

Justyna Wawrzyniuk

University of Białystok

Poland

e-mail: j.wawrzyniuk@uwb.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0002-7359-0617

Ewelina Feldman-Kołodziejuk

University of Białystok

Poland

e-mail: e.feldman@uwb.edu.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-1205-1510

FROM CRISIS TO EMPOWERMENT: APPRAISAL PATTERNS IN WATT-CLOUTIER'S ECOBIOGRAPHY *THE RIGHT TO BE COLD*

Abstract. This article applies the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2011) to Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold* (2018), analyzing how evaluative language shapes the ecological crisis discourse with a particular focus on Chapter Six, *The Voices of the Hunters*. The appraisal framework's sub-systems – Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation – reveal how Watt-Cloutier constructs meanings that interweave negative and positive appraisals. The framing of climate change as threatening, unstable, and destructive contrasts with positive affirmations of cultural heritage, Inuit expertise, and resilience. The analysis demonstrates how evaluative resources, including assessments of human capability, recognition of knowledge, and measurement of intensity, convert adversity into narratives of empowerment. By privileging the Positive Discourse Analysis approach, this study highlights how Watt-Cloutier mobilizes solidarity and ethical commitment to align readers emotionally and ethically with Inuit communities. Ultimately, the article demonstrates how the appraisal framework illuminates the evaluative strategies of ecobiography and environment-centered discourse, which can reframe ecological crises into a call for collective, life-sustaining action.

Keywords: ecolinguistics, ecobiography, Arctic, circumpolar, appraisal framework, Positive Discourse Analysis.

Introduction

Ecolinguistics examines how language and the environment are interconnected, a field often described as “ecological linguistics” (Fill, 2018), which explores how discourse shapes ecological thought and action, whether

destructive or life-sustaining (Penz & Fill, 2022; Stibbe, 2021). Crucially, ecolinguistics is not a neutral undertaking: narratives, metaphors, and evaluative patterns influence how people think, act, and respond to ecological challenges. As Alexander and Stibbe (2014, p. 105) stress, its orientation is toward fostering environmentally sustainable practices, while Penz and Fill (2022, p. 237) highlight its capacity to raise awareness of the links between language and the real world. In this sense, ecolinguistics reminds us that discourse is never merely descriptive but actively shapes ecological futures (Stibbe, 2021).

Building on these foundations, Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA; Alexander & Stibbe, 2014) offers methodological tools for examining the ecological significance of texts. As Penz and Fill (2022) observe, EDA addresses not only representations of nature and animals but also themes such as consumerism, greenwashing, genetic engineering, and nuclear energy, to name a few. Importantly, despite what its name might suggest, EDA is not confined to explicitly ecological or environmental texts. Instead, it recognizes that discourses such as “animal industry handbooks, lifestyle magazines, and economics textbooks [that] are not part of explicitly ‘environmental’ or ‘ecological’ discourses ... all have a potential impact on human behavior” (Alexander & Stibbe, 2014, p. 108).

EDA shares common ground with Critical Discourse Analysis (Stibbe, 2018a, p. 500), particularly in its attention to destructive discourses that perpetuate ideologies and power structures harmful to the environment. The emphasis of EDA on reframing damaging narratives to foster life-sustaining ones connects EDA to Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA; Martin, 2004).

The urgency of climate change has further sharpened ecolinguistic inquiry (Penz & Fill, 2022). As a global crisis, climate change is not merely a scientific or political problem but also a discursive one: the way it is represented in public debate profoundly shapes societal responses (Boykoff, 2011). Ecolinguists (e.g., Fill & Mühlhäusler, 2001; Penz, 2018; Stibbe, 2021) stress the importance of accurate and resonant communication in conveying the dangers of climate change and its destructive effects on lived realities; environment-centered discourses can either paralyze audiences through fear (what Stibbe, 2021 calls “destructive discourses”) or empower them to adopt transformative, sustainable practices (the “beneficial discourses”; Stibbe, 2021).

Within this context, ecobiography emerges as a significant genre for ecolinguistic analysis. Ecobiographies interweave personal, cultural, and ecological histories, showing how individuals and communities negotiate

their identities and futures in the face of ecological crisis (Smith & Watson, 2010). This article presents an ecolinguistic analysis of Sheila Watt-Cloutier's autobiography, *The Right to Be Cold* (2018), a work of environmental advocacy documenting the Inuit struggle against the impacts of global warming. Chapter Six, *The Voices of the Hunters*, is analyzed here as a case study in ecolinguistics and Positive Discourse Analysis, illustrating how language constructs both negative and positive appraisals of climate change and its consequences to promote a change beneficial to the environment.

To explore this case, the article first situates Watt-Cloutier's work within the broader concept of Positive Discourse Analysis and the literary genre of ecobiography and subsequently outlines the appraisal framework as the tool for the analysis. These foundations lead into the main analysis and discussion of Chapter Six, before concluding with reflections on the wider implications of Positive Discourse Analysis for framing ecological narratives.

1. Positive Discourse Analysis and ecobiography

Ecolinguistic research has often concentrated on environment-centered texts to critique and expose linguistic practices that construct and perpetuate harmful and ecologically destructive narratives (Ponton, 2024). In this respect, Ecological Discourse Analysis (EDA) resembles Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA): both scrutinize harmful discourses, societal in the case of CDA and ecological in the case of EDA, and for that reason, they frequently converge. However, as Stibbe (2018b) points out, critique alone is not enough. The next step is to identify alternatives by highlighting positive discourses and linguistic patterns that inspire rather than inhibit change. This is the focus of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA), which Martin (2004) presents not as a substitute for CDA but as its complement. PDA, in Martin's (2004, p. 183) terms, "de-demonizes" analysis by emphasizing language that enables and empowers, rather than only resisting oppression. In ecolinguistics, positive discourse draws attention to alternative ways of using language to promote life-sustaining actions that support both ecosystems and societies (Stibbe, 2018a). Such an approach examines how texts foster hope, solidarity, resilience, and social transformation (see Bartlett, 2012), an orientation particularly suited to ecobiography, where narratives often stress personal and communal agency, cultural continuity, and adaptive strategies in the face of ecological disruption (Smith & Watson, 2010).

PDA is especially relevant to the study of marginalized voices, including those of Indigenous peoples (Buonvivere, 2024, p. 355). Buonvivere highlights research on Indigenous discourses in Australia (Martin, 2004) and Guyana (Bartlett, 2012) alongside his analysis of Aotearoa New Zealand. Extending this line of inquiry, the present study turns to the Arctic, focusing on community voices rather than political elites, who frequently dominate the discussion (cf. Buonvivere, 2024).

By combining EDA with PDA, this analysis illustrates how empowerment – understood as the discursive capacity to affirm agency, authority, and collective purpose — shapes the representation of Inuit experience. Hope, resilience, and cultural continuity emerge not simply as thematic motifs but as linguistic accomplishments that construct empowerment in interaction: they position Inuit communities as knowledgeable actors rather than passive victims of environmental change. Emphasizing empowerment aligns with PDA's focus on solidarity and constructive meaning-making (Martin, 2004), demonstrating how discourse can cultivate shared ethical orientations and mobilize life-sustaining action. This framing prepares the ground for analyzing Sheila Watt-Cloutier's *The Right to Be Cold* as an ecobiography that exemplifies how Indigenous voices engage with climate change discourse through narratives that assert agency, reclaim authority, and invite collective responsibility.

1.1. *The Right to Be Cold* as an ecobiography

The Right to Be Cold, as its subtitle suggests, recounts “One Woman’s Fight to Protect the Arctic and Save the Planet from Climate Change,”¹ but the delivered story is much grander than a mere autobiography of an environmental activist, for, as the author herself notes, it “is also, in part, the story of Inuit history and contemporary Inuit life, through my lens” (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. xxiv). Spinning her autobiographical tale from 1953, the year she was born, to the present day, the writer chronicles the historical traumas that affected and changed not only her own community but the Inuit world at large, including the infamous residential schools that aimed to assimilate Indigenous children to southern lifestyles through eradication of their first language and Native culture or the forced relocation of Inuit families from Arctic Quebec to the High Arctic, to name but a few. Therefore, *The Right to Be Cold* can be classified as an ecobiography (Miller, 2022, p. 83) since it “interweaves the story of a protagonist with the story of the fortunes, conditions, geography, and ecology of a region and reflects on their connection (sometimes failed) as a significant feature of the writing” (Smith & Watson, 2010, p. 268). The author’s vantage point

is deeply rooted in her language, culture, and community, all of which are Arctic-based and demonstrate a uniquely endearing attitude towards freezing weather on which they depend to thrive. The greatest threat to sustaining the Inuit way of life is climate change, or even more specifically greenhouse gas emissions that cause ice and permafrost to melt, wreaking havoc in the Arctic ecosystem.

The Right to Be Cold is as much about the community as it is about the author, as seen in the constant shift from the authorial “I” to the collective “we,” which initially denotes the Inuit. Such a recurring alternation between the singular and plural first person is hardly surprising, for as Hertha D. Sweet Wong notes in her discussion of autobiographies written by Native American women, “the first-person construction is always plural, shaped by familial, historical, and cultural narratives arising from the precise physical and spiritual geography of community” (Wong, 1998, p. 176). In explaining her values, choices, obligations, or circumstances, Watt-Cloutier automatically references the larger cultural framework of her community. As Wong (1998, p. 174) observes, “At such moments, the women become ‘autoethnographers,’ translating their perspectives to the culturally uneducated within their communities and to cultural others outside.” With every page, the reader gets access to the world most people have very little idea of, or when they do, it is often based on “the preconceived notions of the Arctic” (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. xxv) as “an empty world of pristine white” (Wright, 2014, p. 7). Yet, as the author announces in the introductory part of her memoir, “Arctic is not a frozen wasteland. Its ice and snow are teeming with life – not just marine and animal life, but human life: men, women, and children; families and communities” (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. xxv). Therefore, in an ecobiography, the prefix “bio” refers to both human and non-human life, acknowledging their interconnectedness.

The opening line of the book, that is, “The world I was born into has changed forever” (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. xvii), makes one instantly think of *solastalgia*, a term that recently gained substantial popularity in human geography (Galway et al., 2019; Rafa et al., 2025), which relates to “the lived experience of negative environmental change” (Albrecht, 2020, p. 9) or “the pain experienced when there is recognition that the place where one resides and that one loves is under immediate assault (physical desolation)” (Albrecht, 2005, p. 48). However, Watt-Cloutier is careful not to reinforce the anxiety and distress that have ensued in the wake of both colonial interventions and environmental changes that disrupted the traditional way of life of the Inuit. She consciously chooses to paint a different emotional geography of her region, which for too long has been fraught with

negativity and has pushed too many people to take their lives. Instead of voicing ecological grief and despondency that are usually inherent in solastalgia, her attitude resonates more with the concept of *soliphilia*, that is, “the love of the totality of our place relationships, and a willingness to accept the political responsibility for protecting and conserving them at all scales” (Albrecht, 2019, p. 121). Rather than focusing on the loss of solace that the environment has the capacity to offer, the author insists on protecting what is still there to fight for, which relies on curbing the greenhouse gas emissions and keeping the Arctic cold. Unlike solastalgia, which is more about feeling than acting, soliphilia stems from “resistance to the power and arrogance of both government and corporate bodies to silence and isolate public participation in the development approval and environmental monitoring processes” (Albrecht, 2005, p. 54). Garnering support to challenge the indifference of world governments and corporate powers to global warming is precisely the aim of *The Right to Be Cold*. It is achieved by the author developing an affective relationship with her readers, which does not only rely on the careful selection of English words and phrases (i.e., the appraisal patterns that will be discussed in Section 1.2 and later) but also involves her native language.

In her memoir, written in English, Watt-Cloutier introduces a multitude of Inuktitut words, acting as an interpreter and an autoethnographer between her people and non-Inuit audiences. Her repetitive use of words such as *qamutiik* (sleds), *illuvigait* (igloos), *qimutsiit* (dog teams), or *muttag* (whale skin with a layer of blubber below that is considered a delicacy), among others, provides an impression of language instruction in Inuktitut; through these terms, she introduces readers to the ways of living and perceiving the Arctic that are inseparable from the linguistic and cultural categories of her community. Therefore, the book’s inclusion of Inuktitut words inherently alludes to a cultural framework of Inuit traditional knowledge, which forms the foundation of the local identity and shapes their ways of being. Explaining various culturally bound aspects to the non-Inuit audiences, Watt-Cloutier not only endears her readers to the uniquely organized community whose future is threatened by a climate emergency, but, above all, she also manifests the interconnectedness of human and non-human life in the Arctic in all its aspects. While at first glance, ecology and language may seem unrelated, they are in fact strictly connected because the way people treat each other and nature is affected by their ideas, beliefs, and worldviews, and these, in turn, are formed by language. The Inuit’s reverence for the cold-dependent Arctic ecosystem is evident in their traditional knowledge, which, like that of other Indigenous cultures, recognizes sus-

tainability and prioritizes community over the individual. The four values central to the Inuit way of life are all connected with the land:

Nunamut ataqinninneq relates to a sense of pride and respect in a strong familiarity with and knowledge of the land and sea, including its animals. *Akisussaassuseq* is the responsibility that people have to the land and to everything that inhabits it. *Tukkussuseq* relates to the importance of generosity and hospitality to extended family, as embodied by the cultural sharing of our hunt. *Inuk nammineq* emphasizes individual autonomy and strength, particularly the wisdom to discern appropriate choices on the land and in one's life. (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. 292)

The wisdom of the land, a central concept in the Inuit tradition, is also the key point of Watt-Cloutier's book: "The land teaches us what we need to survive. It builds character, nurturing judgment, courage, patience, and strength under pressure" (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. 175). Even if, as a reader, one has never consciously or solely relied on the land for survival, it is difficult to distance oneself from the prospective loss and disruption of life in numerous communities across the globe. Building empathy is precisely Watt-Cloutier's signature style, as she confesses, "I've never found an adversarial approach very helpful. Instead, I've tried to put my faith in people's innate concern for others. I reason that if I can connect with them on a personal level, if I can appeal to their heart with solid facts to back up my story, I may be able to change their attitudes and opinions" (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. 209). Appealing to interlocutors' feelings rather than their intellect is what Watt-Cloutier dubs privileging *heartspace* over *headspace* (British Library, 2022), which is also conspicuous in the following excerpt:

[i]f we allow the Arctic to melt, we lose more than the planet that has nurtured us for all of human history. We lose the wisdom required for us to sustain it. And when I say *we*, I do not mean only Inuit. It is true, we are already among the first to be devastated by climate change, but we are not the only ones. Everything is connected through our common atmosphere, not to mention our common spirit and humanity. What affects one affects us all. (Watt-Cloutier, 2018, p. xx)

With every page, *The Right to Be Cold* progressively becomes "a site of manifesto, a textual place from which to call for an ethic of care for the environment" (Smith and Watson, 2010, p. 161). Simultaneously, the collective "we" that initially designated the Inuit begins to denote the global community, including the reader, that Watt-Cloutier hopes to involve in the fight against global warming.

1.2. Appraisal framework

Watt-Cloutier's reliance on empathy, her appeal to "heartspace," and her expansion of the Inuit "we" into a global "we" illustrate how central evaluation and alignment are to her narrative style:

I am confident that we can come together as one on this planet, that everyone can recognize just how connected we really are. The world needs to realize that our environments, our communities all around the world are not separate, and that our shared atmosphere and oceans, not to mention our human spirit, connect us all. (p. 325)

To examine rhetorical strategies more closely, this study draws on the appraisal framework for analyzing how language negotiates evaluation, stance, and alignment.

The appraisal framework provides a systematic way of examining how speakers and writers position themselves and their audiences through evaluative resources (Martin & White, 2005; White, 2011). Emerging from systemic functional linguistics (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), the framework considers both positive and negative assessments, not only at the level of what is evaluated but also how those evaluations themselves are framed. It distinguishes three major subsystems – Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation – which together capture how texts construct affective stances, attribute value to people and phenomena, and scale meanings up or down to emphasize significance. Each subsystem addresses a different dimension of evaluation, and taken together they map the interplay between feeling, stance, and intensity.

The first subsystem, Attitude, accounts for how feelings are expressed. Martin and White (2005, p. 42) divide it into three domains: Affect (positive or negative emotions such as happiness vs. sadness and confidence vs. anxiety), Judgment (evaluations of human behavior and character, often in terms of capacity, ethics, or social esteem – for example, whether behavior is "ethical" or "lawful"), and Appreciation, which is used to make assessments of value, complexity, or impact, often linked to aesthetics (White, 2011, p. 17), as in descriptions of "a remarkable achievement" or "a devastating loss."

The second subsystem, Engagement, captures how speakers or writers position their stance in relation to other voices (White, 2011). Engagement may be monoglossic, presenting statements without reference to alternative perspectives, or heteroglossic, which acknowledges or incorporates other stances (Martin & White, 2005). Heteroglossic resources can further be divided into dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction, depending

on whether alternative voices are entertained or challenged, as in “it seems that...” or “many believe....”

The third subsystem, Graduation, scales evaluations in intensity or sharpness of focus (Martin & White, 2005, p. 137); Graduation extends both Attitude and Engagement by showing how strongly a feeling is expressed or how precisely a category is defined. Its two main categories are Force, which intensifies or downscales meanings, for instance when something is described as “extremely dangerous” or “slightly concerning,” and Focus, which sharpens or softens category boundaries, as in the claim that someone is “a true leader” or “a leader of sorts” (Martin & White, 2005). In short, Graduation indicates how emphatically an evaluation is made or how prototypical it is.

Taken together, the three subsystems of the appraisal framework provide a robust framework for analyzing how Watt-Cloutier evaluates ecological, political, and cultural experiences. They show how her writing connects with readers, balances the authority of Indigenous and scientific voices, and creates emotional connections with people all over the world. In the context of Positive Discourse Analysis, this model illuminates the linguistic strategies through which Watt-Cloutier’s ecobiography not only articulates critique but also builds solidarity and constructive meaning-making – core concerns of PDA, which seeks to identify how texts mobilize affiliative, hopeful, and future-oriented discourse (Martin, 2004). Making this explicit shows why positive appraisal is relevant for the analysis: it reveals how evaluative language becomes a resource for fostering collective responsibility, mutual recognition, and the possibility of life-sustaining change. This theoretical lens therefore equips us to trace appraisal patterns that structure *The Right to Be Cold*.

2. Appraisal patterns in *The Voices of the Hunters*

The appraisal analysis presented in this section focuses on Chapter Six of *The Right to Be Cold*, entitled *The Voices of the Hunters*. The chapter recounts Sheila Watt-Cloutier’s efforts to ensure that the concerns of her community were heard and taken seriously on the international stage.

The chapter documents a series of meetings, proceedings, and protocols that took place during Watt-Cloutier’s service in the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC). It was selected for analysis because it captures both the harsh realities of climate change and the political entanglements that shape

responses to it. Through condensed yet vivid descriptions of people, events, and environments, Watt-Cloutier creates a narrative that lends itself well to examining evaluative strategies. Her account juxtaposes the traditions and lived experiences of Inuit communities with the politics and limited understanding of decision-makers from the Global North – referred to through her ecobiography as the “South” to reflect their geographical location below the Arctic. These contrasts make the chapter an ideal site for identifying appraisal patterns that reveal tensions between Indigenous experience and external political frameworks.

This section begins with mixed appraisal patterns, where negative evaluations of climate change – fear, vulnerability, and destruction – are juxtaposed with positive elements such as empathy, cultural heritage, and collective action. It then turns to entirely positive appraisal patterns, where stories of resilience, Inuit expertise, and Watt-Cloutier’s own advocacy create a discourse of empowerment; these examples illustrate how appraisal patterns interact across the chapter to transform experiences of crisis into testimonies of cultural strength and hope.

For clarity, the appraisal framework systems are marked in the passages in the following way: **Attitude is bold**, *Engagement marked in italics*, whereas the Graduation is underlined. This allows for displaying how the systems interact.

2.1. Mixed appraisal

Despite conducting this study through the lens of Positive Discourse Analysis, Watt-Cloutier’s text still contains negative evaluations. As already noted, her ecobiography portrays a life deeply dependent on nature at both personal and cultural levels. Her activism emphasizes the need to promote life-sustaining actions, and the criticism expressed in the book accords with this philosophy. The chapter not only depicts the clash between traditional Inuit life and the politics of the South (understood as the Canadian government and the countries of the Global North), but it also stages a clash between positive and negative evaluations. This interplay forms the backdrop for the appraisal analysis that follows.

The examples below are drawn from Chapter Six of *The Right to Be Cold*. For clarity, each excerpt is accompanied by contextual notes, with the phrases under analysis marked as noted above. Page numbers refer to Watt-Cloutier (2018).

As mentioned, negative evaluations are unavoidable, given Watt-Cloutier’s life mission to confront destructive environmental change, especially climate change. Applying the appraisal framework, we first trace how

Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation co-construct meaning in a passage that foregrounds threat and vulnerability. Consider the following:

- (1) Take the village of Shishmaref, Alaska. *Evidence shows* that people have been living in the island village, hunting and fishing, for at least two thousand years. But today, climate change is **threatening to wash away** this traditional village. As the sea ice melts, the shoreline is **losing its defense** against the stormy waves of the Chukchi Sea, which now **gnaw away** at the shore. (p. 185)

In terms of Attitude, this passage evokes fear and anxiety through expressions such as “threatening to wash away,” “losing its defense,” and “gnaw away.” Climate change is represented metonymically through its effects – rising seas and melting ice – that endanger entire communities.

As for the Appreciation, the shoreline “losing its defense” signals vulnerability, the loss of protection against waves intensified by climate change. The phrase “gnaw away” depicts the sea as a predator devouring the land, amplifying the sense of relentless damage. At the same time, Watt-Cloutier pairs this negative imagery with positive evaluation: by emphasizing Shishmaref’s two-thousand-year history of human settlement, she evokes empathy and respect for the cultural continuity of the community.

When Engagement is considered, the passage as a whole is monoglossic, leaving little space for alternative voices or denial. This suggests that while Watt-Cloutier privileges “heartspace” over “headspace,” she grounds her narrative in scientific consensus when it is available: the phrase “Evidence shows” points to that.

In summary, the passage aligns readers emotionally and ethically against climate change: the cultural heritage of Shishmaref highlights what is at stake, while the imagery of predation and loss intensifies urgency and evokes empathy. This pattern of combining fear with empathy recurs in the chapter, reinforcing the dual role of negative and positive appraisal.

The second passage illustrates how Watt-Cloutier dramatizes the erosion of environmental knowledge:

- (2) In the past, we could glance at ice and accurately gauge its **depth** and its **stability**. But now, what looked like solid ice *might actually* be **thin** or **unstable**. (p. 186)

Here, Attitude is expressed through a before-and-after contrast: the ice once signified reliability and safety, but it is now described as “thin” and “unstable,” evoking danger and unpredictability. The positive evaluation of the past (“accurately gauge”) heightens the negative evaluation of the present, producing a sense of insecurity. In terms of Graduation, the re-

liability of the ice is intensified by the precision of “accurately,” while the fragility of the present is underscored through the stark contrast with “thin” and “unstable.”

Although there are no explicit moral evaluations of human actors (Judgment), the broader context of the book positions climate change as the outcome of human actions. Within this frame, the environmental transformation of the ice is implicitly judged as a negative consequence of human behavior.

When Engagement is considered, Watt-Cloutier does not allow space for denialist voices, similarly to (1). The change in the state of the ice is presented as a fact. Even the modal “might,” which could suggest openness to interpretation, functions here less as hedging and more as an acknowledgment of variability in ice conditions. Together, examples (1) and (2) demonstrate how Watt-Cloutier balances negative evaluations of climate change with positive recognition of cultural resilience and knowledge, a duality that characterizes her narrative style.

Since examples (1) and (2) juxtapose Inuit life with the effects of climate change, an appraisal analysis naturally reveals both positive and negative patterns. Evaluations tend to be negative when the environmental crisis takes center stage, but they still acknowledge the historical significance of collective efforts when warranted. Consider, for example (3), Watt-Cloutier’s recollection of the Kyoto Protocol:

- (3) Though no binding targets were established, it was the commitments set in Rio that led to the Kyoto Protocol. Kyoto *has been criticized* for being **too ambitious and not ambitious enough**, both for being **too punitive** on developing nations and **for being too lenient**, and for **manifestly failing to halt** greenhouse gas emissions; yet the fact remains that **for the first time**, the planet **figured out it had a problem and got together to solve it**. This was also **the first time** that the international community **set binding targets** for itself. (Though, **notably**, the United States *failed to ratify* Kyoto, and Canada *withdrew* from it.) (p. 194)

In terms of Engagement, the opening clauses stage overt heteroglossia through attribution: “has been criticized” introduces alternative voices, while the paired evaluations “too ambitious / not ambitious enough” and “too punitive / too lenient,” together with “manifestly failing to halt,” signal a contested field amplified by Graduation (Force) through quantifiers “too” and “not enough.” The clause “yet the fact remains” then reduces the dialogic space, effectively closing the debate by establishing a shared baseline: recognition of the problem and coordinated action.

The Attitude profile places Affect largely in the background, since frustration is implied rather than stated, and it foregrounds Appreciation and Judgment. The repeated phrase “first time” attributes value and novelty and displays Appreciation, strengthened by Graduation, while casting Kyoto as historically significant. At the level of Judgment, the international community is positively evaluated – “got together to solve it,” “set binding targets” – as cooperative and solidaristic. By contrast, the parenthetical “notably” marks the United States’ failure to ratify and Canada’s withdrawal as negative judgments in terms of social sanction, positioning these actors as insufficiently committed to the collective endeavor.

Overall, the passage moves from heteroglossic critique to a contracted consensus that affirms collective agency, while simultaneously marking non-participation as a moral lapse – a balance that recurs throughout the chapter.

2.2. Positive appraisal

The idea for PDA as a complement to CDA proposed by Martin (2004) was to highlight language that promotes change by uplifting and inspiring rather than dwelling on oppression and dominance. In examples (1)–(3), PDA is evident in the positives Watt-Cloutier emphasizes alongside negative evaluations of environmental change. In (1), this is the empathy evoked for Shishmaref through the call to preserve its cultural heritage despite “predatory waves” threatening the village. In (2), we acknowledge the significance of Inuit knowledge in “accurately gauging” the ice, notwithstanding the difficulties presented by “thin” and “unstable” conditions. In (3), it is the recognition of the Kyoto Protocol: though “criticized” as both “too ambitious” and “too lenient,” it is acknowledged as a historic act of collective responsibility. Together, these examples interweave positive and negative evaluations, but always with an orientation toward preservation – of the village, of knowledge, and of international cooperation. The discourse becomes most explicitly positive, however, when Watt-Cloutier turns from political or environmental crises to the lived resilience of her own community.

In these moments, even semantically negative phrases acquire positive value within a broader narrative of perseverance. Consider (4):

- (4) My neighbor, Simon Nattaq, had **fallen through the ice** on a hunting trip soon after I moved to Nunavut. He pulled himself out of the water and, in **soaking wet clothes**, dug himself into a snowdrift for insulation. **He spent two days that way** before he was found. Both his legs were already **frozen**, so they had to **be amputated**. When I was home between trips *I witnessed his*

healing from across the street as he **slowly but surely** learned to get about on his prosthetic legs. As the years passed, *I would see* this **seasoned** hunter getting back on his snowmobile or his four-wheeler, going off to the land and sea to hunt. His **ability to overcome** this **great challenge** and **remain a provider for his family** was an **inspiring example** of the **strength and resilience** of the Inuk hunter. (p. 187)

From an appraisal perspective, the passage evokes shock and empathy through phrases such as “fallen through the ice,” “soaking wet clothes,” and “spent two days that way,” which individually carry negative evaluations by depicting a life-threatening accident. Yet within the wider narrative, these negatives intensify the impact of the positive appraisals that follow. Expressions like “overcome this great challenge” and “remain a provider for his family” highlight perseverance and resilience, transforming the story into one of inspiration.

In terms of Judgment, Simon is portrayed as courageous, resourceful, and resilient: he saves himself under conditions that would have killed many (particularly a non-Inuk) and later returns to hunting. His social esteem is highly valued in terms of capacity and tenacity, while the phrase “an inspiring example” elevates his story to a symbol of Inuit cultural strength. The fact that Simon remained a provider for his family is seen and evaluated positively in the social sanction (propriety) aspect of Judgment.

Regarding Engagement, the narration is largely monoglossic: Watt-Cloutier’s eyewitness stance (“I witnessed his healing”) frames the events as factual, leaving little room for dispute. Yet “inspiring example” simultaneously invokes a heteroglossic dimension, positioning Simon’s actions as symbolic within a shared community framework and inviting the reader to align with that perspective. Compared to examples (1)–(3), which balance critique with affirmation, (4) shifts decisively toward positive discourse, turning hardship into a testimony of resilience and aligning readers with empowerment and cultural continuity.

This focus on resilience leads directly into another strand of positive discourse: the recognition of Inuit expertise itself. Whereas (4) highlights individual perseverance in the face of danger, (5) foregrounds the collective knowledge of hunters and elders, presenting it as vital for survival and as equally authoritative as scientific expertise:

- (5) Our hunters and elders were **carefully** observing nature. They were **finely attuned** to small changes. They **knew what to look for**. They were **experts** because they **had to be**: their daily **survival** on the land and ice **depended on it**. (p. 200)

While this passage does not explicitly evoke emotions, it directs readers toward admiration and respect for the hunters' and elders' knowledge. Elders are valued for their life experience, while hunters are respected for their survival skills and environmental expertise by confirming that they "knew what to look for." Elders and hunters are considered experts, although not in the traditional scientific sense.

This brings the analysis to Judgment and Appreciation, which operate implicitly here. In terms of Judgment, social esteem is constructed through descriptors such as "carefully" and "finely attuned," which highlight attentiveness and discipline. The community's capacity is positively evaluated by calling them "experts" and by emphasizing that they are not simply living but "surviving" on the land and ice. The absence of negative evaluations contributes to an idealized image of Inuit expertise and reframes it as equally important to scientific knowledge, which is often privileged in discussions of climate change.

Regarding Engagement, the passage is strongly monoglossic. Inuit expertise is presented as authoritative and beyond dispute; Watt-Cloutier aligns with the expertise and leaves no space for alternative voices to question the authority of hunters and elders. Finally, the subsystem of Graduation is visible in the adverb "carefully" and the adjective phrase "finely attuned," which intensify the level of precision attributed to their observations and reinforce the credibility of their knowledge. Compared with examples (1)–(4), which emphasize survival, resilience, and collective action, (5) highlights epistemic authority: Inuit expertise is framed as precise, indispensable, and on par with scientific knowledge.

From this celebration of communal expertise, the text moves to an even more personal register. Example (6) shifts the focus from collective observation to Watt-Cloutier's own voice, where she frames her advocacy in terms of maternal care for both her community and the Arctic itself.

- (6) My **maternal instincts** kicked in. And my **desire to protect** the Arctic and our culture, along with *plenty of good strategic advice* from my colleagues, gave me the **courage** and **perseverance** to **increase my participation** in the council meetings. (p. 207)

This passage contains no negative evaluation; it is entirely positive, foregrounding emotional motivation, ethical resolve, and collaborative strength. Within appraisal, the Attitude system works to construct empowerment as an emotional and moral stance. Affect is highlighted through "maternal instincts" and "desire," which signal responsibility, attachment, and a deeply felt obligation to act. These emotions are not portrayed as passive

reactions but as catalysts for agency, transforming concern into purposeful action in the face of a broader climate crisis. Judgment is also highly positive, conveyed through references to “courage and perseverance” (social esteem) and “increase my participation” (social justice), both underscoring Watt-Cloutier as an ethically committed and socially responsible actor. In terms of Appreciation, the reference to “good strategic advice” acknowledges the value of collaborative support. It introduces a heteroglossic moment that strengthens empowerment: her agency is grounded not in individual heroism but in collective wisdom and shared strategizing. Aligning with these supportive voices affirms a model of empowerment rooted in community, guidance, and interdependence – an emphasis that resonates with PDA’s concern for solidarity and constructive meaning-making.

Graduation amplifies these meanings. The metaphor of “maternal instincts” that “kicked in” intensifies the urgency and force of her protective stance, while “plenty of good strategic advice” magnifies the abundance of support and solidarity available to her. The extension of maternal care to “the Arctic and our culture” widens the scope of her agency: her motivation is simultaneously intimate and expansive, linking personal identity to collective survival.

Unlike the earlier examples, where positive and negative evaluations were intertwined, (6) is wholly affirmative. Its evaluative pattern aligns emotional motivation, ethical action, and communal support into a cohesive discourse of empowerment: empowerment as felt, embodied, shared, and operationalized. In this sense, the passage illustrates how positive appraisal constructs not only resilience but also a model of empowered Indigenous leadership that challenges externally imposed vulnerability narratives.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of Chapter Six of Sheila Watt-Cloutier’s *The Right to Be Cold* demonstrates how appraisal patterns shape the affective, ethical, and dialogic dimensions of climate change discourse. Drawing on the appraisal framework, the study traced how Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation interact to construct meanings that oscillate between critique and affirmation. Negative appraisals often focus on the destructive impacts of climate change, such as erosion, instability, and vulnerability, but they often maintain a balance. Even passages that evoke fear or despair are offset with appeals to empathy, heritage, and continuity, aligning the reader not only against ecological loss but also with the resilience of Inuit communities.

The mixed appraisal patterns evident in Watt-Cloutier's recollection of the Kyoto Protocol further illustrate how critique is coupled with affirmation. While acknowledging failures and controversies, the narrative simultaneously emphasizes the historic significance of coordinated international action. This dual orientation reflects Watt-Cloutier's broader rhetorical strategy: to avoid paralysis by balancing acknowledgment of crisis with recognition of agency.

Most striking, however, are the positive appraisal patterns. The story of Simon Nattaq, the portrayal of hunters' and elders' expertise, and the maternal metaphor for Arctic advocacy all exemplify how evaluative resources are used to inspire admiration, respect, and solidarity. Negative descriptions of hardship intensify the impact of subsequent positive evaluations, transforming danger and loss into testimonies of courage, endurance, and cultural strength. Engagement is consistently monoglossic, underscoring Inuit authority, while Graduation amplifies both threat and resilience, ensuring the discourse resonates powerfully.

Overall, the analysis shows how Watt-Cloutier's ecobiography uses appraisal to blend critique with empowerment, positioning Inuit voices as both witnesses to crisis and agents of hope. This fusion of negative and positive discourse exemplifies the potential of Positive Discourse Analysis to reframe climate narratives, demonstrating that linguistic strategies can mobilize empathy, affirm Indigenous authority, and foster life-sustaining change.

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N O T E

¹ The subtitle of the first edition was "One Woman's Story of Protecting Her Culture, the Arctic and the Whole Planet," which sounded less militant and emphasized the storytelling tradition as well as the preservation of Inuit culture more overtly.

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