

“The Amazon Breathes, Dances, and Sings”:

An Analysis of the Rhetorical Use of Personification on the Greenpeace Websites

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Abstract

This thesis analyses the rhetorical use of personification in the English-language communication of the eco-activist network Greenpeace. As environmental problems continue to spread, eco-activists are paying increasing attention to the rhetorical strategies through which they can reach wider audiences and get more people involved in their activism. Consequently, it is important to analyse the functionality and application of these rhetorical strategies. The primary focus of this study is to examine both the context in which personification is utilised and the writer's intended effect behind its usage.

The data for this thesis was collected from the News and Stories sections of Greenpeace organisations' English-language websites. The data is analysed using close reading and the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP). Four distinct semantic categories became evident in the research process: personification as metaphors of physical activity, personification as metaphors of emotional activity, personification as metaphors of communicative acts and personification as social role metaphors. These semantic categories represent different uses of personification in Greenpeace's communication. The results of this study demonstrate that Greenpeace utilises personification as a multifunctional rhetorical strategy, ranging from eliciting emotional responses to establishing connections between human and non-human beings.

Key words: personification, ecolinguistics, eco-activism, Greenpeace

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1 Introduction

In recent decades, eco-activism has become a global phenomenon. The rise of the internet and online resources has aided environmental activists in spreading their message to the masses. This has been a useful means of communication for the global eco-activism network Greenpeace. With a worldwide audience, the resources for aiding endangered areas and species can grow exponentially compared to regional small-scale activism. To capture this global audience, the communication on the Greenpeace websites must be both informative and engaging.

Eco-activism is a direct action taken to protect and aid the environment and nature in general. This can occur, among other things, in the form of lobbying, protesting and raising awareness. In the case of Greenpeace, these actions are executed on a global stage. Greenpeace is a network of environmental activists around the world. It is composed of 25 smaller organisations that work on national or regional levels in 55 different countries. The different branches of Greenpeace focus on both local and global environmental problems. The Greenpeace International website details their operations as “climate & energy, biodiversity and social & economic” (Greenpeace International n.d., n.p.). The eco-activists working behind Greenpeace organisations share the common goal of spreading their message and getting people from all around the world involved in saving the Earth. In order to get people involved, certain rhetorical choices are made.

A common rhetorical strategy used in eco-activist writing is metaphorical language. Research into metaphorical language that occurs systematically in specific discourses is important as it reflects the collective ideas and notions of those who participate in them (Semino 2008, 34). Personification is a type of metaphor in which non-human beings are represented through the lens of human behaviour and attributes (Semino 2008, 101). It functions as an effective means for appealing to readers’ emotions and promoting empathetic engagement with environmental issues. Therefore, personification is commonly employed as a rhetorical tool in Greenpeace’s eco-activist communication.

The effects that language choices can have on environmental problems have been of interest to academic research in recent decades (e.g. Halliday 1990, Stibbe 2015). For example, both linguistic and literary research have taken an interest in the connection between language use and nature with ecolinguistics and ecocriticism respectively. Personification is a metaphorical tool that has been rather thoroughly examined in relation to nature in literary research (e.g. Moore 2008). However, research into its usage in registers that are of interest to linguistic research, such as media and

advocacy, is limited. This thesis will partially breach this gap by examining the use of personification in an eco-activism network's online communication.

The aim of this thesis is to qualitatively analyse the use of personification as a rhetorical tool on the Greenpeace websites. This research draws from previous ecolinguistics research (Stibbe 2015, Fill 2018, Finke 2006) as well as research about metaphors and rhetorics (Semino 2008, Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Buell 2005). The precise focus is on answering the following questions:

1. How is personification used as a rhetorical tool on the Greenpeace websites?
2. What are the writers' intentions behind their use of personification in these instances?

This thesis is structured as follows: First, section 2 outlines the theoretical framework, i.e. ecolinguistics, personification and rhetorical metaphors. Next, the selected data and methodology are presented in section 3. Then section 4 reports the results of the analysis, and section 5 discusses them in a broader context. Finally, section 6 summarises the results and offers directions for potential future research.

2 Theory and Background

This section covers the theoretical framework of this thesis. It progresses from the background theory that this study falls under, which is ecolinguistics (2.1), to previous theory about personification (2.2) and the rhetorical use of metaphors (2.3).

2.1 Ecolinguistics

The effects of human behaviour on environmental phenomena have long been perceived and debated amongst people. The discourse around environmental problems has been of interest to linguistic research resulting in the birth of Ecolinguistics, a branch of linguistic research that is focused on “critiquing forms of language that contribute to eco-logical destruction, and aiding in the search for new forms of language that inspire people to protect the natural world” (Stibbe 2015, 1). The term ecolinguistics has also been attributed to linguistic research related to the endangerment and heterogeneity that languages face in the world as a result of globalisation (Fill 2018, 1). These two branches share points of contact, but as the interest of this thesis lies specifically on the influence that language and discourse have in remediating environmental issues, language endangerment is put aside.

Human culture and identity are of interest to Ecolinguistics. The human approach to phenomena that concern nature and the environment is interwoven with their cultural norms and values. Therefore, the responsibility of protecting nature and finding the right solutions does not pertain only to the experts in natural sciences (Finke 2001, 90). For this reason, it is important that eco-activists do not rely merely on explaining various findings of scientific research. Instead, they must also strive to affect peoples’ values as “in order to protect or even restore the stability and richness of our natural ecosystems, one has to analyze, to influence and to change our cultural ecosystems which are responsible for their damage” (ibid.). The use of metaphorical language, such as personification, is a rhetorical strategy that can play a role in influencing people’s perceptions and beliefs in relation to environmental issues.

2.2 Personification

Language is a tool through which we view the world, and different language choices affect and influence our thoughts and impressions. We construct our interpretations about the world around us via language (Halliday 2001, 179). Therefore, the choices that people make with language in environmental discourse affect other peoples’ attitudes and sentiments around environmental issues.

Halliday states that “language is at the same time a part of reality, a shaper of reality, and a metaphor for reality” (2001, 180). This suggests that language plays an indispensable part in formulating the ways in which humans understand their perceptions of the surrounding world. Accordingly, making conscious language choices that reinforce environmental awareness and empathy towards nature can change peoples’ views.

Personification is metaphorical process in which non-human beings or objects are assigned human attributes, motivations and actions (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 33). Personification enables humans to interpret non-human phenomena through our own perceptions which can for most humans act as “an explanatory power” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 34). People tend to find it easier to empathise with, for example, deforestation, if the trees are personified as humanlike beings that feel pain. Personification is occasionally conflated with metonymy where speakers are “using one entity to refer to another that is related to it” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 35). For example, a clause such as *Forest felling endangers wildlife’s habitats around the globe*, uses metonymy by equating *forest felling* as the entire entity of loggers, companies and the legislative decisions behind it. The distinction between the two is that, as opposed to metonymy, instances where personification is used cannot and do not refer to human beings (ibid.).

2.3 Metaphors as rhetorical tools

The objective of eco-activism websites is generally to encourage people to become actively involved in remediating environmental issues. This can be achieved through many different avenues, such as active participation in protests and aid-projects, donating funds or signing petitions. In order to cultivate an audience that is committed to the cause, certain rhetorical choices are made to influence readers. Rhetoric is an inevitable part of eco-activism as it embodies the connection between linguistic choices and the objectives of persuasion in all forms and genres (Buell 2005, 45). It has been suggested that environmental rhetoric expands language’s capability to express both the creation of imagery and the exercise of advocacy (ibid.) Thus, it is reasonable for eco-activist writers to draw on established environmental rhetoric in their communication to publicise their message.

Metaphors are a multifaceted rhetorical tool as “they can be used to persuade, reason, evaluate, explain, theorize, offer new conceptualizations of reality and so on” (Semino 2008, 31). The use of personification is an example of a rhetorical tool that is metaphorical in nature. It is used commonly in environmental writing as it provides a way for mankind to see themselves in other living organisms. For example, in a clause such as *The trees are weeping*, *trees* are personified through the

humanlike action of *weeping*. This can resonate with people and evoke empathy. Semino indicates that by “metaphorically talking about something in terms of something else, speakers/writers foreground some aspects of the phenomenon in question and downplay others, and therefore potentially affect receivers’ views” (2008, 86). By portraying non-human beings as equal to humans, eco-activist writers are making the conscious choice to foreground the experience of natural beings. When living organisms are treated as active participants in the world, it is more difficult for humans to justify the exploitation of their resources.

3 Data and Methods

This section details the data and methodology used in this study. It starts off by detailing information about the chosen data and its sources (3.1) and then proceeds to outline the methodology step-by-step (3.2).

3.1 Data

The data sampled for this study are text excerpts from Greenpeace organisations' websites. As mentioned previously in section 1, Greenpeace is an eco-activism organisation that works towards combatting environmental problems on a global level. To ensure that their information reaches audiences from around the world, Greenpeace has expanded its operations into country- and region-specific branches. The analysed data chosen for this study includes English-language text excerpts from the UK, Aotearoa, Australia, Africa, India and International branches of Greenpeace. These countries and regions' organisations were chosen to gain a comprehensive understanding of the use of personification across the English-language platforms of Greenpeace.

The data was collected through several different steps. First, the English-language websites were compiled into a list from the Greenpeace International website's "Find a Local Organisation" section. Secondly, articles and stories related to environmental matters published in the timeframe between 2021–2025 were collected from several English-language websites' News and Stories sections. Thirdly, one or more text excerpts containing personification were chosen from these branches for closer analysis which is detailed in section 3.2. The final sampling of data is comprised of four text excerpts from Greenpeace International, two text excerpts from Greenpeace Aotearoa, Australia, Africa and India each and one text excerpt from Greenpeace UK. Greenpeace International was given emphasis as it represents the Greenpeace network globally and, therefore, might reach broader audiences.

3.2 Methods

The methodology used for this study was close reading. The data presented in section 3.1 was examined using both my own standard reading experience as a recipient of the information as well as the Metaphor Identification Procedure (henceforth MIP) (Pragglejaz Group 2007). MIP is a procedure that can be used to identify whether a use of a lexical unit, i.e. word, is being used metaphorically within its context (Pragglejaz Group 2007, 2). It is a process, that begins with an inspection of the full text (Pragglejaz Group 2007, 3). Then the text's lexical units are defined in

their given context and compared to their basic meanings (ibid.). These basic meanings are typically more tangible, more exact, earlier definitions or “related to bodily function” (ibid.). Finally, these basic meanings are contrasted with the meanings that the lexical units acquire in the given context. (ibid.) If the contextual meanings are comprehensible when juxtaposed with their basic meanings they are marked as metaphorical (ibid.). For example, in the clause *Bushes conquer green spaces*, the metaphorical lexical unit is *conquer*. The basic meaning of *conquer* is intentional human seizure of an area but in this given context it relates to spreading of *bushes*. For this study, these basic meanings are meanings in which the lexical units are used in relation to human behaviour or attributes. Due to space limitations, external sources, i.e. dictionaries, are not used to expand on these basic meanings in the results section. Since the focus of this study is on analysing personification as a rhetorical tool, the MIP is sufficient for its purposes, despite the availability of more detailed applications for identifying metaphors (e.g. Steen et al. 2010).

The findings of this study are organised into four semantic categories based on their contextual and basic meanings: 1. personification as metaphors of physical activity, 2. personification as metaphors of emotional activity, 3. personification as metaphors of communicative acts and 4. personification as social role metaphors. In addition, a fifth category is included for borderline cases where the excerpts include personification from multiple different categories.

4 Results

This section covers the results of the metaphor analysis conducted on the sampling of data. The analysis unveiled five semantic categories of personification (see 3.2), which structure the presentation of the results.

4.1 Personification as metaphors of physical activity

The most multifunctional category found in the dataset was personification as metaphors of physical activity. To achieve this effect, the writers of these text excerpts use verbs to personify non-human beings and elements. That is, they employ non-human agency and attribute various forms of intentionality to non-human beings to make sense of their behaviour (Tolksdorf 2011, 52). Agency is generally understood to be a human privilege that encompasses actions, practises and free will (Glock 2011, 559). By applying agency to non-human beings, the writers are using personification as an illustrative tool to draw a comparison between the human and the non-human.

A frequent use of this device in Greenpeace's communication is portraying non-human beings performing movements. One example comes from a Greenpeace International story urging the defence of the Amazon rainforest.

(1) At each moment of the day, the Amazon **breathes, dances and signs** with an endless variety of plants and animals. (Conzaga 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In the excerpt, Conzaga assigns the physical activities of *breathing*, *singing* and *dancing* to the Amazon rainforest and its fauna and flora. Dancing is in its basic meaning exclusively human action which takes creativity and self-expression to produce. It is also active intentional movement that is connected to breathing and singing. By associating these three lexical units together, Conzaga provides the readers with a picture of a forest that is seen, heard and alive. This can in turn help the readers resonate with the Amazon by recognising similarities to their own lives.

Similarly, singing is an action that requires creativity, self-expression and is, apart from birds and whales, exclusively attached to humans. Another example of this is an excerpt from a Greenpeace Aotearoa story about the disappearance of nature sounds and climate change.

(2) **Nature sounds** aren't just background noise, they're **evidence of life itself**. Each chirp, croak, buzz and song is a part of a vast, interconnected orchestra – **a living** symphony. When one voice is lost, the harmony falters. When enough go missing, the song stops altogether. Because the world is so much more beautiful when it sings. Let's make sure it never goes quiet. (Douglas 2025, n.p.; emphasis added)

In this excerpt, singing and the sounds of wildlife are equated to being alive as different species are portrayed as singers converging into an orchestra. As singing is described as *evidence of life*, the disappearance of it would mean death. Sounds of animals are also tangible phenomena that humans can observe, and their disappearance would not go unnoticed. By reminding the readers of the possibility of this disappearance, Douglas constructs a disquieting portrayal of the world that can amplify concern for the cause.

Furthermore, breathing as a metaphor of physical action appears in Greenpeace's communication more than once. This appears in a Greenpeace International story's headline about the ways in which fires caused by industrial agriculture are affecting the Amazon forest's air:

(3) Toxic Skies: The Amazon is now **breathing** dirtier air than the world's biggest cities. (Cunha 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this headline, the personification of the Amazon *breathing* co-occurs with the use of metonymy in *the world's biggest cities*. Cunha compares the air that the Amazon is *breathing* to the air that humans living in large cities are breathing. Air pollution is a familiar problem for readers. Therefore, creating an idea of the Amazon facing an even worse climate can evoke readers' sympathy.

Moreover, this device is also used to personify nature as a protector. One example of this comes from a Greenpeace UK article that covers the importance of protecting wetlands.

(4) Wetlands **play a vital role** in the fight against climate change. They can **act as a shield** [...], they **help with** preventing flooding. They also **offer protection** (Glienicke 2023, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this passage, Glienicke uses multiple different lexical units to create an image of the wetlands as protectors. The phrases *play a vital role*, *act as a shield*, *help with* and *offer protection* are all used to emphasise the importance of wetlands and the way they defend mankind from the dangers of climate change. The basic meanings of both verbs *playing* and *acting* relate to human intention and agency in the action. In addition, *helping* and *offering* relate in basic meanings to humans providing something to other beings. By depicting the wetlands as providers and protectors of humans, Glienicke might aim to inspire readers to safeguard them in return.

In sum, personifying nature through physical activity metaphors is a prevalent strategy used in Greenpeace's communication. The eco-activist writers' use of this device challenges the norm of attributing intentional activity solely to humans, appeals to readers' emotions and draws parallels between humanity and nature.

4.2 Personification as metaphors of emotional activity

Another form of personification in the data is attributing emotions to non-human beings. A significant requirement for emotional activity is sentience. Birch explains that sentience is having an emotional and intuitive understanding of one's own being and surroundings (2024, 8). With sentience, senses, thoughts and emotions are unified into a subjective experience of world (ibid.) In eco-activist writing, depicting non-human beings as sentient bridges the perceived distance between them and humans. Consequently, this increases readers' susceptibility to empathising with them.

In Greenpeace's communication, this kind of personification appears as metaphors for emotional activity. One such use involves framing nature as sensitive and scared. An example of this use comes from the Greenpeace International story discussed in section 4.1.

(5) The Amazon is life-giving, irreplaceable and yet profoundly **vulnerable**. (Conzaga 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this passage, the emotional weight of the sentence lies with the lexical unit *vulnerable* which in its basic meaning typically relates to the human experience of being susceptible to emotional or physical pain. First, Conzaga reminds the readers of the importance of the Amazon and then encourages them to feel sympathy for this irreplaceable forest.

In contrast, some Greenpeace writers choose to portray non-human beings as more strong-minded. This is illustrated by a Greenpeace Africa blog post on the effects of deforestation on the rising sea level.

(6) The sea is **greedy** and leaves no space for tourists, yet the city of Kribi remains one of the favorite destinations for Cameroonian and foreign tourists. (Feukeng 2022, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this excerpt, the sea is personified as being *greedy* which in its basic meaning relates to people who want more than they need. Additionally, Feukeng draws a parallel between the greed of the rising sea and the tourists who insist upon visiting Kribi despite the state of it. This makes the readers consider both the greed of the people visiting and the people responsible for the excessive deforestation causing the reaction of the sea.

Furthermore, this device is also used in a Greenpeace Australia story recounting the story of the Oceania, a vessel that campaigns for the protection of oceans.

(7) It's a very different life at sea, an **emotional** place, everything from **angry raging** gales to soft **embracing calms** and we enjoy it as a crew, together, each doing their best to contribute. (Jones 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this excerpt, Jones uses multiple lexical units to create an image of the sea as a place full of sentience. The juxtaposition of *angry raging gales* and *embracing calms* makes the reader see the sea as a multifaceted emotional being akin to humans.

To summarise, personifying nature by attributing emotions and sentience to it is a useful rhetorical device in eco-activist writing. Its effectiveness lies with the emotional response it elicits in the readers. It is utilised to encourage readers to both emphasise with and to identify with non-human beings.

4.3 Personification as metaphors of communicative acts

Another common rhetorical strategy in Greenpeace's communication is to portray non-human beings as humanlike communicators. By placing nature in the role of a speaker and mankind in the role of listeners, eco-activist writers deliver the message directly from the source. This can be a powerful tool to capture the readers' attention and to help them internalise the message.

A Greenpeace India story on protecting the Dwarka Forest illustrates the use of this rhetorical device as it encourages readers to engage with the cause.

(8) Sign the petition. Share it widely. Let's stand in solidarity and amplify **the voice of our beautiful forest**. (Greenpeace India 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this passage, the Dwarka Forest is personified as having a *voice* which is in its basic meaning related to human communication. By encouraging the readers to amplify the forest's voice, the author is creating an image of the forest as a being that is being silenced. This can make the readers more sympathetic towards the forest.

Additionally, this kind of personification is discernible in a Greenpeace Africa blog post on the ongoing efforts to clean the Nairobi River.

(9) Scientifically, I mean naturally, water is colorless and odorless. But the water you find in Nairobi river [sic] will **beg to differ**. (Chemoiwo 2023, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this passage, the Nairobi River is portrayed as a being that can voice its disagreement. The basic meaning of the idiom *beg to differ* relates to a human politely disagreeing. By using this idiom, Chemoiwo is therefore also depicting the Nairobi River as an agreeable being that deserves to be respected and heard.

To summarise, communicational personification is a device that serves a specific function for eco-activist writing. It centres the non-human beings by depicting them as the source of the information. People are inclined to listen more closely if the message is delivered directly to them from the affected party. In addition, portraying nature as a communicator positions it as an equal to mankind which in turn allows the readers to resonate with it more strongly.

4.4 Personification as social role metaphors

A different rhetorical device visible across Greenpeace's communication is personifying nature through social roles. The use of this strategy allows Greenpeace to place the non-human beings on an equal rather than a subservient level compared to humans.

A significant way of personifying non-human beings through social roles is the characterisation of *Mother Earth*, that is *Gaia*. Earth is personified as *Gaia*, an embodiment of *Mother Earth*, to symbolise its natural and lifegiving resources (Kostera 2012, 204). This strategy is illustrated in a Greenpeace Aotearoa story showcasing pictures of Earth.

(10) On this Earth Day, I have picked out a selection of images of **Mother Earth's stunning creations** from some of the remotest regions of the planet. (Malhotra 2022, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this excerpt Malhotra personifies the Earth as a maternal figure. In addition, Malhotra also refers to Earth's *creations* which in their basic meaning refer to things that have been brought to existence intentionally by a human creator. Likening the nature pictures to creations of a maternal figure with whom the readers share a bond with, is a rhetorical tool used to make the reader appreciate the pictures more deeply.

Alongside maternal figures, non-human beings are personified as friends in Greenpeace's communication. A Greenpeace Australia newsletter about the writer's bond with Swan River uses this device.

(11) [A]t other moments it is the intensity of intimate association at a smaller scale, like a single tree you know as a **friend**[.] (Ritter 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this excerpt, a tree is personified as a *friend* that humans can know in the same way that they know other humans. Friendship is central to the human experience and forming connections with other people leads to a secure and fulfilling life. Calling a tree a *friend* implies a similar deep connection with it. The readers are likely to be more compassionate towards a being that they feel connected to.

In sum, the primary function of employing personification as metaphors of social roles serves in Greenpeace's communication is to create a sense of closeness and emotional resonance in the readers. Aligning nature with maternal figures and friends encourages the readers to form attachments with it and to view it as irreplaceable.

4.5 Borderline cases

Some instances of personification in the data span more than one of the established categories and these borderline cases warranted the creation of a separate analytical category.

A Greenpeace International story about protecting and restoring the Earth exemplifies this.

(12) It's almost as if **Mother Earth** has got something to **say**. Maybe **she's been warning** us all along, we just failed to listen. [...] **She** is **weary, dishevelled and drained**. Given what **she's** been through, who can blame **her**. (Salvador 2021, n.p.; emphasis added).

In this passage, personification is utilised in four different ways. Firstly, Earth is personified as the maternal figure *Mother Earth*. Secondly, the pronouns *she* and *her* are used when referring to Earth. The basic meanings of both pronouns *she* and *her* refer to female humans. Therefore, the use of these pronouns amplifies the *Mother Earth* metaphor. Thirdly, personification is also used to attribute emotions to the Earth, which is depicted as *weary, dishevelled* and *drained*. Lastly, Earth is personified through metaphors of communication as it is *saying* and *warning*. This device is used to amplify the struggles the Earth facing by portraying it as appealing directly to the readers. By using these strong personified expressions, Salvador is appealing to the readers emotions and attempting to make them understand the Earth's struggles through their own experiences.

Another example of an excerpt utilising two kinds of personification appears in a Greenpeace India story about the Dwarka forest analysed previously in section 4.3.

(13) Dwarka Forest is **stubbornly** wild, **offering refuge** to over 65 species of birds and herds of Nilgai[.] (Greenpeace India 2025, n.p.; emphasis added).

The two distinct uses of personification utilised in this excerpt are emotional and physical activity metaphors. The lexical unit *stubbornly* refers in its basic meaning to the human attitude of refusing change while the lexical unit *offering refuge* relates to the human behaviour of providing other beings with safety. In this passage, the writer provides the readers with an image of the forest as being that refuses to diminish or control itself yet is still protecting other beings.

In sum, these borderline cases of personification strive for the same rhetorical impacts as they would if they were used in isolation. However, utilising multiple rhetorical metaphors can amplify the intended effect on the readers, as the information is conveyed through diverse avenues and forms.

5 Discussion

This thesis aims to determine how personification is employed as a rhetorical strategy on Greenpeace websites and to analyse the writers' intentions behind these choices. The diverse utilisation of rhetorical personification is visible in the four semantic categories that surfaced during the analysis of the data. These categories are 1. personification as metaphors of physical activity, 2. personification as metaphors of emotional activity, 3. personification as metaphors of communicative acts and 4. personification as social role metaphors. Additionally, a fifth category that covers borderline cases represents an expanded use of rhetorical personification. These categories reveal that personification is used to portray a variety of human attributes and behaviours ranging from movements to familial roles. These human characteristics are assigned to various non-human entities, such as forests, seas or the Earth as a whole, depending on the context of the texts on Greenpeace websites.

The writers' intentions behind their use of personification are also varied. The context in which the personification occurs has a significant impact on the intended message. Greenpeace operates on diverse issues and the texts sampled in this study's data showcase this. Depending on the overall focus of the text, the intended messages range from establishing connections or parallels between the human and non-human to appealing to the readers' emotions and challenging their perceptions. These intentions have been notable in previous research into the use of personification in environmental writing. It has been stated that personification expands ethical concern to natural entities, illustrates the interconnectedness between humans and non-human beings and critiques the anthropocentric approach (Moore 2008, 10). Similar findings have been observed in research on the use of personification in political writing, where it is described as facilitating "a sense of identification and emotional involvement" (Semino 2008, 103). The primary aim of eco-activism is always to aid the environment. Personification is used as a rhetorical tool to capture peoples' attention and to get them involved in the operations. The Greenpeace websites feature a wide array of causes to donate to and petitions to sign. Emotionally engaging texts increase the likelihood that readers will respond and participate.

In fact, an important aspect in Greenpeace's writing is the target group. As environmental issues have become a part of mainstream public discourse, the target group for eco-activism has expanded accordingly (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992, 194). For example, in America, eco-activism has become a fixed part of the political field as the masses have formed "points of identity with activist groups" (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992, 193). This spreading out of environmentalism has also

affected the way that environmental issues are discussed. Throughout the years, various rhetorical tools have been utilised in eco-activist writing. Before the eco-activist movement established itself as action for the public, these choices were considered more radical. (ibid.) Some eco-activists have, in fact, argued that this expansion has caused the movement to be “compromised and rendered ineffectual” (ibid.) However, there is power in the masses, and the more people are invested in eco-activism the better the chances are of actual systematic change happening. Therefore, Greenpeace’s linguistic choices like the rhetorical use of personification truly do matter as they influence the readers’ perceptions on environmental discourse. Bridging complex scientific findings with human experiences can provide a comprehensive and impactful understanding of environmental issues. This has been utilised in previous eco-activist writing when scientific discoveries have been demonstrated by using literary devices (Killingsworth and Palmer 1992, 53).

Furthermore, it can be challenging to analyse the intention behind the linguistic choices that Greenpeace’s writers make. Language in itself is quite subjective, and people can interpret words and meanings in vastly different ways. Therefore, the intention behind the use of personification can be difficult to distinguish. For example, the verb *singing* that occurred in the data can cause confusion as it is also associated with birds and whales. In such cases there is sometimes no correct way of interpreting the intended meaning. Halliday (2009, 82) argues that in conflicting cases the importance lies in the effect that different interpretations can have on the recipient of the information. In the case of eco-activist writing, personifying non-human beings as agents that move, create, feel and experience can strengthen the readers’ understanding, empathy and engagement with them. If the readers interpret the texts as metaphorical and as a result feel more connected to nature, the possible unintentionality of this is less important as the message was promoted successfully.

Finally, there is the question of whether personification does more harm than good for nature. In an ideal situation, non-human beings could be understood and appreciated simply as they are. Applying human attributes and behaviour to flora and fauna may, to some extent, diminish the importance of their existence on their own terms. However, eco-activism ultimately seeks to motivate the public to protect the Earth and to do that they must be able to understand what is at stake. In terms of the outcome, the most important thing is getting the intended message across and in the present day that can be accomplished with the rhetorical use of personification. Moore (2008, 27) has also stated that as animal consciousness is a real possibility that makes them at least partially humanlike. This implies that if animals share even some human qualities they are deserving of the same respect as humans (ibid.). Eco-activists’ use of personification is not intended

to dismiss or diminish nature. Instead, it is used to strengthen the experiences of non-human beings with explanatory metaphors. Perhaps in the future mankind will be able to change their cultural norms and conventions but as of today humanlike portrayals are still conventional in environmental discourse.

6 Conclusion

This thesis examined the rhetorical use of personification in the English-language communication of Greenpeace. It utilised close reading and the Metaphorical Identification Procedure (Pragglejaz Group 2007) to identify personification in stories and news articles on the different country- and region-specific websites of Greenpeace. The rhetorical effects of these occurrences of personification were then analysed in context drawing on broader themes of the source texts and external research on the register of eco-activist writing.

Eco-activist writers draw on personification in different ways depending on the intended rhetorical effect they hope to achieve. Therefore, personification occurs in various forms on the Greenpeace websites. Four different semantic categories emerged during the analysis process. These include 1. personification as metaphors of physical activity, 2. personification as metaphors of emotional activity, 3. personification as metaphors of communicative acts and 4. personification as social role metaphors. Within these categories personification was utilised to challenge perceptions, appeal to emotions, centre the experiences of natural entities and establish connections between the texts' non-human subjects and the readers. Moreover, the writers' intended messages were amplified when they employed multiple different types of personification across the four established categories. This is illustrated in a fifth category that covers borderline cases in which various forms of personification are simultaneously present.

The findings of this study suggest that personification is a multifunctional rhetorical tool used in modern eco-activist writing. As this research is qualitative and the amount of collected data is limited, establishing precise boundaries for every message or form of personification that occurs across Greenpeace's communication is not possible. However, the semantic categories that emerged in the analysis manage to present a comprehensive overview of the versatile use of personification as a rhetorical strategy in texts on the Greenpeace websites.

As a result of this prevalent use of personification, Greenpeace writers risk excluding a part of their intended audience. Metaphorical language tends to be language-specific which means that utilising it can inadvertently disadvantage non-native English-speakers. In addition, individuals' perceptions of the natural at once exclude world vary, which may lead to opposing interpretations of the same metaphor. Therefore, Greenpeace's writers must carefully consider the balance between their use of metaphorical and literal language. When this balance achieved, personification can be a strong strategy for persuasion, which helps to explain its longstanding presence in eco-activist writing.

Within the scope of this thesis, several interesting approaches had to be set aside. However, they offer possibilities for future research. For example, further research is needed to showcase how the multimodality of online eco-activist sources affects the rhetorical use of personification. It would also be valuable to conduct a comparative study examining two different eco-activist organisations' forms of communication in relation to rhetoric and personification. Lastly, research into other metaphorical rhetorical tools and their presence within the register of eco-activist writing would contribute to a more extensive analysis of metaphor's presence and functions in persuasive environmental writing.

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