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New research by Adriana Bailey and colleagues from the University of Colorado, Boulder, examines the concentration of words that suggest scientific uncertainty about climate change in two agenda-setting US newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, compared with the Spanish national dailies

*El País*

and

*El Mundo*

. Their detailed linguistic analysis identified words or expressions suggesting any room for doubt. These included common hedging verbs (such as "believe", "consider" and "appear"), synonyms for uncertain (such as "blurry", "inaccurate" and "speculative"), as well as adverbial downtoners (such as "almost", "largely" and "pretty").

The findings, just published in *Environmental Communication*, suggest a greater preponderance of such 'hedging' words associated with uncertainty in the US papers in their 2001 and 2007 coverage of two newly released reports from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Contrary to what the authors expected to find, such hedging words were more prevalent in 2007 compared to 2001, which is strange given that levels of scientific uncertainty were actually decreasing over that period.

Editor of *Environmental Communication*, Professor Alison Anderson (*Plymouth University, UK*) said: "This important new piece of research suggests that not only do climate scientists tend to use qualifying language which can sow the seeds of doubt in relation to climate change, US journalists often perpetuate this effect through their own use of hedging language."

Free access is currently available to 'How Grammatical Choice Shapes Media Representations of Climate (Un)certainly' by Adriana Bailey, Lorine Giangola and Maxwell T. Boykoff, which features in a Special Issue of *Environmental Communication* entitled 'Media Research on Climate Change: Where have we been and where are we heading?' Please visit:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17524032.2014.906481>

## Journalists exacerbating the increasing levels of doubt over climate change science

Written by Australian Business

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