APPRAISING ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: AN ECOLINGUISTIC EVALUATION OF THE LOS ANGELES WILDFIRE COVERAGE IN NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

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Abstract

Environmental crises are increasingly mediated through global media platforms, shaping public perception and ecological awareness. National Geographic, as a prominent environmental outlet, plays a key role in constructing narratives around ecological issues. However, the linguistic strategies it employs—particularly evaluative language—remain underexplored. This study aims to investigate the evaluation of LA Wildfire in National Geographic Magazine through an ecolinguistic framework. The study is designed as qualitative research with a content analysis approach, which analyzed four articles discussing LA Wildfire 2025 in the National Geographic Magazine in the Environmental Section. The analysis focuses on appraisal patterns which cover three aspects: attitude, engagement, and graduation where each aspects has their sub categories which makes this analysis detailed. The findings reveal a dominant use of appreciation and judgment to evoke urgency and moral responsibility, while affect is comparatively minimized. Salience patterns foreground scientific authority and global impact, often marginalizing local ecological voices. Metaphors such as "tipping point" and "planetary fever" reinforce crisis framing but risk oversimplifying complex ecological dynamics. This study contributes to ecolinguistics by demonstrating how evaluative language in environmental media can both amplify ecological concern and obscure systemic causes, highlighting the need for more reflexive and inclusive environmental storytelling.

Keywords: LA Wildfires, Ecolinguistics, Appraisal Patterns, Evaluation, National Geographic Magazine

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is real, and its impacts are predominantly negative, having worsened in the 21st century (Lomborg, 2020). It contributes to natural disasters that are more devastating than they might otherwise be. Several hazards have become larger, more powerful, and deadlier in recent decades. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report indicates that the increase in reported disaster damage is almost certain to be a result of climate change (for certain categories of disasters, with weaker evidence for others) (IPCC, 2022; Newman & Noy, 2023). One of the most shocking environmental disasters reported in early 2025 was the Los Angeles wildfire, which captured global attention.However, despite extensive work on climate communication and wildfire news framing, and separate studies applying Appraisal Theory in other genres, there remains a clear gap: few studies explicitly integrate Appraisal Theory within an ecolinguistic framework to analyze a coherent, event-bound corpus from a high-credibility science-journalism venue such as *National Geographic*. Prior research rarely (i) examines a single, high-profile wildfire event in its immediate aftermath, (ii) links Attitude–Engagement–Graduation resources to anthropocentric vs. ecocentric storylines, and (iii) combines close reading with distributional summaries of appraisal patterns across multiple

articles. This study fills that gap by analyzing four *National Geographic* Environment articles on the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires, integrating Appraisal Theory with ecolinguistic critique to show how evaluative choices construct environmental meanings and with what ideological implications. Accordingly, we ask: *How does* National Geographic *evaluate the 2025 Los Angeles wildfires through appraisal patterns and what ecological ideologies are reproduced or challenged by these narratives?*

Media discourse has a significant influence on public perception, understanding, and emotional responses to environmental issues. By selecting particular wordings, structuring narratives in specific ways, and employing evaluative frameworks, media outlets can shape how audiences comprehend events such as wildfires, climate change, and biodiversity loss (Matejova, 2023). Effective representations inform and move audiences, raising awareness and motivating collective or individual action; conversely, they may inadvertently spread misinformation, downplay environmental urgency, or foster passivity through overly neutral or trivializing language. Examining media discourse through an ecolinguistic perspective helps reveal underlying messages, biases, and promoted values (Jabeen, 2024), thereby supporting sustainability, ecological literacy, and ecologically responsible behavior.

Among the numerous media outlets that cover such events, National Geographic occupies a unique position (Pflaeging, 2017). Known for its authoritative posture in environmental journalism and extensive global influence, National Geographic plays a critical role in the development of narratives surrounding ecological events (Ahern, Bortree, & Smith, 2013; Bortree, Ahern, & Smith, 2012; Todd, 2010). As a result, it is imperative to investigate the manner in which this platform portrays wildfires, which includes both factual data and the discursive frameworks that shape readers' attitudes, perceptions, and responses to ecological disasters.

This study employs Stibbe's (2015) ecological discourse analysis framework; this investigation implements an ecolinguistic methodology to evaluate how National Geographic articles in its Environment section depict the most recent wildfires in Los Angeles through appraisal patterns proposed by Martin & White (2005). Ecolinguistics is an emerging discipline that combines linguistics, ecology, and discourse analysis to investigate the linguistic and ideological aspects of environmental discourse (Stibbe, 2014). According to Alexander and Stibbe (2014:105), "ecolinguistics is the study of the impact of language on the essential relationships between humans, other organisms, and the physical environment." Ecolinguistics, like critical discourse analysis (CDA), aims to reveal the hidden beliefs found in the main ideas of society (Stibbe, 2014:119).

Ecolinguistics provides a comprehensive examination of the anthropocentric perspectives that are profoundly ingrained in human language. The essay investigates the influence of language on the promotion of ecocentric and biocentric perspectives that acknowledge the intrinsic value of all species on Earth (Trampe 2008: 52). Because the term "ecology" has numerous connotations, the concept of ecolinguistics can be interpreted in a variety of ways (Stibbe 2015: 8). These concepts encompass a wide range of interactions among a variety of organizations, from a broadly defined perspective to a more focused emphasis on environmentalism. Ecolinguistics comprises a wide variety of research activities, such as the comprehensive assessment of the natural environment, the examination of the relationships between language and the physical world in a specific context, and the analysis of regional language variations. The primary objective of conducting an ecolinguistic analysis is to emphasize the significance of ecosystems by increasing readers' awareness of the non-human world (Stibbe 2015: 163). Ecolinguistics is an academic field that examines language from a critical perspective. The text utilizes a theoretical framework to investigate the

substantial influence of language on the development of ideologies, beliefs, and narratives. It also investigates the impact of these narratives on non-human creatures and our natural surroundings (Fill and Mühlhäusler, 2001).

As mentioned earlier, this study also employs appraisal patterns as the primary theory to evaluate how National Geographic's articles depict LA wildfires. Conversely, evaluations represent the narratives people hold regarding whether a particular aspect of life is perceived as good or bad. To define what kind of evaluation of a text it is, it can be analyzed using appraisal patterns. Appraisal patterns are clusters of linguistic features that come together to represent an area of life as good or bad, in which, in this study, the researchers use the theory from Martin and White (2005). The utilization of analyzing appraisal patterns in language to reveal the underlying evaluation- the stories in people's minds- and open them up to question and challenge (Stibbe:2015). There are various linguistic tools and discourse methods to express either favorable or unfavorable judgments about the environment. These may encompass adjectives, adverbs, verbs, and evaluative statements that convey acceptance, disapproval, praise, criticism, or apathy towards environmental phenomena. The analysis covers three aspects of evaluation: attitude, engagement, and graduation.

Recent research on ecolinguistics, especially evaluation, has been done on various media such as tourism website (Husain, Ali, Murtaza & Shahid, 2025; Istianah, 2020; Istianah, 2021; Istianah & Suhandono, 2022; Istianah, Suhandono & Winarti, 2024), literature (Indriyanto, 2021; Zamruddin, Rahayu, Juliastuti, Muhajir, 2025), news articles (Hanif, Alam & Khan, 2025; Nuh & Prawira, 2023; Schäfer, O'Neill, Nisbet, Markowitz, & Thaker, 2017) and language textbooks (Mou & Wu, 2023; Zahoor & Junjia, 2020). Some of others examined about climate change and ecological crisis through visual lens (Fernandez-Castrillo & Ramos, 2025; Gunay, Yenen Aytekin & Melek, 2025). The previous studies have examined appraisal patterns in ecolinguistic lens by quantifying the eco-lexicon and categorizing whether certain discourse is beneficial, ambivalent, or destructive based on Stibbe's ecosophy (2015). None of them are analyzing the appraisal patterns in articles related to the LA wildfire, although Savandha, Amelia, and Pramesti (2025) have studied the news about the wildfire on public awareness using media discourse analysis. Therefore, this study tries to fill in the gap to provide an analysis of discourses on natural disasters in a more comprehensive way by providing statistical findings and also analyzing the articles as a discourse which might hide an underlying intention. In sum, the study aims to investigate how National Geographic Magazine evaluates the LA Wildfire in their narratives.

Recent ecolinguistics research has shown that evaluative language organizes public meanings about nature across multiple genres and modalities. Studies of institutional and popular media (e.g., news articles, tourism sites, textbooks, and literature) demonstrate how appraisal resources foreground particular values and normalize certain relationships with the environment, whether to entice, instruct, or persuade (e.g., Istianah 2020, 2021; Istianah & Suhandono 2022; Mou & Wu 2023; Zahoor & Junjia 2020; Indriyanto 2021; Hanif, Alam & Khan 2025; Nuh & Prawira 2023; Schäfer et al. 2017). Complementary work uses visual and multimodal lenses to show how images and graphics scaffold ecological meanings alongside text (e.g., Fernández-Castrillo & Ramos 2025; Günay, Yenen Aytekin & Melek 2025). Methodologically, much of this scholarship operationalizes Appraisal Theory and/or Stibbe's ecosophy by quantifying eco-lexicon, classifying discourse as beneficial/ ambivalent/ destructive, and illustrating patterns with selected excerpts (e.g., Husain et al. 2025; Istianah, Suhandono & Winarti 2024; Zamruddin et al. 2025, Rahayu, et al. 2025). Yet within this landscape, event-bound science journalism on fast-moving disasters remains underexamined: prior work seldom integrates Appraisal Theory within an ecolinguistic framework to analyze a coherent, real-time corpus from a high-credibility outlet like *National Geographic*—nor does

it pair close reading with distributional summaries of appraisal across multiple articles on the same event. Even studies on the LA wildfires (e.g., Savandha, Amelia & Pramesti 2025) have focused on media effects/public awareness rather than how evaluative choices themselves construct anthropocentric or ecocentric narratives in this venue. Addressing this gap, the present study analyzes *National Geographic*'s January-2025 coverage of the LA wildfire to show how appraisal resources (Attitude–Engagement–Graduation) configure ecological meanings and with what ideological implications.

LITERATURE REVIEWS
Ecolinguistics as Frameworks
Ecolinguistics is a multidisciplinary study that studies the complex connection between language, ecology, and the environment. Multidisciplinary ecolinguistics investigates the complicated relationship between language, ecology, and the environment. It recognizes that language affects our environmental ideas, beliefs, and actions (Muhlhausler, 2001).

Ecolinguistics studies how language reflects and affects human-environment relationships, including individual ideas, cultural practices, social policies, and global environmental movements. Ecolinguistics examines language's socio-cultural and ecological context. Language influences human-environment connections, cultural portrayals of nature, and environmental advocacy campaigns (Stibbe, 2015). Ecolinguistic study examines how language affects environmental debates and our relationship with nature using anthropology, sociology, psychology, and ecology (Muhlhausler, 2001).

Language is a key part of environmental discourse because it has a big impact on how people and communities see, understand, and deal with environmental concerns. Language impacts public opinion, frames environmental crises, and changes people's views toward sustainability and conservation through specific choices of words, such as metaphors, framing, evaluative terms, and rhetorical frameworks. The way environmental phenomena like climate change, wildfires, pollution, or species extinction are described can either amplify their urgency and foster proactive responses or downplay their significance and perpetuate indifference. Ecolinguistic analysis of language in environmental discourse is therefore essential because it lets us look closely at the hidden ideologies, power structures, and social and political influences that are present in communication. Researchers and professionals can figure out how language use either encourages ecological knowledge and responsible behavior or, on the other hand, keeps harmful behaviors and ignorance about ecological problems going by looking closely at how it is used. So, to promote positive environmental ideals, advocacy, and action, it is important to utilize language in a thoughtful and responsible way.

Appraisal Theory within an Ecolinguistic Lens
Media discourse powerfully shapes how the public understands environmental issues through the meanings it evaluates, voices, and scales—not merely the facts it reports (Matejova, 2023). Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) offers a systematic way to examine these meanings via three interrelated domains: Attitude (how texts evaluate people, actions, events—Affect, Judgment, Appreciation), Engagement (how texts position other voices and viewpoints—monogloss/ heterogloss, attribution), and Graduation (how texts amplify or soften evaluations—force, focus). Read through an ecolinguistic perspective, these resources are not neutral: they help construct "stories we live by" that foreground some values and backgrounds others (Jabeen, 2024). In wildfire coverage, for example, Attitude can privilege human loss or ecosystem valuation; Engagement can center scientific authority or political conflict; and Graduation can intensify urgency or normalize risk. Thus, Appraisal Theory provides the

micro-level linguistic levers, while ecolinguistics provides the macro-level value critique—together revealing how language choices sustain anthropocentric or ecocentric narratives.

Synthesis to this study
Building on this integrated lens, we analyze National Geographic's Los Angeles wildfire reporting to (i) map Attitude patterns that weigh human, infrastructural, and ecological concerns; (ii) trace Engagement strategies that authorize knowledge (e.g., scientists, officials, residents) and delimit alternatives; and (iii) examine Graduation choices that intensify/de-intensify peril, responsibility, and recovery. This synthesis moves beyond describing "what is said" to explaining how evaluative choices configure environmental meanings and which ideologies they privilege—advancing media-ecolinguistic analysis from thematic inference to coded, theory-led evidence (Martin & White, 2005). In ecolinguistic studies, appraisal patterns are very important because they show how language expresses underlying ecological beliefs, feelings, and attitudes about the environment. By studying appraisal in environmental narratives, the researchers can uncover how ecological phenomena like LA wildfires are constructed and communicated in the media.

RESEARCH METHODS
Research Design
This research is a content analysis with ecolinguistics approach to uncover the evaluation of LA wildfires in National Geographic narratives. Qualitative content analysis is particularly suited for this study as it allows for the systematic interpretation of textual data, specifically words, phrases, or sentences that represent appraisal patterns, rather than relying solely on numerical measurements. This method enables a deep dive into the nuanced linguistic choices made by the authors and their underlying evaluative meanings, which is essential for uncovering the ideological aspects of environmental discourse. By examining the discourse in detail, this approach helps to reveal the hidden beliefs and values embedded within media representations of natural disasters

Data and Data Source
The data for this study consists of four articles published in *National Geographic Magazine*'s Environment Section during January 2025, specifically focusing on the Los Angeles Wildfires. The decision to select articles from *National Geographic* is based on its established reputation as an authoritative source in environmental journalism and its significant global influence in shaping narratives about ecological events. This positions the magazine as a crucial platform for understanding how wildfires are portrayed, encompassing both factual information and the discursive frameworks that influence readers' attitudes and perceptions towards ecological disasters.

To ensure the relevance and focus of the selected articles, a systematic search was conducted within the *National Geographic* online archives for the month of January 2025, using keywords such as "LA Wildfire," "Los Angeles fire," and "California wildfires." The initial search yielded several articles, from which four were specifically chosen for their direct and extensive coverage of the Los Angeles wildfires that began on January 7th, 2025. These articles were published between January 10th and January 29th, 2025, ensuring a chronological breadth of coverage within the immediate aftermath of the event. The source of data are as follows:

Table 1 Data Source

Title	Date of Publication	Label
Here's what really caused L.A. fire hydrants to run out of water	10-Jan-25	Article 1
What the images of Los Angeles's fires don't show	18-Jan-25	Article 2

How did these 'miracle' homes survive L.A.'s wildfires?	23-Jan-25	Article 3
Climate change made the L.A. wildfires 35 percent more likely	29-Jan-25	Article 4

This selection ensures a representative sample of *National Geographic*'s immediate discourse surrounding the 2025 LA Wildfire, allowing for a focused and in-depth appraisal analysis of their narrative strategies. The chronological spread of the articles also allows for an examination of how the narrative might evolve over time, from immediate reporting to more in-depth analysis of causes and impacts. The researcher analyzed those articles using Appraisal theory proposed by Martin and White (2005), which covers three aspects: attitude, engagement, and graduation.

Research Instrument

NVivo 14 was used to implement a deductive Appraisal codebook: the researchers used it to create parent/child nodes (Attitude, Engagement, Graduation), unitized text at the sentence/clause level, and ran coding-frequency and matrix queries to tabulate category counts. Each article was set as a case with basic attributes to support cross-article summaries.It helps unveil how National Geographic Magazines evaluate LA wildfires. The researcher herself is the key instrument since the researcher is considered as the expert who has much knowledge about the study included the data, the method, and the approach used in this study. Finally, consistent with contemporary qualitative standards, the researcher functioned as the primary analytic instrument—bringing ecolinguistics/Appraisal expertise to coding decisions—supported by an audit trail (codebook versions, memos, query outputs) for rigor (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher starts the data collection process by doing a series of activities outlined below: (1) Source identification and retrieval**.** Four *National Geographic* Environment articles on the January 2025 Los Angeles wildfires were located via site search and relevant tags. Final full-text versions were saved in TXT/PDF with bibliographic metadata (title, author, date, URL); (2) Archiving and documentation**.** Each article was assigned a unique ID (NG-01…NG-04). A corpus log recorded IDs, URLs, dates, word counts, and notes on genre/section; (3) Preparation for analysis**.** Plain-text files were imported into NVivo (version XX). Light normalization was applied (quotation marks, encoding), without altering wording; (4) Segmentation and unitization**.** Texts were segmented at the sentence/clauses level to enable consistent coding of linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, or sentences) in subsequent analysis (No interpretive judgments were made during data collection; all interpretation occurs in the analysis phase).

Data Analysis Techniques

After obtaining the data, the researchers follow three cycles of data analysis proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). First, the researchers sort out the data to focus on the most representative ones, then display the data in form of the table and quotation to show the frequency and to explain the findings more comprehensively. The last, the researchers draw a conclusion based on the obtained findings and discuss it with related studies and theories.

FINDINGS

The LA wildfire, ignited and spread throughout the Palisade and its surroundings on 8th January 2025, is recognized as the most destructive wildfire in a decade. Various media reported the progress of the fires, what happened to the victims, and what made this fire become more deadly and vulnerable. One of the media are National Geographic Magazine which consistently made several articles related to the wildfire during January 2025. Those articles are filled with evaluations represented through appraisal patterns while showing how emotional the tragedy was as perceived by the victims and scientific explanations of how the wildfire

became uncontrollable. The researchers find all the strategies of appraisal patterns, such as attitude, engagement, and graduation throughout the whole narrative. The result can be shown as follows:

Table 2 Appraisal Patterns in All Articles

Source	Attitude			Engagement		Graduation	
	Affect	*Judgment*	*Appreciation*	*Monoglossic*	*Heteroglossic*	*Force*	*Focus*
Article 1	-	4	40	-	9	7	3
Article 2	18	18	29	2	2	27	-
Article 3	-	8	51	-	3	5	4
Article 4	-	1	24	1	8	38	7

Taken together, the distribution in Table 2 indicates a discourse that appraises the world mainly through human-centered valuation. The dominance of Appreciation points to sustained evaluation of things and processes—most plausibly built environments, institutional responses, and city functioning—rather than the intrinsic worth of ecospheric entities (habitats, species, ecological functions). The steady presence of Judgment further organizes the narrative around moral and competence assessments of human actors (experts, agencies, residents), constructing a storyline where problems are framed as to-be-managed by humans. By contrast, the relatively low Affect (except in Article 2) signals a reportorial distance that privileges analytic authority over empathic alignment with either human or non-human suffering; in ecolinguistic terms, this makes ecospheric experiences even less appraisable. Engagement is largely heteroglossic, but those additional voices are chiefly institutional experts, which authorizes a technocratic reading of the crisis and marginalizes alternative ecologies of knowledge (e.g., indigenous stewardship, community naturalists, bioindicators). Finally, frequent Graduation: Force amplifies scale and urgency, yet what gets scaled are primarily human-relevant stakes (acreage, casualties, infrastructure), while Graduation of ecospheric thresholds (species loss, habitat fragmentation, functional collapse/ recovery) is sparse. In sum, the pattern reproduces anthropocentric "stories we live by": it centers human value, agency, and risk, and backgrounds the intrinsic value and voice of the more-than-human world—a consequential tilt for shaping ecological consciousness.

The table emphasizes both force and focus techniques about Graduation. Force is regularly employed throughout the articles to amplify the magnitude or immediacy of fire-related consequences. Nonetheless, Focus—albeit infrequent—serves a vital function in delineating or blurring boundaries surrounding essential meanings (e.g., "worst-case scenario," "relatively new area of study"). These Focus methods influence the level of certainty, exceptionalism, or typicality assigned to events and responses.

To move beyond quantitative distribution, the following section presents a more detailed *qualitative analysis* of the appraisal patterns. It explores how *Attitude*, particularly *Judgement* and *Appreciation*, works in tandem with *Graduation: Focus* to construct evaluative meaning, position authority, and shape public perception of wildfire causes, consequences, and recoveries.

Attitudinal Evaluation of LA Wildfires in NatGeo Magazine

This section analyzes how the Attitude system (Affect, Judgment, Appreciation) is used across the articles to build evaluative meanings about the wildfire. The researchers trace which attitudinal subtypes dominate and what values they legitimize, highlighting their ecolinguistic implications for human- versus ecospheric-centered narratives. As stated in the previous section, *attitudes* become the most noticeable evaluation strategies throughout the narratives. *Attitudes* are dominantly used to depict how people in charge react to this natural disaster and how the victims perceive this tragedy. Furthermore, *attitudes* are also used to describe what is

left from the wildfires and how they value those buildings and homes. *Affect* refers to the expression of emotions. Martin & White (2005) divide *Affect* into three divisions, each with positive and negative poles. The divisions are happiness/unhappiness, security/insecurity, and satisfaction/dissatisfaction. *Affect* is used in the narratives to show the emotion of the writer and the victims of the LA wildfires. The feeling of sorrow, loss, and anxiety dominates the narratives, especially in Article 2, as follows:

> "***I have friends who lost houses. I have family who were burned out of their home***. *Los Angeles has lost churches, synagogues, and architecture that are **part of our collective history**—not just architectural gems, but civic hubs and touchstones for communal memory.*" (Article 2)

From the quotation above, the writer does not explicitly state her feelings nor the victims' feelings. However, through a sequence of statements listing the loss caused by wildfire, the readers can feel the loss that the victims feel. The feeling of heartbreak to see their memories is gone could bring sympathy to the victims and raise awareness that this kind of disaster can happen anytime to anyone anywhere. Another negative *Affect* is anxiety, which can be seen from this quotation:

> "***It's now day ten that I've had a go-bag in hand*** *when I leave my apartment—**a backpack stuffed with toiletries, backup batteries, important documents***. As someone lucky enough to not live in an area that burned, I'm grappling with survivor's guilt in different ways. **I refresh fire- and air-monitoring apps constantly and pray for rain**. **While writing this piece, two fires started near me, though they were quickly (luckily) put out***." (Article 2)

This statement also does not explicitly state the anxiety that the writer feels. However, through the description of what she brought every day and how she refreshed fire and air monitoring apps, it is clear that she feels anxious about the possibility of other fires that might be taking place. The same anxiety that the people in the COVID-19 pandemic feel (Zhu, Zhang, Li, Chen & Wang, 2023). Through such a disaster, which may take people's lives, belongings, and homes, survivors usually feel anxious that the same tragedy might happen to them (Walsh, 2007). Through this kind of disaster, people also cherished what they have, the old memories they may forget, and the future they should be prepared for. This situation leads to the feeling of happiness while having nostalgia, like the quotation below:

> "***It's such a great pleasure*** *showing people how beautiful Los Angeles is—the nature, the scope, the quirky details, the architectural patterns and trends per era,*" she added. "*It's an incredible community.*" (Article 2)

Nostalgia can evoke joyful memories and foster happiness. It leads the victim to appreciate what they have left and build their resilience (Wang, 2016). From an ecolinguistic perspective, the dominant use of *Affect*, particularly negative *Affect*, generally serves to establish a strong human connection to the disaster. While this effectively elicits empathy for the victims and raises awareness of the human cost, it also frames the wildfire predominantly as a human tragedy rather than an ecological catastrophe with broader environmental implications. The focus on "loss" and "anxiety" is almost exclusively anthropocentric, centering on human belongings, homes, and emotional states. This emphasis, while legitimate, can inadvertently sideline the ecological loss – the destruction of non-human habitats, the impact on biodiversity, or the disruption of ecosystem functions – which are vital aspects of a holistic ecological understanding (Stibbe, 2015). The "survivor's guilt" and "praying for rain" still reflect a human-centric response to an environmental event, rather than a deeper inquiry into human-environment relationships that might have contributed to the vulnerability of the ecosystem.

As already mentioned, that nostalgia can also build resilience in the community, which is depicted in the text. Furthermore, the resilience is shown through the implicit evaluation of judgment, as in the quotation below:

> "For all the losses, the past weeks have seen inspiring examples of resilience and humanity: **neighbors helping neighbors, strangers becoming friends. Los Angeles will rebuild, we always do.** New buildings will go up where old ones stood, and they'll be different—we may not be able to replace icons of mid-century architecture, but we can design structures to better withstand future burns." (Article 2)

Through the evaluation of *judgment*, the narratives also show the capability of the experts. In their narratives, when writers attempt to explain concepts, such as in Article 4, which primarily explains why the LA wildfires have become more vulnerable than expected. The accusation of climate change influence should be supported by credible research. Therefore, the writer supports the main idea of the climate change-induced influence of LA wildfires with several experts, such as the quotation below:

> "While Southern California regularly experiences wildfires, "the impact of these fires and the timing of these fires in the core of what should be the wet season differentiate this event as an extreme outlier," **John Abatzouglou, a climatology researcher at the University of California, Merced, and another of the paper's coauthors**, said in a statement." (Article 4)

In Article 1, the experts' judgment not only demonstrates their capability and trustworthiness but also highlights the firefighter's responsibility.

> "**We pushed the system to the extreme**," Quiñones said during a Wednesday <u>news conference</u>. "**We're fighting a wildfire with an urban water system**. And that is really challenging." (Article 1)

Based on this quotation, Quinones, the CEO of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, demonstrates how his team has already made every effort to extinguish the fire, despite a malfunctioning system. From an ecolinguistic lens, the prevalence of *Judgment* largely centers on human agency and behavior. The emphasis on "resilience and humanity" and the capability/responsibility of "experts" and "firefighters" frames the human response as central to mitigating and recovering from the disaster (Paveglio, Norton, & Carroll, 2011). While this promotes social cohesion and trust in institutions, it can implicitly reinforce an anthropocentric worldview, where nature is viewed as something to be managed, controlled, or rebuilt by humans, rather than an interconnected system with its inherent value and processes. The *judgment* of climate change's influence is a positive step towards acknowledging broader environmental factors, but the narrative often circles back to human actions and their consequences (Syphard, Velazco, Rose, Franklin & Regan, 2024). While *judgment* is used to depict the capability and tenacity of the people in charge, the dominant attitudinal evaluation is *appreciation*. *Appreciation* evaluates things, processes, text, or abstract phenomena in terms of aesthetics, effectiveness, or value. *Appreciation* is divided into three subtypes: *Reaction*, *composition*, and *valuation*. *Reaction* evaluates impacts on readers, such as those spotted in the quotation below:

> "**Some go viral**, earning features on the news and becoming the subjects of **<u>popular social media posts</u>**" (Article 3)

While *reaction* evaluates viewers' reaction, the *composition* evaluates the structures. *Compositions* are used when the narratives show the structure of the building in LA, which relatively influences the massive wildfire, such as the quotation below:

> *"Images from Altadena and Pacific Palisades, the two hardest-hit neighborhoods, show entire **blocks reduced to rubble, piles of gray ash** where familiar community landmarks like homes, businesses, and schools stood before." (Article 3)*

Besides explaining the structure of the building, the writer used *Composition* to make an analogy of what happened so that the LA Wildfire can be as deadly and dangerous as in the quotation below:

> *"This whiplash occurs because, as the Earth increasingly warms, the sky can hold more water, akin to the way **a supersized sponge** is wetter than a typical kitchen version. This **turbocharged "sponge"** releases excess water". (Article 4)*

Besides *composition*, *valuation* is the most dominant *attitude* throughout the texts. The use of *valuation* is expected, as the narratives demonstrate the process by which the wildfire occurs and becomes deadly. Besides, the texts also evaluate how famous buildings, landmarks, and influential places are burned to ashes as follows:

> *"In Altadena, one of my favorite, sleepier L.A. towns—also, after 1968's Fair Housing Act, an enclave for Los Angeles's Black community—the losses may be unknown to outsiders, but they were precious to us." (Article 1)*

From an ecolinguistic perspective, the overwhelming dominance of *Appreciation*, particularly through *Valuation* and *Composition*, strongly reinforces an anthropocentric view of the environment. The *valuation* of "burned houses, landmark, and influential buildings" and "familiar community landmarks like homes, businesses, and schools" prioritizes human constructs and their cultural/historical significance over the natural landscape. While the analogy of the "supersized sponge" in *Composition* attempts to explain an ecological process, it does so through a human-made object, making the natural phenomenon relatable but still through an anthropocentric frame. An ecocentric approach would likely show more *Appreciation* for the intrinsic value of natural elements—the affected flora and fauna, the ecosystem's functions, or the inherent beauty of the wildland, irrespective of human interaction or utility. The focus on what is "lost" is predominantly human-centered, rather than encompassing the broader ecological impacts and the inherent value of the non-human world (Stibbe, 2015).

Evaluation of Engagement of LA Wildfires in National Geographic Magazine

This section analyzes how Engagement (monogloss/heterogloss; attribution, concession, countering) structures the articles' dialogic stance. We show how predominant attributions to institutional experts bolster credibility while potentially narrowing ecospheric and indigenous perspectives, shaping the balance between anthropocentric and ecocentric narratives. *Engagement* refers to how the writers acknowledge, align with, distance from, or challenge other voices or viewpoints in discourse (Martin & White, 2005). All articles are provided with *heteroglossic engagement,* which incorporates more than one voice in the text. Most of them are *expansive heteroglossia*, which means the narration opens the dialogic spaces for other voices. As mentioned before, the article includes statements from several experts and stakeholders, which allows their voices to support one another. The example of *heteroglossic engagement* is as follows:

> *"Nearly **three dozen researchers** across the globe analyzed the impact of the burning of fossil fuels on this "natural" disaster, as part of the London-based nonprofit organization **World Weather Attribution** (WWA). The group posted their rapid analysis on its website today." (Article 4)*

The quotation above underscores the participation of many researchers worldwide in investigating climate change on natural disasters that have occurred in recent decades. Addressing the term "three dozen researchers" and the organization "World Weather

Attribution (WWA)" explains the use of *heteroglossic engagement* especially the *expansive* one to make the article credible. This kind of attribution is found throughout the narrative.

From an ecolinguistic standpoint, the prevalent use of *heteroglossic engagement*, particularly through the inclusion of "experts and stakeholders", serves to establish credibility and trustworthiness. While this is essential for journalistic integrity, it also reinforces a narrative where environmental issues are often discussed and validated by human authorities and institutions (Schäfer et al, 2017). This approach, while necessary for scientific understanding and policy, can unintentionally overshadow indigenous knowledge, local ecological insights, or the "voice" of nature itself, which are often marginalized in anthropocentric discourses (Stibbe, 2015). For contrast, a clear monoglossic move appears in Article 2: "The Los Angeles fires are a soul-crushing and city-defining disaster." This authorial assertion presents an evaluation without attribution to any external source, thereby contracting the dialogic space (closing off alternative voices) and inviting readers to align with the writer's stance. Placed alongside the otherwise frequent attributions to experts, such monoglossic clauses recenter authorial authority and can intensify an anthropocentric reading by foregrounding human-centred values (soul-crushing/city-defining) rather than ecospheric considerations. In Appraisal terms, this is Engagement: monogloss, which contrasts with the surrounding heteroglossic pattern of sourced claims.The reliance on expert voices in fields like climatology and urban water management directs the reader's attention to human-derived solutions and analyses, rather than fostering a deeper, more direct connection to ecological systems.

Evaluation of Graduation of LA Wildfires in National Geographic Magazine

This section examines Graduation as the system that amplifies or attenuates evaluations through Force and Focus. We show how scaling choices heighten human-centered stakes (e.g., casualties, iconic places) and consider whether comparable scaling is afforded to ecospheric thresholds and non-human loss. The LA wildfire is claimed to be the most devastating in a decade. Even this statement involves graduation to force or focus the narration on certain things that the writer wants to emphasize. The graduation refers to how speakers amplify or soften their evaluations. It has to do with volume and precision, which is distinguished into *focus* and *force* (Martin & White, 2005). *Force* can be realized through *intensification* and *quantification*, while *focus* is realized through *sharpening* and *softening*. The *intensification* usually emphasizes the impact perceived by the victim, as described in the quotation below:

> "The Los Angeles fires are a **soul-crushing** and **city-defining** disaster. Callous voices have called it a city-destroying event, but they don't know Los Angeles very well." (Article 2)

Besides, *intensification*s are also used to describe how massive and hazardous this disaster is, as mentioned in the following quotation:

> "Although the WWA could not numerically assess climate's impact on rainfall, the excessive rains pouring down on L.A. in the past two winters **undoubtedly worsened** the fire risk."

In addition to *intensification*, the *force* can also be realized through the use of *quantification*. *Quantification* usually used to show the statistics to raise the trustworthiness and to show the treacherous of the wildfire itself. It can be seen from the following quotation:

> "Together, the two fires have consumed **more than 35,000 acres** and killed **more than two dozen people** since they started in early January." (Article 4)

Not only *intensification* and *quantification* but also *sharpening* are used throughout the narratives, mostly to emphasize the danger and to show how impactful the wildfire is, as mentioned in the quotation below:

*"While **this boom-bust precipitation cycle** creates **particularly dangerous** conditions for fires, it has allowed for California to see its previously shrinking water reserves fill in recent months." (Article 1)*

From an ecolinguistic perspective, the strategic use of *Graduation*, particularly *Intensification* and *Quantification*, primarily serves to amplify the scale of human impact and the urgency of human-relevant consequences. Phrases like "soul-crushing and city-defining disaster" and "consumed more than 35,000 acres and killed more than two dozen people" underscore the severity through human suffering and large-scale destruction measured in human terms. While *Quantification* adds credibility and highlights the "massive" impact, this "massiveness" is often interpreted in relation to human losses and infrastructure, rather than the intrinsic ecological devastation. The Sharpening of "dangerous conditions" also emphasizes the threat to human well-being and assets. An ecolinguistic critique would question if these *intensifications* also serve to highlight the ecological devastation, or if they primarily contribute to an anthropocentric sense of crisis, motivating action based on human self-interest rather than broader ecological concern (Stibbe, 2015).

DISCUSSION

Through the lens of ecolinguistics, the appraisal patterns found in National Geographic articles predominantly construct anthropocentric ecological narratives emphasizing human vulnerability and resilience (Todd, 2010). While this is beneficial in generating emotional responses and awareness, it risks sidelining non-human ecological components and biodiversity, crucial elements in achieving holistic ecological sustainability as outlined by Stibbe (2015).

Specifically, the high frequency of *Appreciation* directed towards human-built structures and their value, alongside *Affect* that centers on human emotional and material loss, perpetuates a narrative where the environment's significance is often tied to its utility or impact on human life. The focus on human "resilience" and the "capability" of human "experts" and "firefighters" in the *Judgment* appraisal frames environmental challenges as problems to be solved by human ingenuity, rather than complex ecological interactions requiring a re-evaluation of human-nature relationships (Paveglio, Norton, & Carroll, 2011). Even the *heteroglossic engagement* relies heavily on expert human voices, potentially reinforcing a top-down, human-controlled approach to environmental issues. Finally, the use of *Graduation* intensifies the narrative of human devastation and immediate threat, which, while impactful, might overshadow deeper ecological consequences not immediately apparent to human experience. This anthropocentric framing, while effective for immediate human engagement, aligns with Stibbe's (2015) assertion that dominant societal narratives often place humans at the center, potentially obscuring the interconnectedness of all life and promoting unsustainable practices. To foster a truly ecological literacy and ecologically responsible behaviors, as suggested in your introduction, media discourse might benefit from incorporating more ecocentric appraisal patterns – for instance, expressions of *Appreciation* for the intrinsic value of ecosystems, *Affect* for the plight of non-human species, or *Judgment* on human actions that disrupt ecological balance, irrespective of direct human harm.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study shows that integrating Appraisal Theory with an ecolinguistic lens clarifies how evaluative choices in science journalism configure ecological meanings. Confirming Stibbe's (2015) claim about dominant anthropocentric "stories we live by," National Geographic's LA-wildfire coverage privileges appreciation of human property/landmarks, Affect centered on human loss, and Judgment of human agency/resilience, while Graduation and expert-driven

Engagement scale and authorize human-centric stakes. Challenging a simple deficit view, however, we find that heteroglossic sourcing and explanatory metaphors can open space for ecological understanding—yet this potential remains underused when ecospheric entities are seldom appraised for intrinsic value. Extending ecolinguistic frameworks, we demonstrate how the micro-mechanics of appraisal (Attitude–Engagement–Graduation) provide operational levers to diagnose and redesign narratives toward ecocentrism (e.g., valuing habitats/species, scaling ecological thresholds, diversifying non-human–attuned voices). Practically, a modest rebalancing—more ecospheric Appreciation, calibrated Graduation of ecosystem risk/resilience, and broadened Engagement (ecologists, indigenous stewards, ecological indicators)—could retain narrative force while cultivating ecological literacy. Given the event-bound, small corpus and descriptive counts, future work should compare outlets/genres and include multimodal appraisal to test whether these propositions generalize and to prototype ecocentric narrative patterns in environmental journalism.

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