Representations of Erosion and Flood in Selected Igbo Environmental Discourse Narratives

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Abstract
This study examined how erosion and flood were discursively constructed, rhetorically framed, and culturally interpreted by residents of selected Igbo communities in South-Eastern Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative descriptive design informed by Cultural Ecology Theory and Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. Data were drawn from 120 purposively sampled interview participants, thirty each from Anambra, Imo, Abia, and Ebonyi States, together with forty secondary discourse texts. Analysis produced four recurrent, frequently co-occurring representations· they are erosion as a predatory, consuming agent; flood as moral or spiritual punishment; environmental hazard as evidence of governmental neglect; and the affected community as a site of collective resilience. The verb 'eating' personified erosion in most interviews and secondary texts, while flood was more often rendered through moral and spiritual vocabulary. Discourse attributing responsibility to government agencies was more prominent in community announcements and social media posts than in newspaper coverage, which tended to moderate accusatory framing with official commentary. The findings suggested that discourse on erosion and flood in these Igbo communities functioned as a flexible cultural repertoire rather than a single master narrative· This carries implications for environmental communication, risk messaging, and sustainability education in Nigeria.
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Cultural Ecology, Erosion and Flood, Igbo Communities, Environmental Discourse.

Introduction

Environmental degradation is increasingly a concern for the humanities and social sciences, not only the natural sciences, because environmental problems are experienced, interpreted, and communicated through language. Ecolinguistics has developed as an interdisciplinary field concerned with the relationship between language, human societies, and the environment. Stibbe (2021, pp·1-3) argues that language contributes to the stories through which societies understand their relationships with the ecological world; environmental discourse is therefore not a neutral description of ecological events but a set of linguistic choices that foreground particular relationships, values, and understandings of responsibility. This perspective is especially relevant to South-Eastern Nigeria, where gully erosion and flood have repeatedly affected communities, livelihoods, farmland, transportation, homes, and infrastructure. Residents may describe erosion as an active force that consumes land, flood as an event associated with moral or spiritual disorder, or environmental degradation as evidence of governmental neglect, and such expressions reveal the conceptual and cultural resources through which communities make environmental risk meaningful.

Metaphor is particularly significant because it allows speakers to understand an unfamiliar or complex phenomenon through a more familiar experiential domain. Agwuocha and Chukwu (2023, pp. 101-112) examined flood representations in Nigerian newspaper reports and identified metaphorical constructions drawing on war, an angry monster, and container/substance domains, demonstrating that flooding was linguistically constructed as catastrophic. Chukwu and Agwuocha (2022) similarly found disease and predation metaphors in Niger Delta poetry on oil-related degradation, while Agbeleoba et al. (2025) combined ecolinguistic and critical discourse analytic methods to examine Sustainable Development Goal communications, distinguishing discourse that actively promoted sustainability from discourse that subtly downplayed ecological concern. Closer to the present study's concern with lay, first person accounts, Ekoh and Teron (2023) interviewed Lagos residents about flood vulnerability and found that participants attributed exposure to state failure in service provision while also describing localized, community based coping strategies, a pattern that parallels the governmental neglect and community resilience themes reported below. These studies share a common limitation· Most analyze discourse produced for or about communities by journalists, poets, or institutional communicators, rather than discourse produced by affected communities narrating their own experience.

A related strand of scholarship concerns indigenous ecological knowledge and Igbo cultural discourse more broadly. Onwuchekwa (2013) demonstrated that Igbo proverbs function as a repository of philosophical and moral knowledge, transmitted orally and drawn upon in everyday speech to interpret events, assign responsibility, and offer guidance, though this evidence was drawn from proverbs collected outside any environmental hazard context. The present study's data provide an opportunity to test empirically whether, and how, this proverbial tradition of moral and causal reasoning extends to erosion and flood related speech, a connection asserted rather than demonstrated in prior scholarship. Existing research on erosion and flooding in South-Eastern Nigeria itself has concentrated overwhelmingly on physical, geological, and infrastructural dimensions (Abdulfatai et al., 2014; Igwe, 2012; Ofomata, 1985; Ogbonna, 2012), producing valuable technical knowledge but leaving underexplored how affected communities themselves talk about these events, and what such talk reveals about local ecological knowledge,

cultural values, and social mobilization. This study addresses that gap by centering interview data gathered directly from affected residents, alongside institutional and media discourse, within a Critical Discourse Analysis and Cultural Ecology framework.

Addressing the Research Gap

Two distinct bodies of scholarship bear on erosion and flood in South-Eastern Nigeria, and neither, on its own, addresses how affected communities discursively construct these hazards. The first, a substantial geomorphological literature, has established the physical scale, causes, and technical dimensions of the crisis (Abdulfatai et al., 2014; Igwe, 2012; Ofomata, 1985; Ogbonna, 2012), but is not concerned with language or meaning-making. The second, an emerging Nigerian ecolinguistic literature, has examined how environmental hazards are represented in print journalism, poetry, and institutional communication (Agbeleoba et al., 2025; Agwuocha & Chukwu, 2023; Chukwu & Agwuocha, 2022), but has concentrated on mediated, institutionally produced discourse rather than the everyday speech of residents narrating their own experience. Consequently, the specific rhetorical and cultural constructions surrounding erosion and flooding that are generated by Igbo communities themselves, rather than by journalists, poets, or officials speaking about or for them, have received little empirical attention. Without this community generated perspective, environmental communicators risk designing risk messaging and sustainability education around technical or bureaucratic vocabulary that does not correspond to how affected residents actually understand, discuss, and respond to these hazards. The problem this study addressed, therefore, was the absence of a systematic, discourse analytic account of how Igbo communities themselves represent erosion and flood, and how such community generated discourse compares with the institutional and media discourse produced about the same hazards.

The study was guided by three objectives· They are; to examine how erosion and flood were represented in Igbo environmental discourse, including the images, agents, and causal structures attributed to these events; to identify the specific rhetorical and metaphorical devices like personification, moral framing, and proverb-like construction, through which these representations were linguistically constructed; and to explore the cultural meanings and ideological implications of these constructions, including the attribution of responsibility and the patterns of community mobilization they helped produce. The study raises the following research questions: how are erosion and flood represented in Igbo environmental discourse, that is, what images, agents, and causal structures do speakers and discourse producers attribute to these events? Through what specific rhetorical and metaphorical devices like personification, moral framing, and proverb-like construction, were these representations linguistically constructed? What cultural meanings and ideological implications, including the attribution of responsibility and the community mobilization these representations helped produce, did these constructions carry?

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored in two complementary frameworks, Cultural Ecology Theory and Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), combined deliberately so that Cultural Ecology Theory accounted for why particular cultural meanings became attached to particular environmental conditions, while CDA supplied the tools for examining how those meanings were linguistically constructed, circulated, and contested.

Developed by the anthropologist Julian Steward, Cultural Ecology Theory proposes that cultural practices, beliefs, and social organization evolve partly in response to the environmental conditions within which a society is embedded (Steward, 1955), centered on the concept of the "cultural core", the constellation of features most closely tied to a people's subsistence activities (Steward, 1955, p. 37). Steward's account does not treat environment as the sole determinant of culture, and the present study likewise treated environmental pressure as one contributing factor among several, alongside history, religion, and political-economic structures. Applied here, the theory helped explain why Igbo communities confronted with recurrent erosion and flooding might develop elaborate rhetorical and moral vocabularies for describing these hazards.

Fairclough's model proposes that discourse should be analyzed simultaneously as text, as discursive practice, and as social practice (Fairclough, 1992). At the textual level, analysis attended to vocabulary, metaphor, grammar, and cohesion; at the level of discursive practice, it examined the processes of production, distribution, and interpretation through which a text was produced and received; and at the level of social practice, it situated discourse within the broader ideological, institutional, and power relations of the society in which it circulated (Fairclough, 2001). In practice, Cultural Ecology Theory guided the interpretive stage· Once a recurrent linguistic pattern like the predatory personification of erosion, had been identified inductively, the theory was used to ask what function that pattern might serve for a community repeatedly exposed to the hazard it described, while alternative, non-environmental explanations were explicitly considered. Fairclough's model structured the descriptive and analytical stage, with each theme examined first for textual features, then for discursive context, and finally for the social relations it presupposed or contested.

Research Design: The study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design, judged appropriate for an investigation concerned with meaning-making rather than statistical generalization.

Population and Sampling: The population comprised adult Igbo speakers resident in communities that had experienced significant erosion or flood in South-Eastern Nigeria, including localities in Anambra State (notably the Nanka, Oko, Agulu axis), Imo State (including parts of Owerri and Ohaji/Egbema), and Abia and Ebonyi States. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 120 interview participants, thirty from each state. The four states were selected because each contains communities with a well-documented, recent history of gully erosion or seasonal flood (Igwe, 2012; Ofomata, 1985), and because their proximity allowed the research team to conduct fieldwork, obtain informed consent, and cross-check translations in person within the study period. Within each state, communities were identified through consultation with local government environmental desk officers and town union leaders, who assisted in identifying households and compounds directly affected by erosion or flood. Thirty participants per state was considered methodologically adequate for a qualitative, purposive design of this kind, set high enough to allow thematic saturation to be assessed within each state while remaining feasible for in-depth interviewing, transcription, and translation within available resources. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 68 years, and the final sample comprised 53 male and 67 female participants. Inclusion required that a participant was an adult ordinarily resident in a sampled community for at least two years, with direct lived experience of erosion or flood within the preceding five years, established through screening questions administered before interviews; participants unable to report specific incidents or effects, or

unable to communicate adequately in Igbo or English, were excluded. Purposive sampling was considered appropriate because the study required participants who could speak with first hand authority about the hazards under investigation, rather than a demographically representative cross section of the general population.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Interview Participants (N = 120)

Variable	**Category**	**n (%)**
State	Anambra	30 (250%)
	Imo	30 (250%)
	Abia	30 (250%)
	Ebonyi	30 (250%)
Gender	Male	53 (442%)
	Female	67 (558%)
Age	Range	18 -68 years
Education	no formal education	28 (23.3%)
	Primary	28 (23.3%)
	Secondary	28 (23.3%)
	Tertiary	36 (30.0%)
Total		**120 (100%)**

Secondary Discourse Texts: In addition to the interview data, forty discourse texts were purposively collected across four categories: newspaper reports, radio transcripts, community announcements, and social media posts, ten from each category, drawn from January 2024 to July 2026. A text was included if it explicitly addressed erosion or flooding in one of the four sampled states, originated from one of the four source categories, and contained sufficient substantive content to support analysis. The four categories were retained separately, rather than collapsed into a single 'media' category, because each carried a distinct register and stance toward the same hazards. See table 2 below;

Secondary Source Category	**Number of Texts**
Newspaper reports	10
Radio transcripts	10
Community announcements	10
Social media posts	10
Total	40

Interviews and Translation: Interviews were conducted in Igbo, English, or a mixture of both according to participant preference, using a semi-structured protocol inviting participants to describe their experience of erosion or flood, how their community typically talked about such events, and the cultural or moral meanings they associated with them. Interviews were audio recorded with informed consent, transcribed, and translated into English by the researchers, who crosschecked translations against one another and worked to preserve the original metaphorical structure of Igbo expressions. Table 3 presents illustrative Igbo expressions from the interview corpus alongside their English translations and analytical interpretation.

Table 3: Illustrative Igbo Expressions, Translations, and Analytical Interpretation

Igbo Expression (Community, State)	**English Translation**	**Context**	**Analytical Interpretation**
'Ụzọ anyi bụzi ọnyà ọnwụ' (Agulu, Anambra)	The road is now a death-	Describing a road destroyed by gully	Personification/predatory framing: the

	trap.	erosion.	environment recast as a lethal, agentive force.
‘Anyị etufuola ọdịnịhụ anyị n’aka idi mmiri’ (Uzuakoli, Abia)	We have lost our future to erosion.	Reflecting on long-term generational loss caused by erosion.	Erosion as destruction: consequence framed in generational/existential rather than material terms.
‘Mmiri ozuzo tosiri ime anyị obi ụtọ… kama ọ wetara anyị iru uju na nhụjuanya’ (Okposi, Ebonyi)	The rainfall which would have brought us happiness… usually brought us sorrow and agony.	Contrasting the expected beneficial role of rain with its destructive effect.	Moral/spiritual framing: an ordinarily benevolent natural force rendered a source of communal grief.
‘N’Oge ududu mmiri, uzo anyị n’atụ ezigbute ụjọ maka ogala wu udu du mmiri’ (Ahiazu Mbaise, Imo)	Our roads are scary during rainy seasons.	Describing anticipatory fear associated with seasonal flooding.	Erosion/flood as threat: hazard represented as a recurring source of fear rather than an isolated event.
‘Mbuze emebiela okporo ụzọ anyị na ala ubi anyị’ (Oko, Anambra)	Erosion has destroyed our roads and farmlands.	Naming concrete infrastructural and livelihood loss caused by erosion.	Erosion as destruction: technical, damage naming register coexisting with predatory personification (see Theme One).
‘Idi mmiri wụ ezigbute ọđachi’ (Umu akpu, Ohaji)	Flood is a disaster.	General evaluative characterization of flood.	Cross-cutting evaluative framing: flood named directly as calamity rather than neutral occurrence.
‘Idi mmiri abụghị enyi mmadu’ (Bende LGA)	Flood is not a friend of humans.	General evaluative, relational characterization of flood.	Adversarial personification: flood constructed as opposed to human wellbeing, echoing Theme One predatory imagery.
‘Ogige ụlọ akwụkwọ anyi jupụtara na idi mmiri’	The school compounds are flooded.	Describing flood damage to educational infrastructure.	Governmental neglect: extends the infrastructural-neglect frame to educational facilities (see Theme Three).

Data Analysis: Analysis proceeded in stages. All audio recordings were transcribed in full, preserving Igbo language material alongside its English translation. Transcripts and discourse texts were then read repeatedly by members of the research team to develop close familiarity

with the data before formal coding began. Open, inductive coding was applied line by line to identify recurrent images, expressions, and rhetorical moves; codes were then grouped iteratively into broader candidate categories on the basis of shared imagery, grammatical construction, or attributed causality, and these categories were refined and consolidated, with reference to the research questions, into working thematic categories. This process of consolidation produced the four themes reported below, each interpreted using Fairclough's (1992, 2001) three-dimensional model and Cultural Ecology Theory (Steward, 1955), applied as described in the Theoretical Framework above. Trustworthiness was strengthened through peer debriefing, in which emergent codes and themes were discussed with colleagues familiar with discourse analysis and Igbo cultural studies, and through negative case analysis, in which extracts that did not fit the four dominant themes were deliberately retained and examined rather than discarded; the clearest such case involved participants who described erosion in technical rather than personifying terms.

Ethical Considerations: Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, its voluntary nature, and their right to withdraw, and gave informed consent, recorded in writing or, where a participant was not literate, orally with the process audio recorded. Interviews were conducted in a private setting chosen by the participant, and recordings and transcripts were stored on password protected devices. Pseudonyms and generic community descriptors are used throughout in place of participants' actual names. No participant under 18 years was enrolled, and interviewers were briefed to pause or end an interview if a participant showed signs of distress.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Thematic and discourse analysis of the interview transcripts and discourse texts produced four dominant, recurrent patterns of representation, presented below with illustrative extracts and discussion of textual, discursive, and cultural significance. Frequency indications describe patterns within the sampled dataset rather than statistically representative estimates of the wider population.

Theme One: Erosion as a Predatory, Consuming Agent

'The gully is eating our land', one participant from Agulu community, Anambra State, explained, describing a channel that had widened from a footpath drain into a chasm swallowing several compounds within a decade. The verb 'eating' recurred across the dataset, occurring in 100 of 120 interviews (83.3%) and 35 of 40 secondary texts (87.5%), personifying erosion as a living, consuming predator rather than a passive geomorphological process. This personification assigns erosion, an inanimate physical process, the grammatical role of an animate agent, and casts land as a consumable object, transforming what geomorphologists document as a slow process of soil detachment (Igwe, 2012; Ofomata, 1985) into an urgent, seemingly intentional threat. The vocabulary appeared across interview speech, newspaper headlines, and radio commentary, suggesting a shared resource across formal and informal registers. Several participants explained that describing the gully as something that 'ate' land was what prompted their households to act quickly, moving belongings or alerting neighbors, grounding a claim that the metaphor performs mobilizing rather than merely descriptive work.

Several participants extended the predatory imagery further, describing gullies as having 'mouths' that widened after every heavy rainfall and as 'swallowing' entire compounds

overnight, elaborations suggesting the personification is generative, capable of sustaining a family of related images across a conversation rather than functioning as a single fixed metaphor. A qualifying pattern is nonetheless notable: although 100 of 120 participants used the 'eating' metaphor, 80 of 120 (66.7%) also employed technical, non-personifying descriptions at some point, particularly participants with formal science education, referring to 'soil washing away' or 'the ground giving way'. Since these figures overlap substantially, most participants who used technical vocabulary also used predatory vocabulary elsewhere in the same interview, reaching for technical, process oriented language when describing the mechanism of erosion and for predatory, agentive language when recounting the experience of loss, two registers coexisting within a single account rather than competing. One statement supplied for the corpus, 'Erosion has destroyed our roads and farmlands' (Mbuze emebiela okporo ụzọ anyị na ala ubi anyị), illustrates this technical, damage naming register coexisting with the predatory metaphor within the same speech community.

Theme Two: Flooding as Moral or Spiritual Punishment

'The river is angry with us', said a participant from Okposi, Ebonyi State, whose market stall had been submerged twice within a single rainy season. Forty-five participants (37.5%) represented flooding as a moral or spiritual consequence of communal conduct. Several participants explicitly linked flood to communal wrongdoing, for instance connecting a flood event to the desecration of a sacred stream or the neglect of customary sanitation practices, giving the moral narrative a concrete causal structure. From a Cultural Ecology Theory perspective, attributing flood to a disrupted moral-ecological balance offers an explanatory and, for some participants, an actionable framework, since moral transgression is understood to lie within the community's own capacity to address. Participants reported ritual activities, communal clean-up, individual behavioral adjustments such as ceasing to dump refuse in waterways, and other collective responses coordinated through town unions and religious bodies. A participant from Ahiazu Mbaise stated that the flood was a warning for abandoning the community's river deity. This finding resonates with, while qualifying, Agwuocha and Chukwu's (2023) observation of catastrophe-oriented print-media metaphor, since the present data suggest that everyday community speech is dominated less by catastrophe than by moral and relational vocabulary. A cautious generational pattern also emerged· Younger participants, below thirty years of age (fifty percent of the sample), appeared somewhat less likely to invoke explicitly spiritual causation, more often blending moral language with references to poor urban planning and climate variability.

Theme Three: Environmental Hazards as Evidence of Governmental Neglect

'We have cried for help, but nobody listens', a community leader from Bende LGA, Abia State, stated, summarizing a sentiment recurring across the interview data and several sampled newspaper and social media texts. This theme constructs erosion and flood as problems aggravated, and in some accounts caused, by inadequate governmental intervention, invoking a vocabulary of abandonment and voicelessness. The theme was especially prominent in social media posts and community announcements: 6 of 10 sampled social media posts, 7 of 10 community announcements, and 5 of 10 newspaper reports foregrounded governmental neglect as a dominant frame, with newspaper coverage tending to moderate accusatory tone by balancing complaints with official statements. Two recent Premium Times reports corroborate this pattern· One described Anambra residents appealing to state and federal authorities over erosion affecting

the Mgbachala and Irugaga areas of Ifite Village, with a community representative warning that continued land degradation could eventually displace residents if remedial measures were not taken ("Anambra Communities Decry," 2026), and another described the Anambra State House of Assembly summoning the Commissioners for Environment, Physical Planning and Urban Development, and Works and Infrastructure to account for flooding that damaged houses, farmlands, and roads across the state, including in Onitsha, Nnewi, and Awka ("Anambra Assembly Summons Commissioners", 2026). Both reports illustrate the pattern identified above: community appeals foreground abandonment and urgency, while newspaper coverage of the same events also records an institutional response, however delayed. This comparison, between how citizen-generated and mediated discourse construct governmental responsibility for the same hazard, is among the more distinctive contributions of the present analysis. At the level of social practice, the theme redirects responsibility outward, toward government agencies, constructing environmental degradation as, in part, a political rather than purely natural or moral event, consistent with Fairclough's (2001) argument that discourse is inseparable from social power. Several sampled social media posts extended this accountability framing comparatively, contrasting perceived government inaction on erosion and flooding with more visible responsiveness to other categories of infrastructural spending. One statement supplied for the corpus, "The school compounds are flooded" (Ogige ụlọ akwụkwọ anyi jupụtara na idi mmiri), extends the governmental-neglect frame from roads and drainage to educational infrastructure.

Theme Four: Community Resilience and Collective Agency

'We rebuild after every rain', one elderly respondent remarked with evident pride, describing the recurring cycle of damage and communal reconstruction that has come to characterize life in her flood-affected community. Unlike the preceding three themes, which foreground vulnerability, danger, or victimhood, this theme constructs the affected community as an agent of endurance and collective action, emphasizing communal labor, jointly clearing drainage channels or rebuilding damaged homes, framed as evidence of social cohesion and cultural continuity in the face of recurrent hazard. From a Cultural Ecology Theory perspective, this theme offers a plausible, though not conclusive, illustration of Steward's (1955) claim that cultural practice adapts in relation to environmental pressure: the recurrence of erosion and flooding appears, in these accounts, to have reinforced rather than eroded communal cooperation, though whether this pattern of communal labor rises to the level of a "cultural core" in Steward's specific, subsistence-linked sense is a stronger claim than the present data can fully sustain. Discursively, this theme was most prominent in interview speech and in community announcements intended to rally participation in cleanup or reconstruction efforts, and comparatively less prominent in newspaper reportage, which tended to privilege the more dramatic register of loss and catastrophe over the quieter register of communal endurance.

Several participants who invoked the resilience theme did so immediately after, or interwoven with, expressions of the governmental-neglect theme, suggesting that resilience is narrated not as an alternative to institutional failure but as a direct response to it: communities rebuild, in their own account, precisely because no one else will rebuild for them. These interweaving points to a broader observation from the analysis as a whole: the four themes identified here are not mutually exclusive categories neatly separated in the data but frequently co-occur and interact within single interviews and even single utterances, reflecting the layered, multi-voiced character of real environmental discourse. Two further statements supplied for the corpus, 'Flood is a

disaster' (Idi mmiri wụ ezigbute ọdachi) and 'Flood is not a friend of humans' (Idi mmiri abụghị enyi mmadu), cut across the four themes rather than belonging to any single one, and are reported here as general evaluative framings of flood found throughout the sampled discourse. The second of these is notable for casting flood explicitly in relational, adversarial terms, a human/non-human friendship denied, which echoes at a general, evaluative level the predatory personification documented under Theme One and reinforces the broader finding that flood and erosion were rarely narrated in this dataset as neutral, morally uninflected occurrences.

Table 4: Representation, Attribution of Responsibility, Rhetorical Function, and Potential Social Consequence across the Four Themes

Theme	**Representation**	**Agency /Responsibility Located In**	**Rhetorical Function**	**Potential Social Consequence**
Erosion as destruction	Erosion as a predatory, consuming agent	The environment itself	Intensifies perceived urgency; calls for active resistance	Motivates rapid, individual/household-level protective action
Flood as punishment	Flood as moral/spiritual consequence	Communal moral conduct	Renders the hazard explicable and, potentially, correctable	May encourage ritual, restitution, or behavioral reform; risks obscuring structural causes
Governmental neglect	Hazard as evidence of institutional failure	Government agencies and officials	Voices grievance; assigns political accountability	May mobilize collective petitioning or protest; risks discourse fatigue if unanswered
Community resilience	Community as agent of endurance	The community itself (recast positively)	Affirms collective capability and cohesion	Sustains communal labor and mutual aid; may reduce pressure for institutional reform

Table 5: Community Generated Discourse Compared with Mediated (Newspaper/Radio/Social Media) Discourse on the Same Hazards

Dimension of Comparison	**Community Generated Discourse (Interviews, Community Announcements)**	**Mediated Discourse (Newspapers, Radio, Social Media)**
Who is represented as responsible	Government agencies and officials, or, under Theme Two, the community's own moral conduct	Government agencies typically named but framing moderated by official statements and comment
Who is represented as the victim	Named households, compounds, and individuals speaking in the first person	The affected community rendered more generically, often without individual voice

Who is given agency	The environment (Theme One) or the community itself (Theme Four)	Government officials and agencies, positioned as the actors expected to respond
Metaphors used	Communal clean-up, ritual/behavioral change, direct appeals to leaders	Calls for government intervention, drainage/erosion-control infrastructure, committee action
How government is represented	Largely absent, unresponsive, or a target of grievance	Present in the narrative, sometimes responding (e.g., site visits, proposed remediation)

As Table 5 shows, community-generated and mediated discourse converge in identifying government as centrally responsible for unresolved erosion and flooding, but diverge in whether government appears as an active, if delayed, respondent, more typical of newspaper coverage, or as an absent addressee of unanswered appeals, more typical of interviews, community announcements, and social media posts.

Discussion

Taken together, the four themes demonstrated that erosion and flood in Igbo communities were represented through a layered combination of ecological, moral, political, and communal narratives rather than a single, uniform framing. Cultural Ecology Theory offered a plausible partial explanation for why environmental events came to be interpreted through culturally embedded beliefs, treating the recurrent, severe nature of erosion and flood as one contributing factor among several, alongside religion, politics, and history. Critical Discourse Analysis illuminated how these interpretive resources distributed responsibility differently depending on the framing invoked, supporting Fairclough's (2001) contention that discourse is never a neutral conduit for information but is implicated in the distribution of social power.

Under Theme One, the 'eating' personification of erosion was, textually, a transitivity choice assigning erosion an animate, intentional role (Fairclough, 1992); cultural-ecologically, it was consistent with a community developing a vocabulary that rendered a recurrent hazard immediately actionable (Steward, 1955); and it extended Chukwu and Agwuocha's (2022) finding of predatory and disease metaphor in Niger Delta poetic discourse to ordinary speech about a different hazard. Under Theme Two, the moral and spiritual framing of flood offered communities an explanatory frame in which the causal agent was understood to lie within their own remedial capacity (Onwuchekwa, 2013), complicating Agwuocha and Chukwu's (2023) finding of catastrophe-dominant metaphor in national print media by showing that, at grassroots level, moral and relational framing was at least as prominent. Under Theme Three, the governmental neglect finding redistributed responsibility outward from environment and community toward the state (Fairclough, 2001), resonating with Agbeleoba et al.'s (2025) finding that environmental discourse can highlight institutional accountability gaps. Under Theme Four, the resilience finding offered a hedged illustration of Steward's (1955) claim that cultural practice adapts to environmental pressure, showing resilience discourse narrated as a direct response to, rather than an alternative to, governmental neglect.

The predatory 'eating' metaphor merits particular attention because it performed several kinds of cultural and rhetorical work simultaneously· It registered ecological threat in terms legible regardless of formal education; it encoded a distinctly Igbo relationship to land as ancestral and inherited, so that land 'eaten' represented a severed connection to lineage rather than merely damaged property; and it assigned the environment agency and intention in ways that appeared to intensify urgency and prompt faster household-level protective action. Throughout the analysis, a distinction was maintained between what participants represented and what the researchers claimed to be objectively true; participants' accounts were treated as meaningful cultural data rather than claims requiring independent verification, a distinction that does not displace the well evidenced geomorphological literature (Igwe, 2012; Ofomata, 1985) on the same events.

These findings extend the existing Nigerian ecolinguistic literature in specific ways. Where Agwuocha and Chukwu (2023) identified catastrophe-oriented conceptual metaphors in national print-media coverage of flooding, the present interview data suggest that, at the level of everyday community speech, moral and relational framings, exemplified by the 'angry river' metaphor, are at least as prominent as catastrophic framings, pointing to a possible divergence between elite media discourse and grassroots community discourse on the same hazards. Where Chukwu and Agwuocha (2022) identified disease and predation metaphors in Niger Delta poetic representations of oil-related degradation, the erosion as destruction theme suggests that predatory personification extends to ordinary speech about geomorphological hazards in a different regional and ecological context, a pattern meriting further comparative investigation. The governmental neglect theme resonates with Agbeleoba et al.'s (2025) finding that environmental discourse can function to highlight institutional shortfall and accountability gaps rather than straightforward ecological description.

The study also indicates that Igbo environmental discourse carries indigenous ecological knowledge, though this claim requires some care. The moral and spiritual vocabulary evident in the flood as punishment theme encodes what can plausibly be described as an implicit environmental ethic, linking human conduct, particularly conduct affecting waterways and land use, to environmental consequence. Whether this moral vocabulary is broadly consonant with contemporary sustainability thinking depends on the specific point of comparison: both frameworks converge in linking human conduct toward waterways and land to environmental outcomes and in treating that conduct as a legitimate target for behavioral correction, but they diverge in that traditional framing typically attributes consequence to a moral-spiritual order, whereas contemporary sustainability discourse attributes it to ecological or biophysical mechanisms. The convergence, then, is at the level of practical orientation rather than underlying causal explanation, and this distinction should be borne in mind before treating indigenous moral vocabulary and technical sustainability discourse as interchangeable.

The co-occurrence of the four themes within individual interviews suggests that Igbo environmental discourse is not organized around a single master-narrative but functions as a flexible repertoire from which speakers draw selectively, and often in combination, depending on the rhetorical purpose at hand, whether to express fear, assign blame, seek explanation, or rally communal action, consistent with Fairclough's (2001) notion of an "order of discourse", a structured but flexible set of available conventions, genres, and styles. Practically, this implies

that environmental communicators cannot rely on a single messaging register: a campaign speaking only in the technical vocabulary of soil conservation would likely fail to engage the moral and communal registers this study found equally, if not more, salient to how communities process and respond to environmental risk.

These findings should nonetheless be read with the study's design and limitations in mind. The sample was purposive rather than probability based, and the geographical scope remained bounded to four states in South-Eastern Nigeria, so findings should not be generalized without further research to other Igbo communities or to non-Igbo communities facing comparable hazards. Interpretation of moral and spiritual framing under Theme Two rested substantially on the research team's judgement; peer debriefing guarded against idiosyncratic readings, but formal inter-coder reliability statistics were not computed. Translation of interview material from Igbo to English, however carefully undertaken and crosschecked, risks some loss or shift of metaphorical nuance, and several claims about the mobilizing effects of particular framings rest on participants' retrospective self-report rather than direct observation of behavior. Together, these limitations mean the study's frequency indications and thematic patterns should be read as a rich description of the sampled dataset rather than as statistically generalizable findings.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation, rhetorical construction, and cultural meaning of erosion and flood in Igbo environmental discourse from South-Eastern Nigeria. Three distinct kinds of contribution follow from the findings. Empirically, the study found that these hazards were not represented merely as physical phenomena but were actively constructed through four recurrent, frequently co-occurring frames· They are erosion as a predatory, consuming agent; flooding as moral or spiritual punishment; environmental hazards as evidence of governmental neglect; and community resilience and collective agency. Theoretically, the combination of Cultural Ecology Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis proved productive specifically because the two frameworks addressed different explanatory questions: Cultural Ecology Theory offered a partial account of why particular representations emerged in a community under sustained environmental pressure, while Fairclough's model showed how those representations were linguistically assembled and what social and political work they performed once in circulation, for instance in the differential distribution of agency and responsibility mapped in Table 4; neither framework alone would have supported both levels of explanation. Practically, the findings suggested that environmental communication in South-Eastern Nigeria, including public awareness campaigns, early warning messaging, and sustainability education, could engage affected communities more effectively by drawing on the moral, relational, and communal registers documented here, rather than relying solely on technical or bureaucratic vocabulary. As erosion, flood, and related ecological hazards continue to intensify across South-Eastern Nigeria and comparable regions, understanding the cultural and rhetorical frameworks through which affected communities make sense of these events remains an important, and still under-resourced, complement to the technical and infrastructural interventions on which environmental policy has traditionally concentrated.

Recommendations

1. Environmental agencies operating in South-Eastern Nigeria should be aware that affected communities routinely frame erosion and flood through the moral, relational, and communal registers documented in this study, and should account for these registers, rather than technical vocabulary alone, when designing public facing communication.
2. Government communication on environmental management, including erosion control announcements and flood early warning messages, should be developed with attention to the governmental neglect framing documented here, since messaging perceived as further evidence of institutional indifference risks reinforcing distrust rather than prompting protective action.
3. Given the finding that translation risks some loss of metaphorical nuance, environmental agencies and disaster communication bodies should invest in early warning and public-awareness materials developed in Igbo and reviewed by speakers with cultural and linguistic competence, rather than translated directly from English-language templates.

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