

The weather for whom? And what for?

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In this article, we examine developments in the linguistic formulation of the ‘public weather forecast’ in a corpus of radio/TV weather forecasts from the 1930s to the 2020s. The methods used are partly a quantitative count of words and word classes and partly qualitative analyses of excerpts from the weather forecasts. The study has a dual purpose: on the one hand, we describe how the linguistic register can change while the genre can be perceived as constant. Our conclusion is that the register in weather forecasts is far from as static as has previously been suggested. On the other hand – and as an extension of this – we examine changes in the speaker’s or newsreader’s relationship to what is said and to the recipient over time, and we attempt to describe the ‘implicit recipient’ of the weather forecast, more specifically what assumptions are made about the recipient and their use of the weather forecast. In doing so, we uncover a development from a very neutral and factual reading of data to, on the one hand, a more engaged and interpretive account of the weather and how it will be experienced and, on the other hand, a simultaneous increase in focus on a recipient who is an urbanite with a comfort-related relationship to the weather.

The article is part of a growing interest in the contribution of linguistics to understanding climate change and modern societies’ reactions to it, as discussed in NyS 67, for example.

KEYWORDS: weather forecasts; genre; register; assessment; appraisal; media language; climate