CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE EFFECT OF FIGURES OF SPEECH IN SEVERN SUZUKI’S PERSUASIVE SPEECH

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Abstract

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a frequently used method with the intent of serving a trustworthy evaluation of what is intended to mean when the language is used to define and commentate. It is therefore of capital importance to consider the social context, the manner and word selection while analysing a speech in order to avoid passively reporting upon since the speech is impregnated with its meaning and perspective. In this respect, the purpose of the current study was to search for the critical discourse analysis of the speech given by a then 12-year-old Canadian girl called Severn Suziki, an environmental activist, in United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992 in order to draw the attention of 117 presidents and representatives of 178 nations to some crucial topics such as environment and global warming. The keyword analysis of the speech revealed that the most frequently used words were ordered as child, children, world and afraid confirming the main aim of the speech that the environment should be protected for the future generations. Critical discourse analysis of the speech demonstrated that Severn Suziki utilised 7 figures of speech such as alliteration, hyperbole, imagery, irony, parallelism, rhetorical questions and simile justifying that she had her own particularity and implemented various persuasive techniques and figures of speech.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Environment, Figures of speech, Persuasive Speech

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1. INTRODUCTION

From the dawn of civilizations human beings have communicated their messages through various kinds of channels such as written and/or spoken communication tools. Broadly speaking, the intended messages are conveyed through these communication tools to the addressed audience. The addressers, however, may fail to make the intended meaning of their written and/or spoken texts reach their audience as they expect. This is basically caused by the way the audience interpret the message, which demonstrates that there is a gap between the intended meaning the addressers intend to convey and interpreted meaning the addressees receive. This does not have to be explained only by the word misunderstanding but also by the different backgrounds of the addresser and the addressee.

What is meant by the different backgrounds of the two groups is simply the fact that the two may have different socio-economic, educational, political and ideological backgrounds. Hence, most of the time the messages are deliberately manipulated by the addressers in order to put a special effect on the addressees’ perceptions and knowledge of, and attitudes towards, the particular area or topic. There are numerous instances of this ranging from politics to business world, from advertisements to news bulletins, and from education to any kind of social arenas including environmental concerns. To this point, people have witnessed so many impressive speeches of politicians like Martin Luther King Jr. and Obama in their political or inaugural speeches, businesspeople like Steve Jobs in his Stanford commencement speech, and activists like Severn Suzuki in her speech in the United Nations World Summit.

What all the above-mentioned addressers had in common was apparently the way they tried to persuade their addressees. They all exploited their own styles to create an impact on the audience. Therefore, it bears the upmost significance to study the persuasive elements by applying a comprehensive discourse analysis of the written and/or spoken texts. By so doing, we can reach a full understanding of what goes around in the text, what linguistic and non-linguistic elements (especially in spoken texts) are employed, how these elements come together to make an effect, and how the perceptions of the addresses are manipulated by the addressers.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are a growing number of researches regarding discourse analysis of texts, whether written or spoken, in the relevant literature. In this part four theoretical frameworks have been reviewed: Discourse Analysis (DA), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Figures of Speech, and Rhetoric and Persuasive Speech.

2.1. Discourse Analysis

The definition of discourse is basically “the language in use, for communication and the search for what gives discourse coherence is discourse analysis” (Cook, 1990, p.6). It contains
any linguistic features such as cohesive devices and coherence, and non-linguistic features such as the gestures and pauses of the addressee particularly in spoken discourse.

Discourse analysis attracts many scholars’ attention as it is closely related to almost every single part of people’s lives. Conversation analysis is one of the areas that discourse analysis is involved in. As a conversation analyst, Sacks (1992) pointed out some qualities of discourse in detail such as “hesitations”, “lexical choice” and “repair”, and added that these features are inseparable parts of speech and influence the outcome of the interaction.

Similarly, Gee (2001) elaborated the scope of discourse analysis mentioned above by stating that “language has a magical property” (p.11). He proposed that people tend to write and speak in a way that whatever they communicate can fit the context or situation. Further, there are a reciprocal relationship between the way we speak or write and the context. In other words, the written or spoken text affects, and also is affected by, the context.

Discourse has three fundamental principles by its nature. In this respect, “discourse is action-oriented, situated and constructed” (Hardy & Bryman, 2004, p.609). By action-orientation, it is meant that discourse has closely related to actions and practices. These actions and practices may be produced through written or spoken texts on the condition that they do have a topic. The fact that discourse is situated is that it is occasioned in its structure. Namely, action of one speaker attracts the action of another. It is also related to the text’s being rhetoric. It has an ultimate effect on the addressees. Finally, discourse is constructed since it contains whatever it should have – words, sentences, rhetorical devices as well as contextual settings, ideology and feelings.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis

The main aim of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to combine social theory and discourse analysis in order to identify, interpret and explain how discourse creates, and is created by, the social world (Rogers, 2005). Social theory plays a significant part in shaping the way discourse is analysed. The analysis becomes more and more meaningful when the social world is involved.

A group of researchers agree on the focus of CDA in terms of the role that language plays. Bourdieu (1977), Davies and Harre (1990), and Gee (1999) claim that the main focus of CDA is the way language interacts with power, privilege and institutions. This is crucial on the grounds that language is a cultural tool which helps transfer the societal values among those who share them. It also determines the shifts within power which is owned by a privileged group in the society.

In addition to the role of the language in shaping CDA, it is found out that three overlapping intellectual traditions are the main sources which feed CDA. While Benveniste (1958/1971), Derrida (1974), Foucault (1969/1972), and Pecheux (1975) stressed that discourse analysis is the first source of CDA, Butler (1990) and Davies (1993) regarded feminist post-structuralism as the second. Critical linguistics was placed as the third source of CDA by Fowler et al. (1979), Halliday and Hasan (1989), Hodge and Kress (1979/1993), Pecheux (1975), Pennycook (2001), and Willig (1999).

All of the opinions and propositions mentioned above are justified by van Dijk (1993) who states that “critical discourse analysis can only make a significant and specific contribution
to critical social or political analyses if it is able to provide an account of the role of language, language use, discourse or communicative events in the (re)production of dominance and inequality (p.279). The role of the language used is emphasized once more as a crucial functional tool of CDA.

2.3. Figures of speech

Considered as a word or phrase which uses figurative language, a figure of speech bears implied or suggested meaning rather than a literal or dictionary meaning. However, it has to be employed in a way that it can have a clear effect on the written or spoken context. As Corbett (1971) suggested, “a figure of speech is a form of speech artfully varied from common usage” (p.460). Metaphor and proverbs can be given as examples of commonly used figures of speech. He further clarified the elements in figures of speech by classifying two different groups – one was the tropes, “which involve a transfer of meaning of a word that is a deviation from what it normally signifies”, and the other was the schemes, “which involve a word transfer that deviates from customary grammatical structure” (p.461).

Grinnell (1987) uses the term "wordplay" instead of figure, but it keeps the same meaning. Wordplay refers to any literary device employed to amuse or entertain the audience. As Jonathan Culler (1975) states, “figures of speech are instructions about how to naturalize the text by passing from one meaning to another—from the 'deviant' to the 'integrated’ (p. 179-180). Naturalizing the text here refers to avoidance of utilizing common language in its ordinary use by integrating figures of speech so as to make an effect on the message.

However, being able to use figures of speech artfully does not make the addressee grasp it in the way it is expected. The implied meaning would be at risk. To this point, Genette (1982) stressed that the figure of speech is simply being aware of the figure, and it is interpreted wholly depending on the reader or listener’s level of consciousness regarding how it influences the discourse. As clearly understood, the message is not only related to the sender but to the receiver.

2.4. Rhetoric and Persuasive Speech

Originated from ancient Greek tradition, rhetoric, or art of eloquent speech, has a close and inseparable connection with persuasion. Cyphert (2010) regards rhetoric as a synonym of discourse, and stresses that it can be employed interchangeably with ideology. It also puts persuasion in its centre and bears a connotation of power.

Similarly, another reference to persuasion is made by Burke (1969) who clearly states "Wherever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is meaning, there is persuasion" (p.72). The triangle of persuasion, rhetoric and meaning was emphasized in order to make the message received effectively, persuasively and meaningfully (in the way it is expected).

According to Holt and MacPherson (2010), there are three inseparable components of classical rhetoric: ethos, logos and pathos. Ethos refers to credibility while logos means reason and pathos is related to emotions. In order to achieve a good argument, these three dimensions of a persuasive speech are combined.
In terms of qualities of rhetoric and its connection with other elements, it can be argued that a wide variety of communicative genres are utilized in public arenas with the help of spoken or written texts, and this practice of art is called political rhetoric, or the theory of eloquence. This is not only related to the flowery figures of speech used in the speech but also to principles of clarity and understandability, accuracy in grammar, evidence and vivid use of language as well as the context (Plett, 2001).

3. ANALYSES AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Setting of the Speech

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), one of the largest gathering of world leaders, was joined by 117 presidents and representatives of 178 nations in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on June 3, 1992. A huge amount of treaties and documents on protection of environment were signed in this Earth Summit.

In the end of a Plenary Session, the speech was delivered to all of the audience at the conference by a then 12-year-old girl called Severn Suzuki who had started the Environmental Children’s Organization (ECO) when she was only 9 years old. ECO was a small group of children committed to learning and teaching other children about environmental issues. (See Appendix 1 for the script of Severn Suzuki’s speech)

What was quite an impressive fact about the speech was the fact that Severn Suzuki and her friends raised their own money to be able to attend this conference. The speech ended up with all the attendees’ standing ovation.

3.2. Outline of the Speech

The speech contains 15 paragraphs which have been categorized below based on what the speaker particularly mentioned in order throughout the speech.

It can be discussed that Severn Suzuki’s speech exposes several striking points when the distribution of the topics and the lengths of the first and the final paragraphs are taken into consideration. As for the distribution of the topics, she mentions her concerns about environment and the future as well as about children. It is clear that she accuses the audience, who she thinks are responsible for her concerns, of being inactive for the environmental problems and children throughout almost more than half of the paragraphs in her speech. Further, although more elaborate introduction and acknowledgement are expected in such public official contexts, she preferred to introduce herself by saying only “Hello. I’m Severn Suzuki” in the first paragraph and “Thank you” in the last paragraph – and not more than that! Clearly, she gives much more importance not to elevating herself or following the principles of eloquence, but to the core idea of the text.

3.3. Frequency and Density of the Keywords

There are 933 words in total – including content words and function words – in the speech and it took Severn Suzuki to finish her speech in exactly 6 minutes and 28 seconds. The script and the video of the speech (together with the aftermath of the video) can be found on https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/severnsuzukiunearthsummit.htm.
Table 1. The Frequency and Density of the Keywords

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keywords</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Density (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afraid</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The keyword analysis demonstrates that the words child and children are the most prominent words of the speech justifying the aim of the speech. They are both repeated 17 times by the speaker who deliberately try to manipulate the perception of the audience about the problems that children face. The word world adds up to the overall meaning of the first two keywords, which signifies the whole population of children across the world rather than a specific group of children. Further, the word world assures that the speaker is addressing the audience as a representative of all the children all over the world. However, the existence of the word afraid changed the flow of the speech wherever it was used. Mostly, it was used to refer to the dangerous chemicals in the atmosphere and the hole in the ozone as well as to the fear people have about sharing their wealth with the needy.

3.4. Use of Figures of Speech

The figures of speech used in Severn Suzuki’s speech are analysed in the alphabetical order. There are 7 different figures of speech elicited from the text. In this part, the definition and analysis of each figure of speech are provided followed by a detailed discussion regarding the effect of each figure of speech.

3.4.1. Alliteration

Alliteration, also called initial rhyme, is the repetition of an initial consonant or consonant cluster in two or more words in a stretch of language (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p.176). A popular tongue-twister can be given as an example for alliteration: Peter Piper Picked a Peck of Pickled Peppers. The initial sounds of 6 words are ‘p’.

Two of the occurrences of alliteration in Suzuki’s text are:

“I am fighting for my future” in paragraph 3 in which /f/ sound is repeated three times.

“... and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder...” in paragraph 5 in which /b/ sound is repeated three times.

In these two examples, it can be argued that repeating sounds such as /f/ in the first and /b/ in the second create a special effect on the emotions of the addressees. When we take “fighting for my future” into account, the /f/ sound gives the listener a feeling of flow – perhaps Suzuki’s fight for future is one with “constant” and “flowing” endeavour. This fight will last for long. On the other hand, the /b/ sound in the words birds, butterflies and but create a conflicting effect between the nature (birds, butterflies, etc.) and breaking the nature (implied by but). The feeling of beauty is sharply blocked by but, which is the core idea of Suzuki’s speech.
3.4.2. Hyperbole
Another device is hyperbole. Alm-Arvius (2003) defines it as “exaggeration is very common in language, and hyperbole is the term used for this kind of figure of speech” (p. 135). For instance, in she is going to die of embarrassment, she is not going to die because she is embarrassed.

Suzuki uses hyperbole in paragraph 10 – “In Canada, we live the privileged life. We’ve plenty of food, water, and shelter. We have watches, bicycles, computers, and television sets. The list could go on for two days.”

It is clearly understood that there is no such list which lasts for two days. But, instead, it only stresses the abundancy of the items in the list. Moreover, hyperbole may be utilized to attract people’s attention to a very serious phenomenon. Here it is the hidden comparison of the belongings of those with privileged life and those living in poverty. This is exactly what Suzuki wants to draw attention to in her speech.

3.4.3. Imagery
Imagery is used to create images in the mind of the reader and includes figurative and metaphorical language to improve the reader’s experience through their senses (retrieved from https://literaryterms.net/imagery/).

In paragraph 5, Suzuki draws the image of the nature as in the sentence:
“In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles, and rainforests full of birds and butterflies…”

Also, she shows us the other side of the medal in paragraph 11:
“I could be a child starving in Somalia, or a victim of war in the Middle East, or a beggar in India.”

It is quite striking that Suzuki benefits from the conflicting, or opposing features of her materials as in these two sentences. On one hand, she asks the audience to visualize the light-hearted and peaceful idea of the nature with its real owners in it. On the other hand, she directs our thoughts to the very opposing notion of war, starvation and poverty. These abrupt transitions are made in her speech to disturb the conscience of the audience and to activate them to end the evil in the world. Further, the use of imagery is one of the elements used in the speech which makes it memorable as the minds of the audience are simultaneously involved in these particular stances while Suzuki delivers her speech.

3.4.4. Irony
As Dupriez (1991) defines irony, it is “the opposite of what one thinks or wants others to think” (p.243). Mostly, it refers to the difference between expectations and reality.

In paragraph 12, Suzuki clearly and sharply addresses to her audience:
“At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us to not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share, not be greedy. Then, why do you go out and do -- do the things you tell us not to do?”

If we put ourselves in the audience’s shoes, it would be shocking to hear such an irony from a 12-year-old girl as statesmen or representatives. The reason for use of irony in this
context is simply to make the audience face themselves in the mirror and show them the contrast between what they teach children and what they do. Apart from the use of irony, the way she tries to put all the audience in difficulty in a very straightforward and frank manner is striking enough by its nature. When these two get combined, the effect created is undeniably the most touching moment of the speech. Clearly, she makes use of this irony to accuse the audience of their actions.

3.4.5. Parallelism

Parallelism, as Alm-Arvius states (2003, p.180), involves semantic repetition and emphasis just as much as formal reoccurrence. The words, phrases or sentences which are repeated within a text are separated from the others in that the repeated units put special emphasis over the intended meaning.

Suzuki uses three different repetitions along her speech, and one of them is repeated four times while the other two repeated three times. To begin with, in paragraph 4, \textit{I am here to speak} is repeated three times as in the sentence:

“I am here to speak for all generations to come. I am here to speak -- speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet...”

Another set of repetition, which is \textit{I’m only a child}, is scattered along paragraph 6, 8 and 11 to refer to the solutions to the problems, perception of being a family, and poverty. The last set of repetition \textit{buy and throw away} occurs in paragraph 9 as in the following sentence:

“In my country we make so much waste, we buy and throw away, buy and throw away, buy and throw away and yet Northern countries will not share with the needy.”

The most significant discussion can be made not on how many times each set is repeated but on what each repeated set is about. It can be clearly seen that the repeating sets in the paragraphs above are \textit{I am here to speak}, \textit{I’m only a child} and \textit{buy and throw away}. And when these three sets are taken into consideration at the same time, the only thing that we can reach is the unity of the meaning of the text. Namely, the only purpose of the addresser as \textit{only a child} is to \textit{speak} about the world that \textit{buy and throw away}. Another importance of using parallelism, or repetition, is closely related to how long it will be remembered by the audience. And this is the final destination of persuasive speeches. If nobody remembers what is spoken, then is there a point in making such a speech?

3.4.6. Rhetorical Questions

“The most manipulative interrogatory form is really a disguised assertion, and is justly called a rhetorical question” (Dupriez, 1991, p. 370). During the speech, speakers may adopt a different style of making their arguments such as employing a shift from a statement to an interrogation – a question. However, the addresser does not expect an answer for the question from the addressees. This is just for how the speakers wishes to direct his/her speech. For instance, Suzuki asks four rhetorical questions throughout her speech:

\begin{quote}
“Did you have to worry of these things when you were my age?” (Paragraph 6)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
“If a child on the streets who has nothing is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy?” (Paragraph 11)
\end{quote}
“Then, why do you go out and do...do the things you tell us not to do?” (Paragraph 12)

“Are we even on your list of priorities?” (Paragraph 13)

Suzuki’s purpose in using rhetorical questions rather than keep using the usual statement form of her sentences is basically to make the audience reflect on their own actions by thinking about the answers of the questions above. They do not have to reply back to her. They know it. Yet they can’t keep themselves from replying to themselves. They are expected to be as honest in their answers as possible as they are asked to talk to their consciousness.

Suzuki also aimed to direct her speech in a way that she can manipulate the audience, their feelings and their perceptions through these rhetorical questions. Even diverging from a usual style of speech and going into a set of questions has an influence on the listeners. To illustrate, the audience should feel responsible for the third rhetorical question. The addresser not only makes them feel responsible for their acts but also tries to take their focus out of damaging the environment and direct it to children in the fourth rhetorical question.

3.4.7. Simile

Simile is a figure of speech which like metaphor describes one thing by comparing it with another, suggesting similarities between them (Alm-Arvius, 2003, p. 125). What is the main difference from a metaphor is that in simile there is an explicit indicator of comparison like as and like while in metaphor there is no such indicator – it is quite implicit. Although two or more concrete nouns can be compared, there are some cases in which abstract nouns are compared. In her speech, Suzuki compares two abstract things in paragraph 3:

“Losing my future is not like losing an election, or a few points on the stock market.”

Though another integrated figure of speech allusion is employed here to make a reference to something known by the audience, the basic device used here is simile. Suzuki compares one abstract thing, which is losing her future and two other things, which are (their) losing an election and (their) losing a few points on the stock market. Similes are strong literary devices on the grounds that they juxtapose two clearly different things before our eyes. The addresser deliberately points out that loss of someone’s future cannot inherently be compared with anything else.

4. CONCLUSION

Considered one of the most influential speeches, Suzuki’s address to a number of statesmen and representatives still bears memorable components although almost two decades have passed since the event. When the video tape of the speech is closely watched from the link shared in part 3.3 Frequency and Density of the Keywords, it can be noticed that the audience are enchanted during her address owing to the fact that she has her own particularity, and employs several persuasive techniques and figures of speech along her speech.

By her own particularity, it is meant that there was a moment in time in which she delivered her speech to a number of people in high position with a straight-forward style. Further, there were so many ironical instantiations within her speech as well as the overall framework of the organization. First, it is inherently interesting and attractive for a 12-year-old child to address to people who are higher in rank. Also, this child puts on an adult style of speech in which she points out the environment, poverty, children, war, etc. in a very elaborate
manner. Second, a child who does not possess any authority to manage a country reminds those who own all the authority about their responsibilities. That is quite ironical in that the grown-ups are expected to remind her of her responsibility. Third, though all the participants attend the event sponsored by their own governments (it happens so as usual), Suzuki and her three other friends raises money to join the conference. This contributes to another ironical situation. Finally, while each attendee represents only one country which is his/her own and maybe a limited number of population, Suzuki represents all the children all over the world and all the animals – alive or dead. There is no limit in her representation. All these elements comprise her particularity. And every single component listed above has its own irony in it. Irony is what makes a speech remain in people’s minds and hearts since it contains contradictory contrasts, which break the usual cycle.

Given the effects of figures of speech employed in Suzuki’s text, it can be argued that making people think in a different, indirect and unusual way through the use of such language devices creates an undeniable influence. Those who are accustomed to usual communicative patterns are surprised or even shocked by an extraordinary way of speech – figures of speech. This is what Suzuki exactly does during the event. She first starts her speech using a simile to make the audience contrast losing the future and losing an election, or a few points in stock market. Then in every 5 sentences she repeats a different figure of speech such as irony, parallelism, rhetorical questions and alliteration. In each attempt she manages to keep the attention of the audience at the highest level. She was even called by the chairperson as the girl who silenced the world for five minutes. This title is able to explain why and how her speech was so effective when it was delivered. The biggest contribution that Suzuki makes is the way she uses persuasive techniques in her speech. She does not underestimate the importance of connecting global issues and her personal experiences in order to make a special effect on the audience as in the connection between the extinction of animals and her past experiences in Vancouver. The effect of the speech is beyond the audience who are present there. It also influences people across the globe as Suzuki challenges the leaders to account for their harmful acts.

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Appendix 1:
(from https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/severnsuzukiunearthsummit.htm)

Hello, I'm Severn Suzuki speaking for "ECO" -- the Environmental Children’s Organization.

We are a group of 12 and 13 year-olds trying to make a difference: Vanessa Suttie, Morgan Geisler, Michelle Quigg, and me. We’ve raised all the money to come here ourselves -- to come 5,000 miles to tell you adults you must change your ways.

Coming up here today, I have no hidden agenda. I am fighting for my future. Losing my future is not like losing an election, or a few points on the stock market.

I am here to speak for all generations to come. I am here to speak -- speak on behalf of the starving children around the world whose cries go unheard. I am here to speak for the countless animals dying across this planet, because they have nowhere left to go. I am afraid to go out in the sun now, because of the holes in our ozone. I am afraid to breathe the air, because I don’t know what chemicals are in it.

I used to go in -- I used to go fishing in Vancouver, my home, with my Dad until, just a few years ago, we found the fish full of cancers. And now we hear of animals and plants going extinct every day, vanishing forever. In my life, I have dreamt of seeing the great herds of wild animals, jungles, and rainforests full of birds and butterflies, but now I wonder if they will even exist for my children to see.

Did you have to worry of these things when you were my age? All this is happening before our eyes and yet we act as if we have all the time we want and all the solutions. I’m only a child and I don’t have all the solutions. I don’t -- I want you to realize, neither do you. You don’t know how to fix the holes in our ozone layer. You don’t know how to bring the salmon back up in a dead stream. You don’t know how to bring back an animal now extinct. And you can’t bring back the forests that once grew where there is now a desert. If you don’t know how to fix it, please stop breaking it.

Here, you may be delegates of your governments, business people, organizers, reporters, or politicians. But, really, you are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles - - and all of you are someone’s child.

I’m only a child, yet I know we are all part of a family -- five billion strong; in fact 30 million species strong -- and borders and governments will never change that. I’m only a child, yet I know we are all in this together and should act as one single world towards one single goal.

In -- In my anger, I'm not blind; and in my fear, I'm not afraid of telling the world how I feel. In my country we make so much waste, we buy and throw away, buy and throw away, buy and throw away and yet Northern countries will not share with the needy. Even when we have more than enough we are afraid to share; we are afraid to let go of some of our wealth.

In Canada, we live the privileged life. We’ve plenty of food, water, and shelter. We have watches, bicycles, computers, and television sets. The list could go on for two days. Two days ago, here in Brazil, we were shocked when we spent time with some children living on the streets. This is what one child told us: "I wish I was rich and if I were, I would give all the street children food, clothes, medicines, shelter, and love and affection."
If a child on the streets who has nothing is willing to share, why are we who have everything still so greedy? I can’t stop thinking that these are children my own age, that it makes a tremendous difference where you are born; that I could be one of those children living in the favelas of Rio. I could be a child starving in Somalia, or a victim of war in the Middle East, or a beggar in India. I am only a child, yet I know if all the money spent on war was spent on finding environmental answers ending poverty and in finding treaties, what a wonderful place this Earth would be.

At school, even in kindergarten, you teach us how to behave in the world. You teach us to not to fight with others, to work things out, to respect others, to clean up our mess, not to hurt other creatures, to share, not be greedy. Then, why do you go out and do -- do the things you tell us not to do? Do not forget why you are attending these conferences -- who you're doing this for. We are your own children. You are deciding what kind of a world we are growing up in.

Parents should be able to comfort their children by saying, "Everything's going to be all right; it’s not the end of the world, and we're -- and we're doing the best we can." But I don’t think you can say that to us anymore. Are we even on your list of priorities?

My dad always says, "You are what you do, not what you say." Well, what you do makes me cry at night. You grown-ups say you love us. But I challenge you, please, make your actions reflect your words.

Thank you.