Climate change (un)certainty
The green for the environment metonymy in UK national newspapers

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ABSTRACT Climate change is a contested issue that has given rise to an opposition between scientific and sceptical arguments. The emergent danger of global warming has instigated a change in society. Environmentally-friendly products have been advertised as solutions to fight global warming and policies have been put in place to avoid any more damage. The green for the environment metonymy has been used as an umbrella term to refer to these solutions. This linguistic trend has resulted in the conceptual metaphor green as good for the planet. However, the conventional use of this metonymy has led to unethical accommodations that possibly promote the rise of scepticism. The awareness that green entities may negatively affect the planet has gradually altered the meaning of the term as it is used in texts about climate change. An analysis of newspaper articles (The Guardian, The Telegraph, Daily Mail, Mirror, The Independent, The Times, The Express) dealing with the issue, as well as a comparison with data from an electronic corpus (British National Corpus, BNC) show how this variation in meaning has occurred. Attention paid to the context helps identify emerging conceptual metaphors that describe different levels of scepticism. By examining negatively evaluated key terms, this analysis thus distinguishes contrasting interpretations that have led to linguistic occurrences of the conceptual metaphor green as bad for the planet that appear through the association with the green for the environment metonymy.

1 Introduction

This paper aims at establishing alternative interpretations of the metonymy green for the environment in climate change newspaper articles. The inclusion of the metonymy in environmental discourses produces an ideological background: it economically represents the causes that environmentalists (e.g. Greenpeace) fight for. This association allows positive connotations to play a role in its interpretation. However, climate change is a highly contested type of environmental discourse. Hence, the following analysis aims at establishing how the use of the metonymy green for the environment has been
adapted to fit with specific opinions on the topic. Its collocation with words such as *economy*, *taxes* and *rhetoric* generates a metaphorical understanding that extends the number of connotations associated with the term *green*. In Section 2, I will describe the relation between metonymy and metaphor with a focus on existing findings about climate change discourses. In Section 3, the particularities of the corpora under study will be defined and I will explain the approach adopted. In Section 4, I will establish how the *green* political ideology is represented in UK newspaper articles depending on the context. In the final section, alternative interpretations of *green* will be described and I will investigate the linguistic means by which they are related or opposed to each other.

2 Metaphorical and metonymical interpretations in climate change discourses

The distinction between a metaphor and a metonymy can be determined with attention to the number of conceptual domains each involves. First, a metaphor involves a mapping between two domains: the target domain, which represents the topic under discussion, and the source domain, which is a concept that is used by the producer to convey a particular perspective on the topic (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 5; Deignan 2005: 14; Semino 2008: 5; Kövecses 2010: 4). Contrarily, a metonymy only involves a single domain: a property of the domain is extracted in order to present the whole domain under a certain perspective (Goossens 2002: 351; Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 35; Deignan 2005: 55; Semino 2008: 20; Kövecses 2010: 184; Littlemore 2015: 1).

For example, in environmental discourses, *green* is mentioned as a property that is commonly shared by the elements that are constitutive of the concept of environment (e.g. the colour of leaves, grass and plants). Even if the elements do not share this property (e.g. wood), the producer uses the metonymy to economically refer to the target (i.e. the environment) because it is salient in common knowledge or in the context of use. Metaphors underlie a similar mapping process to metonymy but transcend the domain boundary: the target is described according to the typical properties of the source (Gibbs 1994: 33; Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 52; Kövecses 2010: 176). This allows properties to be selected according to particular perspectives (Lakoff and Johnson 2002: 157; Charteris-Black 2004: 29; Deignan 2005: 23; Goatly 2007: 30; Kövecses 2010: 92-94; Musolff 2016: 8). This meaningful selection of properties may support the elaboration or extension of the metaphor in order to convey a specific view on the topic. For example, Musolff (2016) analyses metaphor scenarios that allow the producer to adapt a metaphor (e.g. *Britain at the heart of Europe*, Musolff 2016: 39-53). This is possible due to a metaphorical script that involves positively or negatively evaluated elements which are then mapped to the constitutive elements of the target to convey a particular perspective (Musolff 2016: 8).
The interaction between metonymy and metaphor has been discussed by Goossens (2002: 369) who notes that a metaphor can be derived from a metonymy and vice versa. For example, the phrase ‘to catch someone’s ear’ has both metaphorical and metonymical interpretations, namely of an entity trying to get hold of someone’s ear, and of someone’s ear being one of the ways by which attention can be paid, respectively (Goossens 2002: 365). In the corpus of UK newspapers under study, the interaction between metaphor and metonymy takes place when the metonymy green for the environment is used to convey a particular perspective on climate change. The variation of meaning observed in the articles will establish underlying conceptual metaphors which can sometimes be extended to highlight a particular journalistic bias.

Metaphors in climate change discourses play an important role in guiding people’s perceptions on the topic. Indeed, climate change is a complex phenomenon that is not always directly experienced by the people, and thus cannot be represented concretely (Poortinga, Pidgeon, and Lorenzoni 2006: 5; Koteyko, Thelwall, and Nerlich 2009: 23; Nerlich, Koteyko, and Brown 2010). Hence, text producers rely on metaphors to present the issue and to provide an ideologically biased description that underlies a problem of understanding and/or a particular perspective on the topic. For example, Atanasova and Koteyko (2017: 457-461) notice the frequent use of war metaphors in The Guardian to illustrate the urgent need for actions to stop climate change, while the frequent use of religion metaphors in Mail conveys a sceptical interpretation of the phenomenon. Such a diversity of opinion can also be translated by the choice of a specific frame: according to Entmam (1993: 52), “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text”. Nerlich and Koteyko (2010: 45, 48) analyse the metaphors associated with climate change when the issue is financially framed. They make a distinction between the ‘carbon goldrush’ frame that adopts an unethical perspective on the economical profits related to the topic, and the ‘carbon cowboy’ frame that criticises this perspective.

The relation between metaphors and frames is relevant for the following analysis. On the one hand, from a general point of view, all the articles in the corpus are framed in relation to climate change: green is used to metonymically represent the environment but, in the corpus, the environment is framed according to the impact of climate change that affects the quality of the environment. On the other hand, the analysis of the collocations of the word green further specifies which aspect of the topic is discussed (e.g. green economy). The identification of the salient aspects of climate change thus helps the interpretation of the metonymy and highlights the relevant properties that underlie the related conceptual metaphors.
3 Corpus building and analysis

The research started with the identification of frequent collocations of the word *green* in an electronic corpus, the British National Corpus, accessed via SketchEngine (Kilgarriff 2003). This first step gave an overview of the different meanings of *green* in a wide variety of contexts. The function WordSketch classified the collocates according to their functions and locations in the sentences (e.g. *bright* is listed as a modifier of *green*) allowing for a first sorting of the metaphorical and literal uses of the word (e.g. it has been assumed that collocates such as *dark* or *yellow* indicate a literal use of the search term). When the collocates were likely to indicate a metaphorical understanding (e.g. *green fee, too green*), the sentences in which they occurred were analysed in order to get an approximate understanding of the metaphorical meaning.

Overall, the findings showed that *green* frequently has positive connotations:

1. It was a tranquil picture the green field; the far woods; above a blue sky dappled with little fleecy clouds. (BNC J54 2429)
2. ‘No prospect of the green shoots of economic recovery’, said Christopher Sinclair-Stevenson. (BNC H46 1318)

In (1), the presence of words such as *tranquil* and *recovery* indicates that the *field* and *shoots* being *green* is something that is expected by the producer. The meaning is literal: *green* is one of the characteristics of the concept *field* and this characteristic is positively apprehended as the rest of the sentence shows. In (2), the interpretation is metaphorical: the domain of environment is mapped to the domain of economy. The producer wishes the economy had the ability of natural elements to grow again after a period of unsuitable growth.

However, *green* is sometimes found in sentences with negative overtones, especially when the collocate denotes a concrete, visible concept that only receives the property *green* under very specific circumstances:

3. Continuing to stand with his back to her, he stared silently down at the muddy green waters of the river Thames, for some moments, before turning slowly around to face her. (BNC JXX 354)
4. ‘Well, he doubled up and went quite green. I’ve never seen that happen before. I thought it was just something people said, but he actually went green and I thought he was going to be sick.’ (BNC HW8 1612-1614)

In (3) and (4), the colour *green* is attributed to the related concepts because of one of their respective properties: *muddy* and *sick*. In both cases, *green* is the visible evidence of a negative internal process within the river or the human body.
As it has been noted, the majority of the analysed sentences convey a positive bias of the word *green*. However, this positive bias (i.e. of the environment showing the characteristics it is supposed to have) seems to have been somehow negatively adapted to metaphorically describe a naïve behaviour:

(5) This owner called Judge, he got hold of me, promised me a motor car, a fur coat and I don't know what. I was so green I didn't know what was behind it and boasted that I could become Judge’s Baby when I got back to the dressing room. (BNC B34 1676-1677)

The paradoxical perspective of seeing a concept as good when the concept only exhibits its common characteristics as in (1) (as opposed to unexpected positive characteristics) seems to have been adapted to define a human behaviour (defined in the OED) of ‘naïvety’. Here, the negative human traits of Judge are displayed in the narrated situation, but the producer mistakenly perceives those negative traits in a positive way and this mistake results in a negative interpretation of *green*. Hence, *green* can also be used to describe a concept that is mistakenly conceived as good and that is consequently interpreted as bad.

In newspaper articles about climate change, this meaning can be extended to describe a false statement: the negative properties of a concept are voluntarily hidden by the positive connotations of *green* concepts. This point has been acknowledged by Pérez-Sobrino’s (2013) research on ‘greenwashing’ advertising: she establishes that the colour *green* is used to refer to nature and natural products, thus producing the multimodal metaphor *green for nature for nature friendly* (2013: 79-80), while the advertised merchandise (a soda) is originally a contaminant, and thus an unhealthy product (2013: 68-69).

This variation in connotative meanings of *green* has shown the prevalence of a positive bias that can be extended to characterise a negative concept. It can thus be expected that this extension will occur in sceptical articles about climate change. The articles have been selected from Nexis® (accessed 20/05/2018). The research was restricted to the search terms ‘climate change’, ‘global warming’ and ‘green’ in UK national newspapers issued in 2017. This yielded a list of 418 articles that have been downloaded and uploaded to the software AntConc (Anthony 2014). AntConc allows the analyst to focus on a search term from a corpus and to highlight its collocations. The resulting collocations and co-texts were analysed and five main categories of meanings have been established. These categories do not however reflect a strict delimitation, as it is assumed that *green* can be interpreted in various ways depending on the reader and the methodology adopted (see for example the influence of culture on metaphorical understanding in Musolff 2016: 115-131). It will be demonstrated that important nuances appear which seem to be related to each other, either because the target domain is similar (e.g. *green fee, green taxes*), or because the meaning has been extended (as in the case of naïve human behaviour).
The Green Party and green ideology

The following analysis will focus on the adaptation of the use of the term green depending on the interpretation the journalist wants to convey to the readership. The association between green and politics will then be described and will lead to the study of the gradation of its meaning: this first analysis will show that shifts in meaning can occur when green is used to specify a single domain, politics, depending on the ideology of the Party. The use of a similar metonymy can implicitly describe the variable interest in the environment among political Parties.

The references to the Green Party or political ideology are frequent in climate change articles. As the main interest of the people characterised by the colour green is the environment (metonymically identified), their role in climate change discussions is salient in the selected newspapers (see Nerlich 2010; Shaw and Nerlich 2015). The link between a colour and an ideology is not surprising if attention is paid to the use of red and blue in politics (for example Red and Blue States in the US). However, the use of green shows an interesting pattern: its initial metonymical use, e.g. as in example (2), has shifted towards a representation of the environment as being in need of protection, which has resulted in its conceptual association with an ideology that aims at taking actions in order to preserve it. This shift in meaning can be observed in the selected data:

(6) I’ve been the only Green MP in Parliament for seven years now and I’ve never seen a Government so desperate to look like they care about the environment and animals. (‘Green Gove is Taking the Michael; Cold Homes Expose Tory Tricks’, The People, Caroline Lucas, 31/12/2017)

(7) Janet Rice, the Greens transport spokeswoman, said: “The Turnbull government’s commitment to reducing transport pollution has been woeful so far. For all his selfies on trains, the PM has taken no meaningful action on public transport, zero-carbon electric vehicles, setting strong vehicle efficiency standards, or unchoking our clogged cities”. (‘Electricity Target so Weak It Would Require Taking Every Car Away to Meet Paris Deal – Greens; Adam Bandt Says Analysis of Emissions Targets for Electricity Sector Shows the Cost of Caving in to the Climate Deniers’, The Guardian, Michael Slezak, 21/12/2017)

(8) The Guardian View on Green Toryism: It Must Go Beyond Gimmicks; Michael Gove is Pushing a Clutch of Environmental Initiatives But That Alone Will not Remake the Conservatives’ Image. It Does Not Help That Parts of the Party are Steeped in Climate Change Denial. (The Guardian Editorial, 04/12/2017)

(9) Rather than leave it all to Gove, May herself needs to do something big on
the green agenda, with which she has never been associated. (‘Conservative Green Policies are Reaching out to Young People but It’s their Stance on Brexit that Really Matters; Some 71% of 18-24 year olds and 54% of 25-49 year olds Voted Remain in the Referendum, According to YouGov’, The Independent, Andrew Grice, 29/12/2017)

(10) Government to set up environmental watchdog to deliver ‘green Brexit’.
    (Chris Baynes, The Independent, 13/11/2017)

These examples have been selected because they all deal with ‘green politics’ in different ways. Example (6) shows that green can be used to refer to a specific Party as a whole (on account of its own name choice), which is indicated by the capital letter (Green MP). Example (7) further specifies the ideology that is retrieved from the use of green as a political colour: Greens displays the capital letter (as well as the plural form indicating a nominal conversion), and thus refers to the (Australian) political Party. Yet, its use slightly differs from that in (6) because ‘Greens’ is included in a noun phrase in apposition (Janet Rice, the Greens transport spokeswoman). It informs the reader about one of the elements that is targeted by the Party, in this case the reduction of transport pollution. This linguistically shows the evolution from a general ideology towards specific actions.

Example (8) associates the green ideology with another political ideology, Toryism. Hence, the use of green to refer to a political ideology of its own is subdivided to refer to political ideas that Tories do or do not choose to include within their own ideology. This interpretation can be compared to that in (9) which gathers those ideas into a category of their own (agenda). This implies that green ideas have become part of various political ideologies and that politicians must include this category (or not) among various other political decisions (i.e. among other categories such as economic and cultural agendas). Example (10) narrows the meaning of green even more by transforming the green ideology into an aspect of a specific political decision (Brexit). Thus, the environmental beliefs and actions are seen as one of the political components that are taken into consideration while dealing with a political decision.

Overall, this discussion has made clear that the use of green within the domain of politics has received gradable interpretations depending on the elements involved in the context. When the context includes a member of the Green Party, the concept qualified by green is broadened as a whole ideology, whereas when the context refers to something or someone that is not directly associated with this ideology, the use of green is narrowed to specify political ideas or an aspect of political ideas. This observation may not look surprising but it illustrates the way that the interpretation of green can vary even if its collocates belong to the same domain (in this case, of politics).
5 Green beliefs and green scepticism in climate change discussions

It has been shown that political ideas can provoke variations of the interpretation of green. The following analysis aims at researching similar variations within the broader context of climate change. This phenomenon has produced very different opinions that are likely to be translated in newspapers. Indeed, journalists may favour a specific point of view on the topic following the ideological stance of the editors. In the discussion of relevant examples, I will show that the meaning of green varies from a positive to a negative evaluation of the ideology associated with it. Additionally, its implication in climate change discussions shows relevant differences of opinions.

5.1 The positive depiction of green concepts

In this section, we will see that the green label attributed to a variety of concepts establishes a hierarchy that places those concepts in a superior position vis-à-vis ‘non-green’ concepts. This depiction relies on the prevalent positive view of green as it is translated in the examples retrieved from SketchEngine. This may be explained by the fact that green concepts are seen as a solution against climate change, often giving rise to war metaphors, such as GREEN CONCEPTS AS A WEAPON or CLIMATE CHANGE AS AN ENEMY:

(11) Conservationists may preach about the importance of going green to save the planet, but most have a carbon footprint that is virtually no different to anyone else, a study has shown. (‘Conservationists are left red-faced as their green credentials fail to add up’, The Daily Telegraph, Sarah Knapton, 11/10/2017)

(12) Energy companies are under huge pressure from the Government to use more power from cleaner, greener sources to combat climate change. (‘So How Much Do Green Taxes Add To Your Energy Bills?’, Daily Mail, Sara Smyth, 29/11/2017)

(13) Cricket-star turned politician Imran Khan, who heads the political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), launched the green mission in Khyber Pakhtunkhaw in the north-west of the country. (‘Pakistani Province Plants One Billion Trees To Help Slow Down Effects Of Global Warming; Cricket-Star Turned Politician Imran Khan Launched The Green Initiative In Khyber Pakhtunkhawafter Vast Areas Ravaged By Floods And Widespread Felling’, The Independent, Jeff Farrell, 14/08/2017)

(14) Trump gets a load of hot air: Leonardo DiCaprio and thousands of green warriors brave 90F heat to march in DC and across America on the president’s
In (11), green does not label a specific concept (going green): this use can be compared to the label Green Party which means that the green elements as a whole have the quality required to save the planet. This example focuses on human responsibility in the development of climate change. There is an implicit criticism on the people who did or do not pay attention to green solutions (i.e. the absence of green solutions has increased climate change) but this blame is counterbalanced by the depiction of human behaviour as a way to solve the problem. Hence, this paradoxical view can be translated by two subtypes of metaphor: HUMANS AS THE AGGRESSORS and HUMANS AS THE SAVIOURS (OF THE PLANET). The ideological bias in examples (12)-(14) now becomes more visible: the reference to a combat with green sources, launched green mission and green warriors all imply that the humans involved in these examples are taking a kind of defensive position. Climate change is visualised as an attack against the population, but the authors of the attack are not mentioned. The focus is put on the green solutions, probably to respond to an urgent need for actions, omitting the reasons why the phenomenon has occurred.

The anthropogenic cause of global warming is sometimes taken into account by the journalists. However, a variation of meaning can also be observed as the responsibility is divided between green and non-green human actions:

(15) Vampire Strikes Green Banks (Daily Mail, Alex Brummer, 10/01/2017)
(16) China Builds World’s Biggest Solar Farm in Journey to Become Green Superpower: Vast plant in Qinghai province is part of China’s determination to transform itself from climate change villain to a green energy colossus (The Guardian, Tom Phillips, 19/01/2017)

In (15) and (16), the responsibility is specifically directed towards entities that are characterised by their ‘non-green’ actions. As both entities (Bank and China) imply human actions, the references to those negative actions produced by humans lead to the metaphor HUMAN ACTION AS AN ATTACK (ON THE PLANET). This metaphor is further specified by the metaphor NON-GREEN HUMAN ACTION AS AN ATTACK. Thus, the point of view does not take into account the emergence of climate change, but rather focuses on the evolution of the phenomenon. In (15), the term Vampire refers to Macquarie Bank which aims at buying UK’s Green Investment Bank. It implies that the bank that is referred to as a Vampire has no green label (compared to Green Banks) and this consequently suggests the absence of a green ideology. It follows that the purchase of a green entity by a ‘non-green’ entity deletes the green label associated with the former, and thus depicts the suppression of beliefs and actions undertaken within this green entity (it should be noted that both entities metonymically involve human beings and, more precisely, bankers). Hence, a new perspective on climate change is presented: the victim is not the planet, but rather the
green entity which is put in place to save the planet (GREEN BANK AS VICTIM).

Example (16) presents a similar perspective: China’s past ‘non-green’ decisions are summarised by the phrase climate change villain, which means that this country could be described as the (former) ENEMY/AGGRESSOR in the WAR against climate change. The opposition between climate change villain and green energy colossus establishes the green label as the quality required to be one of ‘the good characters’ of the narrative. Hence, this example does not mention the planet/humans as the victim(s) but focuses on the WAR between ‘green good’ and ‘non-green evil’. It implies that the label green is seen as a necessity for humans/countries even if the reasons for its creation and adoption are not mentioned. Indeed, it can be assumed that if the villain becomes green then there are no enemies left to fight and climate change remains an ATTACK without any AGGRESSOR to be identified.

This positive bias which sees the green label as a necessary condition to be one of ‘the good characters’ can be further explicated with examples showing the association between green and good behaviour:

(17) PolitiFact asked the White House just last month to substantiate Trump’s occasional campaign-season claim about winning green accolades. (‘Trump brags to G7 leaders about green awards he won - in 2007 - as he insists: ‘The environment is very, very important to me, Donald Trump’ (but don’t ask what the prizes were for!), Mail Online, David Martosko, 26/05/2017)

(18) David Cameron promised the “greenest government ever” when he came to office in 2010 and the Coalition made a bright start. (‘Hurricane Irma shows that the Government can’t afford to neglect climate change any longer; Not so long ago, the UK was at the forefront of international efforts to combat climate change, promoting the use of green energy and encouraging other nations to help reduce global carbon emissions. Yet for the last five years, matters have regressed’, The Independent, Editorial, 08/09/2017)

(19) Theresa May mocked for trying to rebrand the Tories as the ‘caring party’; The Conservatives are looking to ditch Cameron’s green tree and emphasise Mrs May’s agenda as part of the image overhaul (Mirror, Nicola Bartlett, 30/11/2017)

The green label becomes an identifying feature of the good characters of the narrative. In (17), the journalist insists on the presence of this identifying feature in President Donald Trump’s decision makings. His belonging to the Republican Party (that is, a Party that does not usually focus on the environment) may indeed raise questions about the part he plays in the narrative. The terms green accolades and green awards (in the title of the article) implicitly involve other politicians who are described as representatives
of ‘the good characters’. This interpretation derives from the specification of *accolades* and *awards*: both terms imply friendly relations between politicians, but these relations only hold because of their *green* quality. Hence, this example aims at describing the US President as being one of the ‘good characters’ because of his *green* decisions.

The wish to associate a politician with the *green* ideology can be further explained with the analysis of (18). In this example, the *green* label is depicted as the government’s trademark. The *green* quality of its policies is a promise made to the people who elected David Cameron as the UK’s Prime Minister. It means that *green* decisions are desirable and are assumed to be part of the well-being of the country. The use of the superlative *greenest* indicates that the possible negative side of ‘going *green*’ is not taken into account. *Green* policies are thus advertised as being inherently good for the people without mentioning any possible negative opinions (because negative opinions are not even conceivable). However, such negative opinions are discussed in (19). The notion *green tree* conveys paradoxical perspectives: on the one hand, there is a positive bias that sees the *tree* as an outcome of David Cameron’s political decisions. The former UK Prime Minister has allowed his *green* ideas to grow into a *tree* (i.e. it possibly yields fruits to nourish the British people). He has thus created something good for his country. On the other hand, the metaphor of the *green tree* can also imply that his decisions are not solid enough to resist the Tories (*ditch*). Indeed, if this example is compared with that of (18), the ‘good’ quality of these decisions is in fact questionable because negative opinions emerge from the existence of this *tree*. It means that *green* politics is no longer conceived of as inherently good but rather as something bad for the Tory Party image.

As noted in Section 4, *green* political decisions are divided between good and bad solutions, and this division questions the conceptual association between *green* and good concepts. This point gives rise to sentences like:

(20) Shell has seen the future—and it’s several shades of green. (*The Sunday Telegraph*, Ben Marlow, 15/10/2017)

(21) How green are electric cars? [Norway’s lead on electric cars has been driven by the government backing them with a wide range of generous incentives and perks, as a way of meeting its climate change ambitions. Buyers do not pay import tax and VAT on plug-in cars, shaving thousands of pounds off the upfront cost...] ‘Norway leads way on electric cars: ‘it’s part of a green taxation shift’; Nearly a third of all new cars sold in the country this year will be plug-in models and experts expect that share to skyrocket’, *The Guardian*, Adam Vaughan, 25/12/2017)

Examples (20) and (21) present a gradation of the *green* quality of the *future* and of *electric cars*. In (20), some periods or areas are more or less *green* than others. It means that
the green label is assigned to a range of concepts even if some of those concepts are not intrinsically good for the planet (potentially light green concepts). Similarly, the green quality of electric cars is questioned in (21): the journalist wonders whether electric cars really have the potential to save the environment, that is, if they can be green enough to be considered weapons against climate change or as a kind of Trojan Horse that hides potential bad (or ‘villainous’) qualities. The good reputation of green concepts is thus tempered: the initial appealing impact on the population has turned into an advertising strategy (like in (18) and (21)) which has raised questions about the advertisers’ goals (of saving the environment or of making profits).

5.2 The green ideology as a naïve behaviour

As noted in Section 3, the prevalent positive bias associated with green concepts can give rise to a negative judgement on their appealing quality. As in the case of the advertisement analysed by Pérez-Sobrino (2013), the green label presenting the concept as being good for the environment (or as a weapon that helps ‘fight’ climate change) can be misused in order to fit the societal trend. Several articles from the corpus imply that the green label helps the conceptualisation of a greener, better future, but the shades of green mentioned above indicate that some green concepts may not do enough to save the planet despite their reputation. This general belief that can be summarised by the metaphor GREEN AS GOOD (FOR THE PLANET) is thus sometimes depicted as a form of naïvety:

(22) Enough of the gullible greens – they’ve led us into a peasouper [(...)Bravo! A policy designed to meet our international climate change obligations has led to a rise in pollution levels that are so foul and dangerous to health that the Tories may soon make us scrap our vehicles or we’ll face surcharges for using them.] (The Sunday Times, Sarah Baxter, 05/02/2017)

(23) Like many duped motorists, I acquired my diesel car in the naïve belief that it would not only be more efficient and cost-effective than a petrol one, but also that it was better for the environment. We now know that this green myth is a nonsense. (‘Forget Suing VW. We Should All Be Claiming Millions For Other ‘Green’ Lunacies that Literally Cost the Earth’, Daily Mail, James Delingpole, 10/01/2017)

Examples (22) and (23) illustrate a loss of faith in the green label. They both indicate negative side effects following the overwhelming descriptions of green concepts as being inherently good for the population. Here, the adoption of green political ideas (22) and the purchase of a greener car (23) have been caused by the naïve belief that green concepts do not have any negative aspects (following the implications established in (18)). However, the progressive discovery of green-related problems (here, economic problems)
have produced a denial of the green ideology. Instead of being depicted as ‘good for the environment’, green concepts are associated with the problems that emerge from their appealing image.

This interpretation can be contrasted with the description of the principal green-minded actors advertising this ideology. Indeed, the negative side of green concepts has produced a loss of hope for a greener future because of the resulting lack of (economic) sustainability.

(24) An academic has predicted how some of the most well-known and beloved cities on earth will look like in a future green utopia. (‘What will London and LA look like in 2121? Environmental scientist illustrates the future of world’s biggest cities; Alan Marshall imagined the future of our cities - and they mostly look green’, The Independent, Olivia Blair, 19/01/2017)

(25) ‘But that’s what happens when policy is driven by wishful thinking and green religion.’ (‘Tony Abbott will vote against any ‘unconscionable’ clean energy target from the government – as he demands green subsidies be DUMPED so companies build coal power plants’, Mail Online, News Section Version 4, 19/09/2017)

(26) The do-gooding rich make us pay for their green follies. (The Sunday Times, Editorial, 29/10/2017)

These three examples illustrate a gradation of faith in a green ‘ideal’ future. In (24), the term utopia indicates that green is still associated with positive connotations, but that these connotations are contrasted with problems of the real world that prevent this ideal picture from becoming true. By contrast, in (25), the term religion implies that this green future is not inherently ideal. While (24) depicts green ideals as desirable (but impossible), (25) takes into consideration the people who may not wish for this kind of future. The religion metaphor also indicates that the green decisions put in place by politicians do not fit the real world, just like religion describes an alternative reality with the manifestation of uncommon events. Hence, these green decisions are taken in the hope of seeing uncommon events (e.g. the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions) that seem to belong to a different reality.

This point is emphasized in (26) which focuses on the gap between the green ideology and reality. The term follies refers to the absence of commonalities between green thinking and the real world. Green concepts are not appealing anymore: green is used to describe a future that will never exist and green decisions are described as unrelated to the common world, making the actors of climate change (or the do-gooding rich) look like they are believing in an absurd reality. Hence, the scepticism that emerges from these examples can be explained with the prevalent good connotations of green discussed above associated
with real world events that are far from ideal (such as extreme weather events).

The absence of an aggressor illustrated by examples (12)-(14) and (17) may have led to the absence of any attack (i.e. climate change) which means that the search for solutions is meaningless for some journalists. It can also be seen as a kind of resignation after the repeated occurrences of dramatic events. However, it should be noted that none of the three examples mentioned above discusses the participants’ beliefs. They are depicted as idealists, religious or crazy but the importance they give to green decisions is not perceived as a form of public manipulation.

5.3 Green ideals used to cover the truth

The good reputation of green concepts has been demonstrated and evidence has been found in both corpora (the BNC and UK newspaper articles). Some journalists have acknowledged the accommodation of green concepts by politicians to make their decisions more appealing to the public, relying on the conceptual metaphors green is good therefore green X is good. This point can be compared to Pérez-Sobrino’s (2013) findings on the ‘greening’ of a non-green product.

In the corpus, this persuasive use of the green for the environment metonymy takes place at different levels. In some articles, green concepts are not described as inherently appealing, and journalists implicitly blame politicians for advertising these concepts by highlighting their positive features and hiding the negative ones (as mentioned in Section 5.2).

(27) Tories are putting beauty into green policy; More than a decade since it was first inspired, the party has refound its environmental edge. (The Daily Telegraph, Laura Sandys, 12/12/2017)

In (27), the good reputation of green concepts is paralleled with the Tories’ concerns for the environment (see (8)). Considering the conceptual metaphor green as good, the Tories have had to adapt their policies in order to avoid any conceptual analogy such as the Tories as the aggressors (of the planet). It means that dealing with green concepts has become a requisite of political communications (see Sections 4 and 5.1) and the Tories have had to highlight the green features that fit their policies: green policy is an unattractive concept that is presented with its ‘beautiful’ features by the Tories. It follows that, according to the journalist, these ‘beautiful’ features are used for persuasive purposes so that people may adopt an unattractive green ideology.

This point can be further elaborated by the following examples. The association between green concepts and different political decisions has been understood by some journalists as a way of downplaying other issues.
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(28) These green talks, which are fundamentally about ethical concerns, are nevertheless becoming more like discussions about trade. (‘The Guardian view on climate talks: Brexit’s heavy weather; If Brexit goes ahead, Britain will need to shape a green politics with devolution and social justice at its core. And make sure that politicians cannot renege on our international obligations’, The Guardian, Editorial, 17/11/2017)

(29) Green policies may impress the young, but it’s the Tory stance on Brexit that matters. (The Independent, Andrew Grice, 30/12/2017)

(30) No more green rhetoric. A sustainable future is vital and possible; Climate change is at the heart of Labour’s industrial strategy, which means investing in green tech and renewable energy, and divesting from fossil fuels. (The Guardian, Rebecca Long-Bailey, 11/12/2017)

Example (28) establishes a link between green decisions and economics. The association might be justified in terms of the financial outcomes of green policies already mentioned with regard to (23). In this case, the journalist implies that the green label is no longer used to deal with the protection of the environment (ethical concerns) but rather with economic consequences. It means that a shift of meaning has occurred: environmental decisions involve a long-term process and politicians may focus on immediate solutions that the public can understand because of their well-delineated reality (trade).

In (29), green is rather used as an argument to persuade a part of the population. Green policies are contrasted with opinions on Brexit, which means that the appealing quality of green concepts is used by the Tories to avoid a contentious topic that is presented as having less positive connotations than green decisions. It also shows that the green negative features mentioned previously are not taken into consideration; the label is only used for its good reputation. Example (30) demonstrates a different pattern: politicians’ uses of green positive connotations are described as a form of lie. Green rhetoric seems to prevent any change as it is opposed to green actions. Hence, the meaning of green is divided between the reasons why the environment needs protection (rhetoric) and the means put in place to protect it (green tech). Politicians aim to convince people that green is good but do not mention what it takes to live in a green world. Indeed, establishing green policies may highlight the negative side (e.g. the economy) of good policy aspects (such as green tech), and thus may produce disagreement among the population.

Occasionally, journalists clearly associate green with dishonesty:

(31) Electric cars are NOT as green as you think (and some are worse polluters than petrol!) GUY WALTERS provides a reality check about the vehicles (Mail Online, Guy Walters, 10/11/2017)

Here, green concepts are seen through the spectrum of economic profits. The prevalent
positive view on *green* concepts has led to the labelling of other elements that are in fact not environmentally friendly. Therefore, the implications identified in the use of the word *green* (i.e. concerns for environmental protection) are explicitly opposed to the observations of interfering qualities (pollution). In this example, the conceptual metaphor GREEN AS GOOD still prevails, but the metaphor GREEN CARS AS GOOD does not hold, which leads to the conceptualisation of GREEN CARS AS BAD (FOR THE PLANET). Hence, the concepts that were supposed to be used as a ‘defence’ against climate change are here described as an ATTACK on the planet. The difference that emerges is that the AGGRESSOR is not the phenomenon itself, but rather the advertisers who misuse the *green* label.

### 5.4 The negative description of *green* concepts

The acknowledgement of the misleading use of the *green* label has led to a new adaptation of meaning that defines pretence of *green* commitments as bad for the planet. The evolution of *green* advertising and marketing has added a new perspective on actions taken against climate change. The lack of ethics (making a profit from a global problem) and the increasing feeling of urgency to solve the problem (e.g. the use of apocalyptic rhetoric as analysed in Foust and Murphy 2009) has created a paradox that has contributed to the emergence of scepticism. It can be inferred that the climate change references in advertisements or political rhetoric have transformed the problem into a marketing or persuasive strategy which has promoted global warming denial.

(32) Bennett, of Friends of the Earth, said Gove was not the first politician to be affected by the role of environment secretary, pointing to former Tory MP John Gummer, whose work while in the cabinet had him branded a “green guru” by one newspaper. He said the same had happened with David Miliband. (‘Michael Gove: from ‘shy green’ to ‘full-throated environmentalist’; Many feared what the MP would do when he became environment secretary this year - but he has pleasantly surprised his critics’, *The Guardian*, Anushka Asthana, 12/11/2017)

(33) So vote Blue Planet, not Gove Green! (‘Tory green policy is made of plastic; SM1...he still packs a punch’, *Daily Mirror*, John Prescott, 17/12/2017)

Example (32) illustrates the re-adaptation of *green* talks to criticize this trend. It should be noted that the word *guru* can either qualify the head of a religious sect or an influential teacher.\(^1\) In this example, the assimilation of Tory MP John Grummer as a *green guru* is said to have affected him. Hence, his influence on people has not been perceived positively. People’s beliefs in a better future are accommodated for mischievous purposes. The sceptic perspective of the newspaper mentioned in the example (by one newspaper) may relate to

\(^1\)Oxford English Dictionary Online, accessed 27/05/2018.
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the widespread use of the green label discussed above: the enactment of green policies by a Party which does not adopt the green ideology as a whole (like in the case of the Green Party discussed in Section 4) may have been perceived as a dishonest interest.

This point is further elaborated in (33) which contrasts green policies with effective solutions to save the planet. The phrase Blue Planet refers to a documentary directed by Sir David Attenborough, as explained in the article. The example implies that the meaning of green has been adapted to refer to political talks that do not really aim at finding solutions to climate change. It means that the green label is only used for its positive connotations but does not refer to existing beliefs in a better future. In other words, the author of the article, the politician John Prescott, considers competing strategies to save the environment: on the one hand, politicians advertise green solutions to convince people (to vote for them), and on the other hand, environmentalists wish for rapid solutions that differ from political proposals.

This perspective sometimes leads to a radical denial of the positive connotations of the green label:

(34) The Prime Minister has ordered a renewed focus on animal welfare and the environment four years after her predecessor, David Cameron, told his ministers to ditch “the green crap”. (‘Tories bid to rebuild green credentials with raft of animal welfare measures’, The Independent, Nigel Morris, 13/12/2017)

(35) This Green and Poisoned Land (Mail on Sunday, 21/05/2017)

In both (34) and (35), green is associated with highly negative terms, namely crap and poisoned. The latter creates a kind of oxymoron if green is interpreted according to the conceptual metaphor green is good (for the planet). Hence, instead of saving the planet (and thus, the population), green concepts are depicted as a danger: green concepts are no longer weapons against climate change but rather weapons against the planet. This paradox is even more apparent with the underlying reference to the last verse of William Blake’s poem: In England’s green and pleasant land.² Hence, the association between green and pleasant (also observed in Section 3) is replaced with the use of a term that involves highly negative connotations (poisoned). Indeed, the article deals with the so-called green guzzler that was initially created to produce environmentally-friendly electricity but that released toxic slime in Pencefn, Wales. It follows that the association between a green concept and toxic substances promoted journalistic scepticism. Similarly, the reference to David Cameron’s green crap emphasizes the dishonest uses of the word (with reference to past comments or events) and focuses on the absence of solutions that have gradually favoured either resignation or disbelief.

6 Conclusion

It could have been expected that the use of the metonymy green for the environment in UK newspaper articles about climate change would yield similar interpretations across different texts. Indeed, that the metonymy is used to refer to the environment and climate change discourse further specifies this reference by depicting an environment in potential danger (e.g. the Green Party discussed in Section 4). The uncertainty associated with global warming raises questions about the use of the term green in sceptical articles. The overall positive interpretation of the metonymy green for the environment has been adapted to the discussions of a contested issue, climate change. The scepticism, sometimes associated with the topic, is expected to have exhibited some interpretative variations of green. Hence, attention has been paid to the meaning induced by collocations and co-text, which can lead to metaphorical interpretations of the metonymy, depending on the different perspectives about climate change.

This paper has demonstrated the prevalence of positive implications derived from the use of green in the corpus (examples (11)-(21)) as well as in different contexts (in the BNC, examples (1) and (2)). A gradation of meaning has then been established: the positive connotations have been detailed and the different aspects of green concepts have been related to more specific interpretations. The examples analysed in this paper have demonstrated the underlying conceptual metaphors that can be derived from the producers’ interpretations of the metonymy. Green concepts have been pictured as weapons against climate change leading to the qualification of humans as the victims of the phenomenon. The reference, in some articles, to non-green human activities has counterbalanced this qualification with the depiction of these activities as an attack on the planet. It results that the positive connotations can either be used to describe a naïve behaviour (examples (22)-(26)) or to hide an inconvenient truth (examples (27)-(31)). The green quality of some concepts has been questioned by journalists: they refer to the appealing reputation of the label as a marketing strategy that makes people believe in a green utopia (24). When this meaning is related to politics, journalists challenge the honesty of the Party’s concern for the environment (28). Besides, the green for the environment metonymy can occasionally receive negative implications (examples (32)-(35)) with implicit reference to its more general positive use (such as the reference to William Blake’s poem that describes a green and pleasant land which has been adapted by the journalist to describe the land as being poisoned, (35)).

These findings show the influence that journalistic perspective has on the interpretation of a single metonymy across contexts. The recurrent references to politicians’ stance indicate a connection between politics and green concepts that may reveal new implications in a future corpus analysis of political speeches. The comparison between journalistic and
political uses of the green for the environment metonymy may thus be an interesting topic for further research.

References


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