LCM
Lingue Culture Mediazioni
Languages Cultures Mediation

13 (2026)
1

Discourses of Sustainability: Critical Approaches in Contemporary Contexts

Discorsi di sostenibilità: approcci critici nel discorso contemporaneo

Edited by
Francesco Nacchia, Marina Niceforo, and Robert Poole

Editorial
Discourses of Sustainability: Critical Approaches in Contemporary Contexts 5
Francesco Nacchia, Marina Niceforo, and Robert Poole

Sustainable Beauty: A Critical Analysis of Sustainability Discourse and Framing Strategies in Shiseido's and Weleda's Corporate Reports (2018-2024) 13
Antonella Napolitano

Broken Records, Shared Purpose: Critical Discourse Analysis of Crisis Framing and Institutional Agency in UNEP Annual Reports (2022-2025) 41
Yassine El Rhaffouli

Sustainability for Sale: Discursive Legitimation in Instagram Branded Content 59
Nataliia Goshylyk and Volodymyr Goshylyk

The Green 'Trojan Horses': A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of News Coverage of Chinese Electric Vehicles and Trade Measures in North America and Europe 79
Maria Cristina Aiezza

Unsustainable Digital Discourses: Right-Wing Climate Policy Delegitimization on Instagram in the United States and Italy 117
Giuseppe Balirano and Robin Donadio

'On Sustainability Terms': A Discourse Analysis of Environmental vs. Human-Oriented Framing in a Specialised Glossary 147
Marina Niceforo

Authors 169

‘On Sustainability Terms’

A Discourse Analysis of Environmental vs. Human-Oriented Framing in a Specialised Glossary

Marina Niceforo

Università di Napoli L’Orientale (Italy)

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2026-001-nicm

Abstract

Sustainability language and discourse is intrinsically multifaceted, given the terminological and conceptual complexity arising from the numerous fields and dimensions (e.g. economic, social, and environmental) that shape dictionary definitions and interpretations of key terms and processes – thus making it a clear case for framing. Against this backdrop, the present paper considers several definitions and descriptions of sustainability-related terms consulted and used during the creation and translation of a specialised glossary of sustainability terms. The glossary is the product of a partnership established with the Italian coffee making company Caffè Motta (Salerno) between 2022 and 2024 as part of a research project. During the project, the author collected both oral interviews and written documents to account for the company’s sustainability initiatives; the Italian glossary was subsequently translated into English and donated to the company for their own use and distribution. Selected glossary entries are hereby presented to highlight the absence of an environmental frame at the level of dictionary definitions, thus evidencing the intrinsically human-oriented nature of many conceptualisations of sustainability – and, by extension, of related sustainability goals. Drawing on frame analysis and social actor theory, the analysis considers evoked framing and linguistic reference to nature and the environment in dictionaries and specialised databases of sustainability, offering an ecolinguistics-informed reading of the glossary.

Keywords: coffee making language; ecolinguistics; framing; specialised translation; sustainability glossary.

1. Introduction

The 'three-body problem' of sustainability – implying the delicate balance between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions – keeps puzzling decisionmakers and powerful subjects around the world. Starting from the widely adopted definition provided in the 1987 Brundtland Report[1], sustainability conceptualisations have been heavily linked to issues of human survival, health, and wellbeing, or to the use and conservation of natural resources for both the present and future benefit of people and communities (Marshall and Toffel 2005). More in detail, sustainability science has evidenced "the need to focus on the multiple and diverse values of nature to achieve socially equitable and environmentally sustainable outcomes" (Himes *et al.* 2023, 25), basically trying to analyse and harmonise widespread conceptualisations of the value of nature as intrinsic, instrumental, or relational (IPBES 2022; see also Lengieza *et al.* 2025). As a result, most sustainability definitions and metrics used by both companies and policymakers to measure sustainable initiatives have given way to a human-centred, utilitarian consideration of effective actions and plans. Moreover, as observed Marshall and Toffel (2005), "this definitional chaos has nearly rendered the term *sustainability* meaningless and is distracting from the need to address ongoing environmental degradation" (*ibid.*, 637; emphasis in the original).

As no univocal solution to this problem seems available, the three dimensions naturally pull toward different directions, making sustainable operations – for instance, at the corporate level – inevitably defective. On the one hand, companies struggle to find and maintain economic viability in their business, given the obvious financial obstacles to be faced at every step, from supply chains to distribution; on the other hand, the Sustainability Development Goals (SDGs) require implementing strategies for ensuring safe and decent working conditions for people of all kinds. In addition, environmental protection remains a necessary concern across all sectors and activities. In all three cases, specific legal requirements apply depending on the countries where companies operate.

In this context, companies may establish how and to which extent they are able to implement sustainability initiatives in their activities –

[1] Where sustainable development is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Brundtland *et al.* 1987).

a wide array of areas of action being available to this end. Of course, adhering to sustainability principles can become crucial to a company's success, as well as to its positive evaluation on the part of both customers and stakeholders of various kind – also given the growing relevance attributed to sustainability as a corporate value in general (Waller and Conaway 2011; Camilleri 2017): adopting sustainable initiatives can indeed allow businesses to significantly expand and increase their overall value (Granskog *et al.* 2024). At the same time, it should be observed that individual organizations "are an inappropriate unit of analysis for some sustainability hierarchy levels" (Marshall and Toffel 2005, 679), and that the achievement of sustainable objectives cannot be tied to individual efforts alone – given the contextual variables in which companies worldwide carry out their business. Moreover, the level of sustainability required at the company level is not necessarily the most adequate or "morally desirable" to respect planetary boundaries and ensure human wellbeing (*ibid.*). What can be measured is rather the presence or absence of an environment-oriented framing of sustainability in corporate communications, a less comprehensive but more reliable parameter for assessing adherence to environmental sustainability. And yet, even when such communications are present, the conceptualisations and subsequent dictionary formulations of sustainability terms and expressions are flawed at their very foundations. Indeed, several definitions in this multidisciplinary specialised field seem to lack explicit reference to nature, thus leading to framing sustainability mainly as a human-oriented goal rather than a nature-oriented one. Consequently, environmental goals are often understood – both by companies and the large public – with reference to potential benefits to people and communities (e.g. sustainable outsourcing of natural resources for human use) instead of intrinsically relevant objectives (e.g. global warming as a threat to the planet above and beyond human survival). Of course, companies are not expected to master or even be aware of such finely grained terminological matters; however, reflecting on how sustainable actions are conceptualised may serve as a useful ideological exercise and contribute to offering a different framing of sustainability culture.

Against this backdrop, the present paper investigates the definitions and descriptions of sustainable terms as emerging during compiling and translation of a specialised glossary built from sustainability documents of the Italian coffee making company Caffè Motta, based in Salerno. Drawing on frame analysis and social actor theory for the study of discourse, this paper provides an ecolinguistics-informed reading of

a specialised glossary of sustainability terms, reflecting on the absence (rather than the presence) of references to nature and the environment in normative texts, namely dictionaries and specialised databases, used to compile the glossary. More in detail, the article builds on and expands previous studies resulting from a research partnership established with Caffè Motta between 2022 and 2024 (see also Niceforo 2024; 2025). During the partnership, the author collected both written and oral material about the company's sustainable initiatives through regular visits to the production plant. While all research material (i.e. internal documents and regulations, as well as oral interviews) and the resulting glossary were originally in Italian, the author translated the glossary into English in view of the company's international operations. The glossary, of which the five most relevant entries terminology- and translation-wise are here presented, was donated to the company to be distributed or published at their convenience.

2. Theoretical background

As previously observed, 'framing the elusive concept of sustainability' (paraphrasing Marshall and Toffel 2005) remains a complex task, given the numerous thematic foci comprised in this concept. As a matter of fact, most sustainability frameworks – such as the Triple Bottom Line, The Natural Step, or the Ecological Footprint – focus indeed "on measuring and reducing damage to the natural assets that provide ecosystem services necessary for human well-being" (*ibid*., 674), thus giving a utilitarian view of nature as a provider of goods and services for the benefit of people. Even the Sustainable Development Goals – despite their broad transformational intent (Lencucha *et al*. 2023) – are basically human- and economy-oriented, promoting a positivist problem-solution approach that frequently fails to acknowledge elements such as nature as an intrinsic factor relevant for coordinated synergy plans (Dupont *et al*. 2026). After all, the very idea of a sustainable *development* is fundamentally based on a paradox, since no form of perfect environmental conservation can be achieved while pursuing continual growth, as largely evidenced in ecocritical literature (Banerjee *et al*. 2021; Edwards 2021). Moreover, a large number of businesses, including coffee making, imply "the exploitation of natural resources, including land, water, and energy, as well as human labour, and a polluting

system of mass production sustaining global consumption models" (Niceforo 2025, 5-6). For these reasons, assessing adherence to sustainability without acknowledging some degree of ideological compromise would simply be naive.

Leaving ontological contradictions aside, it is possible to investigate sustainability principles by observing framing of environmental concepts at the level of language and discourse. Relevant literature in the field has dealt especially with corporate and media communication. In the first case, several studies have evidenced the advantages of presenting corporate sustainability as a genuine commitment in corporate communications to build brand reputation and align with customer values (among others, Waller and Conaway 2011; Lahtinen and Närvänen 2020; Dardis *et al.* 2025). As for media discourse, it has been observed how "a shared repertoire of frames in culture provides the linkage between news production and news consumption" (van Gorp 2007, 61), thus influencing how the broad public receives, interprets, and makes meaning of concepts and events (see, for example, Nambiar 2014; Nisbet and Newman 2015; Hansen 2018; Atanasova 2019). In both cases, a widely shared understanding of framing "as a bridging concept between cognition and culture" (van Gorp 2007, 61) is established, also in line with the origins of framing theory in cognitive psychology studies. Following this understanding, culture is not only created or reinforced through frames offered 'from above' (i.e. by providers of knowledge and information) but also *expected* of people as part of frames' leveraging and validation. This resonates with Goffman's theorisation of a frame "as an individual, subjective interpretation of a social situation [...] on the one hand, or the socially and culturally shared system of knowledge or rules applied in the understanding of social situations, on the other hand" (as explained in van Dijk 2023, 157).

More in detail, frames are typically divided into framing devices – "the linguistic packaging of a frame", or its more 'visible' structure – and reasoning devices – "the frame's conceptual content", or "the (latent) information in a text through which the problem, cause, evaluation, and/or treatment is implied" (Burgers *et al.* 2016, 2). In this sense, frames operate on a double level, as they both activate pre-existing knowledge of an event or situation and simultaneously elicit a (new) response – opening to the idea of personal and collective value systems. As noted by Waller and Conaway (2011), "frames are designed to deliberately reconstitute selected aspects of reality surrounding deliberation of a public issue. In essence, a frame binds together carefully chosen ideas, informa-

tion, judgments, arguments, claims, and value statements into a tightly compressed noetic narrative that guides the frameholder's interpretation of events as well as discourse related to a given topic" (*ibid*., 87). Going back to the general theory of framing devised by Goffman (1974), the distinction between *natural* and *social* frames further clarifies how people may perceive their role and act within such processes. Indeed,

> The first are used to understand natural events, such as the weather, and the second to understand events and actions ('guided doings') in which human beings are somehow involved (as would be the weather forecast), and subjected to standards of social appraisal (e.g. of honesty or efficiency), on the one hand, or the constraints of nature, on the other hand – thus also giving rise to two kinds of situations: manipulations of the natural world, or interactions in the social world. (van Dijk 2023, 157)

Under this light, the links to Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) are clear. If natural and social processes are understood in terms of ergativity (Thompson 2013) – an example is climate change, where some still argue over the non-ergativity of the process (i.e. climate change just happens), downplaying the impact of human activity on it (i.e. climate change is caused) –, then transitivity and the concepts of agency and actions in verbal processes (Darics and Koller 2019) become pivotal in framing studies. Regarding the latter point, it is perhaps useful to underline the difference between agency – "a semantic category that refers to the meaning expressed through language use" – and action – "a grammatical category that refers to who or what is represented as grammatically active or passive" (*ibid*., 218). In the case of sustainability language and discourse, the representation of specific agents and actors is particularly valuable for critical investigations, since "how we portray agency and action gives a different configuration to reality, portraying a parallel world and thereby helping to bring about that world" (*ibid*., 220). In addition to that, observing the presence (or absence) of specific environmental framing provides further practical support, as will be shown in the next section.

Finally, observing frames – "a system of categories structured in accordance with some motivating context" (Fillmore 2006, 381) – is also relevant from a terminological perspective, as "some words exist in order to provide access to knowledge of such frames to the participants in the communication process, and simultaneously serve to perform a categorization which takes such framing for granted" (*ibid*.). From this standpoint, term meaning and frames appear to be mutually dependent. On

the one hand, words, terms, and longer stretches of discourse contribute to shaping frames by performing a "configuring function" (*ibid.*, 385), that is, by calling up specific *evoked* meanings. On the other hand, the *invoked* meanings associated with frames derive from extra-textual, general knowledge that is largely independent of individual words or terms. Considering the above, the case of sustainability terms provides an on-point object of study.

3. Methodology

The glossary here presented is one of the research outcomes of the partnership with Caffè Motta. During visits to the plant and throughout the collaboration period, the author collected sustainability-related material and information through oral interviews as well as through physical and digital documents. Due to the variegated nature of the material, it was basically impossible to quantify and systematise the linguistic data available for analysis. To extract relevant terms for glossary compiling, the author relied on her own knowledge and expertise of sustainability language, as well as on obvious deductions about sustainability-related concepts and terms (e.g. indications provided by the company in the form of direct answers or written lists about sustainability initiatives). However, it was possible to cross-check the hypothesised list of sustainability terms by uploading two internal digital documents (3,116 tokens) on Sketch Engine, thus obtaining relevant keywords in Italian – after testing the specialised corpus against Italian Web 2020 (itTenTen20), a corpus of general Italian.

After selecting 38 Italian terms, subsequent phases implied looking for terminological equivalents and their related definitions across both specialised/technical websites and databases in the field (i.e. IATE, the European Parliament portal, the UN's SDGs website) and general dictionaries of English (i.e. Cambridge Dictionary, Oxford Learner's Dictionary, Collins Dictionary). The resulting glossary entries include terms in Italian and English, synonyms and lookup forms, term definitions and sources, term explanations and sources (*What is it?*), and, when present, short descriptions of the terms as part of Caffè Motta's sustainable operations (*For Caffè Motta*). This latter item is actually more relevant for the discursive construction of sustainability by Caffè Motta. More in detail, official terms, synonyms, definitions, and definition sources

were retrieved from the abovementioned databases and dictionaries, whereas term explanations and descriptions were drafted by the author in consideration of the glossary's prospective audience (typically non-expert people) and intended use (ideally, for Caffè Motta's marketing and/or promotional purposes). In line with widespread popularisation practices (Gotti 2014) in specialised translation (Rogers 2015), each glossary item was conceived to offer both terminological accuracy and conceptual clarity, providing source-reliable explanations and enabling, when possible, environmentally fair formulations in both Italian and English.

While consulting existing sources for translation, some problematic definitions emerged, giving rise to the critical observations presented in the following Discussion. As previously observed, several sustainability terms implied a utilitarian, people-oriented view of nature as a provider of goods, services, and other benefits (see for example the entry 'forest degradation'), failing to stress impacts and direct consequences on natural ecosystems. As a result, the ecolinguistics framework provided useful methodological guidance for a critical commentary of the glossary whereby the absence of environmental framing is observed. The environmental frame at the core of this study is inspired by Lakoff (2010), who first denounced the conceptual separation of nature from us, "a terribly false frame that will not go away" (*ibid*., 77). In analyses of language and discourse, it involves "selecting environment-related concepts as the primary frame and evaluating how salient these are in discourse and texts by observing specific linguistic markers" (Niceforo 2024, 74). A key concept in Ecolinguistics (Stibbe 2015), salience

> can be expressed by a large variety of discourse structures, such as semantic macrostructures (topics), themes and their expression in headlines, leads, thematic sentences, keywords, summaries, sequential order, repetition, (lexical) frequency, metaphor, typography, size, photographs, schemas, position on the page or in the newspaper, as well as many other (semiotic) properties of online news and media messages. (van Dijk 2023, 171)

In the following analysis, salience emerges from the examination of actors involved in each definition, particularly as expressed through key nouns and adjectives, as well as through verbal processes. In line with framing theory, salience is also revealed by the evoked (rather than invoked) meaning embedded in dictionary formulations, which potentially leave aside relevant environment-related representations of sustainability concepts (e.g. Where and how does biodegradation happen? Is

nature affected by this process? Is a potentially harmful impact on the environment implied?).

To make up for the lack of well-defined criteria for frame analysis, a linguistics-based model derived from social actor theory (van Leeuwen 2008) was implemented. In particular, the three-step method suggested by Darics and Koller (2019) was adapted "to investigate who is represented (or not) and by what linguistic means the present participants are referred to" (*ibid*., 220) in sustainability terms and definitions. Accordingly, the following analytical steps were taken:

- To identify actors (Darics and Koller's Step 1, 'Identifying social actors'), grammatical exclusion (suppression and backgrounding) and inclusion (activation and passivation), as well as personalisation (determination and indetermination) and impersonalisation (abstraction and objectivation) were considered.
- To identify processes, a transitivity analysis focussed on verbs' process types, namely: material, verbal, mental, behavioral, relational, and existential.
- To investigate framing (Darics and Koller's Step 2, 'Inferring underlying ideologies'), reference is made to van Gorp's (2007) frame schematisation – "The frame package suggests a definition, an explanation, a problematization, and an evaluation of the event and ultimately results in a number of logical conclusions – for example, with regard to who is responsible for the perceived problem" (*ibid*., 65) – and Entman's (1993) classification of framing functions into problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.

Given the type of texts considered, a proper discursive approach is necessarily missing, and Darics and Koller's Step 3 ('Recognizing the communicator's possible intentions') could not apply to the present analysis. However, the concluding remarks of this paper offer some reflections on broader sustainability discourse.

4. Analysis and discussion

As previously observed, only the five most relevant entries of the glossary with reference to terminological analysis and translational aspects are here presented.

The first entry considers the term 'biodegradable', its definition, and its original Italian equivalent.

BIODEGRADABILE / BIODEGRADABLE	
Definizione	decomponibile da parte di agenti naturali
Definition	capable of being decomposed by bacteria or other living organisms
Fonte/Source	https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/806848/it-en
Che cos'è?	qualsiasi sostanza o prodotto che può subire degradazione biologica o biodegradazione (sulla base di: https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/biodegradabile/)
What is it?	any substance or product that can undergo biological degradation or biodegradation without harming the environment (based on: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/biodegradable?q=biodegradable)
Per Caffè Motta	— —
For Caffè Motta	— —

The term definition retrieved from IATE in both Italian and English considers the word class of adjectives, indicating the quality of being "capable of being decomposed" attributed to any substance. While the term originates in the field of chemistry, its proposed definition appears under the label 'waste', thus indicating that the adjective is indeed referred to waste. From a linguistic perspective, the assumed subject 'waste' is passivised through the long passive, agentic phrase "by bacteria and other living organisms". This representation, together with the material process of the verb "being decomposed", suggests a natural process, but excludes nature through grammatical suppression. The more general explanation in the *What is it?* box tries to compensate for this exclusion and add more explicit environmental framing through the expression "without harming the environment". The resulting formulation is based on the Oxford Learner's Dictionary's definition: "a substance or chemical that is biodegradable can be changed by the action of bacteria to a natural state that will not harm the environment" [2].

Looking at framing, the definitions available from the Collins [3] and Cambridge [4] dictionaries are similar, but make more implicit reference to

[2] https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/biodegradable?q=biodegradable [10/04/2026].

[3] "Something that is biodegradable breaks down or decays naturally without any special scientific treatment, and can therefore be thrown away without causing pollution". https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/biodegradable [10/04/2026].

[4] "Able to decay naturally and in a way that is not harmful". https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/biodegradable [10/04/2026].

nature, specifically through the conceptually fuzzy adverb "naturally". As a matter of fact, it is well-known that biodegradation – the "degradation or decomposition [...] by means of bacteria, fungi and other microorganisms by which complex organic molecules are broken down into simpler molecules" [5] – is a complex chemical process with specific elements and conditions. Overall, both formulations provide an explanatory framing ("able to decay naturally and in a way that is not harmful") and almost suggest unproblematic treatment recommendation ("and can therefore be thrown away without causing pollution").

The second entry is the term 'climate change'.

CAMBIAMENTI CLIMATICI / CLIMATE CHANGE	
Sinonimi e voci alternative	cambiamento climatico
Synonyms and lookup forms	— —
Definizione	qualsiasi cambiamento di clima attribuito direttamente o indirettamente ad attività umane, il quale altera la composizione dell'atmosfera mondiale e si aggiunge alla variabilità naturale del clima osservata in periodi di tempo comparabili
Definition	change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods
Fonte/Source	https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/867624/it-en
Che cos'è?	variazioni del sistema climatico terrestre determinate prevalentemente da interferenze antropogeniche provocate dall'emissione in atmosfera di alcuni gas (sulla base di: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cambiamenti-climatici_(Lessico-del-XXI-Secolo)/)
What is it?	changes in the world's climate mainly as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere (based on: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/climate-change)
Per Caffè Motta	— —
For Caffè Motta	— —

In this case, both the Italian and English definitions available from IATE are complete and accurate and offer a good representation of all

[5] https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/1077281/en [10/04/2026].

actors and processes involved. More in detail, the subject "change of climate" is included and activated through the material process "alters"; the verb acts upon the object "global atmosphere", a technical term indicating the natural entity affected by the agentic climate change process. Moreover, the existential process indicated by the repeated copula "is" further personalises climate change. Overall, the definition offers a causal interpretation frame of the issue, reinforced by the inclusion of another often-neglected parameter/actor, namely "natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods". Here, reference is made to current climate change assessments in Earth science studies, which measure human-induced climate change in relation to pre-industrial values – taken as a baseline for "natural climate variability". In this sense, the explicit logical linker "in addition to", as well as the reference to human activity ("is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity"), and the semantically negative verb "alters" make for a moral evaluation frame of the phenomenon.

As for the English *What is it?* box, the Cambridge Dictionary's definition[6] clearly indicates the causal relationship ("as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere") between climate change and anthropogenic interference. However, the term "climate" – observed in the definition retrieved from Collins Dictionary[7] – was deemed more accurate than the original "weather" in Cambridge Dictionary. Since neither the Collins Dictionary nor the Oxford Learner's Dictionary[8] mention human activity as an actor/cause of climate change, the proposed formulation provides stronger environmental framing and matches the Italian definition based on Treccani Encyclopedia.

The next entry considered for analysis is that of 'forest degradation'.

[6] "Changes in the world's weather, in particular the fact that it is believed to be getting warmer as a result of human activity increasing the level of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere".
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/climate-change [10/04/2026].

[7] "Climate change refers to changes in the earth's climate, especially the gradual rise in temperature caused by high levels of carbon dioxide and other gases".
https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/climate-change [10/04/2026].

[8] "Changes in the earth's weather, including changes in temperature, wind patterns and rainfall, especially the increase in the temperature of the earth's atmosphere that is caused by the increase of particular gases, especially carbon dioxide".
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/climate-change?q=climate+change [10/04/2026].

DEGRADO FORESTALE / FOREST DEGRADATION	
Definizione	riduzione a lungo termine dei benefici generati dalle foreste, tra i quali il carbonio, il legname, la biodiversità e altri beni e servizi
Definition	loss of the productive potential of natural resources in areas covered by forests as a result of biological, chemical or physical processes
Fonte/Source	https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/781390/it-en
Che cos'è?	processo graduale legato alla raccolta insostenibile, che provoca la perdita della capacità delle foreste di rigenerarsi e ospitare la biodiversità (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/it/article/20221019STO44561/le-principali-cause-della-deforestazione-e-le-misure-dell-ue-per-affrontarla)
What is it?	gradual process related to unsustainable harvesting that causes a loss of forests' capacity to produce wood or support biodiversity (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20221019STO44561/deforestation-causes-and-how-the-eu-is-tackling-it)
Per Caffè Motta	uno degli obiettivi della EUDR è quello di contrastare il degrado forestale globale
For Caffè Motta	one of the goals of the EUDR is to counter global forest degradation

For this term, IATE's definition was one of the few available, as none of the general dictionaries considered during glossary compiling reported this entry. This is indicative of a more specialised term expression with a precise meaning as opposed to the more popular 'deforestation'. As a matter of fact, 'forest degradation' only appears in pair with (and in opposition to) 'deforestation' in field-specific sources, such as FAO[9], Rainforest Alliance[10], or IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature)[11]. The scarcity of dictionary-ready definitions for this term is possibly explained by the fact that

> Until now, the terms severe forest degradation and deforestation have been used interchangeably, [...] but the EUDR represents the first time that an

[9] https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/531a9e1b-596d-4b07-b9fd-3103fb4d0e72/content [10/04/2026].

[10] https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/insights/deforestation-vs-forest-degradation-what-is-the-difference-and-why-does-it-matter/ [10/04/2026].

[11] "[Forest degradation] occurs when forest ecosystems lose their capacity to provide important goods and services to people and nature". https://iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/deforestation-and-forest-degradation [10/04/2026].

> actionable definition of degradation has been sought and applied – and tied to a corresponding sanction. This landmark law paves the way for more clarity and action on forest degradation. (Rainforest Alliance)

Reference is made to the recent European Deforestation Regulation (EUDR)[12], adopted between 2024 and 2025 to "ensure that products consumed in the EU do not contribute to deforestation or forest degradation in the EU or globally"[13]. With the EUDR, legal requirements for producing and distributing companies are now established also thanks to the important terminological clarification it provides.

The definition of 'forest degradation' focusses on the "loss of the productive potential", thereby backgrounding "natural resources", and making "areas covered by forests" grammatically indeterminate. The formulation conveys a problematisation frame, also reinforced by the lack of verbs. In the second part of the definition, the causal linker "as a result of" suggests a causal interpretation frame, while maintaining impersonalisation through the reference to agentless "biological, chemical or physical processes".

For the more general explanation of the term, the formulation provided by the European Parliament was selected. Specifically, it considers forest degradation as a gradual process and appropriately relates it to "unsustainable harvesting" and human action. Indeed, the phenomenon is largely attributed to both direct and indirect human activities, although it is harder to assess compared to deforestation (European Parliament 2022). Compared to IATE's definition, this one includes the relational process verb "causes", and directly includes "forests' capacity"; moreover, it contextualises the process in relation to "wood" and "biodiversity", thus slightly shifting the focus to a more nature-centric perspective. Interestingly, both 'forest degradation' and the 'EUDR' are mentioned in Caffè Motta's sustainability documents, thereby an additional note – "one of the goals of the EUDR is to counter global forest degradation" – is present in the box *For Caffè Motta*.

Next, the entry 'deforestation' is also considered.

---

[12] "EU Regulation setting rules for placing and exporting certain commodities and products associated with deforestation and forest degradation on the EU market, and aiming to minimise the EU's contribution to global deforestation and to promote sustainable consumption and production patterns".
https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/3645245/en [10/04/2026].

[13] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products_en [10/04/2026].

DEFORESTAZIONE / DEFORESTATION	
Sinonimi e voci alternative	disboscamento disboscamento di terreni distruzione della copertura forestale
Synonyms and lookup forms	forest destruction forest clearance
Definizione	fenomeno causato dalla distruzione delle foreste da parte dell'uomo
Definition	direct human-induced conversion of forested land to non-forested land
Fonte/Source	https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/756756/it-en
Che cos'è?	taglio progressivo di un bosco o di una sua parte per utilizzare il legname o per ottenere suolo coltivabile (sulla base di: https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/diboscamento/)
What is it?	the cutting down of trees in a large area, or the destruction of forests by people (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/deforestation)
Per Caffè Motta	— —
For Caffè Motta	— —

A more established term, 'deforestation' is present in both specialised and general sources. According to IATE, the term has two official synonyms or lookup forms, 'forest destruction' and 'forest clearance'. IATE's definition indicates a "direct human-induced" process, thereby including human actors through genericisation and indetermination, and presents the issue under an explanation and causal interpretation frame. The main subject "forested land" is paired with "non-forested land" in an instance of grammatical passivation which, in this case, introduces deforestation as a material process caused by a human agent on a natural subject. The head noun "conversion" is a technical, semantically neutral term indicating the abovementioned explanation frame; it also appears in FAO's definition[14], whereas the more emphatic "destruction" – reported by the European Parliament[15] – is more effective in terms of environmental framing, conveying stronger moral evaluation.

[14] "The conversion of forest to other land use independently whether human-induced or not".
https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/531a9e1b-596d-4b07-b9fd-3103fb4d0e72/content p6 [10/04/2026].

[15] "Deforestation is the destruction of forests so the land can be put to other uses".

For what concerns the *What is it?* section, the definitions available from the Oxford Learners' Dictionary[16] and Collins Dictionary[17] both mention "the act of", followed by the verbs "cutting down or burning" and "clearing" respectively; furthermore, both relate deforestation to "the trees in an area" or "an area of trees", thus eluding the key concepts of 'forest' and 'forested land'. In this regard, the definition of 'forest' provided by FAO (2020, 4) is terminologically accurate, indicating "land spanning more than 0.5 hectares with trees higher than 5 meters and a canopy cover of more than 10 percent, or trees able to reach these thresholds *in situ*. It does not include land that is predominantly under agricultural or urban land use". For these reasons, the Cambridge Dictionary's definition was deemed more accurate and comprehensive, mentioning the quasi-synonyms "trees in a large area" and "forests". In terms of framing, the two-phrase definition is readily understandable, indicating in both cases a material process ("the cutting down", "the destruction") enacted by a determinate agent ("people"), thus conveying effective environmental framing.

The last glossary entry presented is 'greenhouse gas'.

GAS SERRA / GREENHOUSE GAS	
Sinonimi e voci alternative	gas a effetto serra GES
Synonyms and lookup forms	GHG
Definizione	costituenti gassosi dell'atmosfera, sia naturali che di origine antropica, che assorbono e riemettono radiazioni infrarosse, causando un riscaldamento globale
Definition	gas that has the property of absorbing infrared radiation (net heat energy) emitted from Earth's surface and reradiating it back to Earth's surface, thus contributing to the phenomenon known as the greenhouse effect
Fonte/Source	https://iate.europa.eu/entry/result/835577/it-en
Che cos'è?	gas presenti nell'atmosfera che, in quantità eccessive, contribuiscono al riscaldamento globale

https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/en/article/20221019STO44561/deforestation-causes-and-how-the-eu-is-tackling-it [10/04/2026].

[16] "The act of cutting down or burning the trees in an area". https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/deforestation?q=deforestation [10/04/2026].

[17] "The act of clearing an area of trees". https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/deforestation [10/04/2026].

	(sulla base di: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/topics/it/article/20230316STO77629/cambiamento-climatico-gas-a-effetto-serra-che-causano-il-riscaldamento-globale)
What is it?	one of several gases, especially carbon dioxide, that prevent heat from the earth escaping into space, causing the greenhouse effect (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/greenhouse-gas)
Per Caffè Motta	ridurre le emissioni di gas serra legate alla deforestazione è uno degli obiettivi della EUDR
For Caffè Motta	reducing greenhouse gas emissions related to deforestation is one of the goals of the EUDR

The term definition of 'greenhouse gas' – or 'GHG' in its lookup form – given by IATE describes the absorbing and radiating properties of these gases, making for a highly-specialised formulation within a definition and explanation frame. In the second part of the definition, a problematisation frame is observed through the causal linker "thus", and the material process verb "contributing", both used in relation to greenhouse gases as main causes/agents of the greenhouse effect. Overall, the grammatical inclusion of "Earth's surface" creates a link to a widely-recognised environmental issue, namely the greenhouse effect, but the environmental risks associated with this phenomenon – particularly global warming – are excluded from the definition.

Quite expectedly, the more general definitions consulted for the *What is it?* box are more explicative in this sense. Among these, the definition by Cambridge Dictionary seemed comprehensive, easy to understand, and valid in terms of framing. Here, the largely known "carbon dioxide" stands out among other gases in this group, and a direct link between these gases and the greenhouse effect is established through the relational verb "causing". Similarly, other dictionaries included the multi-word verb expression "are thought to cause" [18], and the copular "are responsible for causing" [19], both in relation to the greenhouse effect. While no mention of global warming as a consequence of the greenhouse

[18] "Any of the gases that are thought to cause the greenhouse effect, especially carbon dioxide".
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/greenhouse-gas?q=greenhouse+gas [10/04/2026].

[19] "Greenhouse gases are the gases which are responsible for causing the greenhouse effect. The main greenhouse gas is carbon dioxide".
https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/greenhouse-gas [10/04/2026].

effect is found across dictionary definitions of 'greenhouse gas', the correlation between these two phenomena is made evident when expanding the search to 'greenhouse effect'. In this case, all general definitions report "the slow steady rise in temperature of the earth's atmosphere" [20], "the gradual rise in the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere" [21], and "a gradual warming of the surface of the earth" [22]. In addition, the complement clause "that prevent heat from the earth escaping into space" adds a causal explanation – through the material and behavioural process expressed by the verb "prevent [...] from", as well as through the more connoted "heat" and "escaping" – of why greenhouse gases are dangerous for the environment, thus conveying a useful problematisation frame.

Finally, the box *For Caffè Motta* includes the term as part of the EUDR's objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss [23]. In this entry, as in 'forest degradation', the fact that sustainability terms are related to regulations (the EUDR) specific of this production area (coffee) further supports the idea that sustainability framing can vary significantly across texts and discourses.

5. Conclusions

The present paper has focussed on framing of sustainability-related terms and concepts, showing how the lack of clear environmental framing can taint dictionary definitions, and fail to communicate the

[20] "The problem of the slow steady rise in temperature of the earth's atmosphere, caused by an increase of gases such as carbon dioxide in the air surrounding the earth, which trap the heat of the sun".
https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/the-greenhouse-effect [10/04/2026].

[21] "The greenhouse effect is the problem caused by increased quantities of gases such as carbon dioxide in the air. These gases trap the heat from the sun, and cause a gradual rise in the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere".
https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/greenhouse-effect [10/04/2026].

[22] "An increase in the amount of carbon dioxide and other gases in the atmosphere (= mixture of gases around the earth), that is believed to be the cause of a gradual warming of the surface of the earth".
https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/greenhouse-effect [10/04/2026].

[23] https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/forests/deforestation/regulation-deforestation-free-products_en [10/04/2026].

negative impact of human activity on nature. More in detail, several terms from the sustainability glossary created for Caffè Motta – ideally addressed to laypeople – have been considered to highlight the recurrent human-centric vision of nature-related elements (i.e. forests, greenhouse gas) and processes (i.e. climate change, forest degradation, deforestation, biodegradation) in sustainability definitions found across general dictionaries. It is acknowledged that dictionary formulations, in line with lexicography and terminology principles, aim for accuracy, clarity, and economy. At the same time, as evidenced in literature, terms operate as framing devices (Burgers *et al.* 2016), thus accounting for "the multiple ways in which the speaker or author schematizes the situation and induce the hearer to construct that envisionment of the text world which would motivate or explain the categorization acts expressed by the lexical choices observed in the text" (Fillmore 2006, 384). In the case of sustainability – or of other subjects of practical relevance to laypeople –, lexical choices are directly involved in the activation of specific frames which, in turn, are needed by communication receivers to understand, categorise, and conceptualise information. While the thematic layering of sustainability makes this operation even more complex, traditional definitions have focussed on a variety of frames emphasising potential benefits for people (i.e. nature as a provider of goods and services), as well as risks to human wellbeing (i.e. nature's inability to provide goods and services).

As this study has sought to show, implementing an environmental frame in dictionary definitions, explanations, or even examples may yield more environmentally fair formulations, thus contributing to shaping popular understanding of topics and issues in a more nature-oriented way. The glossary entries considered in the analysis are emblematic in this sense. Keeping in mind that the expected readership of dictionaries may comprise both experts looking for terminological clarification as well as laypeople looking for word explanations, advanced knowledge of sustainability concepts is generally not to be expected when dealing with specialised topics. To give but one example, the fact that human-induced climate change has a significantly higher impact than *natural* climate variability might not be widely known to the large public; providing clearer formulations that take impacts on nature into account can therefore help to frame sustainable actions as inherently environmental.

While proposing stronger environmental framing to enhance common sustainability efforts, the paper recognises that individual companies alone cannot achieve significant results and should not be solely responsible for the success of sustainable development; instead, society

as a whole should aim for synergistic actions by all actors involved. Overall, the study reflects on the importance of changing current framing of nature and environmental issues, steering away from utilitarian narratives, and – in line with ecolinguistics – acknowledging nature's intrinsic value by making it salient in language and discourse. This is true for all languages and was taken into consideration as a general principle when compiling the original Italian glossary for Caffè Motta, which could not be discussed here due to space reasons.

References

Atanasova, Dimitrinka. 2019. "Moving Society to a Sustainable Future: The Framing of Sustainability in a Constructive Media Outlet". *Environmental Communication* 13 (5): 700-711. https://doi.org/10.1080/17524032.2019.1583262

Banerjee, Subhabrata B., John M. Jermier, Ana M. Peredo, Rajiv Perey, and Andreas Reichel. 2021. "Theoretical Perspectives on Organizations and Organizing in a PostGrowth Era". *Organization* 28 (3): 337-357.

Brundtland, Gro Harlem, Mansour Khalid, Susanna Agnelli, Saleh AlAthel, Bernard Chidzero, Lamine Fadika, *et al.* 1987. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Burgers, Christian, Elly A. Konijn, and Gerard J. Steen. 2016. "Figurative Framing: Shaping Public Discourse through Metaphor, Hyperbole, and Irony". *Communication Theory* 26 (4): 410-430.

Camilleri, Mark Anthony. 2017. "Corporate Sustainability and Responsibility: Creating Value for Business, Society and the Environment". *Asian Journal of Sustainability and Social Responsibility* 2 (1): 59-74.

Dardis, Frank E., Michel M. Haigh, Holly Overton, and Erica Bailey. 2025. "Optimizing Brand Perceptions by Aligning Corporate Communication Strategy with Message Framing Strategy in CSR Messages". *Journal of Promotion Management* 31 (4): 620-652. https://doi.org/10.1080/10496491.2025.2484713

Darics, Erika, and Veronika Koller. 2019. "Social Actors 'to Go': An Analytical Toolkit to Explore Agency in Business Discourse and Communication". *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly* 82 (2): 214-238.

Dupont, Gin, *et al.* 2026. "Prescriptive Positivism: Discourse on Sustainable Development Goal Interactions and Perspectives for a Post2030 World". *Sustainable Development*.

Edwards, Mark G. 2021. "The Growth Paradox, Sustainable Development, and Business Strategy". *Business Strategy and the Environment* 30 (7): 3079-3094. https://doi.org/10.1002/bse.2790

Entman, Robert M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm". In *McQuail's Reader in Mass Communication Theory*, edited by Denis McQuail, 390-397. London: Sage.

Fillmore, Charles J. 2006. "Frame Semantics". In *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, edited by Dirk Geeraerts, René Dirven, John R. Taylor, and Ronald W. Langacker, 373-400. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York: Harper & Row.

Gotti, Maurizio. 2014. "Reformulation and Recontextualization in Popularization Discourse". *Ibérica* 27: 15-34.

Granskog, Anders, Michael Birshan, Robin Nuttall, and Anna Harman. 2024. "Sustainability: Sources of Value Creation". *McKinsey & Company*. [10/04/2026]. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/sustainability-sources-of-value-creation

Hansen, Anders. 2018. *Environment, Media and Communication*. London: Routledge.

Himes, Ashley, Barbara Muraca, Christopher B. Anderson, Simone Athayde, Thomas Beery, Miguel CantúFernández, *et al*. 2023. "Why Nature Matters: A Systematic Review of Intrinsic, Instrumental, and Relational Values". *BioScience* 74 (1): 25-43.

IPBES. 2022. *Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*. Bonn: IPBES Secretariat.

Lahtinen, Satu, and Eeva Närvänen. 2020. "Co-Creating Sustainable Corporate Brands: A Consumer Framing Approach". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* 25 (3): 447-461.

Lakoff, George. 2010. "Why It Matters How We Frame the Environment". *Environmental Communication* 4 (1): 70-81.

Lencucha, Raphael, Alua Kulenova, and AnneMarie Thow. 2023. "Framing Policy Objectives in the Sustainable Development Goals: Hierarchy, Balance, or Transformation?". *Globalization and Health* 19 (1): 5.

Lengieza, Michael L., Janet K. Swim, Jamie DeCoster, Jennifer G. Guerriero, Osamu Saito, Pierre Le Coent, *et al.* 2025. "A Five-Culture Validation of the Environmental Value-Bases Scale". *Sustainability* 17: 10102. https://doi.org/10.3390/su172210102

Marshall, James D., and Michael W. Toffel. 2005. "Framing the Elusive Concept of Sustainability: A Sustainability Hierarchy". *Environmental Management* 36 (5): 673-686.

Nambiar, Prithi. 2014. "Framing Sustainability: A Case Study Analysis of Environmental Discourse in the Indian EnglishLanguage Press". *Global Media and Communication* 10 (1): 93-110.

Niceforo, Marina. 2024. *The Language(s) of Sustainability: A Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Study between ESP and Popularisation*. Napoli: Paolo Loffredo Editore.

Niceforo, Marina. 2025. "Sustainability as an Element of Corporate Identity: Multimodal Analysis of an Italian Coffee Company's Website". *Multimodal Communication* 14 (3): 313-326.

Nisbet, Matthew C., and Todd P. Newman. 2015. "Framing, the Media, and Environmental Communication". In *The Routledge Handbook of Environment and Communication*, edited by Matthew C. Nisbet, and Todd P. Newman, 345-358. London: Routledge.

Rogers, Margaret. 2015. "Specialised Translation: An Orientation". In *Specialised Translation: Shedding the 'Non-Literary' Tag*, 20-42. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stibbe, Arran. 2015. *Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and the Stories We Live By*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Thompson, Geoff. 2013. *Introducing Functional Grammar*. London: Routledge.

van Dijk, Teun A. 2023. "Analyzing Frame Analysis: A Critical Review of Framing Studies in Social Movement Research". *Discourse Studies* 25 (2): 153-178.

van Leeuwen, Theo. 2008. *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Waller, Randall L., and Roger N. Conaway. 2011. "Framing and Counterframing the Issue of Corporate Social Responsibility". *Journal of Business Communication* 48 (1): 83-106.

Copyright (©) 2026 Marina Niceforo
Editorial format and graphical layout: copyright (©) LED Edizioni Universitarie

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons
Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives – 4.0 International License

How to cite this paper:
Niceforo, Marina. 2026. "'On Sustainability Terms': A Discourse Analysis of Environmental vs. Human-Oriented Framing in a Specialised Glossary". *Lingue Culture Mediazioni / Languages Cultures Mediation – LCM* 13 (1): 147-168. DOI: https://doi.org/10.7358/lcm-2026-001-nicm