

Senior Fellowship forum Basiliense, Doriana Cimmino

Dal 15 ottobre al 15 dicembre 2025

Titolo del Progetto: A Collection of Debateable Information on Climate Change

Titolo abbreviato: Pollute the Change

Abstract:

#### *Background and objectives*

Climate change is the most urgent issue of our time. While it is indisputable that political and commercial aspects have direct environmental consequences, social factors have for a long time been overlooked. In fact, misinformation and disinformation can fuel public debate, hindering necessary actions to combat climate change. With the project “Pollute the Change” we aim to analyse detrimental communication on climate change in Switzerland, focusing on institutional and political communication in the Italian language. The fellowship will be dedicated to collecting texts addressed to citizens that implicitly convey debateable or incorrect information on climate change.

The novelty of this project lies in its pragmatic and textual approach to studying public communication on climate change. While overtly fake news on climate change has been addressed extensively, messages that subtly convey a distorted picture of virtuous behaviours to combat it have been overlooked. This type of communication, more subtle than fake news, shifts citizens' attention from the urgency of the climate issue or even promotes political actions that jeopardize the necessary changes to combat its short- and long-term effects.

#### *Methods*

The collection of institutional and political debateable communication will be drawn from official messages addressed to citizens in Ticino and the Grisons between 2024 and 2025. Inspired by the corpus collected in the project It-Ist\_CH (funded by the SFNS, n. 100012 192404, see Ferrari et al. 2022), the sources of texts will include Swiss press releases (e.g. [www.ticinonews.ch](http://www.ticinonews.ch)) and the official website of the Swiss government ([www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch)). All official communication in Italian language at the Confederation, cantons and communes administrative levels will be included. Political communication produced by government members and addressed to citizens through popular social media (Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter) will also be considered as a secondary source of communication.

We selected this particular time span (2024-25) also to reveal differences in the institutional and political communication before and after the decision of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to find Switzerland guilty of governmental inaction on climate change, occurred in April 2024. The lively debate promoted from the KlimaSeniorinnen (Swiss Elders for Climate Protection) could have indeed changed not only the public debate on climate change but also institutional communication about it.

The targeted texts will be those addressed to citizens which implicitly convey debateable or incorrect information on climate change. Technically, the collected texts will have to include implicit language

strategies – namely, presupposition, implicatures, topicalization or vague expressions – conveying false or disputable contents on climate change. For example, the following excerpt is part of a text illustrating the project against the climate change matter of vote in the referendum of the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2023 (called *indirect counterproposal*); the text was published on [www.admin.ch](http://www.admin.ch).

- (1) Il controprogetto indiretto stabilisce che la Svizzera deve diventare neutrale dal punto di vista climatico entro il 2050. Non proibisce il consumo di vettori energetici fossili ma prevede di ridurlo il più possibile. ‘The indirect counterproposal stipulates that Switzerland must become climate neutral by 2050. It does not prohibit the consumption of fossil energy carriers but plans to reduce it as much as possible.’

The text contains a vague expression and an implicature which could hinder the voters’ complete understanding of the law. The vague content, conveyed by the expression *ridurlo il più possibile* ‘reduce it as much as possible’, does not inform the voter on how much the consumption of fossil energy will be reduced; the implicature, conveyed by the whole excerpt, implicitly communicate that ‘as much as possible’ will be enough for the neutrality goal of 2050. This information is not precise enough and it would need a more critical evaluation on the part of the voters, yet it is conveyed implicitly and will be processed with a low level of attention by the readers (see at least Lombardi Vallauri 2019 for more on this point).

### *Expected results*

With the project of a collection of debateable information on climate change we aim to raise awareness about detrimental communication on climate change in Switzerland. We intend to collect around 100 texts during the 3-months fellowship<sup>1</sup> and provide detailed description of their potential power of “Pollute the Change”. The text will be stored in an open database, available for interdisciplinary studies on the social, juridical and economical effects of a non-transparent communication in the institutional and political spheres.

### *References*

- Ding, D., Maibach, E. W., Zhao, X., Roser-Renouf, C., & Leiserowitz, A. (2011). Support for climate policy and societal action are linked to perceptions about scientific agreement. *Nature Climate Change*, 1(9), 462–466.
- Ferrari, Angela/De Cesare, Anna-Maria/Evangelista, Daria/Lala, Letizia/Marengo, Terry/Pecorari, Filippo/Piantanida, Giovanni/Rosi, Benedetta (2022), "Il corpus It-Ist\_CH: un corpus rappresentativo dell'italiano istituzionale svizzero", in Baranzini, Laura/Casoni, Matteo/Christopher, Sabine (a cura di), *Linguisti in contatto 3. Ricerche di linguistica italiana in Svizzera e sulla Svizzera*, Bellinzona, Osservatorio linguistico della Svizzera italiana, pp. 57-70.

---

<sup>1</sup> The goal is reasonably feasible considering less than 10 texts per week, in a period of 14 weeks of work from October to December 2025.

Lombardi Vallauri, Edoardo (2019). *La Lingua Disonesta*. Il Mulino.