

Metaphoric Imaging of the Post-Human Future in Afrofuturistic Discourse

Novikova V. P.¹, Faasema Ngutor Ezekiel²

¹Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor of the Department Foreign Languages of the K.G. Razumovsky Moscow State University of Technologies and Management (FCU). Moscow, Russia

²2nd Year Masters Student, School of Foreign Languages, National Research University, Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100400493>

Received: 22 April 2026; Accepted: 27 April 2026; Published: 15 May 2026

ABSTRACT

This article presents a linguistically oriented investigation of how images of the climate-changed future are constructed in African climate fiction (cli-fi), focusing on Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* and Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*. While both novels are frequently examined within speculative, postcolonial, and environmental literary studies, this article approaches them primarily as discursive artefacts through which futurity is linguistically assembled. It argues that posthuman and Afrofuturist futures are not merely represented thematically but are produced through patterned language use that shapes spatial perception, temporal orientation, ecological relationships, and embodied agency.

Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis, eco-linguistics, narrative stylistics, and pragmatics, the study demonstrates how metaphor, modality, pronoun choice, naming practices, and evaluative stance collectively construct a coherent image of the cli-fi future. In *Noor*, futurity is linguistically framed as a hostile yet navigable terrain through techno-organic metaphors, declarative syntax, and culturally grounded bilingual lexicons that position technological embodiment as adaptive agency. In contrast, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* presents the future as fragile, relational, and collectively negotiated through eco-metaphorical imagery, modal uncertainty, and inclusive discourse patterns. Across both novels, cultural referencing operates as a stabilising linguistic strategy that sustains continuity between ancestral epistemologies and speculative futures. By foregrounding the discursive construction of futurity, this article contributes to cli-fi scholarship by demonstrating that African posthuman futures are linguistically imaged, culturally sustained, and ecologically embedded.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, Climate Fiction (Cli-Fi), Eco-linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Futurity.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change, technological acceleration, and environmental precarity have become defining conditions of the twenty-first century, reshaping not only material environments but also the discursive frameworks through which the future is imagined. One significant cultural response to these transformations is climate fiction (cli-fi), a term popularised by Dan Bloom in the early 2010s to describe narratives that engage explicitly with climate change and its socio-ecological consequences.

Within African contexts, cli-fi acquires particular urgency as climate vulnerability intersects with colonial histories, extractive economies, infrastructural fragility, and culturally specific modes of resilience. African cli-fi does not simply project environmental catastrophe; it also imagines future worlds in which survival, identity, and agency are renegotiated under conditions of ecological and technological transformation. In many of these narratives, the future is not merely an abstract temporal horizon but a discursively assembled environment—one shaped by metaphorical landscapes, embodied language, and culturally grounded meaning-making.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on climate fiction and African speculative writing, much of the existing research focuses primarily on thematic concerns such as environmental crisis, technological change, and postcolonial identity. Less attention has been paid to the linguistic mechanisms through which these imagined

futures are constructed. Yet the representation of the future in cli-fi does not emerge solely from plot or narrative structure; it is also produced through patterned language use, including metaphor, modality, narrative voice, and spatial description.

Against this background, this article examines how African cli-fi texts linguistically construct images of the post-human future. Focusing on Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* and Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, the study explores how posthuman and Afrofuturist futures are produced through discourse. By foregrounding language, the article positions posthumanism not only as a philosophical or thematic concept but also as a linguistic practice, demonstrating how the image of the cli-fi future emerges from cumulative stylistic and discursive choices rather than from isolated narrative themes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework combining Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), ecocriticism, posthuman theory, Afrofuturism/Africanfuturism, and ecolinguistics. Together, these approaches provide a multidisciplinary lens for examining how language constructs posthuman identity, ecological relationships, and cultural continuity in African climate fiction (cli-fi). While ecocriticism and posthuman theory offer conceptual tools for understanding human–environment relations and technological embodiment, CDA and ecolinguistics enable a close analysis of how these relationships are linguistically produced within narrative discourse.

Ecocriticism

Ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, particularly how literary texts represent ecological systems, environmental crises, and human interactions with the natural world. According to scholars such as Johns-Putra (2015), ecocriticism is concerned with analysing how cultural texts engage with environmental questions and how these representations shape human attitudes toward nature. Similarly, Marland (2013) describes ecocriticism as a critical approach that investigates how literature reflects and critiques humanity's impact on the biosphere.

The development of ecocriticism can be traced to the late twentieth century, when scholars began to examine environmental concerns within literary and cultural studies. The term ecocriticism was first introduced by William Rueckert in 1978 in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Since then, the field has expanded significantly, incorporating perspectives from environmental philosophy, cultural studies, and posthuman theory. Early ecocritical studies often focused on nature writing and wilderness literature, while later developments broadened the scope to include environmental justice, global ecological crises, and the representation of nonhuman agency in literature (Gladwin, 2017; DeMott, 2018).

Scholars frequently describe ecocriticism as developing in successive "waves." The first wave emphasised the celebration of nature and wilderness, often focusing on pastoral literature. The second wave shifted attention toward environmental politics, ecological crises, and the intersection between environmental degradation and social inequality. More recent developments have expanded ecocritical inquiry to include global environmental issues, posthuman perspectives, and interdisciplinary approaches that integrate ecological science with cultural analysis (Irr, 2017; Gladwin, 2017).

Central to ecocritical scholarship is the recognition that the relationship between humans and the environment is not merely utilitarian but deeply interconnected. Literature often represents landscapes not simply as settings but as active agents that shape human experience and identity. This perspective is particularly relevant to climate fiction, where environmental conditions frequently function as dynamic forces influencing narrative events and character development.

Within the context of this study, ecocriticism provides a framework for examining how environmental spaces are represented in Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* and Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*. In both novels, ecological landscapes are not passive backdrops but active narrative elements that influence the characters' experiences and survival strategies. By analysing how environmental conditions are linguistically represented,

this study explores how cli-fi narratives articulate complex relationships between humans, technology, and ecological systems.

Furthermore, ecocritical scholarship increasingly recognises the role of language and discourse in shaping environmental perception. As Andimba (2017) observes, environmental discourse has the potential to influence public understanding of ecological crises and contribute to the development of more sustainable relationships with the natural world. In this regard, the present study aligns ecocritical inquiry with discourse-oriented approaches, examining how linguistic choices within cli-fi narratives contribute to the construction of ecological meaning.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Identity Construction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach to language study that examines how discourse both reflects and produces social power, ideology, and inequality. Emerging in the late twentieth century through the work of scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun A. van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, CDA moves beyond purely structural models of linguistics by treating language as a social practice embedded within historical, political, and cultural contexts.

At its core, CDA investigates the relationship between discourse and society, particularly how linguistic choices shape representations of identity, agency, dominance, and resistance. Fairclough (1995) conceptualises discourse as operating across three interconnected dimensions: text (linguistic features), discursive practice (processes of production and interpretation), and social practice (broader ideological and institutional structures). From this perspective, grammatical structures, lexical choices, modality, and metaphor function not merely as stylistic devices but as ideological resources through which meanings are produced, normalised, or contested.

Within literary and cultural studies, CDA has increasingly been applied to analyse how fictional narratives reproduce or challenge dominant worldviews. In the context of climate fiction and posthuman narratives, CDA enables the examination of how ecological crises, technological bodies, and marginalised identities are linguistically framed. Identity, from a CDA perspective, is not fixed or inherent but discursively constructed through naming practices, pronoun usage, evaluative stance, and narrative positioning.

In this study, CDA provides an analytical framework for examining how posthuman identities are negotiated in African cli-fi narratives. By focusing on patterns of metaphor, modality, and lexical choice in *Noor* and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, the study explores how discourse constructs relationships between technology, environment, and human agency within speculative futures.

Posthumanism as Linguistic Practice

Posthumanism emerges as a critical response to classical humanism's emphasis on human exceptionalism, autonomy, and rational mastery over nature. Scholars such as Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Cary Wolfe challenge anthropocentric models of subjectivity by emphasising hybridity, relationality, and interdependence between humans, non-humans, technology, and ecological systems.

While posthumanism is frequently discussed within philosophical and technological frameworks, recent scholarship has increasingly recognised its linguistic dimension. Posthuman identity is not only embodied through technological augmentation or biological transformation but is also constructed through discourse. Language plays a central role in destabilising fixed humanist subject positions and in articulating fluid, hybrid forms of being.

As a linguistic practice, posthumanism is realised through discourse features such as metaphorical embodiment, pronoun fluidity, modal uncertainty, non-linear temporality, and shifts in transitivity that redistribute agency across human and non-human actors. Metaphors that merge body, machine, and environment blur ontological boundaries, while grammatical structures may foreground processes and relations rather than autonomous subjects.

These linguistic strategies are particularly prominent in climate fiction, where ecological crisis necessitates new ways of conceptualising survival, identity, and agency beyond the individual human subject. Within African cli-fi narratives, such discursive patterns contribute to the construction of speculative futures in which technological embodiment and ecological interdependence reshape traditional understandings of humanity.

Accordingly, this study approaches posthumanism not merely as a thematic concern but as a discursive phenomenon realised through patterned language use. By analysing how linguistic choices represent technological embodiment and environmental interdependence in *Noor* and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, the research demonstrates how posthuman identities are produced within Afrofuturist climate narratives.

Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, and Cultural Referencing

Afrofuturism is a cultural and intellectual movement that reimagines Black futures through the intersection of science fiction, technology, history, and African diasporic experience. The term was coined by Mark Dery in 1994 to describe speculative narratives that address the historical exclusion of Black people from dominant technological and futurist imaginaries. Through speculative metaphor, nonlinear temporality, and technological symbolism, Afrofuturism reclaims futurity as a space of resistance, memory, and creative possibility.

Africanfuturism, a term advanced by Nnedi Okorafor, distinguishes itself from Afrofuturism by centring African locations, cultures, languages, and epistemologies rather than diasporic or Western frameworks. While Afrofuturism frequently engages with the legacy of the Middle Passage and global Black modernity, Africanfuturism foregrounds indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, and local cosmologies as foundations for imagining future worlds. Despite these distinctions, both frameworks challenge Eurocentric technological narratives and reassert Black agency in speculative storytelling.

From a linguistic perspective, Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are realised through cultural referencing as a discourse strategy. Cultural referencing involves the incorporation of indigenous languages, symbolic naming practices, oral narrative rhythms, and culturally specific metaphors within futuristic settings. Rather than functioning as decorative elements, these linguistic features anchor speculative futures in African epistemologies and maintain continuity between ancestral knowledge systems and imagined technological worlds.

In climate fiction narratives, cultural referencing also operates as a counter-discourse to narratives of erasure and displacement. By embedding communal memory and ethical frameworks within futuristic language, Afrofuturist discourse constructs posthuman futures that remain historically grounded while imagining new possibilities for survival and transformation. Within this study, Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are therefore approached as linguistically grounded frameworks through which African writers articulate technologically mediated futures while sustaining cultural identity and ecological consciousness.

Eco-linguistics and Climate Discourse

Eco-linguistics examines how language shapes human relationships with the natural environment (Halliday, 2001; Stibbe, 2015). This approach investigates the linguistic patterns through which environmental realities are represented, interpreted, and evaluated within discourse.

In climate fiction, environmental change is frequently framed through metaphorical language that depicts ecological degradation as bodily or experiential crises. Climate change may be described through metaphors of illness, violence, suffocation, or depletion, which transform abstract environmental processes into tangible human experiences (Nerlich, Koteyko & Brown, 2010; Garrard, 2012). Such metaphorical framings influence how responsibility, agency, and survival are conceptualised, positioning both the human body and the environment as interdependent and vulnerable systems (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Stibbe, 2015).

Eco-linguistic analysis therefore provides an important framework for examining how language constructs ecological meaning in literary texts. In this study, eco-linguistics is employed to analyse metaphorical mappings between the environment, the body, and technology in selected African climate fiction narratives. By identifying recurring metaphorical patterns and evaluative language, the study demonstrates how cli-fi discourse linguistically frames ecological crisis and posthuman adaptation within speculative futures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines scholarly works related to the topic under discussion in order to compare existing studies, identify gaps in the literature, and highlight the academic contributions of this research while analyzing the selected novels.

Axel Goodbody's article "Beyond Communication: Climate Change Fiction" (2020) offers a critical framework for understanding how speculative fiction engages with environmental crises, particularly through metaphoric and narrative strategies that imagine posthuman futures. Although Goodbody focuses primarily on climate fiction (cli-fi), his analysis provides valuable insights into how literary works use metaphor to conceptualize futures beyond the anthropocentric present, a concern that is also central to Afrofuturism.

Goodbody argues that fiction does not merely communicate scientific facts about climate change; rather, it performs deeper cultural and psychological functions by staging "likely experiences, reactions, and conflicts" that arise from environmental collapse. This narrative performance often relies on metaphoric imagery—such as drowning worlds, burning landscapes, and ecological trauma—to make the imperceptible scale of climate change tangible and emotionally resonant. These metaphors serve not only as warnings but also as tools for rethinking human agency, responsibility, and coexistence with non-human entities.

In Afrofuturistic discourse, similar metaphoric strategies are employed to envision posthuman futures that challenge colonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric norms. While Goodbody does not address Afrofuturism directly, his discussion of how climate fiction "queers" environmental discourse through irony, ambivalence, and alternative affective modes aligns with Afrofuturism's subversion of dominant futurist narratives. Both cli-fi and Afrofuturism employ speculative metaphors to explore futures in which human identity, community, and ecology are radically reimagined—often in ways that decentralize the human and emphasize interconnectedness, resilience, and hybridity.

Goodbody's emphasis on fiction's role in "working through trauma" and fostering "ethical witnessing" also resonates with Afrofuturism's engagement with historical and ecological trauma. Afrofuturist works frequently employ metaphors of regeneration, cyborgian transformation, and planetary memory to imagine futures that acknowledge past violence while envisioning liberatory posthuman possibilities.

Thus, although Goodbody's analysis is grounded in climate fiction, his exploration of metaphoric imagery, narrative form, and affective engagement provides a useful lens for examining how Afrofuturism constructs posthuman futures—not as escapist fantasies, but as critical and ethically charged reconfigurations of possibility in the face of ecological and social crises.

Similarly, Lauren Gode's thesis, "Climate Change in Fiction: The Evolution and Challenges of Environmental Apocalyptic Literature" (2021), provides a detailed analysis of how apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction employs metaphor to envision futures shaped by environmental collapse. Although Gode focuses on canonical climate fiction by writers such as J. G. Ballard, Margaret Atwood, and Cormac McCarthy, her examination of metaphoric imagery—such as drowned worlds, scorched landscapes, genetic hybrids, and moral decay—offers a useful framework for analyzing similar strategies in Afrofuturistic discourse.

Gode argues that climate fiction uses metaphor not merely to depict disaster but to "make climate change visible and real" by connecting abstract environmental processes with visceral human experiences. In novels such as *The Drowned World* and *Oryx and Crake*, metaphoric landscapes—flooded cities, barren roads, and genetically modified beings—function as narrative devices that critique anthropocentrism, technological hubris, and social injustice. These metaphors operate as warnings while also exploring transformed subjectivities and possibilities beyond the human. For instance, Ballard's narrative imagines a regression toward a "Triassic" consciousness, while Atwood introduces the Crakers as a posthuman species designed to survive in a devastated world.

In Afrofuturism, metaphoric imagery functions in similar ways but often emphasizes liberation, cultural survival, and historical reclamation. While Gode's analysis focuses on environmental trauma and ethical witnessing, Afrofuturism frequently employs metaphors such as cyborgian embodiment, aquatic memory, planetary diaspora,

and ancestral reconnection to imagine posthuman futures that resist colonial and capitalist structures. Both traditions utilize speculative metaphors to destabilize present realities—whether ecological or socio-political—and to create space for alternative ways of being.

Gode's discussion of the "uncanny" in climate fiction—particularly the unsettling blurring of human and non-human boundaries—also resonates with Afrofuturism's engagement with hybridity and transformation. The disorientation produced by metaphors of genetic manipulation or species collapse parallels Afrofuturism's use of cyborgs, spirits, and trans-temporal beings to challenge fixed identities and historicize trauma.

Thus, although Gode's work is grounded in environmental apocalyptic literature, her insights into how metaphors materialize abstract crises, evoke ethical reflection, and reconfigure human–nature relationships provide an important analytical lens for examining Afrofuturism's metaphoric strategies. In this sense, Afrofuturism extends these metaphorical possibilities by envisioning posthuman futures not simply as apocalyptic endings but as sites of resilience, contested possibility, and reimagined community.

Furthermore, Laura Wright's chapter "Cli-Fi: Environmental Literature for the Anthropocene" (2019) examines the emerging genre of climate fiction as a form of environmental storytelling that renders the abstract crisis of climate change tangible through narrative and metaphor. While Wright focuses on cli-fi's role in bridging science and the humanities, her analysis of how fiction engages with the "empathetic imagination" provides a useful framework for understanding Afrofuturism's own use of speculative metaphor to envision posthuman futures.

Wright argues that cli-fi novels such as *Oryx and Crake* and *Solar* employ metaphoric scenarios—genetic engineering, ecological collapse, and scientific hubris—to materialize what scholars describe as the "slow violence" of climate change. In *Oryx and Crake*, the Crakers represent a genetically engineered posthuman species designed to survive in a devastated world, serving as a metaphor for both human obsolescence and the ambiguous potential of bioengineered futures. This metaphoric construction operates not merely as a warning but as a form of cognitive and emotional rehearsal for possible futures. Such a strategy aligns closely with Afrofuturism's speculative reimagining of identity, community, and survival in technologically and ecologically transformed worlds.

Wright also highlights the tension between art and science in cli-fi narratives, noting how Atwood's novel privileges the mythmaker—Snowman—over the pure scientist, Crake. This suggests that storytelling and cultural meaning-making are essential tools for navigating post-catastrophic realities. This emphasis on narrative as a world-building mechanism resonates strongly with Afrofuturism, which often incorporates mythic recursion, ancestral memory, and nonlinear temporality to imagine futures beyond colonial and capitalist structures.

Moreover, Wright observes that cli-fi remains predominantly a Western genre, thereby highlighting the need for more diverse representations of climate futures. Afrofuturism addresses this gap by centering African, diasporic, and marginalized perspectives in speculative narratives. Through metaphors such as cyborgian embodiment, aquatic memory, and planetary diaspora, Afrofuturist works make systemic crises visible while emphasizing liberation, cultural continuity, and resilience.

Therefore, although Wright's analysis focuses on cli-fi's response to the Anthropocene, her insights into how speculative fiction uses metaphor to render crisis intelligible, emotionally compelling, and ethically navigable provide an important theoretical foundation for examining Afrofuturism. Both cli-fi and Afrofuturism treat narrative as a technology of future-making, using metaphoric imagery to interrogate what it means to be human—or posthuman—in worlds shaped by ecological, technological, and social transformation.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative and interpretive linguistic methodology aimed at examining how posthuman identity and ecological consciousness are discursively constructed in African climate fiction. The research is grounded in the assumption that language functions not merely as a vehicle for storytelling but also as a medium through which ideological positions, cultural identities, and ecological relationships are articulated and negotiated.

To achieve this objective, the analysis integrates insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), narrative stylistics, pragmatics, and Ecolinguistics. These complementary frameworks make it possible to investigate how linguistic choices operate across multiple levels of discourse, including lexical selection, syntactic patterning, semantic relations, and pragmatic meaning. By combining these approaches, the study provides a multi-layered examination of how speculative narratives encode relationships between technology, environment, and human identity.

Within this framework, CDA is employed to uncover the ideological implications embedded in language use, particularly in relation to technological transformation, environmental crisis, and shifting notions of humanity. Narrative stylistics enables the examination of how stylistic choices shape narrative perspective and representation, while pragmatics focuses on contextual meaning, speech acts, and interactional strategies within the dialogue of the novels. Ecolinguistics further provides a theoretical lens for analyzing how language constructs and represents relationships between humans, technology, and the natural environment.

Data Selection and Analytical Scope

The primary data for this study consist of selected narrative passages, descriptive segments, and dialogic exchanges drawn from Nnedi Okorafor's *Noor* (2021) and Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* (2022). These novels were purposively selected because they engage with themes central to African climate fiction, including technological transformation, environmental crisis, posthuman embodiment, and social reorganization in climate-altered futures.

Approximately 68 pages from *Noor* (pp. 9–19, 21–27, and 40–92) and 37 pages from *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* (pp. 12–49) were analyzed. These excerpts were chosen through purposive sampling, focusing on sections where linguistic representations of technological embodiment, ecological landscapes, and socio-cultural identities are particularly prominent.

The selected passages contain rich instances of metaphorical language, narrative description, and dialogic interaction that illuminate how characters negotiate technologically mediated identities and environmentally transformed spaces. In *Noor*, the analysis focuses particularly on linguistic representations of cybernetic embodiment and the protagonist's negotiation of human–machine hybridity within a technologically saturated environment. In *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, attention is directed toward eco-metaphorical imagery, representations of communal survival, and linguistic constructions of climate-altered landscapes.

Across both texts, emphasis is placed on passages where language explicitly mediates the relationship between body, technology, and environment, and where discursive strategies such as metaphor, modality, pronoun usage, and evaluative stance are foregrounded. By concentrating on linguistically dense passages, the study ensures analytical depth while maintaining methodological transparency suitable for interdisciplinary literary-linguistic research.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure involves close textual reading combined with systematic linguistic analysis. The analysis is carried out in several stages in order to ensure methodological clarity and analytical rigor.

First, relevant textual excerpts are identified and extracted from the novels based on their thematic and linguistic relevance to posthuman identity and ecological representation. These excerpts are then subjected to detailed linguistic examination.

Second, lexical items within the selected passages are categorized into semantic fields such as technology, ecology, embodiment, survival, and futurity. This semantic grouping helps reveal recurring lexical patterns that construct technological or ecological realities within the narrative discourse.

Third, metaphorical expressions are analyzed using a conceptual metaphor approach in which metaphors are treated not merely as stylistic ornaments but as cognitive and discursive structures that shape how readers

conceptualize technological transformation and environmental change. Particular attention is given to metaphors that construct relationships between humans, machines, and ecological systems.

Fourth, syntactic structures are examined to identify patterns of modality, agency, and transitivity. These grammatical features reveal how responsibility, power, and action are distributed among human and non-human actors within the narrative world. For instance, modality markers are analyzed to determine how certainty, obligation, and possibility are expressed in relation to technological and environmental futures.

Finally, pragmatic analysis focuses on dialogic exchanges and narrative voice. This includes the examination of speech acts, naming practices, pronoun usage, and interactional strategies that reveal ideological positioning and social relationships among characters. Through this multi-level analysis, the study demonstrates how linguistic structures contribute to the construction of posthuman subjectivity and ecological awareness within African climate fiction.

Methodological Limitations

As a qualitative study, this research does not aim to produce statistically generalizable findings. Instead, its primary goal is to generate interpretive insights into how language functions within specific literary contexts. The analysis therefore focuses on depth rather than breadth, examining selected textual passages in detail rather than attempting an exhaustive analysis of the entire novels.

Consequently, the findings should be understood as indicative of broader discursive tendencies within African climate fiction rather than as definitive representations of the genre as a whole. However, this limitation is mitigated through careful contextualization of the textual data and through theoretical triangulation, which combines insights from Critical Discourse Analysis, stylistics, pragmatics, and ecolinguistics. This interdisciplinary approach strengthens the reliability of the interpretations and ensures that the analysis remains grounded in established linguistic theory.

Analytical Framework

This study employs an integrated analytical framework that combines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), narrative stylistics, pragmatics, and eco-linguistics in order to examine how posthuman identity, ecological consciousness, and futurity are linguistically constructed in African climate fiction. Rather than analysing the novels purely at the level of theme or plot, the framework foregrounds language as the primary site through which meanings about technology, environment, and identity are produced.

At the core of the analysis is Critical Discourse Analysis, particularly the model proposed by Norman Fairclough, which conceptualises discourse as operating across three interconnected dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual level focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, metaphor, modality, and pronoun usage. The discursive practice level examines how meanings are produced and interpreted within narrative contexts, while the social practice level situates these meanings within broader ideological structures, including environmental crisis, technological transformation, and cultural identity. Through this framework, language in the selected novels is examined as an ideological resource that shapes how posthuman futures are imagined and interpreted.

Narrative stylistics further complements CDA by enabling detailed examination of how narrative voice, focalisation, and descriptive structures shape readers' perception of fictional environments and characters. Particular attention is paid to stylistic patterns that construct spatial environments, technological bodies, and ecological relationships. This approach allows the analysis to identify how narrative language produces immersive images of climate-altered landscapes and technologically modified bodies, thereby contributing to the construction of posthuman subjectivities.

Pragmatic analysis is also incorporated to examine how meaning is negotiated through interaction, dialogue, and contextual cues within the narrative discourse. Pragmatic features such as speech acts, naming practices, deixis, and evaluative stance are analysed to reveal how characters position themselves in relation to technological

authority, ecological vulnerability, and communal survival. These pragmatic elements provide insight into how identity and agency are negotiated at the level of discourse.

Finally, the framework draws on eco-linguistics, particularly the work of Arran Stibbe, to investigate how linguistic patterns shape representations of the environment and human-nature relationships. Eco-linguistic analysis focuses on metaphorical mappings between body, environment, and technology, as well as semantic fields associated with climate change, ecological degradation, and environmental resilience. Through this perspective, environmental discourse in the novels is examined as a linguistic system that constructs the climate-changed future as both a material and symbolic landscape.

By integrating these analytical perspectives, the study establishes a multi-layered framework capable of capturing the complex relationship between language, environment, technology, and identity in African climate fiction. The framework enables systematic examination of how linguistic strategies—such as metaphor, modality, pronoun usage, and cultural referencing—collectively construct the image of the posthuman future in the selected texts.

Constructing The CLI-FI Future in Noor: Language, Space, and Embodied Futurity

In *Noor*, written by Nnedi Okorafor, the image of the cli-fi future is not produced solely through plot or setting but through patterned linguistic choices that shape how space, technology, and the body are perceived. The novel constructs a future marked by ecological hostility, technological intrusion, and adaptive embodiment. These conditions are discursively assembled through environmental metaphors, embodied narration, sensory description, and techno-organic lexical fields.

Rather than presenting the future as a distant or abstract horizon, the narrative situates futurity within everyday experience. Through metaphor, narrative voice, and spatial description, the novel constructs a climate-altered Nigeria in which environmental catastrophe and technological modernity coexist in unstable tension. The future therefore emerges linguistically as a contested terrain of survival, movement, and negotiation between human and non-human forces.

The Desert as a Discursive Future-Space

The desert landscape in *Noor* functions as more than a physical setting; it operates as a discursively constructed future-space. Through personification, animist metaphors, and sensory lexical fields associated with heat, exposure, and motion, the environment is represented as an active agent rather than a passive background.

For instance, the sandstorm known as the “Red Eye” is described as a living entity:

“The Red Eye was a beast.” (p.10)

Through this metaphorical personification, the environment acquires agency and intentionality. Climate change is therefore not framed as a distant scientific phenomenon but as a tangible and embodied force shaping human perception, mobility, and vulnerability.

The linguistic construction of the future Nigeria depicted in *Noor* further reinforces this atmosphere of instability. Rather than a sleek technological utopia, the narrative describes an uneven landscape marked by corporate infrastructure and environmental degradation:

“I’m used to concrete towers and sprawling buildings... And drones and AI-run robots peopled the streets and the air like insects and birds. Their cooling fans are fluffy with dust and dirt, some are missing parts because people pull them off to sell in the black market.” (p.92)

The simile comparing drones to “insects and birds” constructs technology as an invasive ecological presence. Through such metaphors, the future is linguistically imagined as a hybrid ecosystem where technological artefacts and environmental decay coexist.

Embodied Futurity and the Posthuman Body

Posthuman embodiment in *Noor* is primarily articulated through the character of AO, whose technologically modified body functions as a mobile site of futurity. The narrative's first-person perspective enables AO to linguistically construct her identity through declarative and assertive syntax:

“I run. I adapt.” (p.24)

These short declarative structures emphasise agency, resilience, and bodily adaptability. Linguistically, the posthuman body is therefore framed not as a loss of humanity but as a mechanism of survival within a climate-altered environment.

Importantly, AO's embodiment is described through metaphors grounded in endurance, rhythm, and natural resilience rather than purely mechanistic terminology. This metaphorical strategy integrates technology into culturally meaningful frameworks of bodily experience. As a result, the posthuman body becomes linguistically aligned with ecological adaptation rather than technological alienation.

Corporate Infrastructure and Extractive Futurity

The novel also constructs futurity through the metaphorical framing of corporate technological infrastructures. The wind turbines belonging to Ultimate Corp are repeatedly described through organic imagery:

“Ultimate Corp's famous enormous wind turbines sat like the world's most bizarre plant.” (p.10)

This metaphor juxtaposes organic growth with industrial exploitation. By describing turbines as “plants,” the narrative ironically naturalises corporate technology while simultaneously rendering it grotesque and intrusive.

The metaphor therefore exposes the paradox of climate capitalism: technologies presented as environmentally sustainable may reproduce exploitative and neo-colonial structures of power. Linguistically, the future is depicted as environmentally mediated yet ethically compromised.

Linguistic Realisation of Posthuman Identity

Posthuman identity in *Noor* is linguistically realised primarily through AO's first-person narration. From a narrative-linguistic perspective, first-person focalisation enables the protagonist to control evaluative stance, lexical selection, and metaphorical framing.

AO's discourse does not merely describe her technologically modified body; it actively performs posthuman identity through language. Her self-narration demonstrates how identity emerges through discursive positioning rather than fixed biological categories. Through lexical choices and metaphorical constructions, AO reframes the labels imposed by state and corporate institutions and reclaims agency over her bodily transformation.

Cultural Symbolism and Hybrid Metaphoric Systems

A significant feature of *Noor* is its integration of bilingual and culturally grounded metaphorical systems. Even when written in English, the narrative frequently draws upon Nigerian cultural frames and linguistic traditions.

For example, the sandstorm known locally as *Ja Ido* is described through colonial linguistic mediation:

“Most use the language of our colonizers and call the enormous never-ending sandstorm the ‘Red Eye.’” (p.27)

This statement highlights how language itself becomes a site of cultural negotiation. Indigenous naming practices coexist with colonial linguistic frameworks, producing a hybrid symbolic system that reflects the novel's broader concerns with identity, technology, and displacement.

Environmental Personification and Animist Lexicon

Environmental forces in Noor are frequently personified through animist metaphors that attribute agency to natural phenomena. The sandstorm is described as follows:

“The Red Eye was a beast who would watch me be a beast.” (p.10)

Here, the metaphor simultaneously characterises the environment and AO herself as “beasts.” This parallel identification constructs a symbolic relationship between ecological catastrophe and technological transformation. AO’s cybernetic embodiment is therefore linguistically integrated into a broader ecological order rather than positioned outside nature.

Technological Metaphors and Sensory Experience

Technological experience in the novel is also expressed through metaphorical structures grounded in sensory perception:

“It was like being psychic backwards.” (p.18)

This simile combines traditional notions of extra-sensory perception with technological malfunction. The phrase “psychic backwards” constructs a hybrid metaphor that blends cultural concepts of intuition with digital logic and neurological feedback. Through such expressions, technological embodiment is rendered cognitively and emotionally comprehensible.

Metaphors of Corporatisation and Power

The metaphorical depiction of corporate technology extends throughout the narrative. Ultimate Corp’s infrastructures are repeatedly framed through organic imagery that suggests invasive growth and environmental dominance.

By comparing wind turbines to “bizarre plants,” the novel constructs corporate expansion as an unnatural ecosystem thriving on environmental crisis. Linguistically, this metaphor critiques corporate power structures that commodify ecological disaster while claiming to provide technological solutions.

Constructing The Cli-Fi Future in It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way: Relationality and Fragile Worlds

While Noor constructs the climate-altered future through mobility, bodily adaptation, and technological embodiment, *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* by Alistair Mackay linguistically assembles the cli-fi future as fragile, relational, and collectively negotiated. The novel foregrounds ecological precarity through discourse patterns that emphasize bodily vulnerability, shared responsibility, and modal uncertainty.

Rather than depicting heroic survival or technological mastery over nature, the narrative constructs a future shaped by environmental instability and social interdependence. Linguistically, this future emerges through anthropomorphic environmental metaphors, collective pronoun usage, and modal structures that present futurity as conditional rather than predetermined.

The City as a Shared, Suffering Organism

In the novel, the climate-altered city is frequently described through anthropomorphic and corporeal metaphors that collapse the boundaries between human bodies and the environment. Roads, buildings, air, and infrastructure are depicted as if they share the same vulnerability as human bodies.

For example, environmental conditions are described in terms of bodily fragility:

“If we move too much, or let our hearts race, the temperature rises in our bodies and the air can’t cool us and our organs fail.” (p.9)

This passage demonstrates how environmental degradation is linguistically experienced through the body. The sentence structure foregrounds physiological processes (“hearts race,” “organs fail”), suggesting that survival is contingent upon maintaining a fragile equilibrium between body and atmosphere. The environment is therefore not an external setting but a system within which the human body is embedded.

Similarly, the novel employs metaphors that liken urban infrastructure to deteriorating human skin or exhausted flesh. Such imagery constructs the city as a suffering organism rather than a stable technological space. Through this linguistic strategy, environmental crisis becomes an intimate and embodied experience.

Consequently, the future world imagined in the novel is not one of heroic adaptation but of shared vulnerability. Human survival is depicted as precarious and contingent upon cooperation, restraint, and careful negotiation with environmental limits.

Collective Futurity and Modal Uncertainty

Another significant linguistic feature through which the novel constructs futurity is the pervasive use of modal verbs. Modal expressions such as could, can’t, might, and have to dominate the discourse surrounding future possibilities. These modal structures create a sense of uncertainty and instability that contrasts with the deterministic futurism often associated with conventional science fiction.

For instance, the narrative states:

“We can’t be seen during the day.” (p.12)

The modal verb can’t encodes restriction and limitation, emphasising the constraints imposed by environmental conditions. Survival strategies are therefore framed not as deliberate choices but as necessary responses to external pressures.

The prevalence of modal language also suggests that the future remains open and unresolved. Statements throughout the novel frequently imply that circumstances might change or that survival strategies could fail. This modal uncertainty resists narratives of technological progress or inevitable collapse, instead presenting the future as a continuously negotiated space.

Through such linguistic patterns, the cli-fi future is represented not as a fixed outcome but as a set of contingent possibilities shaped by human behaviour and ecological constraints.

Collective Pronouns and Communal Survival

Pronoun usage in the novel further reinforces the collective nature of futurity. Unlike narratives that centre individual heroism, the discourse in *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* consistently foregrounds communal

identity through the use of inclusive pronouns such as we and us.

For example:

“We’ll try the fly farm this evening.” (p.49)

The pronoun we constructs survival as a shared undertaking rather than an individual achievement. Decisions, movements, and strategies are presented as collective actions undertaken by a community attempting to navigate a hostile environment.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, the dominance of inclusive pronouns creates a sense of distributed agency. Responsibility for survival is not concentrated in a single protagonist but shared across a network of individuals whose actions are interdependent.

This linguistic pattern reflects a broader ethical orientation within the novel. The future is depicted as something that must be built collaboratively or risk being lost collectively. In this way, pronoun usage functions as a discursive mechanism through which the narrative imagines a form of ecological solidarity.

Fragile Worlds and Ethical Futurity

Taken together, the linguistic features examined above—corporeal environmental metaphors, modal uncertainty, and collective pronoun structures—construct a distinctive image of the cli-fi future. Unlike the technologically mediated adaptation depicted in *Noor*, the future imagined in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* is fragile, relational, and ethically contingent.

Environmental collapse is experienced through the body, survival depends upon cooperation, and the future itself remains linguistically framed as uncertain and negotiable. The narrative therefore resists deterministic visions of apocalypse or technological salvation. Instead, it presents the future as a precarious world sustained only through careful collective action.

Through these discursive strategies, the novel imagines a climate-altered future in which ecological survival is inseparable from communal responsibility.

Comparative Synthesis: How The CLI-FI Future Is Imaged Across Both Texts

Taken together, *Noor* by Nnedi Okorafor and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* by Alistair Mackay construct complementary linguistic images of African cli-fi futurity. While the two novels emerge from different narrative traditions and stylistic orientations, both texts employ patterned language use to represent futures shaped by ecological crisis, technological transformation, and social reconfiguration.

In *Noor*, futurity is linguistically constructed through metaphors of movement, bodily endurance, and technological embodiment. The narrative foregrounds individual adaptation within a hostile ecological landscape, where survival is closely tied to the transformation of the human body itself. By contrast, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* imagines futurity as fragile, collective, and relational. Rather than focusing on the adaptive capabilities of a single protagonist, Mackay's narrative emphasises communal negotiation with environmental instability.

Despite these differences, both novels share several discursive strategies through which the cli-fi future is constructed. First, each text deploys metaphorical environmental imagery that positions the environment as an active force acting upon human bodies. Second, technology is linguistically framed not as a utopian solution but as an ethically ambiguous presence embedded within uneven social structures. Third, both narratives employ cultural and linguistic referencing to stabilise speculative futures within recognisable social and historical contexts.

Most importantly, the futures imagined in both texts resist deterministic narratives of technological progress or inevitable apocalypse. Instead, futurity is presented as a continuously unfolding condition shaped through everyday discourse, interpersonal relations, and ecological negotiation. The cli-fi future therefore emerges not as a distant endpoint but as a lived present constructed through language.

Code-Switching, Allusion, and the Bilingual Framework in *Noor*

One of the most distinctive linguistic features of *Noor* is its use of bilingual discourse strategies. The narrative world is constructed through a hybrid linguistic framework in which English interacts with Nigerian languages and cultural references. Through unmarked code-switching, literary allusion, and culturally specific lexical insertions, the novel situates its speculative future firmly within the multilingual realities of contemporary Nigerian society.

This linguistic hybridity challenges the monolingual conventions often associated with global science fiction narratives. Instead of presenting a technologically advanced future dominated by standardized global English, the novel foregrounds the persistence of local linguistic identities within speculative contexts. Language thus becomes a crucial tool for anchoring futurity within culturally specific epistemologies.

Unmarked Code-Switching and Lexical Insertion

A notable example of this bilingual framework occurs when the protagonist exclaims:

“Na wao,” (p.80)

This widely used Nigerian expression, derived from Igbo but common in Nigerian Pidgin and everyday speech, appears in the narrative without italics, translation, or explanatory gloss. The absence of typographical marking signals that the phrase is treated as a natural part of the narrative’s linguistic environment. Rather than interrupting the narrative to explain the expression for an external reader, the text assumes cultural familiarity.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, such lexical insertions function as sociolinguistic markers of cultural belonging. They reflect the fluid movement between English and indigenous linguistic resources that characterises everyday communication in multilingual Nigerian contexts. By incorporating these expressions seamlessly into the narrative, the novel normalises bilingual speech practices and asserts the legitimacy of local linguistic identities within futuristic settings.

Another example appears when AO encounters speech she cannot understand:

“He barked something in a language I couldn’t understand.” (p.40)

In this instance, the character DNA initially speaks in Pulaar, a language associated with Fulani communities across West Africa. The speech is not translated for either the protagonist or the reader, creating a deliberate moment of linguistic opacity. This narrative strategy acknowledges the presence of multiple languages within the fictional environment without forcing them into the dominant narrative language.

Such moments highlight the multilingual complexity of the social world depicted in the novel. They also demonstrate how language difference can function as a narrative device that reflects the limits of individual perception within diverse linguistic landscapes.

Literary and Mythic Allusion: Anchoring Futurity in Cultural Memory

In addition to code-switching, Noor also employs literary and mythic allusions that link its speculative narrative to broader African cultural traditions. These references situate the imagined future within a continuum of cultural memory rather than presenting it as a radical break from the past.

The novel’s epigraph provides an important example:

“He who waits will see what is in the grass.” (p.9)

This proverb originates from *The Burning Grass* by Cyprian Ekwensi, a work deeply rooted in pastoral Nigerian storytelling traditions. By invoking this proverb at the beginning of the narrative, the novel signals that its futuristic setting remains connected to earlier literary traditions concerned with land, patience, and mobility.

Similarly, mythological references appear when AO describes the force of an attack:

“It was as if Amadioha or Shango had slapped me.” (p.21)

The invocation of Amadioha (an Igbo deity associated with thunder and justice) and Shango (the Yoruba god of lightning and power) situates the moment within a culturally specific spiritual framework. Rather than describing the event through purely technological or scientific language, the narrative interprets physical experience through mythic metaphor.

These allusions demonstrate how cultural memory continues to shape the conceptual vocabulary through which new experiences are understood. Even within a technologically transformed future, traditional cosmologies remain active interpretive frameworks.

Culturally Grounded Techno-Lexicon

Another important feature of Noor's linguistic structure is the integration of technological concepts with culturally familiar metaphors. Advanced technological systems are often described through analogies derived from traditional cultural objects or practices.

For example:

“The talking drum that was so much like the beat my brother would play.” (p.11)

The talking drum is a traditional West African instrument historically used as a communication device capable of mimicking speech patterns. By comparing AO's neural implant signals to the rhythm of a talking drum, the narrative frames advanced cybernetic technology through a culturally familiar communicative system.

This metaphorical strategy bridges technological innovation and cultural continuity. Instead of presenting futuristic technologies as entirely alien or incomprehensible, the narrative interprets them through indigenous systems of knowledge and communication.

Such linguistic choices demonstrate how speculative narratives can integrate technological imagination with culturally grounded interpretive frameworks.

Synthesis: Bilingualism as Narrative Architecture

Taken together, the linguistic strategies identified above reveal that bilingualism functions not merely as stylistic ornamentation but as a structural principle in Noor. Code-switching, mythic allusion, and culturally grounded metaphors collectively shape the narrative architecture through which the speculative world is constructed.

By incorporating expressions such as “Na wao,” referencing Nigerian literary traditions, and drawing upon indigenous cosmologies, the novel constructs a future that remains linguistically rooted in African cultural contexts. The speculative world is therefore built upon a layered linguistic fabric in which English interacts dynamically with Hausa, Igbo, Pulaar, Arabic-derived vocabulary, and Nigerian Pidgin.

This hybrid linguistic environment reinforces the central argument of this study: that the futures imagined in African cli-fi are not merely thematic projections but discursive constructions shaped through patterned language use. Through its bilingual lexicon and culturally grounded metaphors, Noor demonstrates how speculative narratives can imagine technologically advanced futures while maintaining deep continuity with local linguistic and cultural traditions.

Environmental Relativity and Aspects of Futurism in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*

Brief Contextualisation of the Novel and Characters

It Doesn't Have to Be This Way by Alistair Mackay is set in a near-future South African city destabilised by ecological collapse, infrastructural breakdown, and extreme climatic conditions. Unlike many technocentric speculative narratives that emphasise futuristic technologies or enhanced individuals, the novel foregrounds the everyday experiences of ordinary people struggling to survive within a deteriorating environment.

The narrative centres on a small group of characters attempting to navigate an increasingly hostile urban landscape characterised by rising temperatures, failing infrastructure, and limited resources. Survival is achieved not through technological mastery but through cooperation, improvisation, and collective resilience.

Within this context, posthuman identity is not embodied in a single technologically augmented protagonist. Instead, subjectivity is distributed across networks of human bodies, environmental systems, and fragile infrastructures. The novel therefore constructs a form of relational posthumanism in which agency emerges through interaction between people, environment, and built space rather than through individual technological empowerment.

Eco-Metaphors and Anthropomorphic Environmental Imagery

One of the dominant stylistic strategies in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* is the anthropomorphisation of the environment. Ecological conditions are frequently described through bodily and affective metaphors that collapse the distinction between human organism and environmental system.

For example, the oppressive atmosphere of the city is represented through somatic imagery:

“As soon as you set foot outside, the hot air howls all around you, and grinds sand into your eyes and ears and nose... but we still have to breathe.” (p.10)

In this passage, the environment is portrayed as an aggressive force that actively attacks the human body. Verbs such as *howls* and *grinds* animate the air, transforming it from a passive atmospheric condition into an antagonistic agent. The metaphorical depiction of sand invading the body's sensory organs blurs the boundary between environment and organism, emphasising the physical intimacy of ecological crisis.

Similarly, urban infrastructure is frequently described through metaphors associated with bodily exhaustion and injury. Roads crack like fatigued skin and buildings appear to lean as if weakened by strain. These descriptions linguistically align the built environment with organic vulnerability.

From an eco-linguistic perspective, this metaphorical strategy reflects what Arran Stibbe identifies as “stories of entanglement,” in which humans and non-human systems are represented as mutually vulnerable. Climate change is therefore constructed not as an external catastrophe but as an embodied condition that permeates everyday life.

Relational Discourse and Collective Posthuman Identity

Posthuman subjectivity in Mackay's novel is primarily constructed through relational discourse patterns, particularly through pronoun usage and dialogic interaction. The narrative frequently employs inclusive pronouns such as *we* and *us*, reducing the prominence of an autonomous individual speaker.

For instance, decisions about survival strategies are framed collectively:

“We'll try the fly farm this evening.” (p.49)

The use of *we* distributes responsibility across the group and emphasises shared agency. Rather than presenting survival as the achievement of a heroic individual, the discourse frames it as a collaborative process dependent on collective action.

Modal verbs such as *might*, *could*, and *maybe* also appear frequently in future-oriented statements. These expressions signal epistemic uncertainty and highlight the unstable nature of the characters' environment. The future is not presented as predetermined but as contingent upon circumstances beyond the characters' control.

From a pragmatic perspective, these mitigated expressions function to maintain social cohesion within the group. By avoiding absolute assertions and leaving space for negotiation, the characters sustain cooperative relationships in conditions of environmental stress.

Consequently, posthuman identity in the novel is linguistically constructed as interdependence rather than individual autonomy, aligning with broader communal ethics often emphasised in African social philosophies.

Temporal Fragmentation and Non-Deterministic Futurity

Temporal representation in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* is characterised by fragmentation and uncertainty. The narrative frequently shifts between present survival activities, recollections of a more stable past, and speculative projections of what the future might hold.

Future-oriented statements are often hedged through conditional language such as if this holds or if we're lucky. These linguistic markers signal the precarious nature of temporal expectation within the narrative world.

Unlike traditional futurist narratives, which often depict technological progress as inevitable, Mackay's novel constructs futurity as fragile and uncertain. The future exists not as a clearly defined destination but as a possibility constantly negotiated in the present.

This stylistic strategy reinforces the novel's ethical orientation. By resisting deterministic narratives of progress or apocalypse, the discourse foregrounds a posthuman ethic grounded in care, cooperation, and situational adaptation.

Environmental Relativity and Embodied Climate Experience

A central feature of the novel's linguistic structure is the concept of environmental relativity: the idea that environmental conditions directly determine bodily experience and social behaviour.

Characters repeatedly describe how their physical actions must be carefully regulated in response to extreme heat:

"If we move too much, or let our hearts race, the temperature rises in our bodies and the air can't cool us and our organs fail." (p.9)

In this passage, the environment functions as an invisible physiological regulator. Human survival becomes dependent on maintaining equilibrium between bodily processes and atmospheric conditions. The metaphorical language used here emphasises the delicate balance between organism and environment.

From an eco-linguistic perspective, such discourse reinforces the idea that climate change transforms the body into a site of environmental negotiation. The boundary between ecological system and human physiology becomes increasingly porous.

Modal Discourse and Conditional Futurity

Another significant linguistic feature of the novel is the heavy reliance on modal verbs to frame discussions of the future. Modal constructions such as could, might, have to, and can't dominate characters' conversations about movement, safety, and resource management.

For example:

"We can't be seen during the day." (p.12)

The modal verb can't expresses both physical limitation and social necessity. It reflects the constraints imposed by environmental conditions as well as the dangers associated with exposure in a destabilised social order.

Similarly, statements regarding survival plans often contain modal qualifiers that signal uncertainty. Rather than asserting definitive outcomes, characters acknowledge the unpredictability of their circumstances.

This modal discourse constructs futurity as conditional rather than inevitable. The future becomes something that may emerge through collective action but remains vulnerable to disruption.

Linguistic Construction of Fragile Futurity

Through the combined use of eco-metaphors, relational pronoun structures, and modal uncertainty, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* constructs a distinctive image of the cli-fi future.

Unlike narratives that frame the future as technologically triumphant or apocalyptically doomed, Mackay's novel presents futurity as fragile and negotiated. The linguistic structure of the narrative reflects this instability: sentences are often tentative, collective, and context-dependent.

The future in this discourse is therefore neither a triumphant technological horizon nor a final collapse. Instead, it is an ongoing process shaped through everyday decisions, interpersonal cooperation, and environmental adaptation.

In this sense, the novel contributes to a broader reimagining of posthuman futurity in African climate fiction—one in which survival depends less on technological mastery than on the cultivation of relational resilience within ecologically fragile worlds.

Discourse, Ecology, And Relational Posthumanism in It Doesn't Have to Be This Way

In contrast to the assertive syntactic economy that characterizes Noor, Alistair Mackay's *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* constructs posthuman subjectivity through fragmented discourse patterns, dialogic interaction, and eco-metaphorical language. Rather than foregrounding technological embodiment or individual agency, the novel's linguistic structure emphasises vulnerability, environmental entanglement, and collective survival.

From a discourse-analytic perspective, the narrative voice reflects a world shaped by ecological instability and infrastructural collapse. The language of the novel repeatedly situates human experience within environmental pressures, thereby dissolving the rigid boundary between human subjects and their ecological surroundings. Through metaphor, pronoun usage, modal expressions, and fragmented temporal references, Mackay's narrative constructs what may be described as relational posthumanism, a mode of identity grounded in interdependence rather than autonomy.

Linguistically, the text foregrounds three interrelated strategies: eco-metaphorical imagery that embodies environmental degradation, dialogic discourse patterns that emphasize collective agency, and temporal structures that resist deterministic futurity. Together, these features present the future not as a technologically mastered domain but as a precarious space negotiated through shared adaptation.

Eco-Metaphor and Anthropomorphic Environmental Discourse

Environmental degradation in the novel is frequently articulated through anthropomorphic metaphors, whereby urban and natural environments are described using bodily or affective language. This linguistic strategy collapses the conventional distinction between environment and organism, portraying ecological systems as entities capable of suffering, fatigue, and resistance.

Descriptions of polluted air, for example, often evoke bodily discomfort and constraint. Atmospheric conditions are represented as pressing against the lungs or making breathing a deliberate act rather than an automatic bodily function. Such imagery transforms air from an invisible environmental background into an active participant in human experience. When characters step outside and encounter harsh heat and sandstorms, the environment appears almost animate, exerting pressure on the body and shaping the rhythm of daily movement.

Similarly, the city's infrastructure is frequently described through metaphors of bodily exhaustion. Roads crack like damaged skin, buildings lean as though weary, and urban spaces appear strained under environmental stress. These metaphors attribute corporeal vulnerability to built environments, reinforcing the idea that ecological disruption affects not only natural ecosystems but also human-constructed systems.

From an eco-linguistic perspective, such metaphors align with what Stibbe (2015) identifies as stories of entanglement, narratives that highlight the interconnected vulnerability of humans and non-human systems. Rather than presenting climate change as a distant catastrophe, the novel's metaphorical language constructs it as an immediate and embodied condition. Environmental harm is not external to human life; it is experienced through the body, through breath, movement, and physical discomfort.

Through these metaphorical structures, the environment becomes a discursive actor within the narrative. It influences action, constrains movement, and reshapes human behaviour, thereby reinforcing the posthuman premise that human life is inseparable from ecological systems.

Dialogic Pragmatics and the Language of Communal Survival

Another defining linguistic feature of *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* is its reliance on dialogic discourse patterns that foreground cooperation and collective decision-making. In contrast to narratives centred on individual agency, the novel repeatedly constructs survival through group interaction and shared negotiation.

From a pragmatic perspective, dialogue within the novel frequently employs inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *us*, and *our*. These pronouns function as markers of collective identity, distributing agency across the group rather than concentrating it in a single protagonist. Statements such as “we could try,” “we’ll see if this works,” or “maybe we should move before the storm” illustrate how decisions emerge through communal discussion rather than authoritative command.

Equally significant is the consistent use of modal auxiliaries such as *might*, *could*, *maybe*, and *perhaps*. These modal forms express epistemic uncertainty, reflecting the unpredictable conditions of a climate-destabilised world. Rather than asserting control over the future, characters linguistically acknowledge the limitations of their knowledge and the fragility of their plans.

In discourse-pragmatic terms, these mitigated expressions function to preserve social cohesion under conditions of stress. Direct commands are rare; instead, suggestions and proposals dominate conversation. This pattern allows individuals to negotiate decisions collaboratively, reducing potential conflict within the group.

Such linguistic features reinforce the novel’s construction of relational posthuman identity. Human agency is not depicted as autonomous or technologically enhanced but as fundamentally interdependent. Survival depends on communication, negotiation, and shared responsibility. The discourse of the novel thus aligns with communal epistemologies often associated with African relational ethics, where identity is understood through networks of social connection rather than individual self-sufficiency.

Temporal Fragmentation and Non-Deterministic Futurity

Temporal structure in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* also contributes to the novel’s distinctive linguistic representation of futurity. Rather than presenting a linear progression from present crisis to technological resolution, the narrative frequently shifts between present survival tasks, recollections of a more stable past, and uncertain projections of what might come.

These temporal shifts create a sense of fragmented chronology, where the future appears unstable and contingent. Memories of past environmental normalcy contrast sharply with present ecological degradation, reinforcing the sense of loss that underlies the narrative. At the same time, projections of the future are rarely expressed with certainty.

Modal expressions such as *if this holds*, *if we’re lucky*, or *maybe tomorrow will be cooler* repeatedly qualify references to the future. These linguistic markers of uncertainty transform futurity into a negotiable possibility rather than a predetermined outcome.

From a discourse-analytic standpoint, this pattern represents a significant departure from traditional futurist narratives, which often portray technological progress as inevitable and linear. Instead, Mackay’s novel constructs what may be described as suspended futurity—a future that remains open, fragile, and dependent on collective decisions.

This discursive structure reinforces the ethical orientation of relational posthumanism. The future is not imposed by technological inevitability but shaped through everyday acts of cooperation, adaptation, and environmental awareness.

Synthesis: Ecology, Discourse, and Relational Posthuman Futures

Taken together, the linguistic strategies examined above reveal how *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* constructs a distinctive vision of posthuman futurity. Through eco-metaphorical imagery, dialogic discourse patterns, and temporally fragmented narration, the novel presents a future defined not by technological dominance but by ecological vulnerability and communal resilience.

Unlike the assertive, technologically embodied agency that characterizes AO's narration in *Noor*, Mackay's narrative voice foregrounds collective adaptation within fragile ecological systems. Language itself becomes the medium through which this relational identity is constructed. Metaphors connect human bodies to environmental processes, pronouns distribute agency across communities, and modal expressions encode uncertainty about the future.

The result is a model of posthumanism that is fundamentally ecological and relational. Humans, environments, and infrastructures are linguistically represented as interdependent systems, each influencing the survival of the others. Futurity, therefore, emerges not as a fixed destination but as an ongoing process of negotiation within an unstable ecological world.

Linguistic Fusion and Afrofuturist Discourse Across the Texts

A comparative linguistic examination of *Noor* and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* reveals that, despite their stylistic and narrative differences, both novels construct futurity through a shared repertoire of Afrofuturist discourse strategies. These strategies combine speculative technological imaginaries with culturally embedded linguistic forms, producing narratives in which the future emerges as an extension of existing cultural and ecological realities rather than a radical break from them.

In both texts, language functions as the primary medium through which posthuman identity is negotiated. Through lexical blending, metaphorical mapping, pronoun distribution, and modal constructions, the novels integrate technology, environment, and cultural identity into coherent discursive systems. This linguistic fusion challenges dominant Western models of futurism that often frame technological advancement as culturally neutral or universally applicable.

Instead, both texts demonstrate that speculative futures in African cli-fi are linguistically situated within culturally specific environments. Indigenous references, vernacular expressions, and culturally grounded metaphors coexist with technological vocabulary, creating hybrid linguistic landscapes that resist the erasure of local identities.

Hybrid Lexicons and Semantic Blending

One of the most prominent comparative features across the two novels is the formation of hybrid lexical fields in which technological terminology is integrated with culturally specific linguistic expressions.

In *Noor*, this blending is particularly visible in the juxtaposition of cybernetic and digital vocabulary with indigenous cultural references. Technological systems, implants, and networks are frequently described through metaphors derived from natural objects, traditional communication systems, or culturally familiar artefacts. Such linguistic strategies translate complex technological concepts into culturally grounded semantic frameworks.

Similarly, *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* integrates technological vocabulary within everyday ecological and social discourse. References to infrastructural systems, energy resources, and environmental technologies appear alongside language describing local landscapes, weather patterns, and communal survival practices.

This semantic blending produces a hybrid lexicon in which advanced technology is not presented as an alien or purely futuristic phenomenon but as part of a broader cultural and environmental continuum. From a discourse-analytic perspective, such lexical fusion functions as a strategy of cultural domestication, allowing speculative technologies to be understood through familiar linguistic structures.

In this way, both texts resist the dominance of Western techno-scientific registers and instead situate technological futurity within culturally meaningful semantic fields.

Modality and Non-Deterministic Futurity

Modal verbs and expressions of epistemic uncertainty play a significant role in shaping the representation of futurity across the two novels. However, the texts deploy modality in contrasting ways that nevertheless contribute to a shared Afrofuturist vision of non-deterministic futures.

In *Noor*, modal expressions are relatively limited, and the narrative voice frequently relies on direct declarative constructions. Short, assertive statements such as “I adapt” or “I endure” minimise epistemic uncertainty and foreground individual agency. The absence of modal hedging constructs a sense of decisiveness and resilience, reflecting the protagonist’s determination to survive within hostile technological and environmental conditions.

By contrast, *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* is characterised by frequent modal constructions such as might, could, maybe, and perhaps. These forms encode uncertainty about environmental stability and future outcomes. Plans are rarely expressed as certainties; instead, they appear as provisional possibilities negotiated within unstable ecological contexts.

Despite these stylistic differences, both novels resist deterministic models of futurism. The future is not presented as a fixed endpoint shaped by technological inevitability. Rather, it emerges as an open and contingent domain, shaped either through assertive adaptation (*Noor*) or collective negotiation (*It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way*).

This modal variability reflects a broader Afrofuturist discourse in which futurity remains dynamic, ethically negotiated, and responsive to environmental and social realities.

Pronouns, Agency, and Communal Identity

Pronoun usage across the two novels provides further insight into their differing yet complementary constructions of posthuman identity.

In *Noor*, the narrative voice frequently employs the first-person singular pronoun I. This pronoun functions as a linguistic marker of self-assertion and discursive autonomy, particularly in relation to institutional forces that attempt to define or control the protagonist’s technologically modified body. Through the repeated assertion of I, the narrative resists discourses that frame technological augmentation as loss of identity or agency.

In contrast, *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* frequently privileges the inclusive pronoun we. Dialogue and narration repeatedly emphasise collective decision-making and shared responsibility. This linguistic preference distributes agency across groups rather than concentrating it within a single protagonist.

From a discourse perspective, these differing pronoun strategies reflect two complementary forms of posthuman ethics. The singular I in *Noor* foregrounds the reclamation of individual identity within technologically mediated systems, while the plural we in Mackay’s novel highlights the importance of communal resilience and relational survival.

Together, these pronoun patterns challenge dominant neoliberal models of posthumanism that prioritise individual technological enhancement. Instead, both texts construct posthuman identity as embedded within networks of cultural, social, and ecological relations.

Implications For African Posthuman Linguistics

The findings of this study contribute to the emerging field of African posthuman linguistics, demonstrating that representations of posthuman identity within African cli-fi are fundamentally grounded in language.

First, the analysis reveals that posthuman embodiment in these narratives is not articulated primarily through technological description but through discursive strategies that integrate bodies, environments, and technologies

within coherent linguistic frameworks. Language functions as the primary medium through which speculative futures become intelligible and culturally meaningful.

Second, the study highlights the central role of cultural referencing as a discursive anchoring mechanism. Indigenous expressions, mythological allusions, and culturally embedded metaphors stabilise speculative narratives by linking futuristic imaginaries with historically grounded cultural knowledge. These references ensure that technological futures remain connected to existing linguistic and cultural traditions rather than displacing them.

Third, the analysis underscores the necessity of expanding posthuman linguistic theory beyond Euro-American theoretical paradigms. Much existing scholarship on posthumanism has focused on technologically advanced societies and has often overlooked the role of language in shaping culturally specific futures. African cli-fi texts provide alternative discourse models in which futurity is framed through communal ethics, ecological interdependence, and linguistic hybridity.

By foregrounding these discursive dynamics, African speculative literature contributes new perspectives to global debates on posthumanism, climate discourse, and linguistic representations of the future.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that posthumanism in African cli-fi is not merely a thematic concern but a linguistically constructed phenomenon. Across both *Noor* and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, language operates as the principal medium through which technological embodiment, ecological transformation, and cultural continuity are articulated.

Through metaphorical systems, pronoun structures, modal expressions, and hybrid lexical formations, the novels produce discursive environments in which humans, technologies, and ecosystems become interdependent elements of a shared narrative framework. These linguistic patterns enable the texts to imagine futures that remain culturally grounded even within technologically transformed worlds.

Afrofuturist discourse, therefore, functions as more than a stylistic device. It represents a linguistic strategy for reclaiming futurity, allowing African writers to envision speculative worlds without abandoning the cultural

and linguistic frameworks that shape contemporary African realities.

By situating posthumanism within culturally embedded linguistic practices, African cli-fi challenges universalist narratives of technological progress and instead foregrounds plural, context-specific visions of the future.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how *Noor* and *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* linguistically construct posthuman futures through culturally grounded discourse practices. By analysing metaphorical structures, lexical hybridity, modal expressions, and pronoun usage, the research demonstrates that language plays a central role in mediating the relationship between technology, environment, and identity within African speculative fiction.

The findings reveal that Afrofuturist narratives do not merely depict technologically advanced futures but actively reconfigure the linguistic frameworks through which futurity is imagined. Cultural references, indigenous linguistic forms, and ecological metaphors ensure that speculative futures remain connected to African epistemologies and social realities.

In doing so, African cli-fi expands the scope of posthuman theory by introducing discourse models rooted in communal ethics, ecological interdependence, and linguistic hybridity. These models challenge dominant Western narratives of technological futurism and contribute to a more diverse and globally representative understanding of posthuman thought.

By foregrounding language as a central analytical category, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations in posthumanism, eco-linguistics, and African literary studies, demonstrating that the future, within African speculative narratives, is not only imagined technologically but also constructed linguistically.

REFERENCE

1. Andimba, S.S.K. (2017). *Analysing the environment in verse: An ecocritical study of Julia Amukoshi's Tales of the Rainbow: A collection of poetry in English and Anneli Nghikembua's A True me in Words: An anthology of poems.* (Master's thesis, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia). Retrieved from <http://repository.unam.edu.na/handle/11070/1927>
2. Bloom, D. (2013). *Cli-fi: Climate change fiction.* Climate-Crisis Network.
3. Bracke, A., & Corporaal, M. (2010). *Ecocriticism and the English studies: An introduction.* *English Studies*, 91(7), 709-712.
4. DeMott, N. (2018). *A brief history of ecocriticism: Where literature and the environment cross paths.* Retrieved from https://medium.com/@Nick_DeMott/a-brief-history-of-ecocriticism-a120614d30fc
5. Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language.* Longman.
6. Fenn, V. (2015). *Roots of ecocriticism: An exploration of the history of ecocriticism, a literary theory of the post-modern world.* *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 2(2), 114-119.
7. Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
8. Gode, L. (2021). *Climate change in fiction: The evolution and challenges of environmental apocalyptic literature* (Publication No. 2583) [Senior thesis, Claremont McKenna College]. [Scholarship@Claremont. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmcc_theses/2583](https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cmcc_theses/2583)
9. Goodbody, A. (2020). *Beyond communication: Climate change fiction.* In D. Holmes & L. Richardson (Eds.), *Research handbook on communicating climate change* (pp. 320–329). Edward Elgar Publishing.
10. Gladwin, D. (2017). *Ecocriticism.* Retrieved from http://doi: 10.1093/obo/9780190221911_0014
11. Halliday, M. A. K., & Hasan, R. (1989). *Language, context, and text: Aspects of language in a social-semiotic perspective.* Oxford University Press.
12. Halliday, M. A. K. (2001). *New ways of meaning: The challenge to applied linguistics.* In A. Fill & P. Mühlhäusler (Eds.), *The ecolinguistics reader: Language, ecology and environment* (pp. 175–202). London: Continuum.
13. Irr, C. (2017). "Climate fiction in English." Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/35288142/Climate_Fiction_in_English
14. Johns-Putra, A. (2015). *How "cli-fi" novels humanise the science of climate change – and leading authors are getting in on the act.* Retrieved from <https://world.edu/cli-fi-151-novels-humanise-the-science-of-climate-change-and-leading-authors-are-getting-in-on-the-act>
15. Kandemiri, C.M. (2018). *A post-colonial ecocritical analysis of selected African texts: A case of Lessing's The Grass is Singing and Mungoshi's Waiting for the Rain.* (Master's thesis, University of Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia). Retrieved from <http://repository.unam.edu.na/handle/11070/2231>
16. Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors we live by.* University of Chicago Press.
17. Mackay, A. (2022). *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way.* Jonathan Ball Publishers.
18. Marland, P. (2013). *Ecocriticism.* *Literature Compass*, 10(11), 846-868.
19. Nerlich, B., Koteyko, N., & Brown, B. (2010). *Theory and language of climate change communication.* *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change*, 1(1), 97–110.
20. Okoroafor, N. (2021). *Noor.* DAW Books.
21. Pasi, J.S. (2012). *Theorising the environment in fiction: An ecocritical reading of Jairos Kangira's The Bundle of Firewood.* *Journal for Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 180-190.
22. Sahu, G. (2014). *Ecocriticism – understanding the relationship between literature and environment in Indian English novels.*
23. Stibbe, A. (2015). *Ecolinguistics: Language, ecology and the stories we live by.* Routledge.
24. Wolfe, C. (2010). *What is posthumanism?* University of Minnesota Press.
25. Wright, L. (2019). *Cli-fi: Environmental literature for the Anthropocene.* In S. Baumbach & B. Neumann (Eds.), *New approaches to the twenty-first-century Anglophone novel* (pp. 99–116). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-32598-5_6