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UNRAVELING GRETA THUNBERG'S DISCURSIVE STRATEGIES OF BLAMING REGARDING THE ISSUE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

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Abstract

Greta Thunberg's environmental crisis speech at the UN Climate Action Summit 2019 was publicly and widely recognized. In relation to that, this research addresses three research objectives: 1) to reveal the construction of discursive strategies of blaming; 2) to identify the focus of blaming, which includes characters, behavior, and outcome; and 3) eventually, to discover the purpose of Thunberg's speech. Accordingly, these are all answered through the application of Hansson et al.'s discursive strategies of blaming and the focus of blaming, along with the purpose of Thunberg's speech, which are discerned from the three metafunctions of Halliday and Matthiessen's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The findings show that SFL provides a useful analytical framework for identifying the blaming strategies in Greta Thunberg's speech, including what is blamed and how the blame is expressed. Furthermore, the formula of these metafunctions facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the speech's overall communicative purpose. The analysis reveals that her speech conveys judgments of veracity, propriety, capacity, and tenacity, with the focus of blaming realized through lexicogrammatical choices operating across the three metafunctions.

Keywords: *climate crisis, discursive of blaming, Greta Thunberg, metafunctions, SFL.*



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Introduction

Research on discursive strategies of blaming is in fact not in abundance. However, this does not mean that such research is not necessary to conduct. (Hansson et al., 2022) argued that modern politics has long been a ground for blaming games. As the extension of one of the subdomains from Martin and White's Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005), (Hansson et al., 2022) proposed strategies and focus of blaming which are based on negative judgments they formulated from protesters that criticized and delegitimized governments and political leaders. In response to this discursive practice, this article aims to scrutinize how Greta Thunberg's speech persuades her concern about environmental issues and political genocidal practices. Greta Thunberg is an environmental activist from Sweden delivering a speech at The UN Climate Action Summit 2019

Greta Thunberg's speech in the highly respected summit (The Telegraph, 2019) has become one of the most widely circulated environmental messages on the internet, not only because of its emotional tone but also because of its strikingly direct and confrontational speaking style. Thunberg's speech confronts world leaders through direct accusations, and urgent warnings of ecological collapse. Her message frames climate inaction not simply as a political miscalculation, but as a direct ethical wrongdoing done by the assembled leaders that endangers present and future generations. This discursive shift is shown through specific linguistic choices, making the speech an essential context for functional analysis.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004) provides a useful framework for understanding how language creates meaning through the three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Metafunctions can be defined as distinct functional components that construct a structurally meaningful clause (Halliday & Mathiessen, 2004, Gerot & Wignell, 1995, p. 5, Xuan et al., 2025). These metafunctions do not merely shape what is said, but how responsibility, emotion and authority are constructed in discourse. The central problem addressed in this study is how Greta Thunberg's speech constructs persuasion through blaming, and how this blaming is linguistically construed through the three metafunctions.

Numerous studies have examined how language functions within multiple contexts by applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The first study was done by Malkawi and Fareh (2023); the paper analysed Hanan Ashrawi's speech on Palestinian rights. This article focused on the larger

scale of discourse by exploring the themes and rhetorical patterns found within the utterances of the speech rather than detailed clause-level metafunctions. The second study by Darong (2021) focused on the interpersonal metafunction found within Joe Biden's victory speech. Rather than analysing it with all three metafunctions, this research limited its focus only on one of them, which was the interpersonal metafunction to find out how mood choices built relationships between the speaker and the audience. The third study was done by Harahap et al. (2024) which examined the Cinderella short story using the three metafunctions in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze a work of practical literature.

The current study applies all the three metafunctions focusing on how blaming is construed through the lexicogrammar within Thunberg's speech. Despite all the previous studies that have been previously mentioned used Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in many aspects, especially political discourse, none of them specifically apply Halliday's three metafunctions (2004) to interpret a text in the form of a speech that is addressed to the government and world leaders from the perspective of a youth activist, nor do they combine interpersonal, ideational, and textual metafunctions to analyze and interpret the construction of blaming with its focus of blaming in each clause. Accordingly, this article examines the discursive strategies of blaming through the analysis of judgments (veracity, propriety, capacity, and tenacity), the focus of blaming, and the goal implied by the selection of lexicogrammar in Thunberg's Climate Change speech.

Research Methods

Design

This current research aims at demonstrating how lexicogrammatical choices realize the discursive strategies of blaming including the focus of blaming and the purpose of the speech through metafunctional analysis in the context surrounding Greta Thunberg's UN Climate Change Summit speech in 2019. By anchoring to this goal of study, the study is designed as a qualitative discourse analysis study informed by Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics and Martin and White's Appraisal Analysis. This design is deemed appropriate as Halliday's SFL helps to understand how the discourse of blaming is constructed through ideational, personal, and textual metafunctions.

Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was a documentation sheet developed to identify, classify, and analyze Greta Thunberg's discursive strategies of blaming regarding the issue of climate change. As this study

employed a qualitative discourse analysis approach, the instrument served as a systematic guide for collecting and interpreting relevant textual data from Greta Thunberg's speeches, public statements, and other relevant discourse concerning climate change. The documentation sheet consisted of several categories, including excerpts of Greta Thunberg's statements, the context of each statement, the targets of blame, the linguistic features indicating blame, and the discursive strategies employed to construct and communicate blame. The analysis focused on identifying how Greta Thunberg used linguistic choices, such as accusations, negative evaluations, direct address, and expressions of responsibility, to attribute blame to particular individuals, groups, institutions, or governments. The researcher acted as the primary instrument in selecting relevant data, interpreting the meanings of the statements, and classifying the identified discursive strategies based on the theoretical framework adopted in the study. To maintain analytical consistency, the collected data were examined systematically in relation to the research objectives and the relevant concepts of discourse analysis and blame strategies. Thus, the documentation sheet and the researcher's analytical interpretation worked together to facilitate a systematic and in-depth examination of how blame was discursively constructed in Greta Thunberg's climate change discourse.

Data Collection

The source of data was taken from "Transcript: Greta Thunberg's Speech at the U.N. Climate Action Summit, posted at September 23, 2019, at 1:58 p.m. ET., by NRP Staff. As the focus of the current study is to demonstrate a transitivity analysis to examine how persuasion is constructed in Greta Thunberg's speech, this study looks at absolute clauses in the speech text. He & Yang (2025) clarify that an absolute clause is at the clause rank at the clause scale. In this case, the absolute clause is higher than a group or a phrase and comprises its own internal clause structure, that is, a subject and a predicate. The absolute clause is structured by functional elements like subject, finite, predicator, complement, and adjunct with the first three as the basic requirement. The speech text consisted of 54 clauses in total, and 28 clauses were selected as the data. The selection was based on the accentuation of participants found in these clauses as participants are important in determining the targets of the blame in her speech. The selected data are segmented into clauses and then coded using the notation [c no.], for example, [c 1] and [c 2], which represent Clause 1, Clause 2, and so forth.

Data Analysis

The discursive strategies of blaming are examined incorporating Halliday and Mathiessen's SFL-based metafunction analysis. The first element to unravel is the ideational metafunction, in which we can assess how experience, actions, participants, and circumstances are represented through transitivity. The second element under scrutiny is the interpersonal metafunction under which the Appraisal framework (Martin and White, 2005) is incorporated to identify evaluative language concerning the government's conduct, responsibility, and capability in addressing climate issues. Appraisal analysis is concerned with the linguistic resources (e.g., words, phrases, sentences) people may use to express attitudes toward others and the world in three subdomains: Affect (emotional responses, e.g., "worried"), Appreciation (aesthetic evaluation of things, e.g., "ugly"), and Judgment (moral evaluation of human behavior and character, e.g., "corrupt"). However, we only explored the Judgment subdomain (Martin and White, 2005) since the discourse of blame is directed at government agents in Greta Thunberg's speech. To accommodate this, the identification of judgments of capacity, veracity, propriety, and tenacity is taken as the basis for assessing the behavior and character of political figures against expected norms of political accountability to resolve the issue of climate change. Judgments of propriety are directed to appraise the ethical or moral state of a person, while judgments of veracity refer to an evaluation of a person's truthfulness or honesty. The third subdomain is judgments of capacity that assess a person's competence and ability. The last one is judgments of tenacity through which we evaluate the degree of one's determination and dependability in resolving problems. The last element to investigate is textual metafunction through which we can unearth how meanings are organized and foregrounded through Theme/Rheme and related resources. Subsequently, Hansson, Page, and Fuoli's (2022) framework of blaming discourse is integrated with the foci of blame on the target's negative character, their bad behavior, or a bad outcome that the subject probably caused or allowed to happen.

Results and Discussion

This part is divided into two: results and discussion. The results display the three-metafunction SFL analysis for each of Thunberg's utterances, organized into tables following Halliday and Matthiessen's model. In addition to the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunction analysis, we draw on Martin and White's subdomain of APPRAISAL analysis, particularly judgments, to investigate blaming discourse within the scope of evaluating 'people and the way they behave' (Martin and White, 2005, p. 52).

Then, the results are also interpreted based on the foci of blame, whether on the behavior, character, or negative outcome produced by the political figures evaluated, as proposed by Hansson, et al. (2022).

Results

First, the results of Hansson, Page, and Fuoli's (2022) focus on blaming, along with the blaming strategies that work hand in hand with analyses of the three metafunctions, are shown in Figure 1.

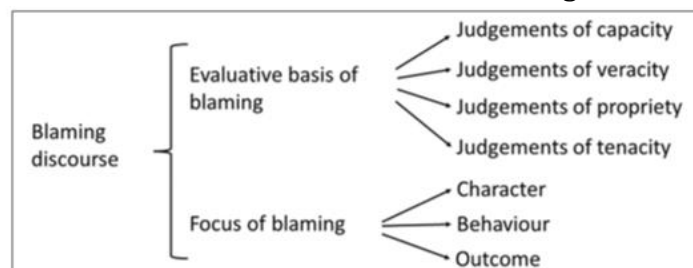


Figure 1. Hansson, Page, and Fuoli's Analytic framework of blaming discourse

Table 1. Types of themes used in Thunberg's selected speech

Theme	Σ	%
This	1	3.57
You	8	28.57
I	6	21.43
Yet	1	3.57
How dare you!	3	10.71
People	2	7.14
The entire ecosystem	1	3.57
We	1	3.57
For more than 30 years the science	1	3.57
When the politics and solutions	1	3.57
No matter how sad and angry	1	3.57
Because if you	1	3.57
(you) still kept on	1	3.57
	28	100

Table 1 presents the distribution of themes identified in Greta Thunberg's selected speech. The table contains 28 theme instances, with You being the most frequently occurring theme, appearing eight times (28.57%). The second most frequent theme is I, which occurs six times (21.43%). Meanwhile, How dare you! appears three times (10.71%), and People occurs twice (7.14%). The remaining nine theme categories each appear once, accounting for 3.57% per category.

The predominance of *You* suggests that Thunberg's speech places considerable emphasis on addressing her audience directly. From a discourse perspective, the use of the second-person pronoun can establish a direct relationship between the speaker and the audience. In the context of climate change advocacy, this choice may serve to direct attention toward the responsibilities of those being addressed, particularly political leaders and other influential decision-makers. It can also make the message more confrontational by positioning the audience as participants in the problem rather than merely observers.

The frequent occurrence of *I* (21.43%) indicates that personal positioning is another prominent feature of the speech. By using the first-person pronoun, Thunberg presents herself as an individual speaker who expresses her perspective, concerns, and reactions to the climate crisis. This personal positioning can strengthen the impression of sincerity and emotional involvement. The contrast between *You* and *I* is particularly significant because it creates a discourse relationship between the person expressing concern and those being challenged to respond.

The expression *How dare you!* accounts for 10.71% of the identified themes. Its occurrence highlights a confrontational and emotionally charged element of the speech. Rather than simply presenting information about environmental problems, this expression conveys criticism and challenges the conduct of the people being addressed. Its rhetorical force is consistent with the speech's broader function as an appeal for accountability and action.

Other themes, such as *People*, *We*, and *The entire ecosystem*, broaden the focus beyond the individual speaker and audience. *People* can direct attention toward the wider population affected by climate change, while *We* can construct a sense of collective involvement. The theme *The entire ecosystem* shifts attention toward the environmental consequences of human actions. Longer thematic expressions, including *For more than 30 years the science* and *When the politics and solutions*, also introduce broader contexts involving scientific knowledge and political responses.

Overall, Table 1 suggests that the speech combines direct audience engagement, personal positioning, collective concerns, and environmental issues. The high frequencies of *You* and *I* indicate that the interpersonal relationship between the speaker and the audience is especially prominent in the reported data. However, the thematic function of each expression should ultimately be confirmed by examining its position and grammatical role in the original clause, since not every clause-initial expression necessarily functions as a Theme in the technical SFL sense.

Table 2. Mood Types in Thunberg's selected speech (interpersonal metafunction)

Mood Type	Σ	%
Declarative	25	89.3
Interrogative (exclamatives)	3	10.7
Imperative	0	0
Total	28	100

Table 2 illustrates the distribution of mood types used in Greta Thunberg's selected speech. The findings indicate that declarative clauses dominate the speech, with 25 occurrences (89.3%). Interrogative clauses, categorized in the table as exclamatives, occur three times (10.7%), while imperative clauses do not appear in the reported data. The total number of clauses is 28 (100%).

The predominance of declarative clauses suggests that Thunberg primarily constructs her speech through statements rather than direct commands or questions. In Systemic Functional Linguistics, the declarative mood is typically associated with giving information. Through declarative clauses, speakers can present facts, express opinions, describe situations, and communicate their evaluations of particular issues. In the context of climate change advocacy, this mood allows Thunberg to articulate her concerns, describe the climate crisis, and criticize the responses of political leaders and other decision-makers.

The frequent use of declarative clauses may also contribute to the speech's argumentative force. By presenting statements about scientific knowledge, environmental consequences, and political responsibility, Thunberg can frame the climate crisis as an issue that requires serious consideration. Declarative clauses enable her to establish propositions that support her criticism and reinforce the urgency of addressing climate change. Nevertheless, declarative mood alone does not establish whether a statement is factually accurate or persuasive; such effects also depend on the content and context of individual clauses.

The three interrogative or exclamative instances (10.7%) represent a smaller but potentially important part of the speech. Although they occur less frequently than declarative clauses, their rhetorical significance may be considerable. For example, the expression *How dare you!* conveys indignation and criticism. It challenges the conduct of the people being addressed and expresses a strong negative evaluation of their actions. In this context, the expression functions primarily as a rhetorical exclamation rather than a conventional information-seeking question.

The absence of imperative clauses is another notable finding. Imperatives are commonly used to issue commands, make requests, or explicitly instruct an audience to perform an action. Their absence in the reported results suggests that Thunberg does not primarily rely on grammatically imperative constructions to communicate her message. Instead, she appears to convey urgency and demand accountability through statements and emotionally forceful expressions. This distinction demonstrates that a speech can seek to influence an audience without relying on explicit grammatical commands.

In summary, Table 2 indicates that declarative mood is the dominant interpersonal resource in Thunberg's selected speech. The combination of predominantly declarative clauses and a smaller number of emotionally charged exclamative expressions suggests a communication strategy that combines information, argumentation, and criticism. The findings also illustrate that grammatical frequency and rhetorical impact are not necessarily proportional: a relatively infrequent expression can have a strong effect on the audience.

Table 3. Types of processes used by Thunberg in her speech (transitivity of ideational metafunction)

Process Type	Σ	%
Relational	8	28.57
Mental	8	28.57
Material	5	17.86
Behavioral	5	17.86
Existential	1	3.57
Verbal	1	3.57
Total	28	100

Table 3 presents the distribution of process types identified in Thunberg's selected speech. Relational and mental processes are the most frequent categories, each occurring eight times (28.57%). Material and behavioral processes each occur five times (17.86%). Existential and verbal processes appear once each (3.57%). The total number of process instances is 28 (100%). Overall, Table 3 shows that relational and mental processes are the dominant process types in Thunberg's selected speech, jointly accounting for 57.14% of the reported instances. This distribution suggests that the speech places considerable grammatical emphasis on representing relationships, descriptions, evaluations, and experiences of consciousness. Material and behavioral processes contribute a further 35.72%, while existential and verbal processes together account for 7.14%.

These findings suggest that Thunberg's speech combines the representation of situations with the expression of thought, feeling, action, and behavior. The relatively high frequency of relational and mental processes may support the presentation of the climate crisis as both a condition requiring evaluation and an issue that generates strong human responses. Meanwhile, material processes provide a grammatical resource for representing actions and events, and behavioral processes may contribute to the representation of human reactions.

To answer the research questions, the analyses and interpretation of the lexico-grammar within the clauses in the speech help reveal the judgment-containing meaning and the focus of blaming. The following is the detailed explanation of the aforementioned techniques.

Types of Negative Judgment

The discursive strategies of blaming within Thunberg's speech include the four (4) categories of negative judgment. The most dominant one is veracity, accounting for 46.43%, followed by propriety, which covers 21.43%, then tenacity, which accounts for 17.86%, and the least is capacity, with 14.28%.

Table 4. Frequency of the Use of 4 (four) Categories of Judgment

	Σ	%
Judgments of capacity	4	14.3
Judgments of veracity	10	35.7
Judgments of propriety	9	32.1
Judgments of tenacity	5	17.9
	28	100

Judgment of Veracity: blaming truthfulness or honesty

Veracity is a blaming strategy by questioning one's truthfulness or honesty via references to deceitful character or dishonest acts and utterances (Hansson, et. al., 2022). This type of blaming is found in 12 clauses, such as the following:

<i>We are in the beginning of a mass extinction,]]</i>	[c 11]
<i>and all you can talk about]]</i>	[c 12]
<i>is the money and fairy tales of external economic growth.]]</i>	[c 13]

To discover the meaning behind these texts, transitivity is an applicable approach. Looking at c 11, this marks the relational attributive process, with "we" as the Carrier and "in the beginning of a mass extinction" as the Attribute. The pronoun "we" creates inclusivity, positioning all humans, including Thunberg, the leader, and the listeners, under the same

existential threat. This pronoun shifts the discourse from describing external victims to including humanity collectively. The rest “...are in the beginning of a mass extinction” assigns a catastrophic condition to the entire human population. Ideationally, this clause expresses the identity of humanity at the start of a devastating global event.

In c 12, “you” creates a direct and accusatory perspective. The absence of modality makes the accusation sharper, presenting the leaders’ priorities as an established fact. This clause “And all you can talk about” as a verbal process, as if an action of saying that contrasts with the previous clause that focused on suffering and environmental collapse, emphasizing an accusation against what the politicians did or said. Whilst, c 13 “is the money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth” evaluates the leaders’ concerns as misguided, unrealistic, and foremost is deceitful. Ideationally, this clause functions as a relational identifying process, identifying the leaders’ discourse “all you can talk about” with “money and fairy tales.” This identifies the leader’s actions as superficial and disconnected from the reality of climate destruction and their truthfulness is questionable.

For more than 30 years the science has been crystal clear]].... [c 15]

C 15 if standing alone becomes hard to comprehend, as this clause is the continuation of the preceding clauses, especially c 11-14, and onward, c 16-19. This statement signifies an over extended period, represented in the circumstance of time “for more than 30 years” followed by “the science” as ‘Carrier’ and “has been crystal clear” as ‘relational process’ and ‘Attributive’. Taken together, these elements construct the notion that Thunberg emphasizes how even scientific evidence, which should be highly valued within the scientific community and has remained consistent for nearly three decades, has failed to convince politicians to say and act as they are expected to. In connection with the preceding and following clauses, c 15 therefore contributes to a broader strand of information through which Thunberg accentuates her exasperation and blames the politicians for their continued failure, so that they take appropriate action.

and come here saying that]]	[c 17]
you’re doing enough,]]	[c 18]
when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight.]]	[c 19]

In accordance with the analysis result, it is implied that Thunberg intends to address the government's actions that are “still nowhere in sight”, or the government basically doing nothing in solving climate change issues. At the ideational stage, there are material processes: “come” and “doing”, also an attributive relational process “are” in “*and (you) come here saying that you're enough when the politics and solutions needed are still nowhere in sight*”. The material processes represent what the Actor or the government does in addressing climate change, while the relational process of being represents the quality of the government's actions, that is, resulting in nothing. Overall, when connecting with the juxtaposed clauses, Thunberg showcased the alleged deceit by politicians who constantly speak of the progress that has been made, whereas the reality suggests otherwise.

<i>You say]]</i>	[c 20]
<i>you hear us.]]</i>	[c 21]
<i>and that you understand the urgency.]]</i>	[c 22]

C 20 applies a verbal process, and c 21 is a mental perceptive process, while the lexis “understand” is a mental cognitive process. These three processes have “you” as the Sayer and the Senser, referred to the adult politicians, or the ruling authorities. The mental process is dealing with consciousness, meaning treating the entity as a conscious being (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004). From this, it can be inferred that the politicians are trying to build rapport with people in general, as seen on “*you say, you hear us.*” Furthermore, this all reveals that the ruling authorities are making claims verbally and are inclined to show emotion or empathy using a mental perceptive process, and a mental cognitive process through the word “understand”. In other words, these three processes construct a meaning that the leader's claim that they have put serious efforts complying to what people yearned, however Thunberg doubts and views these as insincere.

Overall, through these clauses, Thunberg is subtly questioning whether the world leader who makes the claim truly grasps the seriousness of the situation, and showing her doubt in the process, since Thunberg felt as if it is all talk and no action.

Judgment of propriety: blaming ethical or moral standing

Propriety is all about questioning moral standing by references to, for instance, corruption. For this category, likewise, there are three utterances that conceive the insights as indexed by this type of blaming.

....How dare you]]	[c 5]
....How dare you]]	[c 14]
... How dare you continue to look away]]	[c 16]

C 5 and 6 “*How dare you!*” is ideationally a mental affective process, representing Thunberg’s emotional reaction to the leaders’ continued inaction, functioning as a confrontation directed to the leaders. It encodes moral outrage and signals the speaker’s refusal to accept political negligence. This clause expresses Thunberg’s evaluative stance toward their action. She is judging the leaders with intense moral and emotional judgement to provoke the audience’s comfort. Likewise, c 16 “*How dare you continue to look away*” has a behavioural process. The Actor or government is doing a conscious action, which is “continue to look away” from what science has proven about the issue of climate change. In the interpersonal level, this exclamative expression essentially contains a verb like surprise, amaze, can’t believe, which indicates violation of expectation and embeds a question (Tsilia, 2026, p. 15), and is not information-seeking question (Wilhemmy et al., 2025).

You have stolen my dreams in my childhood, with your empty words,]]	[c 6]
and yet I’m one of the lucky ones.]]	[c 7]

C 6 “*You have stolen my dreams in my childhood, with your empty words,*”, from ideational metafunction analysis, the clause is categorized as a behavioural process with “you” as the Behaver and “my dreams in my childhood,...” as Circumstantial Range. It represents Thunberg’s lived experience as one where adults’ inaction, which words that are empty, has caused emotional and psychological harm, as well as ethical judgment. The attributes blame and responsibility not to her but to “you,” the leaders or the politicians. The verb choices position Thunberg as the one who exposes the wrongdoing of the audience as the perpetrators.

In C 7 “*and yet I’m one of the lucky ones*”, the speaker acknowledges her privilege as the lucky ones, more fortunate compared to other people, that she mentions, are suffering and dying in the next clauses. Ideationally, the clause represents a relational attributive process with “I” as the Carrier and “one of the lucky ones” as the Attribute. This process indicates that Greta constructs herself as someone who still possesses advantages compared to others affected by the climate crisis. It shows her awareness that many people face far worse conditions, and she questions how people are not treated with fairness and respect. The attribute “*one of the lucky ones*”

reflects her experience as the one who lives within a social hierarchy of privilege. This ideational choice makes the emotional depth of her message stronger. She provides reflection after expressing her anger to highlight that her broader appeal for climate crisis protest is more ethically powerful.

<i>Because if you really understood the situation,]]</i>	[c 25]
<i>and still kept on failing to act,]]</i>	[c 26]
<i>then you would be evil,]]</i>	[c 27]
<i>that I refuse to believe.]]</i>	[c 28]

Ideationally, c 25 - 28 blend multiple processes: mental cognition in “understood” and “refuse to believe”; material action in “kept on”; and, relational process in “would be”. All these processes imply dithering, doubt, that were allegedly accused to the ruling people. This can also be addressed as enemification to which Bhatia (2008) pinpoints as serving several purposes, including creating a sense of unity and definiteness in objectives.

Clause 28 “*I refuse to believe*” was the response of the statement that was said earlier that Thunberg assumes that the ruling authorities might not understand the situation or might not act properly because of doubt, worry, and these were notions that Thunberg presumably believed, or they simply pretend not knowing it which indicates deception going on. In other words, she denounces what the government or ruling authorities had done and warns that, if they continued to commit the alleged wrongdoing, she would refuse to accept the arguments extended by adult politicians, which Thunberg characterized as fabricated.

Judgment of capacity: blaming competence and ability

Capacity is indexed to references to the policymakers’ incompetence and policy failures. In this category, 4 (four) utterances are perceived to adhere to this type of blaming.

Yet, you all come to us young people for hope. [c 4]

In ideational metafunction analysis, “*Yet, you all come to us young people for hope.*” [c 4], is a behavioural process with “you all” as the Behaver and “to us young people for hope” as the Range. It frames the audience or leaders as actively depending on the younger generation. The speaker criticizes the fact that young generations are expected to provide hope for adults, and at the same time she doubts the competency. “Yet, you all” is directly to address the audience. “You all” is a second person plural pronoun

that the speaker uses to position the leaders as responsible agents, and “come to us young people for hope” is to evaluate the reversal of expected roles.

<i>People are suffering,]]</i>	[c 8]
<i>people are dying,]]</i>	[c 9]
<i>the entire ecosystems are collapsing]]</i>	[c 10]

“*People are suffering,*” [c 8] and “*People are dying*” [c 9] in the ideational function are considered a behavioural process with “people” as the Behaver and “suffering” and “dying” as the behavioural process, that operates within two physiological or psychological processes establishing the seriousness of the crisis. It represents human beings suffering from ongoing harm caused by climate inaction, and this torment becomes even more serious with the description of “dying”. In this way, this implies a shift from discomfort to fatal consequences.

These clauses (c 8-10) emphasize a notion that the climate issue has made a massive number of people out there suffering and even dying. This is likely to escalate the impact. This suggests that the situation which is worsening is not necessarily harmful to the ruling authorities or adult politicians themselves, but rather to the broader population. By repeating the subject “people” Thunberg continues to position human beings as the affected group, reinforcing the emotional weight of the message. Her message coverage even goes further, when she mentioned “*The entire ecosystems are collapsing*” [c 10]. “The entire ecosystem” Thunberg alludes implies the greater impact caused by the irresponsible environmental damage, creating a greater scale of impact. The behavioral process “collapsing” indicates that the ecosystem is in the process of falling down, which will definitely endanger the continuity of the lives of living creatures and mankind.

Judgment of tenacity: personal resolution and determination over incompetency

Blaming tenacity suggests that the politicians are not dependable due to, for example, dithering. This type of blaming is represented in:

<i>This is all wrong,]]</i>	[c 1]
<i>I shouldn't be up here.]]</i>	[c 2]
<i>I should be back in school, on the other side of the ocean.]]</i>	[c 3]

“*This is all wrong,*” [c 1] contains “This” acts as the Token and “all wrong” as the Value. Thunberg, through this process, defines that “this”

which is presumably cataphoric reference, indexing a thing points forward: she was not supposed to be in the forum intended for adults, and because of a critical issue she has no other choice but stands there with confidence in the forum. That evaluates the situation as entirely wrong based on her experiential meaning. It constructs a judgement about the reality she is facing.

The clause *"I shouldn't be up here"* is a behavioural process with "I" as the Behaver and "up here" as the circumstantial place. The process "be" identifies a state that represents herself as a young person who should not have to speak in a forum that was supposed to be intended for, and attended by adults. In the ideational analysis, the clause is a behavioural process with "I" as the Behaver and "back in school..." is the Circumstantial Place. The speaker uses this clause structure to frame her experience in that setting as abnormal, suggesting that she should be living a typical youth life rather than delivering a speech in response to a global crisis. This indicates that the elder generation as the policy makers have failed to solve the climate change issue. Because of this, young people like Thunberg are forced or are proactively moved to step in.

but no matter how sad and angry I am]] [c 23]

I do not want to believe that.]] [c 24]

These [c 23] and [c 24] express the inner conflict faced by the speaker (Thunberg), which contrasts the strong emotions she feels with a firm mental refusal she faces. The pronoun "I" was meant to demonstrate personal and emotional involvement that matches with vulnerability from Thunberg. Vulnerability is thus treated not as a weakness but as an attitude of care and concern that connects us to the world and to each other (Marback, 2009).

These two clauses use mental processes through words such as "I am sad and angry" (affective mental) and "I do not want to believe" (emotive mental). This reveals that the speaker, Thunberg, is experiencing internal struggles through emotional distress but at the same time she mentally resists the idea referenced by "that". This is the reflection of the conflict between emotion and affection that Thunberg encounters. In other words, from this statement, Thunberg highlights that despite her anger, her sadness over those unsolved environmental crises, she assumes that the government is not the party to be blamed for. She, in this, adds emotional touch, bridging all the anger and the blaming she blatantly expresses previously in the forum.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate how lexicogrammatical choices contribute to the construction of blame. The frequent use of declarative clauses allows Thunberg to present evaluations and accusations as facts rather than subjective opinions. This effect is supported by the limited use of modal expressions in several of the most confrontational clauses when addressing political leaders directly through the pronoun “you.” At the same time, thematic choices repeatedly place “you,” “people,” “science,” and “I/we” under the highlight, to identify social actors and affected communities. The ideational patterns interrelate with the interpersonal choices in ways that relational processes construct evaluations of political conduct. Blame is therefore constructed through the interaction of mood, modality, transitivity, and thematic organization. One thing to highlight is that Greta’s speech is an evidence of how United Nations as the global governing institution demonstrates a neopluralist strategy in which it involves the inclusion of all stakeholders in the policy-making processes (García-Gutián & Bouza Garcia, 2026) as presented in Greta’s speech delivered in a formal UN Climate Change Summit 2019. This can be seen as a procedure to provide space for citizen activists to express criticism in the UN official public forum to fulfill a representative function.

The repeated pronoun “you” positions political leaders as the responsible agents, thereby explicitly taking the addressees to blame. In contrast, the way Thunberg uses “I” marks her agency in a political space as opposed to the performative representation of political leaders who fail to take appropriate actions. Thunberg’s shift in perspective from “I” to “we”, hence, bridges her individual experience to the collective burden of climate change that the youth must endure. Considering the context in which Greta expresses her concern, we need to interrogate how she is allowed to be there as if to ensure youth involvement in climate global policymaking. In this view, we argue that Greta’s act cannot be detached from the issue of representative barriers and young people’s liminal position in-between worlds (Holzscheiter et al., 2025), complicating youth ambivalent position both as a commoner as well as a voice which merits further attention. However, youth activism, one of which is directly and accusatorily performed by Greta, must be seen as a conduit to speak up, hence challenging the myth of youth disengagement and pressing established institutions such as schools, universities, and education policymakers to change the unaccommodative policy (Borzenko et al., 2026).

The findings are situated within Hansson, et al., (2022) proposition of blame as a linguistic practice, which, in this case, is performed through the evaluation of political actors’ capacity, veracity, propriety, and tenacity.

Hansson, et al., (2022) also examine strategies of blaming as involving the topic- and context-specific curation of linguistic resources to evaluate a social actor, behavior, or outcome while simultaneously demanding accountability. The current study reports that lexicogrammatical choices in Thunberg's speech demonstrate that blaming political leaders is a persuasive strategy for advocating political accountability rather than attacking world leaders personally. As a consequence, persuasion through blaming in Thunberg's speech is, as cited from Larrondo-Ureta & Meso-Ayerdi (2022), a strategic language advocacy through personalization and emotionalization.

Hansson, et al., (2022) argued that language is a fundamental vehicle for blaming which can affect political decision-making. The discursive strategies of blaming are dissected through the close scrutiny of evaluative language use in Greta Thunberg's speech. Accordingly, Thunberg made use of her speech as youth representative to share her thoughts, concerns, and criticism towards environmental issues. The freshness of her thinking can bridge how youth views this issue and how youth passes their ideas to the elder generation who is now ruling the country and become the policy makers. Based on the analyses of the lexicogrammatical choices from Thunberg's speech, the discussion is constructed through and based on the strategies of blaming to persuade the audience's thinking framework. The analysis follows the blame attribution categories proposed by Hansson, et al., (2022).

Taken together, the findings indicate that Thunberg's blaming strategies operate to demand political responsibility as a consequence of policy failure. The strategies of capacity, veracity, propriety, and tenacity address political leaders as actors who fail or are unwilling to respond competently to the climate crisis. Capacity is unravelled through references to political failure against the notion of economic growth; veracity emerges through the contrast between leaders' claims of understanding and the absence of corresponding action; propriety is constructed through references to the consequences of insufficient political action; and tenacity is associated with the persistence of political indifference despite the scientific evidence. Thus, the blaming strategies are directed to address the leaders as failing to solve the problem and demand their responsibility as urged by empirical recommendation. Departing from the side of youth activist, the blaming strategies are pivotal in the midst of underexamined institutional responses (Borzenko et al., 2026) against the plea delivered by a youth activist in such an official public forum.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis using Halliday's three metafunctions and Hansson, et al.'s framework to analyze the model of judgments and the focus of blaming, this study shows that Thunberg's 2019 UN Climate Action Summit speech constructs persuasion, particularly persuasion of blaming, through a deliberate evaluation of judgments (veracity, propriety, capacity, and tenacity). Drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics and Hansson, et al., (2022) categories of blame attribution, the analysis identified four types of negative judgment: veracity, propriety, tenacity, and capacity. Among these, veracity was the most frequent, followed by propriety, tenacity, and capacity. This distribution suggests that Thunberg's criticism is particularly concerned with the discrepancy between political leaders' claims and their observable responses to the climate crisis. Rather than presenting political failure solely as a lack of ability, her speech repeatedly questions whether leaders' statements of concern, understanding, and action align with the situation they claim to address. The speech consequently frames climate inaction as a matter involving global leaders' credibility, ethical responsibility, and sustained commitment.

Interpersonally, the speech demonstrates that Thunberg addresses the world leaders directly. This makes the tenor personal and accusatory, narrowing the gap between a teenager and heads of state at the UN. The prevalence of the participants "I" and "you" suggests that the text functions as a direct, dialogic act of moral positioning, in which the speaker establishes her identity and legitimacy while ascribing negative attributes and responsibility to her addressees. Her voice is accentuated through the dominant use of declarative moods, while the repeated use of interrogative (exclamative) grounds her emotive yet strategic confrontation.

At the ideational level, the dominance of relational processes indicates that the speech's foremost concern is the dire consequences of climate change. Through this, she also actively evaluates its participants in a circumstantial attributive manner. The field (climate crisis) is thus realised largely through the tenor (a confrontational speaker-addressee relationship), emphasized by the emotive exclamatory as a discursively strategic blaming. Instead of weakening the message, vulnerabilities activate the emergence of emotional capital (Shree & Singh, 2025) that is beneficial to harness the shared emotion between the speaker and the young audience. At the textual level, the most recurring themes of "you" and "I" establish the distinct positioning between the youth confronter and the world leaders.

The study extends the application of Hansson et al.'s (2022) framework by showing how the four dimensions of blame attribution can be

realized through the lexicogrammatical resources of a climate-activist speech and mobilized to make political accountability salient. Overall, the study suggests that Thunberg's blame focuses on the character because the leaders' indecision prevents them from taking necessary action. Blame thus becomes a linguistic resource through which political responsibility is made visible and demanded in the context of the climate crisis.

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