

'Low carbon' metals, markets and metaphors: The creation of economic expectations about climate change mitigation

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Dealing with the threat of anthropogenic climate change has been a challenge for policy makers for many years. More recently the problems posed by climate change and solutions proposed to mitigate its effects have been framed by lexical 'carbon compounds', such as carbon footprint or carbon trading and by one dominant metaphor, the market metaphor. Through a detailed content analysis of industry and press coverage from 1985 to the present, this paper examines the fate of one important lexical compound in this context, namely low carbon, which can be used as an adjective or a noun. Over the last two decades this lexical compound moved across and between three discourses, the steel industry, the car industry and what one might call the climate change industry. Using insights from ecolinguistics and the sociology of expectations, the paper discusses how the lexical compound low carbon in general and the metaphor low carbon future in particular came to prominence in policy discourses, especially in the UK and how they were used to frame expectations of a prosperous low carbon future, while sidelining deeper social and cultural reflection on climate change mitigation.