How to Take Care of the Earth: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Cultural Identity and Contextualized Meaning in Canadian Environmentalist Discourse

by

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Abstract

This thesis uses current sociopragmatic theory to investigate the effects of cultural identity and related contextualizing elements (e.g., knowledge of relevant history) on linguistic meaning in environmentalist discourse, as well as framing theory for an interdisciplinary interpretation and additional support of its findings. More specifically, this entails the application of Acton (2014)'s *Sociopragmatic Framework* to speech data from a documentary film about environmental racism in Canada, which simultaneously provides an instance of substantiated use and validation for the underutilized framework. In order to test the framework's hypothesized predictive capabilities, the project additionally includes a short survey designed to probe the perception and interpretation of speaker identity and motivation in correlation with linguistic and contextual variables, based on predictions derived from data analysis with the framework. Survey results indicate mixed potential of and the need for further research on the framework's predictive capabilities, but clearly demonstrate its immense usefulness and versatility as an analytic tool for applied sociopragmatics. The main analysis illustrates the extensive pragmatic influence of cultural identity on environmentalist discourse, particularly with respect to its role as an effective contextualizing element. The thesis concludes that future research on the topic likely needs to focus more specifically on the effects of individual sociocultural background and ideology.

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1. Introduction

How does culture shape our identity? How does our identity shape the language we use to express things both vital and mundane? And how does it affect our perception of others and the language they themselves use? While arguably impossible to answer in a truly comprehensive manner—much less a single, thematically limited thesis paper—, these and other, similar questions were the primary driving force behind my pursuing the topic of this thesis: to investigate the role of cultural identity and its effects on discourse in a specific social, ideological, and political context: environmentalism.

The main subject matter of this paper falls squarely in the ever-growing and highly interdisciplinary field of sociopragmatics.[1] In order to provide for a sufficiently well-structured methodological basis whilst also contributing in a more direct way to both sociopragmatic theory and the practical tools the field provides, I opted for the use of specific analytical framework, namely Acton 2014's *Sociopragmatic Framework* (SPF). With the application of said framework to speech data taken from the 2019 environmentalist documentary film *There's Something in the Water*, which deals with the devastating consequences of environmental racism against Black and Indigenous communities in Atlantic Canada, I thus aim to accomplish three things in particular. First, to provide answers to the questions posed above about the pragmatic significance of cultural identity and its role in the contextualization of linguistic meaning, as well as—to a lesser degree—a broader commentary on the importance of sociopragmatics in contemporary discourse analysis: its strong points and potential shortcomings, and where its toolkit may yet benefit from leaning even more heavily on the field's interdisciplinary roots (by specifically incorporating modern psychological and cognitive theory). Second, through in-depth analysis of the main subject, to provide additional and substantiated use and testing for an underutilized analytical

[1] For a general (and thorough) introduction to the field, I highly recommend the rather extensive *Cambridge Handbook of Sociopragmatics* (2021, Cambridge University Press).

instrument with—as I see it—immense potential. To more empirically test not only some of the SPF's analytical results, but also its potential predictive capabilities, this project further includes a short survey (and analysis thereof), which ended up becoming a much larger and more central part of the thesis than initially planned. Last, but certainly not least, stands my personal desire to bring attention to the pressing issue of not just environmentalism, but environmental racism specifically—even just as a byproduct of this rather technically dense paper. While hardly scratching the surface of this far-reaching issue, it is my hope to raise at least some additional awareness on how environmental policies and exploitation, anthropogenic pollution, and our rapidly changing climate affect Black, Indigenous, and other socioeconomically marginalized populations disproportionately across the entire globe; especially in Africa and the Americas.[2]

On a more general note, I hope for this thesis—and particularly the sociopragmatic analysis therein—to make for a convincing case for the usefulness and continued relevance of linguistic theory that bridges the persistent gap between semantic and pragmatic research. As such, and due to the paper's heavy reliance on a number of specific (and not always intuitive) sociolinguistic terms and concepts, the theoretical background summary found in chapter 2 is rather extensive, and goes somewhat beyond what is actually (possible to be) tested within the context and scope of this study. Among other things, and for the purpose of making this paper more accessible to audiences not as familiar with sociopragmatic theory in particular, this includes a brief introduction to modern sociolinguistics and variationism, an explanation of Acton's Sociopragmatic Framework, as well as a short overview of the sociopsychological theory of *framing*, which is used in part for the interpretation and discussion of the analysis and survey results. The chapter concludes with a short methodology section that lays out the guiding principles and questions that inform the sociopragmatic analysis.

[2] For a short general introduction to the topic, I recommend Robert Bullard's 2002 *Confronting Environmental Racism in the 21st Century*. For a more in-depth and Canada-specific piece with central relevance to this thesis, see Ingrid Waldron's 2018 *There's Something in the Water*.

As the central component of this thesis, the SPF analysis proper is featured in chapter 3. By applying the framework's diagnostic principles one by one to speech data from environmentalist contexts, I analyze not only the entailed and *non-entailed* meanings (cf. chapter 2) contained within, but am able to draw conclusions about the contributing factor of cultural identity in particular, as well as that of local, historical and political context and other contextualizing elements. In addition, I use these conclusions to make (largely) testable predictions about the possible consequences of a lack of access to said contextualizing elements for the interpretation of an utterance; e.g., the effects on an audience's interpretation of a political statement due to their unawareness of the cultural or historical context in which it was made. To test these predictions and—by extension—the SPF's predictive capabilities, I conducted a short online survey consisting of sixteen questions, the derivation and creation of which is explained at the end of the chapter. The following fourth chapter contains an overview and in-depth statistical analysis of the survey's results, as well as question-specific review of the accuracy of the predictions made through the initial sociopragmatic analysis.

Lastly, chapter 5 first discusses survey efficacy and technical limitations, conclusions drawn from both the SPF analysis and survey on the overall effectiveness and potential limitations of the framework as an analytical tool, as well as some implications for the field of sociopragmatics in general and discourse analysis in particular. The chapter closes with a summary of the findings on the importance of contextualized meaning and cultural identity in environmentalist (and similar ideology-centered) discourse, as well as a brief outline of how these findings may feed into the bigger, interdisciplinary picture of understanding the linguistic expression of cultural identity and its effects on human cognition. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of its most important findings and a number of starting points for potential future research on the topic.

2. Theoretical background

On social meaning: variation, style, identity, and linguistic ideology

Contemporary approaches to sociolinguistics treat variation not simply as the result and broad reflection of social stratification and categorization, but as an integral contributing factor. Simply put: Not only do people speak according to their perceived position within the social sphere, they speak so as to position themselves—consciously or not—relative to others within said sphere. This focal shift towards agency of the speaker (as well as the listener) relocates variation from the realm of the incidental to that of active social practice, firmly placing it among other fundamental features of our sociocultural and political lives, such as ideology, style, and identity. Particularly with regards to the latter two, this *third-wave* approach to variationism is succinctly summarized by Eckert (2008: 456): “Different ways of saying things are intended to signal different ways of being, which includes different potential things to say.” These “different potential things to say,” as Eckert (2008) puts it, point directly towards two pillars that are central to our current understanding and interpretation of variation: the importance of associations, and the distinction between entailed and non-entailed meaning.[3]

Associations, in the words of Acton (2014: 19), “are a crucial factor in designing and interpreting utterances.” In practice, while associations of cultural, historical, religious, and other social dimensions can be linked to essentially any element of language (e.g. in the phonetic realization of English *-ing* as either velar or apical; cf. Campbell-Kibler 2009), their occurrence is overwhelmingly common in the lexical realm of synonyms, ranging from the very subtle—a *dash* of lemon vs. a *spritz*—to the commonly politicized: a *foreigner* vs. an *alien*. In studying and describing these associations, sociolinguistics differentiates between two semantic categories: variables and variants. Simply put, variables are any given semantic

[3] Also frequently referred to as *associated* or simply *social* meaning.

content that can be expressed in a variety of manners (both phonetically and lexically), and embody the original sociolinguistic idea of *different ways of saying the same thing*. In contrast, variants are a given variable's concrete linguistic realization. Going by some of the examples given previously then, variables can resemble things such as the common syntactic marking of the English verbal progressive (-ing) to the concept of 'a small quantity of flavourful liquid added to a drink,' with their respective variants (-ing phonetically realized as either velar or apical; *dash* vs. *spritz*) containing meaning beyond the original variable's basic semantic contents. This attachment of implicit "additional" meaning to certain linguistic components and their respective realizations is commonly referred to as non-entailed, associated, or indexical meaning, and stands in contrast to a given variable's overt lexical, descriptive—i.e, entailed—meaning. In modern sociolinguistics, this distinction of and focus on implicit, associated meaning has become a core pillar of variationist studies, and is generally referred to as indexicality.[4]

Necessarily, as society and its needs, values, and structures change, so do the linguistic features used to convey them. As a meaning-based model of variation, indexicality consequently assumes that linguistic variables are fundamentally mutable, contextual, and an essential part of modern human language (Silverstein 2003, 2010; Eckert 2012; Acton 2014; Jaffe 2016). Referring to another central research interest—style—, this emerging picture of variation as a de facto reflection of (and active mechanism in) the complexity and constant evolution of human social structure and behaviour is outlined by Eckert:

> Variation constitutes a social semiotic system capable of expressing the full range of a community's social concerns. And as these concerns continually change, variables cannot be consensual markers of fixed meanings; on the contrary, their central property must be indexical mutability. This mutability is achieved in stylistic practice, as speakers make social-semiotic moves, reinterpreting variables and combining and recombining them in a continual process of bricolage. (2012: 94)

[4] Referencing the semiotic distinction between sign, index, and icon after Charles Sanders Peirce.

In essence, style denotes the individual use of variables (lexical, grammatical, phonological etc.) by a speaker not only to express themselves, but to project a socially constructed self (i.e. identity or persona) in a given situation or context.[5] Snell (2010: 1) phrases these concerns as follows: "Why does a speaker who has a range of linguistic alternatives choose one particular alternative in a particular context of use, and what effects might this choice have?" Consequently, from an indexical perspective, every stylistic choice is, arguably, also an indexical one. In other words: A person's style is constituted by their indexical choices, and as such, just as its constituents, is highly malleable and contextual (Eckert 2008, 2012; Jaffe 2016).

Another factor to consider in stylistic practice is cultural identity. It describes "how speakers conceive of themselves in relation to their local and larger regional communities" (Hazen 2002: 241f). This has direct—and measurable—effects on a speaker's expression of other sociolinguistic factors such as age, sex, gender, and so on, depending on their respective value and function within the speaker's own culture. As such, cultural identity affects style based on the specific linguistic background(s) a speaker feels subjectively culturally attached to (Hazen 2002: 253).[6] However, given the inherent vagueness and ever changing nature of human identity, even cultural identity specifically, it can at times be useful to additionally define it in terms of simple oppositional features: *I am this because I am not (like) that*, a practice that is particularly common among many Indigenous (and particularly Métis) people

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[5] A comprehensive general model of how sociolinguistic variables relate to and interact with one another was proposed by Eckert in her description of *indexical fields*, or fluid "constellation[s] of ideologically linked meanings" depending on the "situated use of the variable" (2008: 453), and itself based on Silverstein's (2003) work on *indexical orders*.

[6] While generally less contextually variable in its effects on style than the other factors mentioned, the stylistic expression of cultural identity is naturally still affected by a speaker's current circumstances (see Hazen 2002). For instance, a speaker from Newfoundland might emphasize (and subsequently communicate) very different aspects of their cultural identity as a Newfoundlander in Alberta, as a Canadian in the US, or as a North American in Europe. Likewise, a Mi'kmaw person is not only likely to make different stylistic choices based on their identity in conversation with non-Indigenous people vs. fellow Mi'kmaq, but also with other (non-Mi'kmaw) Indigenous people vs. fellow Mi'kmaq (cf. Weaver 2001 for a more general discussion of this topic).

(cf. Poliandri 2007).[7] Lastly, as Weaver (2001: 243) states, cultural identity is ultimately "a combination of self-identification and the perceptions of others." [8]

Since communication does not occur in a vacuum, stylistic practice ultimately involves both the use of language as well as its interpretation, as "[social] meaning is constructed where production and interpretation come together" (Eckert 2012, 2016: 72). It is at this intersection of production, reproduction, identity, and interpretation where ideology comes into play. In general terms, 'ideology' describes a specific set of beliefs or views of a group (or an individual), usually with regards to complex social systems such as religion, politics, and economics. As one such system, language is both shaped by ideology, as well as its primary conveyor within the social sphere:

> How are people's ideas about languages, ways of speaking, and expressive styles shaped by their social positions and values? How is difference, in language and in social life, made—and unmade? [...] Neither true nor false, ideologies are positioned and partial visions of the world, relying on comparison and perspective; they exploit differences in expressive features—linguistic and otherwise—to construct convincing stereotypes of people, spaces, and activities. (Gal & Irvine 2019)

As the indexical and the ideological are practically inseparable, people's perceptions and views of the world are critical in shaping not only their own individual styles, but also the perception and evaluation of any other styles encountered in social interactions (cf. Eckert 2008). This is certainly true for the broadly ideological as framed by Gal & Irvine (2019) above: A person perceiving one or a combination of several linguistic variants—often in conjunction with other observable non-linguistic traits of the speaker—might associate these

[7] One instance of how this can manifest is the immense value placed on community and communal living common throughout many Indigenous cultures, which stands in direct opposition to the much more pervasive (albeit naturally not exclusive) philosophy of individualism persisting throughout general Western culture. By defining themselves as distinctly non-individualistic, and as non-Westerners as such, Indigenous people effectively reinforce their own sense of cultural identity through culturally oppositional features (cf. Weaver 2001, Poliandri 2007).

[8] Even though Weaver (2001) mainly refers to the ways in which an individual's perception of their own cultural identity is simultaneously shaped by its being perceived by others—and subsequently by the latter's views and behaviours—, this idea somewhat mirrors the inherently dualistic nature of social meaning as created between both speaker and listener as posited by Eckert (2012).

with a specific accent or dialect, in turn leading to related (*higher order*, stereotypical) cultural associations, which may lead to (even higher order, stereotypical) associations with broader personality features, etc.[9] Particularly on a strictly linguistic level—i.e., pertaining explicitly to the use of language—, these indexical chain links remain largely subconscious, as language ideologies are mostly "naturalized" and "represent commonsense views of language and society that people take for granted" (Bell 2016: 403).[10] These linguistic ideologies—stances and beliefs of a given speaker or speech community on how language should and should not be used—are generally derived from the broader ideological views previously discussed, and have potential social and political implications ranging from an individual (bullying) to a global scale (war).[11]

Naturally, not any and all indexical associations are ideological in nature.[12] Nonetheless, as an indexical system, variation ultimately "embeds ideology in language and [...] is in turn part and parcel of the construction of ideology" (Eckert 2008: 454)—and thus poses an indirect but impactful link between linguistic variables and the sociopolitical that governs our daily lives. Consequently, it must be assumed that the linguistic ideologies of speakers and speech communities generally contribute to the social context in which language is and needs to be interpreted; something that both semantics and pragmatics have historically struggled to account for systematically (cf. Schiefelin et al. 1998). The same goes for the inclusion of cultural identity as a distinct contributing factor to the individual use of

[9] The process of certain linguistic features or variants being associated over time with specific social, cultural, or geographical backgrounds is commonly referred to as 'iconization' (cf. e.g. Irvine & Gal 2000).
[10] Broadly recognized styles, or registers, are an example of "visible" representation of language ideology, particularly in official (e.g. government, public media) contexts around the globe. One all too common and direct consequence of such "official" ideology and its recognition as legally (and sometimes even morally) superior is the marginalization, disregard, and, in extreme cases, outright defamation of linguistic minorities and their respective registers, dialects, or languages as well as, usually simultaneously, their cultures (cf. Gal & Irvine 2000).
[11] Concerning the central involvement of language ideology and its ties to cultural identity, armed conflicts such as the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s come to mind, and even the most recent and ongoing war in Ukraine.
[12] This is especially true of lower order associations: identifying a speaker's geographical origin based on their accent is not an ideological act in and of itself, although it may subsequently—albeit not necessarily—lead to further ideological assumptions about the speaker (assuming the listener has the required knowledge/prejudice).

language, particularly in the realm of morphosyntax (Hazen 2002). In contrast, sociolinguistic studies have since their inception largely focused on the phonological side of variation, in the process often foregoing the far more common lexical and grammatical manifestations more commonly associated with classical pragmatics.[13] Bridging this persisting gap between modern sociolinguistics and pragmatics, as well as offering a comprehensive tool for the analysis and prediction of "social meaning and variation at the level of words and phrases" is the primary purpose of Eric Acton's S*ociopragmatic Framework* (henceforth SPF), which will be discussed later in this chapter (Acton 2014: 30).

Framing

> Truth must be framed effectively to be seen at all. That's why an understanding of framing matters. (Lakoff 2010:80)

As an interdisciplinary theory with branches in sociology and political studies, cognitive psychology, linguistics, and neuroscience, the concept of *framing* has existed in published literature since the early 70s, and was notably popularized by Goffman's 1974 landmark publication *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Particularly within the field of sociology, framing theory has seen extensive use in the description and analysis of social movements, such as environmentalism (Benford & Snow 2003). Meanwhile, advances in cognitive science and neuroscience have allowed for the study of the concept and its actual psychological effects in less theory-constrained, more empirically verifiable ways. With increasing evidence for a number of concrete underlying neuroanatomical—i.e., biological—mechanisms (see for example Liu et al. 2020), this type of ongoing neurological

[13] E.g. sound changes, which constitute but a fraction of the typically observable sociolinguistic variation under the wider definition given in this section (Eckert 2012, Acton 2014). While this is an obvious oversimplification of events, these tendencies as described have had a measurable impact on the historical trajectory of the study of (particularly social) meaning in language, where the strong emphasis on phonetic and phonological variables has arguably resulted in the relative neglect of their morphosyntactic and pragmatic counterparts (cf. Bell 2016).

research continues to provide additional support for the broader interdisciplinary ideas and approaches, as well as a better general understanding of the cognitive processes involved. Ultimately, while not the main focus of this thesis, framing does provide another helpful theoretical asset for further interpretation of the central sociopragmatic analysis results, and mainly from a more socio-psychological and discourse-oriented perspective.

In order to understand the process of framing, one must first define what a *frame* is. Frames, also referred to as schemas, and as Lakoff puts it, are "unconscious [cognitive] structures" that "include semantic roles, relations between roles, and relations to other frames" (2010:71). More concretely: Frames resemble a systematic structuring of our perception of reality and, as such, shape human psychology and behaviour at a basic level. As Lakoff elaborates:

> All of our knowledge makes use of frames, and every word is defined through the frames it neurally activates. All thinking and talking involves "framing." And since frames come in systems [groups of semantically connected frames], a single word typically activates not only its defining frame, but also much of the system its defining frame is in. (2010:71f.)

In short, framing denotes "an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency and contention at the level of reality construction" (Benford & Snow 2003:614). As a mental process, it not only heavily involves language as one of its primary media of expression, but fundamentally influences both our interpretation of reality as well as our interactions with it in a reciprocal fashion—e.g., through the active participation in political movements in alignment with our values, the latter of which are cognitively represented and accessed as frames. In the context of political movements, such value-based 'shared' frames are also referred to as *collective action frames* (cf. Satheesh & Benford 2020; Benford & Snow 2003).

Besides illustrating the innate relation between framing and the experiential effects of ideology and identity, political activism also emphasizes the central role played by language: By interacting with other people in an ideological context through words, we necessarily

exert a direct and tangible influence on their systems of frames—and thus their perception of us, themselves, their peers, and the ideological context at hand. In the words of Lakoff:

> Words are defined relative to frames, and hearing a word can activate its frame—and the frames in its system—in the brain of a hearer. Words themselves are not frames. But under the right conditions, words can be chosen to activate desired frames. [...] In order to communicate a complex fact or a complex truth, one must choose one's words carefully to activate the right frames so that the truth can be understood. If the hearer has no such frames, then you have to choose your words carefully to build up those frames. (2010:73)

In addition to the importance of both speaker and listener frames, which neatly relates to the similarly and specifically speaker-and-listener-focused philosophy of sociopragmatics, the concept of words as triggers for the activation of certain frames bears a striking—and arguably not coincidental—resemblance to the function of indexical variables as carriers of social meaning that activate certain indexical fields in the minds (and thus influence or even steer the social perception) of listeners.[14] How and to what degree this specific comparison as well as a general understanding of framing can naturally augment the interpretation of sociopragmatic analyses, contribute to their overall meaningfulness, and better explain some of the potential consequences of the expression of cultural identity in the context of environmentalist discourse will be explained during the discussion of results in chapter 5.

Acton's Sociopragmatic Framework

As a tool, the SPF is designed to apply a more holistic view to the study of meaning in language. In order to do so, it addresses elements historically neglected or underrepresented, such as indexical meaning, ideologies (linguistic and otherwise), as well as the mutual recognition of intention in the absence of entailed meaning—i.e., implied meaning, for

[14] For instance, the *technically* simple phrase "Land Back" is likely to elicit a wide range of framing-related responses from a given individual depending on their knowledge of the phrase's origins as well as, and arguably more importantly, their views on Indigenous rights and landownership across North America and the globe.

example in subtext (Acton 2014: 30). The framework itself is based on three fundamental principles rooted primarily in Gricean pragmatics, as well as four analytic principles that combine elements of pragmatics, indexicality, and modern sociolinguistics more broadly. These fundamental and analytic principles can be summarized as follows:

Fundamental principles

The SPF's fundamental principles can be thought of as basic assumptions about the human use(s) of language. While none of them are novel to semantico-pragmatic or sociolinguistic analysis, they are strictly necessary for any comparative analysis of the individual use of language; without them, many aspects of interpretation—particularly concerning the underlying motivations of speakers and speech acts—would essentially amount to guesswork (Acton 2014).

"Goal Orientation"

The first principle is that language is generally used by speakers to attain a goal, with "goal" being broadly defined as "an outcome that a person, consciously or not, directs [their] behavior toward." This general definition encompasses anything from basic human needs (securing food, shelter, a mate) to the more complex ones (authentic expression of self, gaining social influence or power) and, while possibly seeming somewhat superfluous, encapsulates the fundamental assumption that warrants the linguistic study of meaning in the first place: Humans do not typically speak for no reason (Acton 2014: 31).

"Eager, context-sensitive reasoning and interpretation"

The second principle states "that language users eagerly seek explanations for and formulate interpretations of what they observe, and appeal to reason and context in doing so" (Acton 2014: 32). In other words: Interlocutors will generally not take any and all utterances at face value, but use intuition, reason, and individual experience to grasp the full (contextual) meaning of the language they are presented with. Acton (2014) notes that the degree of this

"reading into" as well as the general willingness to do so will naturally vary from person to person and context to context; the basic assumption that people typically apply at least a modicum of logical reasoning, however, remains.

"Context-sensitive expectations"

The third fundamental principle falls largely in line with Grice's (1975) cooperative principle and assumes that "language users have context-sensitive expectations about what makes for a normal and/or appropriate utterance on a given occasion of use." In other words, and again referring directly to Grice's cooperative principle, people generally expect a given statement to be "suitably informative, relevant, truthful, brief, and transparent"—i.e., reasonably useful for the interpretation of the information the speaker is trying to convey, depending on the context (Acton 2014: 33).[15]

Analytic principles

In addition to the three fundamental principles discussed above, the SPF comprises four major principles (or "principles of use and interpretation") for the general analysis and interpretation of—particularly social—meaning in language. These principles make up the methodological side of the framework, and are intended to be applied to a given utterance in order to derive its full contextual meaning in a thoroughly reproducible manner.

AE Principle: Content as both associations and entailments

> "The content of a given linguistic unit (i.e., its meaning abstracting away from context) includes both its entailments and its non-entailed associations (i.e., its indexicality)."

The AE Principle essentially serves as the formal inclusion and recognition of variation as an indexical system as described in section **2.1**, stating that the full content of an utterance (and thus its full meaning) can only be derived under consideration of both its entailed <u>and</u> its non-

[15] Context sensitivity once again being of crucial importance here: If an interlocutor has good reason (or even concrete evidence) to expect a speaker to lie or otherwise doubt the truthfulness of an utterance, they will, of course, typically adjust their overall expectations and interpretations accordingly.

entailed (i.e., indexical) meaning. In short: The general meaning of an utterance is always determined both by its lexical definition as well as its common sociocultural associations, i.e., its denotation and connotations (Acton 2014: 34).

FS Principle: The full significance of utterances

> "The full significance of an utterance u (or portion thereof) depends importantly upon
> 1. context (details of the situation, expectations, ideologies, beliefs of discourse participants, etc.); and
> 2. what is distinctive about u (or portion thereof) relative to a contextually relevant set of other utterances (or portions thereof) with shared functionality."

As the main contextualizing element of the framework, the FS Principle states twofold. Firstly, that for the analysis of any given utterance, its social context matters in its entirety: The setting, circumstances, and overall nature of the conversation, as well as its interlocutors' individual ideologies, beliefs, and goals pertaining to these. Secondly, that an utterance's full significance can only be derived by comparing it against any number of (relevant) functionally similar alternatives—i.e., utterances serving the same conversational goal of the speaker. In short: In analyzing an utterance, any and all aspects of social context matter, as do its relevant pragmatic alternatives (Acton 2014: 35).

DI Principle: Differential importance of different alternatives

> "Different alternatives have differential importance in understanding the full significance of a given utterance. The importance of a given alternative varies directly with how well it squares with conversational expectations and how closely related it is to the actual utterance both conceptually and in terms of form, content, function, and (relatedly) distribution."

The DI Principle acts as a formal extension to and, in part, simplification of the FS principle, stating that not all pragmatic alternatives to a given utterance need to be considered to the same degree. While the FS principle already suggests a limitation to "a contextually relevant set of alternatives," the DI principle expands upon and clarifies this by further delineating the

importance of an utterance's social and pragmatic suitedness as well as its frequency of occurrence: "[…] alternatives that square especially well with conversational expectations and are especially close to the actual utterance are especially likely to play an important role in the interpretation the utterance receives." Conversely, alternatives that do not to do so can be more reasonably discarded (Acton 2014: 36ff). In practical terms: Hearing a rom-com's protagonist sincerely profess to their love interest *I love you more than anything*, one is arguably far more likely to evaluate the respective (underscored) variable against alternatives such as *life itself* or *words can express* (or even *my own mother*) rather than *Reese's Puffs*, *the Grand Canyon*, or *tuberculosis*—assuming neither was a significant prior plot element. Subsequently, these unlikely latter alternatives should—depending as always on the context—have little to no pragmatic weight in the recipient's (or analyst's) valuation of the original utterance (Acton 2014: 36).

VE Principle: Violations of expectations

> "When an utterance violates (or, if taken at face value, would violate) a hearer's expectations for what a normal or appropriate utterance would have looked like in the context, the hearer is likely to attach special significance to the utterance. Conversely, an utterance lining up with such expectations is relatively unlikely to be interpreted as having special significance."

Whereas the first three analytic principles are primarily concerned with what the significance of a given utterance will be and how it is derived from context, the VE Principle, similar to the concept of marked and unmarked elements of speech, is meant to indicate which (part of an) utterance is likely to draw special attention—and thus invite special scrutiny—in the first place by violating conversational expectations. It should be noted that these expectations, much in the spirit of Grice's aforementioned cooperative principle, are not limited to culturally or ideologically specific rules of engagement, but rather pertain to the widely held common context-sensitive expectations of relevance, informativity, truthfulness etc. referred to previously. In other words: "[…] akin to the proposition that people don't violate

conversational expectations for no good reason," if an utterance fails to meet an addressee's basic expectations of, for instance, informativity (*Tell me all about your honeymoon! — Oh, you know, it was nice.*) or relevance (*How did you like the risotto? — I really should get back into Weight Watchers…),* it is more likely to bear special significance—which in turn feeds directly into its full overall significance (FS/DI Principle) and, ultimately, derived overall meaning (Acton 2014: 38).

This abbreviated overview of the SPF's main principles indeed fails to include a significant number of important (yet somewhat obvious) caveats concerning their direct applicability; for instance, the fact that not any and all meaning is generally intended or recognized as such. This also extends to many of the more inherently nuanced aspects of indexicality, such as (unintentional) ambivalence (Acton 2014). On a less obvious note, however, the SPF's principles do actively take into account cognitive processes long since established as central in judging and decision making, such as the representative and, to a lesser degree, availability heuristic in the VE and DI principles, respectively.[16] All in all, and assuming access to the necessary background knowledge on a given sociolinguistic subject, the SPF makes for a powerful analytic tool that effectively connects semantico-pragmatic approaches to modern variationism, and allows its users to perform detailed analyses of contextual meaning in language essentially within any context.

There's Something in the Water, environmentalism, and environmental racism

The field of environmentalism includes a vast number of different sociopolitical, cultural, religious, and otherwise varying ethnic groups. Subsequently, the potential sociolinguistic complexity of environmentalist discourse can be assumed proportional to the social

[16] The availability heuristic describes a common mental process of context evaluation during which easily recallable information is prescribed special significance by the thinking individual, regardless of whether said information is more factually useful than less immediately memorable information (cf. Baron 2000, 134-141).

complexity of the innumerable (speech) communities involved, rendering a holistic analysis of the field at large—at least within a single scientific paper—practically unfeasible. For this reason, this project focuses on data from one major source: Elliot Page and Ian Daniel's 2019 documentary *There's Something in the Water* (henceforth referred to as *Water)*, based on the eponymous book by Ingrid Waldron (2018).[17]

Within the greater context of environmentalism, the 73-minute feature deals with the particular issue of environmental racism—a topic derived from the environmental justice movement that originated in the United States—, defined by Waldron (2020, paraphrasing Bullard 2002) as "environmental policies, practices, or directives that disproportionately disadvantage individuals, groups, or communities (intentionally or unintentionally) based on race or colour." More specifically, *Water* follows the struggles of a Black Canadian community and two Mi'kmaw communities across Nova Scotia, dealing with the often devastating consequences of water and soil pollution due to long-term political neglect and corporate indifference as they fight for social justice and the prevention of further environmental harm being done to the lands they live on. Notably, while the documentary—and subsequently this study—focuses on environmental racism from a Canadian perspective, the systemic issues portrayed are, unfortunately, not any less common across the rest of North America and beyond (Tyson, Kennedy & Funk 2021), nor limited to strictly environmentalist contexts at that (cf. e.g. Lowan-Trudeau 2021; Mang-Benza et al. 2021). This should—in theory, and to a certain degree—allow for the study's conclusions to be applied to the field even in a broader, less geographically restricted sense as the source material would suggest.

As a study subject for sociopragmatic analysis, the documentary and its public discussions offer a wealth of diverse linguistic data to draw from, with a significant number

[17] While I generally expect the reader to be at least somewhat familiar with the term, *environmentalism,* as referred to in the context of this paper, can be understood according to the definition given by Merriam-Webster: "The advocacy of the preservation, restoration, or improvement of the natural environment, especially the movement to control pollution." (*Environmentalism*. Merriam-Webster. https://merriam-webster.com/dictionary/environmentalism. 19th November 2023.)

of (broadly categorically speaking) cultural and sociopolitical influences. Discourse participants shown or quoted are of Black Canadian, First Nation, Métis, and White Canadian/American cultural backgrounds, and incorporate almost the entire socioeconomic spectrum: from the working class to capitalists, the poor to the rich, and including public educators, (spokespeople of) large scale business owners, and politicians at the local, provincial, and federal level. The main points of contention to be dissected via the SPF ultimately all stem from the clashing of these diverse social backgrounds and related conflicting language ideologies: Firstly, with the documentary's discourse taking place against a broader Canadian cultural, political, and legal backdrop, that certain parts of said discourse could be rendered less accessible to audiences not sufficiently familiar with the local, communal, and individual styles presented throughout. This point is critical, since said styles are deliberately employed by the minority group speakers as a potent means of conveying cultural identity, authority, and sociopolitical status.[18] Secondly, and closely related, the film presents politicians' and business owners' frequent lack of intercultural understanding and sensibility to the fair treatment of marginalized communities, which likewise adds to the conflict not only in a political, but also an empirically observable linguistic sense. Additionally, as far as offering ample access to contextualized data is concerned, even *Water*'s premise is highly contextual in and of itself: not only by focusing on a distinctly contemporary issue (environmentalism), but by doing so specifically from the perspective of the historically marginalized.

Lastly, and just like other audiovisual formats, documentaries offer the advantage of "data fidelity"—providing unlimited audiovisual access to complex social interactions just as they occurred. This comes at the cost of likewise format-related limitations such as editing

[18] Of course, it is conversely entirely possible for speakers from a cultural minority to struggle with (or at the very least misinterpret) styles employed by the cultural majority. Since the following analysis focuses on data from a respective minority, however, this fact is largely irrelevant for this study.

and the observer's paradox (i.e., affecting conversational dynamics through the overt presence of a camera or even an entire film crew; cf. Labov 1973), potentially obscuring or distorting some of the conversational context. For the most part, however, these potential pitfalls are relatively transparent here, and are taken into consideration where necessary.

Indigenous identity in context: culture(s), nomenclature, and linguistic influences

Before looking at the speech data that is analyzed in this study, it is necessary to delineate the broader cultural context(s) it stems from, as well as to define the terminology used to refer to said context for the purpose of this thesis. Within the context of Indigenous culture and identity, this begins with the term *Indigenous* itself. As Hilary Weaver notes:

> There is little agreement on precisely what constitutes an indigenous identity, how to measure it, and who truly has it. Indeed, there is not even a consensus on appropriate terms. Are we talking about Indians, American Indians, Natives, Native Americans, indigenous people, or First Nations people? Are we talking about Sioux or Lakota? Navajo or Dine? Chippewa, Ojibway, or Anishnabe? (2001: 240)

This problem of defining who *Indigenous* even refers to has historically been exacerbated by the attempts of non-natives in particular to generalize from hundreds of highly complex and often radically dissimilar cultures in both social and legal contexts, and further led to issues about the recognition of cultural authenticity.[19] One direct result of this is the outright rejection of the term (and other synonymous or closely related terms like *Native*, *Aboriginal*, *Indian* etc.) by some (cf. e.g. Palmater 2013), whereas others have embraced them as a reflection of their broader non-colonial/-Western identities and intertribal solidarity. These differences in both terminological preferences and cultural orientation (more tribe-specific vs. more broadly Indigenous/non-colonial) exist not only at an individual, idiosyncratic level, but also on a larger communal scale, with some tribes and nations (e.g. the Lakota and Blackfoot)

[19] "Who decides who is an indigenous person, Natives or nonnatives?" (Weaver 2001:246).

consciously choosing more “pan-Indian” expressions of identity (Weaver 2001: 246; cf. Poliandri 2007).[20] However, since the Indigenous peoples of the Americas do ultimately share not only certain cultural elements that (to some degree) contribute to each individual’s cultural sense of identity, but unfortunately also share similar sociopolitical mistreatment and cultural oppression throughout history and to this day, I will be using *Indigenous* throughout this paper for purely practical purposes and in the broader non-colonial/non-Western cultural sense as described above, particularly with respect to communities across Canada.[21]

As mentioned in the previous section, *Water* tells the stories of two Mi’kmaw[22] nations—Pictou Landing and Sipekne’katik, both located in Nova Scotia—that fight against the industrial pollution of their lands. In this context of power struggles against oppressive non-Indigenous institutions, such as large-scale corporations and local, provincial, and federal governments especially, the expression of tribe-specific vs. more broadly Indigenous aspects of cultural identity often becomes a true balancing act (cf. Palmater 2016, Weaver 2001). As Poliandri (2007: 246) observes with regards to the Mi’kmaq, “identity is a contested issue,” which naturally extends to its expression. The concrete reasons for this are manifold and ultimately go beyond the scope of this thesis. However, accurately describing (via the SPF) the ways in which this manifests linguistically requires, ideally, to discern between expressions of Mi’kmaw identity specifically and Indigenous identity more broadly. While this is unquestionably the right approach in theory, it is rather difficult (if not often

[20] In its common definition, as used here by Weaver, pan-Indianism refers to a philosophical, political, and ethical liberation movement that primarily seeks to establish unity and solidarity among the culturally diverse peoples indigenous to the Americas (and sometimes beyond) in addition to a broader, more general sense of Indigenous (i.e., non-colonial) identity. This term is not widely used among Canadian Indigenous communities.
[21] As such, I (as a non-Indigenous person) want to state that it is not my intention to rigidly define *Indigenous* (and related terms) for any purpose other than the above mentioned practical necessity, both in North American and global contexts. I further choose *Indigenous* over certain alternatives for reasons of inclusivity (in Canada, *Aboriginal* and *First Nations* specifically exclude Inuit and, in the latter’s case, also Métis people) and personal preference (I have my own etymological quarrels with the term *Native*, the discussion of which is ultimately irrelevant to this paper).
[22] In an effort to strike a balance between spelling consistency and accessibility, I will be using *Mi’kmaw* in reference to the language (over its endonym of *L'nuisi'mk*) as well as for singular and adjectival descriptors, and Mi’kmaq for plural descriptors (e.g., “in *Mi’kmaw*” vs. “a *Mi’kmaw* woman” vs. “the *Mi’kmaq* [people]”). Note that while *Mi’kmaw/q* is frequently used among the people themselves, there are those who prefer the original endonym *L’nu’k* (meaning “the people”; cf. e.g. Poliandri 2007).

impossible) in practice.[23] Instead, throughout the analysis I will generally assume an intent to signal cultural identity on both levels and to varying degrees, and will use the respective terminology to indicate specific exceptions and label my interpretations based on contextual information or the data itself (e.g., using *Mi'kmaw* over *Indigenous* and vice versa).[24]

In terms of actually presenting their Mi'kmaw and Indigenous identities, the speakers featured in *Water* frequently (but far from exclusively) refer to the previously mentioned cultural elements shared across many North American Indigenous cultures: sacred traditions and spirituality, a belief in nature as a holistic and living entity, respecting the environment and its natural limitations in resources, a focus on sustainable living rather than on classical Western notions of material wealth, maintaining of treaties and shared landownership, self-determination, and—most importantly—community (cf. e.g. Weaver 2001; Wilson 2006; Poliandri 2007; Palmater 2013; Audette-Longo 2017, Mang-Benza et al. 2021; Sidorova & Ferguson 2023). Given the documentary's focus on environmental racism, some of these elements are naturally referenced more heavily than others. Besides valuing a deep sense of connection to the land and the Mi'kmaw Nation's traditional territories, this most notably applies to notions of Indigenous self-determination and community.[25] In fact, the latter is arguably the single most important aspect of them all: As Palmater (2013: 149) explains based on her own experience as a Mi'kmaw woman, "being Mi'kmaw is not an identity one can have as an individual separate and apart from the collective identity of the Nation, its

[23] Once again, there is a host of potential reasons for this, many of which likely have as much to do with the speakers' non-Indigenous audience as with the Indigenous speakers themselves. More importantly, however, there is no real contradiction in this alternating expression of different layers of cultural identity, since both are, in essence, two contextual sides of the same coin (cf. Weaver 2001).

[24] While this general approach may not be the most accurate one imaginable, it is arguably feasible and well in line both with Poliandri's (2007) description of Mi'kmaw identity as typically more nation-specific (as opposed to more "pan-Indian"), as well as the direct quotes from the Mi'kmaw women portrayed in *Water*, who quite frequently (and presumably very much intentionally) refer to themselves as Indigenous rather than Mi'kmaw specifically (which often tends to be implied more indirectly through reference to their local communities).

[25] It should go without saying that the above list is far from exhaustive and hardly even scratches the surface of what constitutes Indigenous cultural identity, much less Mi'kmaw identity specifically. For the purpose of identifying how such identities are (in part) expressed within the context of the data analyzed in this thesis, however, it should provide a starting point to recognizing the most commonly encountered cultural elements. Lastly, this is, of course, all in terms of distinctly Western conceptualizations of social identity and the self, which in many ways do differ considerably from their Native American counterparts (cf. e.g. Arola 2011).

history, its territories and all the rights and obligations that flow from that identity." Though Palmater's experience may be specific to her Mi'kmaw identity, the central importance of community and personal identity defined primarily within a larger social context goes far beyond her Nation. In the words of Weaver, herself a Lakota woman: "The sense of membership in a community is so integrally linked to a sense of identity that Native people often identify themselves by their reservations or tribal communities" (2001: 245).

Another core element of culture and identity—and one that is indeed crucial to sociolinguistic analysis in particular—is language. While arguably any language associated with a specific culture can be considered a cornerstone of said culture, this is especially true for Indigenous cultures, whose assimilation into surrounding colonial cultures often begins (and ends) with the loss of language—often through deliberate and generally violent means (such as, for example, the residential school system; cf. Metallic 2023). Consequently, for Indigenous people, the maintenance of or active engagement with (e.g., by learning) one's heritage language is of particular importance for preserving, affirming, and nurturing one's cultural identity (Usborne et al. 2011).[26]

Given the significance of nature and the local environment throughout most Indigenous cultures, engaging with their respective languages is vital not just for connecting with said cultures, but also for understanding and perpetuating the worldviews (and resulting cognitive frames) they bring about, particularly in the context of environmental protection. As Sidorova & Ferguson explain: "Indigenous languages contain not only different interpretations of the natural environment, but also understandings fundamentally linked to specific place-based contexts." They further point out "that land and language are intrinsically connected in many Indigenous ontologies and should not be considered separately," as "doing so compromises the epistemological relationship between land,

[26] Naturally, this also directly aids any global efforts in revitalizing the language(s) in question, which in turn allows even more people to benefit from the positive psychological effects brought about by (re)connecting with their respective heritage language(s) and related aspects of their cultural identity (cf. Usborne et al. 2011).

language, and the knowledge embedded therein" (2023: 11). To not engage with Indigenous languages, they argue, is to risk losing this knowledge.

In short: Indigenous languages are of tremendous importance in the context of Indigenous cultures, ideologies, and worldviews.[27] The unfortunate reality, however, is that—at least in modern day Canada—only a fraction of Indigenous people can speak their respective heritage language(s): According to the 2021 Canadian Census, only about 243,000 of the 2.2 million people (or just over 11%) with North American Indigenous ancestry claim to have some degree of knowledge of their ancestral language(s). For Mi'kmaw specifically, this number shrinks down to just over 7.5%, which mirrors the general English-centric circumstances on mainland Mi'kmaw reserves described by Poliandri (2007).[28]

On the flipside of this—and of central relevance to the linguistic analysis presented in chapter 3—lie the North American Indigenous dialects of English; an area that, despite ample evidence for its existence and socio-cultural significance, remained mostly academically uncharted until well into the 21st century (Ball, Bernhardt & Deby 2005; Ball & Bernhardt 2008). Similarly to other vernaculars born from colonialist history, these dialects are generally influenced by three major factors: features of the primary contact language(s) (in the case of the Mi'kmaq, mainly North American English and French), features of the Indigenous language (Mi'kmaw), and culture-specific norms and traditions of communication. While the latter are (by definition) culturally specific and thus cannot (and should not) simply be generalized, some more common phonological and morphosyntactic features found across North American Indigenous dialects include the realization of the

[27] A fact not only widely agreed upon among Indigenous people themselves, but also one that continues to frequently cause intracultural conflict through questions of cultural authenticity between speakers and non-speakers (see Poliandri 2007 for an examination of this in a Mi'kmaw-specific context).

[28] As a consequence of these statistics and a general lack of information about the specific language skills of the speakers presented, I will largely exclude the potential effects of knowledge of Mi'kmaw from my analysis in chapter 3. While certain sections of the documentary make very apparent the importance of the language to the people—particularly with regard to traditional place names, such as A'se'k or Mi'kma'ki—, the quotes that are analyzed do not contain any direct references. Where relevant, however, potential influences will be pointed out.

English interdental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/) as dental (or sometimes alveolar) plosives (/t/, /d/), pronoun deletion, and lack of inflection in nouns and adjectives (Ball, Bernhardt & Deby 2005; Ball & Bernhardt 2008). In terms of potential lexical influences, things quickly get very complex[29], as not only do they depend on the local cultural and linguistic environment in which the speaker group is situated, but also the latter's specific sociolinguistic customs (e.g., concerning social taboos, systems of honorifics etc.) and Indigenous heritage language—many of which contain pragmatic features and semantically rich concepts not easily translated into English (cf. e.g. Downey & Harkins 2019; Sidorova & Ferguson 2023).[30] Lastly, it should be noted that despite being based on the language of the colonizing forces, Indigenous dialects of English (and other languages) undoubtedly remain "important linguistic markers of Indigenous identity and solidarity" (Ball & Bernhardt 2008: 573).

In summary: As something that has historically been attempted (and abused) by the non-Indigenous and Indigenous alike, a broad definition of Indigenous cultural identity is not only a complicated, but arguably a somewhat counterproductive task. Nonetheless, there do exist certain cultural and linguistic commonalities shared throughout many North American Indigenous cultures, which—in addition to more Mi'kmaw-specific aspects of cultural identity that will be discussed where relevant—will form the basis of the sociolinguistic analysis presented in chapter 3. As a kind of compromise between culture-specific accuracy and (at times unavoidable) oversimplification, then, the primary purpose of this more general approach is twofold: Firstly, to accurately reflect the way the Indigenous speakers in *Water* represent their cultural identities to a general Anglophone Western audience. And secondly, to enable a more culturally accessible speaker- and listener-focused methodology and survey design, the details of which will be laid out over the following two sections.

[29] At the very least too complex for the purpose and scope of this thesis.
[30] Unfortunately, research on Mi'kmaw specifically in this regard appears to be essentially nonexistent. While this should thankfully not negatively impact the linguistic analysis in chapter 3 due to the relative lexical "standardness" of the English used by the quoted speakers, this massive gap in literature basically begs for additional future research on the topic (both for Mi'kmaw and other underrepresented Indigenous languages).

Methodological approach and survey description

The primary subject of interest in the analysis is how social meaning is created, conveyed, and perceived through the use of language in the context of environmentalism (and environmental racism), and to what degree cultural (and, more specifically, Indigenous and Mi'kmaw) identity is involved in the process. The underlying interactions of reference, performance, and recognition consequently presuppose a focus on both speakers and listeners—an approach much in line with the current development of variationism (cf. Acton 2014, Bell 2016, Eckert 2019). Or, in more actionable terms, two sets of questions guiding the analytic process, focusing on language production and reception respectively:

From the production side:

1. What are a given speaker's conversational goals?

2. How do their stylistic choices benefit some of said conversational goals, but—intentionally or unintentionally—conflict with others (e.g. through obfuscation and subsequent inaccessibility)?[31]

3. How is style used to convey cultural identity and authority?

And concerning the receiving end:

4. How does social context shape and influence a listener's perception of a speaker's idiosyncratic, communal, or otherwise socio-culturally unfamiliar style? In particular, how influential is a given listener's linguistic ideology?

5. What specific predictions about the perception of social meaning can be made using analytic frameworks such as the SPF, and with what accuracy?

[31] Cf. Blommaert (2007: 117) on indexical patterns as "systemic patterns of authority, of control and evaluation, and hence of inclusion and exclusion [by real or perceived others]."

Two things should be noted concerning these questions. Firstly, speaker intent (i.e., conversational goals) must naturally never be assumed blindly or definitively. Since, in the case of this study, access to the speakers and the motivations underlying their utterances is available only indirectly, I will limit my assumptions about their intents and conversational goals to what can be plausibly deduced from the statements themselves as well as the speakers' openly stated and pursued social and political goals.[32] Secondly, that the predictions and predictive capabilities tested in this thesis could potentially be of use for the wider application of the SPF or similar frameworks in the conscious optimization of language use for some known social context (e.g. in the context of speech writing), but are mainly intended to test the SPF's explanatory power for contextualized meaning in language in an empirical manner. In other words, answering the following question: As an analytic framework, can the SPF's principles consistently explain contextualized social meaning in a way that is—to a reasonable degree—empirically verifiable beyond the logical reasoning and linguistic intuition of the person using it?

The speech analysis presented in chapter 3 consists mainly of the application of the SPF's principles to various pieces of data—individual variables, utterances, short dialogue excerpts—in order to determine and interpret the social meaning (potentially) embedded therein. These initially derived insights are then used for further indexical analysis with regard to the questions mentioned in the previous section; for instance, to better explain the specific use of style to convey cultural identity in primarily politically motivated arguments, or, with a little more extrapolation, to offer a generalized description of the advantage/ disadvantage of certain types of stylistic choices based on socially contextual perception. This is much in the spirit of Acton's (2014) own initial analyses, however from the

[32] E.g. to protect the local environment, to point out injustices, to be treated fairly as citizens of the land etc.

perspective of environmentalism and, to a lesser degree, social inequality.[33] It should also be mentioned that any systematic, detailed analysis of language via the SPF has the potential to go far beyond ordinary (read: everyday) interpretation of language. One possible instance of this, concerning the legitimacy of Canada's nationhood—and, subsequently, the nationhood of many other modern states founded through colonialism—, will be highlighted during the survey analysis and discussion in chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

Ultimately, the SPF functions as a tool to channel and refine subjective intuitions about language into predictions and somewhat more well-informed interpretations.[34] Moreover, applying the framework's principles to a given piece of data and deriving the contextualized social meaning it carries should theoretically even enable the analyst to infer how this meaning is altered in a different (or altogether missing) context, particularly from the perspective of a listener. Likewise, how its (perceived) meaning might be altered when using a similar but indexically divergent variant of the variable in question. To better validate both of these functionalities (and, by extension, my intuitions about the analyzed data), a short online survey is used.

Survey

The purpose of the survey is to test the predictions made by and with the SPF in a controlled environment. In order to generate data that is both sufficient and processable within a realistic amount of time, the survey features a manageable amount of 4 items—short quotes (or significant parts thereof) from the documentary analyzed with the SPF—presented over 4 distinct survey sections and through a total of 16 questions. Besides asking for some

[33] While data context and references to relevant aspects of Indigenous culture in particular necessarily and primarily revolve around the importance of the local environment, it is by no means my intent to portray and generalize the Mi'kmaq and other Indigenous peoples as mere naturalists during my analysis. In fact, as Mang-Benza et al. note, "Indigenous people are neither inherently more ecologically focused, nor more destructive to the environment, yet [they] generally hold in respect the notion of natural 'inherent limits'" (2021: 20).

[34] As with all partly subjective (and thus partial) analysis, this includes the potential risk of personal bias.

voluntary basic demographic data (gender identity and approximate age group), the survey was entirely anonymous and open to anyone over the age of 18.[35] Recruitment took place through personal communication, mailing lists, and the online platform Reddit (specifically the sub-forum "r/samplesize"), as well as through snowballing via people reached through any of the mentioned recruiting avenues.[36]

The survey questions were designed to test for two things in particular: Firstly, the impact on the perception of social meaning in relation to a listener's access to contextual information, with the latter being either specifically geographic/historical, pertaining to the speaker's cultural background and identity, or both. Secondly, the impact of specific sociolinguistic variables in contrast to a deliberately chosen pragmatic alternative.[37] For both, testing primarily consisted of presenting the participant with a quote or section thereof slightly altered with respect to the variable that is to be tested. Contextual information was provided depending on the goal of the question: If primarily a variable was to be tested, context was generally provided to such a degree as to make the respective quote and questions as easily intelligible to the participant as possible. If context was the main focus of the question, information would only be provided sparingly and as vague as possible without obfuscating the quote's basic content and meaning. Next, the same quote and questions would be presented again, except with the original variable(s) in place of their previously shown variants, and/or additional geographical, social, and/or political context to the quote.[38] The responses to the first and second round of each respective question were then matched statistically (i.e., determining discrepancies in the number of responses each question

[35] While participants were expected to have a level of English proficiency appropriate for the project and language presented therein, non-native speakers were explicitly welcome to take part.
[36] The sub-forum in question can be found under https:/www.reddit.com/r/samplesize.
[37] E.g., "protect the sacred" vs. "protect the environment."
[38] Two questions did not follow this pattern, the reasons for which will be explained in chapter 4. The quotes, contextual information, and sociolinguistic variables that were chosen, as well as the resulting survey questions, are listed and explained throughout the SPF analysis in chapter 3. A link to the complete digital version of the actualized survey can also be found in appendix A.

received), compared quantitatively (i.e., analyzed in terms of concrete numerical differences in responses for each question, including in some cases cross tabulation to account for differences across gender and age groups), and analyzed qualitatively (i.e., in terms of what the result actually means with regard to the predictions derived through the SPF). The order of questions and quotes presented in the survey was mainly chosen in order to prevent (immediate) pattern recognition and forming of bias on the participant's end concerning the themes, sources, and principles underlying the questions themselves, as this could naturally have a negative—albeit hardly quantifiable—impact on the quality and accuracy of responses.

Given the multifaceted and often rather abstract nature of associated meaning and its domains of influence (cultural identity, language ideology etc.), converting the results of the SPF analysis into workable, testable questions proved less than straightforward at times. Simply addressing certain analytic elements directly (e.g., by asking how strongly a listener believes a speaker to feel about a topic based on context and/or language used) offers the advantage of more easily comparable data (before and after changes to context and/or language, i.e. condition 1 vs. condition 2). Simultaneously, however, this bears the drawback of potentially being suggestive to the participant, possibly resulting in other negative effects on response accuracy—e.g., facilitating social desirability bias. At the same time, using increasingly more indirect and roundabout questions to inquire about personal intuitions about already vague concepts is unlikely to create sufficient analyzable (and much less quantifiable) data. Both of these issues were particularly apparent in cases where both contextual information and sociolinguistic variables were of simultaneous interest. While compromises were found in some cases, the majority of inquiries was in the end handled via

the first, more direct approach.[39] The concrete rationale behind specific question phrasings and data selection for the survey will be elaborated on in the following chapter.

Lastly, even though it is naturally included in the primary SPF analysis, the survey ultimately did not allow in format nor scope for the proper investigation of language ideology and the degree of impact the latter might have on the interpretation of the speech data presented to survey takers. While it had initially been planned to include demographic questions about the participants' cultural, geographical, and educational backgrounds, concerns about anonymity and dangerously over-complicating (if not obfuscating) the analytic process resulted in those aspects eventually being removed from the survey entirely. Thus, with no way to even begin to judge any given participant's individual stance on language use, this particular dimension could not reasonably be investigated and was subsequently mostly left untouched in the qualitative analysis and comparison of predictions and results presented in chapter 4.

[39] An attempt at solving the main problem to this approach was to occasionally remind participants that there was generally and genuinely no right or wrong way to respond to the questions—regardless of the potentially political nature or phrasing of some of the questions—, and to solely rely on their immediate intuitions.

3. Analysis, part I: SPF

Data selection

All of the data selected for analysis was taken from the main documentary—i.e., *Water*—as opposed to a number of panel discussions about the film and book that were originally considered. The final selection includes six quotes from four speakers, the latter of which are all Mi'kmaw women from Nova Scotia acting as local environmental protectors and Indigenous rights activists. The main criteria for selection were the inclusion of strong indexical variables (both cultural-Indigenous and local-geographical), the potential for violating conversational expectations, as well as the overt inclusion of the speaker's cultural identity as support or justification for their cause (which commonly necessitates some amount of contextual knowledge about the respective culture and its history in order to fully grasp both the argument made and the meaning indexed).

Of the six quotes that were selected and analyzed with the SPF, only four were actually incorporated into the survey; Quotes 2 and 5 were ultimately dropped, mainly due to concerns about the length of the survey as well as the difficulty of converting the corresponding predictions into questions fit for the survey's overall format (particularly with respect to the lack of ethnic and cultural background information on the participants).[40] In order of their appearance throughout the analysis section, the following quotes were selected:

1. "We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, Alton Gas [...], you're not gonna be successful." (Michelle Paul, 52m[41])

[40] Due to their at times excessive occurrence, simple and semantically "empty" interjections ("uhm," "uh," etc.) have been omitted for the sake of clarity and readability. It should be noted that these minor edits were made with specific care not to falsify any quotes in their semantic content, nor to misrepresent any speaker's general style, register, and intent. No words have been exchanged in any of the utterances analyzed in this chapter.
[41] Denotes the minute at which the quote occurred in the documentary.

2. “As soon as you get to the top of this step—one view—in one view, in one instant, you realize why we are here. This river is sacred to us. This river is a super highway of our nation. It connected our whole territory, from time immemorial. And we continue to do that. And we won’t let this company destroy it.” (Michelle Paul, 58m)

3. “I just hope that people will realize that, you know, we’re not doing these things to… to be troublemakers and to, you know, to cause everybody grief. We’re doing it because we need a future. […] We need to be connected to the land. We need to, you know, have sustainable environment for our kids. For our kids’ kids. And, you know, we do it because we’re meant to be here and do this. The bottom line is that you’re sick of being sick. And we hope to heal. We hope… We hope to… heal from all of this, eventually. But there’s a quote that I always go back to, […] ‘You can’t heal in the same environment that made you sick.’ So, in order for us to start healing, that water has to stop flowing.” (Michelle Francis-Denny, 58m)

4. “Canada… Canada is not a nation. Canada is not a nation, let’s get that straight. It’s a corporation. You know, doctrine of discovery. They didn’t discover nothin’. And each and every time we ask them, ‘Well, give us the proof,’ they can’t show us no proof. This is why we never get justice in this system. Because we’re native. Because we’re Indigenous.” (Dorene Bernard, 62m)

5. “Our truth is that we don’t have a choice. This is who we are, and this is who we are always meant to be. It’s in our DNA, it’s in our blood. They cannot stop us from being Indigenous anymore. They cannot stop us from learning how to take care of the earth, what our relationship is. And they cannot stop us from teaching—not only our children, but everybody’s children.” (Dorene Bernard, 64m)

6. **6.** "They've never done this anywheres in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in little Nova Scotia? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations? The real public safety issue is Alton Gas." (Jolene Marr, 51m)

Analysis

The modular nature of the SPF all but suggests a straightforward principle-by-principle approach for its application, in order to create a rather simply structured and, ideally, comprehensible analysis of the data selected for this project. Each of the six quotes is introduced with the context in which as well as by who it was uttered; as above, a timestamp in brackets indicates its respective occurrence within the documentary in minutes. All quotes are analyzed according to each of the SPF's four analytic principles, in the order of *violation of expectations* (VE), *associations and entailments* (AE), *full significance of the utterance* (FS), and the *differential importance of pragmatic alternatives* (DI). Finally, this is followed by a short summary of each analytic section, including the predictions derived from them. Of note here is that, with one notable exception, the VE sections tend to be comparatively short and light; the simple reason for this being the relative inoffensiveness of the quotes chosen for analysis from a Gricean perspective (cf. fundamental principles of the SPF, ch. 2).

In terms of formatting, elements of each quote have been marked in such a way as to indicate their analytic importance: Square brackets indicate elements that are *not* used for survey questions, interjections, or parts used mainly to establish the context needed for analysis. **Bold** font indicates elements used in the survey.[42] <u>Underlined</u> font indicates elements deemed most important for and specifically focused on in the analysis. Naturally,

[42] As mentioned in the section on data selection, quotes 2 and 5 and their respective analyses were ultimately omitted from being used in the survey. Hence, neither quote in this chapter features any bold markings.

there tends to be an overlap between **bold** and underlined elements. Ultimately, however, both simply serve to better illustrate the analytic process.

Quote 1. "**We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words,** Alton Gas [...], **you're not gonna be successful.**"

Data context:

Said by Michelle Paul (a local Mi'kmaw woman and environmentalist) to local TV reporters at a protest in Stewiacke, NS against Alton Gas and the arrest of several local Mi'kmaw environmentalists (taken from a short clip on Global News Nova Scotia). (52m)

VE Principle (violation of expectations):

The combative nature of the statement is arguably to be expected. Given the specific context (a protest led explicitly by Indigenous women), even a more strongly indexed variable such as "protect the sacred" is likely to be somewhat expected—or at the very least not surprising—, particularly by/to non-Indigenous Canadian viewers familiar with the more overt cultural differences between the Mi'kmaq and non-Indigenous as well as the former's strong cultural focus on spirituality and connection to the land.

AE Principle (content as both associations and entailments):

The statement's primary purpose is to convey a sense of unrelenting resistance and environmental protection ("stand and protect," "we're not gonna stop," "mark my words," "you're not gonna be successful"). As far as doing pragmatic labour, so to speak, "[protect] the sacred" does a considerable amount of heavy lifting by not only drawing a direct indexical link between the environment and the spiritual—and thus cultural—lives of the

Mi'kmaq, but also framing the environment as something more than geographical happenstance.

FS Principle (full significance of utterances):

By emphasizing the great cultural importance of the environment as indexed by "the sacred," the Mi'kmaw speaker frames the actions of Alton Gas as not only a grave injustice and threat to the environment and its dependents—mainly the Mi'kmaq themselves—, but also as an act of indecency and blatant cultural disrespect to Mi'kmaw and even to Indigenous culture and beliefs at large. Simultaneously, in addition to the general partisan nature of the discourse, this puts considerably more sociocultural distance between the speaker and her opponents (Alton Gas) than a less indexically specific choice of words (e.g. "the environment," "nature") would have achieved.

DI Principle (differential importance of different alternatives):

For this utterance, as mentioned above, the alternatives of highest import mainly concern those to "the sacred." Possible and likely to be expected candidates include the aforementioned "the environment" and "nature," as well as "the land" and possibly somewhat less frequently used general descriptors such as "this soil"—arguably none of which would have been likely to convey the cultural message at the heart of the statement to a Western non-Indigenous audience as effectively as actually indexed by the speaker. Due to the explicitly local and cultural nature of the conflict, and obvious differences in entailed meaning aside, more geographically and/or politically generic alternatives such as "Nova Scotia," "this province," "Canada," or this "this country" are far less likely to be expected. While any of them would likely have had the added effect of indexing a sense of shared responsibility (by appealing to the local viewers' solidarity as neighbours on literal common

ground), it would have entirely lacked the strongly culturally specific message inherently embedded in “the sacred,” in addition to being an implicit recognition of the settler-colonial status quo that is, ultimately, the root cause for the speaker’s protest.

Summary and predictions:

Regardless of access to context, the SPF’s principles show that the choice of words (more specifically, “the sacred”) frames the speaker as not just caring deeply about their cause and what they try to protect, but as acting out of spiritual conviction and as part of a larger religious community. This directly invokes a greater sense of culture that the speaker is part of. In turn, the addressee (Alton Gas) is indirectly framed as disrespectful (blasphemous) towards this culture or religious community. Since the aforementioned variable (“the sacred”) is too vague to be inclusive of any specific group of listeners—and potentially even outright foreign to some—, it must be assumed that context (particularly that of environmentalism, and possibly of the North American setting) is crucial for most listeners to fully grasp the social meaning as laid out by the AE and FS principles. Exchanging said variable for a more inclusive or widely accessible variant (e.g. “the environment”) would likely come at the direct cost of failing to convey the deeply personal and culture-based nature of the cause for the speaker.

Quote 2. “As soon as you get to the top of this step—one view—in one view, in one instant, you realize why we are here. This river is sacred to us. This river is a super highway of our nation. It connected our whole territory, from time immemorial. And we continue to do that. And we won’t let this company destroy it.”

Data context:

Said by Michelle Paul to the producers/film crew of the documentary (and, in a way, directly to the audience) on the banks of the Shubenacadie river as a concrete reminder of why the water protectors are fighting for their cause. (58m)

VE:

Overall, if taken within context, the statement does not seem likely to violate any conversational expectations pertaining to informativity, transparency, and even tone and phrasing.

AE:

Beyond the initial part—a justification for the speaker's case akin to *a picture says more than a thousand words*, presented within the visual context of the documentary—, the statement's purpose is to convey the importance of the Shubenacadie river to the Mi'kmaq from both a practical and a cultural/spiritual perspective. While the concept of super highways as vital connectors of modern society—particularly across North America—speaks to the practical importance, it is once again the description of the river as "sacred [to the Mi'kmaq]" that frames the environmental dispute as more than a simple conflict over resources, by emphasizing the local geography's spiritual importance to the Mi'kmaq. Additionally, "[...]from time immemorial" somewhat reinforces this, by implying the fact that Indigenous peoples—and modern politics, such as formal treaty rights, aside—have lived off the river for far longer than any non-Indigenous people ("this company") have even existed in the same local geographical region (and even on the continent).

FS:

Given the irreplaceable nature of the land at risk, the statement's phrasing implies that Alton's ("this company") actions do not only threaten Mi'kmaw livelihoods and intraprovincial mobility, but also a central piece of their culturally vital, spiritual connection to the local environment. The likening of the river to a modern "super highway" emphasizes its practical importance, while serving the important purpose of speaking (in analogy) to a primarily western, and particularly North American/ Canadian audience. Even more important, however, is how the river's description specifically as "sacred" entails a most crucial caveat: that a manmade highway—even a water-based one, like a canal—could simply be rebuilt elsewhere; a natural river, however, used extensively by locals in reverence for many centuries, cannot. This once again puts additional social distance between the speaker and Alton Gas, by framing the latter as ultimately ignorant (or, at the very least, fundamentally uncaring) in the matter (cf. also "destroy"). This social distance is further increased by the speaker's specific mentioning of her community's "[**our**] territory"—presumably both in the historical and the modern political sense—, while also serving as an additional reinforcement of her argument and insistence on her community's rights.

Due to the somewhat vague socio-political implications of the term, "[our] nation" may potentially cause some confusion among listeners not entirely aware of the specific context—i.e., the speaker's being part of the local Mi'kmaw nation. Access to such contextual information should make the intended meaning clear, however. While any of the aforementioned variables ("sacred to us," "super highway of our nation," "our territory," from time immemorial" etc.) could have been phrased differently (e.g. *very important*, *road*/*connector*, *lands*, *for ages* etc.), the speaker's choice of words conveys the actual socio-cultural issue at the heart of the political dispute very effectively and, arguably, much better than most viable pragmatic alternatives.

DI:

As in the analysis of quote 1 above, “sacred” is once again the variable of most import, with no pragmatic alternative achieving quite the same level of socio-cultural entailment (e.g. *vital*, *very important*/*dear* etc.; *holy*, as essentially a synonym, being a potential viable alternative, albeit possibly with undesired Christian undertones). Likewise, as mentioned above, none of the direct alternatives to “super highway [of our nation]” offer quite as clear an alternate analogy to (western) listeners as the speaker’s chosen variable. While *road*, *connector*, *waterway*, *link* etc. are all semantically close, none are able to conjure up the same sense of importance this river has historically had for the Mi’kmaw nation in the eyes of the speaker. With the potential exception of *our lands*, the same goes for the (relatively fewer) alternatives to “our territory”—e.g. *country*, *region*, *geographical area* etc.—, as the latter are either potentially misleading, or fail to add the political dimension to the variable as mentioned in the FS section.

Summary and predictions:

In essence, and similarly to quote 1: Within the context of environmentalism, the speaker’s framing of the river as deeply culturally meaningful (“sacred”) to the Mi’kmaq elevates the seemingly basic land dispute from a substantially practical (“a super highway of our nation,” a river to catch fish from) to a social, cultural, and personal level, in addition to distancing the speaker further socio-culturally from the referenced company (Alton Gas). This is further supported by the speaker’s referring specifically to her community’s “territory,” implying in particular her community’s current political rights by modern legal interpretation of the term. Access to the general geographical and cultural context of the quote (North America, Indigenous community) seems at least somewhat necessary for grasping the full historical and political meaning embedded therein.

Quote 3. "**I just hope that people will realize that**[, you know,] **we're not doing these things** [to…] **to be troublemakers and** [to, you know,] **to cause everybody grief. We're doing it because <u>we need a future.</u>** […] **<u>We need to be connected to the land.</u> We need to** [, you know,] **have <u>sustainable environment</u> for our kids. For our kids' kids. And** [, you know,] **we do it because <u>we're meant to be here and do this.</u>** [The bottom line is that you're sick of being sick. And we hope to heal. We hope… We hope to… heal from all of this, eventually. But there's a quote that I always go back to, […] 'You can't heal in the same environment that made you sick.' So, in order for us to start healing, that water has to stop flowing."]

Data context:

Said by Michelle Francis-Denny to the producers/film crew of the documentary at her private home while talking about the general hopes and motivations behind her and her community's protests and struggle for justice. (47m)

VE:

Within the context of the entire quote and thematic background—particularly necessary in this case so as to clarify the speaker's conversational goal—, the marked utterances are highly unlikely to violate any listener's conversational expectations.

AE:

Besides the stated need for physical sustainability—"sustainable environment for our kids;" being able as a community to live off the endangered lands, being physically connected to them—, the speaker implies a much more far-reaching danger to her community: cultural sustainability ("we need a future"). Damaging the physical integrity of and taking away

access to their natural home and ancestral homelands not only robs the speaker's community of access to vital resources—in addition to causing serious health issues throughout the entire community—, but further infringes upon their core belief and cultural tenet of living in spiritual connection and harmony with their surroundings ("we're meant to be here and do this"). This, in turn, puts them at direct risk of cultural erosion and, eventually, dissolution.

FS:

Once again, beyond being an explanation for a mere land/safety dispute, the full significance of the marked statement very much goes deeper, and draws upon the full social-cultural context it was made in: The speaker's call for justice and justification of her community's actions goes well past their physical need for resource sustainability and right to a non-harmful living space, but crucially includes their cultural need to live in direct connection with their natural ancestral environment. This "need [for] a [cultural] future" is not based on a mere wish to live where one grew up, but rather on a deep spiritual conviction ("we're meant to be here and do this") that lies at the core of Mi'kmaw culture and faith. The full quote clearly states that neither the speaker nor her community chose this conflict ("we're not doing these things to [...] cause everybody grief"), but rather that they are acting in self-defense, in order to preserve their culture and, subsequently, their sense of (cultural) identity. Put differently: This need is what sets them ("we") apart from non-Indigenous/-Mi'kmaw inhabitants ("people," "everybody"), including those actively causing damage to both their physical and spiritual wellbeing (Northern Pulp).

The distinctiveness of the utterance arguably comes from a noticeable lack of viable pragmatic alternatives (of both phrases and terms), resulting in relative linguistic clarity: The community's "need [for] a future," to be—in every sense of the word— "connected to the land," and to have "sustainable environment" are all difficult, if not nigh impossible, to

paraphrase without sounding considerably awkward (i.e., unrealistic) or potentially changing both the implied as well as the entailed meaning of a respective part of the quote.

DI:

As part of a larger utterance, "[to] need a future" is arguably hard to replace, but could conceivably be paraphrased as *needing a means to continue existing* [*beyond today*], which, given the incredible awkwardness of the phrase in the context of unscripted—or, really, any kind of—speech, seems a rather unlikely (read: unrealistic) candidate for a pragmatic alternative. "Sustainable environment" could best be exchanged for *renewable resources and living space*, which, again, seems somewhat far-fetched. *Healthy land* offers another more specifically Indigenous-associated, albeit more repetitive-sounding alternative. Realistically, in terms of actually being pragmatically replaceable, what remains is "connected to the land." Replacing either "connected" (e.g. with *attached*, *linked*, *in touch*/*tune with*, *bonded* etc.) or "the land" (e.g. with *the earth*, *these grounds*, *this province*/(arbitrarily specific geographical name), *this soil* etc.) would result in substantially altering the implied and, more importantly, the entailed meaning of the original phrase as a whole: either by undermining the implied duality of both physical <u>and</u> spiritual connectedness, or the entailed importance of the community's local natural homelands as more than mere geographical happenstance and as essentially a living cultural entity (as opposed to, say, the province of Nova Scotia as a political entity).[43]

[43] Naturally, this is once again dependent on cultural circumstance. A speaker from a more historically agrarian culture (compared to the Mi'kmaq) may well find *this earth* or *this soil* to be a similarly (or even more) fitting choice of words.

Summary and predictions:

More so than in quotes 1 and 2, quote 3's full context—the rest of the quote as well as the context in which it was uttered—is of utmost importance in order to convey the speaker's primary motivational goal: justifying her and her community's actions as an act of existential self-defense (both in a physical <u>and</u> a socio-cultural sense). Assuming access to the full context, the marked statement itself is unlikely to violate any listener's expectations. Similarly, contextual information about the speaker's cultural identity/origin is vital for understanding the threat of cultural erosion entailed in the speaker's demand for her community's future on their own terms. Lastly, very few variables could realistically be replaced by pragmatic alternatives; the most likely candidate being "connected to the land." Altering (parts of) the latter, however, is highly likely to substantially alter the implied and/or entailed meaning of not just the phrase, but also the abovementioned phrase preceding it ("[...] because we need a future").

Quote 4. "[Canada… Canada is not a nation.] **<u>Canada is not a nation, let's get that straight. It's a corporation.</u> <u>You know, doctrine of discovery. They didn't discover nothin'.</u> And each and every time we ask them, 'Well, give us the proof,' they can't show us no proof. This is <u>why we never get justice in this system. Because we're native. Because we're Indigenous.</u>"**

Data context:

Said by Dorene Bernard to the producers/film crew of the documentary at a private meeting with other Water Protectors at their "truck house" (local meeting shelter and building for legal land occupation under treaty rights) while discussing the nature and injustice of the conflict and protest from a legal and cultural perspective. (62m)

VE:

Given the speaker's cultural background, as well as the country's well documented oppressive treatment and continued misrepresentation of Indigenous people in both past and present (cf. e.g. Lowan-Trudeau 2021), the quote's latter half ("This is why we never get justice in this system. [...]") is rather unlikely to violate the average listener's conversational expectations, or to assume any formal significance. The same cannot be said about the first half, however, especially if taken at face value or out of perspective: Despite the country's bloody, colonialist history and the historically disputed validity of the discovery doctrine, the statement that "Canada is not a nation," but (merely) "a corporation," goes directly against the—at this point in history—commonly agreed upon, geopolitically established definition of Canada as a sovereign nation of some 41 million people, thus likely violating Grice's cooperative principle (or more specifically, the maxim of truthfulness). Put simply: Most listeners, particularly without being given the quote's full context, and particularly those culturally identifying as Canadian and legally acting as such within the global cultural-political sphere, would likely raise an eyebrow or two over the idea of Canada being anything but a country (i.e., a "nation").

AE:

The quote implies two major, far-reaching statements indexed within its surface form (i.e., its literal meaning), crucially relying on the sociocultural perspective of the Indigenous speaker.[44] Firstly, that "Canada," as some form of economic-political entity ("corporation," "system"), led specifically by non-Indigenous people, acts primarily for its own profit (read: to amass more power within a larger, global economic system). And secondly, that, by

[44] This is, of course, not to say that a similar conclusion and view could not possibly have been reached by a non-Indigenous person (upon reviewing the historical and modern social and legal context from a non-Indigenous „outsider's" perspective.) In this case, however, it is specifically the Indigenous speaker's own life experience and (at the time of recording) current circumstances that have informed her view and, subsequently, directly influenced the choice of words examined here.

relying on essentially arbitrary and historically disputed justifications such as the early modern European doctrine of discovery, “this [social-political] system” is rigged to allow for the easy overpowering and eventual removal those who obstruct its primary purpose: to maximize its leaders’ economic and political profit and power by exploiting the natural and human resources within its (likewise arbitrarily delineated) geographical boundaries.

In other words: That firstly, the modern state of Canada was created and designed by non-Indigenous people—i.e., settler colonists—for the purpose of generating power (or capital, in modern economic terms) for said colonists as well as their sociopolitical successors. And secondly, that its creation was based on a racist, destructive, and fundamentally self-serving policy used to justify the inhumane actions necessary in order to secure the continued generation of power for those in charge (i.e., the violent mistreatment and utter disregard for the rights of Indigenous people, particularly those rights ostensibly established <u>within the system itself</u>).

FS:

Whether or not the claim of Canada’s merely being “a corporation” and lacking any “real” political authority is to be taken literally, or rather to be understood simply as a means of expressing the underlying entailed meaning described above, is difficult to determine without reading into the speaker’s conversational goals—and, ultimately, political views—to a degree that seems inadequate both on a personal level and with respect to the scope of this analysis. This dilemma-of-sorts does reveal several other important sociopragmatic issues, however. Firstly, the absolute necessity of specific situational context in order to (literally) contextualize and evaluate the speaker’s words from the role of a listener. More precisely, that the speaker chose her words not simply on grounds of feeling generally mistreated (as an Indigenous person) by the state, but because her words were informed specifically by the

precipitous uphill battle she and her community have been fighting politically for generations (and arguably for centuries). From this perspective, the provincial government's (in)actions—complicity due to financial interest, disinterest in the basic rights of a cultural minority, and even active oppression through means of physical force—do arguably very much resemble the greedy behaviour of modern for-profit corporations (such as Alton Gas) that commonly result in the suffering and displacement of those inhabiting the lands they seek to exploit. As such, and geopolitical philosophy and legal semantics[45] aside, the speaker's contextual perspective comprehensibly explains her choice of words, which might understandably bewilder the uninformed listener.

Secondly, that individual ideology—cultural, political, and linguistic—is of crucial importance to deriving the full potential meaning of the quote, in such that stark differences in respective ideologies may thus lead to starkly contrasting interpretations of the quote; depending on the listener's personal understanding of political history, their own cultural identity, and, at the very least, common use of language. The latter matters in so far as that the quote could well be understood as a mere analogy: Canada is *acting* not *like a nation*, but *like a corporation*, and justified its past despicable acts based on outdated, politically subjective claims, and its current ones on other, mostly economic grounds.[46] The more probable reaction, however, given the current and historical geopolitical reality, and particularly the common western ideologies built around it, is to instinctively disagree with the notion of Canada not, in fact, being an independent nation. This naturally goes especially for non-Indigenous Canadian citizens and residents and their cultural and political-legal perspectives, as it would invalidate at the very least their legal status as citizens of an internationally recognized country, but likely also a (potentially considerable) portion of their

[45] What exactly constitutes a *nation*, and on whose authority?
[46] This, from the perspective of a listener who views Canada as a sovereign state in the global political sphere, essentially boils down to giving the speaker the benefit of the doubt by not taking her words at full face value; considering intended comparisons are often colloquially stated as more factual sounding, indicative "is/are" statements (as opposed to "is/acts/behaves like" etc.).

own cultural identities. Conversely, however, this does certainly not categorically exclude the possibility of non-Indigenous, non-Canadian, or even Canadian listeners agreeing with the statement due to sharing the speaker's broader ideological views—be it a general disdain for nations founded on colonialism, for Canada in particular, or simply due to a lack of emotional attachment to any certain country (such as Canada) and the desire to side with the historically and presently marginalized and oppressed.

While the former, dismissive reaction to (particularly the initial half of) the quote is arguably more statistically likely, especially among primarily culturally western listeners, its respective interpretations—and thus its full meaning potential—ultimately and fundamentally hinges on any respective listener's individual ideological views, beliefs, and cultural identity.

DI:

Aside from the possible interpretation of the quote's initial phrases as an analogy (*does not act like a nation*, *is*/*acts like a corporation*), most variables of interest have but few pragmatic alternatives, and are overall unlikely to have a substantial effect on the interpretation of the quote's overall meaning compared to the impact that individual ideology and cultural identity are expected to have. Particularly when taken at face value, variants of "nation" (e.g. *country*, *state*, *society*, *people* etc.) and "corporation" (*company*, *business*, *enterprise*, *organization* etc.) either do not change the utterance's implied meaning to any significant degree, or fail to encompass the concrete political claim being made (*society* being a very gradual term that potentially encompasses many individual nations, *people* not being politically synonymous with "country," an *organization* not necessarily being for-profit etc.). Both "[we're] native" and "Indigenous" are difficult to replace pragmatically, since both are rather specific terms, and because the socio-political context referred to by the speaker is specific to her community's struggle as Indigenous people—as opposed to those struggles of other non-

white minorities present in, but not specifically indigenous to Canada/North America—as well as Indigenous people in general (as opposed to the Mi'kmaq specifically). The two closest pragmatic alternatives then lie in *Aboriginal* and *First Nations*. The former is nowadays commonly avoided and frowned upon by Indigenous communities around the world for its past use as a racial slur, and often excludes Inuit in North American contexts, and both terms specifically and legally exclude Métis and Inuit people in Canada. Lastly, *Mi'kmaw/q* offers the most speaker-specific alternative. All three terms ultimately exclude varying numbers of other Indigenous people(s) across Canada, which effectively jeopardizes any sense of commonly implied (and in this context absolutely expected) Indigenous solidarity.

Summary and predictions:

In essence, the rather unambiguous phrasing of the initial part of the utterance ("Canada is not a nation"), coupled with the (potentially) resulting conflict of interest in personal identity, would very likely cause listeners of dissenting political and cultural ideologies—and who do not interpret it as mere analogy—to disregard the statement as radically untrue (i.e., directly violating Grice's maxim of truthfulness, and thus the cooperative principle); possibly even when given access to its full situational, cultural-political, and ideological context. Given the immense importance of individual ideology for the interpretation of this quote, exchanging any of the variables of note ("nation," "corporation," "justice" etc.) is unlikely to have a significant effect on its deeply polarizing potential.

Quote 5. "Our truth is that we don't have a choice. This is who we are, and this is who we are always meant to be. It's in our DNA, it's in our blood. They cannot stop us from being Indigenous anymore. They cannot stop us from learning how to take care of the earth, what our relationship is. And they cannot stop us from teaching—not only our children, but everybody's children." (Bernard, 64m)

Data context:

Said by Dorene Bernard to the producers/film crew of the documentary at a private meeting with other Water Protectors at their "truck house" (local meeting shelter and building for land occupation under treaty rights) while discussing the nature and injustice of the conflict and protest from a legal and personal, cultural perspective.

VE:

Particularly within its greater context, the quote seems unlikely to violate any common conversational expectations concerning informativity, transparency, brevity, and truthfulness (or, at the very least, sincerity and intentionality).

AE:

Beyond the more overtly anti-racist and pro-equality sentiments entailed by the quote as a whole, the speaker implies at least three additional aspects of her cultural identity through phrasing and historical reference. Firstly, that her and her community's spiritual beliefs and self-perception as caretakers of the(ir) natural environment are as much embedded in their sense of Mi'kmaw cultural identity ("our truth is that we don't have a choice," "this is who we are always meant to be") as their natural—i.e., non-spiritually, scientifically explained—

origins as the (ab)original inhabitants of the lands they live on this day ("it's in our DNA, it's in our blood").

Secondly, that being Indigenous has historically meant (and continues to mean) suffering and hardship at the hands of those non-Indigenous ones ("they") who continuously attempted to oppress, convert, and assimilate Indigenous people (particularly children) into the larger non-Indigenous society by forceful means, such as openly racist jurisdiction, residential schools, and many other forms of social and political abuse. This shared traumatic history has not only galvanized Indigenous communities across the continent (and globe) in their fight for justice and recognition, e.g. through liberation movements focusing on mutual non-Western identity (cf. Poliandri 2007), but has also affirmed and strengthened their sense of cultural identity as Indigenous people specifically ("they cannot stop us from being Indigenous anymore").[47]

Lastly, there is the special significance of the speaker's role as a woman, which in Mi'kmaw culture specifically entails not only the role of mother and caregiver (and not just to one's own biological or adopted children), but also an obligation to teach Mi'kmaw "history, culture, language, and laws" to not only one's own tribe, but to everyone (Palmater 2013: 149; cf. Poliandri 2007). While this layer of meaning is likely to be overlooked by non-Indigenous listeners—especially in the quote's broader context of Indigenous rights and responsibility—, it is almost certainly intended by the speaker, and more likely than not transparent to Indigenous listeners and other Mi'kmaq in particular.

FS:

As described in the AE section above, the quote firstly serves as a strong statement on the social and legal treatment of Indigenous people(s) as equals to non-Indigenous people based

[47] Non-governmental and non-profit organisations such as Intercontinental Cry (intercontinentalcry.org) provide good insights into how these movements work on a global scale.

on the agreed upon rights the former, after centuries of oppression, nowadays hold ("they cannot stop us from being Indigenous anymore," "they cannot stop us from teaching"). Geographical context matters in so far as that the speaker is referring—through her individual perspective—specifically to the social-legal situation of Indigenous people(s) in Canada, although the statement's underlying message could reasonably be applied to contextually similar, but separate perspectives (e.g. Indigenous people in the US, or even outside of North America).[48] Secondly, and given the specific situational context it was made in, the quote further implies the speaker and her community's dedication to ensuring that their rights are honoured not just in theory, but in practice.[49]

Lastly, and most importantly, the quote explains the complex interplay of cultural identity, spirituality, and social purpose as the driving force behind the speaker's words, actions, and self-perception (her "[our] truth"): By embracing her cultural and ethnic heritage ("we don't have a choice," "it's in our DNA, it's in our blood"), the speaker simultaneously embraces the concomitant spiritual beliefs, which in return directly strengthen her sense of cultural identity, while justifying—if not necessitating—her personal ideologies and way of living ("this is who we are always meant to be"). The speaker's beliefs (primarily those about living in tune with nature; "learning how to take care of the earth, what our relationship is") then extend into the social realm as a perceived sense of responsibility to teach said beliefs to the non-Indigenous (i.e., spiritual 'outsiders;' "[...]teaching—not only our children, but everybody's children").[50] This, by contrast, positively reinforces the speaker's sense of cultural identity even further, while also providing a direct sense of purpose and meaning

[48] Once again, this arguably goes for many of the statements analyzed in this study, since the consequences from settler colonialism suffered by Indigenous peoples across the globe are commonly very similar.
[49] The "truck house" in which the speaker made the statement was built specifically to hinder Alton Gas—through legal land occupation under treaty rights—from working in the surrounding area.
[50] While this may at the surface seem much akin to many other religions and ideological systems, the underlying motivations are arguably very different: Where most (particularly mainstream/institutionalized) religions proselytize in an effort to convert people and to expand (or at the very least maintain) the influence said systems already have, the primary goal of teaching Indigenous perspectives is to foster intercultural understanding and, in the process, raise support for dismantling the continuous oppression that Indigenous people widely face.

from both a general as well as a specifically social perspective—which, in turn, is likely to have a similarly reinforcing effect on the speaker's spiritual beliefs.

Whether this positive feedback loop is intentionally described as such by the speaker is arguably unclear (or at the very least impossible to determine after the fact). Its pragmatic effect, however, and particularly due to the specific phrasing chosen by the speaker, is that it lends a sense of ideological conviction and, consequently, cultural 'authority' to the speaker's words that arguably leaves them difficult to judge as anything but—at the very least—fully authentic by even the most ideologically opposed or contextually unaware listener.

DI:

The length and nature of the quote results in a rather big number of potential variables, replacing most of which with their closest respective variants causes either negligible shifts in meaning (e.g., *truth* vs. *reality*/*certainty*, *meant* vs. *supposed* to be, *stop* vs. *prevent/keep*, *earth* vs. *land* etc.) or somewhat unnatural sounding language that native or otherwise highly proficient speakers would generally try to avoid (e.g., *the earth* vs. *the world*/*planet*, *take care of* vs. *preserve*/*sustain*, *children* vs. *offspring* etc.). Two variables, however, do stand out: "our DNA" and "being Indigenous."

While exchanging the former with a semantically similar scientific alternative (e.g., *our genes*/*genetic code*) would likewise result in practically identical or somewhat unnatural sounding language, *our nature* makes for an eligible variant that is, arguably, even more thematically fitting (and thus possibly perceived as even more culturally authentic). The flipside to this, however, is that it lacks the more science-oriented meaning indexed by "DNA," which—as a metaphor, but especially when taken quite literally—is essentially a

direct cultural-pragmatic step towards a more primarily science-oriented, non-Indigenous western audience.[51]

Most variants for the second variable of note ("being Indigenous") can, once again, be disregarded for reasons similar to those mentioned above (e.g., *aboriginal*, *Native American* etc.). That being said, and based on the fact that the speaker herself (as well as her community) is Indigenous, ("They cannot stop us from) *being ourselves* (anymore") is a potentially powerful pragmatic alternative that even more strongly emphasizes the historical loss of identity and selfhood of the Indigenous at the hands of the non-Indigenous across the province, country, and continent. A minor pragmatic consequence to this variant is that context and acute awareness of the speaker's cultural/ethnic identity become considerably more important for a listener's ability to grasp the utterance's full meaning, in addition to losing the direct and strong indexical effects of *Indigenous* itself.[52]

Summary and predictions:

While the quote is overall unlikely to violate any conversational expectations, cultural and, to a lesser degree, geographical context is crucial for understanding its full meaning beyond the basic advocacy of equal rights, environmentalism, and freedom to teach one's beliefs. By implying the deep interconnectedness of spirituality and broader Mi'kmaw (and other Indigenous) culture, the speaker paints a very clear image of her strong sense of cultural identity. This is only enhanced by her openly stated desire (and vocation, even) to teach her views and beliefs to the non-Indigenous as an avenue for positive social change, and in turn is—by cultural contrast to those she intends to teach—likely to not only reinforce her own

[51] This is, of course, about as generalizing as it gets. The broad assumption here is not that Mi'kmaw (and other Indigenous) culture is detached from or opposed to science, but rather that modern day Western culture and society tend to be—at least to some degree—much more connected to nature through the lens of science than that of spirituality.
[52] However, given the absolute necessity of context for understanding numerous other pragmatic elements of the full quote, I consider this more of a technical rather than an actual, practical downside.

sense of cultural identity, but also her being perceived as culturally authentic or even authoritative by contextually aware non-Indigenous listeners.

Geographical context matters for grasping the full extent of the traumatic history the speaker is referring to as a North American (and specifically Canadian) Indigenous person, as well as the impact this has had on Indigenous people's modern day sense and historical reclamation of Indigenous cultural identities across the country and continent. Lastly, despite a relatively large number of potential variables and pragmatic alternatives, only two are of noteworthy impact as far as the quote's full meaning is concerned, with said two exceptions being unlikely to change the perceived meaning of the overall quote in any considerable way.

Quote 6. "**They've never done this <u>anywheres</u> in the world before. Why do they wanna do it <u>here in little Nova Scotia?</u> Why do they wanna do it <u>in our river</u> that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, <u>where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations?</u> The <u>real public safety issue</u> is** [Alton Gas]." (Marr, 51m)

Data context:

Said by Jolene Marr to local news reporters and TV crews at a public protest (presumably in or near Stewiacke, NS).

VE:

While the dialectal "anywheres" (cf. standard English *anywhere*) might strike listeners from outside Atlantic Canada as stylistically unfamiliar or even a little odd-sounding, the quote at large is not expected to violate any conversational expectations.

AE:

The most overt example of associated meaning found in the quote lies in the aforementioned "anywheres." The specifically local realization of this variable (i.e., Atlantic Canadian vernacular English) directly indexes the speaker's social-cultural association with the geographic region and, by extension, the local population she is addressing via the local media. Whether intentionally or not, she thereby effectively signals to her (presumably mostly non-Indigenous) audience her being a fellow Maritimer, likely lending more weight to her statement through perceived local cultural credibility and authority.[53] Similarly, albeit not dialectally specific, "our little Nova Scotia" directly indexes and appeals to the (particularly in rural areas) commonly held cultural and political perception of Nova Scotia as a comparatively geographically small, culturally tight-knit, and relatively politically independent maritime province.

Lastly, and on a similar and less culturally specific note, possessive marking of public geographic places such as in "our river" (as opposed to, for example, *the river* or *the Shubenacadie river*) is a common way to contextually index personal, cultural, or historical affiliation by implying a sense of 'true belonging' to a place for reasons beyond mere legal land ownership or temporary habitation.[54]

[53] Essentially, Maritime *street cred*. This type of variable is also commonly found in Atlantic Canadian English in other related descriptors like *somewheres* and *everywheres*. Notably, however, this variable is not exclusive to the Canadian Maritimes. While generally uncommon and not widely studied to date, Pabst (2022: 109) mentions its usage in neighbouring rural Maine, and it has been anecdotally reported to me as occasionally occurring as far away as coastal British Columbia.

[54] Since Mi'kmaw features and syntactically marks inclusivity (whereas English does not), the speaker might even be intentionally and cross-linguistically ambiguous with her use of the possessive here: "our [the Mi'kmaq's] river" vs. "our [the general local population's] river". Naturally, this ambiguity—if at all intentional—is more likely than not lost on a general local audience that consists largely of non-Mi'kmaw listeners not intimately familiar with Mi'kmaw syntax. It would also not be particularly consistent with the speaker's directly expressed concern about the consequences for the broader local population that is reliant on the river's well-being, as well as commonly held beliefs in Mi'kmaw (and broader Indigenous) culture about shared responsibility for and stewardship over the natural environment (cf. e.g. Palmater 2013, 2016; Mang-Benza et al. 2021), which I assume the speaker shares.

FS:

As outlined above, and given the very specifically local context the statement was made in, the speaker addresses her local audience as not only Mi'kmaw, but also a fellow Nova Scotian. That being said, the issue's being more specifically Indigenous than broadly regional is ultimately reflected in the speaker's choice of words, too.

Both the aforementioned "our river" as well as the speaker's implication (by calling Alton Gas "the real public safety issue") that her community is the actual local public that is endangered by the company's actions can arguably be interpreted to also include other, non-Indigenous locals relying on the river's natural resources, particularly local anglers. However, the speaker's palilogical emphasis on her—specifically Indigenous—community's having lived off the land and river for "**many**, **many**, **many** generations" (as opposed to far fewer for essentially any non-Indigenous settlers) implies the real cross-cultural issue at the heart of the statement: The speaker and her community have, as Mi'kmaq, inhabited these lands for many centuries, legally own a significant, directly affected portion of it under treaty rights, and have every legal and ethical right to continue living off of the land unhindered by foreign entities intending to pollute it for their own profit.

In this sense, the speaker's foregoing of the concrete socioeconomic injustice of the situation[55] is no detriment to her cause, but helps shift the focus on the issue as a more broadly local one, and in direct favour of speaking to the mostly non-Indigenous public. Simultaneously, her emphasis on the land ownership rights of the local Indigenous (over basically anyone else) lends both a sense of local cultural authority as well as general credibility to her argument. All in all, this approach is—at least in theory—likely to inspire resistance against Alton Gas as the common adversary of not just the local Indigenous communities, but the general local populace.

[55] I.e., overt mention of the company's being non-Indigenous-owned, the Indigenous community suffering disproportionately under the proposed plans, lack of compensation, disregard of treaty rights etc.

DI:

As far as pragmatic alternatives to certain indexical variables are concerned, four in particular are of interest: "anywheres," "our little Nova Scotia," "our river," and "(for) many, many, many generations." As described above, the added associated (and implied) meaning of each would, if replaced by another variant, be lost to varying degrees; in some cases entirely.

"Anywheres" is a strong, recognizable index of local cultural (i.e., general Maritime) belonging that is unlikely to be perceived as considerably negative by any non-local listeners. Naturally close alternatives (e.g. *anywhere*, *any other place*) would succeed in expressing the utterance's same overall sentiment, but fall short of conveying the underlying sense of personal cultural involvement of the speaker. Similarly, "our little Nova Scotia" and "our river" invoke associations of community and belonging that viable alternatives (e.g. *our (little) province*, *our region*, *our little corner of the Earth*; *the river*, *the Shubenacadie* etc.) would most likely fail to convey as effectively.

Lastly, most realistic alternatives to "(for) many, many, many generations" (e.g. *for many generations*, *for a long(, long) time*, *for ages*, *for (many) centuries* etc.) either lack the strong emphasis inherent to the original viable, or fail to entail both its temporal ('we have lived here for a very long time') and its communal aspect ('generation after generation we persist together, as a community'). One possible and indexically powerful exception to this can be found in *since time immemorial*, a phrase commonly used not just in reference to Indigenous history in general, but specifically in legal contexts concerning Indigenous landownership.[56]

[56] In particular, see Weir (2013) for a fascinating and in-depth analysis of the term and differences in Indigenous and non-Indigenous conceptualization of history and time on the basis of three Canadian court cases.

Summary and predictions:

By combining both regional dialect as well as general language that invokes a sense of shared community among local listeners both Indigenous and non-Indigenous with rhetoric that emphasizes the speaker and her community's strong sense of cultural identity and resulting authority on the matter, the quote makes—by all theoretical accounts—for an effective cross-cultural rallying cry in favour of the speaker's cause.

Given the vernacular and type of rhetoric employed by the speaker, both geographical and cultural context likely matter considerably with regard to the quote's more strongly indexed bits. While exchanging any of the noteworthy variables in question with a respective pragmatic alternative would have minimal effect on the statement's basic entailed meaning ('we are being treated unjustly by an exploitative outsider, and need to stand up for ourselves and fight'), the cultural and community-focused associated meaning added by these variables would be affected rather drastically, potentially resulting in a much less regionally specific and, ultimately, convincing message conveyed to local listeners in particular.

Summarized predictions and survey implementation

As mentioned in chapter 2, there are two central factors to the SPF—and, subsequently, the predictions derived through it—concerning the making and interpreting of sociopragmatic meaning that the survey focuses on: the degree of access to information about both the speaker (their cultural identity and background, their linguistic ideology etc.) and the geographical, historical, and general context an utterance was made in, as well as the impact of sociolinguistic variables within said utterance (if present). An argument can be made for a third crucial factor: degree of access to the full content of an utterance or, put simply, if a given listener is presented with a full vs. only a partial utterance. While this dimension was originally to also be included in the survey—as it was in the above SPF analysis—, this idea

was ultimately dropped due to risk of over-complication and, more importantly, limited explanatory power to begin with.[57] In the end, four of the analyzed quotes were picked to have their respective predictions be tested through the survey, with two of them focused primarily on testing the predicted impact of contextual information, and the other two mainly concerned with the predicted effects of sociolinguistic variables.[58]

In the following, I will go through the quotes and questions in the order they are presented in the survey, starting with the original (i.e., unaltered) parts of each quote that were chosen to be displayed in the survey. This is then followed by a brief summary of the SPF predictions made for each quote, the primary factor of interest (impact of contextual information vs. indexical variables), as well as the questions and actual presentation of the quotes needed to test these things in the two-condition format originally described in chapter 2. Alterations to variables or general phrasing in the final quote presented in the survey are marked *italic*. Parts of the quote not revealed initially (i.e., during part 1 of a question) are <u>underlined</u>. If not indicated otherwise, the standard response options given to participants for each question include "strongly agree," "somewhat agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "somewhat disagree," and "strongly disagree."

1. **"I just hope that people will realize that we're not doing these things to be troublemakers and to cause everybody grief. We're doing it because we need a future. […] We need to be connected to the land. We need to have sustainable environment for our kids. For our kids' kids. And we do it because we're meant to be here and do this."**

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[57] In the sense that partial perception and interpretation almost always results in an increased potential for misunderstandings and misinterpretation due to the very nature of information itself, which neither concerns the SPF's technical abilities nor the influence of cultural identity specifically. Over-complication of the survey would likely have arisen from the fact that withholding certain parts of some quotes was inherently necessary in order not to give away certain contextual information, the impact if which was to be tested with a specific question. In other words: testing both dimensions in the context of a single quote would, in many cases, have been highly practically unfeasible.

[58] Please note that, for the methodological reasons explained in chapter 2, the order of quotes presented in the survey does not correlate with the order of quotes throughout the SPF analysis. While this should ideally not lead to confusion for you, the reader, this switch-up is ultimately not important, as each quote and its respective questions (and the predictions the latter were based on) form their own self-contained unit within the survey.

Going by the SPF's predictions, contextual information about the speaker and her community's circumstances are by far the most important aspect in conveying the full social significance of the utterance and the very real threat of cultural erosion referred to in it. Tying into this is the huge spiritual importance of the local environment to the speaker, the loss of which would likely entail much more than a simple requirement to physically move elsewhere, and the restoration of which is thus of both practical physical (i.e., health wise) *and* cultural importance to the speaker and her community. To test the importance of context as predicted, no contextual information about the speaker's cultural identity and background will be given initially, and slight alterations to her phrasing will be made in order to inquire about the perceived importance of spirituality (and, in turn, culture) to the speaker.

Part 1:

> Carefully read the following quote and context and intuitively answer the questions below based on what you are presented with.
>
> This quote is from a member of a community threatened by heavy water and soil pollution, causing widespread illness and limited access to vital natural resources:
>
> **"I just hope that people will realize that we're not doing these things to be troublemakers and to cause everybody grief. We're doing it because we need a future. We need to be *in touch with the environment*. We need to have sustainable environment for our kids. For our kids' kids."**
>
> **Question 1:**
>
> > Without any additional context, do you believe the speaker is worried about their community's loss of shared culture due to the environmental circumstances?
>
> **Question 2:**
>
> > Do you think the speaker argues, at least in part, based on personal spiritual grounds?

Part 2:

Now, read the quote below in its original form with more added context, and once again answer the questions that follow based on your intuition and the additional information you are given:

"I just hope that people will realize that we're not doing these things to be troublemakers and to cause everybody grief. We're doing it because we need a future. We need to be connected to the land. We need to have sustainable environment for our kids. For our kids' kids. And we do it because we're meant to be here and do this."

The quoted speaker is an Indigenous woman from a small Mi'kmaw community in Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Question 1:

With the additional context given, do you believe the speaker is worried about her community's loss of culture due to the environmental circumstances?

Question 2:

Do you think the speaker argues, at least in part, based on personal spiritual grounds?

2. **"Canada is not a nation, let's get that straight. It's a corporation. You know, doctrine of discovery. They didn't discover nothin'. And each and every time we ask them, 'Well, give us the proof,' they can't show us no proof. This is why we never get justice in this system. Because we're native. Because we're Indigenous."**

The main focus of the analysis was on the potentially deeply polarizing nature of the quote's initial statement (concerning Canada's not being a nation, but a corporation). The central prediction made is that, due to the quote's overall and far-reaching implications, Grice's cooperative principle—more precisely, the maxim of truthfulness—is likely to be perceived as violated, which even full access to conversational, cultural, and historical context should have relatively little impact on. To test this, the quote's core statement ("Canada is not a nation") will first be presented without any context or explanation, and then once more with not only the full quote and speaker's justification for the statement revealed, but additionally

a short explanation of the sociopolitical and historical references the speaker is making in her statement.

Part 1:

Read the following quote carefully, consider its implications, and answer the questions below based on what you are presented with.

"Canada is not a nation, let's get that straight. It's a corporation."

Question 1:

Overall, do you agree with the speaker's statement?

Part 2:

Once again, what follows is the quote in its original, unabridged form, with some added context. Read both carefully and answer the question that follows based on your personal intuition.

"Canada is not a nation, let's get that straight. It's a corporation. <u>You know, doctrine of discovery. They didn't discover nothin'. And each and every time we ask them, 'Well, give us the proof,' they can't show us no proof. This is why we never get justice in this system. Because we're native. Because we're Indigenous.</u>"

The quote above is from an Indigenous woman and environmental activist fighting against government-supported mining plans of a large natural gas producer. The planned mining operation poses a severe environmental risk to the nearby Shubenacadie river, its ecosystem, and the surrounding (primarily—but not exclusively—Indigenous) communities that rely on it. While the land the company plans to build on is privately owned, the surrounding lands are legally owned and protected by the Indigenous communities under Canadian treaty rights. The Doctrine of Discovery referred to by the speaker is a widely disputed interpretation of international law historically used by European (and later American) settlers to justify and direct colonization of overseas territories.

While the political implications may naturally seem a little daunting, remember that for the purpose of this survey there is no right or wrong way to answer.

Question 2:

Given the additional context and rest of the quote, and once again carefully considering its entire implications: Do you overall agree with the speaker's statement?

3. **“We’re gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We’re not gonna stop. Mark my words, Alton Gas [...], you’re not gonna be successful.”**

The quote’s central element of interest is the sociolinguistic variable “sacred.” While the North American Indigenous context is assumed to be crucial for the full social meaning of the utterance due to the culturally rather unspecific nature of the variable (“sacred” being a term that used in a de facto rather general religious or spiritual sense), the purpose of the survey implementation will be to test whether the use of the variable actually conveys the speaker’s sense of religious motivation in the first place and, more importantly, her deeply personal involvement in the cause and stance against her community’s political adversary (Alton Gas). As there are several viable pragmatic alternatives for the variable, an additional question is posed to investigate the participants’ interpretation of “the sacred” versus one closely and one less closely related variable (“this land” and “the environment” respectively). For this last question, the participants are given the cultural and political context necessary to better understand the speaker’s actual cause, situation, and—to a degree—cultural identity.

Part 1:

Read the following quote and answer the questions based on your intuition and what you are presented with.

The following quote was uttered in the context of a protest of local environmentalists against the environmentally hazardous plans of a large fossil fuel company:

“We’re gonna always stand and protect *the environment*. We’re not gonna stop. Mark my words, you’re not gonna be successful.”

Question 1:

Do you believe the speaker acts, at least in part, out of spiritual/religious conviction?

Question 2:

From a cultural perspective, do you think the speaker feels personally disrespected by their addressee?

Part 2:

Now, read this slightly altered version of the quote and intuitively answer the same questions once more, based simply on what you see. Have your impressions changed or do they remain similar?

"We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, you're not gonna be successful."

Question 1:

Do you believe the speaker acts, at least in part, out of spiritual/religious conviction?

Question 2:

Do you think the speaker feels culturally disrespected by their addressee?

Part 3:

Lastly, consider this: The speaker of the previous quote is an Indigenous person fighting to protect the environment and land they and their local community are situated on. Generally speaking, honouring and preserving the natural environment is of great spiritual importance to the Mi'kmaw, and arguably a cornerstone of Mi'kmaw (as well as other Indigenous) culture(s).

Based on this additional information, consider the three following versions of the quote you read above and indicate which one you think is most likely to accurately convey the personal and cultural importance of the cause to the speaker:

a. **"We're gonna always stand and protect the environment. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, you're not gonna be successful."**

b. **"We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, you're not gonna be successful."**

c. **"We're gonna always stand and protect this land. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, you're not gonna be successful."**

4. **“They’ve never done this anywheres in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in little Nova Scotia? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations? The real public safety issue is Alton Gas**.”

The final quote translated into the survey contained both regionally and culturally coded variables (“anywheres,” “little Nova Scotia;” “our community members,” “many, many, many generations”), and as such provided a more layered example of how cultural identity can influence word choice simultaneously in multiple ways. The analysis’ main takeaway is that the speaker addresses her audience as both a Mi’kmaw and a local Nova Scotian, primarily intending to appeal to her fellow East Coasters’ sense of provincial community and kinship—whilst also emphasizing the particular kind of injustice she and her immediate community are facing as the original inhabitants of the land. The predictions derived from this say that exchanging any of the variables is unlikely to alter the quote’s overall meaning and message, but highly likely to greatly diminish personal and culturally two-sided nature of the statement, as well as its persuasive power in a local (i.e., Nova Scotian/Atlantic Canadian) context.

Since the majority of the audience is not expected to be from Atlantic Canada specifically, and since there is no practical way for this to be tested in an anonymous survey the first place, the investigative focus of the questions will instead lie on the perceived “localness” of the speaker’s address, and whether her use of variables at all indicates a culturally two-sided rhetoric as much as the SPF analysis suggests.

Part 1:

Once more, read the following quote and answer the questions that follow based on your gut feeling.

Similarly to one of the previous quotes, the statement was made in the context of the speaker's local environment being threatened by the proposed actions of a large non-local mining corporation:

"They've never done this *anywhere else* in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in *our province*? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for *so long*? The real public safety issue is *them*."

Question 1:

Do you think the speaker is addressing a strictly local audience rather than a broader, more general one (including non-locals)?

Question 2:

Do you believe the speaker speaks on behalf of a larger, regional group of people (as opposed to only a small, very local group of residents)?

Part 2:

As before, the previous quote is shown in its original version below. Read it again and, taking into consideration the differences, answer the questions based on your first impression and instinct.

"They've never done this anywheres in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in little Nova Scotia? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations? The real public safety issue is them."

Question 1:

Do you believe the speaker is addressing a strictly local audience (rather than a broader, e.g. national one)?

Question 2:

Do you think the speaker speaks on behalf of a larger, regional group of people, as opposed to only their own local community?

Part 3:

The quote you read was, once again, made by a Mi'kmaw woman protesting plans posing a serious environmental threat to the river that her and other nearby Indigenous, mixed, and non-Indigenous communities alike are reliant on. *Anywheres* (as well as other, related words such as *somewheres*) is a common dialectal form found all across the Canadian mainland Atlantic provinces. With this additional information in mind, carefully read the full quote once more and answer one final question based on your overall impression of the speaker's choice of words:

"They've never done this anywheres in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in little Nova Scotia? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations? The real public safety issue is them."

Question 3:

Imagine hearing the quote in its immediate original context (e.g. on TV or on the radio). Do you consider the speaker talking to you about their cause primarily as a (fellow) Nova Scotian, a local Indigenous person, both equally, or neither?

mainly Nova Scotian **more Nova Scotian** **equal parts both**

mainly Indigenous **more Indigenous** **neither**

4. Analysis, part II: Survey

Overview and general statistics

The survey, published and hosted online via Qualtrics, recorded a sum total of 177 participants over its 21 days of public accessibility between July 18th to August 8th 2023. 171 of these participants submitted actual data (i.e., answered at least one of the two optional demographic questions about age and gender identity). In terms of usable data, 148 of the original 177 participants answered one or more non-demographic (i.e., content-featuring) questions, with 123 participants responding to all 16 questions. To account for this discrepancy, and to make results more easily comparable in light of the relatively low number of participants overall, response data will mostly be displayed in percentages instead of absolute numbers.

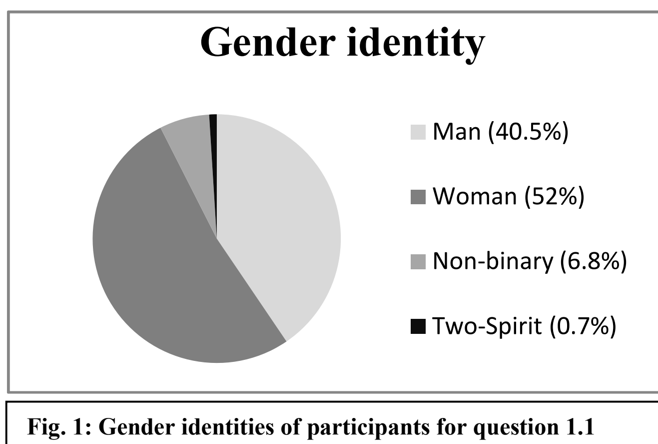

Fig. 1: Gender identities of participants for question 1.1

Fig. 1 shows that of the 148 participants having answered at least one non-demographic question, about 52% self-identified as women, about 41% as men, and about 7% as either non-binary or (in a single case) two-spirit. This initial ration held up despite the "loss" of approximately 1/6 of participants over the course of the survey, with the final question's ratio being essentially identical (<1% difference for women/men, none for non-binary and 2S). Overall, more than 60% of participants were between the ages of 18-36, with the rest being 37-70+ (cf. fig. 2). Of said rest, about half (22% of all participants) were between the ages of 48 and 60 specifically. As with the data on gender identity, the spread across age groups remained largely identical throughout the survey, with only the 49-54 bracket experiencing a slightly larger than average loss.

As far as analytically valuable results go, the survey performed somewhat mixed, but overall reasonably well: More than half of the 9 items analyzed (7 paired questions, 2 single/unpaired questions; see below) offered data that clearly confirmed or contradicted the predictions that informed the questions, and data from two items indicated at least a vague confirmation and contradiction of their respective predictions. Lastly, data derived from two other items was largely inconclusive with regard to the underlying predictions.

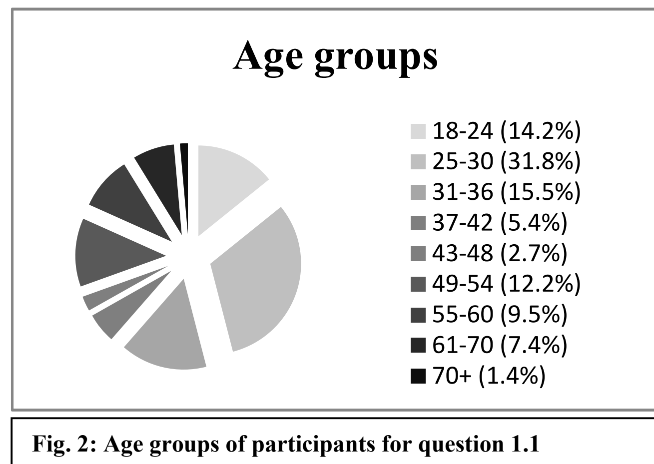

Fig. 2: Age groups of participants for question 1.1

Survey analysis

What follows is a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of the survey results and their implications: a qualitative evaluation concerning the predictions made by the SPF—as well as the questions used to test them—by means of the statistical insights gleaned from the quantitative analysis of the raw survey data. This is done in the same order of questions presented in the survey, with paired questions treated as a single item for analysis, differentiated by their respective conditions (see below). For simplicity's sake, the sections will simply be named **Quote 1-4**, with questions being numbered accordingly (e.g., 1.1 etc.).

As laid out in chapters 2 and 3, the distribution of most survey questions followed a two-round arrangement in which each basic question was posed twice (hence "paired" questions) under two sets of conditions differentiated by at least one independent variable. Depending on the question, these variables are: the exchange of the original variant of a sociolinguistic variable (SLV) for a pragmatic alternative, lexical alterations to a presented quote (i.e., not providing the full quote or making lexical changes to parts not considered

SLVs), and the providing of cultural, political, historical, and/or linguistic context necessary to understand certain implications of the respective quote a question refers to. In many cases, and at times due to technical necessity, several variables apply to the conditions of a given question.

For the following analysis, for each "paired" question, condition 1 (**C1**) will refer to the initial circumstances under which each respective question was first posed, whereas condition 2 (**C2**) refers to the contrasting circumstances under which each question was posed for the second time. Generally speaking, condition 1 includes the deliberate exchange of sociolinguistic variants (SLV), lexical alterations of the quote (e.g., omitting specific parts of the quote or only presenting a single section), and providing no or extremely basic social context only. Condition 2 generally implies the use of the original, unabridged and unaltered quote, with as much context provided as is deemed necessary to grasp its full pragmatic implications as per the underlying SPF analysis. The specific independent variables that inform the conditions of each question are stated in detail in the section on survey implementation in chapter 3 (p.50ff), but can more broadly be gathered from tab. 1 below:

Question(s)	Independent variable(s)	Respect. implications for predictions
1.1, 1.2	Altered SLV, omission of quote content, elaboration on social context	Clear general confirmation (both)
2	Omission of quote content, elaboration on social context and terminology	Clear general contradiction
3.1, 3.2	1 altered SLV	Clear specific confirmation concerning the tested SLV (3.1); inconclusive (3.2)
3.3	Elaboration on social context (single question; no contrasting condition)	Inconclusive, possibly contradicting
4.1, 4.2	3 altered SLVs	Vague general confirmation (4.1); mostly inconclusive (4.2)
4.3	Elaboration on social and linguistic context and terminology (single question; no contrasting condition)	Clear general confirmation

Tab. 1: Overview of types of independent variables for questions and summarized implications for SPF

Quote 1[59]

Question 1.1:

Do you believe the speaker is worried about their community's loss of shared culture due to the environmental circumstances?

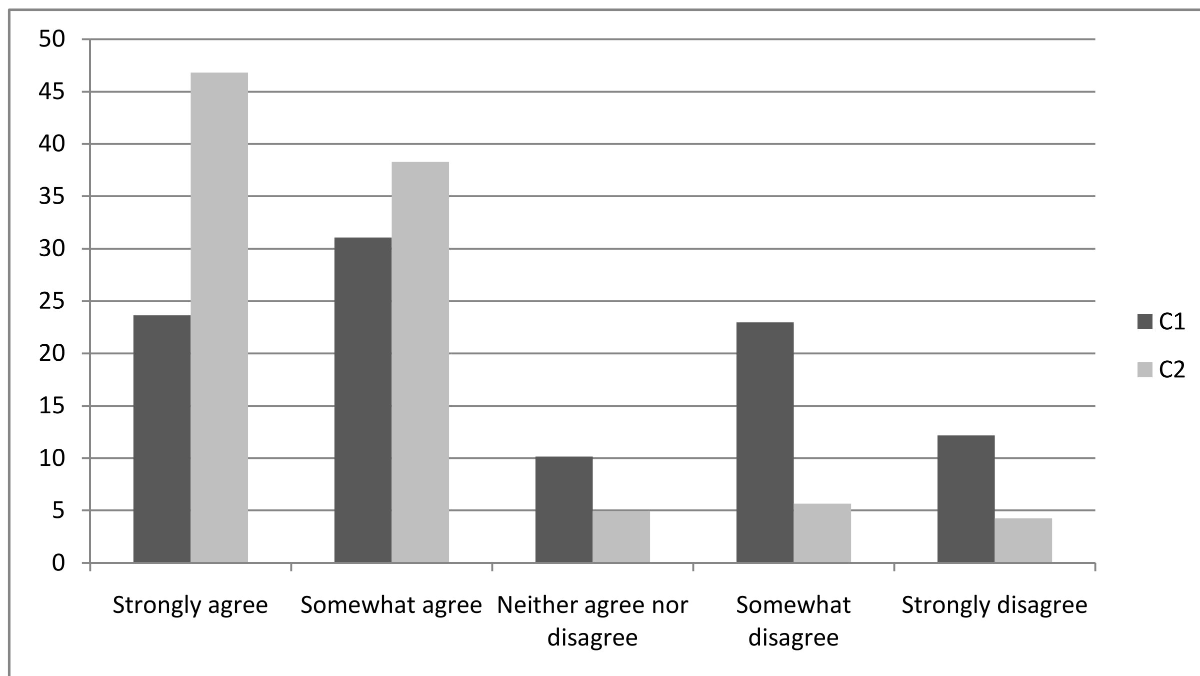

Fig. 3: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 1.1 (percentages of total responses)

The question results in fig. 3 show a notable shift in perception towards the speaker's motivations of communal self-defense and fear of cultural erosion. While general agreement was relatively high under condition 1 (black), neutral and negative responses (particular "somewhat disagree") shrunk considerably after some minor context and the original phrasing were provided. Additionally, strong agreement nearly

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	148	141	-4.72%
Strongly agree:	23.65%	46.81%	+97.92%
Somewhat agree:	31.08%	38.3%	+23.23%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	10.14%	4.96%	-52.08%
Somewhat disagree	22.97%	5.67%	-75.32%
Strongly disagree	12.16%	4.26%	-64.97%

Tab. 2: Statistical comparison of response data for question 1.1

[59] "I just hope that people will realize that we're not doing these things to be troublemakers and to cause everybody grief. We're doing it because we need a future. […] We need to be connected to the land. We need to have sustainable environment for our kids. For our kids' kids. And we do it because we're meant to be here and do this."

doubled. While the SPF prediction for this quote was mainly (but not exclusively) concerned with the importance of socio-cultural context—rather than specific linguistic variables, and with the alterations to the original phrasing necessary in order to enable question 1.2 (cf. fig. 4 & tab. 3)—, the results can arguably still be considered a clear general confirmation of said predictions. Demographic analysis indicates a slightly stronger shift from general disagreement[60] to strong agreement among women compared to other categories, however not to any statistically noteworthy degree (**Δ** <10%).

On a more general note which applies to the above and most of the upcoming analyses, one representational aspect should generally be taken with a grain of salt: the necessary, but ultimately somewhat misleading percentage-based presentation of statistical differences between question responses (represented by **Δ** in the stat tables, e.g. tab. 2). While this value is arguably very helpful to make the overall comparison of results between question conditions easier at a glance, it should mainly be seen as a trend indicator rather than a concrete, practically meaningful number. Given the nature of percentages, positive statistical values for **Δ** (i.e., an increase in responses for a given category value compared to response numbers for the same value in the respective previous question) can and often do far exceed 100%, indicating a two- or higher-fold increase in responses for a respective category value. In contrast, negative values for **Δ** will always fall between 0 and 100%, as a theoretical 100% decrease indicates a total lack of responses for a respective category value.[61] Due to the at times low number of responses for specific category values, even minor statistical changes (in absolute terms) can result in very big—and, potentially, somewhat misleading—**Δ** values:

[60] "General (dis)agreement" simply referring to the combined sum of "strong" and "somewhat" responses within a given category (i.e., "strongly agree" & "somewhat agree" and "strongly disagree" & "somewhat disagree").

[61] Put simply: A **Δ** of +250% indicates that 2.5x as many people voted for a category value **in addition to the original number of votes** (i.e., 100% + 250% = 350% of the original number of responses). Or, in terms of how the statistical data is presented in the analysis: If 10 out of 100 respondents (10%) choose a certain value during round 1 of a question, and said value experiences a **Δ** of +250%, then the statistical difference in responses between rounds is 10 vs. 35 (out of 100), or 10% vs. 35%. Conversely, a **Δ** of -50% means only half as many people chose the same value during round 2 compared to the original number (i.e., 100% - 50% = 50%).

A change from 2 to 6 votes for any given category value (out of 100 question responses in total) is represented as a +200% increase for said value, when the absolute increase (with respect to all responses recorded for that question) is only +4% (2/100 → 6/100). For this reason, and particularly in the case of exceedingly large **Δ** values, it is generally advised to simply compare the data sets of each question directly rather than solely relying on **Δ**.

Question 1.2:

Do you think the speaker argues, at least in part, based on personal spiritual grounds?

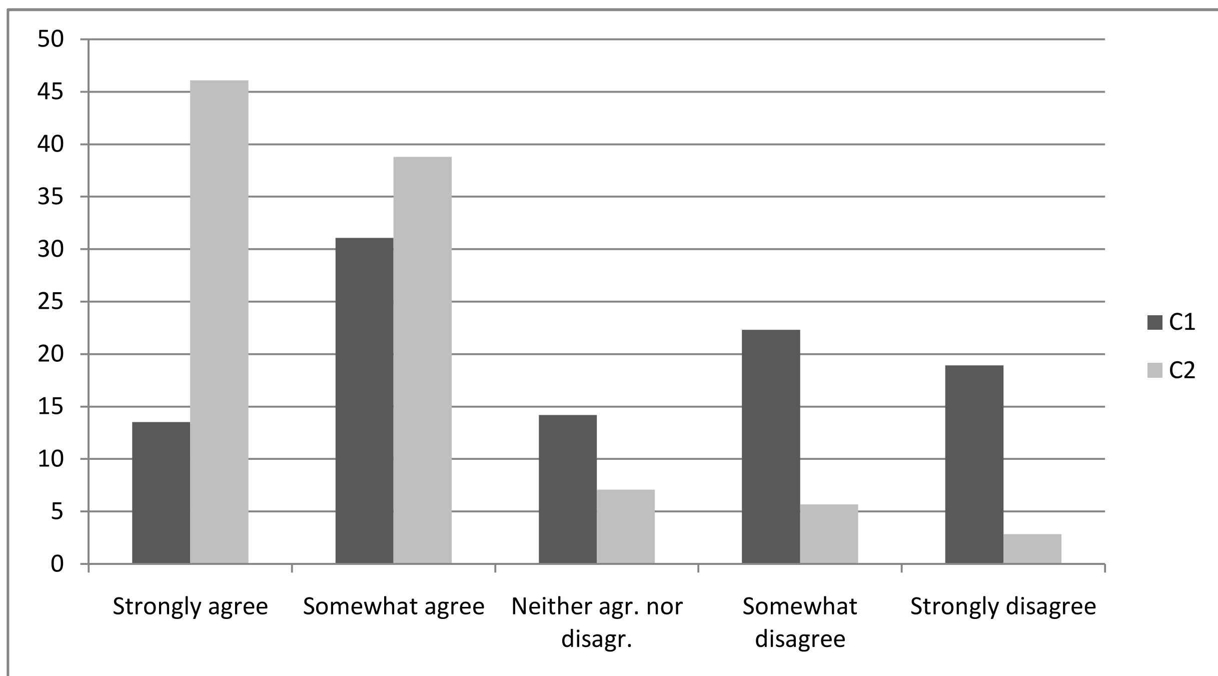

Fig. 4: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 1.2 (percentages of total responses)

Most notably, the results show an extreme increase in strong agreement. This, in addition to a smaller increase in partial agreement (which was comparatively high from the beginning) and, more importantly, a major decrease—50-85% respectively—in both neutral responses and general disagreement, indicates a clear positive shift in the interpretation of the spiritual motivations of the speaker by survey participants after the addition of cultural context and providing the original phrasing. Once again, it is safest to assume that both context and access to the unaltered (and clearly spiritually associated) phrasing are the cause of this shift. Overall, while once more somewhat lacking in specificity, the results can still be seen as a general confirmation of the predictions offered by the SPF.

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	148	141	-4.72%
Strongly agree:	13.51%	46.1%	+241.2%
Somewhat agree:	31.08%	38.3%	+23.23%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	14.19%	7.09%	-50.04%
Somewhat disagree	22.30%	5.67%	-74.57%
Strongly disagree	18.92%	2.84%	-84.99%

Tab. 3: Statistical comparison of response data for question 1.2

Quote 2[62]

Question 2:

Overall, do you agree with the speaker's statement?

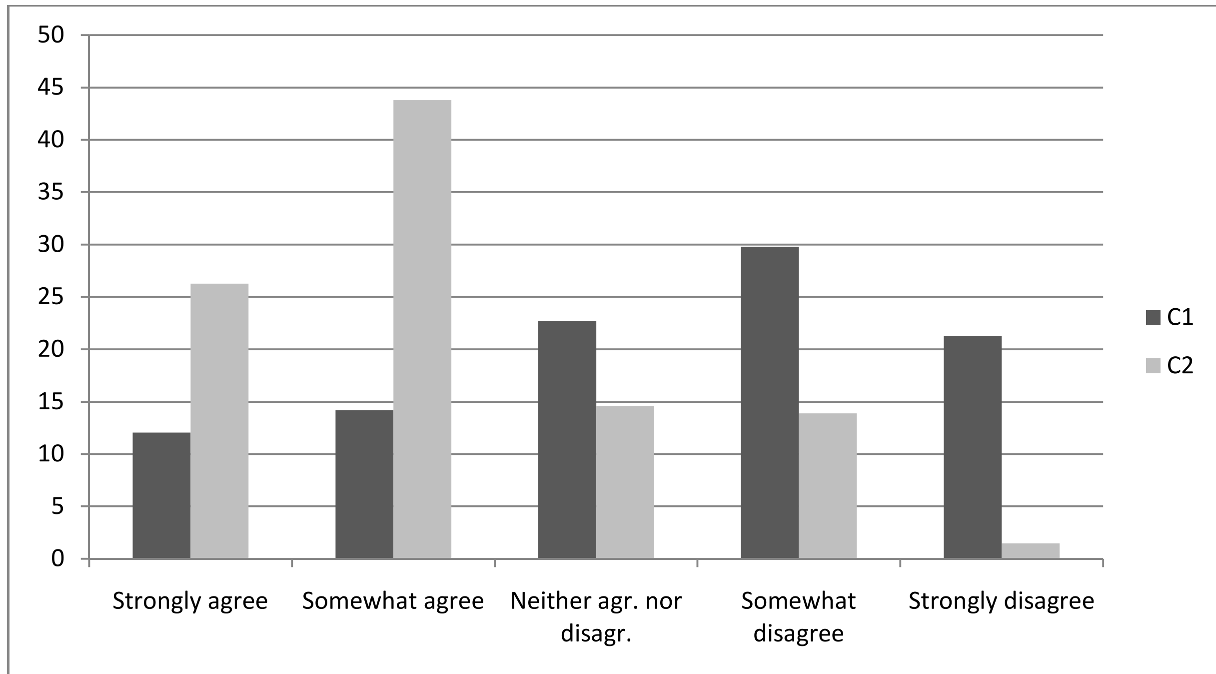

Fig. 5: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 2 (percentages of total responses)

The results show (fig. 5) a stark shift in opinion from neutrality and general disagreement to strong and, primarily, partial agreement, notably with a decline in strong disagreement of over 93%. This shift in interpretation is surprising in so far as that it clearly contradicts the predictions made via the SPF: that, due to the statement's far-reaching implications, even the provision of situational, political, and historical context would likely not have any significant impact on its being perceived as—in one way

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	141	137	-2.84%
Strongly agree:	12.06%	26.28%	+117.91%
Somewhat agree:	14.01%	43.8%	+208.89%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	22.7%	14.6%	-35.68%
Somewhat disagree	29.79%	13.87%	-53.44%
Strongly disagree	21.28%	1.46%	-93.07%

Tab. 4: Statistical comparison of response data for question 2

[62] "Canada is not a nation, let's get that straight. It's a corporation. You know, doctrine of discovery. They didn't discover nothin'. And each and every time we ask them, 'Well, give us the proof,' they can't show us no proof. This is why we never get justice in this system. Because we're native. Because we're Indigenous."

or another—fundamentally untrue. This was clearly not the case, as the extensive addition of such context for condition 2 appears to have had the exact opposite effect. Arguably the most likely explanation for this is that the additionally provided context simply allowed for the interpretation of the phrase as (partially) metaphorical, making it much more broadly agreeable. For the sake of thoroughness, however, let us look at several other potential reasons for these unexpected results, most of which seem plausible if difficult to confirm, but, as I will argue below, do offer good insight into the limitations of the survey.

Firstly, the fact that the setting and format in which this question was asked: an online survey that is both practically (concerning the process of anonymous online participation) and individually (with respect to its concrete tie-in into any given participant's own life) mostly removed from reality. While this kind of setting is conceivably preferable for gathering opinions and perceptions in a relatively "neutral" way—by offering participants a low/no-risk environment in which it is easy to empathize and agree with statements whose actual implications would, for many, not otherwise be so readily agreeable in "social reality"—research both dated and more recent on conditions of anonymity does not necessarily support this conclusion (cf. Pearlin 1961, Murdoch et al. 2014). As such, this is a rather unlikely explanation for the observed results.

In a more everyday attitudinal sense, and despite concrete instructions to be aware of this potential pitfall, the setting might lead survey takers to not *actually* logically think through *all* the relevant practical implications of a given statement (i.e., what constitutes nationhood, who determines the decisive factors for this, what landownership means etc.).[63] Conversely, this also relates back to a previous disclaimer about practical limitations of and necessary precautions about the use of the SPF: the ease with which in-depth linguistic

[63] This is by no means a criticism of the average survey participant. Having been in a similar position countless times in my life, I am well aware of the very casual mindset with which these things are usually approached—especially in anonymous, possibly even recreational cases of survey taking.

analysis can quickly go far beyond ordinary interpretation of language; particularly in an everyday, non-argumentative context.

Lastly, and somewhat akin to the metaphor explanation, it is entirely possible that the speaker's full argument, as well as added context and historical explanations, fostered genuine empathy and understanding among many participants for her and her people's situation, to the point of—at least within the context of the survey—genuinely disagreeing with the notion of Canada (be it specifically, or alongside other colonially created states, or, again, even just metaphorically) being a nation in the sense that has been widely legally agreed upon in global politics for most of modern history. In other words: that the *cooperative principle* was perhaps not actually violated or perceived as such, because the speaker's words were perceived as the radical—but ultimately subjective—opinion that they are, based on a comprehensible, well laid-out, and logically sound argument.

As far as demographic cross-analysis is concerned, the data showed two things in particular: a significantly higher amount of initial general agreement among 18-30 year-olds, as well as a substantial difference in the respective opinion shift of men and women for "somewhat disagree" (with women showing a 3 times higher relative decrease compared to men, implying an overall greater statistical shift from disagreement in women relative to men). Whether the latter could to some degree be influenced by the reveal of the speaker's gender is—given relatively low number of responses—questionable, however not entirely implausible. In the end, and whatever the actual reason(s) may be, this clear contradiction of the predictions made via the SPF poses a stark reminder of the actual complex interplay between political language, framing effects, and the interpretation of social issues in theoretical, virtual, and practical contexts.

Quote 3[64]

Question 3.1:

Do you believe the speaker acts, at least in part, out of spiritual/religious conviction?

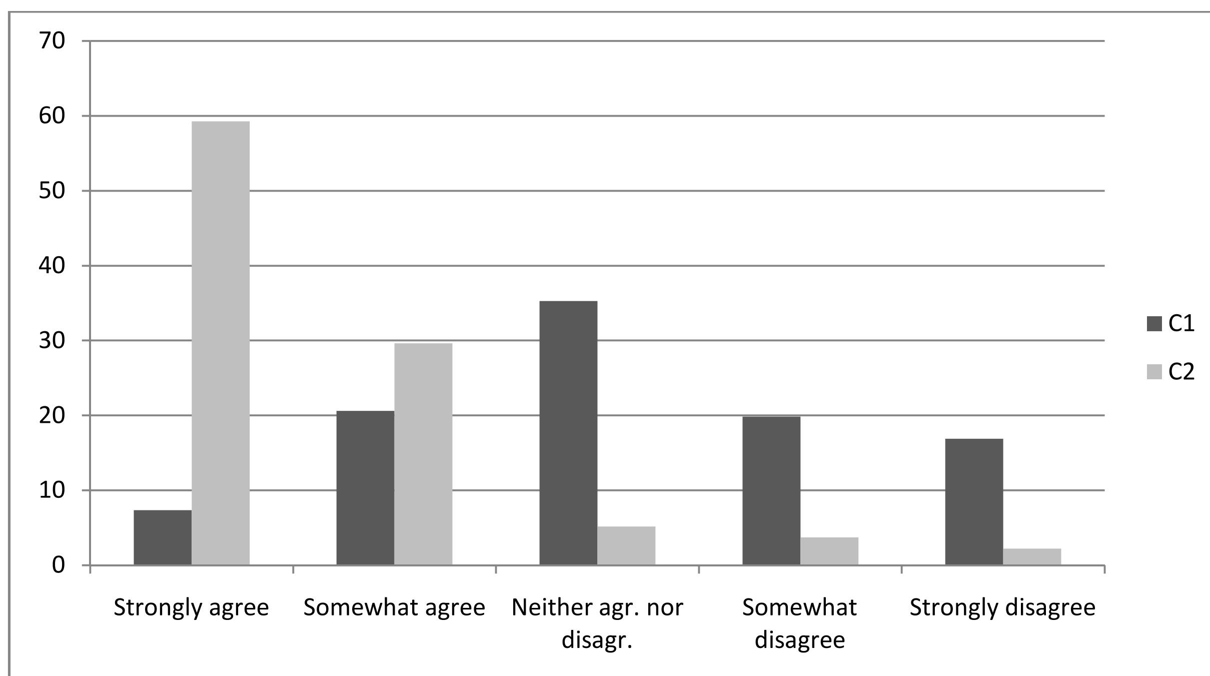

Fig. 6: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 3.1 (percentages of total responses)

As a question designed to test for a specific sociolinguistic variable ("the sacred"), the importance of basic context—which was provided—was assumed. The results (fig 6.) show a staggering increase in strong agreement of over 700%, in addition to a minor additional increase in partial agreement and significant decreases in neutral and negatively correlated responses (81-86%) across the board. This data indicates a definite shift in interpretation (within context) of the speaker's personal spiritual

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	136	135	-0.74%
Strongly agree:	7.35%	59.26%	+706.26%
Somewhat agree:	20.59%	29.63%	+43.9%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	35.29%	5.19%	-85.29%
Somewhat disagree	19.85%	3.7%	-81.36%
Strongly disagree	16.91%	2.22%	-86.87%

Tab. 5: Statistical comparison of response data for question 3.1

[64] "We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. We're not gonna stop. Mark my words, Alton Gas [...], you're not gonna be successful."

motivations, indexed through the tested variable. Overall, these results can be understood as a clear and specific confirmation of the predictions made through the SPF analysis of the utterance. While the question did not address the potential importance of other, similarly indexical pragmatic alternatives, this is partially addressed in question 3.3. Lastly, demographic cross-analysis indicated considerably higher initial agreement (both strong and partial) in women vs. in men.

Question 3.2:

From a cultural perspective, do you think the speaker feels personally disrespected by their addressee?

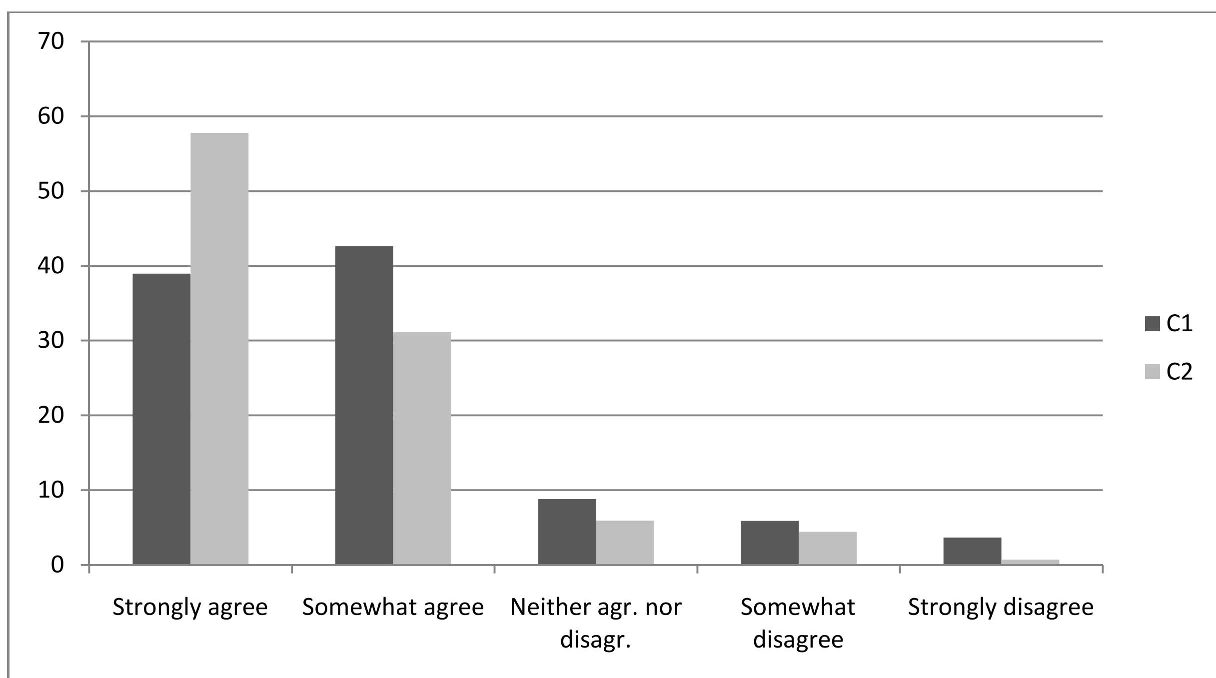

Fig. 7: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 3.2 (percentages of total responses)

The results (fig. 7) show a considerable increase in strong agreement (48%) as the result of overall decreases in each of the other response categories. However, initial general agreement was already significant to begin with, and, in absolute terms, only increased marginally after the changing of the variable (~81.6 → ~88.9%). A possible explanation for this is that, rather than a single indexical variable ("the sacred"), the overall and fundamentally combative-

aggressive and unrelenting nature of the quote has a much larger effect on the perceived “personalness” and sense of cultural self-defense the speaker means to convey. Ultimately, while the general trend and notable increase in strong agreement stand in favour of the underlying predictions, the results are rather statistically weak and should at best be considered inconclusive. Demographic cross-analysis revealed no clear statistical outliers.

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	136	135	-0.74%
Strongly agree:	38.97%	57.78%	+48.27%
Somewhat agree:	42.65%	31.11%	-27.06%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	8.82%	5.93%	-32.77%
Somewhat disagree	5.88%	4.44%	-24.49%
Strongly disagree	3.68%	0.74%	-79.89%

Tab. 6 Statistical comparison of response data for question 3.2

Question 3.3:

Consider the three following versions of the quote you read above and indicate which one you think is most likely to accurately convey the personal and cultural importance of the cause to the speaker.[65]

As predicted, “the environment” was overall not widely perceived as a variant that accurately expresses the speaker’s spiritual motivations and personal cultural affectedness. Surprisingly, however, this is not at all the case for “this land,” which, as a variant that is more closely indexically related to the original variant “the sacred,” managed to even surpass the latter by almost 4% (cf. fig. 8). This is interesting

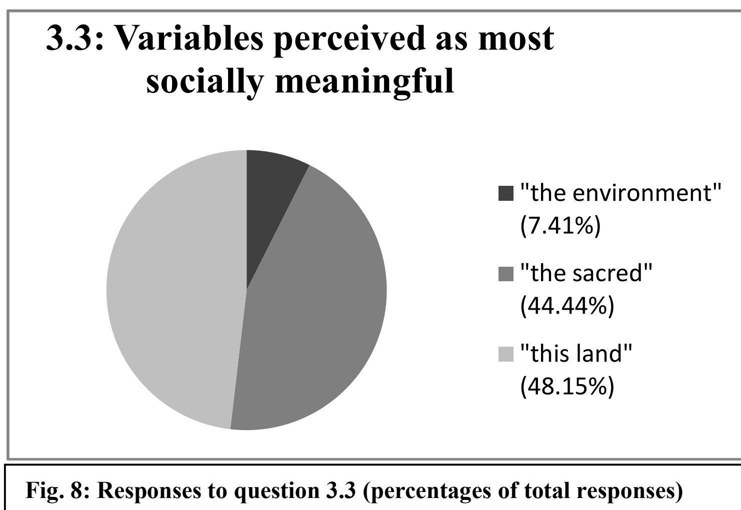

Fig. 8: Responses to question 3.3 (percentages of total responses)

[65] “Were always gonna stand and protect [**the environment] [the sacred] [this land]**. [...]”

mainly due to the fact that "the sacred" was specifically quoted as the variant originally used by the speaker.

One possible explanation for this is that "this land" (i.e., this specific deictic construction) might be perceived as bearing in and of itself a certain mythical or spiritual significance due to its relatively rare use in everyday English and connotations of personification of a specific environment ("this here land we're standing on"). This may also stand in direct contrast to the commonly more specifically Christian (rather than broadly religious) association of "the sacred," assuming a more Christian-influenced western majority of participants.[66] It is likewise fair to assume "land" in particular to be more specifically associated with Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous people—and perhaps even specifically by non-native speakers of English—, rather than the more 'culturally ambiguous' "sacred."[67] Naturally, as is often the possibility, a combination of all of these potential factors may have led (or at least contributed) to the observed outcome.

Lastly, but crucially, there is the possibility of methodological blunder: both "land" and "environment" were directly mentioned in the context description leading up to question 3.3.[68] While this does not by default imply or necessarily result in the subconscious (and much less the conscious) priming of participants, the latter is very well a possible and unintended consequence of mentioning two of the three variants in a closely related context immediately before the question.

[66] Of course, due to the anonymous nature of the survey and the global prevalence of English, this is extrapolation at best and pure speculation at worst. Given the method of recruiting and initial demographic circles involved, however, I do believe it to be a fair assumption within said realm of speculation.

[67] This once again obviously relies on the assumption of a primarily non-Indigenous audience of participants. Going by the relative frequency of North American Indigenous vs. general non-Indigenous people (as well as the question-specific unequivocal support of the variant in question), however, I take this assumption to be plausible. Likewise, the indexical association of "land" with Indigenous culture does—despite use of a different variant in the quote presented—commonly extend to Indigenous people(s) themselves.

[68] "The speaker of the previous quote is an Indigenous person fighting to protect the **environment and land they and their local community are situated on**."

Quote 4[69]

Question 4.1:

Do you think the speaker is addressing a strictly local audience rather than a broader, more general one (including non-locals)?

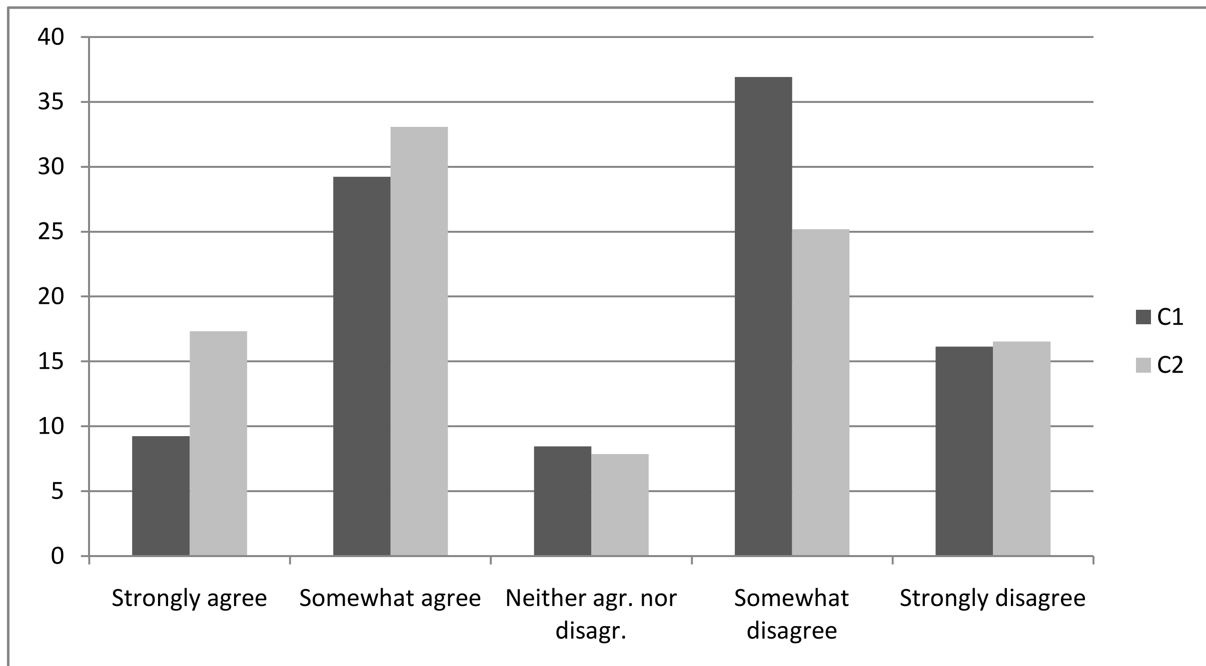

Fig. 9: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 4.1 (percentages of total responses)

At first glance, an increase of almost 88% in strongly agreeing opinions might appear to indicate reasonable shift in perception of the locally indexed nature of the speaker's statement (indexed primarily through "anywheres" and "(here in) little Nova Scotia"). Given the relatively small absolute increase (~8%), however, as well as both

	C1	**C2**	**Δ**
Total responses:	130	127	-2.31%
Strongly agree:	9.23%	17.32%	+87.65%
Somewhat agree:	29.23%	33.07%	+13.14%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	8.46%	7.87%	-6.98%
Somewhat disagree	36.92%	25.20%	-31.74%
Strongly disagree	16.15%	16.54%	+2.41%

Tab. 7: Statistical comparison of response data for question 4.1

[69] "They've never done this anywheres in the world before. Why do they wanna do it here in little Nova Scotia? Why do they wanna do it in our river that our kids fish every year, where they get their food from, where our community members have gathered for many, many, many generations? The real public safety issue is Alton Gas."

the initial and final response data's being relatively evenly distributed in terms of general agreement and disagreement (~50 vs. 42%), the results do not really enable any robust statistical insight into the impact on identity and goal perception of the specific variables presented. While the reasons for this are once again mostly speculative, a possible explanation lies in the inability of non-local (i.e., Atlantic Canadian/ Nova Scotian) participants to pick up on regional markers, or for participants in general to simply interpret certain markers and variables as rather commonplace (cf. Pabst 2022). If the latter is the case, it would certainly fall under the umbrella issue of overestimating the amount of meaning that is read into and extracted from utterances by listeners in a real, practical context, as opposed to through comprehensive pragmatic analysis via a scientific framework. Interestingly, demographic cross-analysis showed that women's responses remained essentially unchanged between conditions 1 and 2, whereas men made up for essentially the entirety of shifted views. All in all, however, and with respect to the predictions made, the first set of questions of quote 4 offers largely inconclusive results.

Question 4.2:

Do you believe the speaker speaks on behalf of a larger, regional group of people (as opposed to only a small, very local group of residents)?

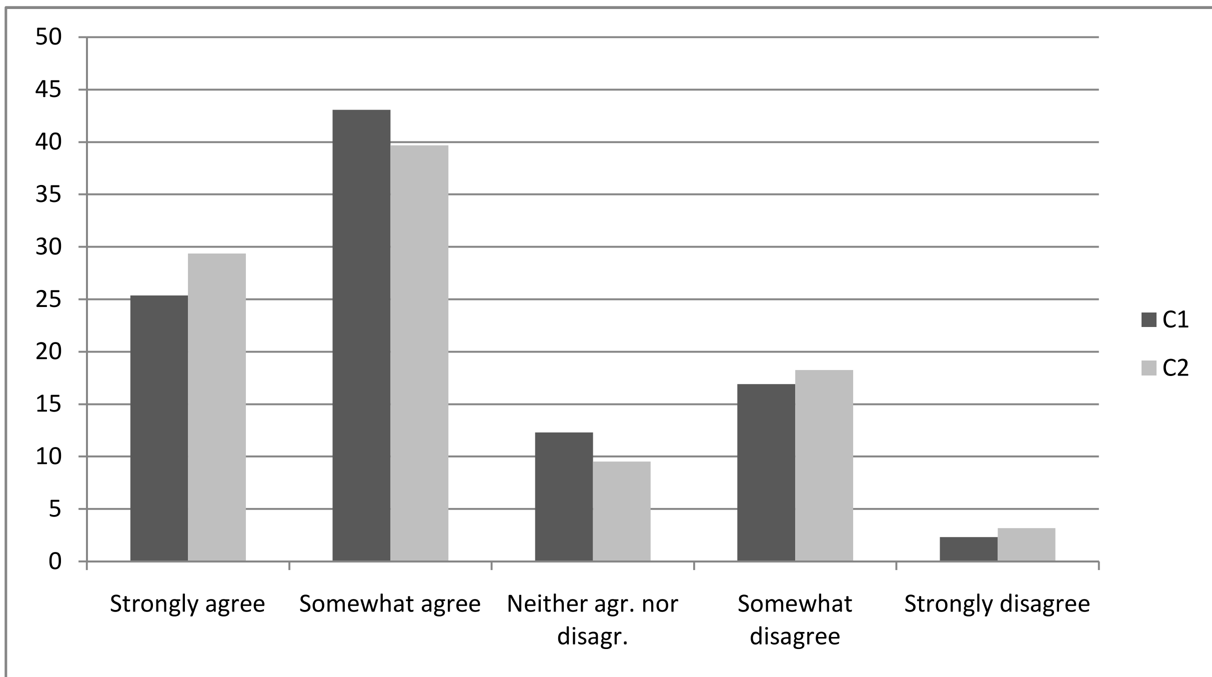

Fig. 10: Visual comparison between conditional responses to question 4.2 (percentages of total responses)

Quote 4's second question offered equally neutral results at best (fig. 10): Despite some very minor discrepancies, the statistical differences in category values with respect to question conditions were too small to indicate any general shift in opinion or interpretation. Additionally, the miniscule shifts that did occur affected, surprisingly and across the board, both general categories of agreement/disagreement (with the single exception of "somewhat agree"), muddying the statistical waters even further.[70] A potential reason for this might be the place-specific phrasings already used under

	C1	C2	Δ
Total responses:	130	126	-3.08%
Strongly agree:	25.38%	29.37%	+15.72%
Somewhat agree:	43.08%	39.68%	-7.89%
Neither agr. nor disagr.	12.31%	9.52%	-22.66%
Somewhat disagree	16.92%	18.25%	+7.86%
Strongly disagree	2.31%	3.17%	+37.23%

Tab. 8: Statistical comparison of response data for question 4.2

[70] This being said, the somewhat paradoxical-seeming increase in strong disagreement is, in fact, so minute that it might as well not have occurred (a single vote). The latter is especially important to remember—potentially

condition 1 (“our province” etc.) as well as the possibly somewhat vague meaning of “community” in the question itself. With respect to the latter, another real possibility is that of the question phrasing’s generally being too vague and/or possibly confusing, resulting in uncertainty for the participant, and difficulty to even make a genuine value judgment based on the presented context. As this question is the second to last of a reasonably short yet rather dense questionnaire, survey fatigue may very well have an effect on any of these proposed reasons. Lastly, cross-analysis showed no relevant statistical outliers or discrepancies between demographic groups.

Question 4.3:

Imagine hearing the quote in its immediate original context (e.g., on TV or on the radio). Do you consider the speaker talking to you about their cause primarily as a (fellow) Nova Scotian, a local Indigenous person, both equally, or neither?

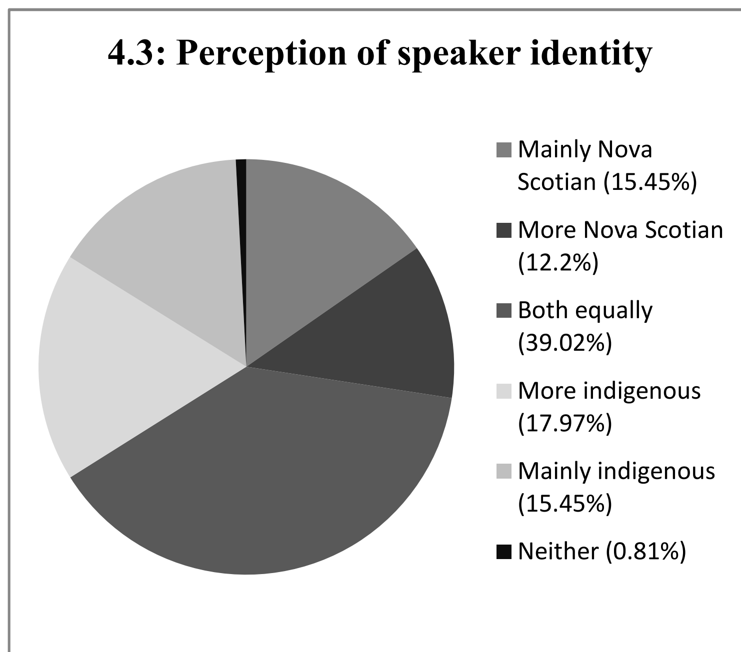

Fig. 11: Responses to question 4.3 (percentages of total responses)

The last question’s results (fig. 11) showed a clear tendency among participants to perceive the speaker presenting herself as both Nova Scotian and Indigenous: 69% of participants considered the speaker as representing both parts of her cultural identity, and a total of 39% of all participants—by far the biggest statistical subgroup—as representing both parts equally, all but confirming the

also with respect to some of the other statistical discrepancies in this data set—in light of the comparatively high rate of vote losses between rounds (4 ~ 3.08%), which at this relatively low remaining number of total data points may well have tangible statistical effects.

predictions made via the SPF analysis. Interestingly, the data distribution across all of the other categories is remarkably equal, bar a slight absolute discrepancy between the "more" categories of about 5.8% in favour of a more Indigenous perception. The latter is surprising in so far as that the previous and explicit explanation of Atlantic Canadian regional markers could potentially have acted as somewhat of a spotlight with regard to a more Nova Scotian perception of the speaker. This, however, was ultimately not the case, with essentially the exact opposite having occurred (albeit to a minor degree). While cross-analysis indicated a slight trend in women to more likely tend towards either "mainly" category compared to men, the statistical difference is far too small to allow for any serious theorizing. Lastly, the single response in the "neither" category is arguably unlikely to bear any real statistical meaning.

5. Discussion

Survey evaluation

As a means for testing the predictions derived from the SPF analysis, the survey did work in so far as providing (varyingly) useful results—a majority of which in turn allowed for the evaluation and confirmation of some of the technical capabilities of the SPF, and, crucially, highlighting a number of both already considered and previously unconsidered limitations of the framework and its practical application as a predictive tool. That being said, the investigation had both question-specific as well as systemic limitations, both preventable in hindsight (mainly the former) and somewhat unpreventable given its role as a master's thesis project (mainly the latter).

Starting with the more widely impactful systemic drawbacks, the survey had two major overlapping issues: the degree of anonymity that was aimed for, as well as the inquiry's general limitations in scope. A (largely) anonymous survey offers the distinct advantage of not only being comparatively easier to organize and justify ethically, but also, due to the lack of personal risk involved in taking it, being likely to reach a wider and generally larger audience. This advantage, however, given the subject's complexity and reliance on individual interpretation, stands in contrast to the relative surface-level analysis it ultimately only allows: The more anonymous the survey—i.e., the less individual demographic information is available about its participants—, the less exact and meaningful its results will be. In this way, collecting more demographic data would have been immensely beneficial for a deeper, more precise analysis of the actual, measurable impact of indexicality and context on the perception of speaker goals and cultural identity. This goes especially for even more individual-specific, more complex influences, such as linguistic background and ideology (as was already laid out in more detail in chapter 2), but also as far as cross

tabulation data is concerned, for which the main issue lies in the anonymous nature of the survey itself: Even though general correlations between age and gender groups and category values can be established and compared, individual correlations cannot. For example, seeing a statistical decrease in 18-24 year-olds' responses in "somewhat disagree" coupled with an increase in "somewhat agree"—with all other categories staying the same—does not naturally imply that the same fraction of 18-24 year-olds who no longer responded with "somewhat disagree" actually chose "somewhat agree;" instead, any number of ways of reshuffling the total sum of votes from the entirety of 18-24 year-olds could have resulted in the observed statistical outcome. As such, cross tabulation data on demographic correlations is, ultimately and at best, nothing more than another very broad statistical trend indicator (albeit a sociologically interesting one for potential further research on the topic).

The second major issue directly relates to this, in that a more demographically specific, in-depth analysis necessarily requires considerably more time and effort to account for the potentially steep increase in data complexity. A higher degree of data individualization and "resolution" also comes at the natural cost of this data being less statistically analyzable—i.e., generalizable—, which has numerous implications for how to approach an already methodologically simplified project like this (i.e., with the intent of testing a framework's predictive capabilities based on extrapolation from statistical data) in the first place. Naturally, this would likely mean a longer overall duration of the survey, too, which in turn might well lead to a smaller number of willing participants. Simply put: While a sufficiently large number of participants (as big as or bigger than the one for this survey) interviewed in a more personal, culturally and linguistically specific, and potentially even publically identifiable manner would undoubtedly have led to far more precise and—possibly—meaningful data for the primary purpose of this project, it would have required a fundamentally different, more risky approach to this project, and ultimately have

been well beyond the scope of a master's thesis. This is, in my view, the most pertinent point to consider for future, less formally constrained research on the matter.

A final, minor issue concerning the general structure and workings of the survey was its difficulty to test for multifactorial influence on language perception; e.g., cases in which both access to a quote's context as well as sociolinguistic variables within are predicted to have a significant effect on how the quote, the speaker's goals, or their cultural identity are perceived by listeners. Examples for this can be seen all throughout Q1, in which sociopolitical and cultural context were the primary targets of investigation, but certain linguistic elements (phrasings and, essentially, sociolinguistic variables) had to be altered in order not to give certain social context away prematurely. While the results were arguably still useful in a broader sense, this "analytical blur" of data is a distinct downside to the simplified question structure that was primarily chosen for this survey, and one that future research should aim to avoid.

As for the question-specific limitations—and besides the aforementioned structural weaknesses apparent in Q1—, three in particular stand out: Firstly, question 3.2[71] was phrased far too vaguely and broadly, especially given the little amount of context provided to participants. Additionally, it was arguably over-reliant on a single variable that, when viewed from an analytic perspective, may have "obvious" logical implications for the kind of addresser-addressee relationship inquired about. From a practical, mostly contextually removed perspective of a survey participant, however, these implications may be anything but obvious; basically, a case of analytic overestimation.

[71] "From a cultural perspective, do you think the speaker feels personally disrespected by their addressee?"

Similarly, question 4.1[72] in all likelihood highly overestimated the acute awareness of regional markers of participants in rather de-contextualized language (and particularly given the relative subtlety of "anywheres" vs. "anywhere"). Likewise, concerning this variable's already complicated measurability, this question relied far too heavily on participant-specific information not even taken into account by it or the survey (i.e., individual linguistic background).

Lastly, question 4.2[73] suffered from a somewhat more fundamental issue, that partially applies to question 4.1 as well: Given the little amount of information provided concerning both speaker and quote, the type of insight and data to be gathered is far too complex and context-dependent for any single, short, somewhat de-contextualized question to extract from a random participant (who might, due to lack of context or guidance on how to approach the question posed, quite genuinely not even have a real, clear answer). In other words, and put as a general rule for future research: The focus of a question needs to be just narrow enough to still extract useful information on the study subject, *and* to accommodate the estimated contextual knowledge of the person answering the question.

Predictive capabilities of the SPF, practical limitations, and general findings

Taking into account the technical and methodological shortcomings of the survey and some of its questions that may have led to inconclusive results, the accuracy of the predictions derived from the SPF analysis was overall mixed: very good in some cases, limited to vague and debatably affirmative trends in others, and, surprisingly, outright antithetical in one case (with the latter—Q2—arguably yielding the project's most interesting results). Naturally, as

[72] "Do you think the speaker **is addressing** a strictly local audience rather than a broader, more general one (including non-locals)?"
[73] "Do you believe the speaker **speaks on behalf** of a larger, regional group of people (as opposed to only a small, very local group of residents)?"

these predictions relied upon the previous sociopragmatic analysis of a single person (myself), the potential individual risk factor for logical, analytical, or plain linguistic parsing errors with regard to formulating these predictions is rather significant. Consequently, as a predictive tool, the SPF is very much dependent not only on the type of prediction—concerning aspects of general intelligibility, coerciveness, public reactions and opinion etc.—and the broader linguistic context in which these predictions are made (e.g., environmentalism), but also, and crucially, the analyst(s) whose interpretations and reasoning these predictions are based on. As such, the SPF is definitely usable as a(n additional) means for making predictions about the potential impact of specific pragmatic choices. Its overall usefulness for that purpose, however, is ultimately somewhat questionable, and the framework likely remains much better suited as an excellent purely interpretational tool—as originally intended.

From both an analytical and a predictive perspective, the SPF's greatest strength as a designedly more holistic framework simultaneously poses its greatest practical "limitation:" By factoring in *all* the contextually relevant information related to an utterance or a volume or element of discourse, as stated in the *FS principle*, the SPF inevitably relies on several determinants that are, due to their complex and oftentimes highly individual nature, incredibly hard to discern for analytic purposes. This is especially observable in questions of ideology—linguistic, political, and otherwise—, as well as concerning the estimation of contextual knowledge a given discourse participant has (or has access to).[74] As a result, some amount of generalization or extrapolation (or narrowing of the subject matter) is almost always going to be necessary for a "complete" and thorough analysis, and, subsequently, some amount of uncertainty unavoidable in the explanatory power of said analysis. However,

[74] Note that the ultimate impact of individual language ideology in a general practical context is likely to remain guessable at best. The exception, of course, being cases in which language use and policy—within whatever greater social, cultural, or political context—are an explicit point of contention and/or discussion.

this is arguably less of an SPF-specific issue as much as that it concerns sociopragmatic approaches as a whole.[75]

The general complexity and complicated delineation of the analytic factors involved in sociopragmatic analysis (cultural, sociopolitical, and historical context, identity and ideology, among others) makes topics such as the one investigated in this thesis rather hard—if not downright impossible—to study with the same scientific accuracy and reliability found in other scholarly fields.[76] This natural potential for vagueness inherent to human language, particularly in sociocultural contexts, is something that, in the end, needs to be accepted and accounted for as an unavoidable element of uncertainty; arguably in any sociopragmatic analysis of discourse, if not discourse analysis in general.[77] While commonly agreed-upon definitions of social, cultural, and political terminology may lessen this problem to a degree, certain dimensions—especially hyperindividual ones, such as linguistic ideology—need extensive and, as in this study's case, at times unfeasibly accurate outlining to be effectively incorporated into the analytic equation.

Nonetheless, the explicit consideration of these elements by sociopragmatic analysis, and consequently by its practical implementations such as the SPF, potentially makes this combined approach—at least in theory—considerably more accurate and powerful a method of discourse analysis than strict reliance on some of its more easily applicable technical components (such as indexicality) alone. Ultimately, whether this exchange of significantly

[75] On an even broader (and slightly more philosophical) note, this issue really extends to language and the many-faceted, somewhat intangible nature of meaning itself. As such, this "limitation" of the SPF is less of a technical shortcoming as much as it as a natural consequence of the study subject the framework is intended to describe.
[76] E.g. compared to the 3- to 5-sigma significance levels of statistical certainty commonly relied upon to prove predictions and verify discoveries in physics and related disciplines.
[77] I should mention at this point that I am being somewhat facetious and, once again, philosophically minded here, and that I am by no means trying to discredit the validity and importance of linguistic analysis; much less that of related social sciences at large. Rather, by considering the difficulties and subsequent limitations of sociopragmatic (and other linguistic) analysis not just from a practical, but also a general theoretical perspective, I found this to be an interesting and, arguably, logical conclusion: uncertainty as an emergent quality of language as a tool for communicating the experience of a fundamentally uncertain (i.e., mutable, constantly changing) social reality.

increased analytical effort for (potentially) higher analytical accuracy is warranted will always—and rather fittingly—be heavily dependent on its practical context.

On contextualized meaning and cultural identity in environmentalist discourse

The importance of contextualized meaning in political or any other ideologically driven discourse is, generally speaking, hard to overestimate (cf. chapter 2). This goes for any kind of contextualized meaning; be it entailed (i.e., ordinary statements made in reference to a specific social, political, historical, or cultural context) or non-entailed (i.e., statements that additionally carry indexical meaning which may actively contribute to the context in which they were made). This naturally extends to the even more context-sensitive issue of environmental racism, as the SPF analysis has, to at least some degree, shown for every single quote that was analyzed. The more conclusive survey results empirically suggested the same conclusion, particularly with respect to questions 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, and question 2 (cf. pp.64-70). Especially the latter (Q2)—and, due to its complete deviation from the analysis prediction, rather ironically—unequivocally showed the importance of thoroughly contextualized meaning, and how it can have a directly measurable impact on even the most theoretically divisive statements.

Clearly, as even our most basic common sense tells us, context matters. However, the immense practical importance of contextualized and indexical meaning—not only for environmentalist, but rather all sociopolitical discourse—can, from a more interdisciplinary perspective, further be understood and elaborated on with the theory of framing. As briefly touched upon in chapter 2, the structural similarities between the sociological and psychological definitions of frames and the sociopragmatic interpretation of meaning formation in discourse (specifically via indexicality) go beyond mere coincidence, as they

arguably resemble two sides of the same coin: an explanation for how social circumstances (e.g., identity, ideology, interpersonal relations etc.) not only create and contextualize meaning with regard to the perspective and intent of the speaker, but also influence its perception and interpretation from the perspective of the recipient. Just as contextual information acts as the literal foundation on which meaning is contextualized, it enables the formation, adaptation, and reinforcement of frames, the latter of which in turn provide the basis for virtually any manner of ideological discourse.[78] And just as indexical variables trigger their respective indexical fields and, consequently, the understanding and conveyance of associated (not overtly expressed) meaning, so do words in general trigger the respective frames they are subconsciously associated with (cf. Lakoff 2010: 73). In other words: To contextualize meaning—be it through the providing of situational background information or the deliberate use of indexical variables—is to employ framing, and to employ framing is to use "*articulation mechanisms* [...] to convey a particular set of meanings and thus a certain version of reality" (Satheesh & Benford 2020:1). Whether this process is successful or not with regard to the speaker's conversational goals ultimately depends as much on the speaker as it does on their audience, and it is this interdependence of potentially conflicting worldviews that makes the process a difficult one; especially in the context of Indigenous environmentalism (cf. Weir 2013; Lowan-Trudeau 2021; Sidorova & Ferguson 2023).

To illustrate all this more practically—and to showcase what is arguably the SPF's greatest strength—, let us take another look at quote 1[79], which demonstrates the principles at work rather neatly:

"We're gonna always stand and protect the sacred. [...]"

[78] As Lakoff 2010:72 succinctly puts it: "In short, one cannot avoid framing."
[79] See p.27 for the full SPF analysis.

Rather than describing the local environment plainly as such, the speaker uses the much more indexically potent "the sacred," thereby conceptually placing it within the realm of religion and spirituality. In doing so, she effectively recontextualizes her environmentalist cause as necessary not only for nature's sake, but for preserving a core pillar of her Mi'kmaw culture.[80] Not only is this approach perfectly coherent from a strictly sociological and psychological view: in that reframing allows the speaker to, among other things, foster additional solidarity among those previously drawn primarily to social justice *or* environmentalist causes. It is also easily and comprehensively explained at a more technical level through sociopragmatics: i.e., by taking into account both the social context—including the speaker's conversational goals—as well as the specific linguistic realization of the utterance through stylistic and indexical choices. Notably, then, as the above analysis summary shows, the actual basis and catalyst for this rhetorically powerful recontextualization is the speaker's individual cultural identity.

With regard to the latter, two somewhat general statements can be made: Firstly, that in the context of environmental racism, cultural identity is a critical, arguably discourse-defining factor. Naturally, given the field's intrinsic connection to both culture and identity in a broader sense, this isn't exactly surprising. However, as the main contextualizing element in a majority of the data studied as part of the analysis in chapter 3—by situationally incorporating not just a given speaker's ideological goals and motivations, but also the sociopolitical history shared between them and their cultural community—, it is, from a

[80] This conscious connecting of not inherently affiliated sociological dimensions and their respective frames—in this case, environmentalism and, through the reference of culture and cultural identity, social justice—is a process referred to as *frame extension* and, in essence, marks the archetypal way in which interdisciplinary fields, movements, and ideological frameworks such as environmental racism commonly come into existence in the first place (Satheesh & Benford 2020: 2; cf. Waldron 2020).

sociopragmatic perspective, hard to overstate cultural identity's importance for and impact on the formation, perception, and the overall exchange of social meaning.[81]

Secondly, it can be assumed that the sociopragmatic effects of cultural identity are particularly noticeable and potentially impactful in localized environmentalist contexts; in other words, when discourse participants are more likely to be acutely familiar with each other's respective cultural background. From a productive standpoint, a familiar (if culturally disparate) audience generally enables the speaker to more effectively frame their cause as locally relevant—i.e., positively—, and possibly even garner additional empathy, recognition, and respect from an audience that is privy to the contextual information needed for a more socially meaningful interpretation of the speaker's words (and cause). Put differently, and from a more socio-psychological perspective: to more efficiently trigger—through the stylistic expression of cultural identity—frames positively associated by the audience with inter-communal solidarity and a shared responsibility for the local environment and its inhabitants. While this particular dimension to the role of cultural identity was rather difficult to test empirically via the survey, the results of question 4.3 in particular can be seen as a relatively clear, positive indicator of this (as well as its possible effect in a realistic, non-simulated scenario).[82]

Lastly and similarly difficult to study, there are the potential negative effects of cultural identity on environmentalist discourse, particularly with respect to the conversational (and even ideological and/or political) goals of the speaker. Both the SPF analysis and survey questions did account for and investigate the potential "loss" of (not successfully conveyed) social meaning due to culturally motivated pragmatic choices by the speaker that may, so to

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[81] While a reasonable degree of extrapolation is certainly necessary (mainly due to a lack of technical accuracy and somewhat divergent investigative focus), the survey results, generally speaking, arguably all but support this conclusion.
[82] **Question 4.3:** "Imagine hearing the quote in its immediate original context (e.g. on TV or on the radio). Do you consider the speaker talking to you about their cause primarily as a (fellow) Nova Scotian, a local indigenous person, both equally, or neither?" (see p.77f for the results).

speak, fall on culturally—and thus, pragmatically—deaf ears. In sociolinguistic terms: Indexical choices are only conducive to conveying a certain social meaning when the recipient has an acute understanding of the relevant indexical field. Importantly, this same issue more broadly applies to cognitive processes of framing, too, as Lakoff points out:

> Frames are communicated via language and visual imagery. The right language is absolutely necessary for communicating 'the real crisis.' However, most people do not have the overall background system of frames needed to understand 'the real crisis'; simply providing a few words and slogans can at best help a very little. (2010:74)

The real underlying issue, however, as he goes on to explain, extends far beyond a mere lack of mutual intelligibility on a technical, cultural, or even political level, and unquestionably poses a much bigger set of problems for any kind of ideological discourse:

> But the framing problems are even more profound. Many people have in their brain circuitry the wrong frames for understanding 'the real crisis.' That is, **they have frames that would either contradict the right frames or lead them to ignore the relevant facts**. Those wrong frames don't go away. [...] What is needed is a constant effort to build up the background frames needed to understand the crisis, while building up neural circuitry to inhibit the wrong frames. That is anything but a simple, short-term job to be done by a few words or slogans. (2010:74; bold face added for emphasis)

In other words: Frames are, as explained in chapter 2, not just a physiological manifestation of our thought patterns, but also inherently linked to and representative of our cognitive biases, and triggering a 'wrong' frame (e.g., through the use of certain words) leads in all likelihood to a highly biased response.[83] This, in turn, probably causes further reinforcement of said 'wrong' frame, which then results in even greater resistance to the argument presented by the speaker (as well as, conceivably, the reinforcement of a corresponding irreconcilable worldview). Due in large part to the innately subjective nature of these (and all) frames, it is

[83] While a comprehensive discussion of common biases and related psychological effects would obviously exceed the purpose and scope of this chapter, *confirmation bias* (i.e., the habit to seek out specific information or interpret situational evidence in a manner that confirms one's beliefs; cf. Nickerson 1998) is arguably the most commonly encountered culprit, as already hinted at by Lakoff 2010 above (bolded part).

naturally difficult—if not practically impossible—to account for any and all potential triggers to be avoided.

Likewise, and other practical considerations of public debate aside, the indexical expression of cultural identity does obviously not by default entail the (unintentional) use of "negative" trigger words in the face of an ideologically opposed audience.[84] Nonetheless, what the above ultimately does imply is that the previously mentioned benefits of cultural identity—its potent effects on discourse and the pragmatic choices it facilitates—may, under the wrong conversational circumstances, and essentially due to basic human psychology, also be its biggest rhetorical pitfall for political (such as environmental) activism of any kind; particularly for groups that are already socially marginalized. That is: an increased potential for not simply losing an audience in contextual translation, but actively fuelling their ideological opposition to one's cause—no matter the validity of one's ethical justifications.

[84] Unless, of course, said audience is explicitly ideologically opposed to the very existence of the speaker's culture (or even the speaker themselves).

6. Conclusion

The primary goal of this thesis was to investigate empirically the overall importance for and impact of cultural identity and contextualized meaning on environmentalist discourse, as well as how cultural identity in particular enables, shapes, and enhances the contextualization of linguistic meaning especially. As expected, sociopragmatic analysis with the SPF showed that both situationally (i.e., historically, politically etc.) as well as linguistically (mainly indexically) contextualized meaning undoubtedly plays a significant role in the public discussion of environmentalism and, more precisely, environmental racism. Culturally motivated indexical choices in particular were shown to be a highly effective tool for embedding entire layers of meaning and contextual significance within utterances that, at a surface level, may appear rather simple (i.e., straightforward).

Besides the common-sense notion that context generally matters, the intrinsic connection between cultural identity and the social, political, and historical circumstances that any given culture (and identity formed thereon) is subject to naturally implies an inherent and fundamental weight that these factors have on the formation and interpretation of social meaning in any culture-related form of discourse. This, as was shown through both SPF analysis and survey, subsequently applies especially to discourse in which said types of context are the prime points of contention; for example, in the case of environmentalism and environmental racism, the disproportionate (i.e., unjust) effects of environmental pollution and climate change on socially marginalized communities.[85] Overall, empirically illustrating this connection may just be the most important feat of this project, and its most important takeaway: Through its linguistic expression―be it indexical and entailed, or via direct

[85] While this reasoning might appear somewhat obvious or even circular―i.e., situational context having major influence on discourse while also being the primary reason for said discourse in the first place―, it arguably still deserves specific mention due to the fact that, as is readily apparent from an overwhelming number of public discussions and daily news reports, political (and other ideological) discourse on complex social issues far too often specifically foregoes fundamental context and is instead centered around comparatively meaningless (and purposefully misleading) subjects; e.g., individual behaviour, social etiquette and “appropriateness” etc.

reference—cultural identity establishes a salient link between the speaker and the cultural, political, and historical circumstances based on which said speaker is arguing their case, and subsequently framing their cause as not merely personal, but inherently tied to a larger social context. In positive terms, this can even have the knock-on effect of lending the speaker and their words additional credibility and weight through perceived authority on the given matter. As such, and while certainly no universal remedy for an audience's (willful) contextual ignorance, cultural identity ultimately bears immense potency as a rhetorical means in environmentalist discourse.

In terms of laying out this causal relationship not just broadly, but tracing it systematically against a specific background of events and based on a varied set of linguistic data, the SPF did a remarkable job at providing the theoretical tools necessary. As a de facto condensation of the fundamental principles of sociopragmatic analysis, it proves the value and necessity of both itself and the discipline for the complex and critical task of describing the practical workings and consequences of language use in an increasingly interconnected world. As a highly versatile and holistic framework, it does so while simultaneously highlighting the biggest difficulty in said task: accurately cataloguing and factoring in all the individual variables that contribute to the *full significance* of any given piece of discursive data, from single utterances to entire multi-party verbal exchanges.

Notably, this somewhat impractical reality of in-depth pragmatic analysis is arguably also the biggest limiting factor in the conducting of empirical research on the matter. While analytical frameworks such as the SPF generally allow their users to adapt by simply narrowing the focus on a given subject matter in order to work with the contextual data that is actually available, the goal of empirical (i.e., data-generating) work—given the ultra-individual and context-sensitive nature of sociopragmatic analysis—should ultimately be to provide as much *specific* data as possible (e.g., on variables such as cultural background,

relevant political and social views, linguistic ideology, stylistic preferences etc.), for which a highly personalized approached to collecting said data is indispensable. Given the limitations in scope and design of this thesis and its survey part specifically, such an approach to the collection of data, particularly with respect to the project's other main goal of providing empirical feedback on the general usability and predictive capabilities of the SPF, was unfortunately not feasible.

However, if unaffected by such constraints, future research on this and related topics would likely benefit immensely from a fundamentally more personalized and audience-focused approach. While it would naturally come at the cost of additional ethical implications, technical hurdles, and a disproportionately larger amount of analytical effort—all of which need to be accounted for accordingly—, it would offer possibilities to explore certain implications of this paper in much greater detail. For one, it would allow for the more thorough study of the effects of cultural identity on discourse between local (i.e., mutually culturally familiar) vs. non-local (i.e., not necessarily mutually culturally familiar) interlocutors. Additionally, and arguably more importantly, this type of methodology would also enable research centered specifically around the potentially 'detrimental' pragmatic consequences of the expression of cultural identity (and similar individual variables) on specific listeners and under specific circumstances, particularly with respect to (negative) framing effects. In general, I consider the theoretical incorporation of the latter as part of a deliberately (even) more interdisciplinary approach to sociopragmatic analysis highly productive for the continuous quest of understanding not just how language is contextually used and interpreted, but what the actual neurological, cognitive, and psychological mechanisms are. In fact, with respect to its potential practical ramifications, I consider it vital for the domain of political analysis, the promotion of social equality and, ultimately, the advancement of a society and species inherently governed by said mechanisms.

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Appendices

A. Original survey presentation and summary of results

A full summary of the original data collected through the survey as well as the complete original survey contents presented to participants through Qualtrics can be found in the Memorial University Research Repository under the title of this thesis ("How to Take Care of the Earth: A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Cultural Identity and Contextualized Meaning in Canadian Environmentalist Discourse") or the author's name (Lukas Huda) at

https://research.library.mun.ca/

B. Ethics approval for survey implementation

ICEHR Number:	**20230624-AR**
Approval Period:	February 16, 2023 – February 29, 2024
Funding Source:	
Responsible Faculty:	Dr. Paul De Decker Department of Linguistics
Title of Project:	*A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Cultural Identity and Contextualized Meaning in Canadian Environmentalist Discourse (preliminary title of master thesis)*
Amendment #:	***01***

July 13, 2023