominatival forms, 'we' and 'they' are used to cover all forms. Other forms are discussed separately when that is relevant for the analysis.

From the beginning of the video report, it became evident to whom the World Bank refers with the pronouns 'we' and 'they' as the narrator utters "But at the World Bank Group, *we* have been keeping pace with the fast changing climate, so *they* are not left behind" (00:17–00:24, my italics). 'We' anaphorically and explicitly referred to the World Bank itself and 'they' to the targets of the Bank's actions. It was observed that 'they' were presented on the video before the anaphoric reference cited above. 'They' referred to the "this family" (00:09), "this farmer" (00:12), and "this city" (00:15), which were attached to imagery of people and scenes most probably from the Global South. It could be stated that 'they' remained an implicit mass, *this family* being a member of it, or even a space, more precisely *this city*.

When the World Bank reported about itself, they primarily used the nominative case, 'we', in seven (7) instances, or the genitive case, 'our', also in seven (7) instances. In contrast, no third-person genitives were used in the video. The first-person genitives reported about the World Bank's "assets" (00:33), "knowledge" (00:34, 03:03), "million[s]" (00:37), "resolve" (02:29), "skills" (03:04), and "resources" (03:06), whereas the resources of the targets of the World Bank's actions are not mentioned.

Similar pattern was detected in the nominative cases of the pronouns and their predicates. For example, the first-person nominatives, 'we', were followed by predicates, such as, "are going big" (00:46) and "are helping people" (01:21), which construct 'we' by describing continuous action by using the present participle. This reporting of action builds the ongoing agency

of the World Bank. It was further observed that the agent was omitted from eight (8) predicates, possibly to avoid tautology, for example, as the agent, 'we' and the auxiliary verb, 'are', remained unchanged in consecutive phrases.

> We are being creative,
> __ getting new players, new partners and the private sector into the fight,
> __ jump starting green markets from new products to bonds and insurance, green factories and industries that create jobs.
> __ Pushing for greater efficiency that saves energy and reduces greenhouse gases.
> (00:50–01:13, elision indicated by underscores)

Not all the instances are as grammatically justified as the example above and, therefore, the omitted pronouns are added to the given citations in brackets when necessary. This elision of the agent reduced the number of first-person pronouns but, nevertheless, the phrases added to the World Bank reporting about its agency. No elisions of 'they' were discovered.

Another clause with an elision was "[we] help *them* [people] stand back up after climate disasters strike" (01:44, my italics), in which they *are helped* by the World Bank so that they can *stand back up*. In the first phrase the audio track differed from the subtitles as the narrator uttered "people", but the subtitles read "them". The most prominent predicate was 'to help', which appeared in the data in three (3) other instances:

1. "We are ambitious – *helping* change laws and policies." (02:02)
2. "*to help* countries re-imagine a climate smart future." (02:52), and one aforementioned occasion
3. "we are *helping*" (01:21).

Three (3) of them (01:21, 01:44, 02:52) had the World Bank, as the subject and *people* (01:21; 01:44) or *countries* (02:52), most likely from the Global South, as the object. In one instance the object of help was omitted, but from the context it was deciphered that it was the laws and policies of 'they' that required change.

One of the examples introduced previously, “they are not left behind” (00:23), was recognised as a passive phrase. Despite the nominative case, ‘they’ are placed in an object position due to the passivation. The passivation also resulted in the elision of the agent, which in an active structure would most likely have been ‘we’, the active phrase being “*we* do not leave *them* behind”. In addition to being the targets and objects of the World Bank’s projects, ‘they’ are represented as those in need and dependent on the projects. The quoted phrase was likely to contain an assumption that without the help provided by the World Bank, ‘they’ would fall behind. Another similar example was the subject in the verbal phrase “they can adapt” (01:39). However, a closer analysis of the surrounding clause revealed that it was a relative phrase in “[we are] finding ways they can adapt” (01:38), where the relative pronoun ‘in which’ or possibly ‘that’ was excluded, complementing the object *ways*. Their adaption remained as an object for actions taken by the World bank. The third and final occasion, where a third person pronoun was in a subject form was the narrator’s utterance “He hasn’t.” (02:30). In this phrase the object was omitted, but it probably was presented in the preceding phrase “Now is not the time to hesitate, or lose our resolve” (02:26). It was inferred that the entire phrase could read as ‘He hasn’t lost the resolve’. Nevertheless, the resolve remained as the possession of the World Bank even if the one who did not *lose* it was part of ‘them’.

What may be worth noting is that one appearance of ‘us’ (01:55–01:57) was omitted from the analysis, because it was part of a video clip where a student, presumably from the Global South, was interviewed, in which case ‘us’ referred to a group of students. The pronoun was only present in the subtitles because the interviewee spoke French. What was textually significant to representation, was the naming on all the interviewees (01:31, 01:52, 02:15, 02:33), as well as other persons displayed on the video. They all remained nameless. This practise is consistent with observation made by Pithouse (2003) in his study of a book authored by the World Bank (pp. 123). No personnel of the World Bank Group were interviewed or presented on the video and therefore the namelessness only applied to ‘they’.

Another notion that has significance for the analysis was the terminology applied when the surroundings of ‘they’ were discussed. The data did not contain verbal references to the area, but the website the video was embedded in repeatedly employed the term “developing countries” when the World Bank’s initiative was discussed. The term appeared in the relatively brief report on the website six (6) times in total while no other term for the entire geographical area was applied.

## 4.2 Visual analysis

This section reports what visual elements were discovered in the video to create representations of the World Bank, ’we’, and the targets of their actions ’they’. These visual indexed were analysed bearing in mind the representations and agency found in the textual analysis. Screenshots (Images 1–3) of the video were attached to the report to add reader’s understanding of the data because, as Kress and Leeuwen (2006) note, describing a visual element only verbally is challenging (pp. 66).

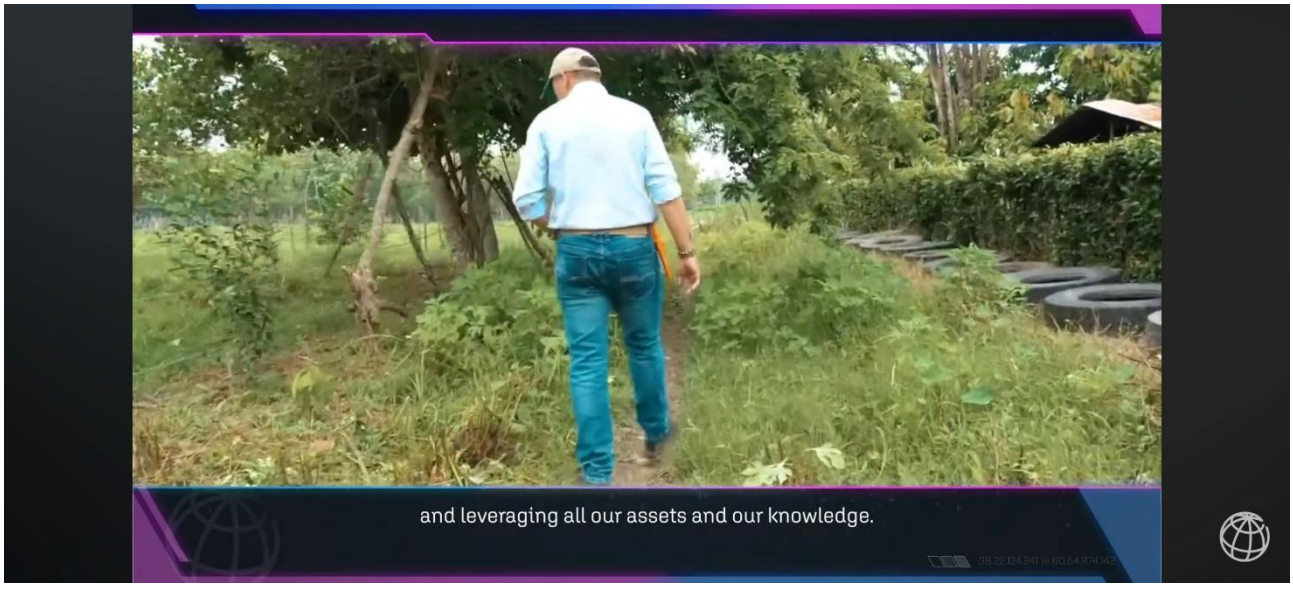


Image 1. Screenshot of the World Bank’s video (0:34-0:36)

The first image that was analysed represented the World Bank's resources. The narrator introduced how the World Bank had been ”keeping pace with a fast changing climate” (00:18) and reported ”leveraging all our assets and our knowledge” (00:33) as one of the ways. To illustrate these utterances, the World Bank had chosen a video clip where the camera follows a white man who walks a path. The man is dressed in a style likely to be associated with the Global North, more precisely the United States, jeans, a cap, and a light-coloured collar shirt (Image 1). Following Kress and Leeuwen's taxonomy (2006, 87), the clothing as *Attributes* could therefore be indexing a person from the Global North belonging to the group 'we'.

The positioning of the camera and the presented person as well as the movement of the person were analysed to study the agency associated with the Global North. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) have stated that paths can operate as vectors, which in this instance could indicate that the subject in the video clip is leading the way (pp. 59, 261). In addition, the positioning and the movement of the camera and the subject, dictate the viewpoint of the spectator (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 261–262). In this clip (00:34–00:36) the camera moves behind the subject in same pace, which could further contribute to the act of leading the way as the viewer follows in the footsteps of the person walking. The representation chosen by the World Bank, possibly illustrates the leading role of the institution due to its knowledge that is considered to originate in the Global North.

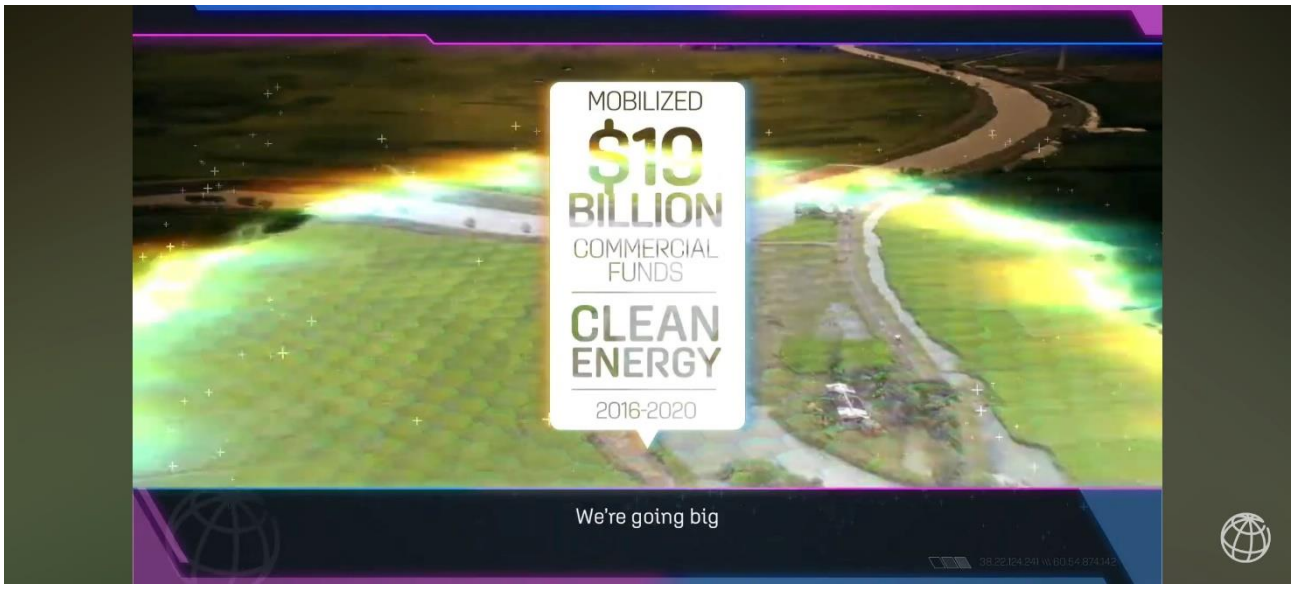


Image 2. Screenshot of the World Bank's video (00:46)

It was noticed that the World Bank repeatedly, total of eight (8) occasions (00:25, 00:41, 00:45, 01:11, 01:39, 01:59, 02:46, 03:02), illustrated the effects of its actions with a vector spreading from a point of impact and brightening the view. The point of impact consisted of a rectangular text field resembling a speech bubble that verbally expressed the target of the World Bank's actions and the amount invested in it. The text box was analysed to be the subject in these illustrations. As this element hit the view, as depicted in Image 2, the circular vector brightened the view and increased its saturation. The view was analysed to be the object of this transaction. Kress and Leeuwen (2006) have suggested that saturation and lighting can impact the mood of the image. (pp. 233, 236). Leaning on these suggestions, it was read that the World Bank visually describes their actions as if they were magical shifts that had a positive and enhancing effect on the target due to the increase of both saturation and lighting. However, it was worth noting that, despite the depicted shift, the landscapes and other views remained physically unchanged. The grass did not grow greener or faster nor did the number of solar panels increase. This superficial change was not aligned with the verbal expression "we're going big" (00:46) in the given example.


Image 3. Screenshot of the World Bank's video (00:23)

The agency was removed from some sections of the video when 'they' were represented. One of such occasions was from the beginning of the multimodal data where a person walking a path with a bicycle is depicted from a bird's-eye view (00:23–00:24). This view was accompanied by a verbal expression "so they are not left behind" (ibid.) that, earlier in this section, was analysed to be a passive structure, thus placing 'they' in the object position despite the nominal case. Even though, the person depicted in the clip was advancing on the path, which according to Kress and Leeuwen (2006) could read as a vector and a sign of agency (pp. 59), the verbal element and the context indicated otherwise. While it was true, that the diagonal path is a vector and the person in Image 3 was walking the path, the earlier notion of passive structure supported the viewpoint of lacking agency.

Because the purpose of the data was to report the actions taken by the World Bank, the vector, in other words the path, might represent a preassigned route determined by the World Bank. Its resemblance to an ascending diagram could be an index of development. In visual elements the "new" and "ideal" objects have often been placed in the upper right corner, whereas old and "real" elements have been laid in the lower left corner (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 197, Fig. 6.15). Therefore, it was assumed that the person belonging to 'they' was making their way from a state of underdevelopment towards progress. This progress has been the fundamental idea of development

discourse (Ziai 2015, 112). The interpretation of Image 3 is parallel with Sibbe's (2021) notion that climate action, including SDG's, place economic growth over other values and that this hierarchy is reflected in the vectors used to symbolise Goal 8 (pp. 54–55). This is further supported by the context surrounding the video on the Word Bank's website, which reports that "climate change" is a threat to "sustainable economic growth and good development outcomes", a condition that was targeted in their project.

Image 4. SDG Goal 8 (the United Nations)

# 5 Discussion

In this section, the results are inspected in the societal context by analysing the power relations present in the data and by comparing them with previous remarks made by other scholars. This broader analysis is the critical dimension of discourse analysis (Pynnönen 2013, 33). The critical dimension answers the third research question by discussing the representations discovered from the data and the power relations between the Global South and the Global North. Representations can reveal hierarchies, values and intentions because they are not arbitrary, but chosen elements (Kress & Leeuwen 2006, 8, 13), so can categorisations and lexicon. However, due to the intermediate proficiency of the writer, the restricted length, the and the linguistic orientation of the study, it is difficult to analyse how the power relations immediately materialise in the real world (see Pynnönen

2013, 33). This would require more profound familiarisation with the actual projects and groundwork operated by the World Bank, because the data only provided linguistic evidence and illustrations of the reported measures and results.

In the previous section the study has shown that in the data ‘we’ refers to the World Bank and ‘they’ to the people or spaces from the Global South, more precisely the objects of the actions implemented by the World Bank. This answers the first research question, who are ‘we’ and ‘they’. The dichotomy was consistent with Pithouse’s (2003) notions from an earlier publication from the World Bank (pp. 123). The second research question on representation and agency of ‘we’ and ‘they’ was answered in the Results section. To summarise, ‘we’ was depicted as the active party with expertise and wealth while ‘they’ were represented as the passive entity with no independent resources. For example, the verbal data described the ”assets” (00:33), “knowledge” (00:34, 03:03), ”skills” (03:04), and ”resources” (03:06) of ‘we’ by utilising the possessive form ‘our’. These possessions are almost identical with Blair’s words that were used to emphasise the hierarchy between the Global North and the Global South: “our assets: knowledge, skills and creativity” (Fairclough 2010, pp. 276–77). As stated earlier, this likely adds to neoliberal discourse and the unequal power dynamics upheld by the neoliberal discourse of development (see Ziai 2015, 136). The hierarchy of ownership is even more evident as there were no third person possessive pronouns in the data.

The first-person plural, ‘we’, was in the position of the agent in verb phrases, representing the World Bank as the active contributor. One of the contributions reported in the verb phrases was helping. In all four (4) cases of help the World Bank entrusted itself with the role of the helper and for the Global South the role of the helped. This observation is aligned with Ideland and Malberg’s (2014) notion of how institutions from the Global North position themselves as the ones that provide help in development projects (pp. 381). One of the given examples was “[we are] helping change laws and policies” (02:02), which supports Ziai’s (2015) remark of the Global North’s political power in the Global South though development funding (pp. 101). Furthermore, the World Bank’s goal is

"to help countries re-imagine a climate smart future" (02:52), which might implicate that the *countries* are considered incapable of making climate friendly decisions. This could be a form of epistemic violence, where only knowledge from the Global North is seen respectable (see Sultana 2022b, 30:53–31:20). In the data no local knowledge is discussed but, of course, the video reported primarily World Bank's actions. This might be a way of categorizing assets and peoples, which, according to Andreucci and Zografos (2021), is a colonial practise (pp. 3). Along with their knowledge, the data presents people of the Global South as insignificant, because they remained an anonymous entity, as discussed in the light of Pithouse's (2003) remarks earlier in the study (p. 123).

The data also suggests that while representing the Global South and its inhabitants as insignificant, the World Bank represents itself as part of the ideal. This was deciphered from the naming of the Global South as 'developing country' or as Stibbe (2021) argues 'an underdeveloped country', which includes the idea of inferiority. This same positioning has been used to entitle colonialism, and the act of helping has reinforced the justification by creating the concept of "white saviourism" or "white man's burden" (see Sultana 2022a, 6; Andreucci & Zografos 2021, 5). The means of this mission is to increase private financing and production (Stibbe 2021, 52), in other words, to spread neoliberalist markets, which does not appear a truly altruistic goal. It would seem that this type of climate projects rarely question the colonial history or the origin of climate change, the overconsumption thriving in the Global North, as noted by Andreucci and Zografos (2021, 5–6) but focus on mitigating the impacts of it. The causes of climate change are not addressed in the data.

The visual analysis further revealed that in the World Bank represents itself as a leading source of knowledge (Image 1) and its actions as positive impact on the areas it operates in, though the depicted impact remained superficial (Image 2). Though, the imagery is probably foremost illustrative, the lack of actual impact of the recurring magical shifts depicted in Image 2 is remarkable. The text boxes launching the shifts report investments and the impact of investments may not be

immediate and, therefore, the effect could be hard to illustrate. On the other hand, the superficial change could imply that due to its existing authority, the World Bank had no need to prove how the funding influenced the environment, but reporting the numbers is sufficient. Despite the interpretation, the magical shifts portray a positive and significant effect, which adds to the power the institution has in the Global South.

The data indicates that the World Bank depicts itself as a resource for knowledge, both verbally and visually, while portraying 'they' as the vulnerable Other, which is consistent with previous notions by Andreucci and Zografos (2021, 3–5). It also suggests that institution recognises the need for help in the Global South, as it did with acknowledges the vulnerability of women of the Global South in the tweets analysed by Yasmin and Amin (2024, 4–6). The positioning on the video is evident from how 'they' were represented and what type of agency was assigned to 'they'. The verbal analysis revealed that the third person forms almost solely appeared in the object position in verb phrases, even when 'they' is in the nominative case, representing the people of the Global South as passive participants, and targets of help, for example, in the passive phrase "they are not left behind" (00:23). The object position of 'they' was further signified by the visual analysis, which indicated that the only agency reserved for 'they' was to follow the path assigned by the World Bank and neoliberal markets. This type of positioning is problematic because it offers no space for agency or local action, which intensifies the existing power relations.

Based on the findings it could be said that the language and the visual elements applied to the video replicate colonial hierarchy between the Global North and the Global South. This is justified by neoliberal values that emphasise knowledge and financing as sources of well-being. If the power relation and the neoliberal hegemony remain unchallenged in discourse, the voices originating from the Global South continue to be unheard. The data analysed in this study indicates no changes in the World Bank's discourse compared to observations made by Ziai (2015). It is worth noting that the data was published in 2020 before the public discourse on climate coloniality erupted in 2021 and,

therefore the impacts of it cannot be observed. However, a second period of Climate Change Action Plan (2021–2025) is coming to an end (World Bank Group) and it could be beneficial to study the material of the latest project to see if inclusiveness is present in the text outside its subtitle “Supporting Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Development”.

# 6 Conclusion

In this CDA study, it was observed that the verbal and visual discourse on the World Bank’s video ”Climate Change Action Plan Delivers $83 Billion and Results” most likely reinforces colonial power structures. This conclusion was drawn from the analysis indicating the groups, the World Bank and the people and spaces in the Global South, and their agency was represented on the video in an Othering manner. ‘We’, the World Bank, was depicted as an active agent with vast resources, such as, assets and knowledge, while ‘they’, the Others, were represented as a passive entity with no resources. The results of this study support the previous studies made about the language and actions of the World Bank on the fields of linguistic and social studies. Although, injustices in climate discourse and climate action is no news, adding multimodal data to the research possibly broadened the field critical discourse analysis has been applied in the study on climate discourse and ecolinguistics. By making injustices visible and measurable, the existing power relations can be challenges and changed. After all, language is a social construct that both describes and constructs its objects, thus, affecting the material world. Because the injustices in climate action were publicly addressed as late as in 2021, in COP26, the discussion and further research of the topic is relatively new and undisputedly necessary.

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